

PRACTICAL STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PRIESTS SERVING THE DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG

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1. Preamble

We, the priests serving the Diocese of St. Petersburg, issue the following Standards of Professional Responsibility. In this document, we hope to publicly define the professional standards that are to be lived faithfully by the priests of our Diocese. As leaders in the Church founded by Christ, we must always seek to uphold Christian values and conduct. In addition to following the Gospel and its mandates, we want to strive to act properly at all times in the light of contemporary society and its needs.

These Standards of Professional Responsibility do not presume to address all of the responsibilities that we have to face in the diversity of our ministry. What it does establish is a set of minimum professional standards.

We hope that these Standards will stimulate discussion within the Church community in order to build consensus on standards of practice. These Standards are not intended to supersede canon or civil law.

Responsibility for adherence to these Standards rests with each of us. The Diocese will provide programs to assist members in understanding and applying these Standards, when such programs are deemed useful and necessary.

Our conduct as Church leaders, both public and private, should inspire and motivate people, and not scandalize them or weaken their faith. We must be aware of the responsibilities that accompany our work. We also know that God's goodness and graces support us in our ministry.

2. General Principles

Integrity

As Church leaders, we are expected to be persons of integrity and must conduct ourselves in an honest and open manner, free from deception or corruption.

We shall handle the responsibilities of our office in a conscientious fashion. As leaders in a Church that sets high moral standards for its members, we have a responsibility to lead by example.

Competence

We shall maintain high levels of professional competence in our particular ministry. Training, education and experience all contribute to make us competent and credible in our areas of expertise. We should not provide services in those areas in which we lack competence. Competence also means knowing one's limitations.

Continuing formation and education are essential for us; time must be found for both at least annually. We must also ensure that our own faith life is strong and should seek spiritual direction.

Commitment to the Spirit of the Gospel, the Church, and the Community

We embrace the teachings of Jesus and work to promote the Gospel. We shall have an intimate knowledge of the Gospels and be able to relate them to everyday situations encountered in the community. Our lives shall reflect the Gospel call to simplicity of life.

We exhibit a deep commitment to the Church, both diocesan and universal, as we embrace the fullness of the teachings of the Church as revealed in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and expressed by the authentic Magisterium. Our loyalty to the traditions of the past, the realities of the present, and the challenges of the future should be evident.

We must show not only a commitment to the parish family, but also to the larger community in which the parish is located. We must show a special care and concern for the needs of the poor and oppressed of society. We can address community social concerns by active reflection on Catholic social teachings. We share the spirit of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in our interactions with other community religious groups.

Respect for Others

We shall respect the rights, dignity and worth of each member of the Church community. We shall respect each individual as a creation of God without regard to their economic status or degree of participation in parish life.

We strive to be sensitive to cultural differences among people and appreciate the opportunities that diversity brings. We take the time to understand the collective journeys of our congregations and understand the role of history in parish development.

We are aware that issues of age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical and mental disabilities, and language all affect how the message of the Gospel is received and interpreted.

3. The Well-Being of the Church Leader

3.1. Physical and Emotional Well-Being

As Church leaders, we have the duty to be attuned to our physical, mental and emotional health.

3.1.1 We should be aware of warning signs in our behavior and moods that can indicate conditions that can be detrimental to our mental and physical health. Inappropriate use of alcohol, misuse of prescription and non-prescription drugs and addiction to pornography are examples.

3.1.2 We cannot minister to others unless we also minister to ourselves. We should immediately seek help when we identify warning signs in our professional or personal lives that our mental, physical, emotional or spiritual health is weakening. We should also maintain regular interaction

with family members, friends and our brother priests, as these relationships are vital to our well-being.

3.1.3 We should make use of the allotted time for vacation and days away from the work environment. We should determine healthy limits in our work environment, and live within these limits as much as possible.

3.1.4 We should be supportive of one another, both in terms of affirmation and holding one another accountable for our physical and emotional well-being.

3.2. Spiritual Well-Being

We have the responsibility to be attuned to our own spiritual health.

3.2.1 We are especially bound to pursue holiness through our pastoral ministry, the celebration of the Eucharist, reflection on the Word of God, and the daily practice of prayer (Canon 276).

3.2.2 We need to address our own spiritual needs to remain focused in the faith. Regular use of a spiritual director and sacramental confession is of vital importance.

3.2.3 We need to take advantage of the allotted time for an annual retreats and days of reflection.

3.3. Professional Well-Being

We have the responsibility to attend to our ongoing professional development.

3.3.1 We should participate in annual seminars and workshops in areas that are relevant to our current ministry, especially in the areas of scripture and preaching.

3.3.2 We should stay current through the reading of both religious and secular sources.

3.3.3 We should participate in a regular process of evaluation of our effectiveness in ministry. Diocesan instruments and procedures should be used where these exist.

3.4. Moral Well-Being

We have a responsibility to encourage and nurture our own moral development.

3.4.1 We need to regularly engage in discussions with fellow ministers, which will help to affirm our vision and values, as well as challenge them, when necessary.

3.4.2 We should seek opportunities to actively participate in peer support groups in settings that are distinct from social gatherings. Examples of such groups include Jesus Caritas and Emmaus.

4. The Spiritual Life of the Parish Community

4.1. Sacramental Life

As Church leaders, we are responsible for providing for and nurturing the sacramental life of the parish community.

4.1.1 We should celebrate the sacraments with decorum with the people entrusted to our care. This includes fidelity to the official Rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

4.1.2 We should understand and respect the policies and procedures of the Diocese.

4.2. Social Concerns

We are responsible for sustaining the social awareness and involvement of the parish community.

4.2.1 We should speak and act from the perspective of a preferential option for the poor. This includes awareness of and active reflection upon Catholic social teachings.

4.2.2 We should nurture the spirit of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue in our interactions with other community religious groups.

4.2.3 We should foster an awareness of and active involvement in church issues and concerns that extend beyond parish boundaries.

5. Professional Relationships

5.1. Collaboration and Administration

As Church leaders, we shall exercise just treatment of employees and volunteers in the day-to-day administrative operations of our ministries.

5.1.1 Personnel and other administrative decisions we make should not only meet the obligations of civil and canon law but should reflect Catholic social teachings. This should include providing a just wage for our employees.

5.1.2 We should strive to work in collaboration with other pastoral staff members, including other priests, deacons, religious and lay women and men.

5.1.3 We who work in a parish setting should strive to work in collaboration with parish lay organizations and groups, and to form and develop such groups as necessary for the life of the parish, particularly the parish Pastoral Council.

5.1.4 We should strive to work in collaboration with the staff and people of other parishes, agencies and officials of the Diocese.

5.1.5 We should make appropriate use of our positions so that we exercise our power and authority in reasonable and responsible ways. We should also be aware that the perception of parishioners about the power and authority entrusted to us could lead them to feel reluctant about sharing their observations with us regarding potential violations of boundaries.

5.1.6 We who are pastors or parish administrators should ensure that there is a clear accounting of all parish funds in close collaboration with a well-informed parish finance council. We should exercise responsible stewardship of all parish resources in conformity with current Diocesan Financial Policies.

5.2. Spiritual Support

Those of us who provide spiritual support for families, individuals, or groups must respect their rights and advance the welfare of each person. (Those of us who are licensed professional counselors must adhere to the standards of that profession in addition to these Standards.)

5.2.1 We should recognize the limits of our competence in situations and should decline to assist when appropriate. Referrals regarding physical or mental health care issues should be handled by those professionals competent to do so.

5.2.2 We shall keep the information learned from spiritual relationships confidential. At the beginning of what is clearly a spiritual relationship, we should inform the individual(s) that confidentiality is limited when there is a clear and imminent danger to themselves or others. In such cases, we must contact the necessary authorities or other professionals. Under no circumstances whatsoever can there be any disclosure, even indirect, of information received through the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

5.2.3 In cases where the individual(s) is/are already in a counseling relationship with another professional, we should make it clear that our role is confined to spiritual assistance.

5.2.4 When moving to another parish, we should help make appropriate arrangements for continued spiritual care of the individuals.

5.2.5 We must be prudent in any relationship to avoid any appearance of impropriety. If the possibility of a conflict of interest seems strong or if feelings of attachment occur, it is best to refer the individual to another priest or pastoral counselor.

5.2.6 Inappropriate expressions (verbal and non-verbal) and certain forms of physical contact, including but not limited to hugging, touching and other gestures of affection, with those to whom we are providing pastoral support can be misconstrued and should generally be avoided.

5.2.7 It should always be clear to ourselves and to those to whom we provide spiritual support that a professional relationship is in process. This can best be done when this support, is conducted in an appropriate setting and at appropriate times. Professional services should not be done in private living quarters or at places or times that would cause ambiguity in the mind of the individual. It would be wise for us to document clearly and concisely the times and places of services, especially if it involves more frequent meetings with the same person or those with whom we work.

5.3. Relationships with Youth

We who are working with youth should use appropriate judgment to ensure an open and trustworthy relationship.

5.3.1 We must be aware of the vulnerability of ourselves or others when working alone with youth (that is, those under the age of 18) and must always use a team approach to youth activities. Also, driving alone with minors is not permitted.

5.3.2 Physical contact with youth can often be misconstrued by both youth and other adults, and should only occur in public gatherings and in an appropriate manner. Inappropriate expressions (verbal and non-verbal) and certain forms of physical contact, including but not limited to hugging, touching and other gestures of affection with those to whom we are providing pastoral support, can be misconstrued and should never take place unless other adults are present.

5.3.3 When working with youth we are not to use alcohol or tobacco and must never use or permit the use of any illegal drugs when working with youth.

5.3.4 No youth are permitted in the rectory or in priests' living quarters unless accompanied by their parents or other adult non-clergy chaperones.

5.3.5 Guests under the age of 18 are not permitted to stay overnight in rectories or the priest's personal residence. Visiting clergy are permitted to stay overnight. Other adult guests may be accommodated overnight in rectories or the priest's personal residence only if other arrangements are not possible.

5.4. Sexual Conduct

We do not exploit the trust of the parish community for sexual gratification or intimacy.

5.4.1 We must not exploit another person, especially for sexual purposes.

5.4.2 We who have made a commitment to a chaste celibate lifestyle are called to witness this in all of our relationships.

5.4.3 We should use discretion when developing close friendships.

5.4.4 Any allegations of sexual misconduct by clergy with minors will be reported to local law enforcement or to the state Department of Children and Families, and to the Bishop. If the Bishop cannot be contacted in a timely fashion, the report may be made to the Vicar General or the Chancellor. When the report is received by the Bishop's Office it will be handled according to the Policy of the Diocese of St. Petersburg for the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults. Any person acting in any capacity of church ministries will immediately notify his/her immediate supervisor of any pending legal action involving allegations of any abuse.

5.4.5 Florida State law mandates that anyone who has knowledge or reasonable suspicion of child abuse, abandonment or neglect must report such knowledge to local law enforcement (911) or the state Department of Children and Families (1-800-962-2873).

5.5. Professional Attitude

We do not engage in physical, psychological or verbal harassment of employees, volunteers, or parishioners and will not tolerate such harassment by other Church employees or volunteers.

5.5.1 Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical or verbal behavior which can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- physical or mental abuse

- racial insults
- derogatory ethnic slurs
- intimidation
- unwelcome sexual advances or touching
- sexual comments or sexual jokes
- requests for sexual favors used as a condition of employment or affecting any personnel decision such as hiring, promotion, or compensation
- display of offensive materials
- sending inappropriate emails, texts or social media posts.

5.5.2 We are committed to providing a professional work environment for our employees which is totally free from such harassment. This commitment continues the Diocesan policy of fair and equal employment to every person regardless of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, disability status or any other status protected by law. However, in certain positions of employment, we do reserve the right to give preference to members of the Catholic faith.

5.5.3 Harassment can occur as a result of a single incident or a pattern of behavior where the purpose or effect is to create a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work environment.

5.5.4 We should follow the current Diocesan policy concerning the reporting of harassment.

5.6. Confidentiality

Information disclosed to us during the course of counseling, advising, spiritual direction and any other professional contact shall be held in the strictest of confidence.

5.6.1 Parishioners and other persons who come to us for help should feel free to engage in full disclosure of information and should be able to trust that this information is confidential to the greatest degree possible.

5.6.2 If consultation with another professional becomes necessary, utmost care should be taken to do so only by using non-identifying information; when this is not possible, the other professional must be bound to the same degree of confidentiality as ourselves. If the other professional is not so bound, the disclosure should not be made.

5.6.3 We are also bound to safeguard the confidentiality of any notes, files or computer records pertaining to professional contact with individuals.

5.6.4 Knowledge that arises from professional contact may only be used in teaching, preaching, writing and in other public presentations only when effective measures have been taken to absolutely safeguard individual identity and confidentiality.

5.6.5 Except as provided above with respect to consultation, confidential information can only be disclosed only with the written, informed consent of the individual. In legal proceedings in which we are a defendant and the allegations stem from a professional contact, the disclosure of confidential information gained in that contact is permitted only to the minimum necessary to achieve the purpose of defense.

5.6.6 When, in the course of professional contact with a minor, it is discovered that there is a serious threat to the welfare of the minor, we shall immediately report the threat to law enforcement or to the Florida Child Abuse Registry.

5.6.7 These obligations are independent of and supplementary to the confidentiality of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Under no circumstances whatsoever can there be any disclosure, even indirect, of information received through the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

5.7. Records and Information

Appropriate confidentiality shall be maintained in creating, storing, accessing, transferring and disposing of parish or institutional records.

5.7.1 Sacramental records shall be regarded as confidential. When, for valid church reporting or parish statistical purposes, information from these records is made public, great care must be taken to preserve the anonymity of individuals.

5.7.2 Diocesan policies and procedures should be followed in respect to requests for parish sacramental records.

5.7.3 Diocesan policies should be followed regarding the release of all financial records.

5.7.4 The records of individual contributions to the parish shall be regarded as private and therefore, shall be used only as necessary and legal.

5.8. Conflicts of Interest

We should avoid putting ourselves in a position that might present a conflict of interest, since the existence of a conflict of interest can call into question our integrity and professional conduct.

5.8.1 While each person possesses a natural freedom to give to whomever he or she wishes, priests must seriously consider whether their reception of large financial or other material gifts could give rise to scandal within the Christian community or if reception of such gifts would give the appearance of “grooming” or exploitation of vulnerable adults. Additionally, there might arise a certain degree of favoritism toward the donors of such gifts, to the neglect and detriment of others. A priest receiving the following types of gifts from persons other than his family members should consult with the Local Ordinary (Bishop or Vicar General), who will advise whether it is best to receive the gift or if the donor should consider donating it to the parish, the diocese or to another charitable entity:

- Any financial gift of more than \$1,000
- Money or property resulting from a will, which value is in excess of \$1000
- Shares in any type of investment fund
- Material goods such as automobiles, houses, condos, mobile homes, precious metals or other material property.

5.8.2 The potential for a conflict of interest exists in many circumstances. Examples include where

we have private business or other dealings with the Church or any of its members, accepting substantial (non-token) gifts for services or favors, employing or engaging in transactions with our friends or relatives for Church business, acting with partiality toward employees or Church members, or violating a confidence of another for personal gain.

5.8.3 Disclosures to the parties involved of all relevant factors can, in some circumstances, lessen the potential for a conflict of interest. Examples include: a parochial vicar shall disclose the relevant facts to his pastor. A pastor shall disclose the relevant facts to his parish council, the Bishop, Vicar General or another delegated person. The Bishop shall disclose the relevant facts to his Vicar General, his Presbyteral Council and/or to his closest collaborators.

5.8.4 Conflicts of interest may also arise in a professional context, where our independent judgment is impaired by prior dealings, where we become personally involved, or where we become an advocate for one (person) against another. In these circumstances, we should advise the parties that we can no longer provide assistance and refer them to other professionals.

5.8.5 In business dealings on behalf of the Church, competitive bids must be used wherever possible to minimize conflicts of interest with family and friends.

5.9. Reporting Misconduct

We have a duty to report ethical or professional misconduct on the part of other Church personnel or church ministry volunteers.

5.9.1 In cases where there are clear indications of illegal actions by a Church personnel or church ministry volunteers, notification should be made immediately to the proper ecclesiastical authorities, and if required, to proper civil authorities.

5.9.2 When we are uncertain whether a particular situation or course of conduct would violate these Standards or other principles, we should consult with peers or others knowledgeable about ethical issues, in order to determine the proper response. We must be careful to protect the identity and reputation of alleged violators when engaging in such consultations.

5.9.3 When we believe that one of our colleagues may have violated these Standards or other principles, we should attempt to resolve the issue, if possible, by bringing it to the attention of the individual.

5.9.4 If an apparent ethical violation is inappropriate for direct confrontation, we must take further action. Such action may include reporting to the supervisor or next higher authority or referral to the Chancery Office. If the matter presents issues of illegality, the matter should then be referred to the proper ecclesiastical authorities, and if required, to proper civil authorities.

5.9.5 Our obligation to report misconduct is subject to the obligation of confidentiality. In extreme circumstances, even such confidentiality obligation must yield to the need to report misconduct. This does not include information received through the internal forum, whether sacramental or non-sacramental.

6. Other Areas

We should know and observe all universal and local Church directives that pertain to us.

We must not only observe all of these Standards carefully, but because of our positions of leadership in the Church, we have an additional responsibility to carefully avoid even the appearance of wrongdoing or conflict of interest.