

# CODE OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT FOR CHURCH PERSONNEL

ARCHDIOCESE OF SEATTLE

Office of Human Resources

October 1, 2007 | Revised June 2015 | Updated March 2025



Church personnel\* are called to high standards of ethical conduct and personal integrity. In our work, including as it relates to conduct, all have a sacred responsibility to uphold Church teaching. Furthermore, those in leadership roles and ministerial positions have a responsibility to lead a personal life that bears witness to Catholic teaching and avoids scandal.



---

\* Church personnel include clerics, religious men and women, and lay employees and volunteers in the Archdiocese of Seattle as defined in the *Policy for Prevention of and Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment*.

**In order to assure that Church personnel act in a manner consistent with Church teaching and ethical standards, Church personnel are required to:**

- Respect the dignity of each person as made in the image and likeness of God
- Respect the right of all persons to a good reputation
- Protect those who are vulnerable, including those who are young, elderly, living with disabilities, grieving and under emotional or mental stress
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries
- Conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the discipline, norms and teachings of the Church
- Report violations of policy or suspected violations of policy to the appropriate civil and/or Church authorities
- Follow Archdiocesan policies

**In order to assure that Church personnel act in a manner consistent with Church teaching and ethical standards, Church personnel are prohibited from engaging in:**

- Any crimes against persons, including sexual abuse, sexual misconduct and sexual harassment
- Acquisition, possession, or distribution of child sexual abuse material and pornographic images of adults
- Inappropriate use of electronic media, whether via internet, email, chatrooms, social networks, phone conversations, text messages, photos, videos or any other access

## **APPROPRIATE INTERACTIONS**

Appropriate interactions between Church personnel and minors or vulnerable adults are a positive aspect of Church life and ministry and promote healthy development. When initiating physical contact, professional discretion must be used. Any display of affection should be made in a public setting in front of others and should respect the wishes of the other person. Depending on the circumstances, the following forms of interaction are customarily (but not always) regarded as appropriate.

**Examples of Appropriate Physical Contact:**

- Short hugs (particularly side to side hugs)
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- “High-fives”
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during prayer

### **Examples of Appropriate Behavior:**

- Maintaining professional relationships with minors or vulnerable adults and their families
- Following appropriate instructions of parent or guardian
- Informing parent or guardian of activities
- Acquiring appropriate signed permission forms for all events

### **Examples of Appropriate Verbal Interactions:**

- Positive reinforcement
- Constructive feedback or instruction
- Appropriate jokes and age-appropriate humor

## **INAPPROPRIATE INTERACTIONS**

Some forms of interaction with minors or vulnerable adults have been used by adults to initiate inappropriate contact. Physical contact should generally be initiated by minors or vulnerable adults. In order to maintain a safe environment for minors and vulnerable adults, the following are examples of activities that should not occur.

### **Examples of Inappropriate Physical Interactions:**

- Lengthy hugs, full-body hugs, forceful frontal hugs, hugging from behind
- Kisses
- Holding minors over four years old on the lap
- Touching buttocks or genital areas
- Being in bed with a minor
- Wrestling
- Tickling
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by or to Church personnel

### **Examples of Inappropriate Behavior:**

- Giving personal email, telephone number or residence location to a minor, vulnerable adult or person to whom they minister
- Being alone with a minor or vulnerable adult in a private setting
- Allowing minors or vulnerable adults to break rules or violate the law
- Offering alcohol to minors or illegal drugs to anyone
- Using, possessing or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the presence of minors to whom they minister
- Showers with or in the immediate presence of a minor or vulnerable adult
- Taking pictures or video/digital recording while others are toileting, dressing or showering
- Showing sexual, child abuse materials or other morally inappropriate materials (photos, films, cartoons, stories, drawings, etc.) to others
- Transporting a minor or vulnerable adult alone
- Giving gifts to minors or vulnerable adults, except with the consent of the parent or guardian and when distributed equitably
- Giving money to minors or vulnerable adults

## Examples of Inappropriate Verbal Interactions:

- Swearing
- Telling sexually suggestive jokes
- Shaming
- Comments relating to physique or body development
- Involving minors or vulnerable adults in personal problems or issues of adults
- Asking minors or vulnerable adults to keep secrets from their parents or guardians
- Derogatory remarks about a minor or vulnerable adult's family
- Engaging in sexually oriented conversations unless part of a legitimate lesson in an approved program, in accordance with Church teaching

## ELECTRONIC/ONLINE CONDUCT

How we publicly represent ourselves and our programs to the public should reflect our identity as Church. The standards of ethical conduct and personal integrity extend to all forms of written, verbal and electronic communications.

- Church personnel using social networking sites for personal use should be aware that any information displayed therein may be evaluated in light of the individual's position in the Church. These sites should not be used to have contact with people to whom they minister or provide any program or parish information.
- Church personnel may not use artificial intelligence or photo altering computer applications to degrade, embarrass, humiliate, falsely represent, or otherwise harm others. These applications must be used in alignment and in support of ministry and the dignity of the human person.
- Church personnel should not email people to whom they minister from a private email account. All correspondence should be through a work email address (or email designated for work use).
- Church personnel should not communicate via instant messenger ("chat") with people to whom they minister from a private account.
- Church personnel should not text message with people to whom they minister from a private account.
- When serving minors, all communications (emails, text messages, chat, etc.) aside from school related communications should be directed to the parent/guardian with a cc to the minor as indicated. One-on-one communication, aside from school/classroom related topics, with minors should be avoided.

**ARCHDIOCESAN HELPLINE: 1-800-446-7762**

---

Copyright © 2007 Archdiocese of Seattle

All rights reserved. Parishes, schools and all other agencies of the Archdiocese of Seattle are permitted to reproduce all or part of this document for distribution to Church personnel. For all other persons, organizations and parties, no part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the Archdiocese of Seattle.

First printing October 2007  
Reprinted, April 2009  
Revised, June 2015  
Revised, March 2016  
Updated, March 2025