



Catholic Diocese of Columbus

Office of the Bishop
614 • 224 • 2251

DECREE

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT FOR CHURCH PERSONNEL, INCLUDING CLERGY, TEACHERS, EMPLOYEES, VOLUNTEERS AND OTHER PERSONS IN POSITIONS OF TRUST

Preamble

This decree establishes standards of clergy conduct, in accordance with Article 6 and Article 12 of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People approved in November 2002 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. These standards of conduct are also applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other Church Personnel and Volunteers (hereinafter referred to collectively as, “Applicable Persons”).

The purpose of these standards is to make clear to clergy and others in positions of trust the need to exercise prudence, avoid any semblance of impropriety, protect their own ministry and reputation, and, most importantly, to safeguard children, young people and other vulnerable persons from harm. At the same time, these standards of conduct are not intended to stifle the ability of priests, deacons and others who exercise some ecclesiastical office or ministry to carry out their ministry or to be available and accessible to their people, nor are they intended to create an atmosphere of suspicion. Furthermore, these standards are general and are to be interpreted broadly rather than minutely structured in every detail. It is understood that the standards require adaptation to the various circumstances of time and place or in case of emergency.

This decree is not an exhaustive policy but presupposes and further specifies other laws, policies and procedures already in existence; in particular, in accord with Canon 285, it seeks to further specify appropriate clerical conduct and, in accord with Canon 277, to provide more specific norms to the clergy for conducting themselves with due prudence. It is understood that acts already condemned by the law of the Church or by the moral teaching of the Church are always and everywhere forbidden and it is not necessary to reiterate them in this document. Given the tense and suspicious atmosphere which prevails today, even perfectly innocent activities may now be viewed as compromising, ambiguous or imprudent. It is this reality which these standards seek to address.

Standards

These standards apply to the incardinated clergy of the Diocese of Columbus at all times and in every place, both within and outside of the Diocese of Columbus. They apply to all religious and extern priests and deacons who exercise any ministry under the authority or oversight of the Bishop of Columbus. They apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to lay persons in positions of trust, teachers within Diocesan and Parochial schools, and all persons exercising an authorized ministry as an employee or volunteer for the Diocese of Columbus, its offices, agencies, parishes, institutions and organizations.

1. Applicable Persons shall ensure that their activities and interactions with youth shall be as open as the situation allows, and shall avoid any interaction that has even the appearance of being secret or clandestine. Applicable Persons shall be aware of others' vulnerability when working alone with youth, and always use a team approach where possible, to managing youth activities.
2. Applicable Persons shall never meet alone with a minor in an isolated room (except in the case of sacramental confession) unless there is a window on the door, or the door is open and accessible to others. Additionally, Applicable Persons shall never meet alone with a minor in location away from a parish, school agency, institution, or other Diocese Organization, and never meet alone in remote locations on the property of a parish, school, agency, or other Diocese Organization. These restrictions apply to after school tutoring of any sort whether or not the tutor is hired by the minor's parents.
3. Two-Deep Requirement - Applicable Persons shall never participate in Diocesan sponsored group activities for minors that do not have at least two supervising adults present, both of whom have successfully completed a training program approved by the Diocese and have approved background reports ("compliant"). *Exceptions for this Policy are allowed only for sacramental confession, and for classroom instruction provided by a properly trained teacher within a classroom setting.*
4. As part of the Diocesan Two-Deep Requirement, Applicable Persons shall not give rides in motor vehicles to minors unless another compliant adult is present and the permission of the minor's parent or legal guardian is granted. Likewise, for all field trips, there should be a minimum of two compliant adults in each vehicle that is transporting minors. See *Section 200.30*.
5. Applicable Persons shall have a sufficient number of adult chaperones over the age of 21 for all youth trips, especially overnight ones. A member of the Clergy, a Volunteer, or any Church Personnel should never be sole chaperone for any trip or activity. When staying overnight with minors, no Church Personnel or Volunteer should sleep in the same bed, sleeping bag, small tent, or bedroom with minors.
6. As part of the Diocesan Two-Deep Requirement, Applicable Persons shall never be present in locker rooms or other dressing rooms used by minors without another adult over the age of 21 being present and shall have a reasonable and justifiable purpose for doing so. Never linger or hang around or spend long periods in locker rooms or other dressing rooms.
7. Applicable Persons should avoid physical contact with a minor. Physical contact shall occur only when completely nonsexual and otherwise appropriate, and should never occur in private. Examples of inappropriate expressions of physical affection with a minor, include but are not limited to: Close or lengthy embraces; kisses; holding minors over two years of age on the lap; touching bottoms, chests or genital areas; wrestling with minors; tickling; piggyback rides; any type of massage given to or received from a minor; and any form of unwanted affection; or compliments that relate to physique or body development.

8. Applicable Persons shall never engage in physical discipline for behavior management of minors. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. In addition, never use any discipline that frightens or humiliates.
9. Applicable Persons, when working with minors, shall refrain from the use of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, vaping and other materials or substances which minors cannot legally purchase. Additionally, Applicable Persons shall never share such substances and materials with minors, or allow minors to use materials or substances which minors cannot legally purchase.
10. Applicable Persons shall never acquire, possess, or distribute pornographic images of minors, nor introduce sexually explicit or pornographic topics, vocabulary, music, recording, films, games, websites, computer software, or entertainment when communicating with minors.
11. Applicable Persons may not initiate one-to-one private electronic communication with a minor. All interaction and communication must be open, public, transparent, and appropriate. See *Sections 400.00–400.13* for more instruction.
12. Applicable Persons shall avoid displaying and/or taking photographs of an unrelated minor (unless explicit permission of their parents or guardian and the relevant supervisor).
13. Clergy shall make a clear distinction between the public and private areas in the rectory, and make the private areas generally inaccessible to visitors. Clergy shall limit access to the priest's private quarters to the priest, rectory staff, other clergy and the priest's relatives.
14. Clergy shall meet with individuals only in the office of the church or public areas of the rectory, church, or school, and, insofar as possible, never be alone with a minor, especially in circumstances which are concealed from public view (e.g., behind closed doors or in an automobile). The confessional or other location in which the Sacrament of Reconciliation is being properly celebrated according to the approved rite is exempt from this provision. Care must also be exercised whenever a minor requests a private, confidential conference.
15. Clergy shall avoid spending excessive amounts of time with the same parishioners or families, or in the homes of the same families or persons. (While social interaction with laypersons is desirable, exceeding prudent boundaries can be misconstrued.)
16. Clergy may show broad interest in the children and youth of the parish or assignment but should avoid showing preference or giving privileges to specific individuals, such as giving them money or gifts, asking them to accompany oneself on errands, asking them to perform services or help with jobs or tasks, outside of regular employment, excusing them from school or giving them access to the rectory.
17. Clergy shall follow all diocesan regulations regarding youth activities and ensure that another compliant adult is present whenever supervising or chaperoning a minor or a group of minors, which may only occur in the context of events sponsored by the parish, school or diocese.

18. Clergy should remember you are role models who must always reflect the values of the Catholic Church in word and action in all circumstances, public and private, whether on or off duty. In particular, speak and act gently and respectfully and with discretion in any mode of communication, and avoid all coarse, demeaning or suggestive language, conversations or discussions.
19. Clergy shall never request or permit young persons to accompany them on vacation trips or overnight or day trips.
20. Clergy shall never invite young persons to a private residence or other private dwelling, be it a family home, vacation cottage, rental, condominium or any other place which is not then and there being used as a venue for a church-sponsored gathering.
21. Applicable Persons shall avoid forming purely personal relationships with minors. Young persons should not be the focus of an adult's social life, nor should adults share inappropriate personal information with youth or pursue purely social, recreational or interpersonal activities alone with them. They should not visit youth in their homes when parents or other responsible adults are not present.
22. All Applicable Persons should always strive to act with utmost professionalism, to develop a keen sense of propriety and the ability to sense and avoid potentially problematic situations.
23. All Applicable Persons should behave in such a forthright and open way as if every action were being observed by an unseen third party.
24. All Applicable Persons shall report any known or suspected violations of the Standards of Conduct to the appropriate Diocesan authority. With respect to known or suspected violations of the Standards of Conduct by a priest or deacon, the report should be made to the Ordinary. With respect to violations of the Standards of Conduct by teachers or other Church Personnel, the report should be made to the Diocesan Director of the Safe Environment Office.

Given at the Chancery Office this 28th day of January, 2003.

The Most Rev. James A. Griffin
Bishop of Columbus

Amended this 30th day of August, 2016.

The Most Rev. Frederick F. Campbell
Bishop of Columbus

Amended this 26th day of January, 2024.

The Most Rev. Earl K. Fernandes
Bishop of Columbus

+ Earl K. Fernandes

Debra J. Mooney VA
Notary