



Code of Conduct for Clergy

Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee

Preamble

Priests and deacons of the Diocese of Memphis in Tennessee are called to live lives of integrity, holiness, and service, witnessing to the Gospel through word and deed. This Code of Conduct sets forth standards for their pastoral, public, and private behavior. Religious clergy residing or ministering in the Diocese and those preparing for Holy Orders are also expected to conduct themselves in accord with this Code.

I. Responsibility

1. Witness & Trust

- Clergy must be mindful that their public and private conduct can both inspire faith and risk scandal. Their behavior should always foster trust, fidelity to Church teaching, and Christian witness.

2. Accountability

- Each member of the clergy is personally responsible for observing this Code. Violations may lead to corrective action by diocesan authorities.
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II. General Ethical Standards

1. Integrity and Personal Conduct

- Clergy shall strive to live consistent with the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.
- They shall demonstrate honesty, sobriety, self-control, and fidelity in all relationships.
- They shall avoid behavior that would compromise their witness or the integrity of their office.

2. Appropriate Boundaries

- Clergy are called to honor and safeguard the spiritual, emotional, and temporal trust placed in them.
- They are to uphold the dignity of every person, showing special care for those who may be vulnerable—such as minors, the elderly, the poor, and anyone seeking

spiritual, pastoral, or counseling support—ensuring that their ministry is always marked by respect, protection, and compassionate service.

3. Professional Competence & Well-Being

- Clergy shall maintain their spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical health.
- They shall continue formation, education, and spiritual direction, recognizing that ministry demands require ongoing growth and care.

4. Public Communications

- In all public communications—whether in homilies, writings, social media, interviews, or other platforms—clergy shall uphold Catholic Church teaching and avoid remarks that are scandalous or misleading.
- All communications must respect the dignity of every person, avoiding defamation, harassment, or any language that could cause harm.
- Clergy must follow all Diocesan Communications policies as promulgated, including any requirements for review, verification, or official approval.

5. Maintenance of Confidentiality

- Clergy are bound by sacramental confidentiality (the seal of confession) in the context of the Sacrament of Penance and by just obligations of confidentiality in pastoral counseling.
- Yet, when required by law or Church policy (especially in cases involving minors), clergy must report misconduct to civil and Church authorities as appropriate. The seal of confession, however, must never be violated.

III. Conduct with Minors

1. Safe Environment

- Clergy must comply with all Safe Environment policies of the Diocese of Memphis: background checks, training, screening, and periodic renewals.
- Interaction with minors must always safeguard both the minor's and the cleric's well-being so that misunderstandings and abuse are avoided.

2. Boundaries & Physical Contact

- Physical contact with minors must be with consent and non-sexual, brief, age-appropriate, publicly observable, and free from any appearance of grooming or favoritism.
- Prohibited conduct includes:
 - prolonged or intimate hugging,
 - any physical contact in private or secluded areas,
 - kissing of any kind,
 - touching areas normally covered by a bathing suit, except for immediate safety or medical necessity with another adult present, lap-sitting, massages, back rubs, tickling, or similar contact, and
 - any behavior reasonably perceived as sexualized or boundary-violating.

3. One-on-One Situations

- Clergy should avoid being alone with an unrelated minor in private settings. If unavoidable, meetings should take place in open or transparent settings (e.g., visible to others, windows, open door).
- Clergy must avoid sharing overnight accommodations with minors.

4. Electronic & Social Media Communication

- Communications with minors via telephone, texting, email, or social media must be professional, for legitimate pastoral or administrative purposes, and subject to any diocesan guidelines. A parent should be copied on electronic communications with minors.
- Private or emotional-intimate communications with minors are forbidden and parents or guardians should be aware of significant or ongoing communications if it occurs on the part of the minor.

5. Gifts, Invitations, Travel

- Clergy shall not accept gifts from minors or give personal gifts without parental/guardian awareness.
- Clergy may not travel alone with an unrelated minor under any circumstance. When travel is unavoidable, a second approved adult must be present at all times. For example, a priest driving youth to a retreat must ensure another cleared adult accompanies them in the vehicle.

IV. Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction

1. Scope and Competence

- Clergy shall only provide counseling or direction within the bounds of their competence. When issues arise that require professional psychological or medical expertise, clergy should refer individuals to qualified professionals.

2. Dual Relationships

- When a person counseled is also a parish staff member, friend, or otherwise in another significant relationship with the clergy, awareness of potential conflicts of interest is required and alternative arrangements or limits may be necessary.

V. Stewardship & Financial Integrity

1. Resources

- Clergy must exercise proper stewardship of Church funds, property, and other resources. Misuse for personal gain is strictly prohibited and is subject to canonical penalty (see canon 1376).

2. Transparency & Accountability

- Financial dealings, budgeting, and reporting must follow diocesan policies and canon law.

3. **Conflict of Interest**

- Clergy should avoid situations in which personal, business, or familial interests could conflict with their ministry. When potential conflicts arise, they should be disclosed to the local ordinary.
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VI. Reporting Misconduct

1. **Obligation to Report**

- Clergy must immediately report any suspected sexual abuse or misconduct involving minors to civil authorities and diocesan offices as required by diocesan policy and Tennessee law.

2. **Cooperation**

- Clergy shall cooperate fully with investigations by civil authorities, diocesan offices, and other competent persons.

3. **No Retaliation**

- Clergy must respect and uphold protections for those who report misconduct in good faith. Retaliation against whistleblowers is prohibited.
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VII. Sanctions & Application

1. **Violations**

- Violations of this Code may result in disciplinary actions by the Bishop or his delegates, according to the precepts of canon law.

2. **Ongoing Review**

- This Code shall be reviewed periodically to ensure relevance, clarity, and compliance with updated canon law, civil law, and best practices for the protection of the vulnerable.
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VIII. Acknowledgment

Every cleric of the Diocese of Memphis must review this Code of Conduct and complete the acknowledgment found in his online Virtus profile.

To Report Child Abuse

To report abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child, immediately make an online report at carat.app.tn.gov or call (877) 237-0004. Suspected sexual abuse of a child by a cleric is also to be reported to the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator at (901) 373-1266.