



Code of Conduct & Behavior Standards for All Clergy, Religious, and Lay Ministers

“For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you, with the simplicity and sincerity of God, (and) not by human wisdom but by the grace of God.” (2 Cor. 1:12, New American Bible, Revised Edition.)

In accordance with Article 6 of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, promulgated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “there are to be clear and well-publicized diocesan/eparchial standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries...” This Code of Conduct is an ecclesiastical governance document that sets out the ecclesiastical, ministerial, and moral standards of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth and constitutes a principal element of its Safe Environment Program. Because clergy, religious, lay employees, volunteers, and others who serve in the name of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, its parishes, schools, or affiliated ministries (collectively, the “Diocese”) are entrusted with the public witness and ministry of the Catholic Church, the standards set forth in this Code govern conduct that bears upon a person's witness, suitability, fitness for ministry, or ability to faithfully represent the Catholic Church, whether occurring in the exercise of ministry or otherwise. All clergy, religious, lay employees, volunteers, and others who serve in the name of the Diocese are required, as a condition of employment, ministry, volunteer service, or authorization to serve, to acknowledge their understanding of and agreement to abide by this Code.

The scriptural, canonical, catechetical, papal, and other ecclesial citations contained in this Code are recognized and relied upon by the Diocese as religious and ecclesiastical authorities and sources that inform the doctrinal, moral, canonical, disciplinary, and pastoral standards set forth herein. Within the Diocese of Fort Worth, and without prejudice to universal law or to any rights, remedies, or recourse provided by canon law, the interpretation, application, and enforcement of this Code belong to the competent ecclesiastical authority, namely the Bishop of Fort Worth, and those who act by his authority. Questions concerning the meaning, religious foundation, canonical scope, pastoral application, enforcement, or consistency of these standards with Catholic faith and morals, ecclesiastical discipline, canon law, pastoral governance, ministerial integrity, suitability for service, or the governance of ministry in the Diocese are matters reserved to ecclesiastical judgment.

PROFESSIONAL, ETHICAL & MORAL OBLIGATIONS

Priests are accountable to the Bishop of Fort Worth, or the Bishop's designee. All other ministers are accountable to the pastor or other duly appointed representative under the authority of the Bishop, and ultimately to the Bishop or his designee.

Clergy, Religious and Lay Ministers (employees and volunteers) must be aware of and comply with all applicable parish, school, and diocesan policies and guidelines with special attention to ministerial competency, sexual misconduct, safety, transportation, parental permission, social media, and medical emergency policies.

Ministerial Role

- Work collaboratively with all those engaged in ministry. (*CIC, can. 275 §2; CCC 910; Ecclesiastes 4:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12*)
- Faithfully represent the teachings of the Catholic Church, with integrity in word and action. (*CCC 912–913; Gaudium et Spes, no. 43; Colossians 3:17; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Timothy 4:12; Philippians 1:27*)
- Be competent and receive ongoing education and training commensurate with your roles and responsibilities. (*CIC, cann. 231 §1 and 279, where applicable; Proverbs 1:5; Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Timothy 2:15*)

- Respect and support the rights and responsibilities of parents, guardians, and caretakers, consistent with the teachings of the Church and the Code of Canon Law, while ministering to the needs and concerns of those receiving ministry. (CCC 2223; CIC, can. 226 §2; Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 84; Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1–4; Colossians 3:20–21)

Inclusion

- Recognize the dignity of each person and refrain from actions or words that are disrespectful of anyone. (Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 195; CCC 357; James 3:9–10; Philippians 2:3; Ephesians 4:29)
- Serve all people in accordance with the Church's teaching on Faith and Morals. (CCC 831, 2032–2040; Galatians 5:13; Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 4:10–11)
- Ensure that all persons have reasonable access to the resources, services, and opportunities they require with particular regard for persons with special needs or disabilities. (Pope Francis, *Message for International Day of Persons with Disabilities*, §2; CCC 1935; Matthew 25:40; Isaiah 1:17; Luke 14:13–14; Leviticus 19:14)

Accountability

- Serve the Faithful, carrying out your ministerial functions "...conscientiously, zealously, and diligently." (CIC, can. 231 §1; 1 Peter 5:2–3; Romans 12:11; Colossians 3:23–24; 1 Corinthians 4:1–2)
- Exercise responsible stewardship of resources while maintaining the highest standards of integrity in all fiscal matters entrusted to you. (CCC 2409; CIC, can. 1284 §1; 2 Corinthians 8:20–21; Proverbs 11:1)
- Promote excellence in ministry by supporting, encouraging, and assisting one another in developing as faithful and effective ministers and leaders. (CCC 1435; Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1; Proverbs 27:17)
- Promptly report known or suspected violations of this Code, diocesan policy, or conduct inconsistent with the mission of the Church through the appropriate supervisory or diocesan reporting channels, and cooperate fully with any resulting inquiry or investigation. (CCC 1435; CIC, can. 212 §3; Matthew 18:15–17; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 5:11)

Confidentiality

- Respect confidentiality. Protect sensitive information learned through ministry, employment, or volunteer service with the Diocese, its parishes, schools, ministries, programs, or affiliated entities. Use confidential information only for authorized ministerial, pastoral, administrative, supervisory, safety-related, legal, or diocesan purposes. (CCC 2491; CIC, can. 220; Proverbs 11:13)

Conduct

- Sustain respectful relationships with all those you serve or with whom you serve, avoiding manipulation, sexual harassment and other abuses of the authority that comes with a ministerial position. (Pope Francis, *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, art. 1 §1(a); 1 Peter 5:2–3; 1 Timothy 5:1–2; Mark 10:42–43)
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries with colleagues. Romantic or sexual relationships between a minister and those ministered to are inappropriate and unethical, regardless of who initiates the conduct. (CCC 2348, 2353; CIC, can. 277 §1 and 285, where applicable; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–6; 1 Peter 5:2–3)
- Model healthy and positive behaviors with all those encountered through ministry. Conduct yourself in a way worthy of the gospel of Christ. (CCC 2044; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 6; Matthew 5:16; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7–8; 1 Peter 5:2–3; Hebrews 13:7; Philippians 1:27)
- Recognize and uphold the dignity of every person in all communications, actions, and conduct. Refrain from gossip, detraction, calumny, and any behavior that harms the reputation or good name of another. (CCC 2477, 2479; CIC, can. 1390 §2; Ephesians 4:25–32; Leviticus 19:16)
- Procuring, providing, or using alcohol for persons under 21 years of age and procuring, providing, or using controlled substances for anyone is illegal, inappropriate, and unethical. (CCC 2290–2291; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Peter 5:8)

Referrals and Intervention

- Be aware of the signs of sexual abuse and physical neglect. All ministers should familiarize themselves with indicators of possible abuse or neglect and remain vigilant. Early recognition is essential to protection of the vulnerable, as part of the Church's commitment to the safety of all God's children. (*Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Circular Letter*, 2011, I(b))

- Be aware of personal and professional limitations with respect to paraprofessional counseling and make appropriate referrals. This ensures the person in need receives the best care, and it accords with the moral virtue of prudence and the avoidance of doing harm by acting beyond one's expertise. (*CCC 1788, 1806*)
- Adhere to all applicable civil and ecclesial laws, policies, and procedures governing the reporting of abuse, neglect, or suspected abuse or neglect. Prompt reporting is essential to protecting the vulnerable and fulfilling both legal and moral responsibilities. (*Pope Francis, Vos Estis Lux Mundi, arts. 2-4, 19; CIC, can. 1398; Romans 13:1-2; Ephesians 5:11*)

BEHAVIOR STANDARDS

- ✓ Clergy, seminarians, deacon aspirants or candidates, paid personnel, and volunteers are to act as role models of proper Catholic values and must not engage in unethical or immoral conduct, or conduct that gives the appearance of such. (*CCC 2287; Matthew 5:16; 1 Timothy 3:2, 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; Philippians 1:27*)
- ✓ Any interpersonal conduct that is prohibited by civil or ecclesial law is likewise forbidden under diocesan policy. As a prime example, any verbal or nonverbal sexual behavior between a minister and a minor is inappropriate and forbidden. Further, illicit use of electronic media, whether via internet, email, chat rooms, social networks, phone conversations, text messaging, photos, videos or any other medium, is prohibited. (*Pope Francis, Vos Estis Lux Mundi, art. 19; 1 Peter 2:12; Ephesians 5:8-10; Philippians 1:27*)
- ✓ Any known or reasonably suspected sexual abuse of a minor, or any known or reasonably suspected inappropriate relationship between a minister and a minor, must be reported promptly in accordance with civil law, ecclesial law, diocesan policy, and Safe Environment procedures. Reports must be made through the required civil, supervisory, and diocesan channels, including without delay to the diocesan Office of Safe Environment (e.g., via a Confidential Notice of Concern). Supervisors who receive such concerns must promptly address, document, and escalate the matter in accordance with diocesan policy. No minister may ignore, conceal, minimize, or fail to report signs of abuse, grooming, boundary violations, or other conduct that may place a minor at risk. Proper reporting protects the vulnerable and upholds the Diocese's legal, moral, and ecclesial responsibilities. (*Pope Francis, Vos Estis Lux Mundi, arts. 2-4; CIC, can. 1398; Ephesians 5:11*)
- ✓ Two Safe Environment-trained adults (21+) or one Safe Environment-trained adult and two trained teens must be present at all religious education programs, classes, and activities for minors, and must remain until all minors have left the premises. All planning meetings/interactions with a teen assistant/helper must take place in public or in the presence of another adult or teen. All Catholic school events and activities outside of a regular classroom setting require the presence of two adults, or one adult and at least two teens. Going out/dating between a minister and a minor is strictly prohibited. (*Diocesan Safe Environment Policy; Pope Francis, Vos Estis Lux Mundi*)
- ✓ When initiating or engaging in physical contact or expressions of affection in ministry, appropriate discretion must be exercised, consistent with the standards set forth in the Code of Conduct, diocesan policy, and relevant training. Any display of affection must occur in a public or observable setting and respect the wishes of the other person. Modesty and respect must govern all interactions. Ministers must remain attentive to how physical gestures may be perceived and avoid any conduct that could be intrusive or inappropriate. Any affectionate or affirming touch should be limited, non-secretive, and appropriate to the ministerial relationship. Consent and context are essential; never impose affection and always remain attentive to power dynamics. By being transparent and restrained, ministers show authentic care without crossing personal boundaries. (*CCC 2521-2522, 2284, 2356*)
- ✓ One-to-one interactions between a minister and those they serve must be conducted with appropriate transparency and in a manner consistent with this Code of Conduct and diocesan policy. Such interactions must occur in public or otherwise observable settings and never in private or isolated environments (e.g., a car or private residence). Diocesan policies apply in all locations where ministry occurs. (*John 3:21*)
- ✓ Driving alone with a minor must always be avoided unless an extraordinary circumstance requires immediate and prudent action. In such situations, the following precautions are required:
 - Make and document reasonable efforts to contact a parent or guardian prior to transport. If unreachable, attempt and document contact with the designated emergency contact.
 - Notify a supervisor as soon as possible prior to transport—even if by call, text, or voicemail—and provide relevant details of the situation.
 - Maintain appropriate physical boundaries; do not engage in unnecessary or inappropriate physical contact.
 - Do not sit in closer proximity than necessary for safe transport.

- Do not make unnecessary stops. If a stop is required, choose a public, well-lit location and turn on the interior vehicle light.
 - Ensure departure and arrival times are recorded and communicated to a supervisor or ministry lead.
 - Document the circumstance by submitting a written or electronic report (e.g., email, text message, voicemail record, or incident report) to the appropriate supervisor or designated ministry lead, in accordance with diocesan policy. The report must include sufficient detail to support safety and accountability, including: the reason for transport; all attempts to contact a parent, guardian, or emergency contact (with method, time, and outcome); the time transport began and ended; and the specific destination and location.
- ✓ If a minister experiences a recurring romantic or sexual attraction toward someone they minister to, the minister must promptly seek guidance from a supervisor or other appropriate Church authority. Spiritual direction may also be sought, but it does not replace any reporting, supervisory, or boundary-related obligation required by diocesan policy. By promptly bringing such a matter to a supervisor, a minister acts with integrity and humility. Open communication with a trusted Church authority ensures that personal feelings do not compromise one's ministry or the well-being of the faithful. (*CCC 2340*)
- ✓ Any sexual gesture, advance, or overture made by or to a minister, involving a person to whom the minister provides ministry, must be reported immediately to the minister's supervisor. The supervisor must promptly address the matter, meet with the individuals involved as appropriate, and ensure the incident is properly documented and reported in accordance with diocesan policy. All known, suspected, or observed Code of Conduct violations must be reported promptly to the supervisor, even if all facts are not yet known. The supervisor is responsible for ensuring the report is properly documented and maintained in accordance with diocesan policy.

Reports involving possible abuse, inappropriate relationships with a minor, or other conduct that may pose a risk to minors or vulnerable persons must be reported without delay to the diocesan Office of Safe Environment (e.g., through a Confidential Notice of Concern), in accordance with diocesan policy.

Each minister shares responsibility for the community's well-being. Pope Francis has emphasized personal accountability at all levels of the Church; no one should look the other way when misconduct occurs. Reporting a violation is not an act of betrayal but of love for the Church and the individuals involved, helping them to correct course. Proper documentation promotes transparency and ensures patterns of misconduct are identified and addressed. This standard cultivates a culture of accountability and care, echoing St. Paul's advice: "Expose works of darkness rather than participate in them" (*Ephesians 5:11*). Our first concern is the safety and spiritual welfare of all; promptly addressing violations of the Code of Conduct is a crucial part of that care. (*Pope Francis, Vos Estis Lux Mundi, art. 2-4*)

Failure to maintain these standards, as determined by the Diocese in the exercise of its ecclesiastical judgment, may result in corrective action, discipline, restriction or loss of authorization to serve, removal from ministry, removal from employment or volunteer service, or other action, according to the person's status and in accordance with applicable law and diocesan policy.

EXAMPLES OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIORS

- ✓ Engaging in conduct that is willfully disruptive, inappropriate, or harmful to the integrity of ministry; public worship; Church governance; diocesan or parish operations; ecclesial relationships; or the mission, unity, and witness of the Church.
- ✓ Speaking graphically about sexual activities (including your own) or permitting others to do so, including telling sexually suggestive jokes.
- ✓ Hosting parish- or school-sponsored events involving minors in a private residence without prior approval from the appropriate authority, or without the required number of Safe Environment-trained and vetted adults, in accordance with diocesan Safe Environment event supervision policies.
- ✓ Possessing, displaying, or distributing pornographic material of any kind (photos, films, cartoons, stories, drawings, etc.) to others.
- ✓ Acquiring, possessing, or distributing sexual or pornographic images of any person.
- ✓ Engaging in, initiating, or permitting any form of sexual behavior with or between others.
- ✓ Engaging in assaultive behavior or any unwanted or inappropriate physical contact, including spanking, shaking, slapping, wrestling, tickling, or any form of physical punishment.
- ✓ Providing, possessing, or being under the influence of alcohol while engaged in ministry, supervising minors, or

participating in parish, school, or diocesan activities where such conduct is prohibited by law, diocesan policy, or the standards of the event.

- ✓ Providing, possessing, or being under the influence of any illegal drugs or misused controlled substances.
- ✓ Providing tobacco, nicotine, or vaping products to minors or to any person in violation of law or diocesan policy.
- ✓ Shaming, degrading, ridiculing, threatening, belittling, or humiliating another person.
- ✓ Using vulgar, profane, or abusive language.
- ✓ Showing favoritism.
- ✓ Dating or pursuing a romantic relationship with a minor.
- ✓ Engaging in physical contact that is, or could be perceived as, inappropriate.
- ✓ Wearing provocative or revealing attire or attire that is not appropriate to the ministry setting.
- ✓ Being nude in front of others.
- ✓ Sharing a bed with a minor.
- ✓ Keeping "secrets" about relationships or interactions with others.
- ✓ Showing affection when no one else is around, or in private or non-observable settings.
- ✓ Observing or watching others while they are dressing or undressing.
- ✓ Commenting on others' bodies.
- ✓ Taking pictures or recording images of others dressing, undressing, or showering.
- ✓ Failing to adhere to diocesan standards regarding appropriate expressions of affection.
- ✓ Sharing, using, accessing, or discussing confidential information without a legitimate diocesan, ministerial, supervisory, safety-related, or legal reason, including by text, email, social media, photograph, or other means.

WARNING SIGNS

- ✓ Altering one's appearance or behavior in a manner intended to attract or gain the attention of a particular person.
- ✓ Spending unusual or excessive time on personal appearance anticipating contact with a particular person.
- ✓ Creating or seeking ways or reasons to be alone with a particular person.
- ✓ Maintaining secrecy about the nature, frequency, or context of interactions with a particular person.
- ✓ Giving or receiving special attention, preferential treatment, gifts, or privileges to or from a particular person.
- ✓ Neglecting ministry to others, or the broader ministerial responsibilities, to spend more time with a certain person.
- ✓ Sharing personal or confidential information about others with a particular person.
- ✓ Sharing personal or intimate information or seeking emotional support or help with personal problems from a particular person in a manner which blurs ministerial or professional boundaries.
- ✓ Discussing topics or issues that are not age-appropriate with minors.
- ✓ Excessively looking forward to seeing a particular person.
- ✓ Having romantic, emotional, or sexual thoughts or fantasies about a particular person.
- ✓ Spending disproportionate time or attention on a particular person to the exclusion of others.

EXAMPLE DISPLAYS OF AFFECTION

Appropriate

- Asking permission before initiating physical contact
- Side hugs (with adults)
- Brief, non-full contact shoulder to shoulder hugs
- Pats on the shoulder or upper back
- Handshakes, high-fives, and fist bumps
- Verbal praise or encouragement
- Brief arm around shoulders
- Limited, appropriate contact such as touching hands, shoulders, and arms
- Sitting close to small children when appropriate for activity
- Holding hands during prayer or when providing comfort
- Holding hands with young children when necessary for safety or support

Inappropriate

- Any form of unwanted or non-consensual contact
- Full frontal hugs or "bear hugs"
- Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas
- Massages of any kind
- Touching thighs, knees, or legs
- Tickling or wrestling
- Touching or hugging from behind
- Games involving inappropriate touching
- Kisses on the mouth
- Special gift giving to/from a certain person

CODE OF CONDUCT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have read this [Code of Conduct and Behavior Standards for All Clergy, Religious, and Lay Ministers](#) (“Code of Conduct”) in its entirety, understand its requirements and standards, and agree to be bound by it. I sign it freely and voluntarily, and I agree to uphold these requirements and standards in all ministries in which I serve.

I understand and acknowledge that my obligation to maintain confidentiality applies during and after my employment, volunteer service, ministry assignment, or other association with the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, including any of its parishes, schools, ministries, programs, or affiliated entities. I further understand that this obligation does not supersede or limit any reporting duty required by civil law, ecclesial law, or diocesan policy.

I acknowledge that service in the Diocese is connected to the mission, witness, and ministry of the Catholic Church. I agree to conduct myself in a manner consistent with Catholic faith and morals, canon law, diocesan policy, and the standards of ministerial integrity set forth in this Code. I understand that the Diocese, acting through the Bishop of Fort Worth and those who act by his authority, has final ecclesiastical authority, in the exercise of ecclesiastical judgment, to determine whether my conduct is consistent with these standards, and that violation of this Code may result in discipline; removal from ministry; removal from any ecclesiastical, clerical, or volunteer office; termination of employment or service; and loss of authorization to serve.

Signature

Date

Email

Printed Name

Home Phone

Cell Phone

Home Address (including City, State, Zip Code)

Church where you are registered (Name and Location)

Your Primary Ministry/Position

Additional Ministries

* Recognizing that many individuals serve in multiple ministries, sometimes across multiple locations, please identify your primary ministry/position and location. Clergy and religious should list the Diocese as their primary entity and submit this form to the Safe Environment Department at the Catholic Center. All others, including lay employees, should identify their primary ministry and location and submit this form to the Safe Environment Coordinator at that location