

# DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

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## 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. 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 persons. Since the founding of the Church, however, there have been those who have abused positions of trust to prey on minors, vulnerable persons, 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 for Church Personnel* (the “*Code*”) of the Diocese of Little Rock (the “*Diocese*”) 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 persons, 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.

This *Code* was adopted and promulgated by Bishop Anthony B. Taylor on July 1, 2022, as particular law for the Diocese of Little Rock. This *Code* supersedes and replaces any and all former codes of conduct (for clergy and for laity) for the Diocese.

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 the dignity of the human person and the witness we are called to give as Church.

Promulgated July 1, 2022

- Promote authentic witness to Jesus Christ by those who serve in the Church;
- Protect, nurture, and guide children, vulnerable persons, 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 Diocese, a parish, a school, or other diocesan entity (including, but not limited to, parish pastoral and finance council members; school board members; and diocesan pastoral council, finance council, and review board members).<sup>2</sup>

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

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

“**School**” means a preschool, elementary, or a secondary school within the territory of the Diocese and recognized by the Diocese as Catholic.

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

“**Vulnerable person**” means any person in a state of infirmity; physical, mental, or emotional deficiency; or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to defend or protect themselves, to get help when at risk of harm, or to want or otherwise resist the offense (see *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, art. 1 §2).

“**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.

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<sup>2</sup> “Church personnel” does *not* include independent contractors; vendors; or employees of Catholic entities that are not under the immediate purview of the Diocese (e.g., non-Diocesan Catholic hospitals).

## **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 Pornography goes against Church teaching on sexuality and human dignity. To that end:

- a. Church personnel are prohibited from viewing pornographic materials on, or taking pornographic materials onto, the property of the Diocese, a parish, a school, or other diocesan entity.
- b. Church personnel are prohibited from showing pornographic material to minors.
- c. Church personnel are prohibited from the production, exhibition, possession, or distribution (including by electronic means) of child pornography, as well as by the recruitment of or inducement of a minor or a vulnerable person to participate in pornographic exhibitions. For purposes of this norm, “child pornography means: any representation of a minor, regardless of the means used, involved in explicit sexual activities, whether real or simulated, and any representation of sexual organs of minors for primarily sexual purposes.

1.7 Church personnel will not make use of dating or hookup apps to the extent that such is not in keeping with their state in life. Priests and deacons are precluded entirely from making use of dating or hookup apps for any reason.

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

1.9 Church personnel will not illegally possess, use, or distribute alcohol or other drugs. To the extent that they impair stable functioning or sound judgment, drugs, alcohol, or medications are prohibited for Church personnel within the course and scope of their work or ministry.

1.10 Although 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>3</sup>

1.11 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.
- 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.

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

1.13 Church personnel who have been issued a diocesan, parish, or Catholic school e-mail account are expected to use their issued account when engaged in activity involving the Diocese or any of its entities. All these e-mail accounts are subject to review.

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

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 persons, 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>4</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 a diocesan 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Section 1.10 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.

<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 relationship between the Church personnel and the unrelated minor's family preceded or is separate and apart from the professional/ministerial relationship between Church personnel and the minor.

- 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, high fives, and fist bumps;
- d. Holding hands during prayer;
- e. Holding hands while walking with young children and those unsteady;
- 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 persons 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 person in the home without another responsible adult present.

2.6 When present at Church or school activities specific to youth and minors, Church personnel are prohibited from using tobacco in the presence of minors and are prohibited from using alcohol altogether.

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.<sup>5</sup> On field trips and other similar travel, two adults must be present in vehicles except in the case of a caravan of cars with clear communication between vehicles (e.g., school field trip caravans).

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

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<sup>5</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 relationship between the Church personnel and the unrelated minor's family preceded or is separate and apart from the professional/ministerial relationship between Church personnel and the minor.

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. Although it is not strictly forbidden for Church personnel to be connected with unrelated minors via social media, Church personnel may engage in social media with minors *only* for professional or ministerial reasons. Church personnel are strictly forbidden from initiating the inclusion of a minor in their list of designated contacts or friends (i.e., “friending”) on social media, as well as from sending private messages or communications to minors via social media. Church personnel are permitted to communicate with minors via electronic means other than social media (e.g., email, text, SMS, GroupMe, or other similar electronic means), but Church personnel must first obtain a parent waiver to do so, and such communications must be for professional or ministerial reasons only.<sup>6</sup> Further guidance on virtual classes, formation, and ministry can be found in the Diocese’s “Guidelines and Best Practices for Virtual Classes, Formation, and Ministry with Minors.”

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 person 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.

2.12 Topics, vocabulary, recordings, films, games, computer software, social media, or any other form of personal interaction or entertainment that could not be used comfortably in the presence of parents must not be used with minors.

2.13 Minors and vulnerable persons will not have keys or unsupervised access to church or school facilities, nor are they ever permitted to drive Church vehicles of any kind.

2.14 Church personnel will not create unsolicited photographs, videos, or other social media images directed at a minor(s) or vulnerable person(s) without at least the implied consent of their parents.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</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 relationship between the Church personnel and the unrelated minor’s family preceded or is separate and apart from the professional/ministerial relationship between Church personnel and the minor.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

### **3. Stewardship**

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

3.2 Church personnel will provide a clear and accurate accounting of all diocesan 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 diocesan 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 Diocese, 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, 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 this 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, thereby subjecting the person who failed to report to disciplinary measures.

5.2 Suspected violations of the provisions of the Code by:

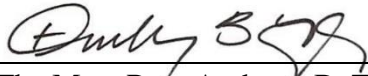
- a. Parish staff and volunteers are to be reported to the pastor of the parish;
- b. School faculty, staff, and volunteers are to be reported to the principal of the school and the pastor of the parish if the school is a parish school;
- c. Principals of parish schools are to be reported to the pastor of the parish. Principals of non-parish schools are to be reported to their immediate superior.
- d. Employees and volunteers of other diocesan ministries are to be reported to the supervisor or director of the program in question;
- e. A priest, deacon, or religious—including for his failure to act on suspected violations brought to him or her—is to be reported to the Chancellor for Canonical Affairs.


5.3 In addition to the above reporting requirements, suspected child maltreatment or abuse (including sexual abuse of a minor) must be reported immediately to:

- a. If the child needs immediate help, call 911.
- b. The Arkansas Department of Human Services Child Abuse Hotline **800-482-5964**. (Failure to report by a mandated reporter is a criminal misdemeanor);
- c. The Chancellor for Canonical Affairs and/or the diocesan Victims Assistance Coordinator (VAC);
- d. Parents or guardians, unless to do so would expose the minor or vulnerable person 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.

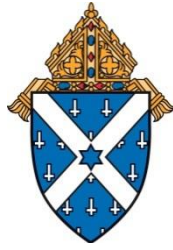
This Code of Conduct for Church Personnel was accepted, approved, and promulgated as particular law for the Diocese of Little Rock on July 1, 2022.

  
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The Most Rev. Anthony B. Taylor  
Bishop of Little Rock

  
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Dcn. Matthew A. Glover  
Chancellor for Canonical Affairs

Promulgated July 1, 2022





## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CHURCH PERSONNEL

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am a member of Church personnel within the Diocese of Little Rock. 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 Diocesan 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 Diocese and its associated entities, for violations of this Code.

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Printed Name

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Signature

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Date

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Position and  
Location of Primary Employment or Service