

St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago



Code of Pastoral Conduct For Pastors and Spiritual Directors

Revised July 2014

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I. Preamble

Priests and spiritual directors must uphold Christian values and conduct. St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago provides this set of “Code of Pastoral Conduct for Pastors and Spiritual Directors” as standards for conduct in particular pastoral situations.

II. Responsibility

The public and private conduct of clergy, staff, and volunteers can inspire and motivate people, but it can also scandalize and undermine the people’s faith. Clergy must, at all times, be aware of the responsibilities that accompany their work. They must also know that God’s goodness and grace support them in their ministry.

Responsibility for adherence to the Code of Pastoral Conduct rests with the individual. Whoever disregards this Code of Pastoral Conduct will be subject to remedial action by the bishop. Corrective action may take various forms—from a verbal reproach to removal from the ministry—depending on the specific nature and circumstances of the offense and the extent of the harm.

III. Pastoral Standards

1. Conduct for Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors

Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors must respect the rights and advance the welfare of each person.

- 1.1 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors shall not step beyond their competence in counseling situations and shall refer clients to other professionals when appropriate.
- 1.2 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors should carefully consider the possible consequences before entering into a counseling relationship with someone with whom they have a pre-existing relationship (i.e., employee, professional colleague, friend, or other pre-existing relationship). *[See Section 7.2.2]*
- 1.3 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors should not audiotape or videotape sessions.
- 1.4 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors must never engage in sexual intimacies with the persons they counsel. This includes consensual and nonconsensual contact, forced physical contact, and inappropriate sexual comments.
- 1.5 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors shall not engage in sexual intimacies with individuals who are close to the client—such as relatives or friends of the client—when there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors should presume that the potential for exploitation or harm exists in such intimate relationships.

- 1.6 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors assume the full burden of responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in all counseling and counseling-related relationships.
- 1.7 Physical contact of any kind (i.e., touching, hugging, holding) between Pastoral Counselors or Spiritual Directors and the persons they counsel can be misconstrued and should be avoided.
- 1.8 Sessions should be conducted in appropriate settings at appropriate times.
 - 1.8.1 No sessions should be conducted in private living quarters.
 - 1.8.2 Sessions should not be held at places or times that would tend to cause confusion about the nature of the relationship for the person being counseled.
- 1.9 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors shall maintain a log of the times and places of sessions with each person being counseled.

2. Confidentiality

Information disclosed to a Pastoral Counselor or Spiritual Director during counseling, advising, or spiritual direction shall be held in the strictest confidence possible.

- 2.1 Information obtained in the course of sessions shall be confidential, except for compelling professional reasons or as required by law.
 - 2.1.1 If there is a clear and imminent danger to the client or others, the Pastoral Counselor or Spiritual Director may disclose only the information necessary to protect the parties affected and to prevent harm.
 - 2.1.2 Before disclosure is made, if feasible, the Pastoral Counselor or Spiritual Director should inform the person being counseled about the disclosure and the potential consequences.
- 2.2 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors should discuss the nature of confidentiality and its limitations with each person in counseling.
- 2.3 Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors should keep minimal records of the content of sessions.
- 2.4 Knowledge that arises from professional contact may be used in teaching, writing, homilies, or other public presentations only when effective measures are taken absolutely to safeguard both the individual's identity and the confidentiality of the disclosures.
- 2.5 While counseling a minor, if a Pastoral Counselor or Spiritual Director discovers that there is a serious threat to the welfare of the minor and that communication of

confidential information to a parent or legal guardian is essential to the child's health and well-being, the Counselor or Spiritual Director should:

- Attempt to secure written consent from the minor for the specific disclosure.
- If consent is not given, disclose only the information necessary to protect the health and well-being of the minor.

Consultation with the appropriate Church supervisory personnel is required before disclosure.

- 2.6 These obligations are independent of the confidentiality of the confessional. Under no circumstances whatsoever, can there be any disclosure – even indirect disclosure – of information received through the confessional.

3. Conduct with Youth

Clergy working with youth shall maintain an open and trustworthy relationship between youth and adult supervisors.

- 3.1 Clergy must be aware of their own and others' vulnerability when working alone with youth. Use a team approach to managing youth activities.
- 3.2 Physical contact with youth can be misconstrued and should occur (a) only when completely nonsexual and otherwise appropriate, and (b) never in private.
- 3.3 Clergy should refrain from (a) the illegal possession and/or illegal use of drugs and/or alcohol at all times, and (b) the use of alcohol when working with youth.
- 3.4 Clergy should not allow individual young people to stay overnight in the cleric's private accommodations or residence.
- 3.5 Clergy should not provide shared, private, overnight accommodation for individual young people including, but not limited to, accommodations in any Church-owned facility, private residence, hotel room, or any other place where there is no other adult supervision present.
- 3.5.1 In rare, emergency situations, when accommodation is necessary for the health and well-being of the youth, the clergy, staff, or volunteer should take extraordinary care to protect all parties from the appearance of impropriety and all risk of harm.
- 3.5.2 Use a team approach to managing emergencies.

4. Sexual Conduct

Clergy must not, for sexual gain or intimacy, exploit the trust placed in them by the faith community.

- 4.1 Clergy, religious, staff, and volunteers who are committed to a celibate lifestyle are called to be an example of celibate chastity in all relationships at all times.
- 4.2 Clergy who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction services must avoid developing inappropriately intimate relationships with minors, other staff, or parishioners. Clergy must behave in a professional manner at all times.
- 4.3 No clergy may exploit another person for sexual purposes.
- 4.4 Allegations of sexual misconduct should be taken seriously and reported to the appropriate person in the diocese and civil authorities if the situation involves a minor.

St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese procedures will be followed to protect the rights of all involved.
- 4.5 Clergy should review and know the contents of the child abuse regulations and reporting requirements for the respective state and should follow those mandates.

5. Harassment

Clergy 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.

- 5.1 Clergy shall provide a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written, or verbal intimidation or harassment.
- 5.2 Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical, written, or verbal behavior, including without limitation the following:
 - Physical or mental abuse.
 - Racial insults.
 - Derogatory ethnic slurs.
 - Unwelcome sexual advances or touching.
 - Sexual comments or sexual jokes.
 - Requests for sexual favors used as:

- a condition of employment, or
 - to affect other personnel decisions, such as promotion or compensation.
- Display of offensive materials.
- 5.3 Harassment can be a single severe incident or a persistent pattern of behavior where the purpose or the effect is to create a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work environment.
- 5.4 Allegations of harassment should be taken seriously and reported immediately to the appropriate person in the diocese.

St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago procedures will be followed to protect the rights of all involved.

6. Parish, Religious Community/Institute, and Organizational Records and Information

Confidentiality will be maintained in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of parish, religious community/institute, or organizational records.

- 6.1 Sacramental records shall be regarded as confidential. When compiling and publishing parish, religious community/institute, or organization statistical information from these records, great care must be taken to preserve the anonymity of individuals.
- 6.2 Most sacramental records older than 70 years are open to the public.
- 6.2.1 Information regarding adoption and legitimacy remains confidential, regardless of age.
- 6.2.2 Only staff members who are authorized to access the records and supervise their use shall handle requests for more recent records.

7. Conflicts of Interest

Clergy should avoid situations that might present a conflict of interest. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can call integrity and professional conduct into question.

- 7.1 Clergy should disclose all relevant factors that potentially could create a conflict of interest.
- 7.2 Clergy, staff, and volunteers should inform all parties when a real or potential conflict of interest arises. Resolution of the issues must protect the person receiving ministry services.

- 7.2.1 No clergy should take advantage of anyone to whom they are providing services to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.
- 7.2.2 Clergy should not provide counseling services to anyone with whom they have a business, professional, or social relationship. When this is unavoidable, the client must be protected. The counselor must establish and maintain clear, appropriate boundaries.
- 7.2.3 When pastoral counseling or spiritual direction services are provided to two or more people who have a relationship with each other, the Pastoral Counselor or Spiritual Director must:
- Clarify with all parties the nature of each relationship,
 - Anticipate any conflict of interest,
 - Take appropriate actions to eliminate the conflict, and
 - Obtain from all parties written consent to continue services.

7.3 Personal Responsibility

Conflicts of interest may also arise when a Pastoral Counselor's or Spiritual Director's independent judgment is impaired by:

- Prior dealings,
- Becoming personally involved, or
- Becoming an advocate for one (person) against another.

In these circumstances, the Pastoral Counselor or Spiritual Director shall advise the parties that he or she can no longer provide services and refer them to another Pastoral Counselor or Spiritual Director.

8. Reporting Ethical or Professional Misconduct

Clergy has a duty to report own ethical or professional misconduct and the misconduct of others.

- 8.1 Clergy must hold each other accountable for maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards. When there is an indication of illegal actions by clergy, staff, or volunteers, you should notify the proper civil authorities immediately. Also, notify the diocese.

- 8.2 When uncertainty exists about whether a situation or course of conduct violates this Code of Pastoral Conduct or other religious, moral, or ethical principles, consult with:
- Peers,
 - Others knowledgeable about ethical issues, or
 - The Chancery office or other responsible administrative authority.
- 8.3 When it appears that a member of clergy, a staff member, or a volunteer has violated this Code of Pastoral Conduct or other religious, moral, or ethical principles:
- Report the issue to a supervisor or next higher authority, or
 - Refer the matter directly to the Chancery office or other responsible administrative authority.
- 8.4 The obligation of Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors to report client misconduct is subject to the duty of confidentiality. However, any agreement or duty to maintain confidentiality must yield to the need to report misconduct that threatens the safety, health, or well-being of any of the persons involved except as provided for in Section 2.6

9. Administration

The supervising clergy shall treat another clergy, staff, and volunteers justly in the day-to-day administrative operations of their ministries.

- 9.1 Personnel and other administrative decisions made by clergy shall meet civil and canon law obligations and reflect Catholic social teachings and this Code of Pastoral Conduct.
- 9.2 No clergy shall use his or her position to exercise unreasonable or inappropriate power and authority.
- 9.3 Clergy should make sure that the volunteers and employees providing services to children and youth have their background checked receive appropriate training specified and must read and sign the Volunteer Code of Conduct before providing services.

10. Staff or Volunteer Well-being

Clergy has the duty to be responsible for own spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health.

- 10.1 Clergy should be aware of warning signs that indicate potential problems with their own spiritual, physical, mental, and/or emotional health.
- 10.2 Clergy should seek help immediately whenever they notice behavioral or emotional warning signs in their own professional and/or personal lives.

10.3 Clergy must address their own spiritual needs. Support from a Spiritual Director is highly recommended.

10.4 Inappropriate or illegal use of alcohol and drugs is prohibited.

IV. Responsibility to implement the Code of Conduct for volunteers, employees and other church personnel

Our children are the most important gifts God has entrusted to us. As a member of the clergy, you are responsible to follow and implement the **Code of Conduct for volunteers, employees and other church personnel** in all the ministries and organizations under your control that will provide services to the children and youth of our *facilities*.

As a Pastor or Spiritual Director I will

- Treat everyone with respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, dignity, and consideration.
- Uphold the standards set by the Commission for the Protection of Children and Youth of this Diocese.
- Create an awareness of the importance of Child protection program in the community I serve through publications presentations etc.
- Help with the audit procedures required by the Commission for the Protection of Children and Youth as guided by the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference and make sure that these are factual.
- Assure that all church personnel are qualified to function in their capacity through a background check, review of experiences and provide them with appropriate training as recommended by the Commission on Protection of Children and Youth.
- **Impartially facilitate and the reporting system set forth by the Commission for the Protection of Children and Youth without interference.** Cooperate fully in any investigation of abuse of children and/or youth.
- Watch for potential dangers to minors and introduce corrective measures proactively
- Assure that the church property including computers cell phones etc. is not used to access pornographic material or present them to minors at any time.
- Take steps to avoid bullying of minors.

V. Code of Conduct Acknowledgement Form

I have received a copy of the **Code of Pastoral Conduct**. I have read and understand this Code of Conduct, and I agree to abide by it. I fully understand that a violation of this code of conduct can result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination and/or removal from ministry.

Clergy: Printed Name

Signature

Date