People and Culture | Safe Environment

Code of Conduct

Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall



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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church is called to be a living sign of God's love, a place where every person is welcomed, respected, protected, and accompanied in faith. Our mission to proclaim the Gospel requires not only fidelity to Christ's teachings, but also a steadfast commitment to integrity, accountability, and responsible stewardship in all aspects of ecclesial life.

It is with this conviction that I present the **2026 Code of Conduct.** This Code is intended for all who participate in the life and mission of the Church, clergy, religious, employees, volunteers, pastoral workers, and all members of the faithful. It expresses our shared commitment to fostering safe, respectful, and trustworthy environments where the dignity of every person is upheld, and where the Gospel is lived authentically.

The principles set forth in this Code reflect these commitments. They provide guidance regarding ethical conduct, healthy and appropriate relationships, the protection of minors and vulnerable adults, financial integrity, workplace health and safety, and the reporting of abuse and misconduct. These standards are not merely rules or obligations, they are practical expressions of our Christian discipleship, and our responsibility to one another as members of the Body of Christ.

Each of us shares in the mission of creating environments where people can encounter Christ with confidence and trust. By embracing the values contained in this Code, we demonstrate our commitment to the dignity of every human being, to the protection of the vulnerable, and to the responsible exercise of ministry and service.

I invite all members of our Catholic community to read this Code carefully, to reflect upon its principles, and to uphold its standards with sincerity and dedication. Together, may we continue to build a Church that reflects the compassion, justice, and holiness of Christ, and that serves as a source of hope, healing, and trust for all.

Entrusting this important work to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, I impart to you my prayerful best wishes and blessing.

Sincerely in Christ,

✠ Marcel Damphousse

✠ Marcel Damphousse
Archbishop of Ottawa-Cornwall

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1. APPLICABILITY

Effective, November 16th, 2026, this *Code of Conduct* is applicable to laity and clergy (herein "All") engaged in ministries and services in the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Ottawa-Cornwall *RCECOC,* including parishes and any other canonical entities under its supervision, as well as all civil corporations under its control (referred to in this document as "Archdiocese").

This document supersedes all previous versions of the *Code of Conduct*. It outlines a set of guidelines that define expected behavior and ethical standards at the Archdiocese. By establishing these guidelines, we aim to protect everyone involved in our ministry and those we serve.

2. DEFINITIONS

For definitions of key terms, please refer to **Annex A**.

3. VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

The *Code of Conduct* is founded on key values and principles that underpin its mission. Each value and principle is chosen to guide actions and foster a safe, respectful, and supportive church community.

3.1. Values

The following key values guide the Church's approach to safety and care. **Collective Responsibility** protects the well-being of the community by upholding clear behavioral **Standards**, and responding to concerns with **Integrity, Respect** and **Compassion**. Respect for **Privacy and Confidentiality**, grounded in civil and canon law, ensures the ethical handling of personal information, while **Wisdom** supports informed and thoughtful decision-making. **Safeguarding** is central to this approach and underscores a proactive commitment to protecting all members of the Church, especially those who are most vulnerable.

3.2. Principles

The principles further translate these values into action. **Risk Prevention** focuses on minimizing harm through screening, training, and adherence to established codes and policies. Thorough and permanent **Documentation** demonstrates due diligence and accountability, particularly in matters involving alleged abuse. Finally, **Due Process** ensures compliance with legal and civil requirements, fairness to all parties, and robust protection of minors and vulnerable adults.

4. RESPONSABILITIES AND ENGAGEMENT

The Archdiocese has entrusted all with the mission of upholding and respecting its values and principles. By demonstrating integrity and dedication, we collectively further the Church's mission while fostering a supportive and respectful community. The following guidelines outline expectations to ensure this commitment:

4.1. Ethics

4.1.1. Punctuality

Arrive on time for service hours and notify your supervisor as soon as possible if you are unable to fulfill your commitment. Reliable participation ensures smooth operations and witnesses to care.

4.1.2. Communication

a. Maintain respectful, courteous, and professional communication.
b. The Archdiocese holds workplace morale in high regard. Positive morale directly contributes to the Archdiocese's success and means a healthier workplace for all. To promote workplace morale, all are urged to support one another and collaborate to make the workplace enjoyable and positive.

4.1.3. Abuse of Power

Avoid improper or unlawful use of authority, including for personal benefit or malicious intent. Abuse of power includes any misuse of authority, influence, or position of trust to intimidate, manipulate, exploit, or harm others. This encompasses, but is not limited to, coercion, harassment, discrimination, retaliation, spiritual or emotional manipulation, and any conduct that undermines an individual's dignity or autonomy. Abuse of power in the Archdiocese can take many forms, including but not limited to:

a. Accepting money or gifts in exchange for favorable decisions or treatment.
b. Threatening job loss to silence complaints.
c. Retaliating against individuals who raise concerns.
d. Assigning excessive or unrealistic workloads as punishment.
e. Intimidation, threats, or coercive management tactics.
f. Gaslighting or undermining an individual's confidence.
g. Blocking access to Human Resources or higher management.
h. Invading an individual's privacy without justification.
i. Taking advantage of an individual's faith for personal benefit (money, status, influence).
j. Exploiting authority to engage in inappropriate or non-consensual relationships.

4.1.4. Conflict of Interest

a. Situations that even appear[1], or have the potential to create a conflict of interest should be avoided.
b. Personal or social relationships outside of work that could impair impartiality or harm the organization's reputation must be avoided.
c. For transparency and accountability purposes, all are required to disclose to their immediate supervisor any affiliations with companies, organizations, or entities that could potentially create a conflict of interest with their current employment or involvement. All must abide by any required measures to minimize the risks linked to a possible conflict of interest.
d. All are strictly prohibited from leveraging their employment or position with the Archdiocese for personal advantage, or to provide any benefit to a third party.

4.2. Interactions

The Archdiocese is committed to fostering an environment of mutual respect. To ensure this, all must adhere to the following principles:

4.2.1. Maintain Appropriate Boundaries

Establish professional limits and ethical standards that govern everyone's behavior both during and outside working hours as follows:

a. All assume the responsibility for establishing and maintaining clear and appropriate boundaries in all relationships, including those related to pastoral counselling and spiritual direction.
b. All must respect the roles and responsibilities of colleagues.
c. All must serve with integrity and prioritize the well-being of those we serve.
d. All are prohibited from any form of exploitation, favoritism, or conduct detrimental to the organization, its members, and those we serve.
e. All are prohibited from engaging in any form of discrimination, violence, harassment, or abuse, including but not limited to, sexual, psychological, or any behaviour that violates an individual's dignity, as defined under applicable law, including the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.
f. All must protect confidential information in accordance with legal and organizational requirements.

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[1] Examples of appearance of, or potential for, a conflict of interest:

1. A manager participates in the hiring process for a candidate who is a close friend or family member.
2. A manager directly supervises a family member or someone with whom they have a close personal relationship.
3. An employee owns or works for an external business that could benefit from decisions made in their role within the Archdiocese.

This list is not exhaustive.

g. All shall not disclose or share confidential or personal information without proper authorization, explicit consent, or as required by law. Such information may be shared only for legitimate work purposes, when required by law, or when reasonably necessary to prevent harm to an individual or the Archdiocese[2].

This *Code of Conduct* supplements and should be read in conjunction with the *Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy*, the *Protocol for Alleged Abuse and Misconduct,* and any other applicable organizational policies, procedures, and guidelines.

4.3. Directives for Minors and Vulnerable Adults

Safeguarding minors and vulnerable adults is a core responsibility of the Archdiocese which requires the contribution of all who are part of it. All must follow the directives below.

4.3.1. Safeguarding Requirements

The following provisions apply to all events, activities, and functions associated with the Archdiocese:

a. The Archdiocese requires a minimum of two unrelated and screened adult chaperones (following the *Safe Environment Policy*) for all activities involving minors and vulnerable adults.
b. During activities requiring overnight shared accommodation, each minor, vulnerable adult, and adult chaperone must sleep in separate beds.
c. Interaction with minors and vulnerable adults must never take place in the residential part of the church property, or in any private residence owned by members of the clergy and laity.
d. Events intended for minors and vulnerable adults must not include the provision or availability of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco products under any circumstances. Community events (such as Christmas parties or similar events) that are not exclusively intended for minors and vulnerable adults, may permit alcohol service, provided that at least two unrelated and screened adults are present at all times and are responsible for actively supervising the event in its entirety.
e. It is strictly prohibited to purchase or provide alcohol, drugs, tobacco products, share media (in any form) or any other inappropriate content to minors and vulnerable adults.
f. Never request, insist, or imply that a minor or vulnerable adult keep a secret.
g. At all times, one must never transport minors and vulnerable adults in a vehicle without the presence of two unrelated and screened adults. Everyone should be aware of the exclusion clauses in their personal insurance policy. When travelling in a group, priority should be given to using public transport or rented vehicles.

[2] Priests and interpreters are bound by canon 983.

ADDITIONAL FOR CLERGY

h. The Sacrament of Reconciliation with minors and other vulnerable adults must be celebrated in an open space or a room with an unobstructed vision of both priest and penitent, or in a confessional in which there is a physical barrier between the confessor and the penitent.
i. Exceptionally, minors who are family members of priests may be guests in a church residence.

4.3.2. Standards for Interactions

a. One must never be alone with minors and vulnerable adults. A minimum of two unrelated screened adults must always be present. Use a team approach in managing activities.
b. Any form of direct one-on-one contact (physical, virtual, social media, text, etc.) with minors and vulnerable adults is prohibited.
c. One must not accept gifts from minors and vulnerable adults. However, small tokens of appreciation may be accepted if they have minimal monetary value and do not create any ethical concerns.
d. One must not offer gifts to minors and vulnerable adults. However, this prohibition does not extend to gifts given collectively by the Archdiocese.
e. Discussions on topics of a sexual nature with minors and vulnerable adults are prohibited, except when strictly required for educational and teaching purposes, and always conducted in the presence of at least two unrelated and screened adults.
f. Where a minor or vulnerable adult raises a question or concern of a sexual nature outside an educational setting, the recipient may respond only to the extent reasonably necessary to provide accurate information, and ensure the individual's safety and wellbeing, or refer the individual to an appropriate parent, guardian, professional, or support service. Such discussions must remain professional and limited to the issue raised.
g. The Archdiocese forbids all from recording, posting, or distributing any personally identifiable information, including photos or videos of any minor and vulnerable adult without the verifiable consent of a parent or guardian.

4.4. Meeting Directives

a. In pastoral counselling and spiritual direction, clergy and laity must not exceed their competence. They must refer individuals to other professionals when appropriate or necessary. A pastoral counselling or spiritual direction relationship should never be considered a clinical relationship or psychotherapy.
b. Pastoral counselling and spiritual direction are most effective in face-to-face encounters. When face-to-face meetings are not possible, the use of online meetings must also adhere to the archdiocesan *Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy*.

c. One-to-one private meetings must be held in an area with see-through windows, or in a room with either an open door or a door with a see-through window, or with other openings offering unobstructed vision, in an occupied building. To that effect, the Archdiocese encourages parishes to install see-through glass windows on all meeting rooms walls or office doors.

ADDITIONAL FOR CLERGY

d. If the above is not feasible, information relevant to the meeting must be recorded in a logbook: meeting attendee's name, date, time, location, and meeting's purpose in general terms (e.g., counselling, personal matter, general discussion, assistance request, etc.). This record must be permanently maintained as a parish or institutional record.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

e. Residence in rectories and buildings operated by the Archdiocese is limited to pastors, parish administrators, priest associates, retired priests, priests in residence, visiting priests, transitional deacons, seminarians, or those with prior written approval from the Vicar General or Episcopal Vicar.
f. In exceptional circumstances, and with the written authorization of the Episcopal Vicar or Vicar General, immediate family members of the Pastor, Administrator, or Associate Pastor may reside in the rectory together with the pastor for a maximum of two weeks, provided that suitable accommodation is available.
g. When away from the parish, clergy must make every reasonable effort to abide in a manner consistent with the directions and values set out in this *Code of Conduct*, adjusted as necessary to reflect their family state.

4.5. Property and Technology

a. Always obtain prior authorization and follow all applicable instructions before using workplace facilities.
b. Do not misappropriate, destroy, damage, or misuse the property and physical assets of the workplace.
c. All use of the workplace computer system, facilities, and equipment, must comply with the rules, regulations, and requirements set forth in the *Policy on the Use of the Internet and Electronic Equipment*, and the *Social Media Policy*.
d. Use organizational resources only for authorized purposes.

4.6. Conformity

a. All must adhere to federal, local, and provincial laws, including the legal duty to report abuse.
b. All must adhere to the regulations and policies of workplace health and safety, e.g., policies governing fire safety, hazardous waste disposal, etc.
c. Smoking is prohibited on all Archdiocesan premises in accordance with the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017*. This includes smoking or holding lighted tobacco or medical (or non-medical) cannabis, an electronic cigarette, or consuming a prescribed substance[3].
d. All must uphold the highest standards of professional conduct while on workplace property, including parking areas, and during service hours. This includes refraining from gambling and using recreational drugs. If alcohol is offered during work-related events, it must not be consumed in a manner that impairs judgment, behavior, or professional responsibilities.

5. FINANCIAL INTEGRITY

All must uphold the highest standards of financial integrity and ethical behavior. The following guidelines ensure transparency and respect for financial matters within the Archdiocese:

a. All must not solicit nor request money, including but not limited to, gifts, loans, donations, favors or services, for their personal benefit.
b. Any unsolicited gifts exceeding $200 CAD must be declared to the immediate supervisor.
c. Furthermore, all are to be attentive to the situation of the donor and refuse gifts with monetary value from vulnerable adults (refer to *5.3.2 - Directives for Minors and Vulnerable Adults - Standards for Interactions).*
d. All must not act as financial or legal advisors, take on the responsibility for power of attorney, draw up a will, or serve as the executor or as a witness for a will or other legal instrument for a vulnerable adult without the written permission of the immediate supervisor.
e. All must not engage in any form of theft or unauthorized dealing, including misappropriation.
f. All involved in financial administration must review, understand, and adhere to the diocesan *Financial Management of Parish Operations Manual* and the *Administration Manual*. These documents are available on the archdiocesan SharePoint (*The Archway*) or at the parish administration.

[3] Smoking or inhaling prescribed substances is not permitted on archdiocesan premises. However, this does not restrict persons from taking prescribed medications as directed, provided they must remain fit for duty for the duration of their work.

6. HEALTH AND SAFETY

All must adhere to health and safety policies and practices at all times. Removal or modification of any equipment or tools related to health and safety is strictly prohibited. Health and safety concerns should be reported to the relevant health and safety representative, supervisor or parish pastor.

7. REPORTING ABUSE AND MISCONDUCT

Laity and clergy have a duty to immediately report abuse and misconduct to the appropriate authorities[4]. Subject to lawful disclosure requirements, all information reported must be kept confidential at all times to ensure the privacy of those involved, and to avoid potentially hindering an investigation if applicable.

The Archdiocese requires everyone to fully cooperate with any civil or canonical investigation. Failure to cooperate fully can be grounds for disciplinary measures.

7.1. How to report

Report any abuse, misconduct, or breach of this *Code of Conduct* by Clergy or Laity occurring on archdiocesan property to the Archdiocesan Safe Environment Department (referred to in this document as "SE") by using the following coordinates:
Email Address: **safeenvironment@ottawacornwall.ca**
Hotline: **613-714-4669**

If at any time the situation has escalated to the point that someone is concerned that they or anyone else is in imminent danger, or if a situation otherwise involves suspected criminal behaviour, **call 911** to request police assistance, and notify SE as soon as possible.

8. COMPLIANCE

We are all responsible for:

a. Understanding and complying with this *Code de Conduct*, as well as the applicable policies, laws and regulations.
b. Completing all relevant trainings assigned by the Archdiocese.
c. Complying with the *Safe Environment Policy*.

[4] Priests and interpreters are bound by canon 983.

9. BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT

If there is a breach of this *Code of Conduct*, I agree to immediately disclose it to SE.

The Archdiocese reserves the right to take progressive disciplinary measures in response to any breach of this *Code of Conduct*. Depending on the nature and severity of the breach, such measures may include verbal or written warning, suspension, or termination of employment or volunteer engagement. This also includes applicable penalty as per the *Code of Canon Law.*

Annex A: Definitions

Abuse
A broad term understood to include any physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual behavior: (i) which causes a person to fear for his or her physical, psychological, or emotional safety and well-being; (ii) which the alleged perpetrator knew or ought to have reasonably known would cause that person to have concern or fear for his or her physical, psychological, or emotional safety and well-being *(Ref. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops - CCCB Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse).*

Archdiocesan Safe Environment Department (SE)
SE ensures a safe environment for the protection of those we serve by establishing standardized policies and protocols, providing guidance and training on the policies and protocols, verifying the policies and protocols are followed, putting abuse prevention systems in place and working with the Archbishop's Delegate to manage allegations of abuse or sexual misconduct.

Clergy
In the context of the present document, clergy refers to bishops, priests, and deacons *(Ref. CCCB's Protecting Minors from Sexual Abuse).*

Conflict of interest
A conflict of interest is a set of conditions in which judgement or decisions concerning a primary interest is unduly influenced by a secondary interest (personal or organizational benefit including financial gain, advancement, or other benefits to family, friends, or colleagues).

Discrimination
When a person is treated unfairly, denied a benefit, or subjected to disadvantage because of a protected ground, in a protected social area (such as employment, housing, services, contracts, or membership in a vocational association).

The *Human Rights Code* prohibits discrimination based on the following grounds: Age, Ancestry (colour, race), Citizenship, Ethnic origin, Place of origin, Creed, Disability, Family status, Marital status (including single status), Gender identity (gender expression), Receipt of public assistance (in housing only), Record of offences (in employment only), Sex (including pregnancy and breastfeeding), Sexual orientation *(Ref. Ontario Human Rights Code* in Ontario*)*.

The Archdiocese has the right to give preference in employment to Roman Catholic applicants in certain positions where a bona fide occupational requirement exists, such

as when the role requires knowledge of or active participation in Catholic teachings, practices, or faith-based duties *(Ref. section 24(1)(a) of* the *Human Rights Code* in Ontario*).*

Harassment
Engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome *(Ref. Human Rights Code* in Ontario*)*. Harassment includes both sexual and psychological harassment *(Ref. Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy.*

Laity
Any non-ordained person affiliated, connected or involved with the Archdiocese: employees, volunteers, contractors, stakeholders, committee members, etc. This list is non-exhaustive.

Minor
In the *Code of Canon Law* of the Catholic Church, and in the Province of Ontario, a minor is one who has not completed the 18th year of age.

Supervisor
Person who has charge of a workplace or authority over a worker(Ref.*Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA). In the appropriate context, this term may also apply to the supervisor of a volunteer, stakeholder, committee member, etc.

For the clergy, below is a description of some roles and their supervisors:

Roles	Supervisors
Associate Pastor or other assisting at a parish	Pastor/Parish Administrator
Pastor/Parish Administrator	Dean
Dean	Episcopal Vicar
Deacon (regarding his parish ministry)	Pastor/Parish Administrator
Deacon (regarding other ministry)	Coordinator of the Permanent Diaconate Ministries and Formation Program

Vulnerable Adult
A person defined as an adult by secular statutes, but who lacks an adult mental capacity or who, by reasons of advanced age, physical illness, mental disorder or disability […], was or might be unable to protect himself or herself from significant harm or exploitation. Therefore, an adult who habitually lacks the use of reason is considered incapable of personal responsibility and is to be considered equivalent to a minor according to the *Code of Canon Law* and for the purpose of this document *(Ref. CCCB).*

Work
Includes the services, ministries, or other involvement, that clergy and laity provide to or through the Archdiocese.

Workplace
Includes the physical or virtual environment from which clergy and laity provide services, ministries, or other involvement, to or through the Archdiocese (parish halls, meeting rooms, archdiocesan offices, cemeteries, etc.).

Workplace Violence
The threat (i.e., a statement or behaviour that it is reasonable for an individual to interpret as a threat), exercise, or attempted exercise of physical force by a person against an individual in a workplace that causes or could cause physical injury to the individual (Ref.*Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy*).

Annex B: Acknowledgement of the 2026 Code of Conduct

I have read the *2026 Code of Conduct* of the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall and agree to abide by its provisions.

Print Full Name

Signature

Date

Print Parent or Guardian Full Name (required for minors)

Parent or Guardian Signature (required for minors)

Date

The signed copy of the acknowledgement of the *Code of Conduct* must be retained permanently in the parish office, or archdiocesan office.

The Archdiocese will review and revise this *Code of Conduct* as needed.

For more information on this *Code of Conduct*, please contact the People and Culture Department people@ottawacornwall.ca or the Safe Environment Department safeenvironment@ottawacornwall.ca at the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall.



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