

GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE



**ANGLICAN
DIOCESE OF NIAGARA**

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GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH AND OTHER VULNERABLE PEOPLE

1.1 The Need for Guidelines

The Diocese of Niagara has adopted a “Policy with Regards to Screening and Management of Staff and Volunteers”, which undertakes to ensure that the Church be a safe and holy place for all whom our ministry affects. The policy states that all staff and volunteers, lay and ordained, who serve children, youth and vulnerable people be screened in a manner appropriate to the ministry or job being undertaken.

Although proper screening is necessary to help ensure that people are only assigned to positions that are appropriate for them, and in line with their ministerial gifts, it is the purpose of these guidelines to address and define appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.

1.2 Limitations of Guidelines

While these guidelines need to be read and understood by all who minister to vulnerable groups within the Church, it is recognized that it is impossible to make recommendations for all situations and circumstances. Cultural differences, as well as differences in local customs, and access to resources vary from place to place across our Diocese. Therefore, we primarily rely on the discretion and good judgement of our clergy and ministry leaders to avoid compromising situations.

Additionally, it is recognized that the Church is an evolving, dynamic organization, with a culture that is constantly changing. Guidelines that may have appeared appropriate in the past could potentially be seen as outdated or out of touch with current realities. Likewise, these guidelines may cease to be completely appropriate in the future. Therefore, it is recognized that these guidelines will need to be reviewed and updated on a periodic basis to ensure that they reflect the current standards that the Church seeks to uphold. This current version was last reviewed and revised in 2025.

1.3 Definition of Vulnerable People

The term “vulnerable people” refers to people who, because of their age, disability, or other circumstance, are more vulnerable than others. While children, youth, adults with disabilities and older adults may come to mind first, anyone can be vulnerable due to temporary or permanent situations or life experiences. Otherwise healthy adults may be vulnerable due to circumstances including, but 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 from an abusive relationship, 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.

1.4 Definition of Ministry Leaders

For the purposes of this document when ministry leader is referred to, this includes, but is not limited to, licensed lay workers, lay staff, wardens, lay readers, children, youth and family leaders, or anyone else taking on a volunteer role within the parish.

1.5 Theological Foundation

The aforementioned Screening and Management Policy and these Guidelines arise from a desire to follow the teachings of Christ as outlined in scripture. When questioned by a Pharisee about which commandment in the law is the greatest, Jesus answered:

“‘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 essential to respect the dignity of all whom we encounter, we acknowledge that some individuals, through no fault of their own, are particularly vulnerable to harm and abuse.

Within our Diocese, we are blessed with the opportunity to serve many people in many communities. Core to our Christian identity is an affirmation of the dignity and worth of all persons as every human being is created in the image of God. In baptism, we make a commitment to follow the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus’ example, we know the importance of respect for all people, healthy and right relationships, and conducting ourselves with integrity. Churches within the Diocese are places of worship, teaching, learning, and community. Relationships built in these sacred spaces continue to bless the wider church and it is our desire to provide spaces that are safe and holy for all.

As baptized Christians, each of us has entered a covenant relationship with God. The words of the Baptismal Covenant reflect the basis of this relationship, which is renewed by the church community each time a baptism is performed. Each vow contained within the Baptismal Covenant calls us to action and directly influences the ways our communities are shaped, as outlined below:

Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

To uphold this vow, it is essential to recognize the God-given value of every person and reject any harmful or exploitative behaviour or remarks that could hinder someone from fully, safely, freely and joyfully participating in the regular learning, fellowship, missional, and worship activities and opportunities of the Church. Our call is to draw people to Christ; to become part of the Christian story and community.

Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

The misuse and abuse of power is sinful and has the profound potential to alienate people from God, one another, and even themselves. For this reason, the Church bears a special responsibility to persevere in resisting any teaching or conduct that violates God's Way of Love and the sacred nature of the community relationships we are called to nurture. The Church has a responsibility to call people away from such conduct and teaching, guiding them back to the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Taking a more positive approach, the Church has a responsibility to teach a life-affirming theology as an integral part of the Good News revealed through the life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus Christ. We understand ourselves to be called to life and compelled to love and aim for church communities to be places of trust, inclusiveness, love, and safety. In this context, these communities should most beautifully reflect the profound depth of love possible in relationship with God.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?

Protecting individuals from exploitation strengthens both our relationships with them and with God. When we have the means to prevent exploitation, especially when vulnerable people cannot defend themselves, it is a baptismal imperative that we act to safeguard their well-being, loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

To uphold justice and peace, it is essential to protect those who are vulnerable, especially where there is an imbalance of power. As the Church strives to be a community that fosters reconciliation and healing, it is the responsibility of all Christians to take seriously the ways in which our communities live out this baptismal commitment. An essential part of this vow is doing everything within our power to minimize and mitigate the risk of potential indiscretion or abuse.

Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the earth?

We are all part of God's beautiful creation, which God blessed as 'good.' To respect, sustain, and renew the life of the earth invites us to steward relationships with care, upholding the sacred integrity of creation and the mutual interdependence we share with one another as humans, and with the whole earth.

1.6 The Need for Clear Position Descriptions

We seek to nurture a community of faith where people respect one another and share the gifts that God has given to them and to others. Healthy boundaries offer opportunities to foster healthy, respectful, and meaningful relationships within and beyond the diocesan community. Healthy boundaries promote and encourage the dignity and self-worth of each person. Healthy boundaries affirm actions that reflect our Christian beliefs, our love of God,

and our love of neighbour. Through all these things, healthy boundaries nurture a spirit of trust and grace, making space for all to thrive in our community of faith.

The current policy requires that all positions within a parish, staff and volunteer, lay and ordained, must have a corresponding position description. Providing these descriptions shows respect for people in ministry and demonstrates that they are valued, that their contributions will be taken seriously, and that they will be supported in their tasks.

Among other things, the position descriptions should include: the time frame associated with the position (renewable if appropriate), an outline of duties and responsibilities for the position, a statement of necessary boundaries and limitations associated with the position, and a statement of the type and frequency of support and supervision that an individual in the position will receive. As such, formal position descriptions set expectations and can provide the basis for discussion around appropriate and inappropriate activities, at the start, during, and at the end of a particular ministry.

1.7 Supervision & Accountability

Ideally, anyone ministering to vulnerable people should have regularly scheduled meetings with a supervisor to discuss the ongoing ministry, ensure that their actions remain appropriate, and ensure that participants are benefiting from the ministry. When there is uncertainty about appropriate or inappropriate actions or concerns, or if there is a feeling that a boundary may have been crossed, the individual should report the situation to the supervisor and seek advice on how best to proceed. If the supervisor is unable, unwilling, or unavailable to assist the individual should seek advice from another qualified person. It is important that the supervisor or advisor be identified in advance to avoid confusion about whom to contact if needed.

In addition to being accountable to a supervisor, we as the people of the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, are accountable to:

- God – to love our Creator with our entire being, mind, body, soul, and strength, according to Christ's instruction;
- one another – that our beliefs, language, actions, and commitments reflect the value we place on a healthy relationship with God and healthy relationships with one another;
- ourselves – that we value such things as will engender a healthy, life-giving way of Christian life, knowing that the things we do in private strongly form that which we become in community; and
- the world – modeling the Way of Christ, to the Glory of God.

1.8 Additional Information and Resources

For detailed guidance on position descriptions, risk assessments, and screening procedures, refer to the following resources:

- The Anglican Diocese of Niagara's *Policy on Screening and Management of Staff and Volunteers*
- Volunteer Canada's *The Screening Handbook: Tools and Resources for the Voluntary Sector* (available at www.volunteer.ca)

For further assistance, contact the Diocesan Human Resources and Volunteer Coordinator at 905-527-1316 ext. 360.

To learn more about the Diocese of Niagara's policies on sexual abuse, harassment, and professional misconduct, refer to the *Safe Church Policy* (October 2024).

1.9 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 they are ministering. This abuse can take the form of 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), and financial abuse (the use of undue influence or coercion to solicit funds for personal gain or as contributions to The Church).

The potential for abuse increases when one individual holds power over another, whether due to position, age, size, gender or other variables. 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.

It is important to recognize that by participating in specific ministries, clergy and ministry leaders may become more vulnerable to boundary crossing, manipulation and abuse by others. Those in positions of trust must take necessary precautions to avoid compromising situations and actively work to reduce the risks associated with such situations. By identifying and avoiding compromising situations, those providing ministry not only protect others from abuse, but also safeguard themselves from potential abuse, and misunderstandings that may lead to allegations of abuse.

Due to the intimate nature of ministry, individuals in positions of trust may suspect or become aware of abuse or neglect by third parties against those who they serve. When these situations involve children, they are required, by law, to inform the local Children's Aid Society. In cases of neglect or abuse involving adults, the ministry leader should encourage the abused person to seek the necessary support and assistance to stop the abuse and, where appropriate and feasible, help secure such support.

2.0 General Guidelines for Avoiding Compromising Situations and Reducing Risk

Those who purposely abuse others often seek private settings where they can be alone with their victim(s), aiming to keep their actions a secret and avoid discussion with others. They may encourage their victims to maintain a veil of secrecy and may attempt to limit their contact with others. Keeping this in mind, it is crucial to avoid situations that involve extreme privacy and/or secrecy, wherever possible.

The following principles are fundamental when ministering to vulnerable groups:

- ♦ As much as possible, interactions should be in public places, open to observation from others.
- ♦ People interacting with vulnerable people and groups are to be supervised and supported in their ministry and not interact with vulnerable people in isolation.

When working in isolation, judgement can become skewed, boundaries may be crossed, and abuse may occur.

Thorough documentation should be maintained for all ministry activities to ensure transparency and accountability.

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

General Guidelines:

1. It is preferable to meet with at least one additional person present 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 have meetings 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, an open door is better than a closed door; a door with a window is better than a solid door.
4. It is best to inform others of one's activities and whereabouts.
5. It is best to schedule regular meetings with a supervisor or colleague to discuss the ongoing nature and actions of one's ministry.
6. 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, they must immediately report and discuss the situation with a supervisor. If the supervisor is unwilling, unable, or unavailable for discussion, they should seek out another qualified person or colleague with whom to discuss the issue. Follow up should happen with the supervisor as soon as possible.

2.1 Recognizing Your Own Level of Competence and Providing a Referral When Needed

There will be times in the course of ministry when a cleric or ministry leader is unable to provide the level of support that the person they are ministering to desires or requires. These situations are most likely to occur in one-to-one ministries such as visiting, pastoral care, or counselling, and may result from limited time, insufficient skills or expertise, or from a lack of resources. In these cases, it is the responsibility of the ministering individual to recognize that the person requires a higher level or different type of care than they can provide. It is also the responsibility of the ministering individual to suggest an appropriate alternative source of care and assist the person in accessing that resource if necessary.

Would the person be better served or benefit more from a government agency, a support group, a professional counselor or a therapist? If so, it is the cleric or ministry leader's responsibility to seek the appropriate person or agency that can offer the necessary support and make that option available to the person receiving care.

When to Provide a Referral or Seek Additional Help:

1. Always provide a referral if the person requests to see someone else or expresses a desire for additional help that you are unable to provide.
2. Provide a referral when a person shows signs of mental illness, psychosis, incoherence, severe depression, violent behaviour, substance abuse, shares suicidal intentions or makes homicidal threats. Engage emergency services when appropriate.
3. Refer the person in situations involving all forms of abuse.
4. Offer a referral if you are unable to devote the necessary time, if you feel out of your depth in terms of experience or expertise, if you don't fully understand the situation or the issues, or if you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope.
5. Provide a referral if you are uncomfortable with the nature of the relationship, if you feel the person has become overly dependent on you, or if you have become emotionally involved to the point of losing objectivity.
6. Refer if you feel that progress is stagnating, if they seem "stuck" in an unproductive pattern, or if you intuitively feel that they would be better served by another approach.
7. Offer a referral if the person's behaviour or the nature of your relationship with them undergoes a significant change. For example, if someone whom you've been regularly visiting suddenly refuses to see you, or if you notice a decline in their self-care.

Potential Places to Refer a Person:

1. There are a variety of community, government, and private resources available to assist people in times of need. Except in cases of emergency, you may wish to check with your supervisor or rector before providing a person with a referral. They should be able to assist you in determining a proper course of action. Personal identities of people receiving care should be kept confidential.
2. Ministry leaders should make a person aware that they can expect to pay a fee when working with a professional counselor. These fees vary amongst individual counselors, but subsidies may be available.
3. The following represents a partial list of possible places to refer:
 - ♦ Police via 911 (*in cases of immediate emergency or danger*)
 - ♦ Suicide Crisis Help Line via 288 (*for anyone in Canada who is thinking about suicide, or who is worried about someone they know*)
 - ♦ Community Help Line via 211 (*for local community resources*)
 - ♦ Supervisor, rector, or diocesan leaders
 - ♦ Children's Aid Society, Indigenous Child & Family Well-being Agency or Local Child & Family Services. (In cases of disclosures and known, suspected, or potential abuse or neglect)
 - ♦ Family doctor
 - ♦ A Family Member
 - ♦ Bereavement councilor

- ♦ A local Sexual Assault Centre or crisis outreach and support team
- ♦ Alcohol, Drug, and Gambling Services
- ♦ A Counselling Agency or Professional Therapist (These include child counselors, family counselors, marriage counselors, women's counselors, etc.)
- ♦ Kids Help Phone
- ♦ 2SLGBTQIA+ Youth & Adult Help Lines

2.2 Specific Guidelines for Children, Youth, and Family Ministry (CYFM) Leader

Children are naturally trusting and readily place their faith in adults who care for them. However, they may lack the skills, knowledge, or experience to distinguish between appropriate behaviour and inappropriate behaviour from adults, making them particularly vulnerable to abuse.

The following guidelines address key considerations for working with children and youth to ensure their safety and well-being.

1. Children should be supervised at all times. When the Church School, program, or event is finished, children should be escorted to meet their guardians or remain under supervision until they are picked up. Parishes with large numbers of children in the Nursery or Church School should consider a more formalized sign in and out procedure, particularly where visitors or infrequent attendees may not be known to the clergy or ministry leaders leading the program.
2. Children should be supervised by adults at all times and may be assisted by responsible teenagers over the age of 16 years old, where deemed appropriate. Children, Youth, and Family Ministry Leaders must have a supervisor to whom they can regularly report, teens should have the opportunity to check-in with a responsible adult before or after each program, event, or session. While it is not required that an adult be present in every room, at least one clearly identified adult should be readily available each Sunday or day of program/event to address any emergencies or extraordinary situations that may arise.
3. Whenever possible, it is best to have at least two ministry leaders supervising a group of children. Unfortunately, recruiting Church School ministry leaders can be a challenge in many parishes. To ensure that a single teacher is not left alone with a group of children, one solution could be to create a schedule whereby parishioners take turns assisting the teacher each week. Another possibility is to connect with the local high schools and recruit teens needing community service volunteer hours. Additionally, parishes can designate one individual to roam among the classrooms each week, checking on each class, and supplying assistance where needed.
4. Ontario Daycare Guidelines suggest a leader to child ratio of 3:10 for infants and 1:5 for toddlers (under 2 and a half years old), 1:8 for older preschool children (2 and a half to 6 years old), and 1:13 for school age children (over 6 years old). Churches are not bound by these ratios, however, where leader to child ratios consistently exceed the suggested numbers, an individual parish/mission should attempt to recruit more Church School ministry leaders. The strategies mentioned above, in point 3, may prove useful when recruiting additional help.

5. It is best that Church School lessons and Youth Group Meetings take place in public spaces. The church is better than a private home; a church hall is better than a secluded room. An open door is better than a closed door; a door with a window is better than a solid door.
6. Special events or field trips off church premises should be pre-approved by church leadership. Guardians should be notified well in advance of the outing and written approval should be obtained. At least two adults should be available to supervise the event.
7. If an event requires a leader drive children or youth, the leader must hold a valid driver's license and insurance. Proper screening for positions that require a cleric or ministry leader to drive should include requesting a copy of the person's driver's license, insurance, driver's abstract and, in some cases, a police record check to be kept in their personnel file. Seat belts must be available for all passengers. When young children, approved child restraints or car seats must be available as required by law. Ministry leaders must not have any alcohol or drugs in their system when driving. Ministry leaders should avoid being alone with a single child in the car unless under extreme circumstances, such as driving a child home in an emergency.
8. Children, Youth, and Family Ministry Leaders should avoid one-on-one interaction with those whom they serve. If a child or adolescent requests to speak privately with an adult, it should be done out of earshot but within view of another adult. It is inappropriate for children, youth and family ministry leaders to suggest a meeting with an individual child outside of regular group activities.
9. Encourage guardians of young children to take them to the washroom before ministry programs. If a child needs to use the washroom during the program, they should be escorted by a ministry leader. It is best if the ministry leader remains outside the washroom with the door open. A ministry leader should not enter a cubicle with a child and close the door.
10. In general, physical contact should occur only at the child's initiation, with the child's permission, and only if the adult feels comfortable with that boundary. Any physical contact with children or youth must be of a non-sexual nature and appropriate to the situation.
- 11.

Appropriate contact includes:

- Speak to the child at eye level, kindly, and listen attentively
- Side hugs: You must obtain permission before offering a side hug
- High-fives
- Handshakes
- Holding hands (with you children in escorting situations)
- Holding a preschool child who is crying, provided that they want to be held

Inappropriate contact includes:

- Kissing, or coaxing a child to kiss you
- Full-Frontal or extended hugging or tickling
- Lap sitting
- Wrestling or piggyback/shoulder rides
- Allowing children/youth to cling to an adult's leg

- Touching any area of the body normally covered by a bathing suit, specifically the buttocks, thighs, breasts, or groin areas
 - Carrying children or youth
12. Physical or verbal attacks should not be used to discipline children. Gentle physical restraint is appropriate only if a child is in danger of causing damage or injuring themselves or others.
 13. **Sexual contact of any type with a child or youth is always inappropriate regardless of who initiates it.** If a child/youth initiates inappropriate physical or sexual contact with a leader, it is the responsibility of the leader to stop such physical contact, explain the necessary boundaries to the child/youth, then reestablish and maintain the appropriate boundaries. Any interaction in which a boundary may have been crossed should be documented and reported to a supervisor immediately. Note that it is far less likely that inappropriate physical or sexual contact will occur when others are present. To avoid any inappropriate contact, or allegations of inappropriate contact, ministry leaders must try to avoid being alone with a child/ youth at all times.
 14. Jokes, innuendoes, or compliments of a sexual nature are inappropriate and must be avoided. Exercise caution when children/youth ask questions or seek advice on topics of sexual nature. In general, avoid saying or doing anything you wouldn't want to see reported in the newspaper or on TV. Be mindful of your actions and words, considering how they would reflect on you, your family and the participant's family.
 15. In overnight situations, no adult leader should sleep in the same space as a child or youth participant. Sleeping and changing areas must be separate to ensure the safety and privacy of all participants. Ministry leaders and participants are required to use separate changing areas to guarantee that individuals are never undressed in the presence of others.

2.3 Suspected Abuse, Disclosures, and Reporting – For Individuals Under 18 Years Old

There may be instances when a ministry leader suspects that a child has been a victim of abuse or neglect by a parent/guardian, is at risk of such harm, or when a child or youth discloses experiencing abuse or neglect to the leader. **In these situations, the leader is required by law to report the case to the local Children's Aid Society (CAS). This requirement cannot be delegated to anyone else, the person who becomes aware of abuse or neglect, or who suspects that the risk for abuse or neglect is present must call the CAS immediately.**

If a child/youth discloses neglect or abuse the following steps should be followed:

- a. Believe in the child/youth and take the disclosure seriously.
- b. Document as much information as possible. Record the facts and write down the child/youth's name, address, telephone number, the time and place of the conversation, and what the child/youth told you in their words.
- c. Do not ask leading questions, listen openly and calmly to the child or youth. Do not phrase questions in a way that implies specific answers or puts words in the child/youth's mouth. Please see examples of questions below. Thank the

child/youth for speaking with you and reassure them that you will do your best to get the right kind of help.

- d. Report the disclosure to the Children's Aid Society.
- e. Tell your supervisory team and the diocesan executive officer that you have made the report to the CAS to prepare next steps and a plan of action.
- f. Appropriate **questions to ask during a disclosure or suspecting abuse:**
 - Can you tell me more about that?
 - What happened?
 - How did that make you feel?
 - Who was there?
 - Where did this happen?
 - When did this happen?
 - Can you describe what happened?
 - Is there anything else you want to tell me about this?

Avoid:

- Leading questions: Did they touch you inappropriately?
- Judgement questions: Why did you let them do that to you?
- Pressuring questions: You have to tell me everything.

When offering a ministry program to children and youth, the ministry leaders must explain their duty to report. You can use a statement such as this:

"In this program, my job is to make sure that you are safe and feeling supported. If you ever feel uncomfortable, hurt, or something is wrong, you can always talk to me, and I will listen. If you tell me about something that could hurt you or someone else, I must share it with the right people to make sure everyone stays safe."

2.4 Guidelines for Online Platforms and Virtual Spaces

The safety and protection of children and youth remain a top priority of the Anglican Diocese of Niagara. This commitment extends to all digital communications, including email, social media, and text messaging.

Risks associated with Online Platforms and Virtual Programming

- 1) **Decreased Supervision:** Online platforms and communications can be more secretive and private limiting guardians, colleagues, and ministry team members to effectively monitor virtual spaces. This can result in reduced oversight and potentially unsafe interactions.
- 2) **Boundaries Violations:** Virtual environments make it easier to violate boundaries, such as through the sharing of personal content, access to youth's social media profiles, direct private messaging, and communication during inappropriate hours. Maintaining professional boundaries and transparency in all virtual interactions is vital to preventing any misuse of this trust.

- 3) **Unauthorized Access:** Predatory or unauthorized adults may attempt to gain access to participants through technology platforms. It is essential to implement strong security measures and regularly monitor activity.
- 4) **Peer-to-peer Abuse/Cyberbullying:** The Increase in online communication and interactions heightens the risk of peer-to-peer abuse including cyberbullying. It is crucial for ministry leaders to stay vigilant and prepared to address and prevent such incidents.

Acceptable Forms of Digital Communication with Children & Youth

Emails: can only be exchanged with minors only when the minor's guardian or a supervisor is copied and strictly when the content pertains to ministry-related matters.

Text messages: As a general practice, texting is not recommended as a form of communication with minors due to the limited ability to maintain a record of the communication, especially if deleted. If texting is used, text messages must only be exchanged with minors when the minor's guardian or your supervisor is included and when the content pertains strictly to ministry-related matters.

Guidelines for Social Media Accounts, Groups, and Meetings

For online groups (e.g., Facebook, Zoom, WhatsApp, Google Meets) the following conditions must be met:

- 1) **Participant Information & Permission Form:** Collecting participant information/permission from guardians is essential to collect before engaging in virtual activities. This ensures that in the event of an incident and/or emergency during an online session, ministry leaders can respond appropriately.
- 2) **Supervision and Monitoring:** Online groups, pages, and virtual meetings must be organized by **at least two ministry leaders** and login access must be provided to a supervisor.

Additional considerations:

- **Age Restrictions:** All online group members must meet the minimum age requirement for the platform being used (e.g., you need to be at least 13 to set up a Facebook account).
- **Community Norms & Expectations:** Develop norms and expectations for virtual spaces with the help of a leadership team. Communicate these ground rules with participants, guardians, and ministry team.
- **Security and Platform Privacy:** Do not publicly share meeting invitation links or meeting recordings. Ensure entry into virtual meetings are password protected and set privacy settings on social media pages.

- **Personal Information Protection:** When posting to social media, do not use the names of children/youth or share any personal information such as their address, school, or other identifying details. Avoid tagging minors in photos or publicly identifying them in any online posts.
- **Photos and Media:** Do not post any photos or videos of participants without the expressed **permission of the guardian**. Ensure signed photo/video release form is completed by the guardian before publishing any posts.
- **Supervision and Monitoring:** Virtual interactions should be closely monitored. Supervisors and ministry leaders must have access to all communication platforms including emails, group chats, and meeting recordings. Regular checks should be conducted to ensure compliance with these guidelines.
- **Boundary Setting and Communication Hours:** Establish clear boundaries for communication including appropriate hours for vital meetings and interactions. Avoid contacting minors during late hours or outside of the agreed-upon times for ministry activities.
- **Responding to Concerns:** If any concerns arise related to inappropriate communication or online behaviour, they should be immediately reported to a supervisor. A protocol for addressing these concerns should be established.
- **Training and Education:** Regularly educate both ministry leaders and youth participants about online safety, including how to recognize and report any potential risks or concerns in virtual spaces such as cyber-bullying or predatory behaviour.

By adhering to these guidelines and best practices, we can foster safe and responsible virtual interactions that prioritize the well-being of children and youth while participating in ministry programs.

2.5 **Specific Guidelines When Conducting Pastoral Care or Individual Counselling**

In times of crisis or uncertainty, people often seek support and understanding from faith communities. Pastoral Care is a vital and rewarding ministry for those involved, but it is important to recognize that during such times, people are especially vulnerable. A clergy member or ministry leader may have significant influence over an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Therefore, ministry leaders must be especially mindful of their own biases and, regardless of their good intentions, must avoid unduly influencing the person seeking care.

When a ministry leader meets repeatedly and regularly with an individual to help address difficulties or uncertainties in life, the relationship may evolve into a counselling relationship. In these circumstances, the degree of influence is likely to be even greater, and the clergy/ministry leader must be particularly aware of the potential power imbalance. Vigilance in maintaining appropriate boundaries is essential.

The following guidelines should be followed when conducting pastoral care or individual counselling:

1. Clergy and Ministry Leaders should be aware of the nature of dual relationships and avoid counselling people to whom they are personally close or with whom they have a working relationship.
2. Clergy and Ministry Leaders should be aware of their own level of competence and avoid working in areas for which they are unqualified. See Section 2.3 of this document, "Recognizing Your Own Level of Competence and Providing a Referral When Needed", for more information along these lines.
3. Clergy and Ministry Leaders should meet with a supervisor on a regular basis to discuss their work, since isolation can lead to a loss of perspective and good judgement.
4. Clergy and Ministry Leaders should never engage in any form of sexual impropriety with those whom they counsel regardless of invitation or consent. Sexual impropriety includes, but is not limited to, all forms of overt or covert seductive speech, gestures and behaviours as well as explicitly sexual contact.
5. Pastoral care and counselling relationships are for the benefit of the person being cared for. They should be entered into only with agreement from the person seeking care and should be continued only as long as it is reasonably clear that the person is gaining some benefit from the relationship.
6. If the clergy/ministry leader becomes unable or unwilling to continue the relationship, they should endeavor to arrange for the person to see another person for support.
7. Clergy and ministry leaders must treat all information and communications obtained in meetings as strictly confidential and should not disclose them to anyone except where required by law or where given written consent by the individual(s) involved. When discussing the details of a particular situation with a supervisor, the identity of the people involved must be protected.
8. When possible and where confidentiality permits, in-person counselling should take place in a church office with a window in the door. It is best to have another person close by while counselling takes place.
9. Counselling relationships should involve some form of record keeping. At a minimum, the cleric or ministry leader should record: the date, the number of the session, who was present, and the session focus. This helps the cleric or ministry leader maintain objectivity, judge an individual's progress over time, and, in the case of litigation, recall accurately what occurred during the sessions.
10. Clergy/Ministry Leaders should not agree to ongoing counselling of a person under the age of 18 without the knowledge and written consent of the youth's guardian. In those situations where a minor has specifically requested counselling without guardian's knowledge, the clergy/ministry leader should seek approval from their supervisor before beginning counselling. The supervisor should speak with the youth directly before granting approval.

2.6 Specific Guidelines When Conducting In-Home Visits

There are a wide variety of reasons and circumstances that make meeting people in their own homes a necessary part of the Church's ministry. When visiting people who can no longer leave their places of residence, preparing people for baptism, welcoming

newcomers, conducting stewardship or planned giving campaigns, or responding to pastoral crises, it is often necessary and desirable to go to someone's home.

However, visiting people in their own homes presents its own set of challenges. Homes, by their nature, are private environments. Because a person tends to be more comfortable and relaxed in their own environment, this increased degree of relaxation may, in fact, make them more vulnerable. Also, because the person being visited is better able to control the situation in their own environment, they may hold a higher degree of power than the visitor. Visitors should be aware that they are potential victims of abuse when visiting someone's home and should take the necessary steps to protect themselves.

The following guidelines are meant to protect both parties in these situations – the visitor and the visited.

1. Always arrange the visit in advance, and if possible, avoid one-on-one visits. Establish a starting time and approximate ending time, as well as a clear purpose for the visit so that the individual knows exactly what to expect.
2. Make another person (secretary, spouse, colleague) aware of where you are going and when you can be expected to return.
3. Be respectful of people's time and do not overstay your welcome. When visiting people who can no longer leave their places of residence or someone who is ill, be particularly conscious of how they are feeling and avoid over-tiring them.
4. Keep the pastoral purpose of your visit in mind at all times. Do not attempt to unduly persuade or influence the person, particularly if they seem confused. Avoid offering advice about medication or medical treatment, and avoid arguing with, or agitating the person you are visiting.
5. Stay in the most public areas of the home – the living room, family room, or kitchen. Avoid entering a person's bedroom unless a 3rd party is present in the home.
6. Choose a seat at a comfortable distance from the person you're talking to, avoid sitting next to them on a couch or sofa. Do not invite or initiate any unwanted or inappropriate physical contact.
7. Visitors should never engage in any form of sexual impropriety with those whom they are visiting. Sexual impropriety includes, but is not limited to, all forms of overt or covert seductive speech, gestures and behaviours as well as explicitly sexual contact.
8. Do not agree to meet anyone in their home if you sense your own personal safety may be compromised, or if you feel that there is the potential that a boundary may be crossed. If a person whom you don't know well asks for a meeting and you are at all suspicious, arrange to meet them at church offices, a coffee shop, or a local restaurant until you know them better.
9. When first arriving at a person's home, assess the situation for anything that may be out of the ordinary. Do not continue if the person is inappropriately dressed, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or if a person or animal acts in a threatening or aggressive manner and is not properly restrained.

10. If the person acts strangely, says or does things that make you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, or initiates inappropriate physical contact, tell them to stop, then, reestablish and maintain appropriate boundaries. If the behaviour continues, excuse yourself, document what happened, and report it to your supervisor. **Do not stay in a potentially dangerous or compromising situation!**
11. Do not take the person away from the home for a walk or in your car unless specifically arranged in advance as part of the visit and approved, in advance, by your supervisor.
12. If driving a person to appointments or errands is part of the stated ministry, drivers must hold a valid driver's license and insurance. Proper screening for positions that require a cleric or ministry volunteer to drive should include requesting a copy of the person's driver's license, insurance, driver's abstract and a police check to be kept in their personnel file. Seat belts must be available for all passengers. Drivers must not have any alcohol or drugs in their system when driving. If possible, driving ministries should be team ministries to avoid being alone in a car with a vulnerable person.
13. Visitors must treat all information and communications obtained while visiting as strictly confidential and should not disclose them to anyone except where required by law or where given written consent by the individual(s) involved. When discussing the details of a particular situation with a supervisor, the identity of the people involved must be protected.
14. Except where the stated purpose of the visit is stewardship or planned giving, it is best not to accept gifts or donations when making in-home visits. Encourage the person to make their donation using the offering plate or by mailing it directly to the church. If the person insists on giving you something while you are there, document the gift (for instance, by taking a picture of the cash/cheque). Explain that the church will issue an official receipt at the appropriate time.
15. Donors should seek independent financial and legal counsel before making any significant contributions to the Church. People should also be encouraged to speak with their family before making significant contributions in order to avoid allegations of undue influence or abuse of trust.
16. Be aware of signs that a person may not be caring for themselves as they should and may require additional community resources to assist them. Signs of personal neglect include but are not limited to: a decrease in personal hygiene, wearing the same clothes all the time, particularly if they are stained or soiled, and periods of confusion, disorientation, or loss of memory.
17. If you become concerned about the well-being of a person whom you are visiting, speak to your supervisor about trying to initiate contact with a family member to discuss the situation and recommend possible courses of action.
18. If a person makes in-home visits to the same person on a regular basis, they should be familiar with the guidelines contained in this document under Section 2.5, "Specific Guidelines When Conducting Pastoral Care or Individual Counselling", and Section 2.1, "Recognizing Your Own Level of Competence and Providing a Referral When Needed."

2.7 Specific Guidelines When Conducting Hospital, Long-Term Care or

Retirement Home Visits with Adults

People in a hospital or long-term care or retirement home may be in unfamiliar surroundings. They may be experiencing considerable pain, uncertainty, or fear over their condition. They may be under the effect of anesthesia or other medication. As such, people in these situations become more vulnerable because they may not be completely themselves. Additional care must be taken when ministering to them, as outlined below:

1. Upon arrival at the hospital or nursing home, check with a nurse or attendant to determine if the person is able to receive visitors and to make them aware of your presence.
2. Make yourself aware of institutional rules and procedures and follow them closely. For example, some hospitals may require the use of security badges for regular visitors. Some areas of the hospital may have strict hand washing or other policies in place.
3. If you are a regular hospital visitor and your hospital has an on-site chaplain, make yourself known to this person. Use this person as a resource when appropriate. The hospital chaplain will be aware of any procedures or issues specific to their hospital.
4. Be prepared to listen to the situation or diagnosis with the individual you are visiting, but refrain from giving opinions or advice.
5. Be prepared to meet friends or family members who may be visiting at the same time as you are. Keep in mind that these people may or may not hold the same religious beliefs as the person you are visiting.
6. Discussions with a patient, their family, or friends should be held in strict confidence. Visitors must treat all information and communications obtained while visiting as strictly confidential and should not disclose them to anyone except where required by law or where given written consent by the individual(s) involved. When discussing the details of a particular situation with a supervisor, the identity of the people involved must be protected.
7. If a nurse or doctor comes to engage the patient in discussion or treatment, excuse yourself to a waiting area until the conversation is finished, unless specifically requested to remain by the patient or the health care professional.
8. If a patient requires assistance to use the washroom, or to get out of bed, seek the help of a nurse or orderly, do not attempt to help the person on your own.
9. Do not take the person away from the hospital or nursing home for a walk or in your car unless specifically arranged in advance as part of the visit and approved, in advance, both by your supervisor and the appropriate authorities at the hospital or nursing home. If driving a person to appointments or errands is part of the stated ministry, drivers must hold a valid driver's license and insurance. Proper screening for positions that require a cleric or minis to drive should include requesting a copy of the person's driver's license, insurance, driver's abstract and a police check to be kept in their personnel file. Seat belts must be available for all passengers. Drivers must not have any alcohol or drugs in their system when driving. If possible, driving ministries should be team ministries to avoid being alone in a car with a vulnerable person.
10. Ontario law makes reporting mandatory when an older adult resides in a Long-term Care Home, or a Retirement Home and elder abuse is suspected or has occurred. Any

person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that any of the following has occurred or may occur shall immediately report the suspicion and information upon which it is based to the Registrar of the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority:

- Improper or incompetent treatment or care of a resident that resulted in harm or a risk of harm to the resident.
 - Abuse of a resident by anyone or neglect of a resident by the licensee or the staff of the retirement home of the resident if it results in harm or a risk of harm to the resident.
 - Unlawful conduct that resulted in harm or a risk of harm to a resident.
 - Misuse or misappropriation of a resident's money.
11. People making hospital or long-term care home visits should be familiar with the guidelines in Section 2.1 of this document, "Recognizing Your Own Level of Competence and Providing a Referral When Needed", and Section 2.5, "Specific Guidelines When Conducting Pastoral Care or Individual Counselling."

2.8 Guidelines for Conducting Hospital Visits to Children/Youth

When visiting a person under the age of 18 in the hospital for pastoral care, it is essential to follow these guidelines to ensure the safety, well-being, and dignity of the minor, recognizing their particular vulnerability.

1) Visit Initiation

Visits to children and youth in hospital by clergy or ministry leaders should normally be requested by their legal guardian(s). The child or youth's comfort, care and dignity should be prioritized, and their preferences respected.

2) Planning

- Before arrival, ensure that the guardians of the child/youth are notified about the time of visit and plans for spiritual care (visit, prayers, Eucharist, etc.).
- Guardians should be present during the visit whenever possible. This ensures both the minor's comfort and the safety of all involved.
- If, for any reason, the guardians cannot be present, every effort should be made to keep the door and or curtain open during the visit to maintain a clear line of sight, notifying the nursing station of your presence.

3) Presence

- At the start of the visit, confirm with the child/youth that they consent to a pastoral care visit. Their personal wishes and comfort should be respected, and they should feel free to decline or stop the visit at any time.
- Make sure to explain the purpose of the visit clearly in the language the child/youth can understand.

- Maintain strict confidentiality about information shared during the visit, unless there is a clear risk to the safety of the child/youth, or others.
- If there are any concerns arising from the visit, documentation must be completed, and visit should be reported to supervisor.

2.9 Specific Guidelines When Ministering to Older Adults

Most of us are familiar with the physiological changes that accompany aging. Pain and stiffness in joints can result in loss of manual dexterity and decreased mobility. Hearing often deteriorates, making communication more difficult. In later stages of life, cognitive ability may decrease, resulting in difficulties with memory or periods of confusion and disorientation. In addition, significant emotional changes are likely to occur as people begin to face end of life issues including: the inability to perform tasks that they once did, loss of significant life-long friends or companions, possible regrets over mistakes made or opportunities missed, and the inevitable facing of one's own mortality.

All, we need to remember is that many people remain active and contributing members of their community throughout their lifespan. These people possess life experiences, gifts, and wisdom that make them a joy to minister to, as well as significant resources for ministering to others.

The following should be kept in mind while working with the elderly:

1. Approach individuals with dignity and respect. Do not prejudge an elderly person's interests or abilities. Physical difficulties may not be indicative of interest or mental acuteness.
2. Elderly people often hold clergy and other church personnel in extremely high regard, particularly if they were taught at an early age not to question The Church. Extra caution must be used not to exert undue influence in these situations, particularly around financial giving.
3. Donors should seek independent financial and legal counsel before making any significant contributions to the Church. Elderly people should also be encouraged to speak with their family before making significant contributions to avoid allegations of undue influence or abuse of trust.
4. Be aware of signs that an older adult may not be caring for themselves as they should and may require additional community resources to assist them. Signs of personal neglect include but are not limited to a decrease in personal hygiene, wearing the same clothes all the time, particularly if they are stained or soiled, and periods of confusion, disorientation, or loss of memory.
5. If you become concerned about the well-being of an older adult, speak to your supervisor about trying to initiate contact with a family member to discuss the situation and recommend courses of action. If the person resides in a long-term care home, you may be able to enlist the assistance of the on-site social worker or other supervisor to address your concerns.
6. When meeting with older adults in their homes, follow the guidelines in Section 2.6 of this document, "Specific Guidelines When Conducting In-Home Visits." Be sure to arrange the visit in advance and do not overstay your welcome.

7. People visiting elderly people should also be familiar with the guidelines in Section 2.1 of this document, "Recognizing Your Own Level of Competence and Providing a Referral When Needed", and Section 2.5, "Specific Guidelines When Conducting Pastoral Care or Individual Counselling".

3.0 Specific Guidelines When Ministering Refugees and Newcomers

Many of our parishes interact with refugee claimants, refugees, and newcomers to Canada, either through formal sponsorship initiatives or simply as welcoming communities that newcomers join after arriving in Canada.

Whether your parish or mission is an official sponsor or is home to newcomer congregants, it's important to recognize that the early stages of resettlement are a particularly vulnerable time for individuals and families, especially if English is a second language.

We have specific guidelines for Refugee Sponsorship Groups below; however, the following guidance applies to all parishes and missions engaging with refugee claimants, refugees, and newcomers in any capacity.

- Any cleric or ministry leader who is going to be working one-to-one requires a satisfactory Police Record Check (including vulnerable sector check, if eligible).
- Clergy and ministry leaders should always have gender, age, socio-cultural, and language considerations in mind when interacting with newcomers. Ministry leaders should never be alone with children.
- While Clergy and ministry leaders may be called upon to help navigate local support social service systems, privacy and confidentiality is paramount. The sharing of private and/or confidential information without express and explicit permission that is for specific purposes (i.e. for healthcare, registration for services such as OHIP, Social Insurance Number, Bank Account registration etc.) is forbidden, and covered by privacy of information legislation.
- Regular engagement in the life of the community is encouraged in public settings, including through shared meals, celebrations, and encouraging the building up of social connections. Active participation in such activities helps foster the settlement process in Canada.

In fulfilling sponsor obligations, the following guidelines are recommended:

- Each Sponsoring Group should adhere to a structure to ensure accountability and transparency of action. One possible group structure might be: "chair," "volunteer coordinator," "subcommittee heads," "treasurer / accountant." The chair is also normally the primary contact with the designated diocesan refugee sponsorship liaison.
- There should be a reporting structure and division of tasks established for the appropriate coordination and fulfilling of tasks. If possible, a "pictorial" directory could be supplied to the newcomer(s) so that they can refer to and identify ministry leaders and their areas of responsibility.
- Go in twos, ministry leaders should always be working in pairs. In each pair, at least one person must have a valid and satisfactory Police Record Check.

- There should never be any “drop-in” or un-announced visits. Ministry leaders should always call ahead and arrange. A system of pre-arranged regular check-ins and or meetings with the newcomers should be established to ensure that the sponsorship is proceeding appropriately, and the newcomers should have a safe space to voice any concerns, ask any questions, and the same be acknowledged and acted upon.
- Providing childcare for refugees or newcomers is not to happen unless in extraordinary situations. Ministry Leaders should never provide care overnight to refugees or newcomers.
- There should be a “logbook” of ministry leader visits and tasks (to do and completed). There should be job descriptions and roles established or ministry leaders to ensure clear and healthy boundaries.

These guidelines are in place to ensure the experience of welcoming refugees and newcomers to our diocese is as life-giving and positive as possible.