



A Recommended Website Statement for Caregiving Organizations

## Creating a Safe Environment for Adult Care Seekers

Version: October 26, 2020

The following template can be filled in with a caregiving organization's name and contact information (text to be changed indicated by red letters) and then used 'as is', or be further customized according to the needs of the specific organization / faith community.

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### Creating a Safe Environment for Adults Seeking Care

The **[[Archdiocese / Diocese] of [Name\_Of\_Diocese] / [Organization\_Name]]** is committed to providing a safe environment for all members of our community. One area of our responsibility includes ministries to adults (and older adolescents) who enter into close pastoral relationships with priests, deacons, women religious, and laypersons with specialized training. We seek to prevent potential harm to those who enter such pastoral relationships, for example, when seeking spiritual direction, marriage, grief, or other counselling, or seeking help in other settings of spiritual or emotional vulnerability such as engaging in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession).

Whoever is providing spiritual or emotional care has an obligation to behave in a professional manner, and not seek to gratify his or her own emotional, physical, or sexual desires with the person being directed / counselled.

Some signs of when spiritual directors, confessors, or counsellors (collectively referred to as 'caregivers') may be seeking to take advantage of the position of trust and authority they have in relation to the adults seeking care (referred to as 'care seekers') include:

- Telling the care seeker about:
  - The caregiver's own loneliness, emotional problems, or unsatisfied sexual desires
  - How 'special' the care seeker is
  - How there is a special 'spiritual' love the caregiver can share with the care seeker, for example, using the friendship between St. Francis and St. Clare and / or the Song of Solomon to justify growing closer emotionally, spiritually, and eventually sexually
- Asking the care seeker to:
  - Hold hands when praying
  - Give the caregiver hugs and / or kisses
  - Provide or receive a massage
  - Meet for a private dinner
  - Meet in the caregiver's or care seeker's home / bedroom
  - Take off clothing
  - Engage in sexual touching / activity



These are just some examples of 'grooming', that is, words or actions that unscrupulous caregivers might use to take advantage of their position of trust with a care seeker. Such abuse of power can cause great emotional, spiritual, and relational damage to care seekers – even suicidal thoughts or actions.

To report abuse of such power that you have experienced within a relationship of pastoral care, please contact **[Name\_Of\_Contact\_Person]** at **[Email\_And\_Or\_Phone\_Number\_Of\_Contact\_Person]**.