

I. Preamble

All Church personnel are to conduct themselves in a manner that upholds Catholic values. This Code of Pastoral Conduct provides a set of standards for conduct either in providing or in supporting the pastoral care of the Christian faithful and all others. The Code does not present an exhaustive list of expectations, standards, or requirements. Rather, this Code accompanies the Universal Law of the Church, civil law, and diocesan policies. Church personnel are to be aware of and committed to all of these norms that govern pastoral conduct.

II. Responsibility

The public and private conduct of Church personnel can inspire and motivate people, but it can also scandalize and undermine people's faith. Church personnel are, at all times, to be aware of the responsibilities that accompany their work. They are to know also that God's goodness and grace support them in their ministry.

Responsibility for adherence to the Code of Pastoral Conduct rests with the individual. Church personnel who disregard this Code of Pastoral Conduct will be subject to remedial action up to and possibly including dismissal. Corrective action may take various forms - from a verbal reproach to removal from the ministry - depending on the specific nature and circumstances of the offense and the extent of the harm.

III. Pastoral Standards

1. Conduct for Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction: Church personnel providing pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are to respect the rights and advance the welfare of each person.

1.1 Church personnel are not to step beyond their competence in counseling situations and are to refer clients to other professionals when appropriate.

1.2 Church personnel are to consider carefully the possible consequences before entering into a counseling relationship with someone with whom they have a pre-existing relationship (i.e., employee, professional colleague, friend, or other pre-existing relationship). [See Section 7.2.2]

1.3 Church personnel are not to audiotape or videotape sessions.

1.4 Church personnel are never to engage in sexual intimacies with the persons they counsel. This includes consensual and nonconsensual contact, forced physical contact, and inappropriate sexual comments.

1.5 Church personnel assume the full burden of responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in all counseling and counseling-related relationships.

1.6 Physical contact of any kind (i.e., touching, hugging, holding) between Church personnel and the persons they counsel can be misconstrued and is to be avoided.

1.7 Sessions are to be conducted in appropriate settings at appropriate times.

1.7.1 No sessions are to be conducted in private living quarters.

1.7.2 Sessions are not to be held at places or times that would tend to cause confusion about the nature of the relationship for the person being counseled.

1.8 Church personnel providing pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are to maintain a log of the times and places of sessions with each person being counseled.

2. Confidentiality: Information disclosed to Church personnel during the course of counseling, advising, or spiritual direction is to be held in the strictest confidence possible.

2.1 Information obtained in the course of individual or group sessions is to be confidential, except for compelling professional reasons or as required by law.

2.1.1 If there is clear and imminent danger to the client or to others, Church personnel may disclose only the information necessary to protect the parties affected and to prevent harm.

2.1.2 Before disclosure is made, if feasible, Church personnel are to inform the person being counseled about the disclosure and the potential consequences.

2.2 Church personnel are to discuss the nature of confidentiality and its limitations with each person in counseling.

2.3 Church personnel are to keep minimal records of the content of sessions.

2.4 Knowledge that arises from professional contact may be used in teaching, writing, homilies, or other public presentations only when effective measures are taken to absolutely safeguard both the individual's identity and the confidentiality of the disclosures.

2.5 While counseling a minor (i.e., anyone under the age of 18) in a formal setting, if Church personnel discover that there is a serious threat to the welfare of the minor and that communication of confidential information to a parent or legal guardian is essential to the child's health and well-being, Church personnel are to:

§ Attempt to secure written consent from the minor for the specific disclosure.

§ Disclose only the information necessary to protect the health and well-being of the minor if consent is not given.

Consultation with the appropriate Church authority such as one's immediate supervisor is required before disclosure.

3. Conduct With Youth

Church personnel working with youth are to maintain an open and trustworthy relationship between youth and adult supervisors.

3.1 Church personnel are to be aware of their own and others' vulnerability when working alone with youth. Church personnel are to use a team approach to managing youth activities.

3.2 Physical contact with youth can be misconstrued and is to occur (a) only when completely nonsexual, (b) other wise appropriate, and (c) in public.

3.3 Church personnel are to abstain from (a) the use of alcohol when working with youth, and (b) the possession or use of illegal drugs at all times.

3.4 Church personnel are not to share private, overnight accommodations with individual young people. This includes, but is not limited to, accommodations in any Church owned facility, private residence, hotel room, or any other place where there is no other adult supervision present.

3.4.1 In rare, emergency situations, when accommodation is necessary for the health and well-being of the youth, Church personnel are to take extraordinary care to protect all parties from the appearance of impropriety and from all risk of harm.

3.4.2 A team approach to managing emergency situations is to be used.

4. Sexual Conduct: Church personnel are not to exploit the trust placed in them by the faith community for sexual gain or intimacy.

4.1 Church personnel who are committed to a celibate lifestyle are called to be an example of celibate chastity in all relationships at all times.

4.2 Church personnel who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction services are to avoid developing inappropriately intimate relationships with minors, other Church personnel, or parishioners. Church personnel are to behave in a professional manner at all times.

4.3 No Church personnel may exploit another person for sexual purposes.

4.4 Allegations of sexual abuse involving a minor are to be taken seriously and reported immediately to the proper civil authorities and to the appropriate Church authority.

4.5 Allegations of sexual misconduct (i.e., sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or sexual harassment) involving adults are also to be taken seriously and are to be reported to the appropriate Church authority who may also report the allegation to the proper civil authority.

4.6 The policies of the Diocese regarding sexual misconduct and sexual abuse are to be followed to protect the rights of all involved.

4.7 Church personnel are to review and know the contents of the child abuse regulations and reporting requirements for the state of Pennsylvania and are to follow those mandates.

5. Harassment: Church personnel are not to engage in physical, psychological, written, or verbal harassment of staff, volunteers, or parishioners and are not to tolerate such harassment by other Church staff or volunteers. (Merely calling people to fulfill the legitimate expectations of their position is not, in and of itself, harassment.)

5.1 Church personnel are to provide a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written, or verbal intimidation or harassment.

5.2 Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical, written, or verbal behavior, including, without limitation, 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 to affect other personnel decisions, such as promotion or compensation; and/or,

§ Display of offensive materials.

Harassment can be a single severe incident or a persistent pattern of behavior where the purpose or the effect is to create a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work environment.

5.3 Allegations of harassment are to be taken seriously and reported immediately to the appropriate Church authority such as the pastor, principal, catechetical administrator, or the Vicar for Canonical Services, the Secretary for Education or the Secretary for Ministerial Leadership.

5.4 Diocesan policies are to be followed to protect the rights of all involved.

6. Records and Information: Confidentiality is to be maintained in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of Church records.

6.1 Sacramental records are to be regarded as confidential. When compiling and publishing statistical information from these records, great care is to be taken to preserve the anonymity of individuals.

6.2 Access to sacramental records is restricted for 100 years from the date of the creation of the record. After 100 years, access to the information in the sacramental record (but not the record itself) can only be provided in accord with diocesan policy.

6.2.1 Information regarding adoption and legitimacy remains confidential, regardless of age.

6.2.2 Only Church personnel who are authorized to access the records and supervise their use are to handle requests for more recent records.

6.3 Parish financial records are confidential. The financial information is made available to the Parish Finance Council and, in summary form, to the Parish on a yearly basis. The Diocesan Financial Policies are to be observed. Contact the Diocesan Office for Civil Legal Services upon receipt of any request for release of financial records.

6.4 Individual contribution records are to be regarded as private and to be maintained in strictest confidence.

7. Conflicts of Interest: Church personnel are to avoid situations that might present a conflict of interest. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can call integrity and professional conduct into question.

7.1 Church personnel are to disclose to the appropriate Church authority (such as one's immediate supervisor) all relevant factors that potentially could create a conflict of interest.

7.2 Church personnel are to inform all parties when a real or potential conflict of interest arises. Resolution of the issues is to protect the person receiving ministry services.

7.2.1 No Church personnel is to take advantage of anyone to whom they are providing services in order to further their personal, political, or business interests.

7.2.2 Church personnel are not to provide counseling services to anyone with whom they have a business, professional, or social relationship. When this is unavoidable, the client is to be protected. The counselor is to establish and maintain clear, appropriate boundaries.

7.2.3 When providing pastoral counseling or spiritual direction to two or more people who have a pre-existing personal or business relationship, Church personnel are to:

§ Clarify with all parties the nature of each relationship,

§ Anticipate any conflict of interest,

§ Take appropriate actions to eliminate the conflict, and

§ Obtain from all parties written consent to continue services.

7.3 Conflicts of interest may also arise when Church personnel's independent judgment is impaired by:

§ Prior dealings,

§ Becoming personally involved, or

§ Becoming an advocate for one (person) against another.

In these circumstances, Church personnel are to advise the parties that he or she can no longer provide services and refer them to another competent individual qualified to provide assistance.

8. Reporting Misconduct: Church personnel have a duty to report their own ethical or professional misconduct and the misconduct of others.

8.1 Church personnel are to hold each other accountable for maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards. When there is an indication of illegal actions by Church personnel, Church personnel are to notify the proper civil authorities immediately as well as the parish or Diocesan Office for Civil Legal Services.

8.2 When an uncertainty exists about whether a situation or course of conduct violates this Code of Pastoral Conduct or other religious, moral, or ethical principles, Church personnel are to consult with the appropriate Church authority (such as one's immediate supervisor).

8.3 When it appears that a member of Church personnel has violated this Code of Pastoral Conduct or other religious, moral, or ethical principles, report the issue to the appropriate Church authority (such as one's immediate supervisor).

8.4 The obligation of Church personnel to report client misconduct is subject to the duty of confidentiality. However, any agreement or duty to maintain confidentiality is to yield to the need to report misconduct that threatens the safety, health, or well-being of any of the persons involved except as provided for in Section 2.5.

9. Administration: Employers and supervisors are to treat Church personnel justly in the day-to-day administrative operations of their ministries.

9.1 Personnel and other administrative decisions made by Church personnel are to meet civil and canon law obligations and also reflect Catholic social teachings and this Code of Pastoral Conduct.

9.2 Church personnel are not to use their position to exercise unreasonable or inappropriate power and authority.

10. Church Personnel Well-being: Church personnel have the duty to be responsible for their own spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health.

10.1 Church personnel are to be aware of warning signs that indicate potential problems with their own spiritual, physical, mental, and/or emotional health.

10.2 Church personnel are to seek help immediately whenever they notice behavioral or emotional warning signs in their own professional and/or personal lives.

10.3 Church personnel are to address their own spiritual needs by regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church and by participating in activities of spiritual development such as times of recollection and retreat, spiritual direction, and the like.

Diocese of Pittsburgh
Acknowledgement of Receipt of the Code of Pastoral Conduct

In accord with my role as Church personnel, and in witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, I will conduct myself with integrity, acting in a manner that is consistent with the discipline and teachings of the Catholic Church. I will guide my behavior by civil and canon law, by the policies of the Diocese of Pittsburgh and by the Code of Pastoral Conduct by...

1. Respecting the rights of each person and advancing his or her welfare during the course of counseling, advising or spiritual direction.
2. Holding in the strictest confidence information disclosed during the course of counseling, advising or spiritual direction.
3. Maintaining an open and trustworthy relationship when working with youth, free from inappropriate behavior that would put them at risk.
4. Honoring the trust placed in Church personnel by not exploiting others for sexual gain or intimacy.
5. Providing a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written or verbal intimidation or harassment.
6. Maintaining confidentiality in creating, storing, accessing, transferring and disposing of Church records.
7. Avoiding situations that might present a conflict of interest.
8. Reporting to proper authorities my own ethical or professional misconduct and the misconduct of others.
9. Treating Church personnel justly in the day-to-day operations of work and ministry.
10. Being responsible for my own spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health.

I HAVE CAREFULLY READ, UNDERSTAND, AND HEREBY COMMIT TO CONDUCTING MYSELF AS A PRIEST, DEACON, SEMINARIAN, CHURCH EMPLOYEE OR VOLUNTEER IN ACCORD WITH THE DIOCESAN CODE OF PASTORAL CONDUCT.

(Name) (Parish, School, Office or Program)

(Position) (Date)