



SAFE ENVIRONMENT: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

WHAT IS SAFE ENVIRONMENT?

This is a program designed to create, maintain and promote a safe environment for all those to whom we minister, to support parish volunteers and preserve their safety, integrity and reputation as well as to ensure that we fulfill our duty of care and obligations as a caring faith community. The program does this by screening people for ministry work and providing training and education so that our volunteers know how to protect those whom they serve and how to protect themselves.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Keeping our communities safe

The first priority of Safe Environment is to keep the vulnerable people in our communities safe. Children are certainly vulnerable, but the elderly can also be vulnerable to manipulation, as can adults with mental or physical disabilities, or adults who have recently arrived in Canada. People with malicious intent will be attracted to the young, the elderly, or the disoriented because they are easier to manipulate.

Safe Environment ensures that we do not place in positions of trust people who—through malice or weakness—would tend to take advantage of the vulnerable.

Not only being good, but being seen to be good

Not only do we want to keep potential abusers out of positions of trust, but we want to do this in a visible way. This not only *deters* those who are seeking to take advantage of the vulnerable, but it *reassures* those who would trust their children or elderly to our care. As part of this reassurance, *everyone* in a position of trust agrees to be screened and trained. It is not enough that *we know* that our parish communities are safe places: it must also be *evident* to those on the outside that our parish communities are safe places.

In particular, we make sure that the parish community places nobody on a pedestal, beyond reproach. Such exalted positions are uncomfortable for those placed there, and it is *especially* those in positions of leadership who must demonstrate their commitment to transparency and vigilance within the parish community.

Demonstrating commitment

In the Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse, Archbishop Miller wrote, “As we move along the path of healing and purifying the Church, let us remember that, insofar as one member of Christ’s Body suffers, ‘all suffer together’ (1 Cor 12:26).” The Safe Environment program provides us an opportunity to demonstrate to ourselves and to others that we take seriously the pain of those who have suffered abuse at the hands of the Church. We want to send the message that what was done by a few members of our Church to those who deserved our protection is deeply offensive to us. So deeply offensive that—even though we are not ourselves abusers—we will do whatever we can to prevent future abuse and to bring healing to those who were abused.

Rebuilding trust

Sadly, there are now many people who no longer trust priests, religious men and women, or even ordinary lay Catholics. Regaining that trust will take decades, and the only way to regain it is to demonstrate our continual watchfulness against abusers and our unwavering concern for the vulnerable. Safe Environment is one of the ways in which we develop and maintain a culture of watchfulness and concern.