

# **A Guide for Victims of Sexual Abuse**

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The Capuchin Province of St. Conrad (Mid-America)  
Founded April 1977

Provincial Office located at  
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The Capuchin Province of St. Conrad and the Capuchin Friars recognize that sexual misconduct by any friar has devastating consequences for victims and their families, for the lay and religious communities, and for the perpetrators. We have become increasingly aware of the effects of this tragic behavior and have developed a steadfast commitment to helping those affected.

This guide is intended to provide basic information and (1) how the Capuchin Province of St. Conrad defines sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships, (2) what its procedures are for responding to complaints of sexually inappropriate behavior, and (3) to whom those subjected to sexual misconduct can turn for help.

## **Sexual Misconduct in a Ministerial Relationship**

A ministerial relationship is one which a person receives pastoral care from a priest, brother, sister, spiritual director (lay or religious), pastoral counselor and other church workers.

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

**Sexual harassment** is defined as unwanted sexualized conduct or language between co-workers. It may include, but is not limited to:

- Unsolicited sexual advances and propositions
- The use of sexually degrading words to describe an individual or his/her body
- The telling of inappropriate or sexually-charged jokes
- Retaliation against a co-worker who refuses sexual advances
- Offers of preferential treatment such as promotions, positive performance evaluations, or favorably assigned duties or shifts in exchange for sexual favors

**Sexual exploitation in a ministerial relationship** consists of sexual contact between a priest or religious and person receiving pastoral care from him.

**Sexual abuse** is sexual contact by an adult with a minor or vulnerable adult.

**Sexual exploitation or sexual abuse** can include physical contact or actions such as:

- Sexual touch or other physical contact that makes the person being touched feel uncomfortable
- Giving a sexually charged 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
- Descriptions of sexual experiences, fantasies, or conflicts
- Sexual propositions

To be clear, the stance of the Capuchin Province of St. Conrad is this: **Sexual misconduct** whether harassment, exploitation, or abuse by Members, employees, and volunteers is contrary to Catholic morals, doctrine, and canon law. **It is never acceptable in a pastoral relationship** with a parishioner, employee, spiritual directee, counseling client, or anyone who has sought the church's ministry. **It is entirely the responsibility of the religious to maintain appropriate emotional and sexual boundaries with those with whom he works and/or serves.**

### **How the Capuchin Province Responds to Complaints of Sexual Misconduct**

Any individual who needs to report a case of sexual misconduct or abuse is encouraged to contact the Province at **303-477-5436** and speak to the **Safe Environment Coordinator**, the **Response Coordinator**, or the **Provincial Minister** who will receive the information with compassion and understanding for the needs of the victim and the gravity of the situation. The individual who receives the initial report of misconduct/abuse or another one of the Safe Environment personnel will explain what the reporting process entails, which is fully outlined within the Province's *Policy on Sexual Misconduct*, in order to give assistance and guidance to the alleged victim.

The Capuchin Province of St. Conrad responds to all allegations of sexual misconduct with great care. To ensure that we handle each instance promptly, thoroughly, and compassionately, any member of the Safe Environment personnel (listed above) will listen to, understand, and discuss in what ways the Province may offer help to the victim. When appropriate, help may include assisting the victim in finding a competent psychological or spiritual counselor.

Recognizing the gravity and injury that sexual abuse can cause, the Safe Environment personnel will convey the concern of the Province; explain the victim's right to contact law enforcement; will separately contact local authorities when required by law; obtain any additional information about the alleged abuse from the victim; and offer them options for Victim's Advocates who will assist them with the reporting process and help convey their needs and/or questions to the Province.

Unless being investigated by local law enforcement, the Capuchin Province of St. Conrad will conduct an independent investigation of the allegation of sexual misconduct. An Independent Review Board made up of competent and professional lay people will review any allegation of sexual misconduct by a friar, employee, or volunteer. If it is established that a Capuchin friar has engaged in the sexual abuse of a minor or vulnerable adult, he will be permanently removed from ministry as to protect and prevent further abuse. It may be recommended that the friar be sent for an evaluation that includes a risk assessment and psychological counseling by a competent professional. This rigorous relapse prevention program provides appropriate psychological treatment specific for offenders, and entails ongoing monitoring and supervision for the rest of their lives as a Capuchin friar. The friar may also receive canonical penalties, up to including dismissal from the Capuchin Order and, where applicable, the clerical state.

The Province's Independent Review Board of lay professionals established by the directives of the Catholic Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, will advise the Provincial Minister and his governing Council on all matters related to sexual misconduct.

### **Preventing Sexual Misconduct**

In addition to establishing procedures for responding to sexual misconduct, the Capuchin Province of St. Conrad has undertaken a series of measures to prevent future incidents of abuse. These include extensive mandatory psychological evaluation of candidates, seminarians and novices before they enter the Capuchin formation programs and the provision of continuing education programs for current friars about issues of sexuality and personal conduct.

### **Conclusion**

It is our firm belief that religious must maintain appropriate boundaries with laypersons in order to preserve the integrity of the ministerial relationship. Moreover, we call upon those with knowledge of any friar's inappropriate behavior--whether past or present--to come forward with this information so that innocent victims may be spared from further harm. In short, we ask everyone to join with us to protect the safety of children, women, and men, and with firm determination, to promote healing where there is pain.

### **Where To Turn For Help**

If you or someone you know believes that a Capuchin friar of the Province of St. Conrad, or someone employed by the Province or volunteers for the Province, has violated the boundaries outlined in this guide, we urge you to report such behavior immediately to the Safe Environment Coordinator, the Response Coordinator or the Provincial Minister. This is the contact information for the Province:

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