

# *Code of Conduct for Church Personnel for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Especially in Regard to Interaction with Minors and Vulnerable Individuals*

## **Preamble**

The Archdiocese of Atlanta holds every person associated with the Archdiocese in any official capacity accountable for maintaining the integrity of all ministerial and professional relationships. The purpose of this Code of Conduct ("Code") is to set forth the basic principles and guidelines. A comprehensive list of specific acts constituting a violation of this Code would be impossible. In addition to strict compliance with legal requirements, Church Personnel in the Archdiocese of Atlanta are expected to be guided by the basic principles of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the conduct of Archdiocesan affairs and to comply with all Archdiocesan policies including never engaging in any act which constitutes Sexual Abuse of a minor ("Sexual Abuse") as defined in the Archdiocese's Policy regarding Sexual Abuse of Minors, as amended from time to time ("Sexual Abuse Policy") and the guidelines contained in this Code. No Church Personnel may engage in any activity within or outside of the conduct of their ministry which might affect the Archdiocese or the members of the Catholic community which would violate any applicable law or the standards set out in this Code or which constitutes Sexual Abuse.

Common sense must be followed. However, the following Code is provided for the purpose of explicitly drawing attention to the special care, which must be taken in ministering to minors or other vulnerable individuals. Archdiocesan clergy, Religious, seminarians, personnel and volunteers must avoid contact with minors or vulnerable individuals that might be misconstrued by reasonable people or lead to misunderstandings. Given the consequences of sexual misconduct, clergy, Religious, seminarians, employees and volunteers should exercise caution and common sense to avoid situations which potentially might be misconstrued and to preclude any occasion that could give scandal or cause injury, whether that injury is intended or not by the individual.

**Note:** This *Code of Conduct for Church Personnel for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Especially in Regard to Interaction with Minors and Vulnerable Individuals* addresses avoidance of actions that are necessary to practice the ministry of foster parenting. Thus, an additional document, the *Code of Conduct for Volunteer Foster Parents of Birth to one year old children in the Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Atlanta Pregnancy, Parenting and Adoption Program* has been established to delineate those actions and is to be used in place of this document for foster parent volunteers only.

## **Application of Code**

The Archdiocese expects you to conduct yourself according to this Code and to support others in doing so.

If you do not comply with this Code or if you permit a member of Church Personnel under your supervision to fail to comply with this Code, you are not meeting your responsibilities and you will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment or ministry if you are an employee or lay volunteer, and action under canon law if you are a member of the clergy or Religious.

Supervisors are responsible for communicating the expectations contained in this Code, the “Ministerial Standards,” and the Sexual Abuse Policy to all Church Personnel under their leadership.

This Code, the “Ministerial Standards” and the “Procedures for Processing Allegations” are established as mechanisms for reporting and addressing non compliance and for routinely assessing our operations and activities to ensure compliance with this Code and the Sexual Abuse Policy, other Archdiocesan policies and the law.

If you know about or suspect non-compliance with this Code, Ministerial Standards, or Sexual Abuse you are expected to report the non-compliance in accordance with the provisions of the “Procedures for Processing Allegations” adopted pursuant to the Sexual Abuse Policy. Any retaliation or threatened retaliation against you for reporting, in good faith, such actual or suspected non-compliance will be considered a serious violation of this Code, resulting in appropriate disciplinary action for anyone who retaliates against you, up to and including termination of employment or ministry and/or action under canon law.

If you have questions about any of the provisions or the application of this Code, the “Ministerial Standards” or the Sexual Abuse Policy, you should contact the Office of Safe Environment at 404-885-7234.

The following specific guidelines are to assist you with meeting the standards of conduct set out in this Code and the “Ministerial Standards” and to avoid allegations of Sexual Abuse. Although they are not exhaustive, they are intended to provide guidance and direction with respect to issues that may arise in the course of your day-to-day work.

## **Implementation and Accountability**

### **1. Compliance with Policies**

In the Archdiocese of Atlanta, compliance with Archdiocesan policies is part of everyone’s job, although ultimate responsibility for adherence to this Code rests with the individual. In order to repair scandal, restore justice and reform offenders, appropriate action will be taken when any Church Personnel disregards or fails to comply with the expectations and behaviors defined in this Code. As a condition of your employment and/or ministry in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, you must be familiar and comply with this Code, the Sexual Abuse Policy, the “Ministerial Standards,” and all other Archdiocesan policies that apply to you. Violations of this Code, the “Ministerial Standards,” or any other Archdiocesan policy are grounds for disciplinary action and possible legal prosecution. This Code provides you with guidance about the Archdiocese’s expectations in regard to your conduct and basic legal

responsibilities as Church Personnel of the Archdiocese. There are some standards specific to one's ministry, which are more precise than the Code of Conduct. In instances where guidelines conflict between the "Ministerial Standards" and the Code of Conduct, the "Ministerial Standards" are to be followed.

## **2. Compliance with the Law**

Compliance with laws and regulations that apply to the Archdiocese is an absolute minimum requirement to maintaining our Catholic values and standard of conduct. While we are called to a higher standard, this minimum requirement means that each of us is responsible for understanding the laws that apply. Violating the law can seriously damage the Archdiocese's reputation, subject the Archdiocese to liability and subject you to personal civil or criminal liability. The Archdiocese's leadership will support you in meeting your responsibility to comply with the law and will provide you with the resources necessary for compliance. Questions concerning any legal responsibility should be referred to the Office of Safe Environment at 404-885-7234.

## **3. "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" Pledge To Report Abuse of Minors**

### **Who Is A Mandatory Reporter?**

- Mandatory reporters are legally required to report allegations and suspicions of sexual abuse. Failure to report can result in legal action. Mandatory reporters include:
- Physicians licensed to practice medicine; interns; residents; hospital and medical personnel; dentists; podiatrists; registered professional nurses or licensed practical nurses;
- School teachers; school administrators; school guidance counselors, visiting teachers, school social workers, or school psychologists
- Licensed psychologists; persons participating in internships to obtain licensing as psychologists; professional counselors, social workers, or marriage and family therapists; child-counseling personnel
- Child welfare agency personnel (including any child-caring institution, child-placing agency, maternity home, family day-care home, group day-care home, and day-care center); child service organization personnel
- Law enforcement personnel
- Persons who process or produce visual or printed matter

(Ga. Code Ann. §§ 19-7-5(c)(1); 16-12-100(c)) (WESTLAW through 2001)

## Mandatory Reporters

If you are a mandatory reporter and have reasonable cause to believe that sexual abuse has occurred, you must complete all of the following steps:

**REMEMBER: Your Role is to Report. There is to be no investigation by you or anyone else at the parish, school, or diocesan level.**

1. If the alleged/suspected victim is a minor, call the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) in the county where the abuse minor lives or in the absence of such agency, to an appropriate police authority or district attorney.
  - a) A list of DFCS contact numbers can be found at [www.archatl.com](http://www.archatl.com)
  - b) Be prepared to give them the child's name, address, age, the nature of the suspected abuse, the name of the suspected perpetrator, and his/her relationship to the child.
  - c) Follow-up with a letter to DFCS.
2. Call the Office of the District Attorney in the county where the abuse occurred. **(Only if involves Church Personnel)**
  - a) A list of DA office contact numbers can be found at [www.archatl.com](http://www.archatl.com)
  - b) Be prepared to give them the suspected victim's name, address, age, the nature of the suspected abuse, the name of the suspected perpetrator, and his/her relationship to the suspected victim.
  - c) Follow-up with a letter to the District Attorney's Office.
3. If the alleged abuse involves church personnel (priests, deacons, seminarians, religious, teachers, employees or volunteers) do all of the following after contacting DFCS and the District Attorney's Office:
  - a) Call 1-888-437-0764 **(24 hours a day)** to file a report.
  - b) Call the Archbishop's Office at 404-888-7804 so that the Archdiocese of Atlanta can be an active participant in cooperating with the appropriate state and local authorities. The report to the Archdiocese is NOT in lieu of the report to the appropriate state and local authorities.
  - c) Immediately fill out and return the form, "Report of Suspected Child Abuse by Archdiocesan Personnel." This form is available at [www.archatl.com](http://www.archatl.com)
4. Once you complete the form, mail it to:

The Archbishop's Office  
680 West Peachtree Street, NW  
Atlanta, GA 30308, in an envelope marked "Confidential,"  
or fax it to 404-978-2765 with a cover sheet.

## Non-Mandatory Reporters

If you are a non-mandatory reporter and have reasonable cause to believe that sexual abuse has occurred, you must immediately report the information to the Archdiocese.

**REMEMBER: Your Role is to Report. There is to be no investigation by you or anyone else at the parish, school, or diocesan level.**

If the alleged abuse involves archdiocesan personnel (priests, deacons, teachers, employees or volunteers) do all of the following:

1. Call 1-888-437-0764 (24 hours a day) to file a report.
2. Call the Archbishop's Office at 404-888-7804 so that the Archdiocese of Atlanta can be an active participant in cooperating with the appropriate state and local government authorities. The report to the Archdiocese is NOT in lieu of the report to state and local government authorities.
3. Immediately fill out and return the form, "Report of Suspected Child Abuse by Archdiocesan Personnel." This form is available at [www.archatl.com](http://www.archatl.com)
4. Once you complete the form, mail it to:

The Archbishop's Office  
680 West Peachtree Street, NW  
Atlanta, GA 30308, in an envelope marked "Confidential,"  
or fax it to 404-978-2765 with a cover sheet

As a non-mandatory reporter, you are not legally required to, but you may also do the following after reporting to the Archdiocese:

1. If the person about whom you are calling is a minor, call the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) in the county where the minor lives or in the absence of such agency, to an appropriate police authority or district attorney.
  - a) A list of DFCS contact numbers can be found at [www.archatl.com](http://www.archatl.com)
  - b) Be prepared to give them the child's name, address, age, the nature of the suspected abuse, the name of the suspected perpetrator and his/her relationship to the child.
  - c) Follow-up with a letter to DFCS.
2. Call the Office of the District Attorney in the county where the abuse occurred. (Only when involves Church Personnel)
  - a) A list of DA office contact numbers can be found at [www.archatl.com](http://www.archatl.com)
  - b) Be prepared to give them the suspected victim's name, address, age, the nature of the suspected abuse, the name of the suspected perpetrator, and his/her relationship to the suspected victim.
  - c) Follow-up with a letter to the District Attorney's Office.

## Reporting of Non-Compliance

If you know about or suspect misconduct, illegal activities, fraud, misuse of the Archdiocese's assets or violations of this Code, the "Ministerial Standards" or Archdiocesan policy you are to report these concerns to the Office of Safe Environment at 404-885-7234. There will be no retribution against you for making such a report in good faith. In fact, the Archdiocese strictly prohibits retaliation or threatened retaliation against you for reporting, in good faith, actual or suspected wrongdoing.

## Principles

Church Personnel of the Archdiocese of Atlanta shall:

- Actively support the teachings of the Catholic Church and work to build up the body of Christ in thought, word, deed and action.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of each person from conception to natural death, and conduct relationships with others in a manner that is consistent with Catholic teaching. This is an even higher obligation for supervisors.
- Meet civil and canon law obligations.
- To the best of their ability, protect children, youth and vulnerable adults from all forms of abuse or neglect.
- Keep all information received in the course of counseling, spiritual direction or other professional or ministerial contact in the strictest confidence except as mandated by law.
- Refrain from making false accusations against another or revealing the faults and failings of another to those who have no right to know.
- Be responsible stewards of Church resources, human and financial, observing canon and civil law.
- Maintain a high level of competence in their particular ministry, and prudently attend to their own physical, spiritual, mental and emotional well-being.
- Avoid accepting or conferring an office, position, assignment or compensation, which may present even the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Promptly report incidents of ethical misconduct or Sexual Abuse by other Church Personnel to the proper Church authority.
- Review and know the contents of the child abuse regulations and reporting requirements for the State of Georgia and follow those requirements as applicable.
- Review and know the contents of the child abuse regulations and reporting requirements for the Archdiocese of Atlanta and follow those requirements as applicable.
- Read, sign, understand and comply with this “Code of Conduct,” “Ministerial Standards” and the “Updated Policy of the Archdiocese of Atlanta Concerning the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Individuals From Sexual Abuse by Church Personnel” (June 2009) before engaging in any form of ministerial work.

## Behavioral Guidelines for Church Personnel Working with Minors

Pastoral Standards for Volunteers, Lay Employees, Religious and Clergy include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Church Personnel are expected to maintain a high ethical and professional standard in their interaction with minors.
2. Church Personnel, unless they are the parent(s) and/or legal guardians of the child, are prohibited from using physical discipline in any way for the behavior management of minors, except insofar as restraint may be necessary to prevent them from inflicting

harm on themselves or others, in which case a detailed written record of the incident is to be made as soon as possible and maintained on file.

3. Church Personnel may never show, provide or make available in any way to minors sexually explicit or morally inappropriate materials. In essence, any discussion, materials, and personal interaction with minors are prohibited if they could not occur or be used in the presence of the minor's parents or guardians. This does not preclude Archdiocesan-approved curricula in schools or religious education programs.
4. Church Personnel are prohibited from the using, possessing or being under the influence of any mind or mood altering substances, including alcohol, while working with minors. Church Personnel are prohibited from providing minors with any alcoholic beverage, tobacco, drugs or any substance prohibited by law. Medications of any kind may be administered to minors only with written parental permission unless you are the parent and/or legal guardian of the minor.
5. Church Personnel should schedule one-on-one counseling sessions or meetings with minors at times and locations that promote accountability and meet accepted standards of propriety. Pastors, principals or the administrator of the appropriate Archdiocesan agency and parent(s) or legal guardians must be notified in writing of any scheduled meeting involving a minor to assist in maintaining a safe environment for our children. Additionally, informal meetings should be the exception not the rule. However, if a minor approaches you and seeks immediate, brief assistance it should be documented and communicated to the pastor, principal, or the administrator of the appropriate Archdiocesan agency and parent or legal guardian if a meeting takes place that has not been scheduled or cleared by a parent or legal guardian in advance.
6. Church Personnel are prohibited from sleeping in the same bed, van, hotel room, sleeping bag or tent with a minor unless the adult is a parent, guardian or sibling. Sharing a bedroom, other than a large dormitory style room, should always be avoided. Church Personnel should not take an overnight trip alone with a minor who is not an immediate family member. Church Personnel should avoid being alone with a minor (not a member of the family) in a locker room, rest room, dressing, changing or showering facility. Furthermore, Church Personnel may not take photographs of minors who are unclothed or dressing, for example, in a locker room or bathing facility, nor shall they permit such photographs to be taken by others.
7. Church Personnel may not give minors keys to any Archdiocesan church or school facility.
8. Church Personnel shall not act as a chaperone for activities that conflict with curfew laws pertaining to minors.
9. Church Personnel observing or becoming aware of anyone (adult or minor) abusing a minor, must take immediate steps to intervene to provide a safe environment for the minor and report the misconduct in accord with Archdiocesan policies and civil law.

10. Church Personnel shall never date or give the appearance of dating a minor, engage in sexualized contact with a minor, give gifts that have more than an intrinsic value, or grant special privileges or opportunities to a specific minor.
11. Church Personnel shall not tutor, counsel, meet with individually or allow overnight stays in their personal residence to individuals to whom they minister unless they are the parent(s) and/or legal guardians. If you teach at the school or parish and have a child who is enrolled at the parish or school ask another responsible adult, preferably one who is not a relative, to assist you with supervision during a social event held at your home.
12. Church Personnel shall not engage in any form of behavior including: (a) verbal harassment, such as derogatory comments, jokes, or slurs; (b) visual harassment, such as derogatory or sexually explicit posters, cards, calendars, cartoons, graffiti, drawings, messages, notes or gestures; (c) sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
13. Church Personnel shall not engage in any behavior that violates a prior written warning from the Archbishop.

## **Guidelines for the Supervision of Minors**

Guidelines include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Unless Church Personnel have a parent's or legal guardian's knowledge and consent in the form of a written permission slip, they are never to drive minors, unless there is a medical emergency or the child is theirs.
2. Programs for minors shall not be conducted by only one adult without additional adult presence.
3. Church Personnel shall report uncontrollable or unusual behavior of minors to parents as soon as possible.
4. Facilities shall be monitored during church services and all school and other activities.
5. Parents shall be encouraged to be part of all services and programs in which their children are involved.
6. Parental permission shall be obtained, including a signed medical treatment authorization form, before taking minors on trips. All due precautions for the safety and well-being of the children must be taken on such trips.
7. Written parental approval must be obtained before permitting any minor to participate in athletic or other activities that involve potential risk.



## Acknowledgement of Receipt (Code of Conduct)

I hereby acknowledge that on \_\_\_\_\_ I received a copy of the Archdiocese of Atlanta's **"Code of Conduct for Church Personnel for the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Especially in Regard to Interaction with Minors and Vulnerable Individuals"**, revised effective June 2009, that I have read the Code, understand its meaning, and agree to conduct myself in conformity with the Code as the Code may be amended in the future. I also understand that this acknowledgment will be kept in my personnel file.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
[Please type or print]

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish/School/Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Check one:

- Priest
- Deacon
- Deacon in Formation
- Religious
- Seminarian
- Employee
- Independent Contractor
- Volunteer