

# Screening Policy for the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall

## I - PREAMBLE

The Catholic Church in Alexandria-Cornwall is made up of people who care deeply for the well-being of all its members and of those to whom they minister. We have become more aware of the possibility of harm being done to those very people who stand most in need of our care and compassion. We hear Christ's words: «Whatever you do to the least of mine, you do to me, » and we respond to them with a renewed commitment to ensuring that our communities will be known for their care of the vulnerable, their safety and their integrity.

We are aware that a small number of people take advantage of organizations that have lax or non-existent screening procedures. We can better protect those who are served, as well as those who serve in our parishes and diocese, through the development, adoption and implementation of thorough, appropriate, consistent and ongoing screening measures for our volunteers and paid-staff. The protection and safety of the people of God, which includes our volunteers and paid-staff, will guide our intentions and actions at all times.

## II - STATEMENT OF INTENT

It is the intent of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall:

- to ensure that, as a faith community, we fulfill our obligations to those we serve, especially the vulnerable.
- to minimize the risk of harm in all situations of service.
- to ensure the integrity, safety and reputation of our volunteers and paid-staff.

## III - PRELIMINARY STEPS

The nature of the service to be provided and the level of risk involved will determine the intensity of the screening process employed.

### *1. Service Description*

A written description of each service offered in the diocese is to be created and maintained. Description of parish services will be available at the parish level. This description is to define the tasks of the service and establish the ground rules for those involved. These descriptions must set clear and appropriate guidelines and boundaries.

### *2. Risk Levels*

#### **i. Determining the risk level**

All services are to be examined in light of the relevant factors to determine the degree of risk involved (high, medium, low). The following types of services will automatically be considered high risk: ongoing participation in activities dealing specifically with children and youth; one to one situations such as counselling and home visitation; positions involving continued handling of parish or diocesan funds.

The parish priest, with the advice of the parish leadership team, will determine the risk level of each service according to the following parameters:

**a. The Participant** — The vulnerability of the person or persons being served must be taken into consideration when screening. Participants who have difficulty protecting themselves from harm, temporarily or permanently, are considered vulnerable. Those at risk because of age, disability, handicap, or other circumstances such as emotional distress or grief may also be vulnerable to a greater or lesser degree.

**b. The Relationship** -- The “perceived authority” of the person delivering the service and the degree of dependence of the recipient are important factors in determining risk. The frequency and intimacy of encounters is very important.

**c. The Setting** — The circumstances surrounding the delivery of service need to be taken into account.

**d. Supervision** — The possibility or lack thereof of ongoing supervision.

## **ii. Reducing the risk level**

When a position is classified as “high-risk,” efforts will be made to manage or reduce the risk by applying one or more of the following strategies:

a. Eliminate the risk: there may be activities involving risks and consequences so great that they should be discontinued.

b. Modify the activity: change the location, length, timing, personnel or mode of deliverance of the activity.

c. Transfer or Share Liability: involve other organizations or service groups that may be better prepared to handle the specific risk in question.

d. Assume the risk but minimize it wherever possible: design all volunteer tasks with possible risks in mind; ensure appropriate screening, orientation and training of individuals; incorporate ongoing supervision and evaluation of volunteers.

## **3. Recruitment process**

Whether requests for volunteers or paid-staff are done in a public way through notices, printed in parish bulletins, church newsletters, announcements or other forms of public communication or through a personal invitation, the “Description of the Service” and its rated level of risk is to be made available to all candidates.

## **IV SCREENING FOR HIGH RISK POSITIONS**

### **1. Candidate Information Form**

A basic information record for those who serve as paid-staff or volunteer is to be kept at the parish level. The completion of an information form is the first step in ensuring such a record. The information form shall include: name, address, previous experience — as well as give permission to conduct reference and police record checks, as may be necessary.

### **2. Interview**

Interviews of all candidates are to be carried out by two people in leadership positions within the parish (viz: the parish priest or other member of the pastoral team, a member of the parish leadership team, a coordinator of services, etc.) The interview is to address questions about a candidate’s background, gifts, talents, skills, interests, and availability. Concerns about the suitability of a candidate for the service in question are to be addressed. The interview is to include questions directly related to risk concerns: i.e. interpersonal style with children or vulnerable adults, history of working with money, and so on.

Notes from the interview shall be placed in the confidential parish volunteer file along with the information form.

### **3. Reference Checks**

References will confirm the background, gifts, talents and skills of the applicant and will provide another opinion concerning the suitability of the person for the service to be offered.

It is to be clear to those providing references that the individual is being considered for a position of trust, i.e. with children, with other vulnerable people, with money, etc. Not all references shall be provided by relatives of the candidate.

References shall be verified by a member of the parish leadership team. Reference check results are to be documented and kept in the candidate’s file.

#### ***4. Police Record Checks***

The candidate will be asked to provide a copy of his/her police record to the diocesan coordinator for screening. If no convictions are noted, the coordinator will send a form attesting to this fact to be included in the candidate's file.

If any convictions appear, the coordinator will advise the parish priest, who will meet with the candidate to clarify details and circumstances of the conviction. The parish priest will make a note of his decision in the candidate's file.

All Police Record Checks will be kept on file at the diocesan centre.

#### ***5. Orientation and Training***

Appropriate orientation including guidelines for working as volunteer or paid-staff is to be provided.

Applicants are required to sign an acknowledgment stating that they have read the diocesan screening policy, understand it and will comply with it and that they have attended the required training/orientation.

#### ***6. Supervision and Evaluation***

Supervision and evaluation are to be recorded and systematic. A written record of any performance appraisal or evaluation is to be kept on file and shared with the volunteer or paid staff.

Performance appraisal shall occur at least once a year and possibly two or three times in the first year. If a volunteer or paid-staff is alone with program participants, it is appropriate to conduct random visits.

#### ***7. Participant Feedback***

Regular and ongoing contact with program participants as well as family members will ensure that programs remain relevant and of high quality. It is vital that programme coordinators inform all involved that regular supervision and evaluation, which may include contact with participants and their families, is part of the risk management procedure used.

### **V - SCREENING FOR MEDIUM RISK POSITIONS**

For medium risk positions, a police record check will not be required. Steps 1-3 and 5-7 of the previous section will be implemented with the necessary adaptations to this lower risk level.

### **VI - SCREENING FOR LOW RISK POSITIONS**

For low risk positions, neither the police record check nor the reference check will be required. Steps 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7 of section IV will be implemented with the necessary adaptations to this lowest risk level.

### **VII - VARIA**

Volunteers and paid staff who are active in more than one service will be screened for the position with the highest level of risk.

When a person moves from a position with a low level of risk to a position of higher risk, appropriate screening will be carried out for the higher-risk position.

A person who has left service in a parish for more than one year will be re-screened when applying for a new position.

### **VIII - CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORD KEEPING**

Information gathered for the purposes of screening is accessible only to the candidate, the parish priest and members of the parish leadership team.

It is important to keep on record basic information, such as addresses and telephone numbers for all volunteers and paid-staff. Where more extensive screening processes are used as a result of the nature of the service, these records are to be updated while the person is with the parish or diocese. Police Records Checks will be kept on file at the diocesan offices, and available only to the diocesan screening coordinator and the candidate's parish priest. Other data on screening and supervision is to be kept on file permanently in the parish or diocese. This policy on confidentiality of records and their maintenance is to be explained to all candidates.

## **IX - IMPLEMENTATION**

The screening process is a permanent feature of diocesan and parish operation. Full implementation of this policy is expected within eighteen months of promulgation.

*Promulgated on March 1, 2004*

(Signed and Sealed)

+Paul-André Durocher

Bishop of Alexandria-Cornwall

Denis Vaillancourt

Chanellor