

# CODE OF ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. COLUMBAN

(MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES, Revised 2018, PAGES 11-17)

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Our conduct as Church leaders has the potential to inspire and motivate people but also to scandalize and weaken their faith. We must be aware of the responsibilities that accompany our work. It is no longer presumed, as it was in the past, that people in ministry behave ethically and know what constitutes proper conduct. We are expected to be persons of integrity and must conduct ourselves in an honest and open manner, free from any form of deception. We have a responsibility to lead by example. All members are expected to comply with Society policies. Many dioceses now have a Code of Ethical Responsibility which can be used in conjunction with the Society policy.

### Respect for Others

It is essential that we respect the rights, dignity and worth of each person and strive to be sensitive to cultural differences among people, appreciating the opportunities that diversity brings by:

- treating all with respect and courtesy
- avoiding all forms of prejudicial discrimination
- honoring the dignity of women, men and children
- resolving disputes through respectful dialogue and negotiation rather than by resort to power
- reaching out to all people, especially those who feel alienated from the Church or marginalized within the Church
- being sensitive to the diverse forms of spirituality and theology within the Church
- respecting people of other faiths/religions
- responding sensitively to the issues that arise when different cultures meet and respectfully welcoming minorities.

## 2. Confidentiality

We respect the absolute confidentiality of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Other confidential information is received on the basis of professional confidentiality. Ministerial relationships are held together by trust. With the exception of the sacramental forum in which confidentiality is an absolute, trust requires a strong presumption in favor of keeping a confidence unless there is a clear and present danger that harm will come to another unless disclosure is made to appropriate persons.

Rarely, there will be circumstances in which such confidential information can or must be revealed, e.g. when such information threatens danger to others or to oneself. When this is the case we must take responsible action to inform potential victims and the proper Society and/or civil authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Two resources which have been consulted extensively for these revisions are: *Integrity in Ministry: A Document of Principles and Standards for Catholic Clergy & Religious in Australia* (N.S.W.: National Committee for Professional Standards, 2004) and Richard Gula, SS, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2010).

No one may unlawfully harm the good reputation which a person enjoys, or violate the right of every person to protect his or her privacy [cf. C. 220].

While we respect a member's right to privacy we cannot regard it as absolute. In order to respond compassionately and responsibly, the appropriate authorities should be informed, such as the local superior, Regional Director/Mission Unit Coordinator, RMU Ethical Conduct Advisory Board, civil authorities, and when necessary the Superior General. For a member who is on administrative/ministerial leave, it is strongly recommended that his superior inform his community of the reason why he is not engaged in ministry. Sharing such information prevents erroneous speculation from spreading and usually elicits support for the member. The Director/Mission Unit Coordinator from the sending Region/Mission Unit should fully inform the Region/Mission Unit leader in the receiving Region/Mission Unit about past behaviour which might render a member unsuitable for ministry or other behavior, which, though not necessarily rendering the member unsuitable for ministry, may be important for the leader to know e.g. a member who has a history of addiction (active or in recovery). When there is a change in leadership in a Region/Mission Unit the same information should be communicated.

### **3. Pastoral Relationships**

We exercise just treatment towards all with whom we come into contact, respecting their emotional, physical, spiritual or sexual boundaries. Boundaries are the way we set limits that create a hospitable space wherein others can come in and feel safe with someone who makes room for them and accepts them. As ministers, we are always responsible for maintaining appropriate behaviour. We never initiate sexual advances and we refuse them when initiated by others. We are careful to choose an appropriate environment in which to exercise ministry.

It is essential that we avoid any behaviour that could reasonably be interpreted as harassment. Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical or verbal behaviour, including but not limited to:

- physical or psychological abuse
- racial insults
- derogatory ethnic slurs
- unwelcome touching or sexual advance
- sexual jokes or sexual comments
- request for sexual favours
- display of suggestive materials

We must not exploit another person for sexual purposes. We have made a commitment to a celibate lifestyle are called to witness this in all relationships. We should use discretion in fostering intimate relationships and avoid such relationships with minors.

#### **4. Working in Cross-cultural Situations**

As cross-cultural missionaries we find ourselves constantly in situations where we are outside of our familiar cultures. Our ability to witness sensitivity towards people of all cultures is an expression of our Gospel-centered lives. We must learn culturally appropriate behaviors especially in regards to physical touch.

We must show discretion before touching another person, since we cannot control how physical touch will be interpreted. That is, we are to take into account how age, gender, race and ethnic background all affect how one's touch may be received and interpreted. This is particularly true for us Columbans as we move in and out of different cultures. We, therefore, need to know what is acceptable behaviour in our country of assignment.

We need to know the civil laws, which affect the exercise of our ministries, in the countries where we are working. We comply with just civil legal systems as well as the laws and policies of the local Church.

#### **5. Cultural Sensitivity**

- In our lives as Columbans we should witness to God's love through sensitivity, reverence and respect in our relationships with each other and those with whom we live and work, especially those coming from different cultures and backgrounds.
- Avoid all forms of harmful discrimination and expressions of prejudice in oneself and actively discourage such conduct from others, especially those with whom we work.
- Resolve disputes through respectful dialogue, negotiation and/or professional mediation.

We must seek to also guard against the potential to use clerical status to claim privilege or special treatment which can be manifested in many ways: social privileges, entitlements, exclusivity, and the lack of any significant accountability structures. We seek an organizational culture that is accountable, transparent, and just which includes policies, procedures and instruments of evaluation that provide for follow through with supervision, and disciplinary procedures.

#### **6. Financial Responsibility**

Ethical financial administration is a way of doing justice. It is integral to ethical pastoral care. Implementing structures of internal control, along with transparency, clarity and honesty in accounting and vigilance in detecting fraud will restore trust in the community and in the integrity of the Society. The following are ways in which we witness our commitment to fiscal stewardship:

- The funds we receive are entrusted to us for mission, not for our personal advantage. They should be expended carefully. We have a duty of stewardship, frugal living and financial accountability.

- Comply with all reporting and accounting laws as required by government/church legislation.
- Keep accurate records of income/expenditure where Society funds are involved and any funds entrusted to your administration.
- Refuse gifts, rewards or benefits which might compromise the integrity of one's ministry.

## **7. Professional Competence**

Formation, on-going education, sabbaticals and experience all contribute to making us competent and credible ministers of the gospel. Continuing education, formation, and renewal opportunities are essential and we must find time for both.

## **8. Relationships with Columban Lay Missionaries and Co-Workers**

The Society recognizes that the organization and our response to mission is enhanced by the participation of lay Co-Workers, whom the Society employs to be of service, and Columban lay missionaries with whom we work in partnership. We are committed to creating just and equitable working conditions as an expression of our commitment to inviting people to join us in mission.

## **9. Health, Healing, and Wholeness**

We have the duty to care for our physical, spiritual, moral, mental and emotional health and to take advantage of the available supports e.g.

- nourishing oneself through Scripture, Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation
- following a regular discipline of reflective reading, prayer, spiritual direction and other spiritual practices
- making an annual retreat
- participating in ongoing formation
- nurturing one's understanding of and commitment to celibacy
- periodically discussing one's physical and emotional health with a colleague or appropriate support person
- seeing that one's overall health is checked regularly by qualified persons.
- monitoring issues of stress, isolation and other risks to health among the Columban community.
- taking regular days off and annual holidays.

We recognize there are times in our lives when emotional, mental, spiritual, and/or physical health becomes imbalanced. We are encouraged to take steps to seek wholeness. Similarly, when we see such imbalance in our confreres, we are encouraged to support with fraternal care and assist as needed ensuring the member seeks the necessary care and treatment.

## **10. Reporting Professional Misconduct**

If a Columban has good reason to believe that a confrere or colleague has violated these ethical standards in a serious manner, especially in the case of the sexual abuse of a minor he has a duty to report this to his superior.

It must be our shared conviction that any type of collaboration in silence or secrecy about such matters is participation in abuse. The most tragic aspect of the sexual abuse crisis was the number of instances when Columbans had doubts about the behavior of a confrere or colleague and failed to act upon their disquiet. The rationales for the silence were often questions of being embarrassed to speak about the matter or even not knowing what to do with their intuitions/concerns.

Our duty is to relate with our confreres and colleagues within the dynamics of fraternal correction without violating the ethics concerning protecting personal reputation. For more information and guidelines when the abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult is known or suspected, see MPP 306 with Annex.

## **11. Social Media**

- Never speak disparagingly about another person on social websites, blogs, Facebook, etc., as it is against natural justice and charity.
- Take professional advice in regard to the setting up of social networking accounts, so as to ensure appropriate confidentiality.
- Recognise that all information placed in social media ultimately becomes public and therefore we should exercise prudence in talking about self, others or the Church.
- Never use photos, videos or personal information about another without written permission of the person involved.
- Write about others with courtesy and respect.
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## **12. Inappropriate use of Internet and Social Networks**

The use of social networks and the internet can be powerful tools in making contact with the people of God and also as a media to spread the Gospel message. However, when these outlets are abused by Columbans to access sexuality inappropriate materials or to post messages that demean others, cause scandal or bring into question the intentions of a Columban, then this behavior must be denounced. We will be very conscious that the messages they post, websites they visit and comments they make are in accord with their religious commitments and the bounds of proper decorum.

When this is not the case, action will be taken to limit that Columban's access to such media until such time as steps can be taken to review the breadth of his communication to ascertain the full nature of his use of internet and social media and until his behavior can be monitored more effectively. Where appropriate:

- Filtering of his computer use will be instituted.
- Review of his webpages, e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc. will be undertaken.
- Future access to computer networks may be limited or curtailed.
- Forensic examination of his computer may be sought.

## **Conclusion**

The first words spoken by Jesus in the gospel of Mark are: 'The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the gospel'. [Mk 1:14f.] In the description of the day that follows, Jesus gathers disciples to share his mission, proclaims the word of God, heals men and women of physical and spiritual illness, and spends time in prayer. That day models life under the Reign of God, where men and women are healed and gathered together in a communion of faith, hope and love.

If we are to live our mission and practice ministry in the spirit of Jesus, then we need to be part of the community of faith that tries to model its life on Jesus and to help one another be faithful and creative in the ways we witness to discipleship today. As a community with a shared mission, we can hold one another accountable to the ways we carry out our role. It is a call to authentic discipleship manifested in our ministry: a life centered on God, inclusive of all people and standing in right relationship with everyone.