

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN FRANCISCO

Sexual Boundary Guidelines: A Code of Ethics for Those Involved in the Ministry of the Catholic Church¹

- We have a responsibility to witness in all relationships the chastity appropriate to our state in life, whether celibate, married or single.
- We must avoid any covert or overt sexual behaviors with those for whom we have a professional responsibility. This includes covert or overt seductive speech or gestures as well as physical contact that sexually abuses, exploits or harasses another person.
- We are to provide a safe place for young people where they can be assured that sexual boundaries will not be violated.
- We should be aware of our own and another's vulnerability in regard to sexuality, especially when working alone with another.
- We bear the greater burden of responsibility for maintaining sexual boundaries in a pastoral relationship, for we hold greater power.
- We must not initiate sexual behavior, and must refuse it even when another invites or consents to it.
- We must give preference to the perspective and judgment of those who are vulnerable and dependent on us in order to determine whether touching would be an appropriate expression of pastoral care.
- We must show prudent discretion before touching another person, since we cannot control how physical touch will be received. That is, we are to take into account how age, gender, race, ethnic background, emotional condition, prior experience, and present life

¹ Citing Richard M. Gula, S.S., Ph.D., *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*, Paulist Press, 1995, pp. 149-151.

situation all affect how our touching may be received and interpreted.

- We should become familiar with the dynamics of transference and counter transference, which can make us vulnerable to violating sexual boundaries.
- We strive for greater self-awareness in order to recognize the sexual dynamics at work for us in pastoral relationships and to heed the warning signs in our lives which indicate when we are approaching boundary violations.
- We should satisfy our needs for affection, intimacy, attraction, and affirmation outside the pastoral relationship.
- We should seek supervision or other professional help to remain focused on our professional responsibilities and to hold firm to the sexual boundaries of the pastoral relationship.
- We must report clear violations of sexual conduct to the appropriate ecclesial and civil authorities and then do what we can to see that justice is done for the victim, the offender, and the community from which the victim and minister come.
- We must intervene when there is evidence of the abuse of children, the elderly, or the disabled. When it is necessary to avert a serious threat of harm to another, justice requires that we make a reasonable attempt to elicit voluntary disclosure, but if disclosure is not made and permission to discuss is not granted, then we should inform only those who need to know and tell them only what they need to know in order to avert harm.