

The [Safe Ministry to Children Ordinance 2020](#) completely revises what the 2018 Ordinance of the same name covered. It incorporates the Safe Ministry content contained in the Parish Administration Ordinance and various other places.

This gives us one source for key Safe Ministry policy.

The bits included from other existing Ordinances have not changed a great deal, but where they have, it will have an impact on church practice.

The bigger changes are in the reshaping of the *Safe Ministry Assessment* process and the *Safe Ministry Check*, which is part of that.

Terminology & Definitions

The [Ordinance](#) itself contains many definitions for the terminology used within it.

Tip: Have the dictionary of definitions at the back of the Ordinance open when you are reading the rest of the document.

For your convenience, the following terms used here are summarised:

Safe Ministry Assessment: means consideration of the person's completed Safe Ministry Check, and, if applicable, information provided by a person's former minister or a referee as part of the Safe Ministry Check.

Safe Ministry Check: means a check that includes the applicable Safe Ministry Check as prescribed from time to time by the Standing Committee.

Child or Children: means any person under the age of 18 years.

Authorised Delegate: Used in the Safe Ministry Check forms and refers to the Senior Minister of the church or more specifically, to the person he delegates with the task of processing and clearing applicants' Safe Ministry Check form. This is the person who will first receive and review the contents of the forms and any related character references. Ideally, they should be a member of the pastoral staff. In large churches, those forms may be distributed to other pastoral staff also delegated for the task by the Senior Minister.

Volunteer church worker: A person in a church who voluntarily undertakes ministry to children. This includes adults (aged 18 years or older) and Junior Leaders aged 13-17 years.

Introduction

This article only addresses the Safe Ministry Assessment and Check as it applies to *volunteer workers* in our churches – ie: the people in our churches who volunteer to undertake ministry to children or youth, that involves direct, regular and not incidental contact with children. Anyone who is in a paid ministry role (lay or ordained) has different Safe Ministry Assessment and Check processes to complete which are managed by the Diocese.

For volunteer workers the Safe Ministry Assessment describes the process of assessing the content of the Safe Ministry Check in order to clear that person to

work with children. The Safe Ministry Check is the application/screening form that is approved by Standing Committee.

For volunteer church workers, there are two types of Safe Ministry Check:

- One for adult volunteers – ie: people aged 18 years of age or older
- One for volunteer church workers aged 13-17 years (whom we call ‘Junior Leaders’).

The Safe Ministry Check

So what does the Safe Ministry Check (hereafter referred to as the SMC) mean for our volunteer church workers and our church administration?

At its core, the SMC is the outworking of our Diocese’ response to some of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and has the full support of our Synod.

Implementing the Ordinance and in particular the SMC in our churches will involve in part:

- **Current volunteer church workers (Clause 11 of the Ordinance)**
Current volunteer church workers working with children will need to complete the SMC by the compliance date (currently January 1st 2021). This will obviously take some planning and preparation for most churches in order to effectively process the Safe Ministry Checks for all the relevant people in your church.

Note that references are now only required if -

- the applicant (current or new) has attended their current church for less than two years - In which case, a reference must be obtained from the Senior Minister of the person’s previous church, or
- the Senior Minister of the person’s current church has not been at the church for 2 years or observed the person undertake ministry to children for at least this period, in which case he is to contact the previous minister of the church.

This is in addition to having a current WWCC clearance.

- **New volunteer church workers (Clause 11 of the Ordinance)**
After January 1st 2021, every volunteer church worker starting in a position of ministry to children will have to complete the SMC and be cleared to work with children (ie: the contents of the SMC will need to be assessed by the Senior Minister or someone authorised by him - his Authorised Delegate) **before** they can start in that role. There is no grace period for this.
Note that references are now only required if -

- the applicant (current or new) has attended their current church for less than two years - In which case, a reference must be obtained from the Senior Minister of the person's previous church, or
- the Senior Minister of the person's current church has not been at the church for 2 years or observed the person undertake ministry to children for at least this period, in which case he is to contact the previous minister of the church.

This is in addition to having a current WWCC clearance.

For parishes where the current Senior Minister has served for less than two years, this is the suggested approach for the initial period when all current volunteers will be completing the SMC:

A list of current volunteers who have submitted their SMC form should be compiled. That list can be forwarded to the *previous* Senior Minister (by the current Senior Minister/Authorised Delegate) with a request that he express any concerns he might have with any of the listed persons working with children to the current Senior Minister.

For people on the list that he has no such concerns with, he should indicate that.

The current Senior Minister/Authorised Delegate should then use that information to inform his decision to clear or otherwise those volunteers to work with children.

This [referee form \(fillable\)](#) ([printable version](#)) may be used by a previous Senior Minister to assist in assessing some or all of the people in this situation.

After January 1st 2021 when all current volunteers have completed their SMC, the ongoing much smaller numbers of new volunteers will be much easier to manage if they require a reference.

- **Safe Ministry Training. (Clause 13-14 of the Ordinance)**

Under the Ordinance, all volunteer church workers will need to have current Safe Ministry Training **before** they start in a position of ministry to children. Previously, there was a 3 month grace period during which new workers with children could complete Safe Ministry Training. That is no longer the case. They must complete their Training before they commence in their role as part of the Safe Ministry Assessment process and they must update their training at intervals of no more than 3 years.

- **Junior Leaders**

Junior Leaders are not specifically mentioned in the Ordinance, but they are church workers and therefore are required to complete the Safe Ministry Check for leaders aged 13-17 years. The SMC for Junior Leaders is substantially different to the adult volunteer form and takes the form of a pledge or positive declaration rather than a questionnaire. It also includes a parental consent section for applicants under 16 years of age.

The big changes affecting Junior Leaders immediately are:

- They must complete their Safe Ministry Check **before** commencing in a ministry to children.
- They must complete the Junior Leaders training course **before** commencing in a ministry role to children. [Junior Leaders Course information page](#)

- **Exemptions**

There are certain exemptions where a person undertaking ministry to children is not required to undergo the Safe Ministry Check. These apply if -

- (i) the church worker is below 13 years of age,
- (ii) the church worker is undertaking ministry to pre-school aged children (or younger) on not more than 10 occasions in a calendar year in the context of activities in which the church worker's own child usually participates,
- (iii) the church worker is undertaking ministry at or in connection with a university or other tertiary institution, or
- (iv) the church worker undertakes ministry to children on not more than a total of 5 occasions in a calendar year, if the ministry involves minimal direct contact with children or is supervised when children are present.

The exemptions do not prevent you from requiring a Safe Ministry Check in these circumstances, only that you are not required to insist on one to comply with the rules of the Diocese.

Implications for your church administration

- **Supporting Documents**

Note that *before* any of your church members seek to complete the Safe Ministry Check form, they should be supplied with:

- A **job description** detailing the role, who the applicant would report to and length of appointment. [Sample Job Description template](#).
- A copy of the current [Faithfulness In Service](#) document.
- A copy of the relevant [Blueprint document](#) for the role.

Note that your church will be able to develop job description templates for most of the roles in your church which will speed that part of the process in the future.

Your church will probably want to also include a more detailed application form such as [this example](#)

For the people who use the paper/PDF version of the Safe Ministry Check form, these additional documents can be given to them with the SMC form document as a package.

- **Storage of data**

The Safe Ministry Check will likely generate a lot of data that will require some planning by your church to manage and store – keeping in mind that we are now required to keep such documents indefinitely. Security is key when planning this – due to the highly sensitive nature of the contents of the form. See [this article](#) for some guidelines and suggestions for your planning of long-term secure storage.

- **Safe ministry records**

Your church will need to add some information to your core Safe Ministry Records that relate to the Safe Ministry Assessment and Check processes. This will mainly be recording details of when people do their Safe Ministry Check, the outcome of that Check and confirmation of their compliance with Safe Ministry Training.

Recommended protocols will be communicated to all churches soon. Those that use SaMRO will find the extra fields added to the system shortly.

- **Pastoral implication when processing the SMC**

The Safe Ministry Check form for adult volunteers contains potentially very sensitive information.

The PSU has some pastoral guidelines for Senior Ministers or their Authorised Delegates to assist with the processing of forms where applicants are revealing pastorally difficult information including information that may mean that they should not be cleared for ministry with children.

This means that if the Senior Minister wishes to delegate the processing of the SMC forms to someone else, that person should be carefully chosen to have considerable pastoral experience and skill. They should generally be a member of the pastoral staff and not a volunteer worker themselves or an administrative staff member/volunteer. They should also not be a close personal relative or family member of the person applying.

- **Resistance from church members.**

Some church members may express resistance to the Safe Ministry Assessment process, particularly if they have been serving in leadership for a

considerable time or if they feel confronted by the nature of some of the screening questions in the form.

While these concerns are understandable it is suggested that informational/educational processes take place in the lead up to your church implementing the Safe Ministry Check.

That might include:

- A simple step by step explanation of the process
- Making the link to (or paper copies of) the Safe Ministry to Children Ordinance 2020 available for those interested.
- A clear explanation of the measures in place to protect people's privacy. Note that your church will need to have appropriately secure long term data storage in place (see [this paper](#) for recommendations).

You can point people to Archbishop's Office [privacy policy](#) for details of how we will treat their data.

- Remind people of the tragic matters revealed in the recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. These measures are a direct and precise response to several of the key recommendations of that Commission. All of us taking this action helps develop a robust set of processes that will go some way to protecting vulnerable people in our churches from abuse in the future.
- Remind your church that their Synod wholeheartedly endorsed this measure at their 2018 and 2019 meetings.

Assistance for your church

Online, automated Safe Ministry Check form

Thinking especially of the initial period where all current volunteer church workers will need to complete their Safe Ministry Checks and have their Senior Minister or his Authorised Delegate process those checks, the Safe Ministry Team (PSU) has an [online solution](#) that will ease the administrative, if not the pastoral load, during this time.

That consists of an automated version of the Safe Ministry Check form for adult volunteers (not the under 18's). When a form is completed online it will mean that:

- Each applicant will have a copy of their completed form emailed to them. Your Senior Minister/Authorised Delegate receives a copy of the form, along with the required ID documentation (an electronic copy or photograph of the applicants ID document).

- Where a character reference is required, the referee is emailed that request with a link to the referee form. When that form is completed, it is sent to your Senior Minister/ Authorised Delegate.
- All the forms and related documents are in electronic form, making the required long term storage of this data much easier.

The Safe Ministry Check forms will also be available as PDF documents which can either be filled out electronically or printed out and completed as a paper document. In the case of the latter, we recommend that the completed form be scanned back to a PDF again for long-term storage.

Pastoral Guidelines

There is a set of pastoral guidelines written by Rev Mark Charleston (Rector of Sylvania, Clinical Psychologist and member of the Subcommittee that approved the forms). These guidelines aim to assist Senior Ministers/Authorised Delegates in managing the pastoral matters that may arise in the Assessment process as a result of some responses to the screening questions in the SMC forms.

This document last updated: 26 July 2020