

DECREE

Standards of Clergy Conduct

Preamble

This decree establishes standards of clergy conduct in accordance with Article 6 and Article 12 of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People approved in November 2002 by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. These policies are also applicable, mutatis mutandis, to other persons in positions of trust in the diocese.

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

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

Standards

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

ALL CLERGY (AND, INSOFAR AS APPLICABLE, OTHER PERSONS IN POSITIONS OF TRUST) SHALL:

1. Ensure that their activities and interactions with other people, particularly youth, shall be as open as the situation allows, and shall avoid any interaction that has even the appearance of being secret or clandestine.

2. Make a clear distinction between the public and private areas in the rectory, and make the private areas generally inaccessible to visitors.
3. Meet with individuals only in the office of the church or public areas of the rectory, church or school, and, insofar as possible, never be alone with a minor, especially in circumstances which are concealed from public view (e.g., behind closed doors or in an automobile). The confessional or other location in which the Sacrament of Reconciliation is being properly celebrated according to the approved rite is exempt from this provision. Care must also be exercised whenever a minor requests a private, confidential conference.
4. Limit access to the priest's private quarters to the priest, rectory staff, other clergy and the priest's relatives.
5. Avoid spending excessive amounts of time with the same parishioners or families, or in the homes of the same families or persons. (While social interaction with laypersons is desirable, exceeding prudent boundaries can be misconstrued.)
6. Avoid forming purely personal relationships with minors. Young persons should not be the focus of an adult's social life, nor should adults share inappropriate personal information with youth or pursue purely social, recreational or interpersonal activities alone with them. They should not visit youth in their homes when parents or other responsible adults are not present.
7. Show broad interest in the children and youth of the parish or assignment but avoid showing preference or giving privileges to specific individuals, such as giving them money or gifts, asking them to accompany oneself on errands, asking them to perform services or help with jobs or tasks, outside of regular employment, excusing them from school or giving them access to the rectory.
8. Follow all diocesan regulations regarding youth activities and ensure that another reliable adult is present whenever supervising or chaperoning a minor or a group of minors, which may only occur in the context of events sponsored by the parish, school or diocese.
9. Remember you are role models who must always reflect the values of the Catholic Church in word and action in all circumstances, public and private, whether on or off duty. In particular, speak and act gently and respectfully and with discretion in any mode of communication, and avoid all coarse, demeaning or suggestive language, conversations or discussions.
10. Never request or permit young persons to accompany you on vacation trips or overnight or day trips.
11. Never invite young persons to a private residence or other private dwelling, be it a family home, vacation cottage, rental, condominium or any other place which is not then and there being used as a venue for a church-sponsored gathering.
12. Always strive to act with utmost professionalism, to develop a keen sense of propriety and

the ability to sense and avoid potentially problematic situations.

13. Behave in such a forthright and open way as if every action were being observed by an unseen third party.

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

+ JAMES A. GRIFFIN
Bishop of Columbus