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March 25, 2010

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The church today, at the Parish and the Archdiocesan levels, offers many ministries to meet the needs of its members. These ministries would be impossible without the dedication, skills and talents of priests, lay employees and volunteers.

It is essential that participation in the church's ministries be a safe activity for all concerned, especially the young, the elderly, and the vulnerable. For this reason, the Archdiocese of St. John's, in concert with many dioceses across Canada, has adopted the Screening in Faith initiative, a screening resource provided by Volunteer Canada.

At the core of effective ministry is a sacred trust which must be created and nurtured. Like professionals in our society, such as physicians, lawyers and others, trust is given to those who perform ministries in the church. Trust can take time to create, but can be destroyed in a moment. Screening of priests, employees and volunteers will help to reveal instances where trust has been abused in the past. It will help to protect those for whom we care, and to reduce the risk of misconduct from occurring in the performance of our ministries. This screening policy will benefit those who minister by clarifying their responsibilities and by outlining how to perform their ministries appropriately.

I have mandated a screening policy for all clergy, employees, and volunteers at the parish and Archdiocesan levels, to take effect on April 15, 2010. A manual will be given to each parish and Archdiocesan office, which outlines the policy and explains how it is to be implemented. Each parish is to set up its own screening committee to implement this policy at the parish level. An Office of Risk Management has been established by the Archdiocese to provide ongoing guidance and support.

I realize that the implementation of this policy will require significant time and effort on the part of priests, employees and volunteers. But it will help to build trust on the part of those who avail of the church's ministries and increased confidence and satisfaction for those who provide them. I am grateful to all who work to make this process a part of our parish and Archdiocesan structures.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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**MOST REVEREND MARTIN W. CURRIE, D.D.**

*Archbishop of St. John's*



## Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of St. John's CHANCERY OFFICE SCREENING POLICY FOR EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

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The members of the Roman Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of St. John's care deeply for the well-being of one another and for those to whom they minister. We have become more aware of the possibility of harm being done to those who are most in need of our care and compassion. It is possible that a small number of persons may take advantage of organizations that have no, or lax, screening procedures. To protect as far as possible those whom we serve, as well as those who serve in our parishes and on behalf of the Archdiocese as a whole, we have adopted thorough, appropriate, consistent and ongoing screening measures for our volunteers and employees. The protection and safety of all, including our volunteers and employees, will guide our intentions and actions in applying these measures.

### **Statement of Intent**

It is the intention of the Archdiocese of St. John's:

- 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 ministry and of service
- to insure the integrity, safety and reputation of our volunteers and employees
- to safeguard the resources of our parishes and of the Archdiocese

### **Implementation**

1. The Archdiocese of St. John's has mandated that all employees and volunteers of the Archdiocese and of every parish in the Archdiocese be screened. All clerics who hold positions in the Archdiocese are also to be screened.
2. All employees and volunteers, those serving at the present time and those seeking to become employees or volunteers, are to be screened.
3. All employees and volunteers are to be screened according to the procedures and instructions presented in the Archdiocesan manual.
4. Standardized forms, provided by the Archdiocese, are to be used in the implementation of a uniform screening process.
5. Pastors are to establish a screening committee in each parish. This committee will have a minimum of two persons and a maximum of five persons.
6. The Archdiocese has established an Office of Risk Management and has appointed an Archdiocesan Screening Coordinator.



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## Position Descriptions

1. A position description outlines the responsibilities and duties of the employee or volunteer as well as the screening measures to be applied.
2. The basic outline for position descriptions is to follow the same format throughout the Archdiocese. Position descriptions are to be reviewed at least once a year. If there is a change in the position description before the end of the year, then revision of the position description should be made immediately.

## Determining the Risk

1. All positions are to be assessed for the level of risk involved. The level of screening of the position must meet the level of risk associated with it. When there is doubt as to the level of risk, a position should be deemed to be **HIGH RISK**.
2. Two (2) categories will be used to assess the position based on the level of trust afforded the employee or volunteer. These are: **LOW RISK** and **HIGH RISK**. These "trust" categories correspond to the levels of risk for potential harm that could occur to participants, the vulnerable or church resources through the position. Risk levels are categorized as: low and high.
3. All ministries involving children or youth, as well as ministries that require home visits are to be categorized as **HIGH RISK**.
4. When drawing up position descriptions for positions that involve finances, the most current Archdiocesan Financial Guidelines are to be followed.
5. Volunteers who are active in more than one ministry are to be screened for the position with the higher level of risk. When a volunteer moves from a **LOW RISK** position to one of **HIGH RISK**, he or she will be screened again according to the higher level of risk.
6. Each volunteer is to complete a **Volunteer Information Form**.
7. For **LOW RISK** ministry positions, the ministry leaders or coordinators are to be responsible for the completion and collection of these forms.
8. For **HIGH RISK** positions, the screening committee is responsible for the completion and collection of all applicable forms.
9. All forms are to be maintained in a confidential file and updated annually.



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**Interviews**

1. An interview is to be conducted for all volunteers in **HIGH RISK** positions.
2. A minimum of two persons from the screening committee shall conduct the interview. A record of the interview is to be made in writing and kept in a confidential file.
3. For positions of **HIGH RISK**, a final one-on-one interview with the pastor or with his delegate may be required.

**Reference Checks**

1. At least two (2) reference checks are to be conducted by the screening committee for all employees and volunteers in **HIGH RISK** positions.
2. The employee or volunteer is to sign a permission form permitting the screening committee to contact the references. Only those named as references are to be contacted.
3. The result of a reference check is to be documented and kept in a confidential file.

**Police Records Checks**

1. A police records check is required for all volunteers in **HIGH RISK** positions.
2. The police records check must be an original, no more than **Sixty (60) days old** and requested by the parish or, where applicable, by the parish or the Archdiocese.
3. A police records check is to be reviewed by the pastor and/or by the screening committee and the Police Records Check form is to be completed. The completed form is to be kept in a confidential file.
4. If the volunteer or employee obtains the police records check and decides not to present it to the screening committee, the parish/Archdiocese cannot accept this individual for a **HIGH RISK** position.
5. A criminal conviction does not automatically exclude an applicant from volunteering or from a paid position. If the police records check confirms a prior conviction, or presents a cause for concern, the parish screening committee will consult with the pastor, who will in turn consult with the Archbishop or a cleric designated by him for the purpose.



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6. A volunteer who leaves a ministry of **HIGH RISK** for one (1) year or longer is required to provide a new police records check.
7. Volunteers, who have participated in ministries, deemed to be **HIGH RISK** for a period of years, and wish to continue to do so, must obtain, or give permission for a police records check every five (five) years.

### **Record Keeping and Confidentiality**

1. Personal information obtained either orally or in writing will be kept confidential.
2. Information gathered for the purpose of screening is to be accessible only to the volunteer or staff applicant, the pastor and the parish screening committee members. Information forms are to be kept in a secure filing system at the Office of Risk Management of the Archdiocese.
3. In situations where a doubt arises as to the suitability of a person for a parish ministry, the pastor will make the final decision. Should the pastor and/or members of the parish screening committee have serious concerns or differences of opinion about a volunteer or staff member's acceptance, or should a conflict of interest arise, the Archbishop or another cleric designated by him for the purpose is to be consulted to assist with the deliberative process.

### **Orientation and Training**

1. All current and new volunteers must participate in an orientation session. The sessions are to be offered at least once a year.
2. All volunteers are to receive a copy of the **Guidelines for Parish Volunteers**. The screening committee is responsible for providing every volunteer or employee with a copy.
3. Volunteers and staff are to be given appropriate training to perform their duties without putting themselves or others at risk.
4. When orientation and training have been completed, the screening committee will document this on the appropriate form.

### **Supervision and Evaluation**

1. The level of supervision is to be based on the level of risk involved in a volunteer position.



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2. The screening committee in each parish will work with the ministry and group leaders or coordinators to assess the level of supervision currently in use in each ministry or group and determine what supervision will be used where none exists.
3. Evaluations are to be performed once a year for positions of **HIGH RISK**. Copies of the evaluation are to be filed in the volunteer or employee's file.
4. When supervision and evaluation have been completed, the screening committee will document this in the volunteer or employee's file on the appropriate form.

**Participant Follow-up**

1. Participant follow-up is to be a regular occurrence for **HIGH RISK** positions.