

## CODE OF BEST PRACTICES FOR PRIESTS ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI

*This code is offered by the Presbyteral Council of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati to assist priests in their ministry. It is not to be taken as legal advice. Whether or not one lives up to this code does not determine whether he or she is legally liable in a court of law. When in doubt about the appropriateness of one's actions, ethically and legally, broad consultation with experts in related fields is always wise. This code is not all-inclusive; the Archdiocese from time to time publishes guidelines and policies on a variety of topics such as its policy on the prevention of child abuse. This code, therefore, does not duplicate policies already in existence.*

The priest is called in a distinct way to advance the mission of the church in cooperation with the pope and bishops by faithfully and competently fulfilling the responsibilities that come to us from ordination, official appointment, or certification. The priest is obligated to respect and adhere to the requirements of canon law and other official church directives such as the liturgical law of the church.

Pastoral ministry is a vocation and a profession. As a vocation, it is our free response to God's call in and through the community to commit ourselves in love to serve others. As a profession, our pastoral ministry is a commitment to be of good moral character and to acquire special competence pertaining to matters of our religious tradition so as to serve the religious needs of the community. Because people's experience of God is so closely tied to their experience of us, we shall want to fulfill our vocation by maintaining professional standards.

Jesus is the ultimate norm for what it means to be a person and to live fully responsive to God. To accept Jesus as the model of whom we ought to be and what we ought to do is to enter the way of discipleship. In the demands of one's own ministry today, one does not replicate the external behavior of the historical Jesus, but lives as a disciple in his spirit. In short, pastoral ministry as an expression of discipleship is inclusive of all, is an exercise of service and not of the use of power, and is best experienced by those served as liberating them to live and love more fully.

Character is manifest in our intentions, attitudes, and motives; it gives direction to our lives. Virtues are the practical skills that link those realities and aspirations to actions. A short list of covenantal and moral virtues to which all ministers should want to aspire is the following: 1. Holiness, 2. Love, 3. Trustworthiness, 4. Altruism, and 5. Prudence.

### PROFESSIONAL OBLIGATIONS

#### A. Theological Competence

1. We give time to developing our theological knowledge and pastoral skills through private study, participating in professional programs, and taking sabbaticals.

2. We develop a competence in providing theological reflection as the specialized expertise that distinguishes us from other helping professionals. That is, we are committed to being able to mediate meaning by bringing the resources of Christian faith to bear on specific situations in the lives of people.

#### B. A Commitment to Other's Best Interest

1. We must be approachable and available to help people.
2. We respect the dignity of each person by providing service without regard to their economic status, age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or physical and mental abilities.
3. We have room for gratuitous service, for going "the extra mile," for flexibility, and for the unexpected.
4. We strive to hold one another accountable to professional standards and conduct.

#### C. Care of Ourselves

1. We strive to keep physically and emotionally healthy by getting proper nutrition and adequate sleep, by taking exercise, days off and vacations, by guarding against the misuse of alcohol and drugs, and by nurturing friendships outside our pastoral relationships to meet healthy needs for intimacy. We strive to manage our time according to the priorities of our ministry and other obligations.
2. We strive to keep spiritually healthy by following a regular discipline of reflective reading, private and public prayer, spiritual direction, and other ascetical practices that enhance our awareness of and responsiveness to God.

#### D. Use of Power

We exercise ministerial power by virtue of our vocation (priesthood) and by virtue of our assignments (pastor, teacher, etc.) The former should inform and impact the latter and not vice-versa.

1. We do not minimize or ignore the unique power that we have over those seeking pastoral service, but we strive to use our power in ways that demonstrate respect for the dignity of persons by empowering them to come into their own freedom and so to participate more fully in the mission of the church.
2. We should be sufficiently self-disciplined so as to maintain clear boundaries in our pastoral relationships and refrain from exploiting the trust and dependency of those who seek our service by not using them to satisfy our needs for attention, acceptance, and pleasure.
3. We strive to avoid, to the extent possible, those dual relationships (e.g., with our employees, students, friends, business relationships) which could impair our

professional judgment, create conflicts of interest, or lead to exploiting the relationship for our own gain. When dual relationships are inevitable, we must lessen their potential for conflicts of interest and exploitation by monitoring our role and boundaries and by being clear about whose needs are being met.

#### E. Confidentiality

1. We are to keep confidential, except when civil law requires otherwise, all information which is disclosed to us while serving in our professional role as a religious authority and representative of the church.
2. We should become knowledgeable of state laws regarding the “religious privilege” of confidential information and the reporting requirements for child abuse.
3. We must seek the permission of the one who has disclosed private information to us before using it in a public way.
4. We must obtain the consent of the one who owns the information on sacraments and financial records before making that information public. However, we may disclose data from these records for statistical purposes as long as we protect anonymity. It is permissible to transmit the usual sacramental records between parishes or Archdiocesan offices including marriage and annulment case records normally requested by legitimate church authorities.
5. We should seek guidance from the Chancellor before disclosing records at the request of a government agency.
6. We should clarify with those for whom our loyalty may be ambiguous or conflicted just how information we acquire will be used and whose interest we are serving, theirs or some other person or institution.

#### F. The Priest as Counselor or Spiritual Director

1. We should become familiar with the Code of Ethics published by professional organizations regarding pastoral counseling or spiritual direction.
2. We should not step beyond our competence in counseling situations and should refer clients to other professionals when appropriate.
3. We should conduct sessions in appropriate settings at appropriate times.
  - a) We should not conduct sessions in private living quarters.
  - b) We should not hold sessions at places or times that would tend to cause confusion about the nature of the relationship for the person being counseled.

## G. Harassment

1. We 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.
2. We should provide a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written, or verbal intimidation or harassment.
3. Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical, written, or verbal behavior, including without limitation the following: a) physical or mental abuse, b) racial insults, c) derogatory ethnic slurs, d) unwelcome sexual advances or touching, e) sexual comments or sexual jokes, f) requests for sexual favors used as a condition of employment or to affect other personnel decisions, such as promotion or compensation, and g) the display of offensive materials.

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