

Context for Understanding and Applying the *Code of Professional Conduct for Church Personnel*

October 15, 2007

Introduction

The *Code of Professional Conduct for Church Personnel* (“*Code of Conduct*”) effective October 1, 2007, is intended to assist Church personnel in creating and maintaining appropriate boundaries in the course of conducting ministerial duties. It accompanies the *Policy for the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Abuse, Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment*, and is designed as a tool to help Church personnel in complying with the policy.

The *Code of Conduct* must be applied using prudential pastoral judgment about the particular ministerial situation. Understood in this context, it will help to provide a safe environment for the children and vulnerable adults served by our Church ministries. It will also help our clergy, employees and volunteer ministers in avoiding even the appearance of impropriety.

In order to clarify the way in which the *Code of Conduct* is to be applied, it may be helpful to distinguish the weight of the various activities described therein.

Requirements and Prohibitions

The first two sets of bullet points are behaviors that are either required or prohibited. Required behaviors include respecting the dignity of each person, following Archdiocesan policies, and respecting the right of all persons to a good reputation. Prohibited behaviors include crimes against persons, stealing, and engaging in sexual abuse, sexual misconduct or sexual harassment. The required and prohibited activities comprise the core expectations under the *Code of Conduct*. Failure to follow these requirements or prohibitions, in most cases, constitutes a serious violation of the *Code of Conduct*.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Interactions

These are examples of behaviors that may be indicators that a violation of the *Code of Conduct* is occurring. It is important to remember that they are only examples. The examples listed as “appropriate” may not, in certain circumstances, be appropriate. Likewise, some of the examples listed as “inappropriate” may not, in all circumstances, be inappropriate.

The concrete examples must always be considered in the larger context of the individual’s activities, and help to provide a barometer both for one’s own actions and for those actions we observe on the part of other Church personnel.

For example, there may be a situation in which a small child over the age of 4 is comforted on the lap of someone performing Church personnel duties. This may not be inappropriate in a given situation. However, if one notices Church

personnel that frequently have children over the age of 4 sitting on their lap, and encourages this behavior from the children, there may be cause for concern and intervention.

Electronic/Online Conduct (Interactions)

This section sets forth examples of behaviors that are intended as guidelines and “best practices” to help Church personnel maintain appropriate boundaries. The internet and, in particular, social networking sites, email, Instant Messaging, Text Messaging and Blogs, are relatively new methods of communication for some parish and school ministries. Concerns over the misuse of these communication tools have increased over the last few years.

Like behaviors described in preceding sections of this document, the examples may or may not describe appropriate or inappropriate conduct depending upon the exercise of prudential pastoral judgment in a particular ministerial situation. The ultimate goal, as with other types of communication is to preserve the integrity of the ministerial relationship by providing transparency and accountability.

Summary

Church personnel are a living witness to their faith, acting in response to the baptismal call to share in Christ’s mission as priest, prophet and king. Their generous and dedicated service inspires and instructs the faith of all those they serve. They infuse vitality, life and love into their parishes, schools, and ministries.

The *Code of Conduct* is designed to help those who devote their time and talent in service of the children and vulnerable adults to maintain a safe environment for those they serve and to help them, as Church personnel, in creating appropriate ministerial boundaries. The examples are provided in order to demonstrate some concrete behaviors that should be observed or avoided while serving in a ministerial capacity with children and vulnerable adults. They must be applied in light of the particular local situation, using prudential judgment. In the event of particular questions, uncertainties, or concerns, it may be helpful to discuss them with other qualified Church personnel, or to contact the Safe Environment Program Office for clarification.

As this *Code of Conduct* is implemented, there will be opportunities for feedback and suggestions to improve this valuable resource in the future, to assure both appropriate pastoral flexibility and behavioral guidelines for appropriate ministerial boundaries.