

## Diocese of Ontario

### PARISH COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Parishes in other Dioceses where Screening in Faith has become commonplace have shared that acceptance of the screening policy depended, in large measure, on how it was introduced. To provide needed information in a timely fashion, and manage change, requires planning. These guidelines and suggestions are offered to help you create your parish communications plan.

#### **Leading the screening process**

1. Be cooperative. The Churchwardens, who form the corporation of the parish, are responsible for screening. They work closely with the Incumbent to implement the screening policy. It is important to work with key ministry leaders to develop an implementation plan.
2. Be prepared. Appoint a Parish Volunteer Screening Coordinator (see the Ministry Description for the Parish Volunteer Screening Coordinator in Appendix C) or a Coordination Team of key leaders to guide the process, whenever possible.
3. Be positive. Introduce and frame screening positively and unapologetically. See the theological foundation in this Handbook.
4. Be informed. To have leaders own the process is critical. Offer information by providing a copy of the policy, and by referring people to the Archdeacon of Ministry and Program by phone at 613-777-0530 or by email at [wvarley@ontario.anglican.ca](mailto:wvarley@ontario.anglican.ca)

#### **Managing change**

Fears and other concerns can be addressed in the communications plan in a number of ways.

1. Designate leaders to whom people can go with their concerns and fears. Manage legitimate concerns through policies to reduce risk and offer facts when fears are ill founded. Offer a safe place and a trusted person when people need to express concerns.
2. Enlist the assistance of parishioners who are trained and experienced managers of change, if available. They can guide communication so that it is timely, accurate and clear, thus maximizing parishioner support. Work on the principle of "no surprises". For example, the screening coordinator at the Church of the Redeemer on Bloor Street in Toronto contacted anyone filling a high risk position, by phone, and told him/her about the screening forms that each would receive. They were told when it was being sent and, more importantly, why. It did not eliminate frustration, but it went a long way to prepare people for the change.
3. Follow change management principles.

- a. *Build trust.* Normalize the process by letting people know that this is required of every parish across the Diocese. No parish is exempted and none is singled out.
- b. *Be open.* Offer all the information people want and need as they need it. Refer people to the Diocesan Congregational Development office, who will be offering a “help desk” function. Empower, who want to be knowledgeable by giving them the information they need to feel comfortable.
- c. *Make the process transparent.* Write screening requirements into the ministry description for each position and distribute them widely or make them easily available.
- d. *Take time.* You cannot rush change. However, be intentional. Each congregation has its way of dealing with change. Incorporating screening will likely follow the historical patterns of how change has always happened in that particular parish. Discover the parish history and use it to help with this change. Do not become paralyzed.
- e. *Involve leaders.* Include change-resistant leaders in developing the parish screening processes, for example, to help assess the risk for their positions and write their own ministry descriptions.

### **Raising awareness**

Some of the ways and means that other parishes have used to raise awareness about Screening in Faith have included:

1. Give homilies: offer a theological reflection, provide the context of Anglican history (residential schools, etc.), current issues facing the church and society as well as an introduction to the Screening In Faith Policy.
2. Offer copies of the screening policy to those wanting the original document and lots of information.
3. Host discussion and Q & A meetings that offer opportunities to answer questions in a group format. This has the added advantage of establishing new group norms quickly, i.e. the "new normal" permeates the group more quickly as they explore the issues together.
4. Schedule periodic reminders at regular intervals. Examples of key reminder times are at Vestry in January/February and whenever the parish is recruiting for positions especially winter/spring, for summer Vacation Bible Schools and camps and spring/summer for the fall start up of church programs.
5. Use newsletters, bulletins, and bulletin inserts to give specific information that people can take home and use as reminders of screening events or as an executive summary of the facts

Remember...

The Screening Policy is designed to support parish leaders. Screening provides clear expectations of their ministry, as well as recognition and support for faithful service.

**Screening Prayer:**

*God of abundance and God of life, infuse your children with courage and love, that we may build communities of hope, which are healthy, thriving and safe. Help us to be responsible with our ministry so that both the weak and the strong find their home in our churches, through the profound love of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.*