



The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
By the Grace of God and Authority of the Apostolic See Bishop of Bridgeport
DECREE FOR THE PROMULGATION OF THE 2026 SAFE ENVIRONMENT HANDBOOK

As Catholics, we share a sacred obligation to protect all of God's Children

In the Diocese of Bridgeport, our Safe Environment program and victim assistance ministry has been in place since 2003 and has made great strides in the areas of child abuse prevention, and compassionate outreach to survivors of sexual abuse. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to meet the challenges faced by children and Vulnerable Adults in our Church; therefore, we are issuing our fourth update to our policies and procedures relating to our implementation of the U.S.C.C.B. Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People in the Diocese of Bridgeport.

I hereby issue an updated set of guidelines and procedures comprising the 2026 Safe Environment Handbook which includes more frequent Safe Environment training and background checks; updates to CT Mandatory reporting guidelines; *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (2023), procedural updates to the Sexual Misconduct Review Board and added safeguards for the victim and the accused during an investigation.

The Diocese of Bridgeport utilizes the VIRTUS *Protecting God's Children for Adults* program, which includes online registration and a link to our criminal background check provider. Initial training consists of three hours of instructor-led training, offered either in person or virtually. Ongoing continuing education may be completed online. The Diocese utilizes the Kidsmartz and Netsmartz programs annually for students in grades K-12 in all diocesan Catholic schools. For children enrolled in parish faith formation, completion of the Connecticut public school child sexual abuse prevention curriculum, Healthy and Balanced Living, is verified by a parent or legal guardian at the time of enrollment. Safe Environment training materials are also provided to parents upon enrollment.

Safe Environment training through VIRTUS online and a criminal background check must be renewed every five (5) years for all clergy, religious, candidates for ordination, employees and volunteers who have scheduled contact with children or Vulnerable Adults. All members of the clergy and personnel who work in direct contact with children or Vulnerable Adults must complete ongoing training through LEAD on our Diocesan Code of Conduct.

Vendors, Tenants, Independent Contractors and Volunteers with no scheduled contact with children or Vulnerable Adults are required to renew both training and a criminal background check every ten (10) years.

The Safe Environment Handbook is available online and in limited printed format. Clergy, Candidates for Ordination and Employees are required to sign a printed version of the Handbook. The revised 2026 Safe Environment Handbook, and all its accompanying policies and procedures, is promulgated for use throughout the Diocese of Bridgeport effective March 29, 2026.

I order that the provisions of this decree have firm and stable effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and that they be promulgated as particular law by publication on the official diocesan website. Furthermore, I order that the present provisions be duly communicated to all who are subject to them.

Given at Chancery Office in Shelton, CT on this 29th day of March 2026, the Fifth Sunday of Lent.

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport

Deacon Gerald Lambert
Ecclesiastical Notary