

**Code of Ethical and Professional Behavior in Ministry
for Members of the Western Province**

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PREAMBLE

God has called the Western Province of the Congregation of the Mission to continue the mission of Jesus Christ evangelizing the poor, in the spirit and after the manner of the Congregation's founder, Saint Vincent de Paul. The members of the Province carry out this mission especially through ministry and other forms of service in the apostolates and works of the Province. Members of the Province, mindful at all times that they bear an awesome responsibility for the sake of the Gospel, must be exemplary. Their personal and professional conduct can and often does inspire and motivate others to a deeper faith and personal holiness. On the other hand, because of the great trust placed in the Congregation by God's people, the conduct of its members can also scandalize, undermine faith, and harm those whom the Church has entrusted to the Congregation's pastoral care.

Members of the Province are at all times to uphold Gospel and Vincentian values in their personal and professional conduct. They are to exemplify a deep commitment to the Church and to the Congregation. They are to respect the rights and inherent dignity of every other person. Particularly in the ministry or work entrusted to them, they are always to maintain a professional level of competence and performance.

Members are accountable for their behavior. In order to maintain the highest level of accountability, there must be a clear and unambiguous plan of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. The intent of this *Code of Ethical and Professional Behavior in Ministry* is to provide such normative standards of conduct for all members of the Western Province. While this Code is not exhaustive in the variety of situations specifically mentioned, the standards it sets out are to be considered normative in personal and professional/ministerial contexts.

Responsibility for adherence to this *Code of Ethical and Professional Behavior in Ministry* rests with the individual member. Members of the Province who violate this Code will be subject to appropriate remedial action by the competent authority in each case. Corrective action may take various forms depending on the specific nature and circumstance of the offense including but not limited to oral or written citation or even removal from ministry.

The following Code is presented in a matter-of-fact style, establishing one behavior as normative, ruling out another behavior as unprofessional. It is important to recall that behind such a Code stands a personal and vocational commitment by members to the mission of the Province and the Congregation. Members willingly choose to serve and minister, even in the face of possible risks. They undertake these tasks in response to an inner call from God. While the primary purpose of this Code is to set standards for offering professional service to others, hopefully such a Code also offers members a set of parameters within which they can minister and serve with peace of mind and surety that they are doing so professionally.

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

A. INTEGRITY

Members of the Province must always conduct themselves with integrity and honor.

1. Members are always to protect the interests and rights of those who are vulnerable, especially minors.
2. Explicitly sexual interaction or even sexually suggestive interaction with persons is never appropriate in the ministerial setting. Members are expected to conduct themselves chastely at all times.
3. Members are to protect the confidentiality and privacy rights of others at all times in accord with the circumstances of the situation.

4. Members have the duty to be responsible for their own spiritual, physical, mental and emotional health and to be conscious of the well-being of their fellow members.
 - a. Members are to be alert to the warning signs indicating potential problems with their own spiritual, physical, mental and emotional health. They similarly are to be alert to any such warning signs in the behaviors of their fellow members. Since healthy living supports healthy ministry and relationships, all signs of unhealthy living should be noted (inappropriate or illegal use of alcohol and drugs, overwork, inappropriate relationships, neglect of prayer, neglecting medical attention, use of pornography, etc.).
 - b. Members are to seek help whenever they notice any behavioral or emotional warning signs in their own professional and personal lives. They are to be ready to offer such help to their fellow members and to alert the leadership in the Province of the warning signs indicating potential problems for these fellow members.
 - c. Members are to attend to their own spiritual needs, at the heart of which are regular participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, frequent celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, and Spiritual Direction.
5. Members who serve as employers and supervisors are to treat justly other members, employees, and colleagues in the ministry in the day-to-day administrative operations of their ministries.
 - a. Personnel and other administrative decisions made by members are to meet the requirements of civil and canon law and are to be in accord with Catholic social teaching and this *Code of Ethical and Professional Behavior in Ministry*.
 - b. Members are not to use their position to exercise unreasonable or inappropriate power and authority.

B. APPROPRIATE CONDUCT FOR PASTORAL COUNSELING AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Members of the Province who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are to respect the rights and advance the welfare of each person with whom they have this type of relationship.

1. Members who provide counseling or spiritual direction are not to overstep the limits of their competence.
 - a. Any counseling conducted by members is to be within the parameters of the member's training or certification from a recognized association of peers or licensure from the State in which this counseling takes place.

- b. Members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are also to be diligent in referring clients to other qualified professionals when appropriate or necessary.
 - c. Members are urged to consult the professional guidelines and standards of similar groups such as the American Association of Pastoral Counseling.
 - d. Ordinarily members engaged in on-going counseling or spiritual direction should themselves be in a supervisory relationship.
 2. Members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are responsible for making sure that clients clearly understand that a counseling or spiritual direction relationship exists between the member and the client. Members are to keep this awareness to the forefront of their own consciousness also.
 - a. There is always to be a clear distinction between the ministry in which members are engaged and other specialized forms of clinical therapy.
 - b. Maintaining awareness that the relationship is one of pastoral counseling or spiritual direction is facilitated by making certain that sessions are conducted in appropriate settings, at appropriate times, and supported by a calendar record of such sessions. Pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are not to take place at times or at locations which could make the nature of the session ambiguous or misleading to the client or to the public. These sessions are not to be conducted in a member's private living quarters. If the community residence does not have parlors or similar spaces, the sessions are to be conducted elsewhere at a location which is appropriate.
 - c. Members who engage in on-going counseling or spiritual direction with minors must have the written consent of the parents or guardians for doing so beyond the initial session.
 - d. Members are to be especially attentive to situations involving vulnerable persons. (For the purpose of this policy, a vulnerable person is "any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offense." *Motu Proprio, Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, May 7, 2019, art 1, §2 b.)
3. Members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are to exercise great caution and consider as much as possible the consequences of entering into a counseling or spiritual direction relationship with someone with whom they have a pre-existing relationship (i.e., employee, professional colleague, friend or another pre-existing relationship).

4. Members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are not to audiotape or videotape these sessions except when in compliance with professional standards. The celebration of the Sacrament of Penance may never be recorded.
5. Members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction assume the full burden of responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear and appropriate boundaries in all counseling and counseling-related relationships. Only techniques sanctioned by professional associations are to be employed in these sessions.
 - a. Members are to avoid unnecessary social contact with clients during the course of counseling.
 - b. Physical contact of any kind (i.e., touching, hugging, holding) between members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction and the persons they counsel, especially during sessions, can easily be misconstrued and is to be avoided. This prohibition of physical contact applies also to the Sacrament of Penance.

C. CONFIDENTIALITY

Information disclosed to members of the Province in pastoral counseling or spiritual direction is to be held in strictest confidence.

1. Information obtained in the course of such sessions is to be safeguarded in confidence, except for compelling professional reasons or as required by law.
 - a. If there is clear and imminent danger to the client or to others, members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction may disclose to the necessary authorities only the information necessary to protect the parties affected and to prevent harm (e.g., a client that threatens harm to himself/herself or others).
 - b. Before such a disclosure is made, if feasible and unless prohibited by law or policy, members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are to inform the person being counseled about the disclosure and the potential consequences.¹
 - c. In the course of counseling a minor, if members discover there is a serious threat to the welfare of the minor and that communication of confidential information to a parent, legal guardian or to legal authorities is essential to the child's health and well-being, members are to attempt to secure written consent from the minor for the specific disclosure if such is appropriate under the circumstances. If consent is not obtained, only the information necessary to protect the health and well-being of the minor is to be disclosed.

¹ Appendix D, Counseling or Spiritual Direction Agreement form.

- d. Before such a disclosure is made, members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are urged to consult with persons knowledgeable in these matters.
2. At the outset of professional relationships of pastoral counseling or spiritual direction, members who provide such are to discuss and make clear with each client the nature of confidentiality and its limits should the client disclose information requiring the suspension of confidentiality.
3. The above obligations are independent of the sacramental seal of Confession which demands that under no circumstance whatsoever may there be any disclosure, even indirect disclosure, of information received through the Sacrament of Penance. c. 983,§1; c. 1388,§1.
4. Members who provide pastoral counseling or spiritual direction are to keep accurate even if minimal records and notes of sessions. Members are urged to seek out training for the appropriate manner in which to keep such records and notes.
5. Information acquired by members providing pastoral counseling or spiritual direction may be used in teaching, writing, preparation of homilies or other public presentations only when effective measures are taken to safeguard absolutely both the client's and any other person's identity and the confidentiality of the disclosures.
6. In conducting group sessions, members of the Province who provide counseling must ensure that no individual is subject to trauma or abuse resulting from such group interactions. The nature of the group and the parameters of confidentiality regarding all individual disclosures during group sessions are to be explained to participants at the outset. Such group interactions include pastoral counseling groups, faith formation groups, renew groups, etc.

D. CONDUCT WITH MINORS

Members of the Province, when interacting with minors, are to maintain open and trustworthy relationships with minors and ordinarily do so within the context of other adults being present. (For the purpose of this policy, minors are under the age of 18. [c. 97,§1]) Members assigned to apostolic works with minors (e.g., teaching in elementary schools) are to follow exactly the policies of the hiring institution regarding appropriate and professional conduct with minors.

1. Members are to be aware of their own and others' vulnerability when interacting alone with a minor. They are always to be mindful that minors, whether in a social or ministerial situation, are not to be considered as possessing the capacity to make free will and voluntary decisions.
2. When interacting with minors, members are to employ a team approach involving the

presence of another adult (except in the case of sacramental confession).

- a. Under ordinary circumstances, members are not to interact with minors if there are no other adults in the immediate vicinity.
 - b. In the case of sacramental confession with a minor, members are to avoid meeting in isolated locations.
3. Members are always to observe the following when interacting with minors. Exceptions may be made for family relations who are minors with the permission of or in the company of parents or guardians.
- a. When members have legitimate cause to meet alone with a minor, the office or room is to have a window or the door is to be left open.
 - b. Members are not to visit a minor's home without another adult present and without the expressed welcome of parents or guardians.
 - c. Members are not to drive alone with a minor on a regular basis or for any long distance without legitimate cause and permission of parents or guardians.
 - d. Members may participate in outings with minors (i.e., retreats, youth group trips, sports-related activities, overnight trips) provided there are the appropriate number of adults present at all times.
 - e. Members are not to share sleeping quarters with minors, unless accommodations are barrack-style with multiple adults and multiple minors in the same room, each individual having a separate bed.
 - f. Members are not to share locker rooms, shower rooms, and dressing rooms with minors. If doing so is necessary, another adult is to be present.
 - g. Members are not to accompany minors into restrooms without another adult present unless the circumstances truly require otherwise.
 - h. Members are not to invite minors alone into the private sections of the members' living quarters.
 - i) In the case of rectories, this includes the member's bedroom.
 - ii) In the case of community houses with apartment style living, this includes the member's apartment.
 - i. Members are not to invite minors alone to stay overnight in rectories or community houses.

If a truly grave cause requires such, members are to take extraordinary care to

protect all parties from all risk of harm and any appearance of impropriety, a team approach is to be employed in managing such situations, and minors are to stay in a separate guest room.

- j. Members are not to share private, overnight accommodations with any minors alone in a private residence, a hotel/motel room, or other facility not associated with the Province.
4. Members may engage in physical contact with minors only when such contact is appropriate, completely nonsexual, not in private, and could comfortably be carried out in the presence of and with the approval of the minor's parents or guardians.
 - a. Appropriate physical contact with minors may include the following:
 - asking permission before touching;
 - hugs;
 - pats on the shoulder or back;
 - handshakes;
 - "high fives" and hand slapping;
 - touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms;
 - arms around shoulders;
 - holding hands during prayer or when a minor is upset;
 - holding hands while walking with small children;
 - sitting close to small children;
 - kneeling or bending down for hugs with a small child;
 - holding or picking up children three years of age or younger.
 - b. Inappropriate physical contact with minors may include the following:
 - any form of unwanted touching;
 - full frontal hugs or "bear hugs";
 - touching buttocks, chests, or genital areas;
 - lying down or sleeping beside minors;
 - massages, whether by a member to a minor or a minor to a member;
 - patting children on the thigh, knee, or leg;
 - tickling, wrestling, or "rough housing";
 - touching or hugging from behind;
 - games involving inappropriate touching;
 - kisses on the mouth;
 - touching when in isolated areas such as bedrooms, staff-only areas, etc.
5. Members are to avoid possible emotional boundary violations with minors including but not limited to the following:
 - compliments that relate to physique or body development;
 - spending too much time with a minor;
 - calling too much;
 - excessive e-mailing and/or texting, participating in chat rooms with minors;

- getting involved in too many of the minor's activities;
 - acting too possessive;
 - initiating conversations about psycho-sexual development and sexual behaviors.
6. Members are to avoid involving minors in activities that his/her parents would not allow the child to do including but not limited to the following:
 - ridiculing the beliefs or rules of a minor's parents;
 - allowing a minor to do things against the wishes of the parents;
 - introducing and exposing a minor to sexually explicit or pornographic topics, vocabulary, music, recordings, films, games, web sites, computer software, print materials, or entertainment;
 - asking a minor to keep secrets from his/her parents.
 7. Members are not to provide drugs, alcohol or tobacco to minors.
 - a. Members are not to use alcohol when interacting with minors in professional and ministerial contexts.
 8. Members are not to use physical force or demeaning language in behavior management of minors.
 - a. Members may use physical force only when protecting themselves, another innocent party, or to prevent a minor from harming him/herself.
 9. Members are to refrain from giving expensive gifts to minors without the prior approval of the minor's parents or guardians and always in accord with the Congregation's regulations governing poverty permissions.
 10. Members are to refrain from accepting expensive gifts from minors without prior approval of the minor's parents or guardians and without the proper approval from the local Superior.

E. EXPLOITATION

Members of the Province are not to exploit another person, adult, vulnerable adult, or minor, violating a trust relationship.

1. Members are to avoid developing inappropriately intimate relationships with minors, with adult clients and parishioners, or with employees and volunteers.
2. Members are to maintain an awareness of an inherent power imbalance with others simply by reason of their trusted position within the Church, and they are to avoid taking advantage of that power imbalance in relationships with minors, adult clients and parishioners, or with employees and volunteers.

3. Members are to avoid exploiting another person, adult, vulnerable adult, or minor, for sexual gratification or intimacy.
4. Members are to be aware of their own susceptibility to seductive behavior and are to monitor the same lest they find themselves crossing appropriate boundaries in ministry and relationships in response to such seduction.

F. HARASSMENT

Members of the Province are not to engage in physical, psychological, sexual, written or verbal intimidation or harassment of clients, parishioners, employees or volunteers and are not to tolerate such intimidation or harassment by other members of the Province.

1. Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical, sexual, written or verbal behaviors, including but not limited to the following:
 - physical or mental abuse;
 - racial insults;
 - derogatory ethnic slurs;
 - unwelcome comments about clothing;
 - unwelcome touching or sexual advances;
 - sexual comments or sexual jokes;
 - requests for sexual favors used as a condition of employment, or to affect other personnel decisions such as promotion or compensation, or in the case of students grading and advancement in school;
 - display of offensive materials.
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 work environment.
3. Members are to take seriously allegations of harassment and are to report them immediately to the competent authority in the Province as well as in the particular agency, parish or school. The applicable personnel policy of the parish, school or agency is to be followed to protect the rights of all involved.
4. Specifically as regards employees of the Province, a more detailed description of the Province's commitment to providing a work environment that is free from all forms of discrimination and conduct that can be considered harassing, coercive, or disruptive, including sexual harassment, can be found in the Province's Employee Handbook.
5. Members are to maintain a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, sexual, written or verbal intimidation or harassment.
6. Specifically as regards members of the Province, see also the Province's policy *Allegations of Civil or Criminal Misconduct by Members of the Province* (December 7, 2021).

G. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Members of the Province in any ministerial or professional interaction are to avoid situations that present a conflict of interest or even the appearance of such.

1. Sound moral principles, uprightness, sincerity and transparent accountability are to be the hallmarks of conduct for all members.
2. Conflicts of interest may occur when the independent judgment of one providing pastoral counseling or spiritual direction is impaired by prior dealings, becoming personally involved, or becoming an advocate for one person against another. In these circumstances, members are to advise the client that they can no longer provide such services and refer the client to another counselor or spiritual director.

H. REPORTING ETHICAL OR PROFESSIONAL MISCONDUCT

Members of the Province have a duty to report their own ethical or professional misconduct as well as the ethical or professional misconduct of other members.

1. Members are to hold each other accountable for maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards. When there is an indication of civil or ecclesiastical illegal action by a member, notification of the competent authority in the Province must be notified immediately as well as the proper authorities.
2. When members are uncertain whether a situation or course of conduct violates this *Code of Ethical and Professional Behavior in Ministry* or other ethical or professional principles, members are to consult with the Province's Misconduct Administrator or with others who are knowledgeable about such issues.
3. When it appears that a member has violated this *Code of Ethical and Professional Behavior in Ministry* or other ethical or professional principles, the matter is to be reported to the Visitor or the Province's Misconduct Administrator.
4. Members are to take seriously allegations of sexual misconduct and are to report such allegations to the competent authority in the Province and follow all civil and ecclesiastical laws if the situations warrants it.
 - a. The norms of the Province's policy, *Sexual Abuse of Minors and Vulnerable Persons*, as well as any policies or procedures for the dioceses in which the Province ministers are to be followed faithfully.
 - b. For the state in which they live and work, members are to know and comply with all applicable civil laws regarding reporting allegations of sexual abuse of minors to public authorities.

II. ADMINISTRATION

Members are to sign and return to the Provincial the acknowledgment form for this policy. The signed acknowledgment will be maintained in the personnel file of the individual member.

III. POSTLUDE ON INTEGRAL LIVING

The preceding Code can only outline the general parameters of professional and acceptable behaviors in ministry and their violation. It cannot do that which is the work of every member, namely, to live a life of personal and professional integrity consistent with the Gospel, the Congregation, and the promises made by each member. To be faithful to one's promises is always demanding. To do so in a relativistic and secularized culture is especially challenging.

Members are urged to make use of all the means available in support of such integral living. Certainly confession, spiritual direction, daily meditation and prayer, and, above all, the Eucharist are ways of encountering the grace of God in Christ and of growing in self-control and the ability to live one's promises. So too are community itself and common life together as well as the experience of apostolic outreach. All can become supports in living with integrity.

Fraternal correction is important when a fellow member is perceived to be in danger because of his personal habits, relationships or dereliction. To do so in a direct and uncompromising way can be difficult, but it is proof of a deep commitment to loving each other in truth and courage.

Living celibate chastity with full integrity can be particularly challenging, and yet members are called to do so and have pledged to be an example of such in all relationships at all times. Special care must be taken to guard against any work, deed or suggestion that would be a source of scandal. Personal attentiveness must be given to the particular dangers imposed by pornography and especially Internet and televised pornography.

This policy is to be reviewed every three years.

Reviewed: February 4, 2021
Revisions approved: December 7, 2021

APPENDIX A

Sources

Source acknowledgment: Sections II, D, 4 through II, D, 6 listing appropriate and inappropriate physical contact with minors, possible emotional boundary violations, and parental boundary violations are taken from materials produced by *Praesidium, Inc.*

Source acknowledgment: Parts of the Postlude on Integral Living are taken from the 1 August 2005 *Code of Conduct* for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, NM.

APPENDIX B

Contact Information

To report allegations of sexual abuse of a minor by a member of the Western Province, contact:

- Any local law official and/or the local Department of Child and Family Services
- The Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-422-4453
- The Misconduct Administrator of the Western Province: 1-314-344-1184
- The Provincial Superior of the Western Province: 1-314-344-1184

To learn more about the prevention and treatment of child abuse, see the Childhelp website: <http://www.childhelp.org>

To report allegations of sexual misconduct or unprofessional behavior by a member of the Western Province towards an adult, contact:

- The Misconduct Administrator of the Western Province: 1-314-344-1184
- The Provincial Superior of the Western Province: 1-314-344-1184

APPENDIX C

Form for Members of the Western Province Acknowledging this Policy

I, the undersigned, hereby acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Western Province's policy *Code of Ethical and Professional Behavior in Ministry for Members of the Western Province*, approved (December 2021). I acknowledge that I have read the policy, understand its meaning, and agree to observe its directives as stated. I understand that failure to observe these directives will result in corrective action by the authority of the Province including but not limited to oral or written citation or even removal from ministry. I also understand that this acknowledgment will be kept in my personnel file.

Date

Signature

Printed name

APPENDIX D

Counseling or Spiritual Direction Agreement Form

Confidentiality means that a pastoral minister has a responsibility to safeguard information obtained during counseling or spiritual direction. All identifying information about your assessment and treatment is kept confidential, except as mandated by law. You must sign a release of information before any information about you is given to anyone, except as mandated by law.

In certain situations, mental health professionals and pastoral counselors are required by law to reveal information obtained during counseling and spiritual direction to other persons or agencies without your consent. In such situations, the pastoral minister is not required to inform you of his actions. Please note the following exceptions to confidentiality:

- Confidentiality does not apply to cases of suspected abuse/neglect of children or vulnerable adults.
- Confidentiality does not apply to cases of immediate possible harm to self or others.
- A mental health professional may disclose confidential information in proceedings brought by a client against the professional.
- Confidentiality may not apply in cases involving legal proceedings affecting the parent-child relationship.
- Confidentiality may not apply to cases involving a minor child. In such cases, the mental health professional may advise a parent, managing conservator or guardian of a minor, with or without minor's consent, of the treatment needed by or given to the minor.

I have read the above information and I understand my rights as a client.

Client's Signature

Date

Pastoral Minister's Signature

Date