

POLICY 5.1.2 Safe Environment Policy

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, staff 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, staff or a volunteer in a high risk ministry, every candidate must read and sign Form 5.1.b, *Ministry Suitability Form and Covenant of Care*, indicating acceptance of this Code. All other volunteers must read and sign Form 5.1.c, *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:

- Procedures are in place to ensure that risks of harm to children, adolescents and vulnerable adults, in particular, are minimal and/or inadvertent.
- 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.
- Clergy, staff and volunteers are trained to respond immediately and effectively to incidents of harassment, bullying, and other threatening or harmful conduct.
- Confidential processes for reporting misconduct are in place.
- A published Misconduct Policy provides a transparent and accountable procedure for handling allegations of misconduct, exploitation, and abuse.
- Nobody and nothing is excluded from complying with the Code of Conduct and the Misconduct Policy.

Training

All clergy, 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*, creating a safe environment, and the *Misconduct Policy* of the Archdiocese. This session will normally be conducted in each deanery, once a year, by the Archdiocesan Coordinator of Responsible Ministry. All clergy, 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

- **Abuse:** Regular and/or repeated cruel and violent treatment of a person. It may be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual. It may or may not be criminal in nature.
- **Bullying:** Unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.
- **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.
- **Harassment:** Aggressive pressure or intimidation that may create a hostile or offensive environment for the victim.
- **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.

Responding to Misconduct

- **Responsibilities to report under the laws of Canada and Alberta**

There is no positive duty 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.

- **Duty to report misconduct under the policies of the Archdiocese of Groaurd-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.

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 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, employees and volunteers to resist making this decision on their own. Please tell your parish priest, the Misconduct Policy Administrator, an officer of the Chancery, or the Archbishop about any behavior by a clergyman, 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 or incidents to be made. Do **not** ignore any situation that gives you pause.

All members of clergy and all employees of the Archdiocese and its parishes have a positive duty to report **immediately** any claims of incidents of misconduct by clergy, 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 (see Policy 5.2.1 Misconduct Policy).

Approved and promulgated by the College of Consultors on 25 October 2016