



Diocese of Palm Beach

***CODE OF PASTORAL CONDUCT
FOR ALL EMPLOYEES OF THE DIOCESE
OF PALM BEACH AT THE PARISHES,
SCHOOLS, PASTORAL CENTER AND
AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS***

Article 1

Purpose

§1. The purpose of this Code is to establish uniform standards of professional, ethical, responsible, and Christian conduct for employees of the Diocese of Palm Beach.

§2. In particular, this Code is intended to:

- 1° protect the dignity, safety, and well-being of all persons served by the Church;
- 2° establish and preserve appropriate professional and ministerial boundaries;
- 3° safeguard minors and vulnerable persons;
- 4° prevent abuse, sexual misconduct, harassment, exploitation, retaliation, financial misconduct, and other inappropriate behavior;
- 5° promote transparency, accountability, and responsible stewardship;
- 6° establish clear obligations concerning the reporting of suspected misconduct; and
- 7° preserve the integrity and credibility of the ecclesial mission of the Diocese of Palm Beach.

Article 2

Scope and Applicability

§1. This Code applies to all employees of the Diocese of Palm Beach and, according to the governance applicable to each entity, to employees of its parishes, schools, offices, ministries, agencies, institutions, cemeteries, foundations, and other affiliated ecclesiastical entities.

§2. The Code applies regardless of an employee's position, title, seniority, employment classification, or whether the employee's responsibilities are primarily pastoral, educational, administrative, professional, financial, technical, custodial, or otherwise.

§3. Compliance with this Code constitutes a condition of employment.

Article 3

Applicable Laws and Policies

§1. Employees shall observe this Code together with:

- 1° applicable civil law;
- 2° the universal and particular law of the Catholic Church, insofar as applicable;
- 3° diocesan personnel policies;
- 4° diocesan safeguarding and safe-environment policies;
- 5° applicable parish, school, institutional, and departmental policies;
- 6° applicable professional licensing and ethical requirements; and
- 7° other policies, protocols, decrees, regulations, or directives legitimately issued by competent diocesan authority.

§2. Where applicable law or another binding diocesan norm imposes a more stringent requirement than this Code, the more stringent requirement shall govern.

Article 4

General Standards of Professional Conduct

§1. Employees shall conduct themselves with honesty, integrity, professionalism, prudence, charity, and respect for the dignity of every person.

§2. Employees shall faithfully perform the responsibilities entrusted to them and shall act within the limits of their position, authority, professional competence, training, licensure, and certification.

§3. Employees shall comply with lawful directives issued by their supervisors and competent ecclesiastical authorities.

§4. Employees shall foster a professional environment characterized by respect, collaboration, accountability, appropriate communication, and concern for the common good.

§5. Employees shall treat parishioners, students, parents, coworkers, clergy, religious, volunteers, visitors, vendors, beneficiaries of diocesan services, and members of the public with dignity and respect.

§6. Employees shall promptly seek appropriate assistance whenever a situation exceeds their professional competence, authority, qualifications, or assigned responsibilities.

Article 5

Positions of Trust and Authority

§1. Employees shall recognize that employment by the Church frequently entails a relationship of trust and, in certain circumstances, an imbalance of authority or influence.

§2. No employee shall use his or her employment, position, authority, professional relationship, pastoral influence, or association with the Church to intimidate, manipulate, exploit, coerce, deceive, or improperly influence another person.

§3. No relationship of trust, authority, dependency, supervision, pastoral care, counseling, education, or professional responsibility shall be exploited for sexual, emotional, financial, political, or other improper personal advantage.

§4. Employees shall maintain appropriate professional and interpersonal boundaries at all times.

Article 6

Respectful Workplace Conduct

§1. Every employee shall contribute to a professional environment in which the dignity and legitimate rights of every person are respected.

§2. Employees shall not engage in:

1° sexual harassment;

2° unlawful discrimination;

3° bullying;

4° intimidation;

5° threats;

6° humiliation or degradation;

7° stalking;

8° coercion;

9° retaliation;

10° physical violence; or

11° other abusive conduct incompatible with a safe and professional workplace.

§3. Employees shall not engage in sexually suggestive comments, gestures, jokes, communications, images, or behavior in the workplace or in connection with diocesan employment.

§4. Employees shall refrain from seriously offensive, degrading, threatening, or abusive language in the performance of their duties.

§5. Professional disagreements shall be addressed through appropriate supervisory, administrative, pastoral, or human-resources channels.

Article 7

Professional and Pastoral Boundaries

§1. Employees shall maintain boundaries appropriate to their professional, pastoral, educational, supervisory, charitable, or ministerial relationship with others.

§2. Employees shall not exploit persons who seek pastoral assistance, counseling, education, charitable assistance, employment assistance, spiritual support, or other services from the Church.

§3. Employees providing pastoral, educational, social, professional, or other services shall act within the scope of their competence and assigned responsibilities.

§4. Appropriate referrals shall be made whenever a person's needs exceed the employee's competence, qualifications, or responsibilities.

§5. Employees shall avoid inappropriate emotional dependency, excessive familiarity, improper favoritism, or relationships that compromise, or could reasonably appear to compromise, professional judgment or appropriate boundaries.

Article 8

Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Persons

§1. The Diocese of Palm Beach maintains zero tolerance for the sexual abuse or exploitation of minors and vulnerable persons.

§2. For purposes of this Code, a **minor** is a person under eighteen years of age.

§3. For purposes of this Code, a **vulnerable person** includes a person who, because of age, disability, illness, impairment, dependency, deprivation of liberty, or other circumstances, may have a diminished ability to protect himself or herself from abuse, exploitation, or coercion, according to applicable law and diocesan policy.

§4. Employees who work with minors or vulnerable persons occupy positions of particular trust and shall exercise heightened prudence, vigilance, and responsibility.

§5. Employees shall comply with all diocesan safe-environment requirements, including those concerning:

- 1° background screening;
- 2° safe-environment training;
- 3° supervision;
- 4° transportation;
- 5° overnight activities;
- 6° electronic communications;
- 7° photography and media;
- 8° physical contact;
- 9° reporting; and
- 10° access to diocesan facilities.

§6. Whenever reasonably possible, interactions with minors shall occur in observable and interruptible environments.

Article 9

Prohibited Conduct Involving Minors and Vulnerable Persons

§1. No employee shall:

- 1° engage in sexual activity or sexual contact with a minor or vulnerable person;
- 2° sexually abuse or exploit a minor or vulnerable person;
- 3° engage in grooming behavior;
- 4° possess, produce, distribute, request, transmit, or access child sexual abuse material;
- 5° expose a minor to pornography or sexually explicit material;
- 6° engage in inappropriate sexualized conversations with a minor;
- 7° strike, slap, shake, spank, or otherwise inflict physical punishment upon a minor;
- 8° humiliate, ridicule, threaten, or degrade a minor;
- 9° employ disciplinary methods intended to frighten or humiliate a minor;
- 10° provide alcohol, illegal drugs, controlled substances, or other prohibited substances to a minor;
- 11° consume alcohol or use impairing substances while responsible for supervising minors;
- 12° give inappropriate or extravagant gifts intended to foster secrecy, dependency, or improper favoritism; or
- 13° encourage a minor to conceal from a parent, legal guardian, or other responsible adult communications, conduct, gifts, meetings, or other aspects of the employee's relationship with the minor.

§2. An employee who encounters inappropriate sexualized behavior initiated by a minor or vulnerable person shall maintain appropriate boundaries and promptly report the matter through the appropriate supervisory or safeguarding channels.

Article 10

Sexual Misconduct and Exploitation

§1. Employees shall respect the dignity and bodily integrity of every person.

§2. Sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, grooming, and other forms of sexual misconduct are prohibited.

§3. No employee shall use a position of authority, supervision, trust, pastoral influence, professional responsibility, or dependency to obtain or attempt to obtain sexual contact, sexual favors, romantic involvement, or other inappropriate personal benefits.

§4. Employees shall exercise particular prudence whenever a substantial imbalance of authority, dependency, counseling, supervision, pastoral care, or professional responsibility exists.

§5. Employees shall comply with all diocesan policies governing sexual misconduct, harassment, safeguarding, and professional boundaries.

Article 11

Electronic Communications and Social Media

§1. Electronic communications undertaken in connection with diocesan employment shall be professional and consistent with diocesan policy.

§2. Employees communicating electronically with minors for legitimate educational, pastoral, athletic, or programmatic purposes shall use methods authorized by the Diocese or the respective parish, school, or institution.

§3. Communications with minors shall be transparent, professional, related to legitimate activities, and conducted in accordance with applicable parental-consent and safe-environment requirements.

§4. Employees shall not use disappearing-message applications, secret accounts, anonymous accounts, or other methods for the purpose of concealing inappropriate communications with minors or vulnerable persons.

§5. Employees shall not send, request, possess, access, display, or distribute pornographic or sexually explicit material using diocesan property, accounts, devices, networks, or systems.

§6. Employees shall never use diocesan resources to access, possess, produce, or distribute child sexual abuse material.

§7. Employees shall not photograph, record, livestream, publish, or distribute images of minors except in accordance with diocesan policy and applicable parental or legal-guardian authorization.

§8. Employees shall exercise prudence in personal social-media activity whenever such activity could reasonably affect their professional responsibilities, the safety or privacy of others, or the mission and legitimate interests of the Church.

Article 12

Confidentiality, Privacy, and Records

§1. Employees shall safeguard confidential and sensitive information obtained through their employment.

§2. Confidential information shall be accessed, used, disclosed, copied, transmitted, or retained only for legitimate professional purposes and by persons authorized to do so.

§3. Confidential information includes, according to the circumstances, personnel, student, educational, health, financial, donor, safeguarding, investigative, legal, pastoral, and personally identifying information.

§4. Employees shall comply with applicable laws and diocesan policies concerning confidentiality, privacy, cybersecurity, records retention, and data protection.

§5. No employee shall improperly destroy, alter, conceal, falsify, or remove a record for the purpose of obstructing an investigation, audit, canonical or civil proceeding, governmental inquiry, or legitimate diocesan review.

§6. The obligation to protect confidential information continues after employment terminates, subject to applicable law.

§7. Nothing in this Article shall prohibit or discourage a report required or protected by civil law or diocesan safeguarding policy.

Article 13

Financial Integrity and Stewardship

§1. Employees shall exercise responsible stewardship over all ecclesiastical goods, funds, donations, property, equipment, and resources entrusted to them.

§2. Employees shall comply with diocesan financial policies, accounting controls, authorization requirements, and audit procedures.

§3. No employee shall:

1° steal or misappropriate Church property;

2° embezzle funds;

- 3° falsify financial records;
- 4° conceal financial transactions;
- 5° make unauthorized transfers or expenditures;
- 6° misuse credit cards, bank accounts, purchasing authority, or reimbursement systems;
- 7° divert donations from their designated purposes;
- 8° use Church property for unauthorized personal benefit;
- 9° participate in fraudulent transactions; or
- 10° knowingly assist another person in any such conduct.

§4. Suspected fraud, theft, embezzlement, misappropriation, significant financial irregularities, or other financial misconduct shall be promptly reported.

Article 14

Conflicts of Interest and Gifts

§1. Employees shall avoid actual or apparent conflicts between their personal interests and their professional responsibilities.

§2. Any actual, potential, or reasonably perceived conflict of interest shall be disclosed to the appropriate authority.

§3. Employees shall not use their position, title, confidential information, purchasing authority, access, or influence for improper personal financial benefit or for the improper benefit of relatives, friends, associates, or businesses in which they have an interest.

§4. Employees shall not solicit or accept gifts, payments, favors, loans, services, or benefits when acceptance could reasonably be understood as influencing professional judgment or official action.

§5. Gifts of nominal value customarily associated with legitimate expressions of gratitude or hospitality may be accepted when permitted by diocesan policy and when they create no actual or apparent conflict of interest.

§6. Without the Ordinary's written permission, employees must not act as executors or trustees of parishioners' estates.

Article 15

Use of Diocesan Property and Technology

§1. Diocesan property and resources shall be used responsibly and principally for authorized ecclesiastical, educational, charitable, administrative, or professional purposes.

§2. Employees shall protect diocesan property against loss, theft, damage, unauthorized access, and misuse.

§3. Employees shall comply with diocesan policies concerning computers, telephones, vehicles, credit cards, facilities, keys, passwords, networks, databases, intellectual property, and other resources.

§4. Employees shall not use diocesan property, resources, or technology for unlawful activity or activity materially contrary to diocesan policy.

§5. Employees shall have no expectation of privacy in diocesan-owned devices, accounts, networks, or information systems, subject to applicable law and diocesan policy.

Article 16

Alcohol, Drugs, and Impairment

§1. Employees shall not report to work or perform professional responsibilities while impaired by alcohol, illegal drugs, or another substance that renders them unable to perform their duties safely and competently. Employees must not consume alcohol during regular working (duty) hours.

§2. The possession, distribution, manufacture, or unlawful use of controlled substances on diocesan property or during diocesan activities is prohibited.

§3. Employees responsible for minors or vulnerable persons shall not consume alcohol while exercising such supervision.

§4. Nothing herein prohibits the lawful and responsible use of prescription or over-the-counter medication; however, employees remain responsible for ensuring their ability to perform their duties safely.

Article 17

Safety, Violence, and Threats

§1. Employees shall contribute to maintaining safe workplaces, schools, parishes, institutions, and ministries.

§2. Violence, credible threats of violence, intimidation, and conduct creating an unreasonable risk of physical harm are prohibited.

§3. Employees shall promptly report serious threats, dangerous conduct, or significant safety concerns to the appropriate authority and, whenever required by the circumstances, to civil law-enforcement or emergency authorities.

§4. Employees shall comply with diocesan policies and applicable civil law concerning weapons on diocesan property and at diocesan activities.

Article 18

Duty to Report

§1. Employees have an affirmative obligation to report suspected abuse, exploitation, serious misconduct, financial malfeasance, or other conduct that may place another person or the Church at substantial risk.

§2. Whenever civil law requires a report to law-enforcement, child-protection, adult-protection, or another governmental authority, the employee shall make such report promptly and in accordance with law.

§3. An internal report to the Diocese does not substitute for a report to civil authorities whenever civil law requires such a report.

§4. Employees shall comply with all diocesan policies governing the reporting of suspected abuse or neglect of minors or vulnerable persons.

§5. Allegations of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, financial malfeasance, or other serious misconduct shall also be reported through the reporting mechanisms established by the Diocese of Palm Beach.

§6. When alleged misconduct involves an employee's immediate supervisor, the employee shall not be required to report the matter to that supervisor and may report directly to another competent diocesan authority or through the Diocese's designated reporting mechanism.

§7. Nothing in this Code shall prevent any person from contacting civil law-enforcement authorities or another competent governmental agency directly.

§8. Employees shall not knowingly make false or malicious allegations.

§9. A report made in good faith shall not constitute a violation of this Code merely because the allegation is subsequently determined to be unsubstantiated.

Article 19

Cooperation with Investigations and Audits

§1. Employees shall cooperate truthfully and in good faith with duly authorized diocesan investigations, safeguarding reviews, audits, administrative inquiries, and other legitimate institutional processes, subject to applicable civil law.

§2. No employee shall:

1° knowingly provide false or materially misleading information;

2° conceal material information;

3° improperly destroy, alter, conceal, or fabricate evidence;

4° improperly influence, threaten, or intimidate a witness;

5° obstruct or interfere with a legitimate investigation;

6° encourage another person to withhold or falsify information; or

7° retaliate against a person because of his or her participation in an investigation.

§3. Nothing in this Article shall be interpreted as limiting any right provided by applicable civil law.

Article 20

Prohibition of Retaliation

§1. Retaliation against any person who makes a good-faith report of suspected abuse, misconduct, financial irregularity, safety concerns, or violations of law or diocesan policy is prohibited.

§2. Retaliation against any person who participates in good faith in an investigation, audit, safeguarding review, or other authorized inquiry is likewise prohibited.

§3. Prohibited retaliation includes, but is not limited to, termination, demotion, harassment, intimidation, threats, unjustified disciplinary action, adverse scheduling, exclusion, or other materially adverse treatment undertaken because a person made a protected report or participated in a protected process.

§4. Suspected retaliation shall itself be reported and may constitute an independent violation of this Code.

Article 21

Background Screening and Required Training

§1. Employees shall submit to background screening whenever required by civil law or diocesan policy.

§2. Employees shall timely complete all safe-environment, professional-conduct, workplace, cybersecurity, financial, or other training required for their position.

§3. Employees shall timely renew all certifications, licenses, screenings, and training required for the performance of their responsibilities.

§4. Employees shall make disclosures concerning their eligibility or fitness to perform assigned responsibilities whenever such disclosure is required by applicable law or diocesan policy.

Article 22

Responsibilities of Supervisors

§1. Employees exercising supervisory or managerial authority bear a particular responsibility to promote and enforce compliance with this Code.

§2. Supervisors shall:

1° model appropriate professional conduct;

2° respond appropriately to reports or warning signs of misconduct;

3° promptly refer safeguarding, legal, financial, personnel, or other serious concerns to the appropriate diocesan authority;

4° protect employees from prohibited retaliation;

5° respect confidentiality to the extent reasonably possible and legally permissible; and

6° refrain from suppressing, concealing, discouraging, or improperly handling reports of misconduct.

§3. No supervisor shall instruct, pressure, threaten, or otherwise attempt to prevent an employee from making a report required by law or diocesan policy.

Article 23

Violations and Disciplinary Measures

§1. A violation of this Code may result in corrective or disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, in accordance with applicable civil law and diocesan personnel policies.

§2. Conduct violating this Code may, when appropriate, also be reported or referred to law-enforcement authorities, child-protection or adult-protection authorities, professional licensing bodies, insurance carriers, ecclesiastical authorities, or other competent agencies.

§3. The Diocese may adopt immediate protective, precautionary, or administrative measures when reasonably necessary to safeguard persons, preserve evidence, protect ecclesiastical property, maintain institutional integrity, or permit an investigation to proceed.

§4. A precautionary or administrative measure shall not, by itself, constitute a determination that misconduct has occurred.

§5. Nothing in this Code creates a contractual right to continued employment or alters the employment relationship except as expressly required by applicable law.

Article 24

Interpretation and Administration

§1. This Code establishes minimum standards of conduct and is not intended to anticipate every circumstance that may arise.

§2. Employees shall exercise sound professional judgment consistent with the letter, principles, purposes, and spirit of this Code.

§3. Questions concerning the interpretation or application of this Code shall be referred to the competent diocesan authority.

§4. The Diocese of Palm Beach reserves the right to interpret, amend, supplement, or replace this Code in accordance with applicable law.

Article 25

Employee Acknowledgment

§1. Every employee shall acknowledge receipt of this Code in the manner established by the Diocese of Palm Beach.

§2. By signing or electronically acknowledging the Code, the employee confirms that he or she:

1° has received or been provided access to the Code;

2° is responsible for reading and understanding its provisions;

3° agrees to comply with the standards established herein;

4° understands the obligation to report suspected misconduct as required by civil law and diocesan policy;

5° understands that violations may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment; and

6° agrees to complete all required training and screening associated with his or her employment.

Article 26

Virtus Training

§1. Every employee required by diocesan policy to observe the norms and provisions of this Code shall commit to undergo *Virtus Training* and to comply regularly with all *Virtus Training* activities and follow-up procedures and duties. Negligence or violation of this norm shall be subject to

immediate suspension to be imposed by the competent authority after having heard the Chief Safeguarding Officer and after a written warning.