



# Code of Pastoral Conduct

*For Priests, Deacons,  
Pastoral Ministers,  
Administrators, Staff,  
and Volunteers*

DIOCESE OF SHREVEPORT



## *Preface*

The Code of Pastoral Conduct for Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators, Employees, and Volunteers (Code of Pastoral Conduct) was developed by the VIRTUS® program of The National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc. Permission has been given to the Diocese of Shreveport for both its use and adaptation. Both the Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council have recommended its adoption for this Diocese. It is approved for the Diocese of Shreveport by the bishop. The purpose of the Code of Pastoral Conduct is to assist in developing and implementing uniform guidelines for appropriate behavior in situations of pastoral ministry, counseling and spiritual direction. The Code of Pastoral Conduct is not intended to address all situations that may arise in pastoral counseling relationships. It is intended to create a structure for addressing a variety of circumstances that, if not appropriately addressed, may create a risk of incidents, allegations, claims and/or lawsuits.

The Church must be exemplary. Clergy, staff, and volunteers should and will be held accountable for their behavior. In order to maintain the highest level of accountability, there must be a clear and unambiguous blueprint of appropriate and inappropriate behavior. The Code of Pastoral Conduct provides a basic structure for identifying limits. It is intended as a “continuous improvement document.” Therefore, your suggestions and recommendations for additions and revisions are encouraged.

The Code of Pastoral Conduct is intended to provide a foundation for implementing effective and enforceable standards of conduct for persons serving in pastoral ministry, counseling and spiritual direction in this Diocese. In addition to this Code of Pastoral Conduct, the Diocese of Shreveport also has a written Policy Concerning Communication and Information Systems and Policies for Youth Ministry with accompanying procedures as they pertain to the supervision of minors, travel and transportation, and planned events.

The Code of Pastoral Conduct and the various other policies and procedures of the Diocese for helping to provide a safe environment for children and young people rest on the basic teachings of the Gospel. Recognition and respect for human persons, even the very youngest, along with love and a caring attitude, receive in this code and in diocesan policies specific applications to real life situations.

Part of our Catholic tradition is to foster the culture of life, truth, justice and peace. One might say that we are attempting to help realize Christian love in action; not offer a book of rules, but rather guidance in living and fostering Christian Communion.

## **I. Preamble**

Priests, deacons, pastoral ministers, administrators, staff, and volunteers in our parishes, religious communities/institutes, and organizations must uphold Christian values and conduct. The Code of Pastoral Conduct for Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators, Staff, and Volunteers (Code of Pastoral Conduct) provides a set of standards for conduct in certain pastoral situations.

## **II. Responsibility**

The public and private conduct of clergy, staff, and volunteers can inspire and motivate people, but it can also scandalize and undermine the people's faith. Clergy, staff, and volunteers must, at all times, be aware of the responsibilities that accompany their work. They must also know that God's goodness and grace supports them in their ministry.

Responsibility for adherence to the Code of Pastoral Conduct rests with the individual. Clergy, staff, and volunteers who disregard this Code of Pastoral Conduct will be subject to remedial action by [the parish, the religious community/institute, the school, the bishop, etc.]. Corrective action may take various forms—from a verbal reproach to removal from the ministry—depending on the specific nature and circumstances of the offense and the extent of the harm.

## **III. Pastoral Standards**

### **1. Conduct for Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors**

Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors must respect the rights and advance the welfare of each person.

- 1.1 Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors shall not step beyond their competence in pastoral ministry counseling situations and shall refer clients to other professionals when appropriate.
- 1.2 Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors should carefully consider the possible consequences before entering into a counseling relationship with someone with whom they have a pre-existing relationship (i.e., employee, professional colleague, friend, or other pre-existing relationship). [See Section 7.2.2]
- 1.3 Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors should not audiotape or videotape sessions.
- 1.4 Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors must never engage in sexual intimacies with the persons they counsel. This includes consensual and nonconsensual contact, forced physical contact, and inappropriate sexual comments.
- 1.5 Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors shall not engage in sexual intimacies with individuals who are close to the client—such as relatives or friends of the client—when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors should presume that the potential for exploitation or harm exists in such intimate relationships.
- 1.6 Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors assume the full burden of responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in all ministry, counseling and counseling-related relationships.

- 1.7 Physical contact of any kind (i.e., touching, hugging, holding) between Pastoral Ministers, Counselors or Spiritual Directors and the persons they counsel can be misconstrued and should be avoided.
- 1.8 Counseling or counseling related sessions should be conducted in appropriate settings at appropriate times.
  - 1.8.1 No sessions should be conducted in private living quarters.
  - 1.8.2 Sessions should not be held at places or times that would tend to cause confusion about the nature of the relationship for the person being counseled.
- 1.9 Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors shall maintain a log of the times and places of sessions with each person being counseled.

## **2. Confidentiality**

Information disclosed to a Pastoral Minister, Counselor or Spiritual Director during the course of counseling, advising, or spiritual direction shall be held in the strictest confidence possible.

- 2.1 Information obtained in the course of sessions shall be confidential, except for compelling professional reasons or as required by law.
  - 2.1.1 If there is clear and imminent danger to the client or to others, the Pastoral Minister, Counselor or Spiritual Director may disclose only the information necessary to protect the parties affected and to prevent harm.
  - 2.1.2 Before disclosure is made, if feasible, the Pastoral Minister, Counselor or Spiritual Director should inform the person being counseled about the disclosure and the potential consequences.
- 2.2 Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors should discuss the nature of confidentiality and its limitations with each person in counseling.
- 2.3 Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors should keep minimal records of the content of sessions.
- 2.4 Knowledge that arises from professional contact may be used in teaching, writing, homilies, or other public presentations only when effective measures are taken to absolutely safeguard both the individual's identity and the confidentiality of the disclosures.
- 2.5 While counseling a minor, if a Pastoral Minister, Counselor or Spiritual Director discovers that there is a serious threat to the welfare of the minor and that communication of confidential information to a parent or legal guardian is essential to the child's health and well-being, the Pastoral Minister, Counselor or Spiritual Director should:
  - Attempt to secure written consent from the minor for the specific disclosure.
  - If consent is not given, disclose only the information necessary to protect the health and well-being of the minor.

Consultation with the appropriate Church supervisory personnel is required before disclosure.

- 2.6 These obligations are independent of the confidentiality of the confessional. Under no circumstances whatsoever can there be any disclosure—even indirect disclosure—of information received through the confessional. (cf. Canon 983, Code of Canon Law)

### **3. Conduct With Youth**

Clergy, staff, and volunteers working with youth should maintain an open and trustworthy relationship between youth and adult supervisors.

- 3.1 Clergy, staff, and volunteers must be aware of their own and others' vulnerability when working alone with youth. Use a team approach to managing youth activities.
- 3.2 Physical contact with youth can be misconstrued and should occur (a) only when completely nonsexual and otherwise appropriate, and (b) never in private.
- 3.3 Clergy, staff, and volunteers should refrain from (a) the illegal possession and/or illegal or inappropriate use of drugs and/or alcohol at all times, and (b) the use of alcohol when working with youth.
- 3.4 Clergy should not allow anyone under the age of 18 years to stay overnight in a Church-owned facility or in the cleric's private accommodations or residence. (cf. Handbook for Priestly Ministry, pp.9-10)
- 3.5 Staff and volunteers should not provide shared, private, overnight accommodation for individual children or young people including, but not limited to, accommodations in any Church-owned facility, private residence, hotel room, or any other place.
- 3.5.1 In rare, emergency situations, when accommodation is necessary for the health and well-being of the youth, the clergy, staff, or volunteer should take extraordinary care to protect all parties from the appearance of impropriety and from all risk of harm.
- 3.5.2 Use a team approach to managing emergency situations.

### **4. Sexual Conduct**

Clergy, staff, and volunteers must not, for sexual gain or intimacy, exploit the trust placed in them by the faith community.

- 4.1 Clergy, religious, staff, and volunteers who are committed to a celibate lifestyle are called to be an example of celibate chastity in all relationships at all times.
- 4.2 Staff and volunteers must behave in a professional manner at all times. Staff and volunteers who provide pastoral ministry, counseling or spiritual direction services must avoid developing inappropriately intimate relationships with minors, other staff, or parishioners.
- 4.3 No clergy, staff, or volunteer may exploit another person for sexual purposes.
- 4.4 Allegations of sexual misconduct should be taken seriously and reported to the pastor, principal, administrator, superior or supervisor and to civil authorities if the situation involves a minor.

Procedures of the Diocese of Shreveport will be followed to protect the rights of all involved.

- 4.5 Clergy, staff, and volunteers should review and know the contents of the child abuse regulations and reporting requirements for the state of Louisiana as stated in the Diocesan Policy for the Protection of Minors and should follow those mandates.

## **5. Harassment**

Clergy, staff, and volunteers must not engage in physical, psychological, written, or verbal harassment of staff, volunteers, or parishioners and must not tolerate such harassment by other Church staff or volunteers.

- 5.1 Clergy, staff, and volunteers shall provide a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written, or verbal intimidation or harassment.
- 5.2 Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical, written, or verbal behavior, including without limitation the following:
  - Physical or mental abuse.
  - Racial insults.
  - Derogatory ethnic slurs.
  - Unwelcome sexual advances or touching.
  - Sexual comments or sexual jokes.
  - Requests for sexual favors used as:
    - A condition of employment, or
    - To affect other personnel decisions, such as promotion or compensation.
  - Display of offensive materials.
- 5.3 Harassment can be a single severe incident or a persistent pattern of behavior where the purpose or the effect is to create a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work environment.
- 5.4 Allegations of harassment should be taken seriously and reported immediately to the pastor, supervisor or other appropriate person in the parish, community/institute, diocese, or organization.

Procedures of the Diocese of Shreveport will be followed to protect the rights of all involved.

## **6. Parish, Religious Community/Institute, and Organizational Records and Information**

Confidentiality will be maintained in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of parish, religious community/institute, or organizational records.

- 6.1 Sacramental records shall be regarded as confidential. When compiling and publishing parish, religious community/institute, or organization statistical information from these records, great care must be taken to preserve the anonymity of individuals.
- 6.2 Most sacramental records older than 70 years are open to the public.
  - 6.2.1 Information regarding adoption and legitimacy remains confidential, regardless of age.



- 6.2.2 Only staff members who are authorized to access the records and supervise their use shall handle requests for more recent records.
- 6.3 Parish, school, diocesan, or organization personnel, financial and payroll records are confidential unless review is required by an appropriate church or government agency. Contact the financial oversight department of the diocese or supervising institution upon receipt of any request for release of financial records. Annual financial reports are published after review by the appropriate finance council and officers.
- 6.4 Individual contribution records of the parish, religious community/institute, or organization shall be regarded as private and shall be maintained in strictest confidence.

## **7. Conflicts of Interest**

Clergy, staff, councillors, and volunteers should avoid situations that might present a conflict of interest. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can call integrity and professional conduct into question.

- 7.1 Clergy, staff, councillors, and volunteers should disclose all relevant factors that potentially could create a conflict of interest.
- 7.2 Clergy, staff, councillors, and volunteers should inform all parties when a real or potential conflict of interest arises. Resolution of the issues must protect the person receiving ministry services.
- 7.2.1 No clergy, staff, councillor, volunteer should take advantage of anyone to whom they are providing services in order to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.
- 7.2.2 Pastoral counselors should not provide counseling services to anyone with whom they have a business, professional, or social relationship. When this is unavoidable, the client must be protected. The counselor must establish and maintain clear, appropriate boundaries.
- 7.2.3 When pastoral counseling or spiritual direction services are provided to two or more people who have a relationship with each other, the Pastoral Minister, Counselor or Spiritual Director must:
- Clarify with all parties the nature of each relationship,
  - Anticipate any conflict of interest,
  - Take appropriate actions to eliminate the conflict, and
  - Obtain from all parties written consent to continue services.
- 7.3 Conflicts of interest may also arise when a Pastoral Minister's, Counselor's or Spiritual Director's independent judgment is impaired by:
- Prior dealings,
  - Becoming personally involved, or
  - Becoming an advocate for one (person) against another.

In these circumstances, the Pastoral Minister, Counselor or Spiritual Director shall advise the parties that he or she can no longer provide services and refer them to another Pastoral Minister, Counselor or Spiritual Director.

## **8. Reporting Ethical or Professional Misconduct**

Clergy, staff, and volunteers have a duty to report their own ethical or professional misconduct and the misconduct of others.

- 8.1 Clergy, staff, and volunteers must hold each other accountable for maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards. When there is an indication of illegal actions by clergy, staff, or volunteers, you should notify the proper civil authorities immediately. Also notify the Pastor, Vicar General, Religious Superior, Administrator, or other appropriate officer.
- 8.2 When an uncertainty exists about whether a situation or course of conduct violates this Code of Pastoral Conduct or other religious, moral, or ethical principles, consult with:
  - Others knowledgeable about ethical issues, or
  - The Chancellor, Vicar General or Diocesan Director of Human Resources.
- 8.3 When it appears that a member of clergy, a staff member, or a volunteer has violated this Code of Pastoral Conduct or other religious, moral, or ethical principles:
  - Report the issue to a supervisor or next higher authority, or
  - Refer the matter directly to the Chancellor or Vicar General.
- 8.4 The obligation of Pastoral Ministers, Counselors and Spiritual Directors to report client misconduct is subject to the duty of confidentiality. However, any agreement or duty to maintain confidentiality must yield to the need to report misconduct that threatens the safety, health, or well-being of any of the persons involved except as provided for in Section 8.5.
- 8.5 These obligations are independent of the confidentiality of the confessional. Under no circumstances whatsoever can there be any disclosure — even indirect disclosure — of information received through Confession (cf. Canon 983, Code of Canon Law).

## **9. Administration**

Employers and supervisors shall treat clergy, staff, and volunteers justly in the day-to-day administrative operations of their ministries.

- 9.1 Personnel and other administrative decisions made by clergy, staff, and volunteers shall meet civil and canon law obligations and also reflect Catholic social teachings and this Code of Pastoral Conduct.
- 9.2 No clergy, staff, or volunteer shall use his or her position to exercise unreasonable or inappropriate power and authority.
- 9.3 Each volunteer providing services to children and youth must read and sign the Volunteer Code of Conduct before providing services.

## **10. Staff or Volunteer Well-being**

- 10.1 Clergy, staff, and volunteers should be aware of warning signs that indicate potential problems with their own spiritual, physical, mental, and/or emotional health.
- 10.2 Clergy, staff, and volunteers should seek help immediately whenever they notice behavioral or emotional warning signs in their own professional and/or personal lives.



10.3 Clergy, staff, and volunteers must address their own spiritual needs. Support from a Spiritual Director is highly recommended.

10.4 Inappropriate or illegal use of alcohol and drugs is prohibited.

#### **IV. Volunteer's Code of Conduct**

Our children are the most important gifts God has entrusted to us. As a volunteer, I promise to strictly follow the rules and guidelines in this Volunteer's Code of Conduct as a condition of my providing services to the children and youth of our [parish, school, facility, diocese, et cetera].

As I volunteer, I will:

- Treat everyone with respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, dignity, and consideration.
- Avoid situations where I am alone with children and/or youth at Church activities.
- Use positive reinforcement rather than criticism, competition, or comparison when working with children and/or youth.
- Refuse to accept expensive gifts from children and/or youth or their parents without prior written approval from the pastor or administrator.
- Refrain from giving expensive gifts to children and/or youth without prior written approval from the parents or guardian and the pastor or administrator.
- Report suspected abuse to the pastor, administrator, or appropriate supervisor and [the local Child Protection Services Agency]. I understand that failure to report suspected abuse to civil authorities is, according to the law, a misdemeanor.
- Cooperate fully in any investigation of abuse of children and/or youth.

As a volunteer, I will not:

- Smoke or use tobacco products in the presence of children and/or youth.
- Use, possess, or be under the influence of alcohol at any time while volunteering.
- Use, possess, or be under the influence of illegal or inappropriate drugs at any time.
- Pose any health risk to children and/or youth (i.e., no fever or other contagious situations).
- Strike, spank, shake, or slap children and/or youth.
- Humiliate, ridicule, threaten, or degrade children and/or youth.
- Touch a child and/or youth in a sexual or other inappropriate manner.
- Use any discipline that frightens or humiliates children and/or youth.
- Use profanity in the presence of children and/or youth.

I understand that as a volunteer working with children and/or youth, I am subject to a thorough background check including criminal history. I understand that any action inconsistent with this Code of Conduct or failure to take action mandated by this Code of Conduct may result in my removal as a volunteer with children and/or youth.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Volunteer's Printed Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Volunteer's Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

An official copy of the form above will be provided to you for your signature. The above is for information/reference purposes.

## **DIOCESE OF SHREVEPORT**

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