

# Safe Ministry Policy and Practice Overview

## Introduction

The Safe Ministry policy and practice of the Anglican Church diocese of Sydney has been developed and updated over many years alongside the changing legislative landscape and emerging best practice. There are a suite of ordinances, documents, resources and processes that work to ensure our churches and organisations engage in Safe Ministry to all people, and especially to children. This guide is intended to provide an overview of how these documents and resources fit together along with a brief definition or explanation of each element.

The diagram below provides an overview. The governance framework shapes the processes/resources that exist to ensure we are meeting our legal and moral obligations. Then there are the roles and structures at both parish and diocesan level that implement, administer or oversee those processes and utilise the resources. At the centre of all our policy and practice lies the people we serve, people loved by God and precious to him.



## Roles and Structures

For the purposes of Safe Ministry in the diocese, the **Archbishop** licences and authorises church workers and is the relevant church authority in relation to complaints made against licensed and authorised church workers under the MSO. The Archbishop is also the head of entity for the diocese under the NSW Reportable Conduct Scheme but delegates functions and investigations under this scheme to the ODSM.

For the purposes of Safe Ministry in the diocese, a **Rector** is ultimately responsible for ensuring Safe Ministry policy, practice and procedure is implemented in a parish. The rector is the relevant church authority in relation to complaints made against lay church workers in their parish under the MSO. Each rector is also responsible to appoint a **Safe Ministry Representative** in the parish who can assist with the administration and exercise of day-to-day responsibilities to ensure compliance with legal and diocesan requirements and to promote and champion safe ministry in the parish.

**Office of the Director of Safe Ministry**, also known as ODSM or the Safe Ministry Office, (formerly known as the Professional Standards Unit or PSU) operates under the oversight of the **Safe Ministry Board**. The Safe Ministry Office is responsible for:

- Advising and supporting parishes and diocesan organisations in relation to Safe Ministry practice and complex pastoral situations.
- Safe Ministry Training.
- Assisting the Archbishop's office and Diocesan Registry with screening of licensed and authorised church workers.
- Receiving complaints of abuse and misconduct under the *Ministry Standards Ordinance 2017* (MSO).

The **Director of Safe Ministry** is responsible for the oversight and administration of the functions of the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry.

## Processes and Resources

The synod of the diocese adopted the **Safe Ministry Policy** on 25 October 2004. Each parish should also adopt this policy and publish it on their website.

**Faithfulness in Service** is the prescribed **code of conduct** for all clergy and church workers in the diocese of Sydney. Chapter 5 of the code specifically addresses matters pertaining to children. Church workers and especially those who work with children, need to be familiar with the code of conduct because it sets the expected standards of behaviour for church workers. They should also understand that breaches of the code could result in complaints under the MSO or result in removal from office or position.

**Safe Ministry Training** – All church workers who are involved in ministry to children or anyone who has the title of “minister” regardless of whether they interact with children must

undertake the Safe Ministry Essentials Training and thereafter maintain regular refresher training before commencing in their role and whilst ever they hold that role. To register for training participants must create an account through the [Safe Ministry Training](#) website.

**Safe Ministry Assessment** – All church workers who undertake a ministry to children must have completed and been cleared for ministry through a Safe Ministry Assessment before commencing in their role. For volunteers, the local church manages the assessment process which involves the completion and assessment by the rector, or his delegate, of a **Safe Ministry Check** completed by the church worker. Referees and reference checking may also be required in certain circumstances. There is an online form that parishes can use to facilitate this process. There is also a Safe Ministry Assessment required for junior leaders aged 13-17 years, but the process is slightly different, first requiring parental permission, senior minister authorisation and the appointment of a training mentor. For junior leaders the Safe Ministry Check takes the form of a pledge rather than a questionnaire. Further information about these processes is available on the Safe Ministry Website and Safe Ministry Blueprint.

For any licensed or authorised church workers (both ordained or paid lay ministers) the Safe Ministry Assessment is conducted and managed at the diocesan level through the Episcopal team, the ODSM and the Registry. The Safe Ministry Check for this type of church worker is more commonly referred to as the Confidential Lifestyle Questionnaire or CLQ. This check is more comprehensive in scope than the check for volunteers and also involves a face-to-face interview with a diocesan representative, followed by relevant screening checks conducted through the ODSM. This process must be completed before the worker commences in their role.

The **Safe Ministry Check** is integral to the Safe Ministry Assessment process prescribed under the *Safe Ministry to Children Ordinance 2020* and must be completed by all church workers engaged in child related work or working as ministers. There are three different Safe Ministry Checks: one for licensed and authorised church workers, one for volunteers over the age of 18 and one for Junior Leaders aged 13-17 years.

The **Safe Ministry Pledge** must be signed by everyone who undertakes a role with children. The pledge forms part of Safe Ministry training and participants are directed to sign the pledge as part of the process before a safe ministry training certificate is issued. Church workers should be mindful of what they have pledged to do and not to do, noting that failure to comply with the pledge could result in complaints under the MSO or result in removal from office or position.

The **Safe Ministry Blueprint** documents provide detailed guidelines for safe ministry practice and procedure. The Safe Ministry Blueprint for Churches is the central document from which extracts have been produced for different roles e.g. Children's Ministry Leader, Youth Leader etc. Anyone working in a role with children should familiarise themselves with the Blueprint most relevant to their role and regularly refer to it to be reminded of reporting obligations and

guidance in safe ministry best practice. These documents are accessible on the **Safe Ministry website**, which also has a raft of other helpful resource documents and articles. The **Safe Ministry Training** website is essential for anyone needing to register for and undertake Safe Ministry training in the diocese.

It is a legal requirement that any person who is engaged in child related work hold a valid **Working with Children Check** clearance before commencing in their role. The local parish manages the checks and verification for all its relevant church workers and must maintain records in accordance with the legal and diocesan guidelines.

The Office of the Children’s Guardian (OCG) administers and regulates the Working with Children Check as well as the Reportable Conduct and Child Safe Schemes in NSW. The **OCG website** has numerous resources to assist organisations in their compliance with these schemes and programs.

**Reporting Processes** (Mandatory Reporting, Reportable Conduct and Diocesan Reporting) – Refer to Safe Ministry Training and the Safe Ministry Blueprint for detailed information about reporting obligations. It is essential that relevant incidents concerning child safety and abuse are reported to the appropriate agencies and diocesan entities.

## Governance Framework

The **Children’s Guardian Act 2019** is NSW legislation that governs the operation of the Child Safe Scheme and the Reportable Conduct Scheme, both of which are applicable to religious organisations working with children including the Diocese. The diocese passed the **Reportable Allegations and Convictions Ordinance 2022** to allow it to meet its obligations under the Reportable Conduct Scheme in relation to allegations of reportable conduct under the Act. The government agency responsible for regulating these schemes is the **Office of the Children’s Guardian (OCG)**.

Other legislation that drives our safe ministry practice and requirements include the **Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012**, the **Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998** and the **Crimes Act 1900**. This legislation respectively sets out the legal requirements for who is required to hold a WWCC and governs mandatory reporting obligations to the **NSW Department of Communities and Justice** and to **NSW Police**.

**The Child Safe Standards** were developed to help to embed the recommendations arising from the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. Any organisation in NSW that works with children must implement the standards in compliance with the NSW Child Safe Scheme. Religious organisations are included in the scheme. The standards are principle based and each parish or diocesan organisation is responsible to implement the standards in a way that is context appropriate. There are numerous resources on the OCG website and there are also some diocesan resources available on the Safe Ministry Website to assist parishes and organisations to implement the standards.

The ***Safe Ministry to Children Ordinance 2020*** sets out the minimum safe ministry requirements for all parishes and diocesan organisations. It addresses, among other things, the requirements for screening and safe ministry training for all church workers whether ordained, paid or volunteers, who work in a role with children.

The ***Ministry Standards Ordinance 2017*** (MSO) establishes the diocesan complaints process for receiving and responding to allegations of abuse and misconduct by church workers. The ODSM administers the processes under this Ordinance.

The ***Safe Ministry Board Ordinance 2001*** defines the functions of the Safe Ministry Board, which oversees ministry standards in the diocese through the promotion of safe ministry to children and other vulnerable people and has oversight of the operations of the ODSM.