

## Standards of Ethical Conduct in the Diocese of St. Augustine - for Lay Employees and Volunteers

### **Introduction.**

The term "church worker" includes clergy, religious, lay ministers and employees, and volunteers in diocesan or parish ministries or programs.

**Applicability.** The following ethical standards apply to church workers in the Diocese of St. Augustine.

These ethical standards are not intended to inhibit any church workers in carrying out their ministry or jobs, or to limit their accessibility to the faithful. Accordingly, these standards are to be interpreted broadly, and with the understanding that they will require adaptation to various and changing circumstances. These ethical standards presuppose the existence of other laws, policies and procedures, both civil and canonical. Actions already condemned by the law or moral teachings of the Church, or by civil law are rarely repeated in these ethical standards except when deemed necessary to emphasize their significance or seriousness.

The primary purpose of these ethical standards is to serve as a guide for more effective ministry and job performance for those to whom they are applicable. Ultimately, these ethical standards are intended to assist us all in the living out of our diocesan mission statement as we, "strive to know, love and serve God in our world through the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of the Father and the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

### **Standards of Conduct Regarding Counseling Activities** (Applies to those involved in counseling activities of any kind)

When clergy, religious, spiritual directors and church workers are involved in counseling activities, they are in a professional relationship with the persons they counsel - as such, they should always be aware that they have considerable personal power because of their ministerial role. Accordingly, they should be particularly aware of the need for healthy physical, emotional, sexual, intellectual and spiritual boundaries. The pastoral and spiritual well-being of those counseled should always be the focus of the relationship.

Any church workers engaged in counseling on behalf of a parish or diocesan ministry, and spiritual directors should be mindful of their level of training and competence and should so advise those who seek their counsel. They should make appropriate referrals to other professionals when this would be in the best interest of the person seeking counseling.

Counseling by all except spiritual directors should be short-term in nature.

If additional counseling appears to be needed after about three counseling sessions, the person

counseled should normally be referred to an appropriately qualified professional. "For lack of guidance a people falls, security lies in many counselors." Proverbs 11. 14.

However, this ethical standard is not meant to preclude longer periods of counseling within the context of specific programs with established goals and objectives such as, for example, marriage preparation or Project Rachel post-abortion counseling.

Any church workers engaged in counseling on behalf of a parish or diocesan ministry, and spiritual directors should give careful consideration to the possible consequences of entering into a counseling relationship with a person with whom there is a pre-existing business, professional or social relationship. Pre-existing relationships can blur the appropriate boundaries necessary for a counselor-counselee relationship, and can impair the judgment of the counselor or spiritual director. Where this situation is unavoidable, counselors and spiritual director should even more diligently establish and maintain appropriate boundaries.

Counseling and spiritual direction sessions should never be audiotaped or videotaped.

Any church workers engaged in counseling on behalf of a parish or diocesan ministry, and spiritual directors should studiously avoid any inappropriate sexual innuendo in the content of counseling or direction. This is especially so when the subject matter of the counseling or spiritual direction involves some aspect of human sexuality.

Any church workers engaged in counseling on behalf of a parish or diocesan ministry, and spiritual directors assume complete responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear and appropriate boundaries in all counseling-related relationships. If a person being counseled, by word or actions, indicates an unwillingness or inability to abide by appropriate boundaries, it is the responsibility of the counselor or spiritual director to immediately terminate counseling and, if warranted, refer the person being counseled to another professional.

Physical contact beyond a handshake between a church worker engaged in counseling on behalf of a parish or diocesan ministry, or spiritual director and one being counseled can be misconstrued and should be avoided unless the counselor or spiritual director is certain that the contact is appropriate under the circumstances.

Counseling and spiritual direction sessions should always be conducted at appropriate places and times.

- Whenever possible, counseling sessions should be held during regular business hours established by the parish or ministry, and in an office setting. Further, offices in which counseling takes place should be designed to include a window in the door or wall, made of glass or similar material, through which human forms are distinctly visible. Where no such counseling setting is currently available steps should be taken at the earliest possible time to modify existing counseling facilities.

Sessions should never be conducted in the private living quarters of either the priest, deacon, religious, church worker engaged in counseling on behalf of a parish or diocesan ministry, or spiritual director, or the person being counseled.

Sessions should not be conducted at places or times which could cause confusion or generate ambiguity about the nature of the relationship either in the mind of the church worker engaged in counseling on behalf of a parish or diocesan ministry, spiritual director, the person being counseled, or the church community.

Any church workers engaged in counseling on behalf of a parish or diocesan ministry, or spiritual directors should be careful to observe the ethical standards of any professional associations to which they may be required to belong, to the extent that those ethical standards do not contravene divine law or the moral teachings of the Church.

### **Standards of Conduct in Financial Matters and Regarding Church Property**

Church workers should be good stewards of any church property or goods over which they exercise supervision. They should treat such property with the care, concern and respect with which they would treat their own private property.

Church workers should avoid commingling their own private funds with church funds, and they should never expend church funds for private or non-church purposes. There should always be a direct and articulable church-related purpose for the expenditure of church funds.

Church workers should never appropriate church property or resources to their own private or non-church uses, or allow others to do so. Occasionally, however, it may be appropriate to allow the use of church property or resources for a civic or social event. This should only be done with the specific approval of the pastor or church official responsible for the property or resources.

### **Standards of Conduct in Dealing with Minors and Vulnerable Adults**

Church workers have a moral and ethical obligation to use good judgement in dealing with minors and vulnerable adults. Good judgement in this context means that church workers will avoid any actions which violate personal integrity or abuse the trust bestowed upon them as a result of their positions. It means that the physical and emotional safety and security of minors and vulnerable adults will always be given paramount consideration in church programs and ministries. It means that church workers will always strive to avoid even the appearance of impropriety in such matters. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world." James 1:27.

Definition of a vulnerable adult: A vulnerable adult is a person 18 years or older whose ability to engage in the normal activities of daily living, or to care for him/herself is impaired because of mental, emotional, physical or developmental causes, or from the infirmities of old age. Florida Statutes, Sec. 415.102.

Church workers should avoid physical contact with minors and vulnerable adults beyond what is required by the circumstances. When circumstances do call for physical contact that contact should never go beyond hugs, handshakes or hand-holding.

Any physical contact with minors or vulnerable adults should only occur in circumstances that are in plain view of others, for example, in the same room, from a distance, or by way of window or glass opening.

The emotional comfort of the minor or vulnerable adult, rather than the church worker's habits or modes of expression, should always be the primary consideration when engaging in any physical contact.

Church workers should be conscious of their vulnerability when working alone with minors or vulnerable adults. Accordingly, a team approach to ministries and programs involving these persons is always preferable to the extent possible.

The use of any alcohol or tobacco products by church workers while actively engaged in youth ministry or activity with minors or vulnerable adults is unethical conduct in this diocese.

It is always unethical and usually illegal for church workers to provide, or to knowingly tolerate the provision of, alcohol or tobacco products to minors or vulnerable adults.

Overnight accommodations in rectories or convents should never be provided for minors or vulnerable adults who are unaccompanied by parents or legal guardians, or who are not closely related by blood or marriage to the priest or religious occupants of the rectory or convent.

Church workers should never go on diocesan or parish sponsored outings or overnight trips with unchaperoned minors or vulnerable adults other than their own children, or those who are closely related to them. Additionally, it is inappropriate for an adult to share a bed with a minor or vulnerable adult during any church-sponsored travel or outings.

It is unethical, immoral and potentially illegal for a church worker to show sexually explicit materials of any kind or type, under any circumstances, to minors or vulnerable adults.

It is unethical, immoral and potentially illegal for church workers to discuss sexual experiences, engage in sexual innuendo, or tell sexually oriented jokes with or to minors or vulnerable adults.

It is unethical and immoral for church workers to use sexually explicit language or "curse" words in the presence or hearing of minors or vulnerable adults.

This ethical standard is not meant to prohibit any diocesan or parish authorized educational programs which include discussions of sexuality in the context of catechetical instruction or education in Christian morality.