



DIOCESE OF WORCESTER

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Code of Ministerial Conduct

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Please read the following statements and sign below to indicate your receipt and acknowledgment of this Diocese of Worcester Code of Ministerial Conduct (the "Code"). If you are an employee or volunteer, please return the signed document to your supervisor. If you are a cleric, please return the signed sheet to the Vicar for Clergy. This acknowledgment will become a permanent part of your personnel file.

- I have received and have reviewed a copy of the Code. I understand that it is my obligation to abide by the provisions contained in this Code.
- I understand that this Code is not a contract and does not grant any rights to continued employment, ministry, or volunteer service. I understand that the Diocese of Worcester reserves the right to change, modify, and/or revise any part of this Code at any time but that the Diocese will notify Church personnel of any changes to the Code as soon as possible.

Signature: _____

Name (please print clearly): _____

Home Address: _____

Home Telephone Number: _____

Parish/School/Agency: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____



CODE OF MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

THE DIOCESE OF WORCESTER

October 2004

INTRODUCTION

Bishops, priests, deacons, pastoral ministers, administrators, staff, employees and volunteers in our parishes, religious communities, institutes, and organizations must uphold Christian values and conduct. The following Code of Ministerial Conduct ("Code") provides a set of standards for conduct in pastoral situations.

Because of the grave responsibilities associated with their work and positions, bishops, priests, and deacons are held to higher standards of behavior than other church personnel. Thus, bishops, priests, and deacons not only are required to comply with the standards of behavior included in this Code, they are also expected to avoid even the appearance of impropriety both inside and outside the scope of their ministry.

The public and private conduct of clergy, staff, and volunteers can inspire and motivate people, but that conduct can also scandalize and undermine people's faith. Clergy, staff, and volunteers must at all times be aware of the responsibilities that accompany their work. They must also know that God's goodness and grace supports them in their ministry.

We have a responsibility to witness in all relationships to the chastity appropriate to our state in life, whether celibate, married or single. We must avoid any covert or overt sexual behaviors with those for whom we have a professional or pastoral responsibility. This includes seductive speech or gestures as well as physical contact that sexually abuses, exploits or harasses another person. We are to provide safe environments in parishes, schools and institutions where children and others can be assured that their boundaries will not be violated.

We should be aware of our own and other persons' vulnerability, especially when working alone with another, and be particularly aware that we bear the greater responsibility for maintaining sexual boundaries in a pastoral relationship for we hold the greater power. We must not initiate sexual behavior and must refuse it when another invites or consents to it. We must give preference to the perspective and judgment of those who are vulnerable and dependent on us in order to determine whether touching would be an appropriate expression of pastoral care.

We must show prudent discretion before touching another person, since we cannot control how physical touch will be received. We strive for greater self-awareness in order to recognize the sexual dynamics at work for us in pastoral relationships and to heed the warning signs in our lives that indicate when we are approaching boundary violations.

We must intervene when there is evidence of or reasonable cause to suspect that children are being abused in any way.

We must report violations of sexual conduct to the appropriate civil and ecclesial authorities and then do what we can to see that justice is done for the victim, the offender, and the community from which the victim and offender come.

APPLICABILITY

Church Personnel

This Code applies to all church personnel employed or engaged in ministry for the Diocese of Worcester, its parishes, Catholic schools, and institutions. Church personnel includes bishops, priests, deacons, seminarians studying for ordination into the Diocese of Worcester and those enrolled in the Permanent Diaconate Formation Program, lay employees and volunteers, who have regular contact with children and young people.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS AND INTEGRITY IN MINISTRY

Standards for Working with Minors

A. Establishing Appropriate Conduct with Minors

Church personnel working with children and youth must be aware of their own vulnerability and that of any minor with whom they may be working. Church personnel should avoid situations where they are alone with a minor. When it is not feasible to have another individual present, such as when in the confessional, counseling or teaching a minor, church personnel should meet with the minor in as public a place as possible, such as a room with the door open or with a clear window in the door.

Church personnel are prohibited from speaking to minors in a way that is or could be construed by any observer as being threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating. Church personnel are expected to refrain from using profane language in the presence of minors and must never use any discipline that frightens or humiliates children and youth. Church personnel are prohibited from using physical discipline including but not limited to spanking, slapping, hitting, or any other physical force. If a minor exhibits uncontrollable or unusual behavior, the church worker should notify the appropriate supervisor and a parent or guardian of the minor.

Church personnel must not use or supply alcohol (excepting sacramental wine in Mass) and/or illegal drugs when working with minors or while participating in a youth activity. Moreover, church personnel must not be under the influence of alcohol or impairing drugs (including prescription medication not used as directed) while working with minors.

Church personnel must not provide any sexually explicit, inappropriate, or offensive material to minors. Church personnel are prohibited from possessing or viewing any sexually-oriented or morally inappropriate websites or viewing or sending such electronic mail messages on church property or in the presence of minors.

Church personnel are prohibited from engaging in any sexually-oriented conversations with minors. However, it is expected that from time to time youth ministry and educational lessons and discussions for teenagers may address human sexuality issues related to dating and sex. Moreover, it is

Standards for Spiritual and Pastoral Relationships

A. Respecting the Rights and Welfare of Those Counseled

Church personnel who conduct counseling for families, individuals or groups must respect the individual rights of these counseled and work to advance the welfare of each person.

Church personnel providing counseling are expected to avoid situations in which conduct in fact or in appearance takes advantage of anyone in order to further the personal, religious, political, or business interests of the provider.

Church personnel shall not overstep their competence in counseling situations and shall refer to other professionals when appropriate. Professional services offered by church personnel must not be beyond those dictated by their training and/or certification from a recognized professional association of peers or licensure from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

B. Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries

Church personnel shall set, communicate, and maintain clear, appropriate boundaries in all counseling and counseling-related relationships.

Church personnel must never engage in sexual intimacies with those they counsel. This includes consensual sexual contact, forced sexual contact, and sexually explicit conversations not related to counseling issues.

Church personnel shall not engage in sexual intimacies with counselee's relatives, friends or other individuals close to the counselee. Church personnel should presume that a potential for exploitation or harm exists in such intimate relationships.

Physical contact with the counselee can be misconstrued. Great care should be taken in any physical contact beyond a handshake.

Sessions should be conducted in appropriate settings at appropriate times and should not be held at places or times that would tend to cause confusion about the nature of the relationship for the counselee. No sessions should be conducted in private living quarters. Church personnel should keep a log of the times and places of sessions with each counselee.

C. Confidentiality

Many people who come to the Church for help expect that church personnel will refrain from disclosing personal and sensitive information they share with church personnel. Church personnel therefore should maintain their confidentiality, except as required by law or as set forth in the paragraphs below.

Church personnel must comply with all reporting requirements mandated by Massachusetts law and the reporting requirements contained in the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Youth regarding the reporting of sexual abuse of a minor.

In accordance with Church law, the sacramental seal of confession is inviolable, and it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray the confidence of a penitent in any way or for any reason. This is applicable whether the penitent is living or dead. Violation of the sacramental seal of confession is considered to be a grave delict (a serious crime) against Church law.

Information obtained in the course of counseling sessions shall be confidential, except for compelling professional reasons, as required by law, or as required by the reporting requirements for sexual abuse contained in this Code. Church personnel are also bound to safeguard the confidentiality of any notes, files, or computer records pertaining to professional contact with individuals to the extent consistent with the obligation to report abuse or prevent harm.

D. Conflicts of Interest

Church personnel shall avoid placing themselves in a position that might present a conflict of interest because the existence or the appearance of a conflict of interest can call into question one's integrity and professional conduct.

The potential for a conflict of interest exists in many circumstances. Examples of such situations and behavior by church personnel include, but are not limited to, 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 one's friends or relatives; soliciting personal loans or requests for financial assistance from parish members, vendors, parish organizations, or employees; acting with partiality toward employees or Church members; or violating a confidence of another for personal gain.

A conflict of interest may exist when Church personnel give family and/or friends unlimited access to church facilities or resources when they are not available to other parishioners. To that end, no person shall reside in a parish building unless assigned by the bishop to minister in the parish. Parish employees and the family members of friends of a priest shall not be provided a residence on parish property without the explicit written permission of the bishop. This blanket prohibition does not apply to a visit or a brief stay.

A conflict of interest may also exist in ministerial relationships. Church personnel must establish clear, appropriate boundaries with anyone with whom they have a business, professional, personal, familial, or social relationship.

VIOLATIONS OF THE CODE OF MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Reporting Ethical or Professional Misconduct

The Diocese is dedicated to taking steps to ensure that the Church is a safe and welcoming environment for all people and that it is free from harassment and intimidation. It is imperative that every member of the Church community participates as actively in the protection of minors as well as others who minister or worship in our Church. Church personnel therefore have a duty to report observations of violations of this code. Clergy, staff, employees and volunteers must hold each other accountable for maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards. If Church personnel suspect that a minor has been subjected to abuse, they must comply with the reporting requirements under Massachusetts law and the Diocese of Worcester Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Youth.

Reports of unethical behavior or other violations of the Code may be made to any one of the following:

1. The pastor, principal or administrator where the conduct took place
2. The Vicar General or Chancellor