



# Professional Code of Conduct

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### 1. Preamble

This **CODE OF CONDUCT** is part of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux Safe Environment Training Process. All Church Personnel shall successfully complete the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux's Safe Environment Training.

This training is available to all Church Personnel on the Diocesan website:  
[www.htdiocese.org/policy-procedures](http://www.htdiocese.org/policy-procedures).

This **CODE OF CONDUCT** applies to all Church Personnel (hereafter referred to as "Church Personnel" or a "Church Person") and its affiliated parishes, schools, councils, entities, chartered organizations, missions, agencies, and other offices under the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux.

This **CODE OF CONDUCT** addresses interactions of/by Church Personnel with minors, legally vulnerable adults, young adults (18-21 yrs.), and adults (hereafter referred to as "Protected"). When referencing children and youth under the age of 18 years, note that the ethical conduct outlined in the following pages pertains not only to interactions with minors but also to those interactions with vulnerable adults over the age of 18 years. An adult is considered vulnerable

when he/she is significantly impaired in the ability to, or otherwise unable to, protect his/her own rights and vital interests or to report abuse or neglect without assistance because of physical, mental, or emotional impairment.

This **CODE OF CONDUCT** is intended to provide a set of normative standards of conduct for all Church Personnel engaged in ministerial and other Church-related activities within the Diocese. While this document is not exhaustive in the variety of situations specifically mentioned, it is to be understood that the standards set forth herein are to be considered normative for every pastoral or other Church-related setting.

Responsibility for adherence to this **CODE OF CONDUCT** rests with each Church Person. Those in violation will be subject to appropriate remedial action by the competent authority in each case. Corrective action may take various forms depending on the specific nature and circumstance of the offense, including, but not limited to, an oral or written citation or even removal from ministry, termination of employment, discontinuance of one's volunteer status, or being reported to civil/criminal authorities .

## **2. Relationships Between Church Personnel and Those They Serve**

Church Personnel act in the Church's name and have special influence in the lives of the people to whom they minister and serve, often inspiring and motivating others to a deepened faith and personal holiness. In light of this position of trust, Church Personnel are at all times responsible to maintain appropriate emotional and sexual boundaries with those to whom they minister and serve.

Church Personnel must at all times maintain a presence of mind with regard to their circumstances, acting to protect the interests and rights of the people to whom they minister and serve.

Church Personnel must not, for sexual gratification or intimacy, exploit the trust of those to whom they minister and serve. Sexual interactions or even sexually suggestive interaction with persons who are served or with whom one works are never appropriate in a ministerial setting. Any sexual activity between Church Personnel and those to whom they minister and serve is always inappropriate and is prohibited.

Church Personnel who are committed to celibacy are called upon to exemplify celibate chastity at all times and in all of their personal and professional relationships. Members of the clergy are expected to conduct themselves chastely according to their state of life.

Church Personnel who are engaged in ministerial and other Church-related activities within the Diocese must avoid developing inappropriately intimate relationships with those to whom they minister and serve and should exhibit professionalism at all times.

Church Personnel should avoid "dual" relationships where personal friendship is intermingled with the ministerial relationship, as such relationships may lead to personal and professional boundary violations.

The Diocese expects all Church Personnel to comply with Catholic moral standards and professional ethics, to act appropriately in all activities and behaviors, and to even avoid the appearance of impropriety in their service.

### **3. Summary of Relationship Standards**

Critical standards for Church Personnel when interacting with minors, legally vulnerable adults, young adults (18-21 yrs.), and adults:

- Church Personnel will comply with all Diocesan Policies and Guidelines applicable to their ministerial roles and responsibilities.
- Church Personnel will endeavor to establish and maintain clear and appropriate physical and emotional boundaries in all ministerial relationships.
- Church Personnel will not use their positions to exercise unreasonable or inappropriate power and authority, or to otherwise take advantage of anyone to further personal, religious, political, or business interests.
- Church Personnel will not knowingly involve themselves in situations that present a conflict of interest or which may create the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- In all situations, Church Personnel are responsible to maintain appropriate ministerial/professional relationships with clearly established professional boundaries.
- Church Personnel will not conceal or ask another to conceal the fact and/or nature of a relationship which may be violative of this Code of Conduct.
- Parents who are Church Personnel will apply these guidelines in all situations and activities, including those extracurricular to their role in the Church, when these situations and activities involve minors.
- Church Personnel shall address and seek to resolve all conflicts promptly, efficiently, and fairly.

### **4. Standards for Reporting Abuse and Violations**

The Louisiana Children's Code (Article 610) specifies that mandated reporters shall make reports immediately upon learning of incidents of child abuse or neglect. All church personnel 18 years or older are considered mandated reporters.

- **Reporting Child Abuse or Vulnerable Adult Abuse (includes child pornography):**

If the abuse is within the home or by a licensed daycare staff call:

***LA Department of Children and Family Services:***

(1-844-452-5437); 1-844-4LA-KIDS

If the abuse is outside of the home call the ***Local Police or Sheriff's Department:***

Lafourche Parish: (985) 446-2255

Terrebonne Parish: (985) 876-2500

St. Mary Parish: (985) 337-828-1960  
Jefferson Parish: (504)36-5300

If the child fears going home or you feel there is clear and imminent danger, DO NOT contact the child's family, call 911.

- **Reporting Child Abuse or Vulnerable Adult Abuse by Church Personnel:**

If the accused is Clergy (Priest, Deacon, Religious Brother or Sister or Seminarian), Employee, Volunteer in a Catholic school, Church parish or other Diocesan entity call the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux outreach line or Victim's Assistance Coordinator AFTER it has been reported to the local police or sheriff's department.

<b><i>Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux Outreach line:</i></b>	(985) 873-0026
<b><i>Victims' Assistance Coordinator:</i></b>	(985) 850-3172

- **Reporting Allegations of Abuse or Mishandling of Allegations of Sexual Abuse by a Bishop:**

To report an allegation of abuse or mishandling of allegations of sexual abuse by a bishop please visit the Catholic Bishop Abuse Reporting Service website or call 1-800-276-1562.

- **Reporting Code of Conduct Violations:**

In an effort to maintain the highest ethical, moral and professional standards, anyone who suspects or observes Church Personnel violating this Code of Conduct must report this information first to the ***Director of Human Resources or the Director of Child and Youth Protection***, (985) 868-7720.

## **5. Standards for Conduct with Minors, Young Adults, and Legally Vulnerable Adults**

Church Personnel will avoid any interactions that may violate or might be interpreted as being violative of the boundaries, responsibilities and/or behavior standards established in this Code of Conduct. Church Personnel working with minors should maintain an open and trustworthy relationship between the minors and adult supervisors. Church personnel must be aware of their own and others' vulnerability when working alone with a minor. They must always be mindful that minors, whether in a social or ministerial situation, are not to be considered as possessing the capacity to make free will and voluntary decisions. Their location and activities should be known by parents or guardians at all times.

### **A. Transportation, Meetings, and Outings.**

- Adult Church Personnel should NOT have one-on-one contact with a minor at any time unless there are other adults in the immediate vicinity.
- When meeting with a minor in an office, the office door should have a window or should remain open at all times.
- Church Personnel should never visit a minor's home without at least one other adult present and without the express permission of the minor's parents or guardians.

- Church Personnel should never transport only one minor unless the child is his/her own child.
- All outings with minors (i.e. retreats, youth group trips, sports-related activities and overnight trips) require the presence of at least two adults at all times and parental permission for the minor to attend.
- Adults may not share sleeping quarters with minors, unless accommodations are barrack-style with multiple adults and multiple minors in the same room and each individual having a separate bed.
- A sole Church Person may transport a group of minors. However, upon arrival, two adult Church Personnel must accompany minor children during all activities, events, and/or outings outside of parish, school, or agency grounds. Church Personnel should contact the volunteer ministry location for all liability requirements and forms prior to transporting individuals using a personal vehicle or hosting an event on personal property.
- Young adults under the age of 21 years may never be taken on personal trips or vacations without other adult Church Personnel or appropriate chaperones.
- Locker rooms, shower rooms and dressing rooms are not to be shared by adults with minors unless another adult is present.
- Minors are not to be accompanied into restrooms without another adult present unless circumstances make it absolutely unavoidable.
- Adults must not appear in front of minors or young people when not appropriately clothed, and may not change clothes, bathe, or shower in view of a minor or young person.
- Church Personnel shall refrain from singling out or paying special attention to individual children and/or youth. They shall not give gifts of any kind without prior knowledge and approval of their parent(s) or guardian(s).
- To report a boundary violation, refer to Section 4: *Standards for Reporting Abuse and Violations*.

#### B. Drugs and Alcohol

Church Personnel should never be involved with the illegal possession and/or illegal use of drugs and/or alcohol. They must never supply such substances to minors, nor may they consume alcohol while functioning in an official capacity with minors. The following are unacceptable at youth events and during school hours:

- Using, possessing, or distributing illegal drugs or marijuana
- Smoking

- Alcoholic beverages
- Smokeless tobacco
- E-Cigarettes

#### C. Environment

Church Personnel cannot always avoid situations where they are alone with a minor or legally vulnerable adult. If a one-on-one meeting is necessary, the following actions are recommended:

- No one-on-one contact includes texting and phone calls on a personal line
- Avoid meeting in isolated environments (must be interruptible)
- Meet in as public a place as possible
- Schedule meetings at times when others are around
- Limit session time
- Leave door ajar
- Choose a room with a window when available
- Avoid all physical contact with the minor or vulnerable adult
- Make appropriate referrals
- If you're meeting in an office setting, a parent or office staff person should be present near the location of the meeting

#### D. Communicating with Young People Under 18

- Letters can be sent about meetings/events/planning –PERSONAL letters are prohibited
- Communicate with parents:
  - Let them know why you are communicating with their child
  - Let them know when you're planning to meet with their child
  - Explain how you plan to communicate (phone, text, email, social media...)
  - Always include parents in your communications
  - Youth should contact the office, not the adults' cell phone

#### E. Touching

Touching must be age-appropriate and based on the need of the minor person or legally vulnerable adult and not on the need of the Church Person. Adults must avoid physical contact when alone with a minor or legally vulnerable adult. Touches and embraces experienced or perceived as uncomfortable to an individual -- minor or adult -- are forbidden. Church Personnel should avoid any physical touching that may be reasonably perceived as sexual in nature. Examples of touching behaviors that can be construed as sexual in nature include but are not limited to:

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kissing
- Touching bottoms, chests, legs or genital areas
- Spanking or slapping
- Showing affection while in an isolated location

- Wrestling, tickling or poking
- Piggy-back rides
- Massages

## **7. Overnight Stays**

- Clergy, except for immediate family, must not provide overnight accommodation for individual minors, including but not limited to, accommodations in any church-owned facility, private residence, hotel room or any place where no other adult supervision is present.
- Church Personnel designated as chaperones for overnight stays shall sign and acknowledge receipt of applicable Diocesan Policies and Guidelines Concerning Youth Trips Involving Overnight Stays. Violations shall be reported to the Diocesan Director of Child and Youth Protection.

## **8. Pornography**

Church Personnel are forbidden from acquiring, possessing, or distributing pornographic images while at work or in the course of ministry. Acquiring, possessing or distributing pornographic images of minors under the age of 18 by whatever means or any form of technology is considered child sexual abuse.

Church Personnel are prohibited from using workplace computers or other means of communications inappropriately.

## **9. Criminal History**

A Church Person may not serve with minors, young adults 18-21, or legally vulnerable adults if he or she has

- a pending criminal charge for any offense
- been convicted of or plead guilty or *nolo contendere* to any of the crimes listed in R.S. 15:587.1(C), the Louisiana Child Protection Act, or those of a jurisdiction other than Louisiana which would constitute a crime under the provisions cited in R.S. 15:587.1(C).
- registered or is required to be registered on the Louisiana sex offender and child predator registry, any other state sex offender registry, and/or the national sex offender registry.
- been convicted of any misdemeanor assault/battery charge within the last five years.
- been convicted of three or more misdemeanor assault/battery charges.

Background screenings of Individuals whose history include other reportable records will be reviewed by the diocesan Safe Environment Office and applicable restrictions may be applied if approved.

## **10. Standards For conduct With All Individuals Served By Church Personnel**

Church Personnel should not engage in any inappropriate speech or actions with those whom they serve, including but not limited to:

### **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment is a violation of the law of the policies of the Diocese, and will not be tolerated.

The Diocese makes every effort to ensure that its workplaces remain free from sexual harassment. All Church personnel are prohibited from sexually harassing other employees. The Diocese will not tolerate sexual harassment of its employees by vendors, visitors, or other non-staff.

Some examples of conduct that may, alone or in cumulative effect, be sexual harassment include:

<u>Verbal (spoken)</u>	<u>Non-Verbal (unspoken)</u>	<u>Physical</u>
sexual innuendos	leering	touching
suggestive comments	whistling	pinching
insults	obscene gestures	brushing the body
humor and jokes about sex activities		coerced sexual
threats or sexual demands		assault

### **Other Harassment**

Harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, genetic information, or any other prohibited basis is a violation of the law and against the policy of the Diocese. It will not be tolerated.

The Diocese makes every effort to ensure that its workplace remains free from harassment. All employees, including managers and supervisors, are prohibited from harassing other employees. The Diocese will not tolerate harassment of its employees by vendors, visitors, or other non-staff.

Some examples of conduct that may, alone or in cumulative effect, be sexual or prohibited

- Comments about physique or body development
- Humiliating, ridiculing, bullying, threatening, or degrading another person
- Discussions, vocabulary, recordings, films, games, computer software, internet sites or any other form of personal interaction or entertainment that could be reasonably construed as inappropriate.
- Distributing, circulating, or posting sexually explicit or pornographic material
- Singling out persons, especially children or legally vulnerable adults, for special personal attention or gifts

*Allegations should be reported to your immediate supervisor and will be taken seriously.*

### **Confidentiality**



Church Personnel may have access to certain confidential and proprietary information. Employees shall not disclose any confidential and proprietary information of the Diocese to any person, firm, corporation, association, or other entity other than in the course of performing their authorized duties, without prior authorization.

### **Acknowledgement and Receipt of the Code of Conduct**

- Church Personnel shall be responsible for adherence to this Code of Professional Conduct.
- Church personnel who violate or disregard this Code of Professional Conduct will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
- This code of conduct is to be used in conjunction with the other volunteer, independent contractor or employment-related rules, guidelines and policies as applicable to each individual.
- Each church person shall acknowledge receipt of this Code of Professional Conduct on the online Safe Environment Training website.

### ***Acknowledgment on Safe Environment Training site:***

I certify that I have read and understand the Diocesan Code of Conduct in its entirety and will adhere to its principles. I understand that this Code of Conduct does not supersede canon or civil law and establishes appropriate ethical standards for ALL personnel who minister and work in the Diocese. I understand that this Code of Conduct was developed upon guiding principles of integrity, respect for others, well-being and competence.

☐ I understand and agree