

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CHURCH LEADERS DIOCESE OF CROOKSTON

I. PREAMBLE

As leaders in the Church founded by Christ, those who minister within our parishes and institutions must always seek to uphold Christian values and conduct. In addition to following the Gospel and its mandates, Church Leaders will want to act properly at all times in the light of contemporary society and its needs. The following is a set of general ethical standards for our lives and ministry.

This code is intended to stimulate discussion within the Church community in order to broaden consensus on standards of practice and further refine them. This Code will aid in the training and education of new Church Leaders. Lastly, it demands accountability from Church Leaders who may fail to live within the ethical standards of the Code.

This code is written for all Church Leaders, whether paid or volunteer. The term “Church Leader” is defined as those individuals who represent the Church by virtue of office or designated position, and includes but is not limited to: catechists, deacons, directors of religious education, parish administrators, pastoral associates, priests, principals, religious, teachers, and youth ministers. This Code of Conduct expresses the core values that must guide the conduct of Church Leaders.

Responsibility for adherence to this Code of Conduct rests with the Church Leaders themselves. It is anticipated, however, that disregard of this Code by Church Leaders will be dealt with by the appropriate employing/appointing organization’s representative (e.g. the pastor/parish administrator, the religious superior, the bishop). Remedial action may take various forms from counseling to removal from ministry.

The conduct of Church Leaders, both public and private, has the potential to inspire and motivate people, or scandalize and tear down their faith. Church Leaders must be aware of the responsibilities that accompany their work. They also know that God’s goodness and graces support them in their ministry.

II. FIVE KEY PRINCIPLES

Five key principles underlie the ethical stance of this Code. The ethical Church Leader is one who embraces the principles of ecclesial commitment, integrity, respect for others, well-being and competence.

1. Ecclesial Commitment

Church Leaders embrace the teachings of Jesus and work to promote the Gospel. They shall pursue understanding of the Scriptures and be able to relate them to day-to-day situations encountered in the parish and community.

Church Leaders shall exhibit a commitment to the Church. Loyalty to the traditions of the past, attentiveness to the realities of the present, and readiness/preparedness for challenges of the future should be evident. They are responsible for providing for and nurturing the life of the community, especially its sacramental life. They shall conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the discipline and teaching of the Catholic Church.

Church Leaders must show a commitment not only to the parish family, but also to the larger community in which the parish is located. They must show a special care and concern for the needs of the poor and the oppressed of society. Church Leaders shall address community social concerns by active reflection on Catholic social teachings. Church Leaders shall share the spirit of ecumenism in their interactions with other community religious groups.

2. Integrity

Church Leaders are expected to be persons of integrity and must conduct themselves in an honest and open manner, free from deception or corruption. They shall handle the responsibilities of their office in a conscientious fashion. Leaders in a Church that sets high moral standards for its members have a responsibility to lead by example. Church Leaders witness in all relationships to the chastity appropriate to their state of life, whether celibate, married or single.

3. Respect for Others

Church Leaders shall respect the rights, dignity and worth of each member of the Church and larger community. Church Leaders respect each individual as a creation of God without regard to his/her economic status or degree of participation in parish life. Church Leaders refrain from physically, sexually, verbally or emotionally abusing or neglecting a minor or adult.

Church Leaders strive to be sensitive to cultural differences among people and appreciate the opportunities that diversity brings. Church Leaders take the time to understand the collective journeys of their congregations and understand the role of history in parish development.

Church Leaders are aware that issues of aging, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical and mental disabilities, and language all affect how the message of the Gospel is received and interpreted.

4. Well Being

Church Leaders are expected to attend to their own human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral well-being.

a. Human Well-Being

Church Leaders have a duty to be attuned to their physical, mental and emotional health. They should be aware of warning signs in their behavior and moods that can indicate conditions that can be detrimental to their health. Inappropriate use of alcohol, technology or misuse of prescription drugs are examples. Church Leaders should immediately seek help when they identify warning signs in their professional or personal lives.

Church Leaders should be supportive of one another, in terms of both affirmation and holding one another accountable for their physical and emotional well-being.

Church Leaders should determine healthy limits in their work environment and live within these limits as much as possible. They should make use of allotted time for vacation and days away from the work environment.

b. Spiritual Well-Being

Church Leaders have a duty to stay attuned to their own spiritual health. Church Leaders must maintain and nurture an ongoing prayer life. Church Leaders need to address their own spiritual needs in order to remain focused in the faith. Regularly meeting with a spiritual director is highly recommended. Church Leaders need to take advantage of time provided for an annual retreat and days of reflection.

c. Intellectual Well-Being

Church Leaders have a responsibility to attend to their ongoing intellectual development. Church Leaders should participate annually in seminars and workshops in areas that are relevant to their current ministry. Church Leaders should stay current through reading of both religious and secular sources. Church Leaders should participate in a regular process of evaluation of their effectiveness in ministry. Church Leaders should make use of the time and funding provided for ongoing formation.

d. Pastoral Well-Being

Church Leaders are responsible for nurturing the life of the parish community. They should know and respect the people to whom they have been given in ministry. As appropriate to their ministry, they should celebrate the sacraments with decorum, in fidelity to the official rites of the Roman Catholic Church. Church Leaders should know and respect the policies and procedures of the Diocese. Church Leaders should nurture in themselves the pastoral heart necessary to lead their people in word, worship and service.

5. Competence

Church Leaders shall maintain high levels of professional competence in their particular ministry. Training, education and experience all contribute to make them competent and credible in their areas of expertise. Church Leaders shall not attempt to provide services in those areas in which they lack competence; competence also means knowing one's limitations.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

1. Administration:

Church Leaders exercise just treatment of employees and volunteers in the day-to-day administrative operations of their ministries.

1.1 Church Leaders shall seek to relate to all people with respect, sensitivity and reverence. Meetings are to be conducted with patience and courtesy toward the views of others, in an environment where it is safe for others to offer constructive criticism.

1.2 Church Leaders seek to empower others, supporting each person to live the life to which God calls him/her. They are to seek to work in ways that respect the different talents people bring to the Church.

1.3 Church Leaders exercise responsible stewardship of all parish resources. They must also ensure that whatever their area of ministry, there is a clear accounting of all parish funds.

1.4 Church Leaders ensure that systems are in place to protect both the Church and the individual from financial mismanagement. Independent audits of financial operations are to be conducted on a regular basis.

1.5 Personnel and other administrative decisions made by Church Leaders should not only meet civil and Canon Law obligations, but should reflect Catholic social teachings.

1.6 All Church Leaders who receive financial recompense for their ministerial service under stipulated contract terms or diocesan scales may not receive dual reimbursement for work that falls ordinarily under the scope of their pastoral assignment or ministry (e.g. a pastor who teaches religious education may not receive both a pastor's salary and that of a director of religious education, etc.).

1.7 Pastors and Pastoral Administrators will provide guidelines for volunteers who work with young people.

1.8 Driving a church or school vehicle is prohibited unless prior authorization has been received and the appropriate license or certification has been obtained.

1.9 Church Leaders are not to entrust minors with keys to church facilities.

2. Conduct in Counseling:

Church Leaders who conduct counseling for families, individuals, or groups, must respect their rights and advance the welfare of each person.

2.1 Church Leaders should not step beyond their competence in counseling situations. The parameters for Church Leaders are dictated by their training or certification from a recognized professional association of peers, or licensure from the State of Minnesota.

2.2 If conducting group sessions, Church Leaders must insure that no individual is subject to trauma or abuse resulting from group interactions. The Church Leader must state to group participants the nature of the group, and the parameters of confidentiality of all individual disclosures.

2.3 Church Leaders do not disclose information learned from counseling sessions. In beginning what is clearly a counseling relationship, the Church Leader should inform the counselee that confidentiality is limited when there is clear and imminent danger to the client or to others as well as in cases where there is abuse of minors or vulnerable adults. In such cases, the Church Leader must contact the necessary authorities or other professionals.

2.4 In cases where the counselee is already in a counseling relationship with another professional, the Church Leader should make clear what they can provide to the counselee. Generally, this should be confined to spiritual assistance.

2.5 Church Leaders who move to another parish while conducting counseling with parishioners should help make appropriate referrals for continued care.

2.6 Church Leaders ordinarily do not begin a counseling relationship with someone with whom they have a preexisting relationship (i.e., employee, professional colleague).

2.7 Church Leaders do not engage in sexual intimacies with those whom they counsel.

2.8 Physical contact with the counselee can be misconstrued and should generally be avoided.

2.9 It should always be clear to both the Church Leader and the counselee that a counseling relationship is in process. This can best be done when the counseling, especially if extended, is conducted in an appropriate setting and at appropriate times. Counseling should thus not be done in private living quarters or at places or times that would be ambiguous or misleading to the counselee.

2.10 Church Leaders should be cognizant at all times of the significance of boundaries in all counseling relationships. During the course of the counseling relationship, Church Leaders ordinarily do not socialize with counsees.

2.11 Church Leaders who conduct counseling should hold themselves accountable in that activity. This may be accomplished by engaging in professional peer consultation and/or supervision as appropriate. They should keep a calendar of times and places of contacts, phone calls and electronic communication especially in the case of more frequent meetings with the same person.

2.12 When a Church Leader's independent judgment is impaired (for example, by prior concurrent personal or professional relationships, where he or she becomes personally involved, or where he or she becomes an advocate for one person against another), the Church Leader should advise the party/parties that he or she can no longer provide counseling and refer him/her/them to other counselors.

3. Conduct With Minors:

Church Leaders working with minors should use appropriate judgment to insure trusting relationships marked by personal and professional integrity.

3.1 Church Leaders must be aware of their own vulnerability and that of any individual minor with whom they may be working. In every instance possible, a team approach to youth ministry activities should be considered. Church Leaders should avoid establishing any exclusive relationship with a minor and exercise due caution when they become aware of a minor desiring a relationship. Both the participants and members of the church community can misunderstand such relationships.

3.2 Church Leaders are prohibited from developing an exclusive relationship with a minor child or vulnerable adult through a pattern of "grooming" behavior which includes personal contact, mail or telephone or communication through electronic media; e.g. e-mail, instant messaging, texting, social media or gaming, giving of gifts, private meetings, singling a child out for special attentions, driving a child alone to and from an event.

3.3 Physical contact with minors can be misconstrued by both minors and other adults, and should only occur under appropriate public circumstances.

3.4 Church Leaders do not consume or supply alcohol and/or illegal drugs when working with minors.

3.5 Church Leaders do not provide any sexually explicit, inappropriate, or offensive material to minors.

3.6 Providing overnight accommodations in rectories or other personal residences for parish minors, or other minors with whom the Church Leader may have other than a close familial relationship, is strictly prohibited.

3.7 Church Leaders should know and understand diocesan policies and procedures concerning allegations of sexual misconduct involving minors, developmentally disabled and vulnerable adults.

3.8 Church Leaders will be held to a policy of zero tolerance in regards to the sexual abuse of minors.

3.9 Touching must be age-appropriate and based on the need of the young person, not the need of the adult.

3.10 Engaging in physical discipline of a young person is unacceptable. Discipline problems are to be handled according to parish or school policy.

3.11 Church Leaders should not be alone with young people in areas inappropriate to a ministry relationship.

3.12 Church Leaders are prohibited from taking trips alone and especially overnight trips alone with a young person from the parish or school community who is not a member of their immediate family.

3.13 Church Leaders do not share beds with anyone except their spouse. If attending a parish or school sponsored event that requires a stay in a hotel the adult must sleep in a separate room.

3.14 Topics, vocabulary, recordings, films, games, computer software, or any other form of personal interaction or entertainment that could not be used comfortably in the presence of parents must not be used with young people. Pornographic material is prohibited.

3.15 Administering medication to a minor of any kind is prohibited without the explicit written permission of the parent.

3.16 If inappropriate personal or physical attraction develops between a Church Leader and a young person, the adult is responsible to maintain clear professional boundaries.

3.17 If one-on-one pastoral care of a young person should be necessary, avoid meeting in isolated environments. Schedule meeting at times and location that create accountability. Limit both the length and number of sessions, and make appropriate referrals. Notify parent of the meetings.

3.18 Church Leaders are prohibited from permitting children to cross a road by themselves while the children are their custodial care.

3.19 Taking photos of young people while they are unclothed or dressing is prohibited.

3.20 Prior to any planned discussion or session on human sexuality, Church Leaders are to send a communication to parents who then have the option to withdraw their child from the session. This section does not refer to Safe Environment Training which deals with abuse of power rather than human sexuality.

4. Sexual Conduct:

Church Leaders do not exploit the trust of the parish community for sexual gain or intimacy.

4.1 Church Leaders must never exploit a person for sexual purposes.

4.2 It is the personal and professional obligation of the Church Leader to be knowledgeable and be able to recognize sexual exploitation of another and to be familiar with the laws of the State of Minnesota and the Safe Environment Policy regarding sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, grooming and sexual assault.

4.3 Church Leaders who have made a commitment to celibacy are called to witness this in all relationships. Likewise, those who have made a marital commitment are called to witness to this fidelity in all their relationships.

4.4 Any allegations of sexual misconduct or sexual abuse will be taken seriously and reported according to the Safe Environment Policy.

4.5 Church Leaders should be knowledgeable of the State of Minnesota Child Abuse regulations and know the proper reporting requirements. Church Leaders also comply with all mandatory reporting requirements except if the information was received under the seal of the confessional. In such cases, no reporting can occur.

4.6 In order to witness to Catholic values and social teachings, Church Leaders should strive to move beyond simply meeting the mandatory requirements. Church Leaders should also exercise their obligation to engage in permissive or optional reporting, as described under Minnesota law.

5. Professional Behavior:

Church Leaders do not engage in gender bias in hiring, promotion or assigning responsibility or in physical, psychological or verbal harassment of employees, volunteers, or parishioners, and will not tolerate such harassment by other church employees or volunteers.

5.1 Church Leaders are committed to providing a professional work environment for their employees, which is totally free from such harassment. This commitment continues the diocesan policy of fair and equal employment to every person regardless of race, religion, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status, veteran, handicap status or any other status protected by law. Church Leaders should provide a work environment that is free from intimidation and harassment based on any of these factors.

5.2 Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical or verbal behavior, which can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Physical or mental abuse;
- Racial insults;
- Derogatory ethnic slurs;
- Unwelcome sexual advances or touching;
- Sexual comments or sexual jokes;
- Requests for sexual favors used as a condition of employment or affecting any personnel decision such as hiring, promotion, or compensation;
- Display of offensive materials;
- Chauvinism.

5.3 Harassment can occur as a result of a single severe incident or a pattern of conduct, which results in the creation of a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work environment.

5.4 Church Leaders are to follow the established procedure for reporting of harassment, and are to ensure that no retaliation for bringing forward a claim of harassment will be tolerated.

5.5 Church Leaders are to insure that there is a clear policy on reporting harassment for both employees and volunteers.

6. Confidentiality:

Information disclosed to a Church Leader during the course of counseling, advising, spiritual direction and any other professional contact shall be held in strictest confidence.

6.1 Parishioners and other persons who come to the Church Leader should feel that they are entering a relationship marked by respect, trust and confidentiality.

6.2 The Church Leader is also bound to safeguard the confidentiality of any notes, files, or computer records pertaining to professional contact with individuals.

6.3 If consultation with another professional becomes necessary, utmost care should be taken to do so only by using non-identifying information; when this is not possible, the other professional must be bound to the same degree of confidentiality as the Church Leader. If the other professional is not so bound, the disclosure should not be made.

6.4 When consultation is necessary, the Church Leader must exercise great care to limit the content of the information to be shared. The Church Leader must first determine: what is the precise information that the Church Leader needs to have shared; with whom is the information to be shared; and why does it need to be shared.

6.5 Knowledge that arises from professional contact may be used in teaching, writing and preaching or other public presentations only when effective measures have been taken to absolutely safeguard individual identity and confidentiality.

6.6 Except as provided above with respect to consultation, confidential information can be disclosed only with the written, informed consent of the individual. In legal proceedings in which the Church Leader is a defendant and the allegations stem from a professional contact, the disclosure of confidential information gained in that contact is permitted only to the minimum necessary to achieve the purpose of defense.

6.7 When entering into a counseling relationship, Church Leaders must instruct the counselee from the outset regarding several exceptions to the ordinary rights of confidentiality: threats of self-inflicted harm to the counselee and threats against others because of the counselee's emotional status or behavior. Threats of self-harm may also include suicidal ideation with a plan to commit the act and/or plans to commit violence against another. In these situations, which pose a grave risk for the counselee's welfare and the welfare of others, communication of information to a parent or legal guardian (in cases when the counselee is a minor) and to the civil authorities should occur expeditiously with or without the consent of the counselee. The Church Leader must exercise great care and judgment in determining the appropriateness of this kind of disclosure and in balancing the ultimate welfare of the counselee with the duty to warn.

6.8 These obligations are independent of and supplementary to the confidentiality of the confessional. Under no circumstances whatsoever can there be any disclosure, even indirect, of information received through the confessional.

7. Records and Information:

Appropriate confidentiality shall be maintained in creating, storing, accessing, transferring and disposing of parish or institutional records.

7.1 Sacramental records shall be regarded as confidential. When, for valid Church reporting or parish statistical purposes, information from these records is made public, great care must be taken to preserve the anonymity of individuals.

7.2 A trained staff member who is authorized to locate the requested information or supervise the use of such records shall handle requests for all records.

7.3 Parish financial records are to be held as confidential unless an appropriate governmental agency or office requires review. The Office of Administration should be contacted regarding the release of all financial records.

7.4 The records of individual contributions to the parish shall be regarded as private and therefore shall be used only as necessary.

8. Conflicts of Interest:

Church Leaders should avoid putting themselves in a position that might present a conflict of interest, since the existence, or even the appearance, of a conflict of interest can call into question one's integrity and professional conduct.

8.1 The potential for a conflict of interest exists in many circumstances. Examples of such behavior by a Church Leader include: conducting private business or other dealings with the Church or any of its members; accepting substantial (non-token) gifts for services or favors; employing or engaging in transactions with his or her friends or relatives; acting with partiality toward employees or church members; or violating a confidence of another for personal gain.

8.2 Disclosure of all relevant factors can in some circumstances lessen the potential for a conflict of interest.

9. Reporting Misconduct:

Church Leaders have a responsibility to report violations of the Code of Conduct on the part of other Church Leaders.

9.1 In cases where there are clear indications of illegal actions by a Church Leader, notification should be made immediately to the proper civil and Church authorities.

9.2 In cases where there are clear indicators of unethical, but not illegal actions by a Church Leader, notification should be made to the proper Church authorities.

9.3 When Church Leaders believe that one of their colleagues may have violated this Code of Conduct, they should attempt to resolve the issue, if possible, by bringing it to the attention of the individual. If this fails, the Church Leader shall take further action by reporting to the supervisor or next higher authority, or to the Office of the Vicar General.

9.4 All accusations and concerns, either past or present, involving the sexual abuse of a minor and/or adult sexual exploitation, as defined by Minnesota law, must be reported promptly according to our Safe Environment Policy.

9.5 When Church Leaders are uncertain whether a particular situation or course of conduct would violate this Code of Conduct, they should consult with peers knowledgeable about ethical issues and this Code, or the Office of the Vicar General, in order to determine the proper response.

9.6 When a Church Leader witnesses anyone (adult or minor) abusing a young person, the Church Leader is to immediately take appropriate steps to intervene and to provide a safe environment for the young person and report the misconduct to the proper authorities.

10. Conduct Between Minors:

The Diocese of Crookston strictly prohibits any intimidation or bullying between students.

10.1 The Diocese of Crookston adopts Minnesota State Administrative Rule 121A.0695 which states that “each school board shall have a written policy of prohibiting intimidation and bullying of any student in all forms including, but not limited to, electronic forms and forms involving internet use”.

10.1.1 In relation to Catholic schools, the term School Board will be read as Advisory Board.

10.2 Bully means any written or verbal expression, physical act or gesture, or pattern thereof, by a student that is intended to cause or is perceived as causing distress to one or more students and which substantially interferes with another student or students educational benefits, opportunities, or performance. Bullying includes, but is not limited to, conduct by a student against another student that a reasonable person under the circumstances knows or should know has the effects of harming a student, damaging a student’s property, places a student in reasonable fear of harm, or creates a hostile learning environment for that student.

10.3 A suggested uniform bullying prohibition policy is attached as Appendix A.

11. Electronic Communication:

The Diocese of Crookston adopts as its best practices in relation to electronic and telephone communication the guidelines set out in NFCYMs Recommended Technology Guidelines for Pastoral Work with Young People (see Appendix B).

RESOURCES

- Code of Canon Law (1983)
- Diocesan Policy Manual
- Sexual Misconduct Policy of the Diocese of Crookston
- Grateful acknowledgment is extended to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee
- Creating Safe and Sacred Places by Gerard J. McGlone, SJ PhD, and Mary Shrader, St. Mary’s Press, 2003