

Diocese of Fort Worth
Code of Conduct & Behavior Standards for Ministers, Employees and Volunteers

The Diocese of Fort Worth has developed the following *Code of Conduct and Behavior Standards* for ministers which includes clergy, employees and volunteers. The Diocese requires all ministers (clergy, employees and volunteers) to adopt this code by signing and dating it on an annual basis. A copy will be kept on file in the parish/school or other site where the person serves. This *Code of Conduct and Behavior Standards* is intended for ministers, employees & volunteers in the church of Fort Worth.

Professional Ethical Obligations

1. Ministerial Role

- a) Ministers work collaboratively with all those engaged in ministry.
- b) Ministers faithfully represent the teachings of the Catholic Church with integrity in word and action.
- c) Ministers are competent and receive ongoing education and training commensurate with their role(s) and responsibilities (§ 231, *Code of Canon Law*).
- d) Ministers respect the diversity of spiritualities in the faith community and will not make their personal form of spirituality normative.

2. Inclusion

- a) Ministers recognize the dignity of each person and refrain from behaviors or words that are disrespectful of anyone or any group.
- b) Ministers serve all people without regard to gender, creed, national origin, age, sexual orientation, marital status, socioeconomic status, or political beliefs.
- c) Ministers ensure that all persons have access to the resources, services, and opportunities they require with particular regard for persons with special needs or disabilities.

3. Accountability

- a) Priests are accountable to Bishop Vann or the person he designates; all other ministers are accountable to the pastor or other duly appointed representative under the authority of Bishop Vann.
- b) Ministers are called to serve the faith community, carrying out their ministerial functions "...conscientiously, zealously, and diligently" (§ 231, *Code of Canon Law*).
- c) Ministers exercise responsible stewardship of resources while holding themselves to the highest standards of integrity regarding the fiscal matters placed in their trust.
- d) Ministers are responsible for supporting each other toward being effective leaders. This support must include discussing concerns about inappropriate behaviors concerning children, youth and vulnerable adults with the particular minister and/or minister's supervisor.

4. Confidentiality

- a) Ministers respect confidentiality.
- b) Ministers adhere to civil and ecclesial law concerning the reporting of neglect or abuse or whenever physical harm could come to the person or to a third party.
- c) Ministers support the rights and roles of parents, guardians and caretakers while ministering to the needs and concerns of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

5. Conduct

- a) Ministers will sustain respectful relationships with all those they serve, avoiding manipulation, sexual harassment and other abuses of the power which comes with a ministerial position.
- b) Ministers maintain appropriate professional boundaries with colleagues. Romantic or sexual relationships between a minister and a child, youth or vulnerable adult are inappropriate and unethical, regardless of who initiates the conduct.
- c) Ministers model healthy and positive behaviors with all children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- d) Procuring, providing, or using alcohol and/or controlled substances for or /with children, youth or vulnerable adults is inappropriate and unethical.

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6. Referrals and Intervention

- a) Ministers are aware of the signs of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and neglect.
- b) Ministers are aware of their limitations with respect to paraprofessional counseling and make appropriate referrals.
- c) Ministers adhere to civil and ecclesial law, policy and procedure for reporting abuse, suspected abuse or neglect.

7. Parish/School /Diocesan Policies and Guidelines

- a) Ministers are aware of and comply with all applicable parish/school, organizational and/or diocesan policies and guidelines with special attention to ministerial competency, sexual misconduct, safety, transportation, parental permission, and medical emergency policies.

Behavior Standards:

1. Any verbal or nonverbal sexual behavior with any child, youth or vulnerable adult is inappropriate and forbidden.
2. All suspicions of child or sexual abuse must be reported as required by state law and diocesan policies. Any knowledge or suspicion of any minister, employee or volunteer having an inappropriate relationship with a child, youth or vulnerable adult must be reported promptly to that person's supervisor.
3. All observed Code of Conduct violations must be reported to the supervisor and documented.
4. Dating or going out with any child, youth or vulnerable adult is forbidden.
5. Discretion must be used in dealing with all, especially regarding physical contact. Any overt display of affection should be made in a public setting in front of other group members and should respect the wishes of the other person.
6. Sexual gestures or overtures a child, youth or vulnerable adult makes to a minister should be reported to the supervisor so that discussion can be held with the child, youth or vulnerable adult.
7. "Buddy systems" should be used by ministers whenever possible, but especially when children, youth or vulnerable adults are involved. Two adults or one adult and one teen are required in all religious education programs, classes and activities. This includes all activities for children and all youth ministry events and activities, and all jvenes ministries that include adolescents. Please note, that an adult must always be certain that all interaction/planning meetings with a teen assistant/helper must take place in public or in the presence of another adult or teen.
Also, all Catholic school events and activities outside of a regular classroom setting require the presence of two adults or one adult and a teen.
8. One-to-one counseling with a child, youth or vulnerable adult should always occur in a public place—never alone in a car or a private place.
9. Driving alone with a child, youth or vulnerable adult should be avoided at all times, especially when working with troubled teens. Two adults must be in attendance until all youth have left the premises.
10. If riding or driving alone with a child, youth or vulnerable adult cannot be avoided, special care should be taken:
 - Contact parents and document outcome of call.
 - Don't sit close to one another in the car.
 - Do not come into physical contact with each other.
 - Do not stop the car to talk.
 - If you must stop, turn on the inside light of the car.
 - Avoid physical contact (hugs and kisses) when saying goodbye.
 - Be aware of the time you depart and arrive. Mark those times in your diary or record.
11. Never swear or use foul or abusive language in the presence of those you serve in ministry.

12. Never speak graphically about sexual activities, including your own and do not allow others to do so.
13. Never show pornographic materials to those you serve in ministry.
14. Never use your role to degrade, ridicule, threaten or humiliate another person.
15. Never give children, youth or vulnerable adults tobacco, alcohol or unauthorized drugs.
16. Never allow children, youth or vulnerable adults to become sexual with one another during ministry activities.
17. Never invite or host children, youth or vulnerable adults in your home unless another adult is present.
18. Never spank, shake, slap or physically punish children, youth or vulnerable adults.
19. Never use, possess or be under the influence of alcohol at any time while ministering to children, youth or vulnerable adults.
20. Never use, possess or be under the influence of illegal drugs at any time.
21. Never wrestle with or tickle a child, youth or vulnerable adult.
22. When a minister experiences romantic or sexual attraction for a child, youth or vulnerable adult, the minister is required to discuss the situation with the supervisor or spiritual director for guidance.
23. Standards for communication or conduct of relationships apply to electronic media including internet access, email, chat rooms, phone conversations, photos and pictures.

Warning signs:

- Wearing special clothes when you know you're going to see a certain person.
- Spending extra time grooming yourself when you know you're going to see a certain person.
- Finding ways or reasons to be alone with a certain person.
- Keeping aspects of your relationship with a person secret from others (such as how often you talk on the phone or see each other alone).
- Giving and receiving special gifts from a certain person.
- Neglecting to spend time with other people because you want to spend more time with a certain person.
- Sharing personal information about others with a certain person.
- Sharing personal information or seeking help with personal problems from a certain person.
- Excessively looking forward to seeing a certain person.
- Fantasizing or daydreaming about a certain person.
- **Remember...**part of your responsibilities in ministry are to communicate when you have concerns about others serving in your ministry as well as yourself.

Unacceptable behaviors:

- Meeting alone in isolated places.
- Showing favoritism.
- Physical contact that can be misinterpreted.
- Provocative or revealing attire.
- Meeting in homes and in bedrooms without others present.
- Being nude in front of children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Sleeping in bed with children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Special gift giving to/from a certain person.
- Keeping "secrets" about relationships.
- Failing to adhere to uniform or accepted standards of affection.
- Showing affection when no one else is around.
- Staring while others are dressing.
- Commenting on others' bodies.

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- Taking pictures while others are dressing or showering.
- Shaming or belittling an individual.

Appropriate displays of Affection in Ministry:

- Asking permission before touching.
- Side hugs (with adults).
- Brief shoulder to shoulder hugs.
- Pats on the shoulder or back.
- Handshakes.
- “High-fives” and hand slapping.
- Verbal praise.
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms.
- Arms around shoulders.
- Holding hands during prayer or when a person is upset.
- Holding hands while walking with small children.
- Sitting close to small children.
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with a small child.

Inappropriate displays of Affection in Ministry:

- Any form of unwanted affection.
- Full frontal hugs or “bear hugs”.
- Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas.
- Lying down or sleeping beside others.
- Massages.
- Patting others on the thigh, knee or leg.
- Tickling or wrestling.
- Touching or hugging from behind.
- Games involving inappropriate touching.
- Kisses on the mouth
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, restricted areas or other private rooms.
- Compliments that relate to physique or body development.

Violations of *The Code of Conduct & Behavior Standards for Ministers, Employees and Volunteers* which involve minors are grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

I have read and understand the above *Code of Conduct & Behavior Standards for Ministers, Employees and Volunteers* and commit to uphold this code in my ministry.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please keep this copy for your personal records. When you attend the *Keeping Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults Safe* session, you will be required to sign and submit a form acknowledging your agreement to adhere to the *Code of Conduct & Behavior Standards for Ministers, Employees and Volunteers*.

January, 2006