

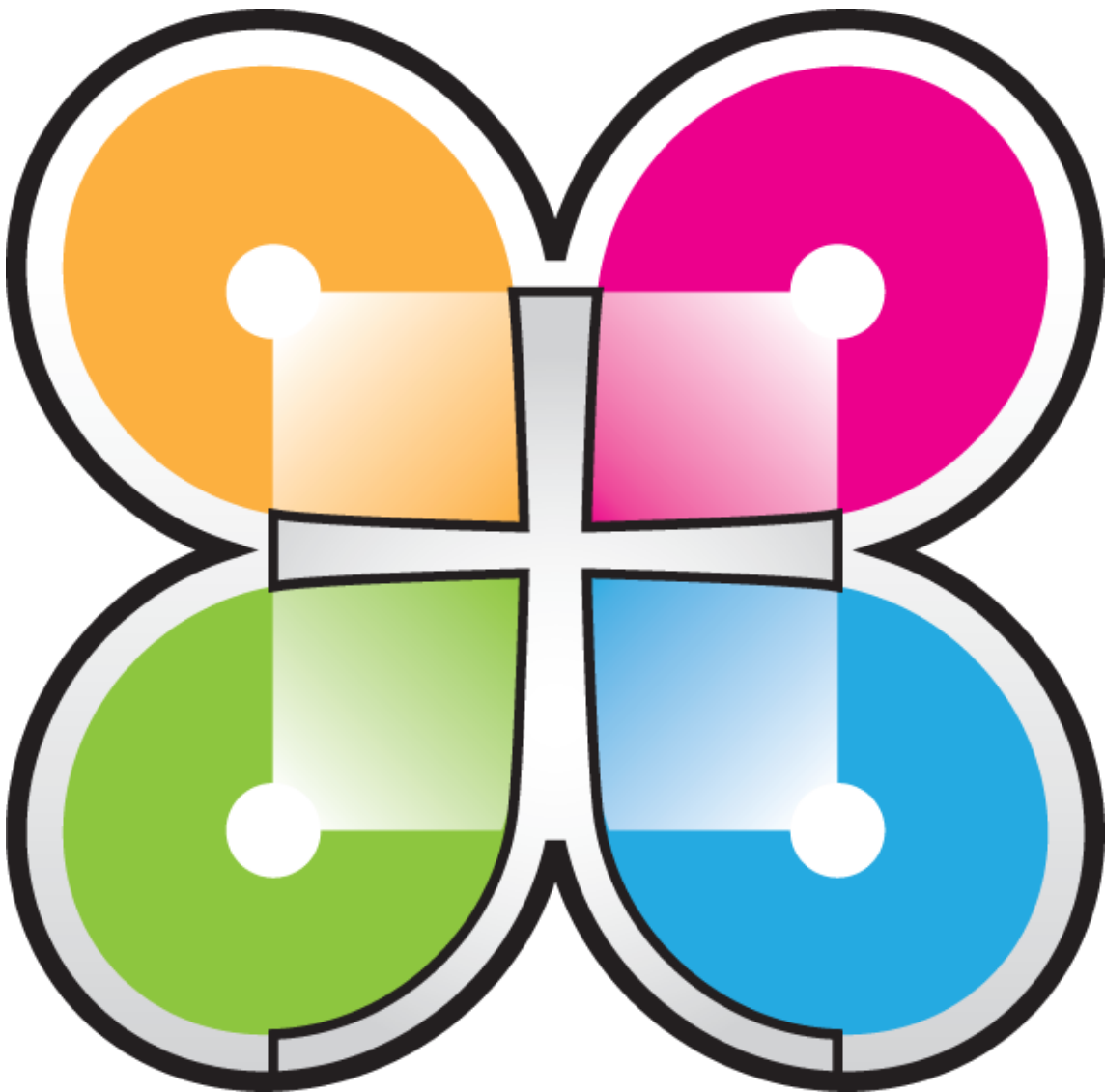
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# Responsible Ministry and Safe Environment Policy

What You Need to Know

The Diocese of Victoria

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# Foreword

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In September 2011, the Diocese implemented its *Responsible Ministry and Safe Environment Policy* (RMSE). This short-form document has been developed to help you understand the process and expectations of all persons engaged as volunteers or paid personnel in the Diocese.

*This synopsis should not be considered a complete account, legally or descriptively, of the RMSE Policy.* Its intent is to provide basic information you may find useful on a day-to-day basis. The complete RMSE Policy is available from the Diocese of Victoria at the address or email address below, or on the Diocesan website ([www.rcdvictoria.org/responsible-ministry-safe-environment.php](http://www.rcdvictoria.org/responsible-ministry-safe-environment.php)).

Please do not hesitate to consult your parish priest, Parish Responsible Ministry Coordinator (PRM), or the Diocesan Responsible Ministry Coordinator (DRM) at the Diocesan RMSE Coordinator's office (250) 479-1331, extension 223 (messages are checked daily) with any questions or concerns that are not addressed here or in the complete Policy.

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*The RMSE logo depicts four separate areas, each a different colour and each representing a different aspect of RMSE: The Diocese of Victoria (blue); Parishes (green); Clergy, Employee and Volunteers (yellow); and Vulnerable Persons (pink). The areas, which themselves represent people looking up to God, are linked by the central theme of the Cross, which joins His people in unity. The overall shape is reminiscent of a butterfly, which is sometimes seen as a symbol of resurrection, change, rebirth and hope.*



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# Responsible Ministry and Safe Environment Policy

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## **What is a *Responsible Ministry and Safe Environment Policy*?**

As a local faith community of the Catholic Church, the Diocese of Victoria upholds and promotes the values expressed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and in the teachings and laws of the Catholic Church. This means, among other things, that the Diocese takes a stance of deep respect for the dignity of all persons and commits itself to the wellbeing of all persons.

The Diocese upholds the fundamental goodness of all that God has created. The Diocese holds, further, that through the death and resurrection of Jesus all humanity has been redeemed, lifted up, and transformed. We are also deeply aware of the continuing weakness of human beings and the sinfulness present in humanity. We acknowledge that we must take seriously the possibility of misconduct—even among our own clergy, religious, employees and volunteers—and so the Diocese has put in place the *Responsible Ministry and Safe Environment* policies and procedures outlined in this document. These guidelines are designed to assist the Church in responding with charity and justice to situations that involve such misconduct.

Through the RSME, the Diocese offers assistance and protection to vulnerable persons (children, youth or vulnerable adults) and to Diocesan clergy, religious, employees and volunteers. It also offers assistance to communities in which alleged abuse may have occurred.

## **Who is considered a “vulnerable person?”**

A *vulnerable person* for the purposes of this document is a child, youth or adult who may be dependent on others for a variety of reasons.

## **What are our ethical responsibilities to vulnerable persons?**

When engaged in parish or Diocesan activities, our parishioners and others who use our services are in our care. As such, we have a moral responsibility to protect them from dangerous or abusive situations.



### **What is the responsibility of the Diocese?**

In every situation or allegation of misconduct by clergy, religious, a staff member or a volunteer of the Diocese of Victoria, the Diocese will respond swiftly and compassionately, investigating all allegations, providing assistance to those in need of healing and reconciliation, and taking any and all means to prevent a future occurrence of misconduct. Adhering to civil and canon law, working together with the Responsible Ministry Advisory Committee, psychological counsellors, the Chancellor of the Diocese, and the Diocesan insurer and legal counsel, the Diocese will provide a thorough and comprehensive response to resolve allegations of misconduct. The primary concern will be the well-being of all persons involved—both the one(s) who suffer the effects of misconduct and the one(s) who might be guilty of misconduct. The Diocese has a particular concern about the health and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults who might be affected.

The Diocese will always act in accordance with the laws of Canada and of the Province of British Columbia. This Policy reflects the existing law of the Province of British Columbia, the laws of Canada, and current canonical norms. The Policy applies to all clergy, religious, employees, and volunteers of the Diocese.

### **Who must be screened?**

In order to protect those who provide and benefit from ministry, potential clergy, employees and volunteers must follow formal screening steps designed to create and maintain a safe environment. This process involves identifying any activity or any ministry position that could place children, youth or other vulnerable persons at risk of being harmed. The screening process involves discerning the suitability and appropriateness of an individual for a position in the Diocese. As part of this screening process, all clergy and employees of the Diocese must provide a current criminal record check. All volunteers working in “high risk” or “medium risk” positions must provide a Clearance Letter from the Criminal Record Review Program (see full RMSE Policy for definitions, position ratings and a description of the criminal record/Clearance Letter application process).

### **What is our policy on harassment?**

The Diocese of Victoria is committed to providing an environment free from harassment where everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Harassment hurts and embarrasses its victims and affects us all. For the one being harassed, it is difficult to endure and stressful to initiate a formal complaint. Some mistakenly fear that their jobs will be impacted if they complain. Anyone who is subjected to harassment has the full support of the Diocese to stop such injustices from occurring. A detailed explanation of the complaint process can be found in the full RMSE Policy.



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# What is our RMSE Policy?

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The RMSE Policy is intended to provide an objective, accountable, transparent and compassionate response to all who may be involved in a misconduct allegation. It sets out instructions and procedures (civil and legal) to be followed by the Diocese, its clergy, religious, employees or volunteers in the event abuse or a dangerous situation is suspected.

If you suspect a child may be in need of protection you are required to report this to civil authorities (see page 7). Clergy, religious, employees and volunteers of the Diocese are expected to be familiar with and to comply with applicable child protection reporting requirements in the Province of British Columbia.

In addition, we have a similar legal and moral obligation to vulnerable adults; that is, persons above the age of majority with disabilities (mental, emotional or physical) and/or the elderly. If you suspect an adult may be in need of protection, you should follow the procedures outlined in this document and advise the proper authorities as defined by RMSE Policy.

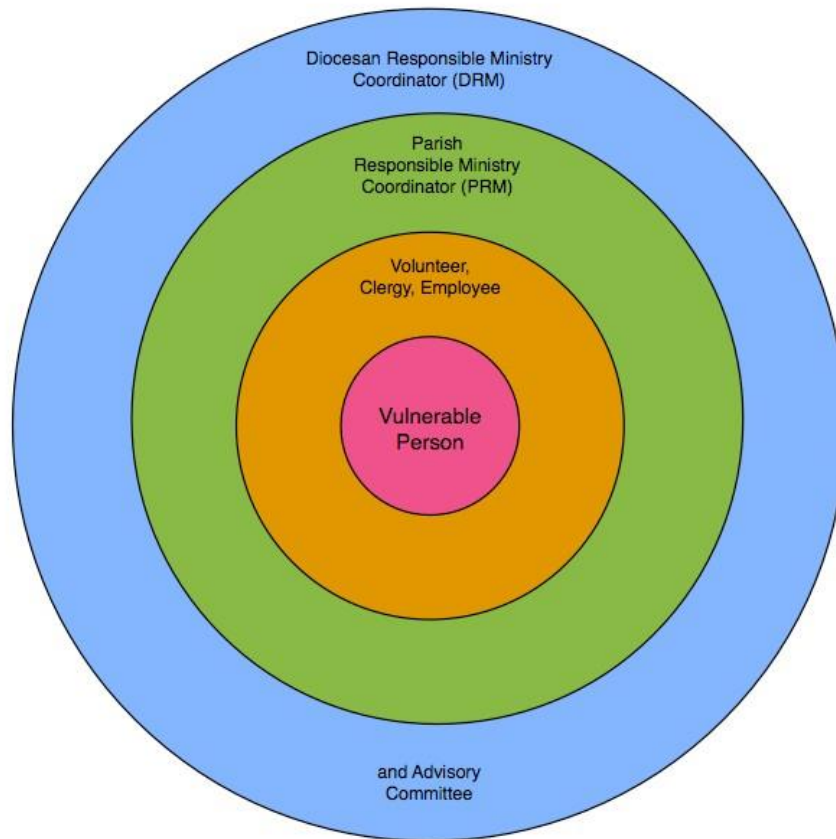
Abuse of children and vulnerable adults is of special concern and will not be tolerated. Any person under investigation for, or found guilty of abuse of children shall be removed immediately from any ministry. Those under investigation for abuse of vulnerable adults may be removed from ministry until all investigations are completed. If proven guilty, the offender may not return to active ministry.

The Policy also protects people working on behalf of the Diocese, either as clergy, religious, employees or volunteers. Imagine this: you take Communion to the home of an elderly woman who suffers from dementia. You are there alone with her; after you leave, she calls her son and tells him money is missing from her purse. You were the last person there, and she fully believes you are the person who stole her money. Procedures under the Covenant of Care can help protect you in advance by insisting that two people visit an at-home individual who is alone. Thus, all individuals involved in the activities of the Diocese, whether clergy, religious, employees or volunteers, are required to participate in the overall process described in the *Volunteering in the Church* brochure.



This includes providing a criminal record check, signing the Covenant of Care Agreement and participating in orientation and training sessions, before beginning their ministry or employment (see page 8 for more information about our Covenant of Care Policy).

### How is the RMSE managed?



- Diocesan Responsible Ministry Coordinator:* The Bishop will appoint a Diocesan Responsible Ministry Coordinator (DRM) to administer the Policy and to represent him in receiving complaints of misconduct and conducting investigations of alleged misconduct (abuse). This person is responsible for the administration and implementation of the RMSE policies and procedures. If it is deemed necessary, for reasons of actual or perceived conflict of interest, the Bishop may appoint an Alternate DRM. If it is deemed necessary or desirable, the DRM may also appoint an Investigator to assist with the process. It is the DRM's responsibility to ensure employees, volunteers and clergy have current criminal records checks on file, are screened, and know the RMSE Policy & best practices.



- There is an *Advisory Committee for Responsible Ministry*, appointed by the Bishop and responsible to him through the DRM, who will act as chair. The Committee will meet at least three times each year and its membership is comprised of between six and nine people.
- *Parish Responsible Ministry Coordinator*: Pastors in each parish will appoint a Parish Responsible Ministry Coordinator (PRM) who is accountable and responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Responsible Ministry and Safe Environment Policy within the parish. He/she works closely with the DRM. The PRM will be responsible for managing volunteers in his or her parish.

### How do I report suspected abuse?

- Any cleric, religious, employee or volunteer who has reason to believe that a child or vulnerable adult may be abused, neglected or is for any other reason in need of protection, must first report this to the appropriate authorities. Please refer to the MCFD Handbook: Responding to Child Welfare Concerns. Your Role in Knowing When and What to Report, March 2017. Reports of suspected child abuse can be phoned in confidentially to the Ministry of Child & Family Development at **1-800-663-9122** at any time, day or night. You do not need to identify yourself. If a child or vulnerable adult is in immediate danger call **911**. If you are a child or youth (under 19) and would like to talk to someone, please call the Helpline for Children at **310-1234** (no area code required). Reports of suspected abuse of a vulnerable adult may be phoned to VictimLinkBC at **1-800-563-0808**.
- Subject to the advice of the appropriate authorities, the person reporting suspected abuse should also report this information to the DRM through the Chancery Office, at 1-250-479-1331, extension 223. This confidential voice mailbox is checked regularly. An *Incident Report Form* may also be used.
- Should a priest or PRM become aware that anyone is reporting suspected abuse, they must follow up to ensure the appropriate Office or Ministry has been informed.
- Both the person serving as your PRM and the DRM should be able to identify appropriate actions to be taken. If, for reasons of perceived conflict of interest, you are unable to discuss the matter with your PRM, you should speak directly to the DRM.
- Complaints received by anyone else under this Policy shall be referred to the DRM. The Diocese, its employees or volunteers, where misconduct is suspected but no complainant has come forward, may also initiate a complaint.



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# What is our *Covenant of Care Policy?*

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The Covenant of Care Policy describes appropriate or necessary behavior for clergy, religious, employees and volunteers in the Diocese of Victoria. In general:

### ***Physical Contact***

- Always maintain clear boundaries in all situations involving vulnerable persons.
- All physical contact must be completely non-sexual and based only on the individual's needs.
- Never engage in corporal punishment of any person. Discipline problems will be handled in coordination with the immediate supervisor and the parents/care providers.

### ***One-to-one Contact***

- Always ensure there is a team of at least two adults present during ministry work. For example, there should be two volunteers in addition to the communicant when bringing the Eucharist to those at home.
- Always do your best to ensure there are two adults present when supervising children or vulnerable adults. The doors to rooms should be left open if one of the volunteers, clergy or employees has to leave the room temporarily. Examples of such activities include catechism instruction and youth group gatherings.
- Clergy, religious, employees and volunteers should never be alone with a child or vulnerable adult in a sleeping facility, locker room, dressing facility or any other closed area.
- In situations such as counselling sessions where one-to-one meetings are necessary, the sessions must take place in rooms and locations that are open to public view.
- No single child or vulnerable adult should ever stay overnight in the private accommodation or residence of a cleric, religious, employee or volunteer.
- There should always be leaders/workers of the same gender(s) as the children/youth present during any type of ministry work.
- Overnight trips and other special events that occur require special planning and care by the leadership team and may require written permission from a parent or guardian for the individual who is attending.





***Photography***

- Verbal, and in some cases, written consent for taking photographs of children and vulnerable adults must be obtained from a parent or a legal guardian prior to taking pictures.
- Ensure no child or vulnerable adult is photographed in a way that diminishes his or her dignity.

***Provision of Substances***

- Children or vulnerable adults will never be provided with alcohol, tobacco, drugs or anything prohibited by law.
- Written parental/care-giver permission must be obtained before administering medication to any vulnerable person.

***Reporting Procedures***

- Clergy, religious, employees and volunteers who learn of danger to a child or vulnerable adult must report their concern immediately to the relevant authority (see reporting procedure on page 7).
- Clergy, religious, employees and volunteers will promptly report suspicious behaviour to the PRM and/or the DRM and complete an Incident Report Form.
- Further details of specific, individual obligations are detailed in the Covenant of Care Agreement.

**NOTE:**

The Covenant of Care form can be accessed at the following link:

<http://www.rcdvictoria.org/rmse-forms.php>

