

Pastoral Code of Conduct



The Roman Catholic
Archdiocese of
Washington

September 2026



Office of the Archbishop

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington

Post Office Box 29260, Washington, DC 20017-0260

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we work together to foster parish communities of encounter and discipleship, I am pleased to share this updated Pastoral Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct, which was first promulgated in 2016, sets forth the expectations for behavior of priests, deacons, employees, and volunteers in our parishes, schools, and other ministries of the Archdiocese of Washington. As with the prior version, the updated Code of Conduct is intended to cultivate a culture where professional and personal conduct is marked by integrity and respect for the dignity of all.

The Code of Conduct is now available on the Safe Environment page of the Archdiocese of Washington website, where you will also find the current version of our Safe Environment Policy for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults (updated in 2024), and other helpful resources.

I take this opportunity to thank each of you who give so generously of your time and talents in service of the Church. It is through your steadfast witness that the faithful come to experience a personal encounter with Jesus Christ who is the very heart of our Church.

With grateful sentiment for the work you do, I am

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Robert Cardinal McElroy
Archbishop of Washington

Archdiocese of Washington

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“The face of Christ is reflected in the varied faces of those of his disciples who place their charisms at the service of the Church’s mission” (Pope Francis, *Praedicate Evangelium*, 7). The mission of accompanying others to an encounter with the saving love of Christ is both a great gift and at the same time a great responsibility.

Authentic pastoral service demands that everyone recognize the call to live an exemplary life in the Church and in the world. “This entails everyone’s engagement in the demanding task of being missionary disciples, showing an example of dedication, a spirit of piety, of welcome to those who come to them, and of service” (Pope Francis, *Praedicate Evangelium*, General Norms, Art. 5).

This *Pastoral Code of Conduct* sets forth standards for conduct which reflect concrete witness of faith in Christ through lives marked by integrity of word and witness, in particular, in our relationship with those we serve through continuous exercise of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

“Be holy by laboring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters” (Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 14).

Aware of the inherent influence of my ministerial role:

- I will foster a safe environment for those served by Archdiocesan parishes, schools, and ministries, especially minors and vulnerable adults.
- I will strive to exemplify holiness and trustworthiness in my personal and professional life.
- I will practice integrity and self-control in word, witness, and conduct, to be mindful to reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- I will maintain the highest ethical standards of conduct respecting the rights and welfare of each person, by avoiding any semblance of intimidation or misuse of my position or authority.
- I will protect the interests of those with whom I minister, especially minors, those who are living with a mental, physical, or emotional disability, or otherwise vulnerable individuals, whose presence in the church is integral to the Church community.
- I will seek to empower others by supporting and respecting the differing abilities and gifts others bring to the Church.
- I will treat each person who comes to, or interacts with, a parish, school, or ministry of the Archdiocese of Washington with respect, courtesy, and charity.
- I will relate to all people with respect and sensitivity, avoiding any verbal or physical harassment.
- I will model the virtue of temperance by refraining from the use of illegal drugs or the unauthorized use of controlled substances and by abstaining from alcohol in youth ministry settings.
- I will inform my supervisor and pastor if I become aware of any financial misconduct or when a real, potential, or apparent conflict of interest arises that could call integrity and professional conduct into question.
- I will faithfully maintain any confidential information and safeguard the confidentiality of any notes, files, or computer records I am privy to through my ministry.

- I will uphold the dignity of every person by not engaging in sexual harassment or sexual abuse, and I understand that such behavior is absolutely forbidden in any parish, school, workplace, or other ministry of the Archdiocese of Washington.
- I will faithfully abide by all Archdiocesan policies applicable to my employment or ministry.

COMMUNICATION

“The task laid before us is not to stop digital innovation, but rather to guide it and to be aware of its ambivalent nature. It is up to each of us to raise our voice in defense of human persons, so that we can truly assimilate these tools as allies” (Pope Leo, XIV, *Address for the 60th World Day of Social Communications*).

Understanding the particular need to uphold the dignity of every person, particularly in online communication:

- I will maintain in all communications, including social media, appropriate relationship boundaries with clergy, religious, parents, students, parishioners, and all other persons with whom I minister or serve.
- I will exercise prudence and sound judgment in communication with minors, by including parents and avoiding private communication that could be misconstrued.
- I will practice careful discernment in the use of digital technology and avoid exposing others to inappropriate or immoral material.
- I will maintain the dignity of truth, avoiding the spread of misinformation, especially in the use of any digital platform.
- I will honor the virtue of chastity by not viewing, possessing, or sharing any pornographic, obscene, or inappropriate material, and I understand these are absolutely forbidden in any parish, school, workplace, or other ministry of the Archdiocese of Washington.
- I will uphold the Archdiocesan *Social Media Policy*; in particular, I will refrain from the use of any private or temporary online communication tool in interaction with minors.

MINISTRY WITH YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

“We need to protect, guide and encourage our young people, helping them to build a society worthy of their great spiritual and cultural heritage” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Journey to Sri Lanka, *Homily January 19, 2015*).

Understanding the need for prudence in ministry involving minors and vulnerable adults:

- I will abide by the requirements of the Archdiocese of Washington’s *Safe Environment Policy for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults*.
- I will maintain a safe environment by ensuring that there are at least two compliant adults present when ministering to minors.
- I will maintain a professional ministerial relationship by avoiding inappropriate physical displays of affection toward those to whom I minister.
- I will respect spiritual and emotional boundaries, exemplify integrity, and foster transparency by avoiding counseling or similar pastoral care of minors behind closed doors, in private living quarters, or in other circumstances that could reasonably be perceived to be inappropriate.

- I will protect the minors in my care by ensuring that any allegation of suspected abuse or neglect of a minor is promptly reported to civil authorities, irrespective of whether the allegation pertains to an Archdiocesan setting or any other setting.

Additionally:

- I will refrain from wrestling, tickling, horseplay, or any other physical acts or gestures with minors that could reasonably be perceived to be inappropriate.
- I will refrain from the use of physical punishment, the threat of physical punishment, or demeaning language when disciplining minors.
- I will not display or provide any type of pornographic or obscene material to a minor. I acknowledge that the production, possession, or depiction of child pornography is prohibited by Archdiocese of Washington's *Safe Environment Policy for the Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults* and constitutes a crime.

"All the members of the People of God—clergy, men and women religious, the lay faithful—are laborers in the vineyard. At one and the same time they all are the goal and subjects of Church communion as well as of participation in the mission of salvation. Every one of us possessing charisms and ministries, diverse yet complementary, works in the one and the same vineyard of the Lord" (Second Vatican Council, *Christifideles Laici*, 55).

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