



The English Speaking Catholic Council  

---

Le conseil catholique d'expression anglaise

**ETHICAL GUIDELINES HANDBOOK**

**FOR THE CATHOLIC LAITY IN APOSTOLIC SERVICE**

Approved by the ESCC Board of Directors,

Montreal, September 5, 2007

# **Ethical Guidelines Handbook**

## **for the Catholic Laity in Apostolic Service**

Introduction:

### *What is the Ethical Guidelines Handbook?*

The Ethical Guidelines Handbook (EGH) offers a concise overview of the basic ethical standards that may be relevant to lay Catholic associations and individuals (salaried and volunteer) involved in various forms of apostolic service. The handbook is not a formal code of conduct. The goal of this document is to highlight ethical norms relevant to various forms of apostolic service in the community. It also attempts to provide a useful ethical toolbox or checklist for lay Catholic associations interested in establishing ethical codes.

### *The Local Context for the EGH Initiative*

The EGH is the initiative of the English Speaking Catholic Council of Montreal (ESCC). It was developed through a consultative process that involved both lay and clerical input. It also drew upon a broad range of religious, legal, scholarly, and professional resources.

This initiative should not be perceived as an attempt to address specific ethical problems in our local associations. The English Catholic community of Montreal is noteworthy for its wealth of diverse lay Catholic associations serving an ethnically and linguistically diverse population. These associations have a distinguished tradition of apostolic service that has been remarkably free from forms of misconduct or neglect that can pose risks to clients.

This initiative is an attempt to draw on the rich body of common wisdom, moral leadership and dedication that have been notable features of this grass-roots tradition of lay Catholic service.

### *Audience for the EGH*

These guidelines were principally designed by lay Catholics for lay Catholic associations and individuals. However, we recognize that these norms are not exclusively “lay” Catholic concerns. Many, if not most, of the guidelines would be relevant to clergy and religious, as well diocesan, parochial, and religious associations. Furthermore, most of the guidelines also would be relevant to individual lay Catholics serving within secular or non-Catholic organizations. Finally, the guidelines are relevant to volunteers as well as employees. The courts consider volunteers to be equivalent to employees for the purposes of legal, as well as ethical, risk and liability.

### *The Rationale for the EGH*

The concern for articulating clear ethical standards has been an important, perhaps universal, feature of the Catholic tradition going back to its earliest origins. It has biblical roots in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Ten Commandments and various legal and wisdom literature of the Old Testament). It is also a prominent feature of the New Testament. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount establishes a higher moral benchmark than the Mosaic Law. The gospels and letters of the New Testament offer a significant body of moral instruction for the first Christian communities. Many religious orders have long-standing traditions of ethical codes that go back to their founding constitutions.

In recent years, there has been a growing consensus about the need for clearer ethical guidelines in Catholic institutions. There are a variety of explanations for this development. Some argue that there is a need to articulate clearer public standards due to the ongoing erosion of the unwritten moral traditions that once sustained our communities. Others argue that this need arises from the growing revelation of various patterns of ethical misconduct that were not adequately addressed and responded to by our traditional moral cultures. Furthermore, recent history has shown that violations of basic ethical standards can cause very serious personal, moral and institutional harm.

Finally, ethical misconduct or negligence often can carry very serious legal consequences in terms of criminal or tort law (direct or vicarious liability). For a variety of reasons, numerous Catholic associations have been coming to the conclusion that there is a need to provide clearer ethical guidelines for their members.

### *Are Codes Effective?*

There are some legal scholars and ethicists who raise thoughtful concerns about the limits and effectiveness of codes of conduct. We recognize that codes of conduct are not magic bullets. Nor can they adequately address core dimensions of our faith. However, ethical codes or community moral standards have been longstanding features of the Catholic tradition. Codes can be a significant part of a more broad-based approach to the moral and spiritual formation of Catholic individuals and communities. According to Deborah Pope-Lance, an expert on conduct issues in religious institutions, the absence of clear public standards or codes of conduct is an important factor predicting the likelihood of misconduct in various areas of service. David Blaikie and Diana Ginn, two recognized legal experts on religious organizations and the law, contend that the establishment of sound codes and policies is “an essential aspect” of prudent leadership that strives “to eliminate or reduce risks that cause harm.” (*The Legal Guide for Canadian Churches*, Novalis 2006)

### *Goals of the Ethical Guidelines Handbook*

The *EGH* attempts to meet a number of basic goals:

- To highlight basic ethical guidelines relevant to various Catholic lay associations, works and services.
- To contribute to the continuing education and formation of lay leaders and workers.
- To provide a useful ethical toolbox and checklist for lay Catholic leaders and workers.
- To identify significant areas of ethical and legal risk.

- To provide clearer community standards to guide and protect those who do attempt to raise issues of ethical concern. According to one expert, the majority of “whistle-blowers” do experience some form of negative reaction, marginalization and victimization.
- To promote healthy community standards for the protection of those who are served, as well as those who serve, in the diverse forms of Catholic apostolic work.

*Limitations of the Ethics Guidelines Handbook:*

It is also important to be clear about the important limitations of the *EGH* document:

- The guidelines listed below are not intended to be a formal or comprehensive code of conduct. However, Catholic associations could, if they see fit, adopt these guidelines, or variations of them, as their code of conduct.
- This document should not be used as a measure or benchmark for determining the “Catholicity” of particular associations.
- Various guidelines listed below might be less relevant, or irrelevant, to the mission and circumstances of specific forms of apostolic work or service. For example, the section on relationships with minors would be largely irrelevant to apostolic forms of service that involve no outreach to minors.
- The specific norms listed in this handbook often require an interpretation and an application that is sensitive to the particular context of service.
- These guidelines do not include ethical guidelines that relate specifically to the unique missions of various forms of Catholic apostolic association, work or service. For example, a Catholic newspaper would need to address diverse issues of media or journalism ethics that are not addressed in this document.
- These guidelines tend to focus on very basic areas of ethical conduct. They focus on the “don’ts” rather than the “do’s.” They do not attempt to address the loftier ethical or religious aspirations of Catholic teaching.
- These guidelines do not address the mission goals of various forms of Catholic lay apostolate.
- Ethical guidelines must be disseminated, discussed and reviewed on a regular basis if they are to be effective instruments in educating for healthy community standards.

*Definition of Terms:*

- This guideline defines Catholic “lay worker” to be any Catholic lay volunteer or employee involved in a Catholic association, apostolic work or service.
- When the word “client” is used in this document, the term primarily refers to any individuals or their family members, for whom Catholic lay volunteers or staff provide forms of service, care or counsel that involve relationships of trust or confidentiality.
- When the word “colleague” is used in this document, the term refers to fellow employees or volunteers involved in a Catholic association, apostolic work or service.
- In accordance with Catholic teaching, this guideline defines “minor” to be anyone under the age of 18.

## **Ethical Guidelines for the Catholic Lay Apostolate**

### **Preamble: The Vocation of the Lay Faithful**

*Ethical guidelines for lay Catholics must be situated within the context of an appreciation of the laity’s crucial role in the common mission of the Church.*

*The lay vocation is 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.” (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.” (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.” (900)

## 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 the numerous Catholic apostolic associations and services flow from, and should always correlate with, the “common mission” of the Church to bring, through words and/or 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 might focus on one concrete mission of social justice, such as care of the elderly. 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. Respect for conscience is not absolute. The obvious exception is when conscientious behaviour causes, or threatens, harm to others.
- 2.4 With due respect for freedom of conscience, strive to be faithful to the Catholic faith, beliefs and practices in particular contexts of service.
- 2.5 Refrain from using your position in Catholic lay service as a platform to express personal disagreements with official teachings of the Catholic Church.
- 2.6 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.

- 2.7 Maintain an active relationship and good standing with the Catholic Church.
- 2.8 Seek ongoing faith and spiritual formation.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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 diverse cultures.
- 3.3 Act in a courteous, responsible and mature manner when interacting with colleagues or clients.
- 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 anything related to the apostolic service or work that may pose health and/or safety risks to oneself, colleagues or clients.
- 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 Avoid the use or distribution of illegal drugs or substances.
- 3.10 Avoid 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.
- 3.11 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 apostolic service that involve confidential communication, counselling and trust between the lay servant and his/her client(s) 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 the professional/client relationships and refrain from any exploitation of that imbalance.
- 4.3 Avoid dual relationships with clients (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 client relationship.
- 4.6 Provide clients with 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 a qualified health professional if a client exhibits psychosis, delusional thinking, bizarre behaviour, suicidal thoughts, drug or alcohol abuse, or symptoms of severe depression.
- 4.11 Treat all communications from clients with confidentiality except when disclosure is required for necessary treatment, when granted by client permission, when required for the safety of any person, or when required by law.
- 4.12 Ensure that the identities of clients 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 groups and young adult associations are important settings for an education in interpersonal relationships and the development of intimate relationships that may eventually lead to marriage.*

*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 fellow colleagues in apostolic service. These norms are not meant to suppress the expression of healthy and

appropriate courtship relationships within Christian community. However, certain forms of behaviour can be abusive or seriously compromise and confuse colleague/client relationships.

- 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 both colleagues and clients in the domain of physical contact and intimacy.
  - Terminate any physical activity or conversation that colleagues or clients indicate (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 with colleagues or clients that would compromise and confuse the service environment by fostering inappropriate dual relationships.

## 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). Jesus' warnings underline the need to develop a moral environment that protects the wellbeing of young people.*

*Audience and Context:* All ministries that have an outreach to minors should exercise ethical vigilance. Some 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 between clients and lay apostolic workers that workers 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, seductive 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.
- 6.12 Immediately report any evidence of 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 served. Transparency refers to the responsibility to adequately inform co-workers and stake-holders 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 other 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.
- 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

## 9.0 Personal commitments and responsibilities

*The lay faithful are called to live with integrity and to “be strong in their inner selves” (Eph 3:16). In order to truly love their neighbour as themselves, they also must care for their own spiritual, physical, and psychological needs.*

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

- 9.1 Manage commitments and personal lives in a healthy fashion and seek appropriate assistance for personal problems or conflicts.
- 9.2 Ensure that private conduct does not impair the ability to fulfil one's responsibilities or bring dishonour to your apostolic service.
- 9.3 Pursue ongoing personal spiritual growth, development, and formation.

- 9.4 Avoid taking on commitments that may undermine the ability to fulfil one's responsibilities to family, spouse, or children.
- 9.5 Avoid taking on onerous commitments in apostolic service that may undermine the ability to perform properly one's job responsibilities in the workplace.

## 10.0 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.

- 10.1 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.
- 10.2 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.
- 10.3 Speak and act in ways that respect and promote the Catholic vision of marriage and family life.
- 10.4 Promote justice in relationships with others, especially on behalf of persons in need.
- 10.5 Encourage informed public debate on issues of social and moral concern.
- 10.6 Foster responsible and active citizenship in a pluralistic democratic state.



