

# **Code of Ethical Standards For Church Leaders**

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# **CODE OF ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR CHURCH MINISTERS**

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## **CODE OF ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR CHURCH MINISTERS**

### **I. SCOPE AND INTENT**

We who minister within our parishes, organizations, and institutions of the Church founded by Jesus Christ have the responsibility to exemplify Gospel teachings, values, and mandates in our lives, and in our actions. We must be aware of the responsibilities that accompany our work, knowing that God's goodness and graces support us in our ministries.

The intent of this Code is to establish ethical standards of conduct for Church ministers within the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The conduct of Church ministers has the power to inspire and motivate people, or to scandalize them and erode their faith.

Church ministers, as used in this document, include all who represent and work for the Catholic Church in this Archdiocese, by virtue of office or designated position, whether paid or unpaid. This Code does not supersede canon or civil law, nor does it presume to answer all ethical questions.

This Code has three purposes:

1. to provide Church ministers with guidelines on which to model our lives and ministries;
2. to stimulate discussion in order to broaden consensus on ethical standards of practice, and to be an aid in training and supervision;
3. to act as an instrument for accountability within ministry, and a basis as needed for disciplinary action.

Responsibility for knowing and adhering to this Code rests with us, those who minister in the Church.

### **II. GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

Five key principles form the ethical foundation of this Code. They are: Ecclesial Commitment; Integrity; Respect for Others; Personal Well Being; and Competence.

## **A. ECCLESIAL COMMITMENT.**

As men and women of faith, we who are Catholic Church ministers value and embrace the teachings of Jesus, have an intimate knowledge of the scriptures and the teachings of His Church, work to promote the Gospel through our ministries, and strive towards lives of virtue. The Gospel and its values infuse our work of nurturing the life of the community, especially through its sacramental life.

The presence of God is made manifest within a community of faith. Therefore, because of this, we value a deep commitment to the Church and its traditions. Moreover, we strive to be in service to the larger community, inspired by active reflection on Catholic social teaching. We demonstrate a special care and concern for the needs of the poor and the oppressed of society. We share the spirit of ecumenism in our interactions with other religious groups.

## **B. INTEGRITY**

Church ministers value integrity, which is to be who we say we are (*agere sequitur esse*) and to live our moral commitments. Because we belong to a Church that sets a high moral standard for its members, as ministers we must strive toward holiness and trustworthiness for ourselves.

We are public persons who identify ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ and servants/leaders in our Church. In turn, we must live and minister in a way that is faithful and congruent to that identification. This is exemplified by sound moral principle, uprightness and sincerity, conduct that is honest and consistent, without deception or corruption.

Our life and ministry is characterized by service. We handle the responsibilities of our office in a conscientious fashion that gives evidence of the Gospels and a commitment to the mission of the Church. We lead by word and example, with Jesus as our guide.

## **C. RESPECT FOR OTHERS**

Church ministers value each individual as a unique creation of God. We respect the rights, dignity and worth of each individual. We are sensitive to cultural and socioeconomic differences among people, and appreciate the opportunities that diversity offers. We manifest this through careful listening and shared dialogue.

Church ministers recognize 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. Because of this compassionate awareness, we do not discriminate on any basis. However, since

a person's faith, moral conduct, church participation, and adherence to the tenets of the faith may be essential to their role on behalf of the Church, the law does permit religious convictions to be considered in certain hiring, promotion and termination decisions.

#### **D. WELL BEING**

As people created by God and given the gift of life, we value our own personal and professional well-being. In order to maintain a strong foundation for our pastoral witness, we must sustain our personal health, spiritual life, and intellectual growth

1. **Personal Health.** We value attending to our own physical and mental health. We respect warning signs in our behavior and moods that might indicate conditions detrimental to our health. We recognize the value in seeking professional help when warning signs surface. We are attentive to alcohol and drug abuse, and other addictions, in ourselves and others, and consider treatment for such a priority.

We value healthy limits in our work environment. We value utilizing our allotted time for vacation and days away to replenish our body, mind, and spirit. We support our colleagues in ministry through affirmation, and hold one another accountable for maintaining personal health.

2. **Spiritual Life.** We value attending to our spiritual life, so as to remain focused in our faith, and in our ministry. We are faithful to Sunday Mass, and take the sacrament of reconciliation seriously. An ongoing prayer life, meeting regularly with a spiritual director, and taking time for annual retreats and days of reflection are important ways of maintaining and nurturing spiritual life.
3. **Intellectual Growth.** We value our ongoing intellectual development. Utilizing the time and the funding opportunities for ongoing formation to stay current in our fields is encouraged, as are reading religious and professional books and journals, and participating in continuing education programs related to our ministries.

## **E. COMPETENCE**

As Church ministers we value personal and professional competence in our particular ministries. It is on the basis of competence and abilities that the Church and those we serve recognize our positions as Church ministers. Competence is acquired and maintained through education, formation, training and skills development, and ongoing certification where appropriate.

Competence also means knowing our limitations and remaining within the scope of our duties and skills, making appropriate referrals as needed. Personal and professional assessment of competence, which includes regular performance review, is part of personal development within ministry.

## **III. ETHICAL STANDARDS IN MINISTRY**

All ministerial relationships within a church-related setting require that the highest ethical standards of conduct be maintained at all times and in all relevant areas. These include personal and professional interactions, program leadership, protection of privacy, and response to misconduct.

### **A. Personal and Professional Interactions.**

- 1. Role Integrity.** Church ministers must be faithful to the Church and to their individual ministerial roles. These roles possess inherent power with corresponding obligations, responsibilities and limitations.

**1.1** Church ministers must recognize that there is power inherent in their roles that may afford influence over another. They must be sensitive to that relative power and never use it inappropriately. Church ministers must protect the interests of those with lesser power, especially minors, mentally, physically or emotionally incapacitated, or otherwise vulnerable individuals.

**1.2** Sexualized interactions with persons who are served, or with whom one works, are never part of the ministerial role, and may incur reporting requirements for misconduct. Church ministers who have made a commitment to celibacy are called to witness this charism in all relationships. Likewise, those who have made a marital commitment are called to witness to this fidelity in all their relationships.

**1.3** Church ministers must protect the confidentiality and privacy rights of others. Church ministers must be sensitive to the potential problems inherent in dual relationships, (e.g., pastoral/personal relationships).

**2. Conduct in Pastoral Counseling.** Pastoral counseling is a specific type of interaction with its own corresponding guidelines. Pastoral counseling includes both professional pastoral counseling and short-term pastoral counseling engaged in by qualified priests, deacons, pastoral associates, and other qualified individuals for whom this is part of their ministry.

**2.1** Any counseling conducted by a Church minister must be within the parameters of his or her training or certification from a recognized professional association of peers, or licensure from the State of Wisconsin. Church ministers are expected to seek consultation/supervision and continuing education consistent with their counseling practice.

**2.2** It must always be clear to both the Church minister and the counselee that a counseling relationship is in process. Counseling relationships are characterized by meetings at appropriate times and places, supported by a calendar record of contacts. Counseling should not occur at times or places that would be ambiguous or misleading to the counselee.

**2.3** Church ministers should not begin a pastoral counseling relationship with someone with whom they have a preexisting business, professional, or social relationship.

**2.4** Church ministers must respect existing counseling relationships with another professional, and must not start another counseling relationship that would lead to confusion or duplication.

**2.5** Church ministers must be cognizant at all times of the significance of boundaries in counseling relationships. Church ministers should avoid unnecessary social contact with counsees during the course of counseling. Physical contact with counsees can be misconstrued and should be avoided. Church ministers must never engage in sexual conduct with those whom they counsel.

**2.6** Church ministers must not disclose information learned from counseling sessions. In beginning what is clearly a counseling relationship, the Church minister must inform the counselee of confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality should a counselee disclose intent to put self and/or others in imminent danger. In such cases, the Church minister must contact the necessary authorities, with or without consultation and assistance from other professionals, with or without the permission of the counselee.

**2.7** In conducting group sessions, Church ministers must ensure that no individual is subject to trauma or abuse resulting from group interactions. The Church minister must state to group participants the nature of the group, and the parameters of confidentiality of all individual disclosures. Group sessions of this type include pastoral counseling groups, as well as other types such as Confirmation groups, Renew groups, and so forth.

**2.8** When a Church minister's independent judgment is compromised (e.g., by prior or concurrent personal or professional relationships, when he or she becomes personally involved, or when he or she becomes an advocate for one person against another), the Church minister must advise the party/parties that he or she can no longer provide counseling and make a referral to other counselors.

**2.9** Any form of pastoral counseling requires knowing the limits of one's competence, and making appropriate referrals as needed.

**2.10** Church ministers, who leave their current positions while conducting counseling with parishioners, are expected to offer appropriate referrals for continued care.

**3. Conduct with Minors.** All interactions with minors deserve special attention.

**3.1** Minors should always be viewed, whether in a social or ministerial situation, as "restricted individuals;" that is, they do not have the capacity to make free and voluntary decisions. Wherever they are and whatever they do should be with the explicit knowledge of their parents or guardian.

**3.2** In general, two adults should be present in situations involving minors, with the exception of sacramental confession. Church ministers should observe the following guidelines:

- a. When meeting with a minor, the office door should have a window or be left open. Do not meet with a minor if there are no other adults in the general vicinity.
- b. Never visit a minor's home without at least one other adult present.
- c. Avoid driving alone with a minor on a regular basis, or for great distances.
- d. All outings with minors, such as retreats, youth trips, sports-related activities, and overnight trips, require at least two adults.
- e. Sleeping quarters may not be shared with minors, unless accommodations are bunk-style with multiple adults and multiple minors in the same room, each having a separate bed.



- f. Locker rooms or other dressing areas must not be shared with minors unless another adult is present.
- g. Avoid accompanying children into restrooms without another adult present, unless it is unavoidable.
- h. A minor should be allowed only in the public section of a rectory, never in the living quarters. Minors should be permitted to work in the rectory only when there is at least one other adult present.

**3.3** Physical force or demeaning language should not be employed in disciplining minors. Physical force should only be used to protect oneself, another innocent party, or a child who is out of control.

**3.4** Caution must be exercised in using physical displays of affection, such as hugging, with minors. This gesture has different meanings for different people. Consider the age of the child, the situation, the setting, and your relationship with the child in all cases, as well as whose needs are being met.

**3.5** Adult chaperones of youth group activities should maintain a professional presence at all times. Activities, topics or vocabulary that cannot comfortably or appropriately be used in the presence of parents or another adult should not be employed with minors.

**3.6** Adults are prohibited from supplying or serving alcohol or any controlled substance to minors. Furthermore, alcohol should never be consumed in the presence of one or more minors by an adult who is functioning in an official capacity with minors.

**3.7** If a Church minister finds him/herself in an embarrassing, strange, or possibly compromising situation, it should be reported immediately to a supervisor, or to the Archdiocesan Sexual Abuse Prevention & Response Coordinator, in order to obtain consultation and assistance.

## **B. PROGRAM LEADERSHIP**

**1. Just Treatment.** Church ministers must exercise just treatment of all persons whom they encounter in the daily operation and administration of their programs.

**1.1** Church ministers 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 and in an environment where it is safe for others to offer constructive criticism.

**1.2** Church ministers shall seek to empower others, supporting each person to live the life to which God calls them. They are to respect the different talents people bring to the Church.

**1.3** Personnel and other administrative decisions made by Church ministers should not only meet civil and canon law obligations, but should reflect Catholic social teachings.

**1.4** Church ministers must support policies which provide a fair and equal employment setting to every person regardless of race, religion, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status, arrest or conviction record, veteran status, handicap status, or any other status protected by law. However, since a person's faith, moral conduct, church participation, and adherence to the tenets of the faith may be essential to their role on behalf of the Church, the law does permit religious convictions to be considered in certain hiring, promotion and termination decisions.

**1.5** Church ministers must be committed to establishing and maintaining a professional work environment, which is free from intimidation and harassment. Harassment can occur as the result of a single severe incident, or a pattern of conduct which results in the creation of a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work environment. Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical or verbal behavior, which can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- a. physical or mental abuse;
- b. racial insults;
- c. derogatory ethnic slurs
- d. sexual advances or unwelcome touching;
- e. sexual comments or sexual jokes;
- f. requests for sexual favors used as a condition of employment, or affecting any personnel decision such as hiring, promotion, compensation, or termination.

**1.6** Church ministers within [and members of] the archdiocese who, in good faith, report a violation of a law or regulatory requirement or ethical standard or who participate in good faith in any resulting investigation or proceeding

shall not suffer harassment, retaliation, or adverse employment [or member] consequence. The archdiocese or parish will take disciplinary action (up to and including termination) against an employee who in its assessment and in violation of this policy has engaged in retaliatory conduct against a good faith reporter.

**2. Stewardship.** Church ministers must exercise responsible stewardship of all financial and material resources within their area of ministry.

**2.1** Church ministers must recognize that the resources which support their ministries come in great part from contributions; therefore those who benefit from them must ensure that these resources are prudently and responsibly utilized, avoiding mismanagement and waste.

**2.2** Church ministers must provide a clear accounting of all funds within their control, and they must ensure that adequate systems are in place to protect both the Church and the individual from financial mismanagement.

**2.3** Independent audits of financial operations are to be conducted on a regular basis.

**3. Conflict of Interest.** Church ministers must avoid conflicts of interest, since the existence, or even the appearance, of a conflict of interest can call into question the leader's integrity, and harm the organization's reputation.

**2.1** Situations which have the potential for a conflict of interest include, but are not limited to the following examples:

- a. Conducting private business or other dealings with the Church or any of its members;
- b. Accepting or giving substantial (non-token) gifts for services or favors;
- c. Employing or engaging in commercial transactions with friends or relatives;
- d. Acting with partiality toward employees or Church members;
- e. Violating a confidence of another for personal gain.

**2.2** All Church ministers who receive financial compensation for their ministerial service under stipulated contract terms or Archdiocesan scales may not receive dual reimbursement for work which falls ordinarily under the scope of their pastoral assignment or ministry. For example, a pastor who teaches religious education may not receive both a pastor's salary and that of a director of religious education.

**2.3** Disclosure of all relevant factors can, in some circumstances, mitigate the potential for a conflict of interest.

## C. PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

1. **Confidentiality.** Persons who come to a Church minister, for assistance or advice, are entering a relationship marked by respect, trust, and confidentiality.
  - 1.1 Information disclosed to a Church minister during the course of counseling, advising, spiritual direction, or any other professional contact shall be held in strictest confidence.
  - 1.2 The Church minister is required to safeguard the confidentiality of any notes, files, or computer records pertaining to professional contacts with individuals.
  - 1.3 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 safeguard individual identity and confidentiality.
  - 1.4 If consultation with another professional becomes necessary, care should be taken to protect the identity of individuals and limit the content of the information to be shared. The minister must consider what information needs to be shared, with whom, and the rationale for disclosure. The other professional must be bound by the same principles of confidentiality.
  - 1.5 In legal proceedings in which the Church minister is a defendant and the allegations stem from a professional contact, the disclosure of confidential information gained in that contact is permitted as needed for legal defense.
  - 1.6 In certain circumstances, breaking confidentiality is not only permissible, but mandated. These occur when a minister has knowledge that:
    - a. an individual poses clear and imminent danger to him/herself or others;
    - b. a child or vulnerable adult is being abused;
    - c. a fellow minister is engaged in illegal activity, including sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable adults.

In these instances, a minister must communicate with the appropriate civil and Church authorities, as well as with parents and legal guardians when appropriate.

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

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

**2.1** Sacramental records shall be regarded as confidential by Church ministers, and the employees and volunteers under their direction. When, for valid Church reporting or parish statistical purposes, and with the approval of the pastor, information from these records is made public, great care must be taken to preserve the anonymity of individuals.

**2.2** Church ministers are to guarantee and safeguard individual personal information including, but not limited to, all information gathered from counseling sessions, staff discussions, home visitations, parishioner relationships, and marriage preparation discussions. Sharing information with others concerning these types of contacts must always be done prudently, and solely for the benefit of the individuals involved.

**2.3** The public may be given access to sacramental records older than 70 years, except for information related to adoption and legitimacy. A trained staff member who is authorized to locate the requested information or supervise the use of such records shall handle requests for more recent records.

**2.4** Church financial records are confidential documents. When legally required, however, these records are to be made available to qualified Church or civil authorities. The Archdiocesan Finance Services Office is to be contacted for authorization to release financial information.

**2.5** The records of individual contributions by church members are to be considered confidential and privileged information. Summarized tabulations of contributions can be used for informational and budgetary use, so long as the identity of individual contributors is not made public. If an individual wishes to have an in-kind or financial contribution made public, a record of that person's permission should be documented and retained.

**2.6** Other church and parish records are to be maintained and kept current which will ensure proper operational integrity, support the mission of the Church, and assist in the continuity and transition of Church ministry.

## **D. RESPONSE TO MISCONDUCT**

**1. Misconduct of an Illegal Nature.** Church ministers are required to report, to both the proper civil and Church authorities, any behavior by another Church minister where there is a credible suspicion of illegal conduct.

- 2. Ethical Misconduct.** Church ministers must notify their supervisors or, if needed, other Church authorities of ethical misconduct by another Church minister.

  - 2.1** When Church ministers are uncertain whether a particular situation or course of conduct would violate this Code of Ethical Standards, they should consult with peers knowledgeable about ethical issues and this Code, or the Chancery Office, in order to determine the proper response.
  - 2.2** When Church ministers believe that one of their colleagues may have violated this Code of Ethical Standards, they should make a good faith attempt to resolve the issue, if possible, by bringing it to the attention of the individual. If this fails, the Church minister must take further action by reporting to the supervisor or next higher authority, or by referral to the Chancery Office.
  - 2.3** In cases where there are clear indicators of unethical, but not illegal actions by a Church minister, notification is to be made to a supervisor, or the proper Church authorities.
- 3. Sexual Misconduct.** Church ministers must be knowledgeable of the laws of the State of Wisconsin regarding sexual assault, sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation, and the reporting requirements of the Archdiocese and of civil law which apply to such misconduct.

  - 3.1** All allegations and concerns involving the sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult, or sexual exploitation, as defined by Wisconsin laws, must be reported promptly to the appropriate civil authorities.
  - 3.2** The Archdiocesan Sexual Abuse Prevention & Response Office is available, as needed, for assistance and consultation on all issues of sexual misconduct, including the notification of proper civil authorities regardless of whether the alleged behavior is past or present.

## Resources

- Wisconsin State Statutes Section 48.981  
“Reporting Policy” and “Sexual Assault Law”  
Contact the Director, Archdiocesan Response to Sexual Abuse,  
(414) 758-2232
- “Clergy Manual”, Archdiocese of Milwaukee  
Contact the Clergy Services Office, (414) 769-3484
- “Parish Personnel Guidelines and Resource Guide”  
Archdiocese of Milwaukee  
Contact the Office for Parish and School Personnel, (414) 769-3370
- “Policies and Regulations”, Archdiocese of Milwaukee  
Contact the Office for Schools Services, (414) 758-2252
- “Records Retention Guidelines for Parish Records”, Archdiocese of Milwaukee  
Contact the Archivist, Chancery Office, and (414) 769-3407
- “Mandatory Reporting Responsibilities”, Archdiocese of Milwaukee  
Contact the Director, Archdiocesan Response to Sexual Abuse, (414) 758-2232

View at: [www.archmil.org/resources/userfiles/MandatoryReportingResponsibilities.pdf](http://www.archmil.org/resources/userfiles/MandatoryReportingResponsibilities.pdf)

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## Acknowledgement

I have downloaded *The Code of Ethical Standards for Church Leaders* from the Archdiocesan web-site ([www.archmil.org](http://www.archmil.org)), or have received a copy of it (2010 revised (edits) version) from my parish/employer. I have read the *Code* and understand its applicability to my work and/ or volunteer efforts for the Church. I also have read the *Mandatory Reporting Responsibilities* (see above in “resources”) and understand my responsibilities.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please detach this acknowledgement and submit it to your parish/employer.*