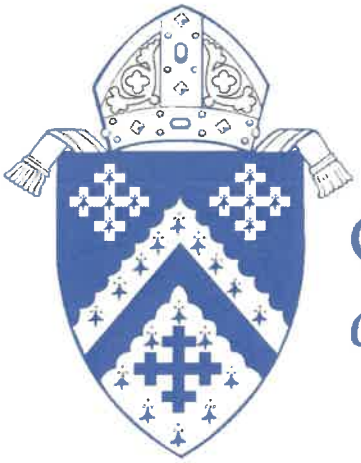


Catholic Diocese
of Cleveland

Standards *of* Conduct *for* Ministry

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I. INTRODUCTION

This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.[1]

As Church Personnel, we are all workers in God's vineyard with a responsibility to conduct ourselves in a manner that advances the Kingdom and proclaims the Gospel. These Standards of Conduct are, in conjunction with the Diocese's Policy for the Protection of Children, an important part of the Diocese's efforts to ensure that those who minister, work, and volunteer in the Diocese conduct themselves consistent with that expectation. Each individual bears the primary responsibility for adhering to the *Standards of Conduct* for Ministry. Church Personnel and Volunteers who disregard the *Standards of Conduct* may be subject to disciplinary action by the Covered Entity that employs, supervises, or authorizes their ministry or employment, whether it be the Bishop, a pastor, a principal, the executive leadership of a corporation, or other appropriate person within the Church structure. Corrective action may take various forms – from a verbal reprimand to removal from employment of the ministry – depending on the specific nature and circumstances of the offense and the extent of the harm.

These *Standards of Conduct* are intended to meet the requirement of Article 6 of the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* that dioceses are to have well publicized standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for Church Personnel and Volunteers with regard to their contact with minors.

Certain standards use the words "should" or "should not" ("**Guidelines**") while others use language such as "shall," "shall not," "must," or "must not" ("**Norms**"). Norms must be followed at all times. Guidelines are ordinarily to be followed, recognizing that there may be exceptional circumstances that allow for a limited exceptions.

[1] Micah 6:8

II. SCOPE AND APPLICATION

These Standards apply to all Church Personnel unless explicitly stated otherwise. To the extent that these Standards conflict with Canon Law, Canon Law shall govern and control, and the Bishop or his delegates shall have the sole responsibility for the interpretation of these *Standards of Conduct.*

DISCLAIMER: These *Standards of Conduct* are intended to reflect the moral and/or canonical commitments of the Diocese regarding ministry. This document is not intended to create duties nor should it be interpreted as creating duties or having application under civil law or to any secular court proceedings of any nature.

Diocesan Standards of Ministerial Behavior

These *Standards of Conduct* are intended to fulfill the requirement of Article 6 of the USCCB *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.* These standards are a set of minimum expectations and do not prevent any group of professional ministers within the Diocese of Cleveland from developing a code of ethics for its own use, provided the group obtains appropriate approvals, the code developed does not contradict anything in this document, and the code developed does not replace or supersede this document or seek to do so.

Definitions

Bishop. The Diocesan Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.

Boundaries mark off the physical, spiritual, and psychological space which is the private preserve of a person upon which there should be no intrusion.

Canon Law. The body of binding laws, norms, and juridical traditions enacted or recognized by competent ecclesiastical authority to govern the Catholic Church and its members in fulfillment of the Church's salvific mission. For the Latin Church, the principal source of universal law is the 1983 *Codex Iuris Canonici* (Code of Canon Law), together with other applicable universal and particular ecclesiastical legislation. Unless otherwise stated, all references to canons in the Standards refer to the canons of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law.*

Charter. The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.

Church Personnel. Any cleric lawfully serving in the Diocese (including bishops, religious clerics, and Extern Priests), any seminarian enrolled a seminary of the Diocese or serving in the Diocese, or any employee or Volunteer of a Covered Entity regardless of their role.

Civil Authorities. Those governmental agencies responsible for the enforcement of civil laws or the protection of children. Civil Authorities include, without limitation, local police departments, county children services agencies, and federal, state, and county law enforcement agencies.

Clergy / Cleric. A person who has received the sacrament of Holy Orders (i.e., a priest or deacon).

Conflicts of interest. The act of Church Personnel to take advantage of a one's position or relationship to further their own personal, political, or financial interests. Conflicts of interest also arise when Church Personnel's independent judgment is impaired by:

a. prior dealings;
b. becoming personally involved; or
c. becoming an advocate for one (person) against another.

Confidentiality. A legally recognizable expectation that a communication (whether written or verbal) is private since it was made under circumstances showing that the speaker intended the communication only for the individual addressed. One of the circumstances leading to a determination of confidentiality may be the relationship between the speaker and the listener; another is the absence of other persons.

Counselors. Trained individuals who provide pastoral counseling, mental health counseling, school counseling, family and marriage counseling, vocational counseling and spiritual direction.

Covered Entity. The Diocese (including all Diocesan owned or operated schools), all parishes of the Diocese, any entity considered separate from the Diocese under civil law but which is considered to be part of the juridic person of the Diocese under Canon Law, any corporation or LLC (including a school) organized under civil law where the Bishop or the Diocese is a member of such corporation or LLC, and any school operated or founded by a parish where the pastor of such parish controls, is a member of, or otherwise holds an ex officio appointment in regard to the school.

Diocese. The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.

Interaction with Minors. Interaction with Minors means, with respect to any person or position, the existence of any of the following conditions:

a. having or being assigned duties that include interaction with Minors. Incidental contact with Minors or occasional proximity to Minors, particularly when other adults are present, is not considered Interaction.

b. the care, supervision, custody, or control of a Minor.

c. Any position involving regular unsupervised access to a Minor. Unsupervised access means having access to a Minor if no other person eighteen years of age or older is present in the same room or, if outdoors, no other person eighteen years of age or older is within a thirty-yard radius of the Minor or has visual contact with the Minor.

Minor. A person under the age of 18 or a person of any age who habitually lacks the use of reason. One who "habitually lacks the use of reason" is one who, by reason of a serious and chronic or permanent condition, may be considered to be an infant under Canon Law (i.e., a person under the age of 8). See can. 97 §2.

Pastoral Counseling. Those caring acts of the Church under the guidance of a minister who addresses issues of care from the perspective of both Christian theology and the modern sciences, especially psychology. While not necessarily accompanying licensure or certification, pastoral counseling requires basic training and preparation.

Policy. The Catholic Diocese of Cleveland Policy for the Protection of Children.

Professional Counseling. Services provided by a licensed professional for assistance in dealing with personal problems that can include behavioral, job, marriage, and school, rehabilitative or emotional issues. A counselor is a licensed professional who utilizes the skills of active listening, empathy, reflection, educating, and problem solving. Some counselors administer and interpret psychological tests to assist with the counseling process. Psychotherapy is a general term referring to therapeutic interaction or treatment contracted between a trained professional and a client. The problems addressed are psychological in nature and can vary in terms of the causes, influences, triggers, and potential resolutions.

Sexual Abuse. The commission by a Church Personnel of any of the following acts:

- Any act described in canon 1398.
- Sexual conduct with a Minor (i.e., (i) vaginal intercourse between a male and female, (ii) anal

intercourse, fellatio, or cunnilingus regardless of the sex of the parties, (iii) the penetration or insertion, however slight, of any part of the body or any instrument or object of any kind into the vaginal or anal cavity).

- Sexual contact with a Minor (i.e., any touching of an erogenous zone of another, whether inside or outside of clothing, including without limitation the thigh, genitals, buttock, pubic region, breast, or nipple for the purpose of sexually arousing or gratifying either person).
- Soliciting, requesting, or attempting sexual conduct or sexual contact with a Minor.
- Forcing a Minor to perform or submit to sexual conduct or sexual contact with another or forcing another to perform or submit to sexual conduct or sexual contact with a Minor (whether such force is by violence or threat or through abuse of authority).
- Exposing one's genitals, engaging in sexual conduct or sexual contact, or masturbating under circumstances in which a reasonable person would know that such conduct would likely be viewed by a Minor.
- Acquiring, possessing, creating, producing, exhibiting, or distributing pornographic images of a Minor, including images generated by artificial intelligence, for purposes of sexual gratification of any person or for profit, regardless of the means, medium, or technology utilized.
- Displaying, sharing, or exhibiting pornography (whether child pornography or not) with a Minor either intentionally or in a manner in which a reasonable person would know that such would likely be viewed by a Minor.
- Viewing, photographing, filming, or recording video of a Minor in a state of nudity, for the purpose of sexual gratification or profit, regardless of the medium or technology used.
- Engaging in conversations of a sexual nature with a Minor for the purpose of sexual gratification.
- Any other conduct that would be considered to be a child sex crime under Ohio law.
- Attempting to do any of the above, including with persons the perpetrator believes to be Minors but who are not (e.g., law enforcement officers posing as Minors).
- Conduct described in Ohio's criminal grooming statute (ORC. 2907.071).

For the avoidance of doubt, conduct described in this section that is committed by minors that is not a crime under civil law or delict under Canon Law is not included in the definition of Sexual Abuse.

Spiritual Direction. Services provided by a trained spiritual director and is directly concerned with a person's actual experiences of his or her relationship with God.

Standards. These Standards of Conduct for Ministry, revised 2026.

USCCB. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Victim Assistance Coordinator. The designated representative of the Diocese to whom reports of Sexual Abuse are made and who communicates with Victims and other reporting parties on behalf of the Diocese.

Volunteer. A person who provides services to a Covered Entity without compensation or expectation of compensation of any kind.

III. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

A. Standards of Conduct Relating to Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction

Scope: Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors.

Guiding Principle: Pastoral Counselors and Spiritual Directors and others who fall within the scope of these Standards of Conduct should respect the rights and advance the welfare of each person whom they Counsel.

Those who provide Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction:

1. should not step beyond their competence in counseling situations and should refer clients to other professionals when appropriate;
2. should avoid whenever possible 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). When unavoidable, counseling should be preceded by an open discussion of the relationship and, if warranted, an appropriate written disclosure should be made with written consent by the counselee;
3. should not make audio- or video-recordings of sessions (for the avoidance of doubt, this does not prohibit telehealth services, or using video conference software to conduct unrecorded Spiritual Direction or Pastoral Counseling sessions provided that the sessions otherwise comply with these Standards);
4. must never engage in sexual intimacies with the persons they counsel; this includes consensual and nonconsensual contact, forced physical contact, and inappropriate sexual comments;
5. must 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; they should presume that the potential for exploitation or harm exists in such intimate relationships;
6. should assume the full burden of responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear, appropriate boundaries in all counseling and counseling-related relationships;
7. should avoid physical contact of any kind (i.e., touching, hugging, holding);
8. should conduct sessions in appropriate settings at appropriate times;
    a. should not conduct sessions in private living quarters; those who are clerics must not conduct sessions in private living quarters or areas;
    b. should not hold sessions at places or times that would tend to cause confusion about the nature of the relationship for the person being counseled;
9. should maintain a log of the times and places of sessions with each person being counseled (this log should be retained by the counselor).

B. Conflicts of Interest

Scope: These standards apply to Church Personnel and Volunteers in positions of trust.

Guiding Principle: Church Personnel and Volunteers should avoid situations that might present a conflict of interest. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can call integrity, professionalism, and ministerial conduct into question.

1. Church Personnel and Volunteers should disclose to the individual all relevant factors that potentially could create a conflict of interest.

2. Church Personnel 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.

    a. Church Personnel and Volunteers should never take advantage of anyone to whom they are providing services in order to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.

    b. Church Personnel and Volunteers should not provide a counseling service 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.

    c. 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

        i. must clarify with all parties the nature of each relationship;

        ii. should anticipate any conflict of interest;

        iii. if a conflict of interest arises, must take appropriate actions to eliminate the conflict; and

        iv. should obtain from all parties written consent to continue services.

    d. When a conflict of interest has arisen and cannot be reconciled, Church Personnel should advise the parties that he or she can no longer provide services and make a referral for continued ministry.

C. Confidentiality

Scope: The following standards apply to pastoral counselors, spiritual directors, and other Church Personnel and Volunteers who provide services to individuals, families, or other groups (hereinafter "counselors").

All Church Personnel are expected to maintain confidentiality within the scope of their duties and as delineated in any job descriptions and employee practices.

The following 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 celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Guiding Principle: Information disclosed in ministerial settings during the course of counseling, advising, or Spiritual Direction shall be held in the strictest confidence possible.

1. At the commencement of the counseling relationship, the Counselor should discuss the nature of confidentiality and disclose its limitations with each person in counseling and obtain a signed acknowledgement of the disclosure.
2. Information obtained in the course of sessions should be confidential, except for compelling professional reasons or as required by law.

    a. If there is clear and present danger to the person being counseled or to others, the Counselor should disclose sufficient information necessary to protect the parties potentially affected and to prevent harm.

    b. Before disclosure is made, if feasible, the Counselor should inform the person being counseled about the disclosure and the potential consequences.

3. The Counselor should keep minimal records of the content of sessions. This may include, but is not limited to, dates and times of appointments, general summary of content in order to assist the Counselor with personal recall, and other pertinent information in order to assist the individual receiving counseling.
4. While counseling a minor, the Counselor may discover a serious threat to the welfare of the minor. Reporting to law enforcement and/or a children services agency shall be done in accordance with applicable law and the diocese *Policy for the Safety of Children.* If communication of confidential information to a parent or legal guardian is essential to the child's health and well-being, the Counselor should:

    a. Attempt to secure written consent from the minor for the specific disclosure.

    b. If consent is not given, the Counselor should disclose sufficient information necessary to protect the health and well-being of the minor. Consultation with the appropriate church supervisory personnel is required before disclosure, but is not to delay the disclosure.

5. In some circumstances, a legal privilege that applies to confidential communication may seem to prevent a Counselor from disclosing misconduct by a counselee, but a Counselor must take care to follow the legal requirements for reporting and the diocesan *Policy for the Safety of Children.*

D. Conduct With Youth

Scope: These standards apply to Church Personnel and Volunteers who have Interaction with Minors.

- *Guiding principle: Church personnel and volunteers working with youth are called to engage in healthy, appropriate relational ministry, recognizing that meaningful Christ-centered relationships are essential for effective accompaniment and faith formation. Interactions should remain open and transparent to co-workers and supervisors, and be worthy of the trust placed in them.*

1. Church Personnel and Volunteers must be aware of their own and others' vulnerability when working alone with youth. They should use a team approach to managing youth activities.
2. Church Personnel and Volunteers should not meet with a minor alone in a separate room unless there is a window on the door, or the door is open, except in the case of a sacramental confession.
3. Church Personnel and Volunteers should be committed to a lifestyle that serves as an example of chastity at all times.
4. Physical contact with youth can be misconstrued and:

    a. Shall occur only when completely nonsexual and otherwise appropriate, and

    b. Should never occur in private.

    c. Church Personnel and Volunteers should avoid using inappropriate expressions of physical affection with minors, including but not limited to: Close or lengthy embraces; kisses on the mouth; holding minors over two years of age on the lap; touching bottoms, chests or genital areas; sleeping in bed with a minor; wrestling with minors; piggyback rides; any type of massage given to or received from a minor; any form of unwanted affection; or compliments that relate to physique or body development.

5. Church Personnel and Volunteers should refrain from the use of alcohol, nicotine-containing products, cannabis, and other materials or substances which minors cannot legally purchase, use or possess when working with youth, and they must not share with, or allow the use of materials or substances by minors which minors cannot legally purchase, use or possess.

6. Church Personnel and Volunteers should not provide shared, private, overnight accommodations 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.

7. All youth trips, especially overnight ones, should have a sufficient number of adult chaperones over the age of 21 present. 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 clergy, Church Personnel or Volunteers should sleep in the same bed, sleeping bag, small tent, or bedroom with minors.
8. Church Personnel and Volunteers should never accompany minors to movies, sporting events or other forms of entertainment without at least one other adult chaperone over the age of 21 being present.
9. Church Personnel and Volunteers should never be present in locker rooms or other dressing rooms used by minors without another adult over the age of 21 being present. They should not linger or hang around or spend long periods in locker rooms or other dressing rooms.
10. Church Personnel and Volunteers should not give expensive gifts or gifts of a personal nature to minors nor accept expensive gifts or gifts of a personal nature from minors without prior express permission of the minor's parents or legal guardians.
11. Church Personnel and Volunteers should never obtain or possess sexually explicit or pornographic materials through any medium including without limitation mobile apps, social media apps, or texting apps, and must not participate in the distribution or receipt of pornographic materials through any medium or share these materials in any way with minors. Clergy, Church Personnel and Volunteers must never possess or access child pornography through any medium.
12. Church Personnel and Volunteers should avoid taking unfair advantage of counseling relationships with minors for personal benefit or gratification.
13. Church Personnel and Volunteers should not give rides in motor vehicles to minors unless another adult is present and the permission of the minor's parent or legal guardian is granted.

E. Sexual Conduct

Scope: These Standards of Conduct apply to all Church Personnel and Volunteers.

Guiding Principle: Church Personnel and Volunteers shall not, for sexual gain or intimacy, exploit the trust placed in them by the faith community.

1. Since all are called to the virtue of chastity, Church Personnel and Volunteers should be an example of chastity in all relationships at all times.
2. Church Personnel and Volunteers, particularly those who provide Pastoral Counseling or Spiritual Direction, shall not develop inappropriate intimate relationships with minors, other staff and parishioners and should behave in a professional manner at all times.
3. No Church Personnel or Volunteer shall exploit another person for sexual purposes.
4. Suspected sexual misconduct must be taken seriously and reported immediately to the appropriate person in the Covered Entity and also to civil authorities and the diocesan Victim Assistance Coordinator if the situation involves a minor, following the *Policy for the Safety of Children.* The procedures of this policy shall be followed to protect the rights of all involved.
5. Church Personnel and Volunteers should review and know the contents of the child abuse regulations and reporting requirements for the State of Ohio and should follow those mandates. Information on the reporting obligation can be found in the *Policy for Safety of Children.* This policy can be found on the Diocese of Cleveland website.

F. Harassment

Scope: These standards apply to all Church Personnel and Volunteers.

Guiding Principle: Church Personnel and Volunteers must not engage in physical, psychological, written, or verbal harassment of other Church Personnel, Volunteers, parishioners or others, and must not tolerate such harassment by other Church Personnel or Volunteers.

1. "Harassment" encompasses a broad range of physical, written, or verbal behavior, including without limitation the following:

    a. Physical or mental abuse;
    b. Racial insults;
    c. Derogatory ethnic slurs;
    d. Unwelcome sexual advances or touching;
    e. Sexual comments or sexual jokes;
    f. Display of offensive materials;
    g. Requests for sexual favors used as a condition of employment, or to effect other personnel decisions, such as promotion or compensation.

2. 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 ministry or work environment.

    a. Church Personnel and Volunteers should provide and/or contribute to a professional ministry and work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written, or verbal intimidation or harassment.

    b. Church Personnel and Volunteers must never intentionally post or communicate through any medium materials that are false, derogatory, defamatory, degrading, malicious, disrespectful, or threatening to anyone. (See Section K below.)

    c. Allegations of harassment should be taken seriously and reported immediately to the appropriate person in the Covered Entity. The policy and procedures of the Covered Entity, as appropriate, will be followed to protect the rights of all involved.

G. Organizational Records and Information

Scope: These standards apply only to pastors, administrators, parish life coordinators, and any other persons who may be in charge of a parish, parochial vicars, parish staff and any others who may have charge of or access to sacramental or financial records.

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

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 the individuals.

2. Sacramental records are not open to the public.
    a. Information regarding adoption and legitimacy remains confidential, regardless of age of the document.
    b. Only staff members who are authorized to access the records and supervise their use should handle requests for more recent records.

3. A parish or other entity's financial records are confidential unless review is required by the diocese or an appropriate government agency. Individuals in charge of diocesan, parish, or church-related corporate

financial records should contact the Diocesan Legal Office, or other counsel for a Covered Entity, as appropriate, with regard to any request for their release or disclosure.

4. Individual contribution records of the Covered Entity should be regarded as private and should be maintained in strictest confidence.

H. Reporting Ethical or Professional Misconduct

Scope: These standards apply to Church Personnel and Volunteers.

Guiding Principle: Church Personnel and Volunteers should report their own ethical or professional misconduct and the misconduct of others and must report sexual abuse of minors in accord with the Policy for Safety of Children and state or local laws.

1. When an uncertainty exists about whether a situation or course of conduct violates this document or other religious, moral, or ethical principles, Church Personnel and Volunteers should consult with, in order of preference:

    a. their supervisor;
    b. If the matter involves their supervisor, their supervisor's supervisor or other appropriate leadership of the Covered Entity;
    c. legal counsel for the Covered Entity.

2. When it appears that a member of the clergy, Church Personnel, or a Volunteer has violated one or more of these *Standards of Conduct*, the matter should be reported to the individual's supervisor or next higher authority.
3. If it is a matter of sexual abuse of a minor, reporting shall be done in accordance with applicable law, as well as the *Policy for the Safety of Children* and comply with any further requirements that may exist for a Covered Entity.
4. Members of the clergy, Church Personnel and Volunteers should hold each other accountable for maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards.

I. Administration

Scope: These standards apply to Church Personnel who are employers and supervisors.

Guiding Principle: Employers and supervisors shall treat justly Church Personnel and Volunteers in the day- to-day administrative operations of their ministries.

1. Personnel and other administrative decisions made by Church Personnel shall meet civil law and Canon Law obligations and also should reflect Catholic social teachings and these *Standards of Conduct.*

2. No employer or supervisor should use his or her position to exercise unreasonable or inappropriate power, authority, or domination.

J. Well-Being of Church Personnel and Volunteers

Scope: These standards apply to Church Personnel and Volunteers.

Guiding Principle: Church Personnel and Volunteers should be responsible for their own spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health.

1. Church Personnel and Volunteers should be aware of warning signs that indicate potential problems with their own spiritual, physical, mental, and/or emotional health.
2. Church Personnel and Volunteers should seek help immediately whenever they notice behavioral or emotional warning signs in their own professional and/or personal lives.
3. Church Personnel and Volunteers should not engage in inappropriate use of alcohol and drugs and must not engage in illegal use of alcohol and/or drugs.
4. Church Personnel and Volunteers should address their own spiritual needs.
5. Those in serving in roles of leadership should always maintain an interest in the well-being of all Church Personnel and Volunteers.

K. Use of Social Media and All Forms of Electronic Communication

Scope: These standards apply to all Church Personnel and Volunteers.

Guiding Principle: Church personnel and Volunteers should use digital communication in a manner that supports healthy, appropriate relational ministry and effectively engages youth and families, and that ensures communications remain appropriate and accountable and that parents/guardians are aware of the methods of communication being used. Communication must never be used to form inappropriate or exclusive relationships with minors.

1. Meaning of "Social Media" and "Electronic Communications"

    a. "Social Media," for purposes of this document, refers to Internet, network, and mobile-based tools for sharing information and communicating in interactive dialogue. Social media is a constantly developing field which currently includes but is not limited to: Snapchat, X, Tik-Tok, Facebook, YouTube, Google+, MySpace, LinkedIn, blogs, Yelp, Foursquare, Flickr, Instagram, texting, and various mobile device "apps."
    b. "Electronic Communications" for purposes of this document, refers to emails, text messaging, or apps that are designed for direct communications, such as GroupMe, Remind, FlockNote, and Flare.

    c. Because technology is constantly evolving, the ethical principles in these *Standards of Conduct* apply to new forms of communication developed after the issuance of these standards. A change in technology does not exempt Church personnel or volunteers from diocesan principles and standards.

    d. Prohibitions on certain Social Media. Certain Social Media, due to its inappropriate nature or the potential for scandal, should not be used by Church Personnel, including without limitation Grindr. In addition, no app should be used where the app content is designed to disappear.

2. No Privacy in Electronic Communications and Social Media

    a. Electronic mail, social media, or Internet communications, and Internet browsing related to one's ministry with a Covered Entity are not private. Such communications and Internet use in the course of ministry or with persons served in ministry, that are made using the Internet service, hardware or software owned, leased or licensed by any Covered Entity (with or without permission) are subject to oversight and scrutiny and may be monitored, reviewed or accessed without the knowledge or consent of the sender or recipient.

b. All computers, cell phones and other digital or electronic devices owned or leased by a Covered Entity may be inspected at any time without any advance notice, including such devices assigned to an individual for his exclusive use.

3. Open and Transparent Electronic Communication or Use of Social Media by Church Personnel and Volunteers

a. Church Personnel and Volunteers shall discuss with supervisors and pastors their planned use of social media, e-mail communication, or the Internet before applying it to an area of ministry, especially with minors.

b. Church Personnel and Volunteers shall carefully compose appropriate communication, especially communication that is intended for minors, to eliminate any wording that could be interpreted as sexually suggestive and copy an adult who is a ministerial supervisor on the communication so that it is public and verifiable.

c. When the director of a ministry determines that communication via electronic, digital or social media is appropriate to ministry, each entity promoting that ministry should provide all Church Personnel and appropriate Volunteers in the program with individual email addresses and/or other access accounts which indicate the name of the entity and the specific ministerial function. There are two methods for providing email to church personnel and volunteers.

Preferred method – entities should provide email accounts specific to the domain of their parish/institution web site (i.e. DRE@stgeorge.com).

Other method – supervisors could establish a web-based account (i.e., stgeorgeDRE@gmail.com). The password in this case should be known by the supervisor and the individual church personnel or volunteer.

d. Church Personnel and Volunteers should use these official ministry e-mail addresses or accounts for communications and social media access rather than their personal addresses or access accounts to communicate with persons related to their ministry, especially minors.

4. Supervision of Electronic Communications

a. A supervisor or other designated person of an entity shall have the ability to access the communications pertaining to work of every Church Personnel or Volunteer. Access should be made available by the system administrator using the system's administrative functions. The sharing of individual passwords is never recommended to gain access to an account. In the event that an individual's official email is web-based (i.e. Gmail, Ymail, AOL, etc.), a common password to that account should be known by the individual and the supervisor.

b. Church Personnel and Volunteers should not use the entity's hardware, Internet portal, or software for personal communications not related to the entity.

c. The use of personal, as opposed to entity or an employer's, social media may be an occasion for disciplinary action, including termination of employment or status as a volunteer, especially if there is violation of the norms in these *Standards of Conduct* in relation to parish or entity activity.

d. Evidence of the accessing, storing, or transmitting of pornographic images is cause for immediate disciplinary action, including termination of employment or status as a volunteer.

e. Any evidence of criminal activity, such as suspected child pornography, found on any device by any Church Personnel or Volunteer shall be reported to law enforcement officials, as well as to the appropriate supervisor.

5. Guides for the Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media

a. Electronic communication from Church Personnel or Volunteers should be brief, simple, and clear as to its stated purpose of business.

b. Personal remarks other than common courtesies appropriate in the situation, especially when addressing minors, should be avoided. Excessive familiarity or a purely social relationship is not appropriate in ministry; adults in ministry may develop a cordial and supportive relationship with minors, but must refrain from excessive familiarity or friendship with minors.

c. When using any form of social media, e-mails, or the Internet, all policies contained in the *Standards of Conduct* apply. This especially applies to rules of confidentiality, conduct with youth, sexual conduct, and harassment. The Church Personnel or Volunteer should utilize the resources and techniques made available through *Virtus* training.

d. Church Personnel and Volunteers are to see that their own personal social networking site does not contain any material that is pornographic, indecent, or inconsistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

e. Church Personnel and Volunteers shall not post on their own social networking sites any image of a minor with whom they are working or have previously worked in a parish or entity. When sharing a photo that includes a minor on the entity's social networking site, written permission shall be obtained from the minor's parent or legal guardian. The identity of any minor should never be included as part of the picture or description without parental consent.

f. Church Personnel and Volunteers should not, without specific approval from their supervisor, patrol social networking sites of the minors with whom they work, monitor minors' behavior on those sites, or seek out or examine a minor's personal site for details of his or her personal life.

6. Administrative Matters

a. Copyrighted Material. Use of a Covered Entity's system or systems for unauthorized creation or copying of copyrighted software or content is expressly prohibited. Moreover, proprietary information belonging to others must not be placed on an entity's system without the prior written approval of the owner. Any Church Personnel or Volunteer who violates these rules may be disciplined.

b. AI Use. All AI-generated outputs must be thoroughly reviewed and validated by human oversight to ensure accuracy, appropriateness, and compliance with copyright law and these Standards of Conduct for Ministry.

c. If Church personnel or volunteer receives notice, in writing or otherwise, or becomes aware that an entity's system(s) is being used or is proposed to be used to create, disseminate, store, upload or download any messages, communications or other material in violation of copyrights, trademarks, patents, intellectual property or other property rights of any party, such Church Personnel or Volunteer shall inform the Covered Entity director or his or her designee in writing of such use or proposed use. The Covered Entity may remove or disable access to any material

that is claimed to be infringing or to be the subject matter of infringing activity.

d. The Covered Entity may establish a policy or policies to protect information from unauthorized and inappropriate access, publication or modification; such a policy may also supplement, but not contradict these *Standards of Conduct*, to address particular activities, ministries, staff, expertise in technology, system or site, its own hardware and software.

e. All Church Personnel and Volunteers must adhere to any such policy or policies. Failure to adhere to such policy or policies may be an occasion for disciplinary action, including termination of employment or status as a Volunteer.

f. If Church Personnel and Volunteers do use electronic communication or social media to communicate with a minor or minors, then parents should be informed in writing that such communication is likely to occur.

g. Any site or system established by an entity must have an adult as the administrator of the system or site; the administrator is to be selected by the director of that entity.

h. The Office of Communications shall from time to time issue norms and guidelines to provide further guidance for the implementation of this Section of the *Standards of Conduct*. Covered Entities are encouraged to contact the Social Media Coordinator within the Office of Communications for Best Practices in creating, monitoring and educating their audiences about social media use.

L. Priests

Scope: This applies to all ordained priests who are incardinated in the Diocese of Cleveland, as well as priests incardinated in other dioceses or religious orders who are engaged in ministry under the control or auspices of the Diocese of Cleveland.

Guiding Principle: Priests should exercise professional caution in all interactions with minors.

1. Whenever possible, a priest should avoid being alone with a minor, excluding sacramental confession (normally taking place within a church), counseling and spiritual direction (normally occurring in the professional offices of the church or rectory with an open door or a closed door with a window).
2. Minors are permitted only in the public areas of a rectory and never in the private living quarters of a priest. Minors are not permitted in any private residence, cabin, condominium, summer home or other dwelling whether leased or owned by a priest unless the minor is accompanied by his or her parents or guardians.
3. Minors are not permitted to be employed in positions whose regular work location is in either the parish office or rectory. Incidental or occasional need to perform work in the parish office or rectory is not prohibited.
4. Priests should not give alcohol to minors or share alcohol with minors, except for distribution of Holy Communion under both species.
5. Priests who find themselves attracted to minors or who frequently seek their companionship rather than that of adults should seek advice and assistance from the Secretary and Vicar for Clergy and Religious, who may suggest a professional evaluation with a trained psychological expert.
6. Conversations or discussions of a topic of a sexual nature with minors should be limited to the priest's teaching office or made in response to specific questions.

7. Priests should share concerns about suspicious or inappropriate behavior of a cleric or other Church personnel with a minor with the Secretary and Vicar for Clergy and Religious, in addition to following the reporting duties delineated under Ohio law and the *Policy for the Safety of Children.*
8. With regard to minors within a priest's extended family or in cases where priests may have children, priests should follow these *Standards of Conduct* with due discretion, diligence and prudence, adapting those standards which should be adapted because of family relationships.

M. Permanent Deacons

Scope: This applies to all ordained permanent deacons who are incardinated in the Diocese of Cleveland, as well as permanent deacons incardinated in other dioceses or religious orders who are engaged in ministry under the control or auspices of the Diocese of Cleveland.

Guiding Principle: Permanent deacons should exercise professional caution in all interactions with minors.

Permanent deacons should follow the same *Standards of Conduct* as priests and as clergy, church personnel and volunteers with regard to relationships arising out of ministry. With regard to their own family and their own private dwellings, permanent deacons should follow these *Standards of Conduct* with due discretion, diligence and prudence, adapting those standards which should be adapted because of family relationships.

Standards of Conduct for Ministry, Revised 2026
Diocese of Cleveland
Acknowledgment Form

Diocesan, Religious, and Extern Clerics

I have received a printed or electronic copy of the *Standards of Conduct for Ministry* (Revised, 2026). I have read and understand these *Standards of Conduct* and I agree to abide by them. I understand that a violation of these standards can result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination and/or removal from ministry.

Priest
- Diocesan
- Extern
- Religious _____Congregation

Deacon
- Diocesan
- Extern
- Religious _____Congregation

Parish/Assignment _____

Date _____

All clerics are to return this acknowledgment form to:

Office of the Chancellor
Diocese of Cleveland
1404 East Ninth
Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44114-1722

Standards of Conduct for Ministry, Revised 2026

Diocese of Cleveland

Acknowledgment Form

Employees and Volunteers

I have received a printed or electronic copy of the *Standards of Conduct for Ministry* (Revised, 2026). I have read and understand these *Standards of Conduct* and I agree to abide by them. I understand that a violation of these standards can result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination as an employee or volunteer and/or removal from ministry. Nothing in these *Standards of Conduct for Ministry* is intended to alter an employee's at-will or contracted status, as the case may be.

Signature _____

Name (Please print clearly) _____

Parish/Assignment _____

Position (or volunteer activity) _____

Date _____

The signed *Standards of Conduct for Ministry* Acknowledgment Form shall be kept in employee personnel files at the agency/parish/school or in a general volunteer file at the agency/parish/school.