

Code of Conduct for Maintaining Healthy Boundaries with Minors and Vulnerable Adults



Philippine Custody of the Immaculate Conception and Blessed Bonaventure of Potenza

I. GENERAL PRESENTATION

This Code of Conduct is an effort on the part of the friars and the Custody to highlight the importance and urgent need to respond to the pressing call of the Church to promote *safe environment*.¹ This is in keeping with our life of consecration and in consonance to the demands of initial and on-going formation.

To facilitate and unify our understanding of the code, it is presented here from the viewpoint of four boundary types paired together (like two guiding eyes) to wit: *Physical and Temporal*; *Emotional and Psychological*; *Ministerial and Spiritual*; and *Material and Digital*.

Boundaries by defining clear limits help prevent ethical lapses, abuses, and uncalled for conflicts both in our respective religious communities and ministries. They guard our precious personal and communal sense of security and safety, ergo, *safe environment*.

II. DEFINITION OF TERMS²

A **friar** is a professed religious of the Custody. This includes a friar of the Custody returning to the Philippines from abroad or a professed religious of another jurisdiction or Institute (national or international) who will be under the authority of the Custody.

A **formand** is a young man in the initial formation who did not yet profess religious vows. This includes novices, postulants, and those participating in the modified San Damiano Experience.

A **minor** is anyone under the age of 18.

A **vulnerable adult** is anyone over the age of 18 who would be considered uniquely susceptible to abuse because of physical, mental or emotional disabilities, or otherwise at risk due to a life situation and/or power differential.

An **abuse** is any sexual, physical, and emotional ill-treatment, neglect, or exploitation, occurring within a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.

III. PARTICULARS

PREAMBLE

The Custodial Code of Conduct establishes clear and practical boundaries for friars and formands in their ministry, community life, and interaction with minors and vulnerable adults. The aim is to protect the dignity of every person, promote healthy relationships, and preserve the integrity of professed life. Hence,

I will observe the following physical and temporal boundaries:

1. Friars and formands shall avoid being alone with a minor or vulnerable adult in enclosed or private spaces. When it is necessary to be alone, the meeting must take place in a location that is visible or where the interaction can be clearly seen by other people.
2. Interactions with minors and vulnerable adults must respect personal space and time. Situations that could lead to isolation, misinterpretation, and over-familiarity must be avoided.

¹ In safeguarding work, a **safe environment** is more than just a physically secure space — it's the whole network of conditions, attitudes, and practices that protect minors and vulnerable adults from harm, uphold their dignity, and allow them to flourish. (*quoted from AGI Microsoft Co-Pilot*)

² Adapted from the Policies, Procedures & Protocols for Maintaining Ethical Ministry with Minors and Vulnerable Adults of the OFM Conventual Our Lady of the Angels Province (USA), May 2019.

3. Physical contact must be decent and appropriate, non-invasive to privacy, and has a sense of proper sensitivity.
4. Moments spent with a minor or vulnerable adult must be confined to appropriate time and purpose. Late-night on-line conversations or phone calls by a Friar with a minor or vulnerable adult is discouraged unless prior approval from the legal guardian of minor or vulnerable adult is obtained and the Friar received a permission from the superior.
5. Overnight stays, travel, or late-night meetings involving minors or vulnerable adults require the prior consent of their parent or legal guardian, and, where applicable, the superior. A written waiver shall be secured, containing complete event details—including venue, companions, contact persons, and contact numbers—to ensure transparency, accountability, and safeguarding compliance.
6. As much as possible meetings with minors and vulnerable adults should be done at daytime (office hours) respecting the curfew imposed by the parents/guardians. It is the duty of the friars to contact the parents/legal guardians whenever meetings are to be done outside office hours.
7. Observe the two-adult rule as legislated by REPUBLIC ACT 7610³

I will observe the following emotional and psychological boundaries:

1. Friars and formands shall offer emotional and psychological support with prudent caution, remaining alert to transference, countertransference, emotional entanglement, and any confusion of roles. They shall avoid attachments that blur boundaries, compromise objectivity, or create dependency, and shall address such dynamics promptly through supervision, consultation, or referral, so as to safeguard the integrity of ministry and the well-being of all.
2. Personal sharing must remain prudent, avoiding over-disclosure or burdensome confiding that could confuse roles, exploit vulnerabilities, or create emotional dependency, particularly with minors or vulnerable adults.
3. Friars and formands shall exercise prudence and responsibility by refraining from disclosing community issues or internal matters outside the fraternity. Such concerns must be addressed and resolved within the proper internal forum, in a manner that upholds mutual trust, discretion, and the integrity of fraternal life.
4. Any form of counseling or emotional support must be within the scope of training and authority. Referral to a qualified professional is encouraged when necessary.
5. Emotional manipulation and favoritism must be prohibited.
6. Friars shall maintain a decent and modest tone in all interactions, avoiding overly intimate language or terms of endearment, (bhe, bunso, kuya, etc.) and exercising care to ensure that words or gestures do not manipulate emotions, diminish dignity, or cause psychological harm.
7. In cases of counseling or accompaniment, appropriate and timely referrals to licensed professionals must be made when issues exceed one's field of expertise. The friar should be honest and be self-aware of his competence and limitations.

I will observe the following ministerial and spiritual boundaries:

1. The sacred trust of ministry requires that friars and formands use their spiritual authority with humility and never for personal gain, manipulation, or control.
2. Spiritual guidance must be within the limits of freedom, avoid coercion, and respect the trust of ministerial roles.

³ See appendix A.

3. A Friar shall not use his spiritual authority to influence spiritual decisions that is beyond his ministerial scope.
4. Confidentiality of information must be upheld at all times, unless disclosure is required or permitted by our common or proper laws. Sacramental and pastoral encounters—such as confession, spiritual direction, and prayer sessions—shall always observe this confidentiality and be conducted only in appropriate, and designated spaces.
5. Avoid any public display of conduct that is inappropriate or scandalous — including but not limited to drunkenness, profane or abusive language, and other vices — which could cause harm or give negative example, particularly to minors and vulnerable adults. They shall likewise refrain from condoning such misconduct through silence, inaction, or habitual tolerance.
6. Actively participate in the organized programs/seminar-workshops of the Custody regarding safe-environment and observe conscientiously its implementing guidelines especially in relation the work of the apostolate.

I will observe the following material (financial) and digital boundaries:

1. Interactions involving gifts and digital communications must be within the confines set by the common and proper laws. Transparency and accountability must be upheld.
2. Personal gift giving to minors or vulnerable adults is discouraged. Community-initiated gift giving is preferred.
3. Digital interactions with minors and vulnerable adults must be within the purpose of providing ministerial role and nothing beyond.
4. Photos, videos, and any kind of digital recordings must be taken only if explicit consent is obtained and within the bounds of decency and modesty.
5. In all digital platforms—including social media, messaging applications, and other online communications—friars and formands shall maintain professional, transparent, and respectful interactions. Digital content shared must be appropriate, uphold the dignity of all, and never be detrimental to anyone’s reputation, especially that of minors or vulnerable adults.
6. Gifts, monetary support, or material favors to individuals shall be given with transparency, in accordance with Custodial guidelines, and never in ways that create indebtedness, exclusivity, or unhealthy personal attachments.
7. Friars and formands shall exercise strict integrity in the use of financial or material resources entrusted for ministry, ensuring they are not used for personal benefit or to unduly influence minors and vulnerable adults.

The following provisions are classified separately, as they do not directly pertain to minors or vulnerable adults. Nevertheless, they form an integral part of the Code, as presented during the General Assembly of friars and formands on August 25, 2025. **Accordingly, I shall observe the following boundaries:**

1. Friars and formands shall not enter the bedroom of a confrere except for a valid reason, such as in cases of emergency or illness. In circumstances of sickness, any form of massage or similar physical care is to be done with doors ajar and with the expressed permission from the formator or guardian.
2. Therapies involving physical contact—such as those administered by massage therapists, chiropractors, or similar professionals—when provided by a member of the opposite sex, shall be

conducted during daytime in open and observable settings. Whenever feasible, another responsible adult should be present.

3. Friars and formands shall exercise their ministry only within the scope of their competence and clearly defined role—such as spiritual director, confessor, youth minister, or similar capacities—to preserve harmony, prevent boundary violations, or the assumption of responsibilities for which they are unqualified.
4. In cases of doubt or uncertainty regarding ministerial, pastoral, or administrative matters, friars and formands shall seek guidance from the competent and proper authorities. The decisions or directives given shall be received with humility and faithfully observed.
5. Friars and formands shall honor fraternal moments — such as meals, chapters, and similar communal gatherings — by refraining from the use of electronic devices or digital media that could divert their attention from the shared presence and fellowship with their confreres.
6. In dealing with collaborators, friars and formands must maintain appropriate boundaries, avoiding being unduly influenced. They shall exercise the prudence to decline any offer which may cause unnecessary compromise. They shall educate collaborators on the boundaries that must be observed in support of the Custody's mission.
7. Friars entrusted with the administration of funds or resources shall ensure their proper allocation, strictly in accordance with their intended purpose. The intention of the donor must be respected at all times, and such resources shall not be diverted to other uses without appropriate authorization from competent authority.

IV. CONCLUSION

The **Custodial Code of Conduct** is both a safeguard and a guide, shaping our witness as consecrated persons in the Church and the world. It calls us to a disciplined charity—protecting the dignity of the vulnerable/minors, fostering trust within the community, and ensuring integrity in all pastoral, spiritual, and temporal affairs.

By living this Code faithfully, friars and formands not only comply with safeguarding norms, but also embody the Gospel values at the heart of our vocation. Let us remember that boundaries are not barriers; they are the clear pathways through which authentic relationships, fruitful ministry, and true fraternity can grow.