

Dominus Vobiscum Code of Conduct and Ethics

(for Staff, Volunteers,
Clergy, Participants, and Visitors¹)

Preamble: The Vocation of the Lay Faithful

Ethical guidelines for clerical and lay Catholics must be situated within the context of an appreciation of their collaborative role in the common mission of the Church.

The lay vocation is in the “front line” of Church life. Church teaching recognizes that “lay believers are in the front line of Church life; for them the Church is the animating principle of human society. Therefore, they in particular ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the common Head, and of the bishops in communion with him. They are the Church.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 899*)

The lay faithful are the Church in the world. The laity are called “to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 898*). “The initiative of lay Christians,” the Catechism insists, “is necessary especially when the matter involves discovering or inventing the means for permeating social, political, and economic realities with the demands of Christian doctrine and life.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 899*)

The right and duty of the laity to work and exercise leadership in their various apostolates. The laity are entrusted with both “the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all... throughout the earth. Their activity in ecclesial communities is so necessary that, for the most part, the apostolate of the pastors cannot be fully effective without it.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 900*)

¹ This code was originally drafted for the Dominus Vobiscum Retreat Centre, McGill’s Catholic Chaplaincy and the Newman Centre. Versions of this code are currently used by the Newman Centre of McGill University ([Newman Centre Code of Ethics](#)) and the English Speaking Catholic Council ([Ethical Guidelines Handbook](#)).

1.0 General Norms

Catholic moral and social teachings are founded on belief in God and the affirmation of the sacred dignity of every human person created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27). Catholic teaching also affirms a preferential option for the poor.

Audience and Context: The following norms are applicable to all areas of service:

- 1.1 Speak and act in ways consistent with our vocation to know, love and serve God.
- 1.2 Speak and act in ways that respect the equal dignity and worth of every individual.
- 1.3 Speak and act in ways that reach out to those who are suffering, weak or vulnerable.

2.0 Relationships with the Faith Community

Baptism in the life and mission of Jesus Christ involves ongoing faithfulness to the life and mission of his Church. The diverse missions of lay Catholic associations flow from the “common mission” of the Church to bring, through words and deeds, the good news of God’s love and salvation to the world.

Audience and Context: For individual lay Catholics striving to be faithful to their vocation the following norms are applicable to all areas of service. The common mission of the Church gives life and meaning to the diverse apostolic services within the Catholic community. However, it is important to point out that Catholic organizations normally do not define their own particular missions in a way that highlights all, or even most, of the diverse elements of Catholic identity in their specific area of apostolic work. For example, some organizations focus on one concrete aspect of the mission of social justice, such as care of the elderly or outreach to refugees. It would be inappropriate and impractical to expect specific Catholic organizations to respond to and promote all aspects of Catholic mission.

- 2.1 Speak and act in a manner that is consistent with the common mission of the Church.
- 2.2 Speak and act in ways that respect the diverse conditions, vocations, and offices of members of the Body of Christ.
- 2.3 No one should be forced to act in a manner contrary to one’s informed conscience, nor be restrained from acting in accordance with one’s conscience, especially in matters moral or religious.
- 2.4 Respect for freedom of conscience is not absolute. The obvious exception is when conscientious behaviour causes, or threatens, harm to others.

2.5 With due respect for freedom of conscience, strive to be faithful to the Catholic faith, beliefs and practices in particular contexts of service.

2.6 Refrain from using your position in Catholic lay service as a platform to express personal disagreements with official teachings of the Catholic Church.

2.7 Respecting due process, prudence, and the correct avenues for change (personal example and/or appropriate types of collective action), work to reform practices and policies that clearly contradict or violate the common mission of the Church.

2.8 Maintain an active relationship with and good standing within the Catholic Church.

2.9 Seek ongoing faith and spiritual formation.

2.10 In accordance with one's areas of knowledge and competence, affirm and exercise the right and duty of the laity to express opinions on matters pertaining to the good of the church with due regard for the integrity of faith and morals, the common good, and the dignity of persons.

2.11 If for any reason the lay faithful are not free to appropriately exercise or express their Catholic faith, they should notify the proper religious and/or civil authorities.

3.0 Basic Respect and Care

Disciples of Jesus are called to love one another as he has loved us (John 15:12), to seek to do good for others, and to avoid evil.

Audience and Context: The following norms are applicable to all areas of service.

3.1 Avoid any unjust discrimination “based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.” ([*Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*](#)).

3.2 Demonstrate respect for the diversity of cultures that shape the tapestry of human societies.

3.3 Act in a courteous, responsible and mature manner when interacting with others.

3.4 Speak and act in ways that foster respect and care for the environment.

3.5 Take reasonable care to avoid acts or omissions which you can reasonably foresee would be likely to cause harm to others.

3.6 Report to those responsible in Dominus Vobiscum anything related to its activities that may pose health and/or safety risks.

3.7 Report to those responsible any activity or threat that poses serious harm (physical, emotional or psychological) to oneself or another, especially if the endangered person is a minor.

3.8 Disclose to those responsible any criminal charge or conviction that has not been pardoned and that may be directly or indirectly relevant to the apostolic service engaged in.

3.9 Smoking and e-smoking are prohibited on in the buildings of the Dominus Vobiscum retreat centre or during its activities or events.

3.10 Avoid the use or distribution of illegal drugs or substances.

3.11 Avoid any abuse of alcohol. Avoid the use or distribution of alcohol in contexts of service where the presence of alcohol would be inappropriate or could pose risks to health or safety. Possession or consumption of Cannabis is prohibited. There can be an exception if the use is for medically documented reasons.

3.12 Avoid, and protect others from, any form of coercive, intimidating or otherwise abusive words or actions. Abuse encompasses a range of activities including, but not limited to:

- physical aggression or intimidation (striking, shoving, grabbing, etc.)
- verbal, written, or psychological abuse
- public displays of physical anger (throwing things, punching walls, etc)
- bullying
- harassment
- racial, ethnic and religious insults.

4.0 Confidentiality and Trust in Relationships

Christian leaders are called to be “good shepherds” who care about those whom they serve and who refrain from exploiting their position for their own personal interests (Jn 10, 1 Pet 5).

Audience and Context: The following norms apply with more force to areas of service that involve the exercise of pastoral authority and professional expertise such as counselling and spiritual direction. Types of service that involve confidential communication, counselling and trust between the lay servant and those served require special attention to ethical boundaries and appropriate conduct.

- 4.1 Refrain from exploiting relationships of trust and authority to pursue personal interests and desires; always work to promote the interests and wellbeing of those being served.
- 4.2 Be mindful of the imbalance of power in such relationships and refrain from any exploitation of that imbalance.
- 4.3 Avoid dual relationships (such as business or close intimate relationships) that could impair judgment and integrity.
- 4.4 Avoid fostering unhealthy or harmful forms of psychological or social dependency that do not contribute to the development of those being served.
- 4.5 Do not initiate, promote, or agree to, any form of sexual behaviour within the bounds of professional and spiritual relationships.
- 4.6 Provide clear and realistic expectations regarding responsibilities and services.
- 4.7 Understand the limits of individual competence and make referrals to other professionals when appropriate.
- 4.8 Recognize the integrated nature of Christian service and avoid recommending prayer or other forms of spiritual activity as *substitutes* for professional attention and care.
- 4.9 Refrain from using psychological tools or tests unless the person administering them is accredited in their use.
- 4.10 Recommend referral to qualified health professionals if those under pastoral care exhibit psychosis, suicidal thoughts, delusional thinking, bizarre behaviour, drug or alcohol abuse, or symptoms of severe depression.
- 4.11 Treat all communications with confidentiality except when disclosure is required for necessary treatment when granted by permission, when required for the safety of any person, or when required by law.
- 4.12 Ensure that the identities of others are thoroughly disguised if pastoral experiences are referred to in teaching, public talks, or publications.

5.0 Sexual Responsibility

Scripture affirms the unitive and procreative meaning of human sexuality and the sacramentality of the marital union (1 Cor 6-7; Eph 5). Catholic associations should foster a healthy and responsible sexual ethos. Youth programs and events are important settings for education in interpersonal relationships.

Audience and Context: The following norms aim at prohibiting forms of seduction, sexual harassment or abuse between lay workers and the adults or minors whom they serve, as well as their colleagues in apostolic service. These norms are not meant to suppress the expression of healthy and appropriate courtship relationships within the Christian community. However, certain forms of behaviour can be abusive or seriously compromise and confuse relationships especially where staff is involved.

5.1 Foster a healthy responsible sexual ethic consistent with the Catholic vision of human sexuality.

5.2 Avoid any form of sexual harassment. Harassment encompasses a range of activities including, but not limited to:

- inappropriate and/or unwelcome touching
- inappropriate sexual comments, innuendos or invitations
- inappropriate sexual displays of one's body
- displays of offensive pictures, cartoons, or pornographic materials.

5.3 Avoid any forms of behaviour aimed at sexual seduction or soliciting sexual favours.

5.4 Respect the physical and emotional boundaries of all persons in the domain of physical contact and intimacy.

- Terminate any physical activity or conversation indicated (verbally or nonverbally) to be unwelcome, uncomfortable or threatening.
- Exercise the right to terminate any physical activity or conversation that you experience as unwelcome or threatening.

5.5 Avoid courtship behaviour aimed at inappropriate individuals, such as those who are married, religious, or clergy.

5.6 Refrain from nurturing romantic liaisons that would compromise and confuse the service environment by fostering inappropriate dual relationships.

5.7 Immediately report any incident or threat of physical or sexual abuse to the civil authorities.

6.0 Relationships with Minors

Jesus encouraged his disciples to welcome and reach out to children (Mk 10). Catholic apostolic work has an outstanding tradition of outreach to the young through its schools,

educational programs, diocesan youth organizations, parish youth ministries, and many other forms of youth apostolate. Jesus also solemnly warned against any abuse of children (Matt. 18). His warnings underline the need to develop moral and spiritual environments that protect the wellbeing of young people.

Audience and Context: All ministries that have an outreach to minors should exercise ethical vigilance. Concrete guidelines include:

6.1 Programs or services for children and adolescents should aim for a healthy integrated development of the young person's faith, values, personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities.

6.2 In all forms of service, the rights and dignity of young people, parental rights and obligations, and as well as the young person's cultural background and identity, should be respected.

6.3 Foster a culture that promotes balanced and reasonable goals for young people and avoids imposing onerous expectations or undue burdens on adolescents or children.

6.4 Encourage young people to seek appropriate parental and professional help and support for any physical, psychological or social difficulties that they might be struggling with.

6.5 In the case of serious problems that expose minors to grave risk such as physical injury, illness, serious psychological disorders, substance abuse, physical or sexual harassment, there should be a common understanding that workers at Dominus Vobiscum have a responsibility to alert the parents and/or appropriate custodians to the problem.

6.6 Do not supply or serve alcohol or any controlled substance to a minor.

6.7 Avoid any form of behaviour towards minors that could be construed as grooming, seduction or courting.

6.8 Avoid forming "special" or exclusive relationships with minors.

6.9 Ensure whenever reasonably possible that another adult is present or close by when providing pastoral services to minors.

6.10 Avoid, whenever reasonably possible, being alone with a minor or group of minors in sleeping, dressing or bathing areas, or when transporting a minor, making sure to exercise prudent judgment and behaviour when another adult cannot be present.

6.11 Report concerns about inappropriate adult behaviour or relationships with minors to those who have responsibility for the individual(s) concerned. Inappropriate behaviour refers to boundary violations similar to items listed above (6.7-6.10).

6.12 Immediately report any evidence of criminal acts such as physical or sexual abuse of minors to the appropriate civil authorities.

7.0 Stewardship and Collegiality

Jesus called his disciples to a new type of servant leadership that embraces authority as a form of dedicated service rather than an entitlement or privilege (Mk 10).

Audience and Context: These counsels are more relevant to those who have leadership or decision-making responsibilities in organizations, committees, or serve on boards of directors.

7.1 Avoid treating leadership responsibilities as a form of entitlement or privilege rather than a work of dedicated service.

7.2 Foster practices of transparency and accountability to fellow workers and stakeholders, as well as those who are being served. Transparency refers to the responsibility to adequately inform co-workers and stakeholders in the association of rules, procedures, decisions and policies related to the area of apostolic service, as well as any changes to the above. These communications do not include matters deemed confidential.

7.3 Attend to and solicit feedback from colleagues and those who are served.

7.4 Represent accurately any professional qualifications and affiliations.

7.5 Do not malign colleagues, clergy or other professionals.

7.6 Exercise good stewardship and accountability in the use of money and other resources entrusted to one's care.

7.7 Do not engage in activities that might constitute a "nuisance" (loud sound, smoke, pollution) for others.

7.8 Prudently use contributed funds for the purposes stated in soliciting them.

7.9 Foster collegial relationships recognizing that good judgment is achieved through consultative interaction rather than through isolated decision-making.

7.10 Follow established rules of fair procedure in committee or board decision-making.

7.11 Seek advice and counsel of clergy, colleagues or other professionals whenever it is in the best interest of those being served and make referrals when appropriate.

7.12 Constructively collaborate for changes in institutional practices that will promote greater solidarity, justice and service.

7.13 Resolve disputes through dialogue, reconciliation, negotiation, and/or professional mediation if deemed necessary.

7.14 Take collegial and responsible action when concerns about or direct knowledge of misconduct occur.

8.0 Public Communication

The gospel proclaims that the truth shall set us free (Jn 8: 32). Transparency and truthfulness are ethical requirements for lay Catholic organizations and associations, as well as for individuals representing these institutions.

Audience and Context: These counsels would be applicable to those who are responsible for the dissemination of information for lay Catholic associations or various forms of lay apostolic service.

8.1 Foster a culture of honesty, openness and disclosure, rather than secrecy and concealment, concerning institutional policies, decisions, practices, and procedures.

8.2 With due respect for matters involving valid confidentiality concerns, respond to requests for information promptly and accurately.

8.3 Avoid disseminating information or advertising which contains any of the following:

- Fraudulent, deceptive, or misleading claims
- Deceptive or misleading misrepresentations of qualifications, titles or expertise.
- Statements likely to create unjustified expectations of favourable outcomes.
- Sensationalism or exaggeration
- Defamatory statements that harm, injure or adversely affect someone's reputation
- Exploitation of fears, anxieties or emotions.
- Misrepresentation or denigration of other faith traditions

9. Civic Duties

Catholic lay associations, services and activities are important elements of the dynamic civil society life vital to free democracies. Lay Catholics should strive to be engaged citizens as well as faithful members of their Church.

Audience and Context: The following norms are applicable to all areas of service.

9.1 Speak and act in a manner that is consistent with the “supremacy of God and the rule of law” (Canadian Charter), the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and Freedoms.

9.2 Speak and act in ways that promote a “culture of life” and respect the inviolable right to life of all human beings from conception to natural death.

9.3 Speak and act in ways that respect and promote the Catholic vision of marriage and family life.

9.4 Promote justice in relationships with others, especially on behalf of persons in need.

9.5 Encourage informed public debate on issues of social and moral concern.

9.6 Foster responsible and active citizenship in a pluralistic democratic state.

Dominus Vobiscum: Catholic Family Foundation is located within the Archdiocese of Montreal and therefore is responsive to evolving diocesan codes of ethics and policies.

Archdiocese of Montreal:

- [Code of Ethics specific to ministry involving minors and vulnerable adults](#)
- [Diocesan Policy on Responsible Pastoral Ministry](#)