

Diocesan Office for Safe Environment explains 'Essential Three'

FALL RIVER — In July 2020, Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., promulgated the Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful. This policy updated the diocese's existing protection policies in substantial ways.

One significant change in this policy is the mandate of the Essential Three for those who minister, work or volunteer in the diocese. For decades the diocese has required some form of background check and training for those who work with children and youth. The Essential Three is now required for *all* who minister, work or volunteer regardless of whether their work is directly involved with minors. The Office

for Safe Environment answered some common questions:

• *What does Essential Three mean?*

— The Essential Three refers to three components: Criminal Background Check, Safe Environment training and Code of Conduct. Most people assent to the Code of Conduct when they complete the online safe environment training.

• *I'm just a ... (lector, Eucharistic Minister, food pantry volunteer etc.) and I don't work directly with children or youth. Must I complete the Essential Three?*

— Yes. The Essential Three is required for *all* who minister, work or vol-

unteer throughout the Diocese regardless of whether their position is directly connected to children and youth.

• *It is hard enough to find volunteers, why would the diocese make people do all this work?*

— We recognize that volunteers are already giving freely of their time. The goal of the Essential Three is not to make people jump through hoops but rather to create a culture of safety and child protection throughout the diocese. The more people who are screened, trained, and have agreed to a Code of Conduct, the more assurance we can have that ALL the faithful are in a safe envi-

ronment in every parish, school, and diocesan facility. We know that many of our volunteers are parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Even if their volunteer work does not directly involve children and youth, the training can help them be aware of signs that raise concern about the safety and well-being of the young people in their lives.

• *If this is because of the clergy abuse crisis, why must lay volunteers and employees do this?*

— This is not just about clergy abuse. The clergy abuse scandal led the Church to make significant changes. One positive outcome is that it has helped raise awareness of the

devastating impact of child sexual abuse throughout our world. Research suggests that one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they reach 18. With these troubling statistics in mind, we want everyone to know what to watch for and how to respond if they see behaviors that raise concern. We want our parishes and schools to be full of trusted adults who can assist a child if needed.

If you have any questions about the Essential Three and/or the Diocesan Policy for Protecting the Faithful, please contact the Office of Safe Environment at 508-675-1311 x6511.