



## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CHURCH PERSONNEL

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

God in his very essence is relational. From all eternity, the one God has existed as three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in relationship with one another. He created human beings in his own image for relationship with each other and him. It is the mission of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City to make disciples of Jesus Christ and to witness the love of Jesus Christ to all. We recognize, as disciples of Jesus Christ, that we must witness to Jesus both by what we say and what we do, and that our conduct always should seek to be in accord with the faith professed by the Catholic Church.

Building a culture of conversion and discipleship requires Church personnel to be in relationship with others, including minors and vulnerable adults. Since the founding of the Church, however, there have been those who have abused positions of trust to prey on minors, vulnerable adults and others. Jesus anticipated such people, saying that it would be better for them to have millstones hung around their necks and to be drowned in the sea.

This *Code of Conduct (Code)* of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City (Archdiocese) establishes standard policies and provides guidance for the service of Church personnel, allowing persons of good will to carry out their ministries in relationship with those they serve, including minors, while promoting healthy boundaries, avoiding appearances of impropriety, and weeding out those who would abuse minors, vulnerable adults and others. Defining healthy and safe relationships is not meant to undermine the strength and importance of personal contact or Christian witness. Rather, it is to assist all who fulfill the many roles that create the living Church to demonstrate their love and compassion for children and adults within genuine and healthy relationships.

The *Code of Conduct: Policies and Guidelines on Ethical Standards and Safe Environment* was originally adopted by the Archbishop of Oklahoma City on Aug. 20, 2003. An *Amended and Restated Code of Conduct* was adopted on June 17, 2014. This *Code* was adopted by Archbishop Paul S. Coakley on June 30, 2020, and supersedes and replaces the 2003 and 2014 versions of the *Code*.

This *Code* aims to further the Church's mission by providing concrete guidelines to achieve several overarching objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> The provisions of the Code apply to all Church personnel regardless of individual religious beliefs or affiliation. For non-Catholics, this introductory section reminds them of the mission of the organization they have chosen to serve and are called to support through their service. It does not imply a personal assent to all Catholic Church doctrine but rather a commitment to conduct themselves in their role with the Catholic Church in a way that is consistent with Church teachings so as not to give a public witness counter to the faith and teaching of the organization they are serving. Therefore, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, who are serving the Church in an official capacity, are expected to comply with the provisions of this Code, which is based on Catholic Church's understanding of the dignity of the human person and the witness we are called to give as Church.

- Promote authentic witness to Jesus Christ by those who serve in the Church;
- Protect, nurture and guide children, vulnerable adults and all others with whom we interact;
- Provide practical guidance to Church personnel to enable them to serve effectively and safely;
- Promote personal well-being and professional competence; and
- Build positive relationships founded upon trust and integrity.

### **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

- Church personnel must bear witness to the mission of the Church through their conduct;
- Church personnel must exhibit high ethical standards and personal integrity. They must be aware of the responsibilities and positions of trust that accompany their work and exhibit this awareness by maintaining appropriate boundaries and exercising caution against all harm;
- Relationships are at the foundation of Church ministries and are central to Catholic life. Healthy and safe relationships are founded upon and demonstrate our sincere love, respect and compassion for all of those we serve;
- Church personnel are responsible for their own spiritual, physical, mental and emotional well-being. They are also responsible for maintaining professional competence and for meeting the commonly recognized professional standards of their particular roles. They should seek the necessary help when either personal or professional areas of their life need attention.

### **KEY TERMS**

**“Church personnel”** means clergy, vowed religious, seminarians, candidates for the diaconate and lay employees or volunteers serving the Archdiocese, a parish, a school or other archdiocesan entity, including, but not limited to, parish council members, parish finance council members, Catholic school advisory council members and archdiocesan finance council members.

**“Minor”** means anyone who has not reached the age of 18.

**“Parish”** means a parish within the territory of the Archdiocese and recognized by the Archdiocese as Catholic.

**“School”** means a primary school or a secondary school within the territory of the Archdiocese and recognized by the Archdiocese as Catholic.

**“Unprofessional”** means below or contrary to the standards expected in a particular profession.

**“Vulnerable adult”** means persons with physical, mental or emotional developmental conditions that render them unable to defend or protect themselves or get help when at risk of harm.

**“Harassment”** may be a single incident or a persistent pattern of behavior where the purpose is to create a hostile, offensive or intimidating environment.

**“Exploitation”** is the action or fact of treating someone unfairly to benefit from their actions or work.

## **ETHICAL STANDARDS**

### **1. Professional and Personal Interaction**

1.1 Church personnel are called to live lives of integrity according to their vocation and to exhibit this through their conduct.

1.2 Church personnel will maintain appropriate boundaries in professional relationships and not use the power inherent in their position to exercise unreasonable or inappropriate authority over others.

1.3 Church personnel will relate to others respectfully and professionally, working collaboratively and cooperatively with others serving the Church.

1.4 Church personnel will not engage in physical, psychological or sexual harassment of any person and will not tolerate such harassment by others serving the Church.

1.5 Church personnel will not exploit another person for any purpose.

1.6 Church personnel will not acquire, possess or distribute any pornographic images or written content.

a. Church personnel are prohibited from viewing pornographic materials on, or taking pornographic materials onto, the property of the Archdiocese, a parish, a school or other archdiocesan entity.

b. Church personnel are prohibited from showing pornographic material to minors.

1.7 Church personnel will dress professionally, appropriately and commensurate with their role.

1.8 Church personnel will not illegally possess, use or distribute alcohol or other drugs. Church personnel will not be under the influence of illegal drugs, alcohol or medications that impair stable functioning or sound judgment.

1.9 While reasonable debate on matters of social import is valued, Church personnel will conduct themselves in a manner consistent with Catholic teaching as set forth in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in all public communications. Public communications are communications offered in a public forum or disseminated to a general audience, including communications whose potential for broad dissemination is reasonably foreseeable (e.g., public speech, bulletin article, op-ed submission to media, social media post, or blog).<sup>2</sup>

1.10 Church personnel will exercise discretion and confidentiality in handling sensitive information and may not disclose confidential or sensitive information to others not entitled to such information.

a. Divulging personal and confidential information known about a minor through ministry interaction is completely inappropriate and can be destructive to both the young person and the parish community, unless it is required by law.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 1.9 does not apply with the same strictness to Church personnel who are volunteers and whose volunteering cannot reasonably be understood as representing the Catholic Church and its teachings. Examples of such Church personnel include parents who drive on school field trips.

b. Such information only should be shared with a parent or the supervising Church personnel when deemed necessary, and even then, only on a need-to-know basis.

1.11 Church personnel will abide by policies and procedures set forth in official handbooks and other official documents of relevant archdiocesan entities.

1.12 Church personnel who have been issued an archdiocesan, parish or Catholic school e-mail account are expected to use their issued account when engaged in activity involving the Archdiocese or any of its entities. All archdiocesan e-mail accounts are subject to review.

## **2. Conduct with Minors and Vulnerable Adults**

2.1 Church personnel must exercise prudent judgment and common sense when working with minors.

2.2 Church personnel should be aware of their own vulnerability and the vulnerability of others when working with minors. Church personnel should avoid any conduct that a reasonable person could misconstrue as improper. A team approach should be used when working with minors or vulnerable adults, and appropriate supervision should be in place to promote safe environments for all.

2.3 Church personnel should avoid being alone with any unrelated minor,<sup>3</sup> except for reasonable, common sense exceptions such as emergency situations and circumstances where the interaction is incidental and not extended.

a. One-on-one meetings with an unrelated minor may take place at an archdiocesan facility and in an area visible to others through a window or open door. A responsible, Safe Environment trained employee or volunteer (if available) or other adult known to be reliable must be in close proximity such as an adjoining room or hallway from which easy visual, auditory or physical access is possible.

b. One-on-one meetings with an unrelated minor may be held in public area such as a coffee shop as long as the Church personnel makes a parent or guardian aware of the meeting.

c. Church personnel must know their own limitations. Any counseling done in a one-on-one setting or other settings must be within the scope of the Church personnel's expertise, training or certification.

2.4 As Church personnel our physical contact with unrelated minors must be consensual, public, appropriate and nonsexual. Some examples of permissible physical contact include:

- a. Brief side hugs or an arm around the shoulder;
- b. Brief pat on the shoulder/upper back;
- c. Handshakes or "high fives;"
- d. Holding hands during prayer;
- e. Holding hands while walking with young children and those unsteady;

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<sup>3</sup> Exercising prudence and common sense, this section does not apply with the same degree of strictness to Church personnel and an unrelated minor where the Church personnel and the unrelated minor's family had a close appropriate relationship prior to the professional or ministerial relationship between Church personnel and the minor.

- f. Brief touching of hand, head, shoulder or arm;
- g. Necessary contact to provide physical assistance, e.g., first aid, support after a fall or injury, etc. The incident must be documented in writing and communicated to the proper supervisor and the minor's parent or legal guardian.

Some examples of non-permissible physical contact include:

- a. Tickling;
- b. Massages;
- c. Prolonged hugs from the front or rear;
- d. Touching of buttocks, breasts or genitals.

2.5 Church personnel who minister to home-bound adults, minors or vulnerable adults are encouraged to serve in the company of another Safe Environment trained adult whenever possible. In no event should Church personnel visit a homebound minor or vulnerable adult in the home without another responsible adult present.

2.6 Church personnel are prohibited from using tobacco, and use alcohol only in moderation and at appropriate times (e.g., dinner on a trip) when participating in Church youth activities.

2.7 Church personnel will not travel alone in a vehicle with one unrelated minor without another Safe Environment trained adult present, except in documented emergencies. On field trips and other travel governed by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City's *"Field Trip and Travel Regulations"* two adults must be present in vehicles except in the case of a caravan of cars with clear communication between vehicles.

2.8 Church personnel will not share private overnight accommodations (bedroom, hotel room, tent, camper, bed, etc.) with any unrelated minor. In situations in which overnight accommodations are in open spaces (gymnasiums, classrooms, gathering spaces, etc.), actions should be taken to provide suitable supervision and create reasonable separation between sexes and between adults and minors.

2.9 Communications by Church personnel with unrelated minors must be for professional or ministerial reasons only.<sup>4</sup> Such communications are governed by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City's *"Communications Policies for those Working with Minors or Vulnerable Adults."*

2.10 Church personnel will not use physical force or use profane, demeaning or abusive language in interactions with a minor; except that proportional physical force may be used as necessary in situations of self-defense or defense of the minor, or when the minor or vulnerable adult is a danger to self or others.

2.11 Church personnel will not accept expensive or excessive gifts from an unrelated minor, or give expensive, individual or personal gifts to an unrelated minor without the permission of the parent or guardian. Exchanges of modest, appropriate gifts between groups of minors and Church personnel in the ordinary course of parish programs and school settings are permissible. When in doubt, seek the permission of parent or guardian.

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<sup>4</sup> Exercising prudence and common sense, this section does not apply with the same degree of strictness to Church personnel and an unrelated minor where the Church personnel and the unrelated minor's family had a close relationship prior to the professional or ministerial relationship between Church personnel and the minor.

### **3. Stewardship**

3.1 Church personnel will exercise responsible stewardship of all archdiocesan and related entity financial and material resources.

3.2 Church personnel will provide a clear and accurate accounting of all archdiocesan and related entity funds and material resources for which they are responsible and must ensure that adequate systems and safeguards are in place and followed.

3.3 Church personnel will not misappropriate archdiocesan and related entity funds or materials for personal uses or purposes.

### **4. Conflicts of Interest**

4.1 Church personnel must avoid actions that may reasonably be perceived as exploiting their position with the Church to further their personal, political or business interests. Church personnel should avoid situations that present conflicts of interest. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can call integrity and professional conduct into question and should be avoided.

4.2 A conflict of interest may exist when Church personnel have an ownership interest in, an investment interest in, or a compensation arrangement with, an entity or individual who engages in regular or substantial business with the Archdiocese, relevant parish or relevant Catholic school.

4.3 Conflicts of interest situations that are to be avoided include:

- a. Acting with unfair bias or partiality toward anyone with whom Church personnel have an existing professional or personal relationship;
- b. Violating the confidence of another person for personal gain; and
- c. Accepting any gift of material value where the gift could be perceived as a quid pro quo.

4.4 Church personnel must exercise discretion when considering personally assuming fiduciary obligations or financial responsibility for a person associated with a parish or Catholic school, with the exception of family members, and should consult with the pastor, canonical administrator or relevant supervisor before assuming such obligation or responsibility.

4.5 Church personnel may not receive dual compensation for work within the scope of their assignment or employment.

4.6 Church personnel must disclose conflicts of interest to all affected parties. In resolving the issues, primary attention always must be given to the protection of the person receiving ministry or services.

### **5. Reporting Misconduct**

5.1 Church personnel are required to report suspected violations of the provisions of the Code.

- a. Church personnel must hold each other accountable for maintaining the highest ethical, professional and charitable standards.

b. Failure to report a suspected violation immediately is itself a violation of this policy subjecting the person who failed to report to disciplinary measures.

5.2 Suspected violations of the provisions of the Code by:

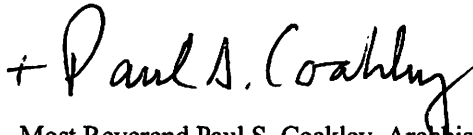
- a. Parish staff and volunteers, including school principals, are to be reported to the pastor of the parish;
- b. School faculty, staff and volunteers are to be reported to the principal of the school and the pastor of the parish if the school is a parish school;
- c. Employees and volunteers of other archdiocesan ministries are to be reported to the supervisor or director of the program in question;
- d. A pastor, including for his failure to act on suspected violations brought to him, is to be reported to the Chancellor at **405-709-2749**.

5.3 Suspected abuse, including sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult, should be reported immediately to:

- a. The Oklahoma Department of Human Services **800-522-3511**. (Failure to report is a criminal misdemeanor);
- b. The Archdiocesan Victims Assistance Coordinator (VAC) at the Archdiocesan Hotline at **405-720-9878**. (The VAC's report of the call will automatically be sent to the Archbishop, Chancellor and Vicar General);
- c. Parents or guardians, unless to do so would expose the minor or vulnerable adult to additional risk, or unless instructed otherwise by civil authorities.

5.4 Church personnel must self-report to their supervisor immediately if they are arrested or charged with a crime.

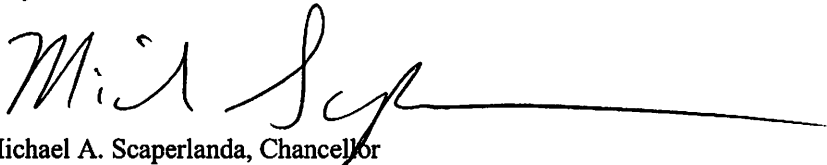
This Code of Conduct for Church Personnel was accepted and approved on June 30, 2020.



Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley, Archbishop of Oklahoma City



Very Reverend William L. Novak, Vicar General



Michael A. Scaperlanda, Chancellor



## **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CHURCH PERSONNEL**

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am a member of Church personnel within the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. I have read this Code of Conduct for Church personnel and promise to abide by it.

I understand and agree that I am subject to periodic background checks and am required to participate in Archdiocesan Safe Environment Training commensurate with my role. I also understand that I may face consequences or discipline, up to and including termination of my employment or other relationship with the Archdiocese and its associated entities, for violations of this Code.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Position and Location of Primary Employment or Service