

**PRACTICAL STANDARDS OF
PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
FOR PRIESTS SERVING THE
DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG
PUBLISHED MARCH 15, 1999
REVISED JANUARY 2004**

I. 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 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 responsibility that we have to face in the diversity of our ministry. What it does establish is a set of minimal 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 rest with each of us. The Diocese will provide programs to assist members in understanding and living these Standards, when such programs are deemed useful and necessary.

Our conduct as Church leaders, both public and private, has the potential to inspire and motivate people, or scandalize and 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.

II. 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 shall 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; times must be found for both. We must also ensure that our own faith life is strong and should seek spiritual direction through both formation and prayer.

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 day-to-day situations encountered in the parish and 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 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 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 aging, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical and mental disabilities, and language all affect how the message of the Gospel is received and interpreted.

III. The Well-Being of the Church Leader

1. Physical and Emotional Well-Being

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

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 or misuse of other drugs are examples.

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 health is weakening.

1.3 We should make use of 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.

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.

2. Spiritual Well-Being

We have ways to be attuned to our own spiritual health.

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 a regular practice of prayer (Canon 276).

2.2 We need to address our own spiritual needs to remain focused in the faith. Use of a spiritual director is highly recommended.

2.3 We need to take advantage of allotted time for an annual retreat and days of reflection.

3. Professional Well-Being

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

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

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

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.

4. Moral Well-Being

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

4.1 We need to be part of a community of values; one which affirms and challenges our vision and values.

4.2 We should seek opportunities to actively participate in peer support groups.

IV. The Spiritual Life of the Parish Community

1. Sacramental Life

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

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

1.2 We should know and respect the policies and procedures of the Diocese.

2. Social Concerns

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

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.

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

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

V. Professional Relationships

1. Collaboration and Administration

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

1.1 Personnel and other administrative decisions we make should not only meet civil and Canon Law obligations, but should reflect Catholic social teachings. This should include providing a just wage for our employees.

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

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.

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

1.5 We should make appropriate use of our positions so that we exercise our power and authority in reasonable ways.

1.6 We who are pastors or parish administrators should ensure that there is a clear accounting of all parish funds. We should exercise responsible stewardship of all parish resources in conformity with current Diocesan Financial Policies.

2. Spiritual Support

Those of us who conduct 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.)

2.1 We should recognize our competence in situations and should decline assistance when appropriate. Referrals are best left to the individual's primary health care provider.

2.2 We keep confidential the information learned from spiritual relationships. In beginning what is clearly a spiritual relationship, we should inform the individual(s) that confidentiality is limited when there is clear and imminent danger to them 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.

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 to the counselee is confined to spiritual assistance.

2.4 We who move to another parish should help make appropriate arrangements for continued spiritual care.

2.5 We must be prudent in any relationship to avoid a conflict of interest.

2.6. Certain forms of physical contact with any individual can be misconstrued and should generally be avoided.

2.7 It should always be clear to both ourselves and the individual that a professional relationship is in process. This can best be done when the support, especially if extended, 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 keep a log or appointment book of the times and places of services, especially if it involves more frequent meetings with the same person.

3. Relationships with Youth

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

3.1 We must be aware of our own and others' vulnerability when working alone with youth and should consider a team approach to youth activities.

3.2 Physical contact with youth can often be misconstrued by both youth and other adults, and should only occur under appropriate public circumstances.

3.3 We should refrain from the use of alcohol and never use or permit the use of any illegal drug when working with youth.

3.4 Entertaining unchaperoned youth in our personal living quarters is not to be done.

3.5 Providing overnight accommodations in rectories or other personal residences for youth is not to be done, except for members of our family.

4. Sexual Conduct

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

4.1 We must not exploit another person especially for sexual purposes.

4.2 We who made a commitment to a celibate lifestyle are called to witness this in all relationships.

4.3 We should use discretion in developing close friendship.

4.4 Any allegations of sexual misconduct with minors will be reported to the Florida State Child Abuse Registry and to the Bishop. If the Bishop cannot be contacted in a timely fashion, the report may be made to the Vicar General, Chancellor or Secretary for Priest Personnel. 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 Adults.

4.5 Florida State law mandates that anyone who has knowledge of child abuse, abandonment or neglect must report such knowledge to the Florida Child Abuse Registry by calling 1-800-962-2873.

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.

5.1 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;
- * 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.

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, except we do reserve the right to discriminate on the basis of religion. We should provide a work environment that is free from intimidation and harassment based on any of these factors.

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.

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

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 confidence.

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.

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.

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

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

6.5 Except as provided above with respect to consultation, confidential information can 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.

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, and further, that communication of confidential information to a parent or legal guardian is deemed essential, we should first attempt to elicit the consent of the minor for such disclosure. If such consent is not given, we must exercise great care and judgment in deciding the extent of any disclosure to a parent or legal guardian.

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.

7. Records and Information

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

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 represent the anonymity of individuals.

7.2 Diocesan policies and procedures should be followed in responsibility to requests for parish sacramental records.

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

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

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.

8.1 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, accept substantial (non-token) gifts for services or favors, employ or engage in transactions with our friends or relatives for Church business, act with partiality toward employees or Church members, or violate a confidence of another for personal gain.

8.2 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 or the Bishop or his designee, depending upon the circumstances.

8.3 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.

8.4 In business dealings on behalf of the Church, competitive bids may be used to minimize conflict situations with family and friends.

9. Reporting Misconduct

We have a duty to report ethical or professional misconduct on the part of other Church leaders.

9.1 In cases where there are clear indications of illegal actions by a Church leader, notification should be made immediately to the proper ecclesiastical authorities, and if required, to proper civil authorities.

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.

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.

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.

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, either sacramental or nonsacramental.

VI. Other Areas

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