

# CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CLERGY

ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF MONTREAL

VERSION 1.0

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## I) PREAMBLE

Bishops, priests, and deacons (transitional and permanent), hereinafter “clergy” or “as members of the clergy”, are called to uphold Christian values and conduct appropriate to their state of life. This Code of Conduct for Clergy establishes standards of conduct in pastoral contexts. It applies to all members of the clergy living and serving in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal, as well as seminarians and candidates for the permanent diaconate preparing for ordination.

## II) RESPONSIBILITY

The public and private conduct of members of the clergy has the potential to inspire and encourage the faithful, but also to scandalize them and undermine the faith of those entrusted to their pastoral care. Clergy must remain mindful at all times of the sacred responsibilities inherent in their vocation and of the trust placed in them by those to whom they minister.

## III) SANCTIONS

Responsibility for compliance with the Code of Conduct for Clergy rests with each individual. Members of the clergy who fail to comply with this Code of Conduct shall be subject to corrective measures imposed by ecclesiastical authorities. Corrective measures may take various canonical forms—ranging from a verbal warning or a monition to revocation from ministry—depending on the nature and circumstances of the offense, the gravity of the fault committed, and the extent of harm caused.

## IV) SACRAMENTAL SEAL

The Code of Conduct establishes standards for ministry but **does not override the sacramental seal**. Under **no circumstances** may information received through the Sacrament of Confession be disclosed, directly or indirectly.

## V) STANDARDS

### 1. CLERGY WELL-BEING

- 1.1. Members of the clergy are responsible for maintaining their spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health to serve and minister conscientiously and effectively.
- 1.2. Members of the clergy must engage in ongoing training annually to further their development, for up to five days.
- 1.3. Members of the clergy are entitled to thirty-one (31) days of annual vacation and five (5) consecutive days of spiritual retreat.
- 1.4. Members of the clergy must remain alert to signs of potential spiritual, physical, psychological, social, or emotional difficulties.
- 1.5. Members of the clergy must seek help immediately upon recognizing behavioural or emotional warning signs affecting their personal or relational life.
- 1.6. Members of the clergy struggling with addiction (e.g. gambling, internet, alcohol, drugs, pornography, or others) may request assistance from the Ordinary.
- 1.7. Members of the clergy are responsible for addressing their spiritual needs; support from a spiritual director is strongly recommended.
- 1.8. Except as provided in 1.2 and 1.3, members of the clergy may not leave the Archdiocese without prior authorization from the Ordinary.
- 1.9. Members of the clergy intending to exercise ministry outside the Archdiocese must provide a recent letter of suitability or equivalent documentation.

## 2. CONDUCT AS SPIRITUAL ADVISORS (INDIVIDUAL)

- 2.1. Members of the clergy acting as spiritual advisors individually must:
  1. respect the rights and promote the well-being of each person;
  2. provide counsel and spiritual accompaniment consistent with their training, knowledge, and certification;
  3. carefully consider potential consequences before entering into a spiritual accompaniment relationship with someone with whom they already have another relationship (e.g., employee, professional colleague, friend, or family member);
  4. exercise judgement and prudence regarding any physical contact (e.g., touch, hug, embrace) with those they counsel or accompany spiritually. Any physical gesture or contact must be clearly non-sexual

in nature and perceived by all as non-sexual.

- 2.2. When ministering as individual spiritual advisors, clergy must comply with this Code of Conduct and must not:
  1. exceed their competence in counselling situations and must refer individuals to other professionals when appropriate;
  2. record encounters in which they exercise their role on any digital or electronic format (e.g., audio, video, digital application);
  3. engage in intimate relationships with anyone, particularly with those they accompany spiritually or have previously accompanied. This prohibition includes both consensual and non-consensual contact, cohabitation, romantic dating, forced physical contact, and inappropriate sexual gestures or comments.

2.3. Meetings must take place at appropriate times and locations.

1. No meeting may occur in the clergy member's private living quarters. The meeting may take place in open or glass-partitioned spaces, respecting necessary discretion.
2. Ensure the setting cannot create confusion regarding the nature of the relationship between the parties concerned.

2.4. Members of the clergy bear full responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear and appropriate boundaries, as outlined above, in all spiritual accompaniment relationships and advisory roles to prevent misunderstandings.

### 3. CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION

3.1. Information disclosed to a member of the clergy during a

personal encounter of counselling, assistance, or individual spiritual direction must be kept strictly confidential. Confidentiality means maintaining the reserved character of the information heard.

3.2. The sacramental seal of confession imposes absolute secrecy, a formal prohibition for the priest to reveal, directly or indirectly, what he has heard. Breach of this obligation constitutes an offense reserved to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. Paragraphs 3.3 to 3.6 do not affect the obligation to observe sacramental secrecy.

3.3. Information obtained during meetings is confidential and may be disclosed only for compelling professional reasons if required by law or with the consent of the person, while respecting the obligation in 3.2.

- 3.4. In cases of clear and imminent danger to the person or to others, disclosure by a member of the clergy is limited to information necessary to protect the parties concerned and prevent harm.
- 3.5. Whenever possible, before disclosing information, a member of the clergy must inform the counselled person of the disclosure and its possible consequences.
- 3.6. When ministering to or accompanying a minor, if a member of the clergy becomes aware of a serious threat to the minor's well-being, and that disclosure of confidential information to a parent, legal guardian, or representative of the Youth Protection Directorate is necessary to safeguard the minor's health and welfare, the clergy member must disclose only the information necessary to protect the minor. Advice may be

sought from the Ombudsman regarding obligations and procedures to follow.

- 3.7. In cases of exception outlined in paragraphs 3.3 to 3.6, a clergy member must maintain a record of the content of meetings.

#### **4. CONDUCT WITH MINORS AND VULNERABLE PERSONS**

- 4.1. "Minors" = persons under 18 years old; those with impaired reason are treated as minors.
- 4.2. "Vulnerable persons" = any person in a state of infirmity, with physical, psychological, intellectual, or freedom limitations that impair understanding, will, or resistance to offense. Such persons are considered vulnerable, given their fragility, their inability to adequately protect themselves, and their continued risk of harm or injury.

4.3. “Abuse” refers to physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual behaviour by a member of the clergy that causes a person to fear for their physical, psychological, spiritual, financial, or social safety and well-being, and of which the alleged abuser knew or reasonably ought to have known that it would cause such fear.

4.4. Any member of the clergy who works with a minor or vulnerable person must ensure interactions are always appropriate, honest, open, and trustworthy, avoiding any perception of impropriety.

4.5. A member of the clergy must recognize their own vulnerability and that of others when interacting alone with one or more minors or vulnerable persons. They must prioritize a team-based approach (a minimum of two adults present) and use open or glassed-in spaces when conducting activities with minors or vulnerable persons.

4.6. Physical contact with minors or vulnerable persons can be misinterpreted. Such contact must never occur in private. All physical contact must be non-sexual and appropriate in nature.

4.7. The clergy member must refrain at all times from consuming alcohol, be they legal or illegal, when working with minors or vulnerable persons.

4.8. Member of the clergy must never hear the confession of a minor or vulnerable person in a private, closed location, except in a confessional designated for that purpose.

4.9. A member of the clergy must not be alone in a closed space with one or several minors or vulnerable persons.

4.10. A clergy member must not, when alone, share accommodations with minors or vulnerable persons overnight. This prohibition applies to all locations, including Church-owned residences, private homes, hotel rooms, campsites, and any other place without supervision by another adult.

4.11. In rare emergency situations, where accommodation is necessary for the health and well-being of a minor or vulnerable person, the competent authority (Episcopal Vicar of the region) may authorize accommodation in a Church-owned facility, ensuring the presence of another adult. Clergy member must take extraordinary precautions to protect all parties from any appearance of impropriety and from any risk of harm.

## 5. ABUSE IN MINISTERIAL RELATIONSHIPS

5.1. Abuse in ministerial relationships is understood to include any abuse of power, spiritual abuse, financial abuse, or breach of trust or authority related to a ministerial relationship.

5.2. A member of the clergy must never betray the trust placed in him by the faith community, whether for personal gain, sexual intimacy, or any other reason.

5.3. Member of the clergy must refrain from possessing, consuming, or using illegal drugs or substances.

## 6. SEXUAL CONDUCT

6.1. Member of the clergy who has committed to living in celibacy shall exemplify chastity in all relationships at all times. He must not engage in romantic or sexual relationships, whether occasional or ongoing, with persons of any gender, nor cohabit in a marital-like relationship.

- 6.2. Sexual exploitation of any person is prohibited, regardless of age.
- 6.3. Allegations of sexual misconduct must be taken seriously and reported to the appropriate parties (Ombudsman and superior), as well as to civil authorities (Director of Youth Protection – DYP) if the allegation involves a minor.
- 6.4. The procedures of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal must be followed to protect the rights of all persons involved.
- 6.5. A member of the clergy must review and be familiar with the regulations concerning the abuse of children or minors and the mandatory reporting requirements in the province of Quebec, including those established under the Youth Protection Act.

- 6.6. A clergy member must know and comply with all rules and policies of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal regarding sexual misconduct.

## 7. HARASSMENT

- 7.1. A member of the clergy must not engage in physical, psychological, written, or verbal harassment, nor acts of violence toward staff, volunteers, or parishioners. He must not tolerate such harassment by other Church personnel or volunteers, whether witnessed or reported. A professional, respectful, and safe environment must be provided to all.
- 7.2. Harassment encompasses a wide range of physical, written, or verbal behaviours, including, but not limited to:
  1. physical or psychological abuse through gestures, verbal, or written communication;

2. racially offensive remarks;

3. ethnically or culturally offensive remarks;

4. sexual advances or inappropriate touching;

5. sexually explicit comments or jokes;

6. requests for sexual favours used as a condition of employment or to influence personnel decisions, such as promotion or remuneration.

7.3. Harassment may take the form of a single, severe incident or persistent behaviour, intended or resulting in a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work environment.

7.4. Allegations of harassment must be taken seriously and reported to the Ombudsman.

7.5. Procedures of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal, as described in the Policy on Countering All Forms of Harassment in the Institutions of the Archdiocese, shall be followed to protect the rights of each individual.

## 8. ADMINISTRATION

8.1. Clergy decisions regarding personnel and other administrative matters must comply with civil and canon law obligations and reflect the Catholic spirit, Catholic social teaching, and this Code of Conduct.

8.2. Clergy must not use their position to exercise unreasonable or inappropriate power or authority, or to obtain personal advantage or benefit.

8.3. A member of the clergy must read and comply *Policy on Conditions for Working in the Archdiocese of Montreal*.

8.4. Clergy member must complete the diocesan ***Focus on Victims*** (*Virage Victimes d'Abus – VVA*) training program in order to exercise ministry in the Archdiocese of Montreal.

8.5. Member of the clergy must undergo a criminal background check in accordance with the *Policy on Conditions for Working in the Archdiocese of Montreal*.

8.6. Member of the clergy responsible for volunteers must ensure that these volunteers read the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the various ecclesial environments and the *Policy on Conditions for Working in the Archdiocese of Montreal*.

## ANNEX – DECLARATION OF ADHERENCE

As a member of the clergy, I commit to strict compliance with the rules and guidelines set forth in this Code of Conduct, both in my personal life and in the exercise of my ministry, particularly in relation to minors and vulnerable persons within my parish. I also acknowledge the inherent dignity of every person and commit to respecting it.

As a member of the clergy, I undertake to:

1. Treat all persons with respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, dignity, and consideration;
2. Avoid situations where I am alone in a closed space with a minor or vulnerable person;
3. Refuse to accept gifts exceeding \$100 from minors or vulnerable persons, or their parents or guardians;
4. Refrain from offering gifts to minors or vulnerable persons, except modestly valued devotional items;
5. Report any suspicion of abuse to the Ordinary (i.e. the diocesan bishop or his delegated authority);
6. Fully cooperate with any investigation of allegations of abuse.
7. Complete the ***Focus on Victims (VVA)*** training;
8. Undergo a criminal background check.

As a member of the clergy, I **undertake not to:**

1. Be under the influence of alcohol at any time while exercising my ministry;

2. Use, possess, or be under the influence of legal recreational drugs or illegal substances at any time;
3. Engage in romantic or sexual relationships with anyone;
4. Be alone in a private dwelling or accommodation with a minor or vulnerable person in the context of my ministry;
5. Hit, shake, push, or slap any person;
6. Humiliate, ridicule, threaten, or demean any person;
7. Engage in sexual contact with any person. All physical contact must be non-sexual and appropriate;
8. Use coarse, vulgar, or offensive language.

I understand that this Code of Conduct applies to all members of the clergy serving and ministering in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Montreal.

I have read this Code of Conduct and commit to fully comply with it.

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Clergy Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Role/Position: \_\_\_\_\_