

OUR LADY OF THE VISITATION CATHOLIC CHURCH

PARISH LEADERS, CATECHISTS, AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS CODE OF ETHICAL STANDARDS



**Jesus preached for love, fairness, respect,
and justice among all of God's creation.**

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Our Lady of the Visitation Catholic Church

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Dear Parish Leaders, Catechists, and Volunteers:

Thank you and welcome to your ministry within the Our Lady of the Visitation Parish!

One of the myriad of components of fulfilling our stewardship call of offering our time, talents, and treasure to God's Church involves ministerial work in God's vineyards—our specifically, His Church and the parish's Religious Education classrooms.

In an effort to help us all understand a common set of expectations and responsibilities in our ministerial roles, please find attached a Code of Ethical Standards for all parish volunteers. I invite us to please embody these qualities and characteristics in our everyday life and in our ministerial roles within the Church.

May God bless you abundantly for your good works, and through the intercession of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mother of God, may they bestow upon you much peace and joy in your parish-level employee or volunteer ministerial role.

Respectfully
Yours in Christ,

Fr. Bob Newbury
Pastor

CODE OF ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR PARISH LEADERS, CATECHISTS, AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS

1. SCOPE AND INTENT

We who minister within our parishes, organizations, and institutions of the Church founded by Jesus Christ have the responsibility to exemplify Gospel teachings, values, and mandates in our lives, and in our actions. We must be aware of the responsibilities that accompany our work, knowing that God's goodness and graces support us in our ministries.

The intent of this Code is to establish ethical standards of conduct for Church ministers within the Our Lady of the Visitation Parish. The conduct of Church ministers has the power to inspire and motivate people, or to scandalize them and erode their faith.

Church ministers, as used in this document, include all who represent and work for the Roman Catholic Church in this diocese and parish, by virtue of office or designated position, whether paid or unpaid. This Code does not supersede canon, criminal or civil law, nor does it presume to answer all ethical questions.

This Code of Conduct has three purposes:

- a. To provide church ministers with guidelines on which to model their lives and ministries;
- b. To stimulate discussion in order to broaden consensus on ethical standards of practice, and to be an aid in training and supervision; and
- c. To act as an instrument of accountability within the ministry, and a basis as needed for corrective and/or disciplinary action.

Responsibility for knowing and adhering to this Code rests with us, those who minister in the Church.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Five key principles form the ethical foundation of this document. They are: **Ecclesial Commitment; Integrity; Respect for Others; Personal Well Being; and Competence.**

a. **Ecclesial Commitment**

As men and women of faith, we who are Catholic Church ministers: value and embrace the teachings of Jesus; have an intimate knowledge of the scriptures and the teachings of His Church; work to promote the Gospel through our ministries; and strive towards lives of virtue. The Gospel and its values infuse our work of nurturing the life of the community, especially through religious education and the sacramental life.

The presence of God is made manifest within a community of faith. Therefore, because of this, we value a deep commitment to the Church and its traditions. Moreover, we strive to be in service to the larger community, inspired by active reflection on Catholic social teaching. We demonstrate a special care and concern for the needs of the poor and the oppressed of society. We share the spirit of ecumenism in our interactions with other religious groups.

b. **Integrity**

Church ministers value integrity, which is to be who we say we are (*agree sequitur esse*) and to live our moral commitments. Because we belong to a Church that sets high moral standards of its members, as ministers we strive toward holiness and trustworthiness for ourselves.

We are public persons who identify ourselves as followers of Jesus Christ and servants/leaders in our Church. In turn, we must live and minister in a way that is faithful and congruent to that identification. This is exemplified by sound moral principles, uprightness and sincerity, conduct that is honest and consistent, without deception or corruption.

Our life and ministry is characterized by service. We handle the responsibilities of our office in a conscientious fashion that gives evidence of the Gospels and a commitment to the mission of the Church. We lead by word and example, with Jesus as our guide.

c. **Respect for Others**

Church ministers value each other as a unique creation of God. We respect the rights, dignity and worth of each individual. We are sensitive to cultural and socioeconomic differences among people, and appreciate the opportunities that diversity offers. We manifest this through careful listening and shared dialogue.

Church ministers recognize the issues of aging, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical and mental disabilities, and language all affect how the message of the Gospel is transmitted, received, and interpreted. Because of this compassionate awareness, we do not discriminate on any basis. However, since a person's faith, moral conduct, church participation, and adherence to the tenets of the faith may be essential to their role on behalf of the Church, the law does permit religious convictions to be considered in certain hiring, promotion, and termination decisions.

d. **Well Being**

As people created by God and given the gift of life, we value our own personal and professional well-being. In order to maintain a strong foundation for our Christian Catholic witness, we must sustain our personal health, spiritual life, and intellectual growth.

- (1) **Personal Physical and Mental Health:** We value attending to our own physical and mental health. We respect warning signs in our behavior and moods that might indicate conditions detrimental to our health. We recognize the value in seeking professional help when warning signs surface. We are attentive to alcohol and drug abuse, and other additions, in ourselves and others, and consider treatment for such a priority.

We value healthy limits in our work environment. We value utilizing our allotted time for time-off, vacation and days away to replenish our body, mind, and spirit. We support our colleagues in ministry work through positive affirmation, and hold one another accountable for maintaining personal health.

- (2) **Spiritual Life:** We value attending to our spiritual life, so as to remain focused in our faith, and in our ministry. We are faithful to our attendance at the Sunday Mass and Days of Obligation, and participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation as often as needed. An ongoing prayer life, meeting regularly with a spiritual director and taking time for annual retreats and days of reflection are important ways of maintaining and nurturing a healthy spiritual life.
- (3) **Intellectual Growth:** We value our ongoing intellectual development. Utilizing the time and opportunities for ongoing education and faith formation related to our respective ministries.

e. **Competence**

As Church ministers we value personal and professional competence in our particular ministries. It is on the basis of competence and abilities that the Church and those we serve recognize our positions as Church ministries. Competence is acquired and maintained through education, formation, training and skills development, and ongoing certification, where appropriate.

Competence also means knowing our limitations and remaining within the scope of our duties and skills, making appropriate referrals as needed. Personal and professional assessment of competence, which includes

regular performance review/feedback, is part of personal development within any ministry.

3. **ETHICAL STANDARDS IN MINISTRY**

All ministerial relationships within a church-related setting require that the highest ethical standards of conduct be maintained at all times. These include personal and professional interactions, program leadership, protection of privacy, and a timely response to perceived and reported misconduct.

a. **Personal and Professional Interactions**

(1) **Role Integrity:** Church ministers must be faithful to the Church and to their individual ministerial roles. These roles possess inherent direct or delegated authority with corresponding obligations, responsibilities, and limitations.

(a) We must recognize that there is an authority inherent in our roles that may afford influence over another. We must be sensitive to that relative authority and never use it inappropriately. We must protect the interests of minors; mentally, physically, and emotionally incapacitated; or otherwise vulnerable or at-risk individuals.

(b) Sexualized interactions with persons who are served, or with whom one interacts or works, are never part of the ministerial role, and may incur reporting requirements for misconduct. Church ministers who have made a commitment to celibacy are called to witness to this charism in all relationships. Likewise, those who have made a marital commitment are called to witness to this fidelity in all their relationships also.

(c) Church ministers must protect the confidentiality and privacy rights of others. Church ministers must be sensitive to the potential problems inherent in dual relationships (e.g., pastoral/personal relationships).

(2) **Conduct in Pastoral Counseling:** Pastoral counseling is a specific type of professional interaction with its own corresponding guidelines. Pastoral counseling occurs between clients and qualified priests, deacons, pastoral associates, and other qualified lay individuals.

- (a) *Any* counseling by a Church representative must be within the parameters of acceptable and appropriate training or certification from a recognized professional association of peers, or licensure from the Church and/or State of Colorado. Church ministers are expected to seek consultation/supervision and continuing education consistent with their counseling practice. It is important to note that within the State of Colorado, ministers engaged in pastoral counseling are restricted from being considered “counselors” without state sanctioned training, certification, and licensure requirements.
- (b) Counseling relationships are characterized by meetings at appropriate times and places, supported by a calendar record of contacts.
- (c) A pastoral counseling relationship should not begin with someone with whom the Church’s representative has had a pre-existing business, professional, or social relationship.
- (d) Church representatives must be cognizant at all times of the significance of maintaining healthy, personal and professional boundaries in counseling relationships.
- (e) Church representatives are restricted in disclosing information garnered during counseling sessions (e.g., an internal forum). The client must be informed of the terms of an agreement of confidentiality and the limits of such confidentiality, should a client disclose:
 - a. Intent to put self and/or others in imminent danger or harm or,
 - b. If they below the age of 18, that they are a victim of sexual abuse.

In such cases, the Church representative must contact the necessary local authorities, in accordance with Colorado state laws and satisfy any diocesan reporting requirements.

(3) **Conduct with Minors:** All interactions with minors deserve special attention. In addition to the helpful and best practices mentioned above for Pastoral Counseling:

- (a) Minors should always be viewed, whether in a social or ministerial situation, as “restricted individuals”; that is, they do not have the capacity to make free and voluntary

decisions. Wherever they are and whatever they do should be with the explicit knowledge and consent of their parents or guardian.

- (b) In general, in compliance with the existing U.S. Bishops Charter on the Protection of Children and Young People, **two adults** should be present in situations involving minors, with the exception of sacramental confession. Church ministers should observe the following guidelines:

1. When meeting with a minor, the office or classroom door should have an unobstructed, clear window opening or be left open.
2. Do not meet with a minor, if there are no other adults in the general vicinity.
3. Never visit a minor's home without at least one other adult (preferably a parent or guardian) present.
4. Avoid driving a minor without at least one other adult present; even for short distances or durations.
5. All outings with minors, such as retreats, youth trips, sports-related activities, and overnight trips, require at least two safe environment cleared and trained adults to be present (including chaperones).
6. Adult sleeping arrangements may not be shared with minors.
7. Locker rooms or other dressing areas must not be shared with minors, unless another adult is present.
8. Avoid accompanying children into restrooms without another adult present; unless it is absolutely unavoidable
9. Minors should only be permitted to work in the rectory when there is at least one other adult present (excluding a priest).

- (c) Physical force or demeaning language should not be employed in disciplining minors. Physical force should only be used to protect oneself, another innocent party, or upon a child who is out of control.

- (d) Caution should be exercised in using physical displays of affection (such as hugging) with minors. This gesture has different meanings for different people and societies. Consider the age of the child, the situation, the setting, and your relationship with the child in all cases, as well as whose needs are being met.
- (e) Adult chaperones of youth group activities are to maintain a professional presence at all times and the two-adult rule shall be employed around minors.
- (f) Parish ministers are prohibited from supplying or serving alcohol or any illicit or controlled substance to minors. Furthermore, alcohol should never be consumed in the presence of one or more minors by an adult, who is functioning in an official ministry capacity with minors.
- (g) If a Church minister finds him/herself in an embarrassing, uncomfortable or possibly compromising situation, it should be reported immediately to a supervisor, pastor, or the diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator, in order to begin consultation and/or seek assistance.

b. **Program Leadership**

- (1) **Just Treatment:** Church ministers must exercise just treatment of all persons whom they encounter in a daily activity and in the administration of their programs (regardless of race, religion, color, sex, language, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status, arrest or conviction record, veteran status, handicap status, or any other status protected by federal and state law).

Church ministers must be committed to establishing and maintaining a professional work environment, which is free from intimidation and harassment. Harassment can occur as the result of single, severe incident or a pattern of conduct which results in the creation of a hostile, offensive, or intimidating environment. Harassment compasses a broad range of physical or verbal behavior, which can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- 1. physical and mental abuse;
- 2. racial insults;
- 3. derogatory ethnic slurs;

4. sexual advances and unwelcome touching;
5. sexually oriented comments or sexual jokes;
6. request for sexual favors used as a condition of employment, classroom participation, or affecting any personal decision such as hiring, promotion, compensation, or termination.

(2) **Stewardship:** Church ministers must exercise responsible stewardship of all financial and material resources within their area of ministry.

(a) Church ministers must recognize that the resources that support their ministries come in great part from the generous contributions of others; therefore those who benefit from them must ensure that these resources are prudently and responsibly utilized, avoiding mismanagement and waste.

(b) Church ministers must provide a clear accounting of all funds within their control, and they must ensure that adequate systems are in place to protect both the Church and the individual from accusations of financial mismanagement or improprieties.

(c) Independent audits of financial operations are to be conducted on a regular and recurring basis.

(3) **Conflict of Interest:** Church ministers must avoid conflicts of interest, since the existence, or even the inference or appearance of a conflict of interest, can call into question the individual's integrity, and can cause harm to reputations.

Situations which have the potential for a conflict of interest include, but are not limited to the following examples:

(a) Conducting private business or other dealings with the Church, or any of its members;

(b) Accepting or giving substantial gifts for services or favors;

(c) Employing or engaging in commercial transactions with friends or relatives;

(d) Acting with partiality toward parish children/youth, employees or church members;

(e) Violating a confidence of another for personal gain.

c. **Protection of Privacy**

(1) **Confidentiality:** Persons who come to a Church minister, for assistance or advice, are entering a relationship marked with respect, trustor confidentiality.

(a) Information disclosed to a Church minister during the course of counseling, spiritual direction or any other professional contact, shall be held in strictest confidence.

(b) The Church minister is required to safeguard the confidentiality of any notes, files or computerized records pertaining to professional contacts with individuals.

(c) If consultation with another professional becomes necessary, care should be taken to protect the identity of individuals and limit the content of the information to be shared. The minister must consider what information needs to be shared, with whom, and the rationale for disclosure. The other professional must be bound by the same principles of confidentiality.

(d) In certain circumstances, breaking confidentiality is not only permissible, but mandated (excluding that associated directly with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These occur when a minister has knowledge that:

1. An individual poses a clear and imminent danger to him/herself or others;

2. a child or vulnerable adult is being abused;

3. a fellow minister is engaged in illegal activity, including sexual abuse of minors or vulnerable people.

In these instances, a minister must communicate with the appropriate civil and Church authorities, as well as with parents and legal guardians, when/if appropriate.

(e) These obligations are independent of and supplementary to the inviolate sacramental confidentiality of the confessional. Under no circumstances whatsoever can there be any disclosure, even indirect, of information received through the confessional.

- (2) **Records and Information:** Appropriate confidentiality shall be maintained in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of parish or institutional records.
 - (a) Sacramental records shall be regarded as confidential by Church ministers, and the employees and volunteers under their direction. When, for valid Church reporting or parish statistical purposes, and with the approval of the pastor, information from these records is made public, great care must be taken to preserve the anonymity of the individuals.
 - (b) Church ministers are to guarantee and safeguard individual personal (e.g., student, co-catechist, etc.) information including, but not limited to, all information gathered from counseling sessions, staff discussions, marriage preparation discussions, etc. Sharing information with others concerning these types of contacts must always be done prudently, and solely for the benefit of the individual(s) involved.
 - (c) Other Church and parish records are to be maintained and kept current which will ensure operational integrity, support of the mission of the Church, and assist in the continuity and transition of Church ministries.

d. **Response to Misconduct**

- (1) **Misconduct of an Illegal Nature:** Church ministers are required to report, to both the proper civil and Church authorities, any behavior by another Church minister where there is a credible suspicion of illegal conduct.
- (2) **Ethical Misconduct:** Church ministers must notify their supervisor or the pastor, or, if needed, other Church authorities of ethical misconduct by another Church minister.
 - (a) When Church ministers are uncertain whether a particular situation or course of conduct would violate this Code of Ethical Standards, they should consult with their pastor.
 - (b) When Church ministers believe that one of their colleagues may have violated this Code of Ethical Standards, they are asked to make a good faith attempt to resolve the issue, if possible, by bringing it directly to the attention of the individual. The Church minister is then asked to then

report the incident to their supervisor, pastor, or next-higher level of Church authority, as soon as possible.

- (c) In cases where there are clear indicators of unethical behavior or activity, but not illegal action by a Church minister, notification is to be made to a supervisor or the pastor in all instances, as soon as possible.
- (3) **Sexual Misconduct:** Church ministers must be knowledgeable of the laws of the State of Colorado regarding sexual assault, abuse, and exploitation; the U.S. Bishops Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People; and the established reporting requirements to local law enforcement authorities and the Diocese of Colorado Springs, if/when incidents of such misconduct arise.
- (a) All allegations involving a credible sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable person must be reported promptly to the appropriate civil authorities.
 - (b) The Pastor and the Diocese of Colorado Springs Safe Environment Office is available, as needed, for assistance and consultation on all issues of sexual misconduct, including the notification of proper civil authorities; regardless of whether the alleged behavior is past or present.
- (4) **Allegation Response:** All reports of credible boundary violations and sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable person must be reported and thoroughly examined within the Diocese of Colorado Springs; without jeopardizing or otherwise interfering with the local, law enforcement investigation.
- (a) Sexual misconduct/abuse cases will be reported to local law enforcement authorities in compliance with the Colorado state law and the U.S. Bishops' Charter.
 - (b) Boundary violations, which do raise to the level of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct, will:
 - i. Be documented by the reporting party(s)/witness(es) as an Incident Report (similar to sexual misconduct/abuse) and forwarded to the parish's Pastor or next higher-level of Church authority.
 - ii. Be evaluated to determine the level of seriousness and cause(s).

- iii. Necessitate timely corrective/disciplinary measures to be implemented by the Pastor or next higher-level of Church authority. These include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - 1. Temporary suspension (at least until the investigation and/or all corrective measures have been completed) or permanent removal from ministry positions which require recurring access to children.
 - 2. Review of the diocese's foundational Safe Environment Training (SET) video and comprehension exam and/or other required training (clergy/employee/volunteer);
 - 3. Assurance that the involved person(s) fully understand the need for safe and healthy boundaries, and agrees to maintain them in the future, if they are to be returned to their parish-level ministry role;
 - 4. A written disciplinary action record (clergy/employee).
- iv. Copies of all related documentation (e.g., Incident Report, report of corrective measures taken and completed, etc.) will be maintained in the parish or office-level employee or individual volunteer file.
- v. The originals of all related documentation (identified above) will be forwarded to the diocese's Bishops Charter compliance representative.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have received, read, and understand this *Code of Conduct for Parish Leaders, Catechists, and Other Volunteers* published and distributed by the Pastor of the Our Lady of the Visitation Catholic Church, as it pertains to my paid employment and/or volunteer activities within the Catholic Church, my parish, and the Diocese of Colorado Springs.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

LIST OF RESOURCES

1. *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, USCCB, Washington, DC.
2. *Keeping Kids Safe Program Manual*, Diocese of Colorado Springs, Colorado.
3. *Personnel Policy and Procedure Manual*, Diocese of Colorado Springs, Colorado.
4. *Code of Ethical Standards for Church Leaders*, 2008, Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.