

□ **BROWNSVILLE:** Religion

# Catholic diocese sets ethics standards

Valley Morning Star

BROWNSVILLE — The Catholic Diocese of Brownsville announced this week it has completed a policy on standards of ethical behavior for all diocesan employees.

"The policy covers such matters as use of controlled substances, sexual harassment, child abuse, sexual misconduct and procedures when child abuse or sexual misconduct are alleged," according to a press release issued by the diocese.

Sister Esther Dunegan, chancellor of the diocese, will explain the policy in seminars for church personnel before it goes into effect Feb. 1.

"The policy is going to be a challenge for all of us but it is a challenge the church is going to have to face in this day and age," said Dunegan, who drafted the new policy, which formalizes many unwritten policies used previously.

"I think in anything it always helps to have some direction, some guidelines," she said.

The new, written policy states that "all who work for or visit the parishes or diocesan offices will be treated with dignity and will not be subject to sexual harassment or an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment." It also states that "sexual misconduct by church personnel is contrary to proper ethical behavior, is outside

the scope of the duties of church personnel, and will not be tolerated," according to the press release.

Diocesan spokeswoman Pam Downing said the new policy was not in response to recent claims of sexual misbehavior in the Brownsville diocese.

"I think our whole concept of forgiveness as well as counseling have changed over the years and this is a reaction to that change," Downing said.

Claims of sexual misconduct were made this summer against two former employees of the diocese.

On July 24, the Rev. Benedicto Ortiz, a retired chaplain at Knapp

Medical Center in Weslaco, was seriously injured when he was stabbed and slashed with a knife at a Donna apartment complex. The suspect, Juan Angel Villanueva Ramirez, said at his arraignment that the priest had made sexual advances toward him. Ortiz was hospitalized for more than two months and Villanueva is awaiting trial.

Also in July, three Austin women filed a lawsuit claiming sexual assault by a Dominican monk who had served for 14 years in the Diocese of Brownsville. The women's lawyer said Brother Timothy Wrinn also may have assaulted women in the Brownsville area while he served there from 1978 to 1992.