

**CODE OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**  
for *Pastoral Leaders, Administrators, and Employees*  
of the Diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota

September 13, 2007

**I. Preamble**

We, the *pastoral leaders, administrators, and employees* of the Diocese of New Ulm, issue the following Code of Professional Responsibility. As leaders and employees 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 act properly at all times in response to contemporary society and its needs.

This Code of Professional Responsibility is written for *pastoral leaders, administrators, and employees* of and in the Diocese of New Ulm who are serving and/or working in the Church in some capacity. *Many* of us serve the Church through the active ordained priesthood. We also count among us deacons and those in other leadership roles.

This Code of Professional Responsibility does not presume to address all of the responsibility that we have to face in the diversity. What it does establish is a set of minimal professional standards. These standards will help to delineate boundaries within which behavior can be evaluated.

We hope that this Code will stimulate discussion within the Church community in order to build consensus on standards of practice. This Code is not intended to supersede canon or civil law, or to stand in opposition to any future Code proposed by the Diocese of New Ulm.

Responsibility for adherence to this Code of Professional Responsibility rests with each of us. The diocese will provide programs to assist in understanding and living these standards, when such programs are deemed useful and necessary.

Our public and private conduct has the potential to inspire and motivate people, or scandalize and weaken their faith. We must be aware of the responsibilities that accompany our vocation. We also know that God's goodness and graces support us in our ministry.

**II. General Principles**

**Integrity**

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 and workers 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 or function. 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.

Where applicable, continuing formation and education are essential for us; time must be found for both. We must also ensure that our own faith life is strong and shall seek spiritual direction through both regular 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 shall exhibit a deep commitment to the Church. Our *faithful attention* to the traditions of the past, the realities of the present, and the challenges of the future shall 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. *Catholic social teaching should guide our reflection and social action.* We share the spirit of ecumenism and inter-religious 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 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. Well-Being**

### **1. Physical and Emotional Well-Being**

We have the duty to be attuned to our physical, mental and emotional health.

1.1 We shall 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 shall immediately seek help when we identify warning signs in our professional or personal lives that our health is weak.

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

1.4 We shall 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 the duty to be attuned to our own spiritual health.

2.1 We must maintain and nurture an ongoing prayer life, including a regular practice of prayer.

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 Pastoral Leaders need to take advantage of allotted time for an annual retreat and days of reflection.

### **3. Professional Well-Being**

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

3.1 We shall participate annually in seminars and workshops in areas that are relevant to our current ministry or work.

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

3.3 We shall participate in a regular process of evaluation of our effectiveness in ministry. Diocesan instruments and procedures shall 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 shall seek opportunities to actively participate in peer support groups.

#### **IV. The Spiritual Life of the Parish Community**

##### **1. Sacramental Life**

Pastoral Leaders are responsible for providing for and nurturing the sacramental life of the parish community.

- 1.1 We shall celebrate the sacraments with decorum with the people entrusted to our care. This includes fidelity to the official Rites of the Roman Catholic Church.
- 1.2 We shall know, respect and follow 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 shall 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 shall nurture the spirit of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue in our interactions with other community religious groups.
- 2.3 We shall foster an awareness of and active involvement in Church issues and concerns that extend beyond parish boundaries.

#### **V. Professional Relationships**

##### **1. Collaboration and Administration**

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 shall not only meet civil and canon law obligations but shall reflect Catholic social teachings. This shall include providing a just wage and supporting the right of workers to organize.

- 1.2 We shall strive to work in collaboration with other pastoral staff members, including other priests, deacons, pastoral associates, and religious and lay ministers.
- 1.3 We who work in a parish setting shall 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 shall strive to work in collaboration with the staff and people of other parishes and agencies and officials of the diocese.
- 1.5 We shall make appropriate use of our positions so that we exercise our power and authority in reasonable ways.
- 1.6 We who are pastors, *parochial administrators*, or *pastoral administrators* shall ensure that there is a clear accounting of all parish funds. We exercise responsible stewardship of all parish resources.

##### **2. Counseling Relationships**

Those of us who conduct counseling for families, individuals or groups must respect their rights and advance the welfare of each person.

- 2.1 We shall recognize *the limits of* our competence in counseling situations and shall refer to other professionals when appropriate.
- 2.2 When conducting group counseling sessions, we must ensure that no individual is subject to trauma or abuse resulting from group interactions. We must state to group participants the confidentiality of all individual disclosures.
- 2.3 We keep confidential the information learned from counseling sessions. In beginning what is clearly a counseling relationship, we shall inform the counselee that confidentiality is limited when there is clear and imminent danger to the client or to others. In such cases, we will contact the necessary authorities or other professionals.

- 2.4 Sessions should not be audiotaped or videotaped.
- 2.5 In cases where the counselee is already in a counseling relationship with another professional, we shall make it clear what role we can provide to the counselee. Generally this shall be confined to spiritual assistance.
- 2.6 We who move to another parish while conducting counseling with parishioners shall help make appropriate arrangements for continued care.
- 2.7 We shall not begin a counseling relationship with someone with whom we have an established professional relationship (e.g., employee, professional colleague).
- 2.8 We must never engage in sexual behavior, real or alluded, with those whom we counsel. This includes consensual and non-consensual contact, forced physical contact, and inappropriate sexual comments.
- 2.9 Physical contact with the counselee can be misconstrued and shall generally be avoided.
- 2.10 It shall always be clear to both ourselves and the counselee that a counseling relationship is in process. This can best be done when the counseling, especially if extended, is conducted in an appropriate setting and at appropriate times. Counseling shall thus not be done in private living quarters or at places or times that would cause ambiguity in the mind of the counselee. It would be wise for us to keep a log of the times and places of counseling, especially if it involves more frequent meetings with the same person.
- 2.11 We shall familiarize ourselves with appropriate referrals for various situations.

### **3. Relationships with Youth**

We who are working with youth shall 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 shall consider a team approach to youth activities.
- 3.2 Physical contact with youth can often be misconstrued by both youth and other adults and shall only occur under appropriate public circumstances.
- 3.3 We shall refrain from the use of alcohol and never use any illegal drug when working with youth.
- 3.4 *Apart from emergencies*, providing overnight accommodations in rectories or personal residences for minors is not permitted.
- 3.5 Overnight trips alone with a minor are prohibited if not a member of their immediate family.
- 3.6 Inappropriate topics, vocabulary, recordings, films, games, computer software, or any other form of personal interaction, entertainment, or technology are not to be used with minors. Pornographic material is prohibited.
- 3.7 Taking photos or making recordings or drawings of minors while they are unclothed or dressing is not allowed.
- 3.8 Prior to any planned discussion or session on human sexuality, communication is to be sent to the parent/guardian.

### **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 for sexual purposes.
- 4.2 We who have made a commitment to a celibate lifestyle are called to witness this in all relationships.
- 4.3 We are all called to chastity according to our lifestyle as a priest, religious, single, or married person.

4.4 We shall use discretion in developing close relationships and avoid such relationships with minors. Such relationships can be misunderstood by both the participants and members of the Church community.

4.5 We must know, understand and follow diocesan policies and procedures concerning allegations of sexual misconduct, especially in relation to minors. Any allegations of sexual misconduct will be taken seriously and reported to the Diocese of New Ulm Sexual Misconduct Board. Diocesan procedures will be followed to ensure the rights of all involved.

4.6 We shall be knowledgeable of the State of Minnesota Child Abuse Regulations and know the proper reporting requirements.

## **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, religion, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, marital status, arrest or conviction record, veteran, disability status or any other status protected by law. We shall 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.

## **6. Confidentiality**

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

6.1 Parishioners and other persons who come to us for help shall feel free to engage in full disclosure of information and shall 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 shall 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 shall 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 shall 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 preserve the anonymity of individuals.

7.2 Diocesan policies and procedures shall be followed in responding to requests for parish sacramental records. (See Diocesan Policies: Worship and Spiritual Life, Baptism 2; Worship and Spiritual Life, Confirmation 1; Social Concerns, Family Life 1, page 3 (Marriage))

7.3 Parish financial records are to be held as confidential unless review is required by an appropriate governmental agency or office. Follow the records retention checklist dated August 1, 2002.

7.4 The records of individual contributions to the parish should be regarded as private and therefore shall be used only as necessary. They shall never be used as a requirement for receiving services or involvement in Church ministries.

## 8. Conflicts of Interest

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

8.1 Disclosure of all relevant factors can in some circumstances lessen the potential for a conflict of interest.

8.2 Conflicts of interest may also arise in a counseling 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 shall advise the parties that we can no longer provide counseling and refer them to other counselors.

8.3 After an allegation is made, no bishop or priest involved in an investigation may hear the sacramental confession of the accused.

## 9. Reporting Misconduct

We have a duty to report ethical or professional misconduct on the part of others.

9.1 In cases where there are clear indications of illegal actions by a pastoral leader, notification shall be made immediately to the proper civil authorities.

9.2 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 celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

## VI. Other Areas

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

### Resources

*Code of Ethics for Priests, Deacons, and Pastoral Ministers*, Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

*Code of Professional Responsibility* for members of the Association of Chicago Priests, Archdiocese of Chicago.