



**SUBJECT:** Circle of Care Program

July 2020

Dear St. Matthew the Evangelist Parishioner and/or School Family,

As your Pastor, I want to provide you with an update on our parish and archdiocese's efforts to best protect our parish and school youth from unsafe adult-youth interactions. To assist with this goal, the Archdiocese uses the Circle of Care program. The Circle of Care program has two components—the Circle of Grace (CoG) teaching program for our youth and the Safe Environment (SE) certification program for our adults. Our youth receive Circle of Grace teachings in their School or Religious Education classes. This letter further explains the adult Safe Environment certification requirements and process.

**Safe Environment Certification Program.** The SE Certification Program's objective is to ensure safe interactions between adults and youth in our parishes and schools. It is a United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Archdiocese of Omaha-mandated program that provides background checks on and training of adults who work or volunteer with youth in Catholic schools and parishes. Any adult who works in or volunteers in a position interacting with the youth of St. Matthew Catholic Community must comply with Safe Environment certification requirements. The USCCB revised SE policies in June 2018 and part of the revisions have increased the number of adults needing to be SE certified. The table accompanying this letter has further explanation of SE certification requirements based on various occasions of youth-adult interactions. SE certification aims to—1) train adults, who are mandatory reporters according to law, to be the “eyes and ears” of the Church to best protect our children; 2) inform about “best practices” to create safe environments for our youth and adults alike; and 3) ensure all adults interacting with youth have passed a background check. There are two levels of SE certification—Initial and Recertification.

**Certification (Initial).** If not already having done so, all staff and volunteers interacting with parish and/or school youth must take the Initial Safe Environment training and submit to background screening. More information on youth-adult interaction occasions requiring SE certification is found on the accompanying table. Training is an approximately two-hour face-to-face session. At times, the training is held at St. Matthew's and will be announced in the church bulletin and posted on the parish and school calendars. However, staff/ volunteers may also take Initial Training at another parish and these locations and dates can be found on the Archdiocese of Omaha's website (<https://archomaha.org/safe-environment/>). Once completed, the certification is valid for six years. Please be advised that the initial screening and training certification process can take up to four weeks from the training date, so please start the process early as you must be certified prior to the activity involving youth. The Archdiocese no longer accepts any type of youth/safe environment training from any other source. Therefore, all staff/volunteers must do the initial ArchOmaha certification if not in the Archdiocese database.

**Certification (Recertification).** Each Safe Environment certified participant must be recertified every six years. Once you're in the Archdiocese database, i.e. after taking the Initial training or Recertification Training online, you should receive an email 60 days prior to expiration of your current certification notifying you that your certification will expire in 60 days. The training for Recertification takes about seventy-five minutes to complete and is done online. Additionally, your background check will be updated. You can find the training at the ArchOmaha website using the “Safe Environment” link given above. If you don't complete the Recertification prior to its expiration, you cannot interact with our youth and there is no “grace” period for expired certification. Recertification is valid for six years.

**Coordination.** Each adult who works or volunteers in an activity with youth must be confirmed as having been Safe Environment certified prior to the activity. Each activity will have a point of contact (POC) who will submit the names of staff/volunteers who will be involved in the activity. We ask that this list be submitted at list one week prior to the activity. The activity POC will submit the list to either the Safe Environment Coordinator or the St. Matthew School Principal. After checking the database, the Coordinator or Principal will then provide the activity POC with approval or any feedback on the proposed list.

**Questions?** The St. Matthew's Catholic Community thanks you for your generosity in helping the community's ministry to our youth. The Circle of Care program is a valuable tool to helping ensure the safety of the youth and adults in these ministries. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact Deacon Mark White, the St. Matthew's Safe Environment Coordinator, at 402 292-7928 or [mhwhite@archomaha.org](mailto:mhwhite@archomaha.org).

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Father Leo Rigatuso".

Father Leo Rigatuso, Pastor

**St. Matthew the Evangelist  
Safe Environment (SE) Certification Guidelines  
Occasions of Adult-Youth Interaction**

Occasion	SE Certification Requirement	Point of Contact	Other Considerations
Mass, liturgies, Adoration/prayer services, group studies, etc.	None	Not applicable	Paid staff member(s) and/or SE certified volunteer(s) supervising or participating in the activity should monitor youth-adult interactions to optimize SE compliance
Paid St. Matthew school and/or parish staff	Required	Principal or Parish Secretary	
Workers not employed by St. Matthew or Archdiocese (ex. BPS Resource Teacher, vendor/contractor, etc.)	None required but see "Other Considerations"	Principal, Parish Secretary, or Facility Manager	1) Regular workers are asked to complete SE "Code of Conduct" to be kept on file. 2) Vendors/contractors should be supervised by paid staff or SE certified volunteer
Homebound ministries (ex. SVdP, EMHCs, etc.)	Required	Primary point of contact for that ministry	
Volunteers not planning on interactions with youth (ex. parish office support, KoC fry hut/kitchen duties, Minutemen, mowing team, Mass set-up crews, etc.)	None	Not applicable	Paid staff member(s) and/or SE certified volunteer(s) supervising or participating in the activity should monitor youth-adult interactions to optimize SE compliance
Volunteers supporting "Parish festival" or other large parish or school activities (ex. Bingo, Trivia Night, Sports, School Book Fair, etc.)	Required	Principal or parish's primary point of contact for that activity	
Volunteers performing service hours as agreed upon per school handbook	Required	Principal	Volunteers earn 2.0 hours credit for attending the Initial Safe Environment Training course and 1.0 hours for Recertification.
Volunteers for RE/FBC, classroom/lunch assist, chaperones, drivers, etc.	Required	Principal or parish's primary point of contact for that activity	Drivers also need "Defensive Driver" training available on CMG (Catholic Mutual Group) training dashboard.
Volunteers supporting Knights of Columbus parish activities	Required (for exceptions, see "Other Considerations" #2)	Grand Knight or his appointee coordinating / supervising the activity	1) Certain KoC positions are required to take KoC-specific youth protection training. This counts for Archdiocese training, but KoC member still needs to submit to Archdiocese background check (coordinate with SEC). 2) KoC volunteers not planning to have any interactions with youth (ex. fry hut/kitchen duties, cleaning/set-up crews, etc.) are exempt.
Spectators or visitors attending sporting events, school performances, awards ceremonies, etc.	None	Not applicable	Paid staff member(s) and/or SE certified volunteer(s) supervising or participating in the activity should monitor youth-adult interactions to optimize SE compliance
Infrequent visitor at large group meal/snack (ex. school lunch, "Donuts for Dads," etc.)	None	Not applicable	Paid staff member(s) and/or SE certified volunteer(s) supervising or participating in the activity should monitor youth-adult interactions to optimize SE compliance

\*Person responsible for coordinating with SE Coordinator (SEC) to confirm adult staff/volunteers participating in the event have valid SE certification (prior to the event) and then monitor, or designate an alternate monitor, youth-adult interactions to optimize SE compliance.