

# Models of Right Conduct

A Pastoral Statement by  
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In the rite of priestly ordination, the Bishop prays the prayer of consecration over the priest. Included in this prayer is the following:

Almighty Father, grant to these servants of yours the dignity of priesthood. Renew within them the Spirit of holiness. As co-workers with the order of bishops may they be faithful to the ministry that they receive from you, Lord God, and be to others a model of right conduct.

While this is a prayer for the newly ordained priest, all of us as baptized believers are called to some type of ministry, and called to be faithful to that ministry which is a gift from God. Included in that call is the responsibility to carry out that ministry in holiness and integrity. All who serve God's people--clergy, religious, laity--are to imitate fully the example of Jesus Christ, to be models of right conduct. Fortunately, the vast majority of men and women called into ministry and service to God's people have generously served in fidelity and integrity, day in and day out.

Sadly, however, a very small minority have not been faithful to their commitment and have, through their sexual misconduct, abused their spiritual position and caused immeasurable harm to children, to adolescents, and to their families. For this, we are all deeply remorseful and sympathetic.

As your Bishop, I want you to know that I am committed to the safety of all children under our care. I can assure you that we have received no complaints or allegations of pedophilia against any cleric currently in active ministry in this diocese. I will not knowingly assign or retain a priest, deacon, religious, or lay person to serve in our parishes, schools, diocesan ministries, or any other assignment when such an individual has engaged in the sexual abuse of a child.

Over the years, the Diocese of Beaumont has taken numerous measures to assure trustworthy ministry and to safeguard children. Since 1996, we have implemented and followed the diocesan Ethical and Personal Conduct Policies and provided orientation sessions to clergy, religious, and lay employees throughout the diocese. Volunteers who have regular and concentrated access to children also receive a copy of these policies and are made aware of their responsibilities. Included in these policies is the mandate to make the required report to the civil authorities if there is reason to believe that a child has been or is in danger of being abused. These policies may be found on the Diocese of Beaumont web site ([www.dioceseofbmt.org](http://www.dioceseofbmt.org)) under "Documents."

In addition, our clergy and seminarians receive regular mailings of current information on sexual and emotional issues from Catholic sources. Ordained priests and permanent deacons have opportunities for ongoing formation and education programs to assist them in their commitments as clergy.

For many years the diocese has had in place a Vocations Board (priests, religious, laity) which assists in the screening of persons who apply for the seminary. (For the screening process, refer to the Diocese of Beaumont web site, under the "Vocations Office.") Once all the required documentation is obtained from an applicant, including current references, the information is provided to the Board, which subsequently meets with the applicant. After the interview, the Board discusses all of the information and makes a recommendation to me. Afterwards, I interview the applicant alone. If the applicant is accepted as a candidate, he takes a medical exam and a psychological exam from a psychologist who is an expert in sexual abuse; criminal and other background checks are also done. In addition to the criminal and sex offender background

checks, which have been done in the past, the diocese will begin doing credit and driving records checks. If something of concern surfaces from all of these exams and checks, then a further sexual inventory assessment is done, and there is an interview with the priest psychologist on the Vocations Board. Every reasonable effort to screen out those who might be/become a sexual predator is taken. In their formation, seminarians are provided programs that deal with human growth and development, human sexuality, maintaining appropriate boundaries, living a celibate life. Every semester, they are evaluated by the Seminary staff, and there is close collaboration between the Seminary rector and our Director of Seminarians. During seminary formation, we monitor our seminarians, and if behavior becomes indicative of problems, it is confronted right away. Depending on the nature and severity of the problems, dismissal from the seminary is sometimes the final result. Before ordination, a seminarian ordinarily is required to do a pastoral internship, living and working in a parish. The supervising pastor and others monitor and evaluate the seminarian, and this assists the Seminary and diocesan officials to determine suitability for diocesan priesthood.

There are other measures to assure trustworthy ministry and to safeguard children. In 1999 the Diocese established additional guidelines for the screening of applicants for paid positions in all the parishes and diocesan offices and for volunteers who would have concentrated access to children and minors. These include reasonable screening steps, such as completion of the Applicant/Volunteer Background Questionnaire, which inquires about any past accusations of or convictions for child/sexual abuse and gives approval to conduct background checks. Also, criminal convictions and sex offender background checks are to be done for new applicants/volunteers. These guidelines on background checks can also be found on the Diocese of Beaumont web site in the "Documents" section.

In addition, no clergy from outside the Diocese of Beaumont will be given general faculties for long-term ministry in the diocese until we have received a complete curriculum vitae and a statement of suitability from his religious superior or diocesan bishop. Such a statement includes information about any past allegations of sexual misconduct, financial wrongdoing, or substance abuse. Extern clergy who briefly visit the diocese must present a current credential from their religious superior or diocesan bishop attesting to their good standing.

Few have not heard about the scandals regarding priests that have been in the media and newspapers, especially in the past few months. With so much publicity, we tend to think that the misconduct by a few priests is widespread. This is certainly not the case. We are truly blessed with priests and deacons who faithfully carry out their ministry with integrity and zeal. In fact, most of our clergy are working too hard, trying to meet the multiplying challenging pastoral demands. They work side by side with other dedicated religious and lay ministers who give of themselves selflessly for the good of the Christian community. I thank them and commend them for their commitment to the people of this diocese. Horrific actions by abusive priests, such as the matters pending in Boston, have a tendency to lower the morale of our good and faithful priests and deacons because they feel painted with the same broad brush of the abusers. Now is a time for the Catholic people of the Diocese of Beaumont to pray for and reach out to their pastors, priests, and deacons and support them with the love and compassion of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let us pray for one another that all of us may be models of right conduct in our families, in our jobs, in our communities, and in our ministries.