

Code of Conduct

Introduction

An essential step in creating healthy and safe communities for volunteers and participants is to create a parish “code of conduct”. This helps ensure that volunteers working directly with vulnerable people (children, youth, the elderly, people in need) are aware of how best to minister safely to others. A list of basic “do’s and don’ts” for ministry as well as details related to specific positions can be listed in the boundaries and limitations section of the job description or placed in a separate “parish code of conduct” document. This information should be based on the parish’s mission statement and values, and include the definition of a vulnerable person. Part of the screening procedure would be a requirement that the volunteer understand and agree to abide by the contents of that document.

Two Code of conduct examples follow. They are both based on the Diocese’s “Guidelines for Ministering to Vulnerable People” which is provided on this website.

A Sample Code of Conduct

Church of the Incarnation, Oakville Creating and Maintaining a Safe Environment

Introduction

Safety and respect for all members of the Church community are very important to the Church of the Incarnation. We undertake to ensure that our Church be a safe and holy place for all whom our ministry affects. Special care for those members of the Church who may be more vulnerable is even more paramount. This is especially true in the case of our children, youth and some adults and elderly members.

A code of conduct is a natural way of harnessing the goodwill of a community and placing an ideal into action. Our code of conduct is a natural extension of the vision statement, mission statement and core values of Church of the Incarnation

Vision Statement

Reaching out, reaching in, growing together

Mission Statement

We at the Church of the Incarnation are called by God to a life of worship and service. As an Anglican community, we provide a contemporary, family oriented parish for Christians of diverse ages and backgrounds. We nurture faith and promote spiritual growth in an inquiring and thought-provoking environment, at the same time looking beyond ourselves to fulfil needs in the wider community.

Core Values

- inclusive of all people
- family oriented
- presence of children and young people
- informal atmosphere
- outreach to others
- involvement in the life of the parish
- close relationship with our clergy
- support of people in need
- responsible stewardship

Definition of Vulnerable People

The term “vulnerable people” refers not only to people who are typically recognized as vulnerable, such as children, youth, some of the elderly, those coming from an abusive relationship, hospital patients, and the mentally and physically disabled, but also to those otherwise healthy adults who are vulnerable because of recent life experiences. These circumstances include: but are not limited to, those who are grieving because of the death of a loved one, those experiencing job loss, or career difficulties, those living with separation, divorce, or marital discord, those living through financial difficulties, those facing illness in themselves or others, and those facing other uncertainties. It is important to recognize that all of us are vulnerable to varying degrees at different stages of our lives.

Theological Foundation

Jesus said: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22: 37–40)

In following these commandments, each of us is called to serve God and to minister to others in life-giving ways. While it is important to respect the dignity of all whom we come into contact with, we acknowledge that there are those among us who, through no fault of their own, are particularly vulnerable to harm and abuse. As ministers of God and followers of Christ, it is our duty and responsibility to recognize these people and do all that we can to protect them from coming to any harm through the ministries of our Church.

Imbalance of Power and the Potential for Abuse

Abuse can occur when a person in a position of trust or authority intentionally or unintentionally misuses their position to further their own desires or fails to act in the best interest of the person to whom he or she is ministering. This abuse can take the following forms:

- physical abuse (causing bodily harm),
- emotional abuse (causing a person to feel badly for their own thoughts or feelings),
- sexual abuse and harassment (through inappropriate speech, gestures, innuendo, touch, or explicit sexual contact), spiritual abuse (unduly imposing one’s own values or morals on another)
- financial abuse (the use of undue influence or coercion to solicit funds for personal gain or as contributions to the Church).

Where one individual holds power over another, due to position, age, size, gender or other reason, the potential for abuse is greater. An imbalance of power may be real or perceived, but where such an imbalance exists, the person in the position of power must be responsible for ensuring that abuse does not occur. It is therefore necessary for all people within the church to be familiar with actions that constitute abuse and avoid both behaviour and situations where abuse or the appearance of abuse has the potential to occur.

Further, it needs to be recognized that by agreeing to specific ministries, staff and volunteers themselves become vulnerable to manipulation and abuse by others. As much as possible, people in positions of trust must take necessary precautions to avoid compromising situations and must take steps to reduce the risk associated with such situations. By recognizing and avoiding compromising situations, people who supply ministry protect others from abuse, they protect themselves from abuse, and they protect themselves from misunderstandings that may lead to allegations of abuse.

Also, because of the intimate nature of ministry, people in positions of trust may suspect or become aware of situations of abuse or neglect by third parties against people to whom they minister. Where these situations involve children, a person is required, by law, to inform the local Children’s Aid Society. In cases of neglect or abuse involving adults, the ministry person should encourage the abused person to seek the necessary support and help to stop the abuse and should endeavour to secure such help for the individual where appropriate and feasible.

Guidelines for Avoiding Compromising Situations and Reducing Risk

Those who purposely abuse others seek out private places where they can be alone with their victim. They want their actions to remain secret and do not discuss them with others. They encourage their victims to maintain a veil of secrecy and may attempt to limit their contact with others. Keeping this in mind, it is important to avoid situations involving extreme privacy and/or secrecy, wherever possible. The following two principles are fundamental when ministering to vulnerable groups:

1. As much as possible, ministry should be performed in public places, open to inspection from others.
2. People should not minister in isolation. They should be supervised and supported in their ministry. When working in isolation, judgement can become skewed, boundaries may be crossed, and abuse may occur.

While the principles noted above and the general guidelines noted below should be followed whenever possible, circumstances will arise in a church environment where these principles and guidelines cannot be met. It is likely that there will be times when people will request private, confidential pastoral care in closed settings, and that there will be times where individual in-home visits are necessary. These types of ministry should continue and not be discouraged, however, the people involved need to be aware of the inherent risks in these situations and minimize the chance of ending up in a compromising situation.

General Guidelines:

1. It is preferable to meet with a group rather than be alone with an individual.
2. It is preferable to have more than one adult present when working with vulnerable people (if the other adult cannot be in the same room, it is best to have them close by in the same building).
3. It is preferable to meet in an open, public space rather than a closed, private space. A church hall is better than a secluded room, a church office is better than a person's home, a living room is better than a bedroom
4. When meeting, an open door is better than a closed door; a door with a window is better than a solid door.
5. It is always wise to make others aware of your activities and your whereabouts.
6. It is best to schedule regular meetings with a supervisor to discuss the ongoing nature and actions of the ministry.

A Sample Code of Conduct

Saint John's Anglican Church, Elora Guidelines for Creating and Maintaining a Safe Environment

Introduction

Safety and respect for all members of the Church community are very important to St. John's Church. We undertake to ensure that our Church be a safe and holy place for all whom our ministry affects. Special care for those members of the Church who may be more vulnerable is even more paramount. This is especially true in the case of our children, youth and some adults and elderly members.

Guidelines for our attitudes and actions can be a natural way of harnessing the goodwill of our Church community and converting an ideal into action. Some values supported by St. John's Church include:

- inclusive of all people
- family oriented
- presence of children and young people
- informal atmosphere
- outreach to others
- involvement in the life of the parish
- close relationship with our clergy
- support of people in need
- stewardship

Definition of Vulnerable People

The term "vulnerable people" refers not only to people who are typically recognized as vulnerable, such as children, youth, some of the elderly, those coming from an abusive relationship, hospital patients, and the mentally and physically disabled, but also to those otherwise healthy adults who are vulnerable because of recent life experiences. These circumstances include, but are not limited to, those who are grieving because of the death of a loved one, those experiencing job loss, or career difficulties, those living with separation, divorce, or marital discord, those living through financial difficulties, those facing illness in themselves or others, and those facing other uncertainties. It is important to recognize that all of us are vulnerable to varying degrees at different stages of our lives.

Theological Foundation

Jesus said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22: 37-40)

In following these commandments, each of us is called to serve God and to minister to others in life-giving ways. While it is important to respect the dignity of all with whom we come into contact, we acknowledge that there are those among us who, through no fault of their own, are particularly vulnerable to harm and abuse. As ministers of God and followers of Christ, it is our duty and responsibility to recognize these people and do all that we can to protect them from coming to any harm through the ministries of our Church.

Imbalance of Power and the Potential for Abuse

Abuse can occur when a person in a position of trust or authority intentionally or unintentionally misuses their position to further their own desires or fails to act in the best interest of the person to whom he or she is ministering. This abuse can take the following forms:

- physical abuse (causing bodily harm),
- emotional abuse (causing a person to feel badly for their own thoughts or feelings),
- sexual abuse and harassment (through inappropriate speech, gestures, innuendo, touch, or explicit sexual contact),
- spiritual abuse (imposing one's own values or morals on another)
- financial abuse (the use of undue influence or coercion to solicit funds for personal gain or as contributions to The Church).

Where one individual holds power over another due to position, age, size, gender or other reason, the potential for abuse is greater. An imbalance of power may be real or perceived, but where such an imbalance exists, the person in the position of power must be responsible for ensuring that abuse does not occur. It is therefore necessary for all people within the church to be familiar with actions that constitute abuse and avoid both behaviour and situations where abuse or the appearance of abuse has the potential to occur.

Further, it needs to be recognized that by agreeing to specific ministries, staff and volunteers themselves become vulnerable to manipulation and abuse by others. As much as possible, people in positions of trust must take necessary precautions to avoid compromising situations and must take steps to reduce the risk associated with such situations. By recognizing and avoiding compromising situations, people who provide ministry can make three important contributions: they protect others from abuse, protect themselves from abuse, and protect themselves from misunderstandings that may lead to allegations of abuse.

Also, because of the intimate nature of ministry, people in positions of trust may suspect or become aware of situations of abuse or neglect by third parties against people to whom they minister. Where these situations involve children, a person is required, by law, to inform the local Children's Aid Society. In cases of neglect or abuse involving adults, the ministry person should encourage the abused person to seek the necessary support and help to stop the abuse and should endeavour to secure such help for the individual where appropriate and feasible.

Guidelines for Avoiding Compromising Situations and Reducing Risk

Those who **purposely** abuse others, seek out private places where they can be alone with their victim. They want their actions to remain secret and do not discuss them with others. They encourage their victims to maintain a veil of secrecy and may attempt to limit their contact with others. Keeping this in mind, it is important to avoid situations involving extreme privacy and/or secrecy, wherever possible. Thus the following two principles are fundamental when ministering to vulnerable groups:

- As much as possible, ministry should be performed in public places, open to inspection from others.
- People should not minister in isolation. They should be supervised and supported in their ministry. When working in isolation, judgement can become skewed, boundaries may be crossed, and abuse may occur.

While the principles noted above and the general guidelines noted below should be followed whenever possible, circumstances will arise in a church environment where these principles and guidelines cannot be met. It is likely that there will be times when people will request private, confidential pastoral care in closed settings, and that there will be times where individual in-home visits are necessary. These types of ministry should continue and not be discouraged, however, the people involved need to be aware of the inherent risks in these situations and minimize the chance of ending up in a compromising situation.

General Guidelines:

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- When meeting, an open door is better than a closed door; a door with a window is better than a solid door.
- It is always wise to make others aware of your activities and your whereabouts.
- It is best to schedule regular meetings with a supervisor to discuss the ongoing nature and actions of the ministry.

If a person is involved in a situation where a boundary is violated, or something occurs that is out of the ordinary or could be misinterpreted, he or she should immediately report it and discuss it with a supervisor. If the supervisor is unwilling, unable, or unavailable for discussion, he or she should seek out another qualified person or colleague with whom to discuss the issue.