

# RESPONSIBLE FAITH MINISTRY



ROMAN CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF PETERBOROUGH  
VOLUNTEER SCREENING  
GUIDELINES

AUGUST 2024

# Responsible Ministry Volunteer Screening Guidelines

Since the earliest days of the Church, we have come together to worship to live out our faith. As followers of Jesus, we are called to show love to one another and to the world as well as to share our gifts and resources. We continue that tradition today. We reach out to those in need, we counsel, we help, we teach. Each of us brings unique gifts to share.

Volunteers are the lifelines of our parishes. Without the time, effort and gifts of our volunteers, the Church would not be able to fulfill its ministry to help those in need. We recognize and appreciate the invaluable contributions of our many volunteers. Through Responsible Ministry Screening, we can provide support and protection to our volunteers.

Our actions as volunteers and as a Church, while performing our ministries, should be guided at all times by our goal: the protection and safety of our vulnerable people, our volunteers and our Church. The “*Responsible Ministry Volunteer Screening Guidelines*” are designed to assist you in performing your ministry.

“For I was hungry, and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,  
I was naked and you gave me clothing,  
I was sick and you took care of me,  
I was in prison and you visited me.”

Matt. 25:36, 37



## Responsibilities in Ministry

*From: “A Statement of Commitment, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops”*

## **Responsibilities of Those Who Minister**

Desiring to minister as Jesus did and to exercise leadership that is about service, not power, and that calls and enables others to serve, we will:

- Strive to develop the communication and management skills that are needed in a particular ministry.
- Welcome regular evaluation of our ministry by colleagues and the people we serve.
- Acknowledge the limits of our position, our abilities and availability.
- Try, where appropriate, to make decisions in a consultative manner and to search for consensus so that different views are heard, and people respected in the process.
- Exercise good stewardship of all funds and assets entrusted to our care.

## **Responsibilities to Those to Whom We Minister**

Conscious of the trust placed in us and anxious to respect and protect the dignity and integrity of all people because they are made in the image of God, we will:

- Maintain confidentiality and respect the privacy of people to whom we minister unless serious harm would result.
- Inform ourselves of and comply with the legal obligations to report suspected cases of child abuse.
- Never sexually, emotionally, or physically abuse or harass any adult, adolescent, or child.
- Always respect the physical and emotional boundaries of the relationship when counselling.
- Not foster dependency in the people we counsel, nor use them to satisfy our own needs, nor take advantage of their vulnerability.

We embrace these commitments with the conviction that God, who has called us to a ministry, will sustain us by abundant grace. We rely on God's love and the support of those with whom and to whom we minister and take to heart the challenge to rekindle the gift of God that is within. (2Tm 1.6)

## **Responsibilities of Parish Volunteers**

The letters of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus show that from the earliest time, ministry was expected to be marked by love that overflows into service, stewardship, trust and exemplary personal conduct. The call and commitment to serve God involves accepting certain responsibilities as individuals and as members of our communities.

### **Volunteers in the Church can expect to:**

- Be treated with respect.
- Receive the training and orientation necessary to perform their duties.
- Receive support and guidance.
- Work in ministries that are compatible with their interests and skills.
- Be appreciated for their contributions.

### **Volunteers in the Church are expected to:**

- Be a Christian witness and a model of Christian living.
- Attend training and orientation sessions.
- Provide a safe and caring environment for activities.
- Be reliable, arrive on time and be prepared.
- Provide adequate notice to the parish team or ministry leader if unable to perform their duties.
- Report any changes in address and telephone number to the parish team or ministry leader.
- Inform the parish team and/or ministry leader if they have any concerns for the well-being of the participants, other volunteers or the Church.
- Respect confidentiality of the participants, other volunteers and the church.
- Minister within the guidelines of the Position Descriptions.

## Guidelines for Volunteers

The following guidelines are intended as a general overview as to how volunteers should interact with the most vulnerable of participants. Guidelines provide clear rules for behaviour so that volunteers understand what is expected of them.

- Volunteers should not spend extended time alone with vulnerable participants, such as seniors, children, or people with disability, without the consent and knowledge of the ministry leader or parish team.
- Volunteers, who are to be alone with a vulnerable participant, must respect his or her privacy.
- Volunteers must keep information, such as medical, financial, and emotional conditions confidential.
- Volunteers should inform the ministry leader or the parish team if they observe serious safety problems or signs of abuse.
- Volunteers should not take any money or property from the vulnerable participant for their volunteer ministry.
- Volunteers are to act within the stated activities and responsibilities of their ministry descriptions.
- Volunteers are to act at all times in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- Volunteers and participants have the right to be treated with respect.

These guidelines are not intended to hamper relationships between volunteers and participants. Being open and “transparent” with the ministry leader or parish team will help ensure the safety of the participant and the integrity of the volunteer.



## **Guidelines When Working with Children**

Society has become very sensitive to ensuring the safety of children. There are numerous examples of adults abusing the trust children have placed in them. These guidelines are not intended to hamper relationships between adults and children or create suspicion. These steps are to help ensure the safety of our children, the integrity of our programs and the well being of our volunteers who work with children.

- Respect the dignity and spirit of children and youth. Exercise good judgement and common sense when working with children and youth.
- Adults should not spend extended time alone with children without the consent of the child's parent or guardian and the knowledge of the ministry coordinator or parish team.
- When an adult is required to be alone with children (overnight camps or field trips for example) every effort must be made to protect the child's privacy. Girls and boys should not change together, and adults must change separately. Adults should not sleep in close proximity to children.
- Adults who form a relationship with children through parish activities should not seek out opportunities to spend time with the child "off site". If off site interactions must occur, it should be with the knowledge and permission of the child's parent or guardian.
- If help with toileting is necessary, the parent or guardian should give permission before help is given.
- Avoid potentially compromising situations by ensuring, where reasonably possible, that at least two adults are in attendance while supervising or accompanying children and youth. This prevents the potential for abuse and allegations of abuse.
- Do not use vulgar or inappropriate language when working with children and youth. Do not shout, swear, or call children names.
- Adults should not take children in their vehicle without the permission of the parent or guardian and knowledge of the ministry leader or parish team.
- Never hit or strike a child even in so-called "play". Do not use physical punishment of any kind.

## **Guidelines When Working with Children ...continued**

- Realize that bullying, physical, verbal, or cultural abuse and sexual harassment, neglect or any other type of abuse is unacceptable conduct.
- Adequate supervision must be provided. Maintain appropriate adult to child and youth ratios for the activities and the age group.
- Be alert to children at risk, know the signs of abuse and be approachable to children in need. If abuse is suspected, it is your responsibility to report it.
- Adult volunteers operate in a position of trust. Personal information pertaining to the child or youth must be kept confidential, as well as conversations with parents.
- Confidentiality does not need to be respected in the following situations:
  - When the child or youth threatens suicide.
  - When a minor (under the age of 18) reports physical or sexual abuse.
  - When the volunteer's or someone else's wellbeing is threatened.
  - When the situation is beyond the volunteer's experience or expertise.

In the above situations, it is appropriate to seek help and advice from the ministry leader, the pastor, or the parish team. The person must not rely on anyone else to report on his or her behalf.

In all cases, a certain amount of discretion rests with the adult based on his or her knowledge and the nature of the relationship with the child, the child's family, the setting and the nature of the activities. Talking to parents, keeping them informed and being transparent helps ensure the safety of the children, the integrity of the programs and the well-being of the volunteers.



## Examples of Good Conduct When Working with Children & Youth

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Difficulty</b>	<b>Possible Solutions</b>
Holding a private conversation with a child or youth.	By placing yourself in a one-to-one situation out of sight or hearing range, you can leave yourself open to allegations of abuse.	Keep the office door open. Use an office with a window.
Disciplining a child or youth away from the group.	By placing yourself in a one-to-one situation out of sight or hearing range, you can leave yourself open to allegations of abuse.	Step away from the group but remain visible. You may remove the child or youth from view, but the volunteer must remain visible to others.
Driving or walking a child or youth home.	By placing yourself in a one-to-one situation out of sight or hearing range, you can leave yourself open to allegations of abuse.	Take along a friend of the child's or another volunteer. Call the parents when you leave and tell them when to expect you. Tell a colleague where you're going and when you'll return.
A child is injured, and staff must remove clothing to treat injury.	You must decide between safety and modesty.	Get another volunteer or a friend, preferably the same sex as the injured child, to help.

*Adapted from Boys' and Girls' Club of Greater Victoria, British Columbia*



## Reporting Abuse and/ or Inappropriate Conduct of a Volunteer

Everyone has a responsibility for the welfare of children, seniors, and other vulnerable persons. We also have a responsibility to ourselves, other volunteers, and our parishes. Abuse or inappropriate conduct may occur while a person is serving as a volunteer for the parish. In the case of a volunteer discovering abuse, the volunteer has the responsibility to report it as per the reporting procedures listed below.

### Reporting Procedures

**In the case of a Child under 18 years of age there are two steps to follow:**

Step 1: Contact the local *Children's Aid Society (CAS)* and report the abuse, as required under *Ontario's Child, Youth and Family Services Act (CYFSA), 2017*. This means that if a volunteer, ministry leader or a member of the screening committee suspects abuse, he or she must report it to the CAS personally and promptly. He or she may ask for assistance, but is not to rely on anyone else to make the call.

Step 2: Contact the pastor to update him on the situation. Prepare a report on the incident as soon as possible. Prepare a copy for the volunteer's file and give a copy to the Pastor. The pastor will contact the necessary parties, such as the parents, the ministry leader, the civil authorities, and the volunteer involved. The Pastor will inform the volunteer that he or she is to immediately withdraw from the volunteer position.

**In the Case of a Person, 18 years of age or older:**

Step 1: Contact the Pastor to let him know the situation. Prepare a report on the incident as soon as possible. Put a copy in the volunteer's file and give a copy to the Pastor. The Pastor will inform the necessary parties such as the ministry leaders, the civil authorities, and the volunteer involved. The Pastor will inform the volunteer that he or she is to immediately withdraw from the volunteer position.

### Responsibility to Report CYFSA s.125 (1)

Members of the public, including professionals who work with children, have an obligation to report promptly to a Children's Aid Society if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection. The term "child in need of protection" includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm. "Reasonable grounds" are what an average person, given his or her training, background and experience, exercising normal and honest judgement, would suspect. If you are unsure about your suspicion, then you may consult the Children's Aid Society for further advice and clarification.

The duty report applies to children up to the age of 16 under the CYFSA. Children aged 16 and 17 are covered by the CYFSA noting that a report may be made. However, Church law requires that where abuse or neglect is suspected in children aged 16 and 17, a report to the Children's Aid Society is required. **To be clear and straight forward, all allegations of abuse or neglect pertaining to children from birth to 18 years of age must be reported forthwith to the Children's Aid Society.**

### ***Ongoing Duty to Report CYFSA s. 125(2)***

The duty to report is ongoing. If a person has made a previous report about a child and has additional reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is in need of protection, that person must make a further report to a Children's Aid Society.

### ***Persons Must Report Directly CYFSA s.125 (3)***

The person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must make the report directly to a Children's Aid Society. The person must not rely on anyone else to report on his or her behalf.

### ***Protection from Liability CYFSA s.126 (2)***

If a civil action is brought against a person who made a report, that person will be protected unless he or she acted maliciously or without reasonable grounds for his or her suspicion.

### ***Diocese of Peterborough Policy and Procedure for Cases of Alleged Abuse and/or Misconduct By Clergy, Religious, Lay Employees and Volunteers (April 2015)***

In order to protect the interests of all concerned, the Bishop or the Bishop's Delegate may determine at any time, and subject to legal advice or police direction to the contrary, after being informed of the allegation, the individual accused of the allegation may be suspended from ministry by the parish pastor.

When after investigation, it has been determined that serious misconduct and/or abuse has occurred, there will be no re-entry into ministry or employment.

If there is doubt about whether misconduct or abuse has occurred, re-entry may be possible. It is for the Bishop to determine any eventual return to ministry of a volunteer, after the Bishop's delegate has provided a comprehensive report to the Diocesan Review Board for its recommendations to the Bishop.

The Diocesan's firm commitment to ensuring safe environments is the overriding consideration, and no one will be permitted to return to public ministry if such ministry is a potential danger to minors or vulnerable persons or a cause of scandal for the community.

## **Documentation of Suspected Abuse and /or Inappropriate Conduct**

Document any observations of abuse or inappropriate behaviour (and any related statements or conversations) as soon as possible. Describe the incident or situation and include the date, time, and location the event took place. Include the names of anyone who may have witnessed the event and what actions were taken (called Children's Aid Society, called Pastor, provided medical care, talked to individual, etc.) A sample incident report form is provided. Keep these documents strictly confidential and pass them on to the Pastor. A copy of the incident is to be given to the volunteer and put in his or her file.



Diocese of Peterborough

## INCIDENT REPORT FORM

**Parish:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Incident:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Person Reporting Incident:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location of Incident:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parties Involved in Incident:** \_\_\_\_\_

Summary of Incident:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Actions Taken and /or Follow-up Necessary:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### Information Collection Authorization:

Personal information on this form is collected under the authority of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and will be used for Screening of Volunteers. This information will be stored permanently in a confidential locked cabinet in the Parish Rectory. Any questions with respect to this information should be directed to the local pastor or the Diocesan Screening Committee, 350 Hunter Street West – Box 175, Peterborough, Ontario, K9J 6Y8. Phone: (705) 745-5123 Fax: (705) 745-2555.

COPIES: Original – Parish Rectory File Copy: Diocesan Screening Committee

Form 6.1190

## *Dedicated Hearts*

*Dedicated hearts like yours  
Are not so easy to find.  
It takes a special person to be  
So generous and kind.*

*To care so much for your fellow man  
Is a quality all too rare.  
Yet you give of your time and talents.  
For all in need to share.*

*Thank you for being a volunteer,  
We're privileged to work with you.  
We want you to know how appreciated you are,  
Not just today, but the whole year through.*

*Revised: August 2024*