

Pastor's Corner - February 13, 2011 - Policy on abuse

After an extensive review and at the insistence of insurance companies all dioceses in our insurance group implemented on October 1, 2010, an updated physical and sexual abuse policy. This new policy, called the Responsible Ministry and Safe Environment Policy, has now been completed in draft form. This policy and the protocols which go with it are now being included in our updated Administration Manual both at the Diocesan as well as at the Parish level. A Diocesan Committee has been constituted to mandate the implementation and monitoring of abuse protocols. A screening process of all existing clergy, employees and volunteers, including police checks every five years, are being implemented, again both at the Diocesan as well as at the Parish level.

Concretely, this means that we as a Parish must implement a series of measures some of which we were already taking, others which are new. We are making a list of all the activities in the Parish which carry with them a risk assessment for vulnerable people. Any high risk activity that cannot be mitigated has been eliminated, e.g. in home-catechesis or catechetical instruction other than by the parents of the participants. Two adults have to be present when supervising children. Doors to rooms have to be left open if one of those adults has to leave the room temporarily.

All staff and clergy (yes, I) must provide a current Criminal Record Check to be included in their personnel file at the Chancery Office, as well as a signed Covenant of Care form. This week we will begin to follow the instructions that have been provided and we hope to have the whole process completed by the end of March. The local police department estimates a 2 - 4 week processing time.

What about volunteers? Not all volunteers are affected. That is why we have to make a list of all the parish activities which carry with them a risk assessment for vulnerable people. Only those volunteers at the parish level who are in a high or medium risk ministry will have to submit to a Criminal Record Check and will have to sign a Covenant of Care. Criminal Record Checks were already required of all catechists. Now we have to do the same for other activities. The cost of this check is usually provided free of charge for volunteers of charitable organizations. The Parish will provide a letter printed on letterhead which the volunteer uses when requesting a Criminal Record Check from the Police Department. Once we have determined which are the high and medium risk ministries (within the next month), we will provide to those volunteers the necessary letters to start the process.

Some of you may question whether it is necessary for volunteers to follow these procedures. However, it is now the policy of the Diocese of Victoria that volunteers, lay personnel and clergy must obtain a Criminal Record Check. It is not a question of their credibility. If a person chooses not to obtain this Check then they will have to volunteer in a different ministry of general risk level.