

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Grouard-McLennan

S-1 - Selection and Screening of Those Who Engage in Ministry as Paid Staff / Employees

PREAMBLE

In our concern for the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults who take part in the ministries of our Archdiocese and our Parishes, it is increasingly necessary to prevent any abuse before it can take place. The perpetrators of sexual or physical abuse are not always easily identified; they rarely fit the stereotype of “strangers wearing trench coats” or “dirty old men”. Consider the following:

- Over 80% of the time, the abuser is someone known to the victim
- Most abuse takes place within the context of an ongoing relationship
- 20% of sex offenders begin their activity before the age of 18
- Child abusers are often married and have children

Studies indicate that many child sexual abusers abuse children over an extended period of time before they are caught and convicted. There are many abusers living among us as parents, grandparents, volunteers, and leaders in the community who have never been caught or charged with offences. Moreover, those charged with offences for which they have been convicted represent only a small minority of actual offenders, and those who are convicted often commit child abuse again after they are released from prison.

Is screening important? Ask any member of a church in which an incident of sexual abuse has occurred. It is imperative both for the safety of the children, adolescents and vulnerable adults to whom we minister, and for the safety and reputation of the Church, that we have a screening process for those employees who are going to work with children, adolescents and vulnerable adults.

I. THE SCREENING PROCESS

In the interest of assuring that employees of the Archdiocese or its Parishes as well as volunteers intending to serve in high risk positions are properly screened for their ministry with children, adolescents or vulnerable adults, the following documents will be submitted and carefully examined by supervising personnel before they are hired or entrusted with their volunteer position:

- a. **S-3** “Standard Information/Application Form for Prospective Employees and Volunteers for Ministry in High Risk Positions” provided by the Archdiocese.
- b. **S-5** “Ministry Suitability Form and Covenant of Care” filled out, dated and signed by the prospective candidate for employment or volunteer service.
- c. **S-4** “Standard Form for Confidential Character &/or Performance References” filled out for at least two of the references provided on the “Standard Information/Application Form”. These **S-4** Forms will be filed with the Chancery Office confidentially after use by those entitled to see them.
- d. A Criminal Record Check and a Social Welfare Record Check or its equivalent. After perusal by those entitled to see them, all such confidential documents will also be forwarded to the Chancery Office.

The following positions are considered “high risk” by our insurers, in relation either to their potential for physical or sexual abuse or to their potential for theft or mishandling of funds. Any person, employed or volunteer, serving in any such position is required to submit to the full screening process before being entrusted with this ministry:

- Altar Server Coordinator
- Bereavement Team Member
- Any Ministry involving direct contact with Children such as,
 - Sunday School
 - Children’s Liturgy
 - Children’s Choir
 - Sacramental Preparation
 - Youth Ministry
 - Legion of Mary
 - Coach for Sports
 - Playground Supervisor
- Collection Counter
- Custodian and Maintenance Personnel
- CWL Officer
- Knights of Columbus Leader
- Minister who distributes Communion in institutions or homes
- Official Pastoral Visitor
- Outreach Personnel such as
 - Meals-on-Wheels Driver
 - Regular Food Bank Distributor
- Volunteer Screener
- Prayer Group Leader
- Seller of Religious Articles
- Regular Driver to and from Church Events
- Parish and Archdiocesan Staff

If prospective candidates for ministry with children, adolescents or vulnerable adults refuse to comply with any of the above, or if they have criminal abuse violations, they will not be allowed to work, under any circumstances, with children or adolescents or vulnerable adults within the Parish or the Archdiocese. Any alleged behavior in violation of the accepted Code of Conduct and/or the Misconduct Policy of the Diocese will result in immediate remedial action.

Standard Information/Application Form for Prospective Employees and Volunteers for Ministry in High Risk Positions

This form is to be used in all parishes and institutions of the Archdiocese as the entry-level data gathering instrument for all employees as well as for all volunteers being considered for service in “high risk” ministry positions. It may be supplemented locally by other forms as required.

Ministry Suitability Form

All employees and volunteers in high risk ministry positions are required to fill out, date and sign the Ministry Suitability Form with its Covenant of Care.

Reference Check Forms

Standard Forms are provided for reference checks which are a critical part of evaluating the suitability of potential ministry personnel who will be working in high risk positions. These reference checks are, in most cases, more important than criminal record checks since the majority of people who abuse children, for example, do not have a criminal record.

Any person who wants to work in a high risk ministry position will have two reference checks done on him/her. The coordinator or pastor overseeing the program in which a person is applying to minister will make the appropriate reference checks, either by supplying the Form for the referenced person to fill out directly or by filling it out after interviewing that person. The completed Reference Check Form will then be confidentially filed with the Chancery Office.

If the reference checks raise misgivings about a person’s suitability for working in a high risk position, the coordinator will review the reference checks with the Pastor, or in the case of the Pastor conducting the reference checks, he will confer with the Misconduct Policy Administrator of the Archdiocese. Together they will make a decision regarding the applicant’s suitability for this ministry.

Criminal Record Checks

The Church will conduct Criminal Record Checks on all who are entrusted with ministry in high risk positions.

While Criminal Record Checks are useful, it is important to note that they have some limitations:

- Record Checks only identify convictions, charges, peace bonds, conditional discharges, and dispositions under the Young Offenders Act.
- A person may have been repeatedly investigated for suspected child abuse without being charged and convicted. Many circumstances may prevent conviction, including the extreme youth or disability of a victim, or fear of further damage to a child during a trial.
- Convictions received in other countries are not available for review.
- Convicted offenders can apply for pardons after a specified crime-free period and pardoned convictions cannot be revealed.

Because of these limitations and the fact that most abusers have neither been convicted nor even reported to the police, the Criminal Record Check can be only one of several screening mechanisms that we utilize. For example, where available, a Social Welfare Record Check shall also be utilized.

II. PREVENTION

Part 1 – Training

All ministry personnel who work with children, adolescents or vulnerable adults will attend an orientation session on the abuse policies of the Archdiocese.

Part 2 – Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct provides clear guidelines for behaviour. Familiarity with this Code ensures that everyone understands the Archdiocese's conduct policy and that the policy can be fairly applied. The Code of Conduct covers appropriate physical conduct, discipline, aggression, and other issues related to ministry.

The goal of the Code of Conduct is to help prevent abuse and to avoid even the suspicion of abuse.

All who work in high risk ministry positions must sign the Ministry Suitability Form and its Covenant of Care which commits them to adhere to this Code of Conduct.

Part 3 - Two Adult Rule and Other Precautions

- a. Two unrelated adults must be present during any church ministry activity involving children, adolescents or vulnerable adults, including the distribution of Communion in private homes.

- b. Overnight trips and other events involving high risk groups must be planned to incorporate all necessary precautions.
- c. Doors to classrooms and meeting rooms in which children, adolescents and vulnerable adults are gathered may remain closed only if two unrelated adults are present. If one of them must leave for any reason, the door remains open.

The purpose of this policy is two-fold: to reduce the risk of sexual abuse and to protect the ministry personnel from false accusations.

III. REPORTING

Part 1 – Reporting Suspicious Behaviour of Ministry Personnel

- **Suspicious behaviour** of ministry employees or volunteers is to be documented on the “Incident Report Form” and reported to the Supervisor immediately.
- The Supervisor, after consulting with the Misconduct Policy Administrator, will confront the person(s) under suspicion forthwith and discuss the incident. If appropriate, written warnings will be issued.
- After meeting with the employee or volunteer under suspicion, the Supervisor will brief the Misconduct Policy Administrator regarding the incident. All documentation will be given to the Misconduct Policy Administrator for confidential filing.
- Any minister under suspicion who ignores warnings will be dismissed from his or her ministry position.

Part 2 – Reporting When Abuse is Suspected

When abuse is suspected, the Archdiocesan Misconduct Policy is implemented by informing the Archdiocesan Misconduct Policy Administrator.

Part 3 – Reporting Accidents, Illnesses or Unusual Occurrences:

If during a program or other event anyone is involved in an accident, becomes ill, or if there is an unusual occurrence, an Incident Report Form must be filled out and given to the Ministry Supervisor.