

Responsible Ministry:

Screening in Faith Policy

Diocese of British Columbia



for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. 1 John 4:20b-21

Section 1

1.1 Theological Foundation

The Diocese of British Columbia is committed to ensuring that our church is a safe and holy place for the people of God. Our Baptismal Covenant states that we are to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbour as ourselves (*Book of Alternative Services*, p. 159). It is our solemn responsibility, therefore, to be actively involved in seeking the welfare of all members of our community and especially those who are vulnerable through age, infirmity or particular circumstances of dependency. This is a sacred trust which must be responsibly and safely managed.

The Diocese of British Columbia “affirms that every human is created in the image of God who has made us for loving, covenant relationships with our Creator, others and the world. We believe that our peace arises out of right relationships. Our personal dignity, freedom and bodily integrity are ensured by faithfulness to just covenants of mutual trust, care and respect. Such covenants undergird the moral framework of our communal life, responsibilities and entitlements.” *Lambeth Conference Report, 1988*

Through our baptism we are all called to the privilege of ministry according to our varied and different gifts. (BAS pp. 158-160) In order to match an individual’s gifts with a particular need, church leaders must use their gifts of discernment, insight, courage and honesty in speaking with those who wish to exercise ministry in the church. Even though a person may feel a strong call to a specific ministry, the church may not be able to affirm this desire. However, only those who are perceived to have the appropriate gifts for the position will be permitted to minister. This truth must be spoken with understanding and love. This is an important principle to ensure that the recipients of the ministry, the individual who feels called to the ministry and the church are safe from harm.

Ministry must be seen as a privilege of servanthood and all persons must be willing to be trained, mentored and possibly reassigned, as needs dictate.

1.2 Rationale for the Policy

This Responsible Ministry: Screening in Faith policy is the means by which the Diocese of British Columbia responds to our obligation to provide safety and quality to those we serve in faith. It is necessary, therefore, that we discern gifts and determine a person's suitability to a ministry position.

The Diocese of British Columbia is abundantly blessed with gifted and committed clergy, employees and volunteers who offer their talents in full recognition of their obligations. In fact, the church could not operate without the work of hundreds of individuals throughout the Diocese who exercise a variety of ministries to persons within the church community and beyond.

It is critical, therefore, to ensure that those we place in positions of power and trust be selected, trained and supported so that their ministry may be life-giving. In this way our Christian values are consistent with the legal concept of "duty of care." Duty of care arises out of legal doctrines dealing with negligence. Everyone has a general obligation to conduct themselves in a manner which does not cause damage to other people or their property. The duty of care is most obvious where a relationship of dependence exists.

1.3 Application

The policy applies to:

- all lay and ordained people under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of British Columbia, that by virtue of their ministry or work are in positions of trust.

It is a requirement that this policy be implemented in all parishes, ministries or other organizations which:

1. are funded, in whole or in part, by the Diocese of British Columbia;
2. function on behalf of the church (whether on or off its premises);
3. operate on church premises;

This *Responsible Ministry: Screening in Faith* policy establishes minimum standards for the screening of staff and volunteers. Any parish or organization may develop more comprehensive policies of its own to reflect its own circumstances provided such policies at least meet the minimum standard of protection for children and vulnerable adults, and physical, spiritual and financial responsibilities contained in this policy. Screening standards must be consistently applied to all appropriate ministries.

This policy complements and strengthens the commitment of the Diocese of British Columbia to “ensure that all activities and work...uphold the values of love, truth and justice proclaimed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” (Section 1.2, *Sexual Misconduct Policy*, Anglican Diocese of British Columbia, June 2003)

1.4 Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the organizational leadership (bishop, churchwardens, director, incumbent, priest-in-charge) to ensure that screening standards are implemented in the parish or organization. If the leadership does not comply with this policy, it could jeopardize insurance coverage. It could also result in disciplinary proceedings. The Bishop serves as the supervisor of the clergy. For the purposes of this policy, the churchwardens are mutually accountable regarding all screening issues.

1.5 Definition of Vulnerable Persons

The definition of “vulnerable person” includes children, the elderly, hospital and hospice patients, senior citizen residents, all care patients of any age, the mentally and physically disabled and all persons who are vulnerable because of personal circumstances. This includes bereavement, divorce, loss of employment, illness and many other uncertainties facing people at various stages in their lives.

Section 2:

Screening Steps

- Step 1: List all the ministry activities and positions
- Step 2: List all the duties and responsibilities for each ministry activity or position
- Step 3: Assess the risk for potential harm
- Step 4: Reduce the risk for potential harm
- Step 5: Assign appropriate screening standards for each ministry position
- Step 6: Finalize the ministry descriptions
- Step 7: Establish appropriate training and supervision
- Step 8: Apply the screening standards
- Step 9: Make a selection decision based on the screening information
- Step 10: Evaluate and enforce the screening standards

2.1 Step 1, List All the Ministry Activities and Positions

Each parish or organization shall make a list of all positions associated with the church or organization, whether short-term, long-term, formally or informally established, paid or volunteer, involving laity or the ordained, taking place on Sunday or during the week, on church premises or off-site. (Appendix A, *Ministry Positions List*)

2.2 Step 2, List All the Duties and Responsibilities for Each Activity or Position

List all the tasks, duties and responsibilities for each ministry positions listed in 2.1 above. (Appendix B, *Ministry Position Template* and Appendix C, *Sample Ministry Descriptions*) These preliminary lists will be used to assess the risks of each ministry activity and to establish proper screening standards.

2.3 Step 3, Assess Risk for Potential Harm

Assess the level of power, authority and control of those who minister, the level of vulnerability of those being ministered to, and the risk that harm could be committed by sexual harassment, exploitation, assault, emotional, verbal, physical, spiritual or financial abuse. Determine the risk level and assign a low, medium or high rating. Appendix D, *Risk Assessment Checklist*, provides a more thorough worksheet to help assess the level of risk of a position. Retain the worksheet, if used, as documentation of the decision-making process for assessing risk. A ministry can shift from medium to high risk depending on the specific setting, activity and leadership arrangement of a particular event. The highest risk activity within a given ministry will determine its risk rating.

Low Risk Ministries

Ministry duties and responsibilities that do not involve a person being alone with a child or vulnerable adult, or do not permit access to financial resources or confidential information. Such ministries do not require a significant level of authority or trust.

Examples: arranger of coffee fellowship, audio-visual controller, bulletin folder, flower arranger, greeter, reader, some committee and group members

Medium Risk Ministries

Ministry duties and responsibilities that permit few opportunities for a person to be alone with a child or vulnerable adult or allow limited access to moderate amounts of financial resources or confidential information. People in these ministries are in a position of authority or trust.

Examples: adult Bible study leader, advisory board member, chairperson, lay eucharistic administrator, team collection counter, team nursing home visitor, hospitality coordinator, licensed lay reader

High Risk Ministries

Ministry duties and responsibilities that permit opportunities for a person to be alone with a child or vulnerable adult or permit access to significant amounts of financial resources or sensitive and confidential information. These ministries are positions of authority or positions that allow a person to establish long-term relationships of trust. All residential or off-site ministries with children or vulnerable adults are always ranked high risk.

Examples: camp leader, Christian education coordinator, church musician, churchwarden, clergy, counselor, home visitor, most parish employees, parish nurse, server instructor, Sunday school teacher, youth leader, pastoral care worker

2.4 Step 4, Reduce the Risk for Potential Harm

Whenever possible, the risk associated with any ministry should be lessened or eliminated. This can be accomplished by changing the size of a group being ministered to, the number of leaders required, the location and visibility of the ministry, the level of supervision or the degree of authority associated with the position. It is much easier, and ultimately safer, to reduce the risks associated with any ministry than to apply a higher level of screening.

2.5 Step 5, Assign Appropriate Screening Standards to each Ministry Position

Low Risk Ministries

It is **recommended** that all people in these ministries:

1. Fill out an Application Form which does not require a list of references. (Appendix F, *Application Form*)
2. Receive a Ministry Description of the position. (Appendix B, *Ministry Description Template*, Appendix C, *Sample Ministry Descriptions*)
3. Be trained for the ministry.
4. Meet regularly with a supervisor who will provide support, feedback, mentoring and information about the nature and duties of the ministry, including observing the ministry itself.

Medium Risk Ministries

Carefully fill out the Screening Checklist, Appendix E, for each person being screened.

It is **required** that all people in these ministries:

1. Be known to the organization or a regular church attender for at least 12 months or have a good reference from another parish before they are assigned to the ministry. Establishing a probationary period in the new ministry is advisable. (This may not be an appropriate requirement for paid employees.)
2. Fill out an Application Form which does not require a list of references (Appendix F, *Application Form*)
3. Receive a Ministry Description for the position. (Appendix B, *Ministry Description Template*, Appendix C, *Sample Ministry Descriptions*)
4. Be interviewed by the senior person responsible for the ministry to discern suitability. The discussion should include a review of the ministry description, the norms of the faith community and expected behaviour and attitudes required for the position. (Appendix G, *Interview Questions*)
5. Be trained for the ministry.
6. Attend a sexual misconduct policy training session at the beginning of the ministry and every three years thereafter. The person responsible for the ministry will ensure the person's attendance is recorded and kept on file for an indefinite period of time. (Appendix H, *Training Attendance Form*)
7. Receive a copy of the Guidelines appropriate for their type of ministry from the ministry coordinator.
8. Meet regularly with a supervisor who will provide support, feedback and mentoring.

High Risk Ministries

Carefully fill out the Screening Checklist, Appendix E, for each person being screened.

It is **required** that all people in these ministries:

1. Be known to the organization and a regular attender for at least 12 months or have a good reference from another parish before they are assigned to the ministry. (This may not be appropriate for paid employees.)
2. Fill out an Application Form and provide a list of three references. (Appendix F, *Application Form*) Sign a release on the Application Form allowing for reference checks. The senior person responsible for the ministry will ensure the reference checks are completed. (Appendix J, *Reference Interview Questions*)
3. Receive a Ministry Description of the position. (Appendix B, *Ministry Description Template*, Appendix C, *Sample Ministry Descriptions*)
4. Be interviewed by the senior person responsible for the ministry to discern suitability. The discussion should include a review of the ministry description, the norms of the faith community and expected behaviour and attitudes required for the position. (Appendix G, *Interview Questions*)
5. Be trained for the ministry.
6. Attend a sexual misconduct policy training session at the beginning of the ministry and every three years thereafter. The person responsible for the ministry will ensure the person's attendance is recorded and keep on file for an indefinite period of time. (Appendix H, *Training Attendance Form*)
7. Receive a copy of the Guidelines appropriate for their type of ministry from the ministry coordinator.
8. Document all one-on-one visits or meetings that occur with children or vulnerable adults. (Appendix K, *One-on-One Record Form*)
9. All off-site activities involving children under the age of 16 shall require a parental consent form signed by parents or legal guardians. (Appendix L, *Parental Consent Form*)
10. Meet regularly with a supervisor who will provide support, feedback and mentoring.
11. Sign and initial the permission form for a Criminal Record Check (CRC) following the procedure set out in Section 3.1. The CRC must be repeated every three (3) years.

2.6 Step 6, Finalize Ministry Descriptions

The parish or organization will provide a Ministry Description for all medium and high risk ministries. The ministry descriptions will include the title, length of term, responsibilities, skills required, qualifications needed, limits of the position, reporting relationship, benefits and opportunities and screening requirements. (Appendix B, *Ministry Description Template*, Appendix C, *Sample Ministry Descriptions*)

2.7 Step 7, Establish Training and Supervision.

Clear lines of supervision must be established for all ministry positions. All individuals ministering in positions of authority should have regularly scheduled meetings with a supervisor in order to discuss the ministry, ensure that their actions remain appropriate, and that participants are benefiting from the ministry. When an individual is in doubt about appropriate or inappropriate courses of action, or is in doubt about the vulnerability of a particular group or individual, or when he or she believes a boundary may have been crossed in the course of ministry, he or she must report the situation to the supervisor and seek advice on how to proceed. If the supervisory person is unable, unwilling or unavailable to assist, advice should be sought from another qualified individual. It is important that the supervisory or advisory person be identified in advance so that there is no question about whom to contact should it become necessary.

All individuals ministering in medium and high risk positions, because of their responsibilities for children or vulnerable adults, shall attend a sexual misconduct policy training workshop at the beginning of their ministry and every three years, thereafter. The Diocese shall supply training resources to assist the parishes with this responsibility.

2.8 Step 8, Apply the Screening Standards.

All screening standards must be applied equitably and consistently. Do not lower the standards and do not skip steps. It is the nature of the position not the nature of the person holding the position which determines the standard. It is the responsibility of the organizational leadership (bishop, churchwardens, director, incumbent, priest-in-charge) to ensure that screening standards are implemented in the parish or organization.

2.9 Step 9, Make a Selection Decision Based on the Screening Information.

To make the selection decision:

1. Review the documented material.
2. List the screening standards and where concerns were raised, if any.
3. Obtain more information, if needed, e.g. a second interview.
4. Assess the information based on the nature of the ministry, services and activities provided; the degree of vulnerability of the participant; the relevant ethical and spiritual principles associated with the ministry and the potential risk for harm.
5. Assess the information objectively and consistently.
6. Determine suitability by exercising “best judgment.”

If the information obtained through the screening procedures does not raise any concerns then the applicant can be accepted into the ministry position. (*Appendix N, Sample Acceptance Letter*) If a decision is made not to accept the person for a ministry position, they must be informed. (*Appendix O, Sample Refusal Letter*)

Those implementing the screening process and making the selection decisions may be the churchwardens, incumbent, organizational leader or individual who directly oversees the ministry. The selection decision is not communicated to the individual being screened until the incumbent or organizational leader ratifies the decision and signs the Screening Checklist. If there are concerns raised in the screening process, then the incumbent or organizational leader should be consulted.

The signing of the Screening Checklist is the responsibility of the incumbent or organizational leader. The incumbent or organizational leader may delegate all other screening responsibilities to another person(s) as long as the governing advisory board or committee ratifies this appointment.

2.10 Step 10, Evaluate and Enforce the Screening Standards.

The screening process does not stop when the individual is accepted for a ministry. Ongoing training, supervision and evaluation will be required. This policy is designed to assist parishes and organizations to implement a screening program appropriate to their context.

Section 3

3.1 Police Records Checks (Criminal Record Checks – CRC)

Police records checks are only required for High Risk positions or where the level of risk cannot be reduced through other methods. Most volunteer agencies throughout Canada use the CRC as it is considered a prudent measure where children and vulnerable adults are being served. It is important to note that the record check only provides limited information and so it must never be the most relied upon screening standard.

A Criminal Record Check is required for all ordained ministry and normally for paid employee positions where there is a level of trust inherent in these positions of ministry/work and a lack of daily, structured supervision. An original record check is required at the beginning of a ministry and must be renewed every three years. This record check must be made for the diocese. Copies of checks made for other organizations are not acceptable.

The procedure for obtaining a Criminal Record Check in the Diocese of British Columbia is similar for all persons in a High Risk ministry.

- a) Record check request forms are available from the parish administrator, Synod Office or may be downloaded from the Diocesan web site.
- b) Once the personal information has been filled in, the permissions to search initialed and the form signed, it should be returned to the local police authority.
- c) The completed request form is then sent to be processed.
- d) Once processed, the form is returned to the applicant. It should then be sent to the Canon Pastor where it is placed in a confidential file.
- e) NOTE: In some areas a record check may be administered free of charge, for volunteers, from the local police agency.

The Synod Office will receive and store all original information from police checks. In order to protect the privacy of information in the document, the original record check will be stored centrally at the Synod Office. All information associated with this process will be handled in a confidential manner consistent with the Diocesan Privacy Policy. A copy will be returned to the individual along with confirmation that they are permitted or not to serve in a position ranked High Risk. A copy of the confirmation will be sent to the parish.

Certain classes of convictions will automatically preclude an individual from filling a ministry position of trust with children or vulnerable adults (e.g. violent or sex-related crimes). In some cases the existence of an official Pardon will be taken into consideration. An individual with a criminal history may be accepted into a ministry position so long as the convictions are not related to the tasks of that position.

3.2 Records Keeping

The minimum records that must be sent to the Synod Office are:

1. A copy of the Screening Checklist for all ministry positions ranked as High Risk. (Appendix E), *Screening Checklist*
2. The Criminal Record Check request form for those ministering in positions ranked as High Risk.

This information must be sent to the Canon Pastor at the Synod Office so it can be permanently stored in a manner consistent with the Privacy Policy of the Diocese.

All screening documents, reference checks, etc. (excluding the CRC which is kept at the Synod Office) should be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the parish for an indefinite period of time. Access to the filing cabinet shall be limited to the incumbent and the parish administrator or director. Those who have access to the files have a moral obligation to do everything within their power to maintain confidentiality. The location of the locked filing cabinet may or may not be at the parish. However, if it is not at the parish, it must be in a location mutually agreed upon by those who have access to the files. Files must never be left out in the open or in a readily accessible location. People being screened should know who has access to their file. Only documentation that is necessary to the screening process should be kept on file. This type of record keeping and storage may be a difficult adjustment for some congregations and improvisation may have to occur. However, maintaining appropriate documentation is key to a meaningful screening program and is required as proof of implementation of the screening practices.

3.3 Individuals Holding Multiple Positions within the Parish

Individuals who hold more than one position within a parish or organization are to be screened in a manner consistent with the position that holds the highest level of risk and has the most stringent screening requirements.

3.4 Elected Positions within the Parish or Organization

There are a number of elected positions in most parishes and organizations. These positions are subject to the same screening procedures as all other positions. It should be made clear to both the elected individual and to the parish at large that following the election the individual will have to meet the requirements of the screening process before serving in the elected position. When possible, screening requirements should be addressed with nominees, prior to election in order to avoid potential confusion and/or embarrassment.

3.5 Sexual Offenders

The Diocesan *Sexual Misconduct Policy* (June 2003) states that:

“persons who have been convicted of criminal offences against children will not knowingly be permitted to maintain or assume positions of responsibility within a parish or other areas of ministry. There may be exceptions to this policy, but the exceptions should be narrowly circumscribed.”

And:

“where an adult has been convicted of a criminal offence involving sexual assault or misconduct, or where there has been a substantiated case of sexual harassment or exploitation, his/her continued role in the parish is reviewed by the bishop’s assessment panel which advises whether it is appropriate for the person to continue in, or return to, a position of responsibility within the parish or other areas of ministry, and especially as this is governed by the appropriate canon of the General, Provincial or Diocesan Synods.”

In accordance with the laws of the Province of British Columbia and the Diocesan *Sexual Misconduct Policy*, the parish will ensure all reasonable suspicions of sexual offence against children and vulnerable adults are reported to the Ministry of Children and Families Development Office, the police, and the Canon Pastor.

3.6 Changing Relationships

From time to time, relationships between parishioners and their families may move from ministry to friendship. In many cases this is to be celebrated, since an important role of the church is building communities of friendship that reveal Christ’s love. Unfortunately, sexual offenders also attempt to form relationships that serve their own purposes and harm the most vulnerable. It is important to inform the incumbent and to be sensitive to responsible boundaries in any relationship of trust.

3.7 Compliance With Policy

In accordance with a resolution adopted at the February 19, 2009 meeting of the Diocesan Council, compliance with this policy is mandatory. Minor changes may be made to the guidelines and policies as they develop and are approved by Council.

It is the responsibility of the organizational leadership (bishop, churchwardens, director, incumbent, priest-in-charge) to ensure that screening standards are implemented in the parish or organization. The incumbent or senior person of the organization shall ensure the Screening Checklists are sent to the Canon Pastor at the Synod Office.

In order to monitor and support parish compliance the Canon Pastor will maintain records which confirm that each parish/organization has met the following compliance indicators:

- All ministry activities of parish/organization are listed and assessed for risk (high, medium, or low).
- All individuals in medium and high risk positions have attended Sexual Misconduct Policy training at the beginning of the ministry and every three (3) years thereafter.

- All individuals in a High Risk position have completed a Criminal Record Check.

If a parish fails to carry out its ministry in compliance with the Responsible Ministry: Screening in Faith policy, the Bishop and Diocesan Council will take all necessary steps to ensure compliance, which may include, but is not limited to, enforcement of the appropriate Canons and Diocesan policies.

Parishes and organizations are encouraged to create the position of Parish Volunteer Manager to oversee the implementation of this policy and the consistent application of the screening standards.

NOTE: Help is available to parishes and organizations which would like further assistance in developing and implementing a screening program by contacting the Canon Pastor. The appendices provide a number of samples, forms and communications documents to simplify the screening process.

3.8 Outside Groups Using Church Property

The church or organization is not directly responsible for screening leaders of other organizations that use the church's property. However, the church could be named in a legal action and held vicariously liable should there be charges of negligence or abuse. It is therefore necessary the church inquire into the screening procedure of the groups using the facilities. Where the screening procedures of an outside organization do not meet the standards outlined in this policy, a discussion should take place between the churchwardens and the user organization to determine an appropriate course of action. If the user group ministers to vulnerable people and is unable or unwilling to undertake proper precautions in terms of risk-reduction and/or screening procedures the church must consider terminating the relationship for safety reasons.

3.9 Screening Standards for Parish Employees

Many of our church employees are given authority, by virtue of their position, and perform their work/ministry with little supervision in places where they could have access to children and vulnerable adults. Therefore, normally, all paid positions in the church will be ranked as a High Risk Ministry and the screening standards of this risk level are to be applied to it. Exceptions to this norm should be documented and kept with the ministry description for this position.

3.10 Screening Standards for Ordained Ministry

Ordained ministry takes place in a variety of contexts, some of which are unsupervised and demanding and where there is a highly visible public role in the faith and secular community. The ordained person must work with the needy and vulnerable of society in such a manner that trust and pastoral integrity of the relationship is never compromised. It is essential, therefore, that the Diocese make every effort to ensure the people who are called to ordained ministry are able to cope with this responsibility and trust. Ordained ministry is ranked as a High Risk Ministry and the screening standards of this risk level are to be applied to it. Ordained persons may also have to participate in additional screening activities and training at the discretion of the Bishop.