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## Christmas Caution

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Well the Christmas season is upon us once again. And along with it come all the requisite joys and wonders, prayers and songs, well-wishes and presents, and abundant opportunities (and possibly even a little extra pressure) to volunteer for the Holiday play/living nativity/breakfast-with-Santa/church hayride, etcetera. People love this time of year and these events and rightfully so, but they do provide for a somewhat chaotic, albeit jolly, atmosphere. During these times, it only makes sense to be certain that the level of alertness remain constant.

Many churches and schools do not require safe environment training for occasional volunteers, so it bears mentioning that these folks will not have the understanding of safe environment issues found among the regular volunteers or the paid staff. This places a little more of the burden on the “regulars” who coordinate and lead these events.

We are not talking about raising some sort of red alert. We are speaking of maintaining a safe environment; something no different than what we have been doing for several years now. That environment however, needs to be maintained more often than normal and may contain more people than usual, so it helps to be prepared.

Make sure everyone who is helping out knows the event team. Who should they find if they have a question or concern? What should they do if a child is separated from their parents? Does every set of chaperones include adults who have received safe environment training? Each event is unique and

requires a little thought to keep everyone safe.

Christmas events, or any other once-a-year events (Easter comes to mind), need not be handled with a heavy hand or dire warnings. Simple planning and preparation on the part of staff and the organizers can certainly allow everyone to enjoy the spirit of the season in all its fullness and joy. It is not difficult or obstructive to maintain boundaries on locations, and it is just as simple to make sure a qualified presence is kept in all occupied areas. After all, we are simply maintaining vigilance, not actively tracking a suspect.



Once the plans are in place and everyone knows their responsibilities, it is time to join in the festivities. Keep an eye out. Enforce safe policies (kindly please). Smile at everyone you see. And sing the Christmas carols at the top of your lungs (unless you're supposed to blend in). And whether you intend to use it or not, be sure to watch out for the mistletoe.

Thank you for another year of doing everything you do for our children and for the Church. May our Lord, Jesus Christ rain down blessings this Christmas season upon your efforts, upon your events, upon your children and families, and upon you.



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