

POLICY 5.1.1 Safe Environment Policy for Clergy, Lay Employees and Volunteers

General Overview

In the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan, we are committed to ensuring that our parishes, ministries and programs are places filled with the peace and joy that come with loving our Lord God and serving one another in charity and humility. Events of the recent past have shown us that a combination of prudent measures to prevent and properly respond to claims of harm will best ensure that no one, and most especially no child, youth or vulnerable adult, is subjected to exploitation, abuse, bullying or any other form of physical, emotional, sexual or spiritual violence. These prudent measures are what make up our *Safe Environment Policy*.

The principal elements of the *Safe Environment Policy* are the *Code of Conduct* and the parish training sessions. We believe that education on and enforcement of these elements will make our faith communities attractive and nurturing places to be for everyone.

Code of Conduct

The *Code of Conduct* of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan sets out the responsibilities and expectations for clergy, lay employees, and volunteers who serve in the parishes and offices of the Archdiocese.

Everyone to whom it applies must understand it and abide by it, for the good of the Archdiocese, the faithful, and him or herself. The *Code of Conduct* describes attitudes and behaviours that are considered essential elements of any ministry in the Archdiocese. Before beginning to serve as clergy, lay employees, or a volunteer in a high risk ministry, every candidate must read and sign Form 5.1.2b *Ministry Suitability Form and Covenant of Care*, indicating acceptance of this Code. All other volunteers must read and sign Form 5.1.2c *Code of Conduct Acknowledgement*.

Violations of the Code will be handled pursuant to Policy 5.2.1 *Misconduct Policy of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan*.

Creating a Safe Environment

In the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan, the principal features of a safe environment include:

- a. Procedures are in place to ensure that risks of harm to children, adolescents and vulnerable adults, in particular, are minimal and/or inadvertent
- b. The physical environment for ministry and activities, especially as it relates to children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults, is designed to eliminate “private spaces” and to enhance visibility of all activities and interactions between individuals.
- c. Clergy, lay employees, and volunteers are trained to respond immediately and effectively to incidents of harassment, bullying and other threatening or harmful conduct.
- d. Confidential processes for reporting misconduct are in place.
- e. A published *Misconduct Policy* provides a transparent procedure for handling allegations of misconduct, exploitation, and abuse.

- f. Nobody and nothing is excluded from complying with the *Code of Conduct* and the *Misconduct Policy*

Training

All clergy, lay employees, and high-risk ministry volunteers of the Archdiocese and its parishes are required to attend an orientation session on the policies of the Archdiocese, covering the *Code of Conduct*, *Safe environment Policy* and the *Misconduct Policy* of the Archdiocese. This session will normally be conducted in each deanery, once a year, by the Archdiocesan Screening Coordinator. All clergy, lay employees and high-risk ministry volunteers in parishes of a deanery will be required to attend the session made available in their first year of service, and then at least every three years.

Definitions

- a. **Abuse:** Regular and/or repeated cruel and/or violent treatment of a person. It may be verbal, emotional, or sexual. It may or may not be criminal in nature
- b. **Bullying:** Unwanted, aggressive behaviour that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.
- c. **Exploitation of a ministerial relationship:** Using another person for selfish purposes and/or using a position of authority or trust to gain a personal advantage or benefit.
Ministerial Relationship: A relationship involving trust and confidence that is based primarily upon the ministry offered by a priest or deacon or other minister to another person. Examples of ministry include counselling, spiritual guidance and the celebration of the sacraments.
- d. **Harassment:** Aggressive pressure or intimidation that may create a hostile or Offensive environment for the victim.

Responding to Misconduct

a. Responsibilities to report under the laws of Canada and Alberta

There is no positive duty¹ under the Criminal Code of Canada to report criminal acts (e.g assaults, harassment, bullying, physical and sexual assault), or theft to police or other authority.

Under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act of Alberta*, anyone who witnesses or suspects that a child has been or may be abused or neglected by a parent or guardian is obliged to report that information to a caseworker at the local Child and Family Services offices.

b. Duty to report misconduct under the policies of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan

The organizational nature of the Archdiocese means that the parish priest will most often be the person who receives the initial report of a violation of the *Code of Conduct*.

¹ Positive Duty: legal obligation requiring proactive disclosure of knowledge or suspicion of wrongdoing to the authorities.

It is widely understood that the physical or sexual abuse of a child, youth or vulnerable adult requires immediate involvement of, and investigation by, the police, other government services, and the Misconduct Policy Administrator (MPA) of the Archdiocese.

However, other violations of the *Code of Conduct* may be more difficult to identify and respond to. People, especially volunteers, may find themselves questioning whether what they have witnessed or been told about warrants the intrusion of an investigation. We ask all our clergy, lay employees and volunteers to resist making this decision on their own. Please tell your parish priest, the Misconduct Policy Administrator (MPA), and officer of the Chancery, or the Archbishop about any behavior by a clergyman, lay employee or volunteer which appears to be a violation of the *Code of Conduct*. By discussing it, those involved should be able to clarify the need for any further steps to be taken. It will also allow for a record of the incident(s) to be made. Do **not** ignore any situation that gives you pause.

All members of clergy, and all lay employees of the Archdiocese and its parishes have a positive duty² to report **immediately** any claims of incidents of misconduct by clergy, lay employees and/or volunteers. These may be incidents they personally witnessed, incidents they have been told about, and incidents of which they become aware and have a well-founded reason to believe occurred. The report may be made to a supervisor or to the Misconduct Policy Administrator (MPA) (c.f. Policy 5.2.1 *Misconduct Policy*).

Approved by the College of Consultors on 25 October 2016
Reviewed by the Curia 9 March 2026

² Positive Duty: legal obligation requiring proactive disclosure of knowledge or suspicion of wrongdoing to the authorities.

Code of Conduct of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan

Scope

The *Code of Conduct of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan* applies to all members of the clergy, all lay employees of the Archdiocese and its parishes, and all volunteers in ministries of the Archdiocese and its parishes.

Our Values

As a local faith community of the Catholic Church, the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan upholds and promotes the values expressed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings and laws of the Catholic Church. These include, but are not limited to:

- a. Serving others in love, humility and sacrifice.
- b. Respecting the dignity and well-being of every person
- c. Acting in justice and charity in every situation and relationship.

Our Code

The Principal Elements of the *Code of Conduct of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan* are: Accountability, Confidentiality, Respectful Attitudes, and Protection of Vulnerable People.

1. Accountability

- a. Adhere to the published policies of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan and, if applicable, the parish where you serve.
- b. Comply with the elements of orientation and training provided to you for carrying out your ministry.
- c. Act always with integrity and take responsibility for your actions and words.
- d. Respect the hierarchy of the Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan.
- e. Follow the chain of reporting for your position.
- f. Do not exceed the authority of your position.

2. Confidentiality

- a. Respect and maintain the confidentiality of any personal information you gain through your position.
- b. Respect and maintain the confidentiality of information related to the business and operation decisions of the parish and/or Archdiocese gained through your position.

3. Respectful Attitudes and Behaviours

- a. Abuse of any kind is strictly prohibited
- b. Harassment of any kind, including personal (physical and verbal), sexual, and cyber is strictly prohibited.

- i. Personal harassment means any kind of discriminatory conduct, whether physical or verbal, directed at an individual and causes that individual substantial distress.
 - ii. Sexual harassment means any conduct, comment, gesture or contact of a sexual nature directed at an individual and is unwanted and/or unwelcome.
 - iii. Cyber harassment is using technological means of communication to direct sexual or discriminatory words, gestures, or images at an individual that causes that individual substantial distress.
- c. Bullying of any kind, including verbal, physical and cyber, is strictly prohibited. Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behaviour that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.
- i. Verbal bullying is the use of words and language to intimidate an individual in order to force him or her to do what you want.
 - ii. Physical bullying is the use of physical force or coercion against an individual in order to force him or her to do what you want.
 - iii. Cyber bullying is the use of technological means of communication in a threatening or an exploitative way against an individual in order to force him or her to do what you want.
- d. Mishandling and/or misappropriation of temporal goods³ of the Church is strictly prohibited.

4. **Protection of Vulnerable People**

- a. One-on-one meetings (e.g. counselling, reconciliation, education activities, home visits)

i. Children and adolescents

It is prohibited for one unrelated adult to be alone with a child or adolescent when serving in or at an activity of a parish or the Archdiocese. There must always be two unrelated adults⁴ present for any ministry to a single child or adolescent.

ii. Vulnerable adults

It is recommended that there always be two unrelated adults, present for any ministry that involves a single, vulnerable adult.

b. If ministry requires one-on-one for effectiveness or confidentiality reasons

If it is essential to serve a child, adolescent, or vulnerable adult one-on-one, then it must be done in a location that is entirely visible to other people.

For example:

- i. In an open space off to one corner.
- ii. In a room with glass doors and/or windows.

³ Temporal goods: material or property owned by the Church or religious organization to support their spiritual mission such as buildings, land and funds. Governed by Canon Las 1254-1310

⁴ Unrelated adults: adults who are not related to each other.

- iii. If for the purpose of confession, a traditional confessional may be used, as long as the priest and penitent are entirely separated by a physical barrier.

c. Group activities and events.

i. Children and adolescents

In activities that involve groups of children and/or adolescents, there should always be two unrelated adults, to offer instruction or supervision. These two adults must always be visible to one another during the activity or event. See **Section 8 Policy on Activities and Events for Youth and Young Adults** of the *Policy Manual for Codes of Conduct* that are specific to youth activities and events.

ii. Vulnerable adults

In ministry activities involving vulnerable adults, there should be two unrelated adults present.

d. Sacramental Preparation

The preparation of children for the celebration of the Sacraments of first Reconciliation, first Communion, and Confirmation is to be done in a group format, with at least two unrelated adults present. One-on-one instruction for children and adolescents is never permitted. The two adults must always be visible to one another.

e. Liturgy of the Word with Children (“Sunday School”)

The Liturgy of the Word with Children during Sunday Mass is always to be conducted by at least two unrelated adults, but that may not always be possible in smaller communities. The two adults must always be visible to one another.

f. Other catechetical and recreational programs for children and adolescents

Two unrelated adults are to be present for all recreational and catechetical programs.