

RESPONSE TO COMPLAINTS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Q. How are complaints or allegations of sexual misconduct handled by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles?

A. The Archdiocese treats all complaints of sexual misconduct seriously and deals with such allegations in a *prompt, confidential and thorough* manner with compassion and consideration for all those involved.

- A complaint against an Archdiocesan priest or deacon, Catholic school personnel, or other Archdiocesan employee may be initiated in writing or by telephoning the Assistance Ministry Coordinator at (800) 355-2545.
- Complaints against religious order priests or women religious are made to their own religious superior. The Archdiocesan Assistance Ministry Coordinator is able to assist directing such a complaint to the proper authority.
- Complaints against parish employees or volunteers may be directed to the pastor or associate pastor of the parish in question.

Q. How will the Archdiocese handle sexual exploitation or sexual abuse complaints if lodged against a member of the clergy (i.e., bishops, priests or deacons)?

A. When a member of the clergy is accused, a team (including the Assistance Ministry Coordinator, the Vicar for the Clergy, and a special fact-finder known as an Auditor) responds promptly to the complaint. In dealing with these, the Archdiocese will:

- Make every effort to act in a way that protects people from being harmed, including relieving an accused priest or deacon from ministerial duties if there is sufficient evidence to support the allegations.
- Comply with all civil reporting mandates governing sexual abuse.
- Strive impartially to determine the facts and circumstances as accurately as possible.

- Offer victims and their families assistance in obtaining psychological counseling and spiritual direction.
- Deal as openly as possible with members of the parish community while respecting the privacy of the individuals involved and in accordance with Church law governing such situations.

PREVENTING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Q. What is being done to prevent sexual misconduct in the Church?

A. Every effort is made to assure that all persons ministering in the Archdiocese are aware of and will abide by the policies prohibiting sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse, and of the procedures for dealing with incidents of sexual misconduct.

School personnel are screened for their ability to work safely with children, are provided information to help recognize and deal with issues of child sexual abuse, and are offered guidance and instruction on appropriate professional conduct with students.

All seminarians and candidates for the diaconate go through an extensive evaluation and psychological assessment before entering formation. After ordination, priests and deacons receive ongoing training on maintaining the integrity of the ministerial relationship.

Every person has the right to be respected and treated with the dignity befitting a child of God. Every person has the right to having appropriate boundaries respected. Every person has the right to challenge any behavior or comment that is offensive or inappropriate. It is the responsibility of everyone to protect the safety of children, families, women and men, and to promote healing where there is injury with firm justice and mercy towards all.

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the BOUNDARIES

KEEPING MINISTERIAL RELATIONSHIPS HEALTHY AND HOLY



**“The Light Shines in the Darkness
and the Darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5)**

ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES
3424 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90010-2241

DEFINING THE PROBLEM: SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ARISING IN A MINISTERIAL RELATIONSHIP

Q.What constitutes a “ministerial relationship”?

A. This is a relationship in which a person is receiving pastoral care from a church leader.

Whenever a person begins a relationship with any person in his or her capacity as a church official or leader, a ministerial relationship is created. This applies to:

- Clergy (bishops, priests and deacons)
- Members of religious communities (priests, brothers, sisters)
- Lay ministers, lay pastoral associates, youth ministers, liturgical ministers
- Spiritual directors and pastoral counselors
- School personnel
- Seminary faculty, staff, and administrators
- Religious education teachers, church camp counselors, choir directors, etc.

THE NATURE OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Sexual misconduct is a general term that includes sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

More specifically:

Q.What is sexual misconduct arising from the ministerial relationship?

A. While ministry is never about sexual contact, sexualized contact or sexualized behavior may arise within a ministerial relationship. In our Catholic faith, this is never acceptable in a pastoral relationship with a parishioner, employee, student, spiritual directee, counseling client, or anyone who has sought the church’s ministry.

Q.What is sexual harassment?

A. **Sexual harassment** is unwanted sexualized conduct or language between co-workers in the church setting. Although difficult to define precisely, sexual harassment may include but is not limited to the following:

- Making unsolicited sexual advances and propositions.
- Using sexually degrading words to describe an individual or an individual’s body.
- Telling inappropriate or sexually related jokes.
- Retaliating against the co-worker who refuses sexual advances.
- Offering favors or employment benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluations, favorably assigned duties or shifts, recommendations, etc. in exchange for sexual favors.

Q.What is sexual exploitation?

A. **Sexual exploitation** is the sexual contact between a church leader and a person who is receiving pastoral care from the church leader.

Q.What is sexual abuse?

A. **Sexual abuse** is sexual contact between a church leader and a minor or a “vulnerable adult” as defined by law.

Either sexual exploitation or sexual abuse can include **physical contact** from the church leader such as:

- Sexual touch or other intrusive touching (i.e., tickling, wrestling, or other physical contact) that causes uneasiness or discomfort in the one touched
- An inappropriate gift (such as lingerie)
- A prolonged hug when a brief hug is customary behavior
- Kissing on the lips when a kiss on the cheek would be appropriate
- Showing sexually suggestive objects or pornography
- Sexual intercourse, anal or oral sex.

Sexual exploitation or sexual abuse can also include **verbal behavior** such as:

- Innuendo or sexual talk
- Suggestive comments
- Tales of sexual exploits, experiences or conflicts
- Making sexual propositions

Q.What factors might lead to sexual misconduct in a ministerial setting?

A. It is a common dynamic in ministry for some to feel attracted to those in church leadership positions, or to feel flattered by his or her attention. This never excuses any form of sexual misconduct. Clergy or other church leaders who engage in any form of sexual misconduct are violating the ministerial relationship, misusing their authority and power, and are taking advantage of the vulnerability of those who are seeking spiritual guidance.

Because of the respect and even reverence with which many people seek help from the Church’s ministers, there is an imbalance of power and hence a vulnerability inherent in the ministerial relationship. In these circumstances there is an absence of meaningful consent to any sexual activity, even if the person is an adult. This imbalance of power makes it never okay. It is the responsibility of the Church leader to maintain appropriate emotional and sexual boundaries with those with whom they work or serve.

Q.What impact could ministerial sexual misconduct have on its victims?

A. Victims of ministerial sexual misconduct frequently feel deep shame or self-condemnation. They may fear not being believed or fear being blamed by Church officials or members. Many times they may not even realize that the way they were treated was abusive. Sadly, victims can experience a crisis of faith and even leave the Church altogether.