

Safe Church:

Preventing Abuse
and Harm



ANGLICAN COMMUNION
SAFE CHURCH COMMISSION



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Introducing the Work of the Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission

Safeguarding is a critical issue for the global Anglican Church.

In recent years, numerous cases of abuse have been reported within the Anglican Church. Many of these have not been managed well. As a result, several provinces (member churches) have been held to account by their governments for safeguarding failures within their churches. Church leaders have sometimes compounded the suffering of those who have been subjected to abuse by responding inappropriately or inadequately when they disclosed the abuse. The church acknowledges that this needs to change and there is an urgency in ensuring that it does. Preventing abuse within the Anglican Church worldwide is fundamental to the church's mission of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission ('the Commission') was therefore established at the request of the Anglican Consultative Council in 2016 (ACC-16). Its function is to promote the safety of people within churches of the Anglican Communion – with a particular focus on children, young people and vulnerable adults.

During the first phase of its work, from 2017 to 2019, the Commission developed safeguarding guidelines for implementation by each province: *Guidelines to enhance the safety of all persons within the provinces of the Anglican Communion* ('the Guidelines'). The Guidelines were approved by the Anglican Consultative Council in 2019 (ACC-17) and are available in Spanish, French, Portuguese, Portuguese for Brazil, English, Korean and Japanese.

In the second phase of the Safe Church Commission's work until ACC-19 its primary role is as an advisory body for the effective implementation of the Guidelines in the provinces by developing resources, offering training and supporting Provincial Safe Church Representatives.

This resource forms a part of a series produced by the Safe Church Commission. Other resources in the series include:

- Safe Church: How to Start Guide
- Safe Church: Responding Well When Abuse is Disclosed or Reported
- Safe Church: Dealing with Allegations of Abuse

All can be downloaded for free from the Anglican Communion website on the Safe Church Commission page.

www.anglicancommunion.org/community/commissions/the-anglican-communion-safe-church-commission.aspx

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Glossary

This glossary provides the meanings of certain important words used in this document.

Abuse is usually an ongoing pattern of behaviour (although it can be a single incident) which:

- a. causes harm to another person, or
- b. is intended to cause harm to another person, or
- c. which may place another person at risk of harm.

Abuse can be physical, sexual or emotional/psychological. Other forms of abuse include financial, verbal and spiritual abuse as well as bullying and harassment and neglect. Concealing the abuse of another person is also a form of abuse. Abuse can take place in person or online.

Members of the clergy and lay leaders can be reported for perpetrating abuse and the abuse can be the focus of disciplinary action. A comprehensive definition of abuse can be found in the Safe Church Guidelines: www.anglicancommunion.org/guidelines

A church worker is any member of the clergy or lay person who is actively involved in the ministry of the church.

Risk assessment (in the context of a church) is a process of examining the church's activities, ministries and practices to see if there is any aspect of these which could put a member of the church community at risk, particularly a child or vulnerable adult. Risk in this context is the risk of abuse and not a general health and safety risk. Any risks identified should then be addressed to minimise the risk of abuse and harm.

Background checking is the processing of gathering information about a person's history and previous behaviour in order to determine a. whether or not they are who they say they are, b. whether or not the claims they make about themselves are true, and c. whether or not their previous behaviour/employment/qualifications/experience suggest that they are suitable for a particular role.

A code of conduct is a statement or set of rules that describe the ethical principles and standards of behaviour expected of members of a particular group or organisation (e.g. members of the church choir), persons carrying out particular roles in an organisation (e.g. Sunday School teachers) or persons in a particular profession (e.g. a member of the clergy).

Why do we need specific measures to prevent abuse and harm in the church?

The measures that we put in place to prevent abuse within the church are the foundation of Safe Church work. These measures should prevent abuse of any member of a church community by any person in a position of leadership or authority within the church.

In many contexts, churches are seen as safe and trustworthy institutions by people both inside and outside the church community. This means that people are also more likely to trust others in their church community, particularly those in leadership roles. Church leaders hold power – spiritual power, power of influence, power of authority – over people. Most church leaders will hold this power with humility and care and will use it for the good of the church community. However, some do not. A betrayal of someone's trust in a church leader through manipulation and abuse can be devastating for the person abused, those close to them and the wider church community. This makes it essential for churches to put Safe Church/

safeguarding measures in place to prevent abuse. Church leaders play a central role in this work.

Abuse and the harm it causes

Abuse most often consists of a series of traumatic events. Abuse and trauma can have profound negative effects on victims/survivors, changing how they view the world, interact with others and understand themselves. Trauma can cause both physical and psychological harm.

When people are abused by church workers it can impact negatively on their sense of safety in the world, their self-esteem, their general well-being and their faith in God. Withdrawal, depression, and anxiety are common responses. Abuse by someone that you trusted and respected and who should have kept you safe, destroys trust and this can have a negative effect on relationships with others and with God. The impacts of abuse can be profound and long-lasting. Nobody should have to experience this and particularly not within the church.

People who have experienced abuse and trauma often take a long time to heal from the harm they cause and will need support, understanding and often professional help to overcome the complex challenges that may arise from an experience of abuse.



Why is Safe Church work so important?

Safe Church work is therefore more than a moral, ethical or even legal requirement. It is a spiritual practice deeply embedded in the values and mission of our Christian faith in the Anglican tradition. It goes straight to the heart of our calling as a church to be a community where love, mutual respect and protection of the vulnerable are evident in all relationships and interactions. Making our churches safer places for everyone is a practical expression of the Gospel: resisting the abuse of power (justice), defending and protecting the vulnerable (mercy) and following Jesus' example of treating every person with respect, dignity and compassion, regardless of their age, gender or position in society (humility).

‘Making our churches safer places for everyone is a practical expression of the Gospel.’

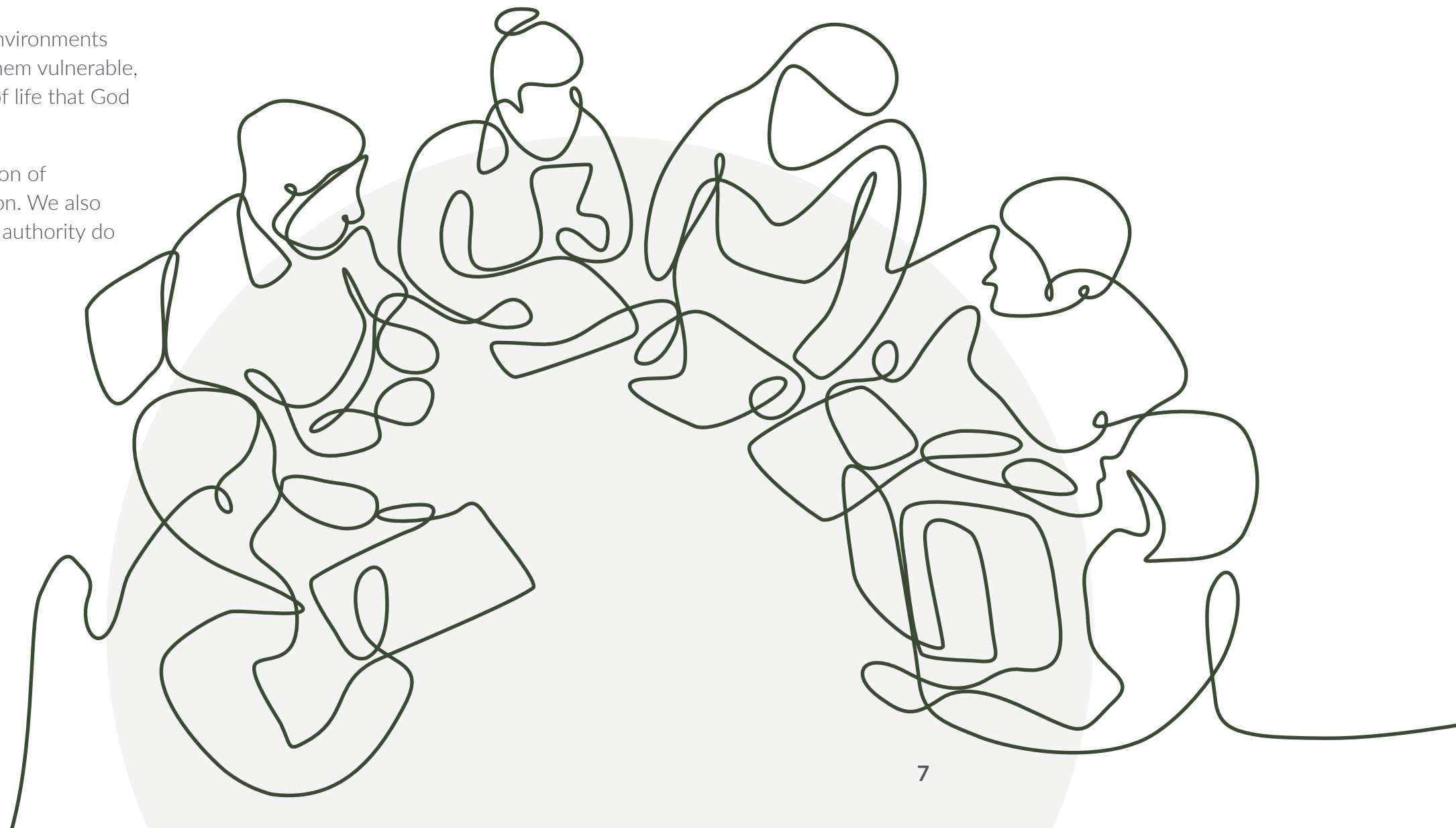
It is our responsibility as church leaders to create and sustain environments where everyone, especially those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, can feel safe and be safe and come to experience the fullness of life that God intends for each person.

We want to prevent the harm caused when a person in a position of leadership or authority uses their power to abuse another person. We also want to prevent the harm caused when people in leadership or authority do not take reports of abuse seriously or respond effectively.

How do we prevent people from abusing others within the church?

The work of prevention in a province/diocese/parish includes:

1. clearly describing/defining abuse and then having conversations about abuse within the church so that people know that abuse does happen within the church, what it looks like, that it is wrong and that they can report abuse when it occurs;
2. conducting risk assessment as an important aspect of church activities, programmes and events;
3. implementing background checking or vetting to ensure that everyone working in ministry in the church is suitable for their role;
4. developing clear standards for ministry and formalising these in a code of conduct for clergy and other church workers;
5. requiring leaders and others in the church community to undergo training on abuse and Safe Church work.



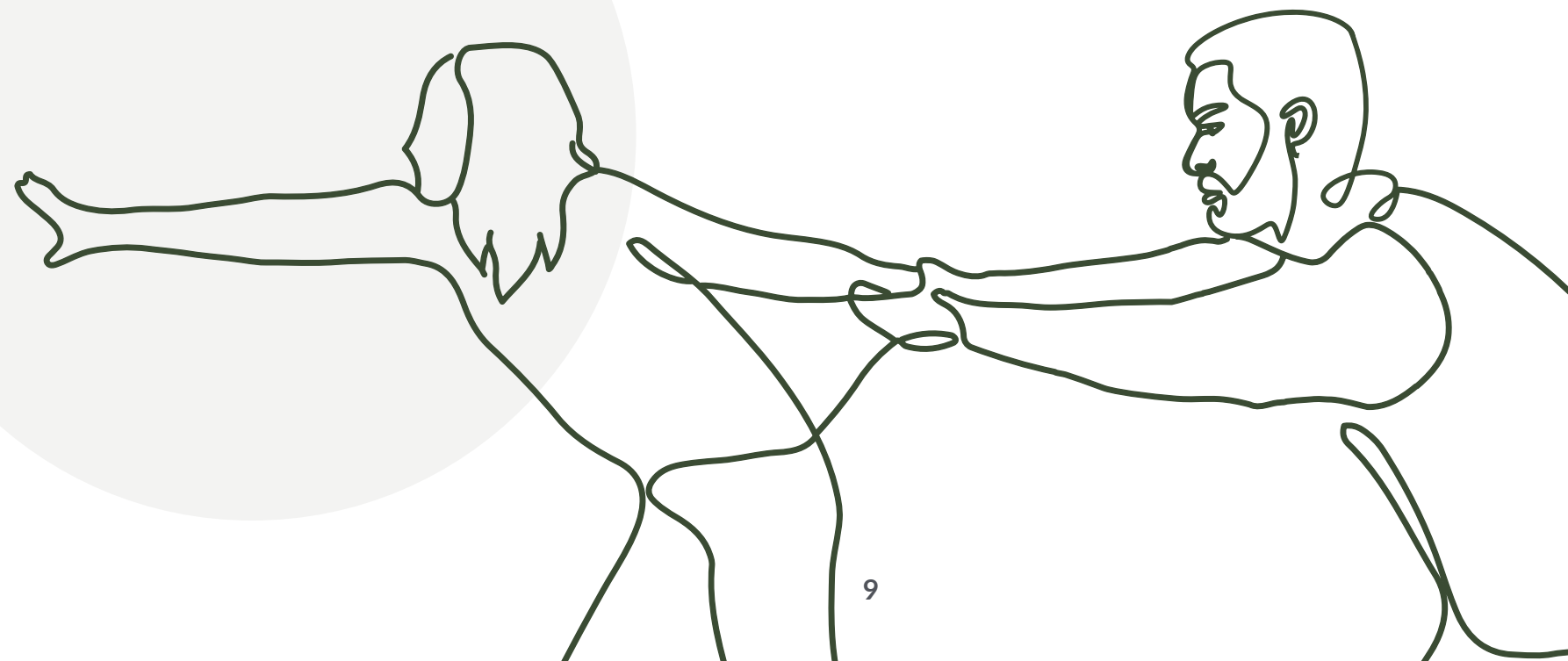
1 Having conversations about abuse

1.1 Get people talking about abuse

- Getting people talking about abuse is the single most effective and important aspect of any Safe Church work.
- People need to know what abuse is and what it can look like and feel like (the different forms that it can take), so that they can recognise when behaviour is abusive.
- Start talking about the reality, nature and dynamics of abuse openly within the church, from the pulpit, in all groups and ministries (including activities for young people such as Sunday School, youth ministry). Keep talking about it on a regular basis.
- Make it clear that no form of abuse is ever acceptable.
- Church communities need to be aware that:
 - Abuse is something we can talk about.
 - Abuse happens everywhere in the world.
 - There are many different types of abuse. Abuse can be physical or sexual, but it can also be emotional, verbal, financial or spiritual. Neglect, bullying and harassment are also forms of abuse.
 - Abuse can happen inside the church as well as outside. Churches often speak out against abuse in society but they also need to take steps to make sure that the church itself is a safe place for all.
 - Anyone who holds power, may use that power to manipulate and abuse. Church leaders or members of a church community could abuse others. It is never acceptable to abuse another person, no matter your status or position.
 - If abuse happens to someone in the church community, there should be someone in the church community that they can talk to about it. They should be taken seriously and treated with respect.

1.2 Talk about our responses to victims and survivors of abuse

- We need to address victim blaming and shaming which occurs when a victim/survivor is blamed for somehow causing their own abuse. We need to emphasise care, healing, and inclusion and to highlight where the responsibility lies for abuse – with the abuser not the victim/survivor. If someone is abused, it is not their fault, no matter what the abuser may say.
- We need to challenge the idea that victims/survivors are somehow ‘damaged’ or tainted or made less worthy of respect and care by abuse. We need to challenge our church communities to be more caring and compassionate and less judgemental towards all victims/survivors.
- Some law enforcement and legal systems are harsh towards victims/survivors or dismissive of their claims. We need to have honest conversations about the legal context of the country in which we operate when it comes to abuse, both within the church and outside the church. Where corruption is widespread or systems are weak, the likelihood of achieving legal justice will be small. It is helpful to think about what the church could do in such a context (such as advocacy, victim/survivor support) and how you could develop processes that could lead to a just outcome in your context.
- Many provinces/dioceses have disciplinary procedures for ordained clergy but not for lay leaders in the church. Think about and discuss together how the church could respond if someone reports abusive behaviour by, for example, a Sunday School teacher or volunteer bible study leader. If the allegation is substantiated, could the person be reported to the authorities, or removed from their position, or any other action taken?



2 Conducting risk assessments

1.3 Talk about consent and respect

- We need to encourage open conversations about relationships, consent, sex, manipulation, harassment, safe and unsafe touch, and ownership of your body. Such open conversations may be uncomfortable or unusual in some cultures but the church could equip and support parents to have these conversations with their children.
- One approach is to speak about the fact that every person deserves to have their wishes in relation to their bodies respected all the time. Each person should be able to choose whether or not another person may touch them. This is what consent is all about. It means that we should always ask if someone is comfortable with us touching them, for any physical touch from holding a friend's hand to giving a child a hug to any form of romantic or sexual touch. The person's response should always be respected.
- Not talking about sex or abuse is not somehow more spiritual. It is spiritual to engage honestly and realistically with the world and to talk to our children about potential dangers and risks, as well as about what is good and wholesome and pleasurable.

- In each province/diocese/context it is important to do a 'risk assessment' looking at all the factors that could increase the risk in that area of:
 - Abuse happening in general e.g. in contexts of war, extreme poverty, historical collective trauma, gang violence, acceptance or tolerance of violence as a means of responding to conflict.
 - Particular types of abuse happening e.g. female genital mutilation, family and domestic abuse, child marriage, sexual violence, human trafficking, elder abuse etc.
 - People feeling that they cannot or may not speak out or report abuse e.g. police not taking reports of abuse seriously, victims being judged and blamed.
- Risk assessment also means we assess how safe our own church community is from abuse in all its forms (sexual, physical, spiritual, emotional and so on). Over time, those leading all the different activities and events that take place on church premises or in the name of the church can learn to assess potential risk to all participants.
- The reason for doing such assessments is for the church community to think about what we can do to address or mitigate the risks that we identify and thereby prevent abuse.

3 Implementing background checking

3.1 What is background checking?

Background checking (also called vetting) is a process that a company, institution (such as the church or a school) or individual follows to check and confirm that:

- a person is who they say they are; and
- any claims that they make about their criminal record, education, employment history, and other activities and achievements are true.

In the context of Safe Church work, this means that whenever a person is employed or appointed by the church (as a member of clergy or lay person) or volunteers to work in the church with children, young people or adults whose circumstances could make them vulnerable to abuse, the church will first ask members of the community or previous employers about the person's suitability for the role.

In some countries, criminal record checks or government clearance for working with children are required for people working with children and/or vulnerable adults. Churches should, at very least, comply with the secular law of the country in which they operate and ensure that the necessary clearance is obtained before the person undertakes a role in the church. In countries where it is possible to do so, clergy and lay leaders who work with children and/or vulnerable adults should have their details checked against the relevant/available databases in their country to ensure that:

- the person does not have a criminal record that would suggest they are unsuitable for the role; and
- the person has not committed any specific sexual offences or offences against children.

All types of sexual offences, any offences or known histories involving violence, theft, alcohol or substance abuse (including use of illicit drugs or abuse of prescribed or over-the-counter drugs) need to be taken into consideration when assessing suitability of a person for a role. If the person is coming from another province, diocese or denomination, every attempt should be made to check with their previous supervising church leader to determine their suitability for the role they are going to take up.

3.2 Why do we do background checking?

We do background checking to ensure that those who have harmed others, perpetrated abuse or behaved badly in other places are not unquestioningly welcomed into new communities where they can repeat the same behaviour.

Background checks help to protect the entire church community. They help us to identify people whose past behaviour suggests they could pose a risk to others, allowing us to put measures in place to keep everyone safe. Background checks can also be a deterrent – people who intend to abuse are less likely to apply for a position or try to join a community where they know there is careful background checking.

3.3 Who should we do background checking for?

Background checking should apply to everyone in the church community, whether appointed, employed or volunteering, who has contact with children, young people and adults whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. The depth of background checking depends on the level of interaction that the person will have with these groups e.g. serving tea once a month vs running a bible study group for children every week.

3.4 How do we do background checking?

- Take time to get to know newcomers before giving them access to people who may be vulnerable (e.g. if someone comes in really eager to work with the youth, they should serve a period of settling in and getting to know the church community before they are allowed to take up any leadership role).
 - *Self-declaration*: this is a statement that every person should sign where they declare:
 - a. that they have never been accused, investigated or found guilty of any offences against children, young people or vulnerable adults;
 - b. that they have never been accused of, investigated for or found guilty of violent behaviour, theft, sexual assault, or alcohol or drug related offences;
 - c. that they have never been asked to leave a role due to inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour; and
 - d. that they are not aware of any reason why they should not serve in their chosen role.
- If someone cannot make this declaration, they would need to provide details about the circumstances in which any of the above happened.
- Interview everyone who is being considered for a leadership role where there will be contact with children,

young people and/or adults who may be vulnerable. Ask questions that will help to reveal their awareness of and attitudes towards abuse.

- Get a police clearance where available/possible.
- Apply the Protocol www.anglicancommunion.org/protocol for checking when clergy/lay people move within or between provinces or dioceses.
- Check with previous employer/parish/diocese. Ask: Would you re-employ this person/have this person serve in your church again? Even if there has been confidential severance agreement, the previous employer/church leader can answer this question honestly.
- Speak to people who have known the person in other places or roles.
- Conduct a psychological evaluation (if possible) for ordinands before they enter seminary or while they are in seminary. A once-off interview will only pick up major concerns/red flags. A more robust process with group work and role plays may offer more information, as would an ongoing group process facilitated by mental health practitioners during seminary training.
- Evaluate the province's/diocese's process for determining suitability of ordination candidates. Is it thorough enough to accurately assess the character of the candidate?

3.5 Some factors to consider when doing background checking

In some places and cultures, background checking could be considered offensive especially for volunteers. Therefore, it is essential that it is presented carefully and in a way that will be accepted. If there is a backlash against background checking, church communities may be tempted to stop doing it altogether, so it is worth approaching it carefully.

Background checking is not something that we do to check up on a particular person that we have suspicions about. Background checking must apply consistently to everyone so that everyone understands it is not personal, it is simply something we do to enhance the safety of the whole community.

In each context there may be different reasons for resistance to background checking. We cannot assume that because someone resists background checking, they are trying to hide something.

We also need to be aware that the process of background checking may be more difficult and/or less reliable in contexts where systems are limited/non-existent/open to corruption and the process may take a very long time. It may be necessary to use a range of different methods of background checking to develop a robust approach.

In more collective/communal cultures, a background check involving the person's family (however extended) may also be considered.

It must be emphasised that background checking is not infallible/fail-proof. It is a deterrent (a scarecrow rather than a fence) but cannot guarantee that those who take up roles in the church have not offended before. It just means that they have not been reported and convicted; that they have not gone through an official disciplinary or legal process with a finding against them.



4 Developing a code of conduct

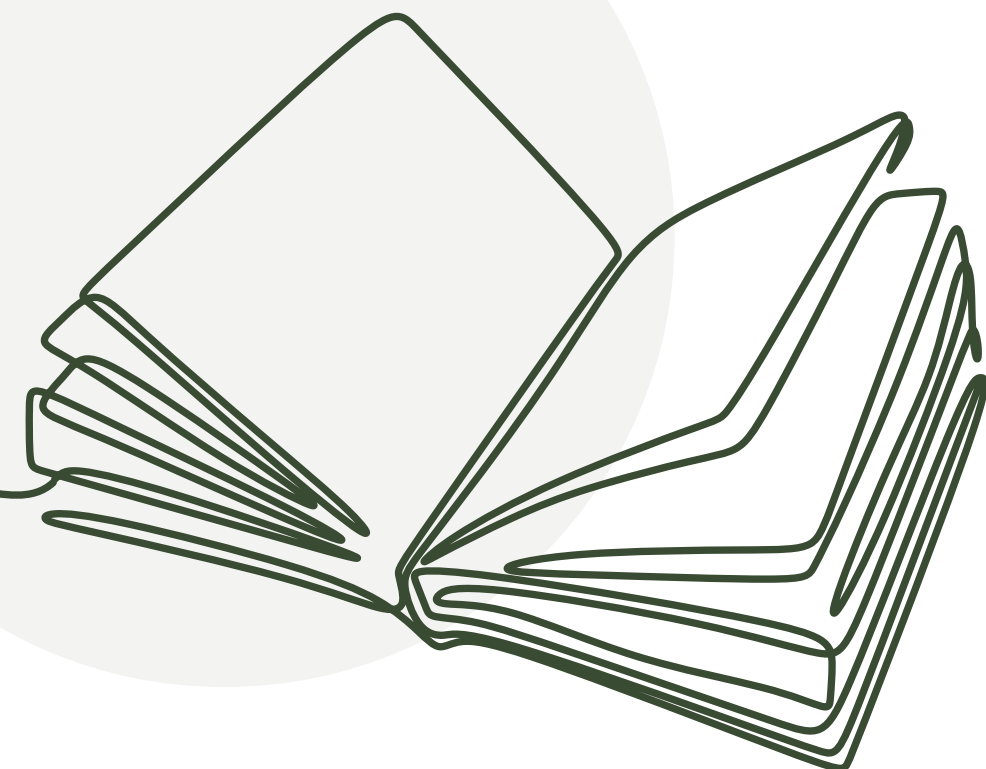
Each province should develop a code of conduct that sets out standards for the practice of ministry to be observed by church workers. The code of conduct should address the following areas of conduct:

- the nature of ministry relationships and how power is to be used in the best interests of those being ministered to;
- maintaining confidentiality when one receives information in the course of ministry and understanding the limits of confidentiality, such as when the laws in your country require you to report abuse of a child;
- appropriate use of communication in ministry including the use of language, gestures and images, the use of technology, and where, when and how one conducts meetings, interviews and conversations with parishioners;
- appropriate boundaries in ministry relationships including emotional, financial, physical and sexual boundaries;
- ministry to *children* and *young people* including avoiding as far as possible working alone or in isolation with them;
- ministry to *adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable* including avoiding as far as possible working alone or in isolation with them; and
- reporting known or suspected abuse by another church worker to the relevant church authorities and/or civil authorities as required.

All clergy and lay leaders should be made aware of the code of conduct and should be trained on its contents and what they mean in practical terms for their ministry. It is also good practice to ensure that each person signs to say that they have been fully briefed about the code of conduct and its contents and that they will comply.

5 Developing policies and procedures

- Policies and procedures help everyone to know:
 - What kinds of behaviours are unacceptable;
 - What to do to prevent abuse and harm as far as is possible;
 - Who you can report to when abuse has occurred, or if you suspect abuse has occurred; and
 - What procedures will be followed when someone reports abuse.
- We need to respond effectively (take it seriously and follow procedures) every time there is an allegation of abuse so that all members of the church community know that the process is consistent, effective and fair. This will encourage people to speak out when abuse happens. It will also deter people from harming others.



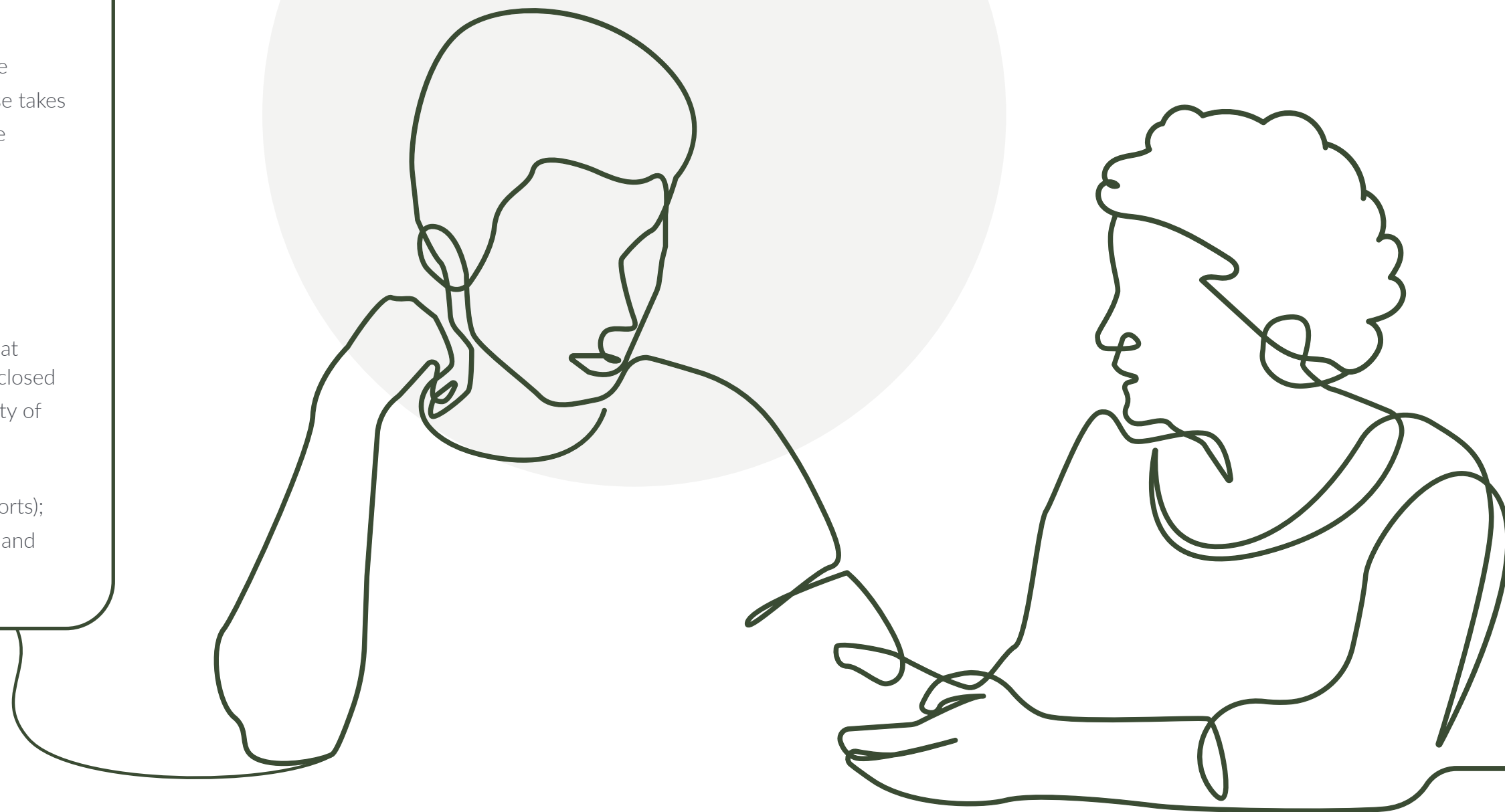
6 Requiring Safe Church training

Every member of the clergy and paid and voluntary lay leaders in a church community need to undergo Safe Church training before taking up their responsibilities. The extent of the training would vary according to the person's role and level of responsibility.

Basic Safe Church training for every church worker should cover:

6.1 Training specifically related to abuse

- Understanding the power dynamics of abuse
- Understanding the different forms that abuse takes
- Identifying warning signs of grooming, abuse and neglect
- How to respond well if someone discloses suspected abuse, or abuse that they have witnessed or experienced themselves
- What procedures will follow once a report/allegation of abuse has been made
- What procedures to follow if you suspect that abuse is taking place but it has not been disclosed
- How to protect the safety, privacy and dignity of all involved including:
 - the person who experienced the abuse;
 - the person reporting (if someone else reports);
 - the person who receives the information; and
 - the alleged abuser.



6.2 Training related to the person's specific role in the parish/diocese/institution

- Training on how to do what they have been appointed, employed or volunteered to do – what the expectations are for that role and what they are committing themselves to.
- Training on the Safe Church policies and procedures that are in place in the province/diocese/parish/institution.
- Broader expectations of ethical behaviour by church workers as set out in the code of conduct including confidentiality (which matters are confidential and which cannot be) and how to establish and adhere to boundaries in pastoral relationships (including emotional, financial and sexual boundaries).
- An appropriate level of theological training regarding power dynamics and the responsibilities of church workers in relation to the power that they will always have due to their roles. Training also related to the theology and ethical practice of ministry activities such as pastoral visits, exorcism, prophesy, preaching, and praying for people.
- Training regarding cultural/cross-cultural sensitivities and how to address cultural practices which may be causing harm e.g. accusations of witchcraft, female genital mutilation.
- Training for clergy (perhaps at seminary) in pastoral care.

6.3 Training on safer recruitment processes

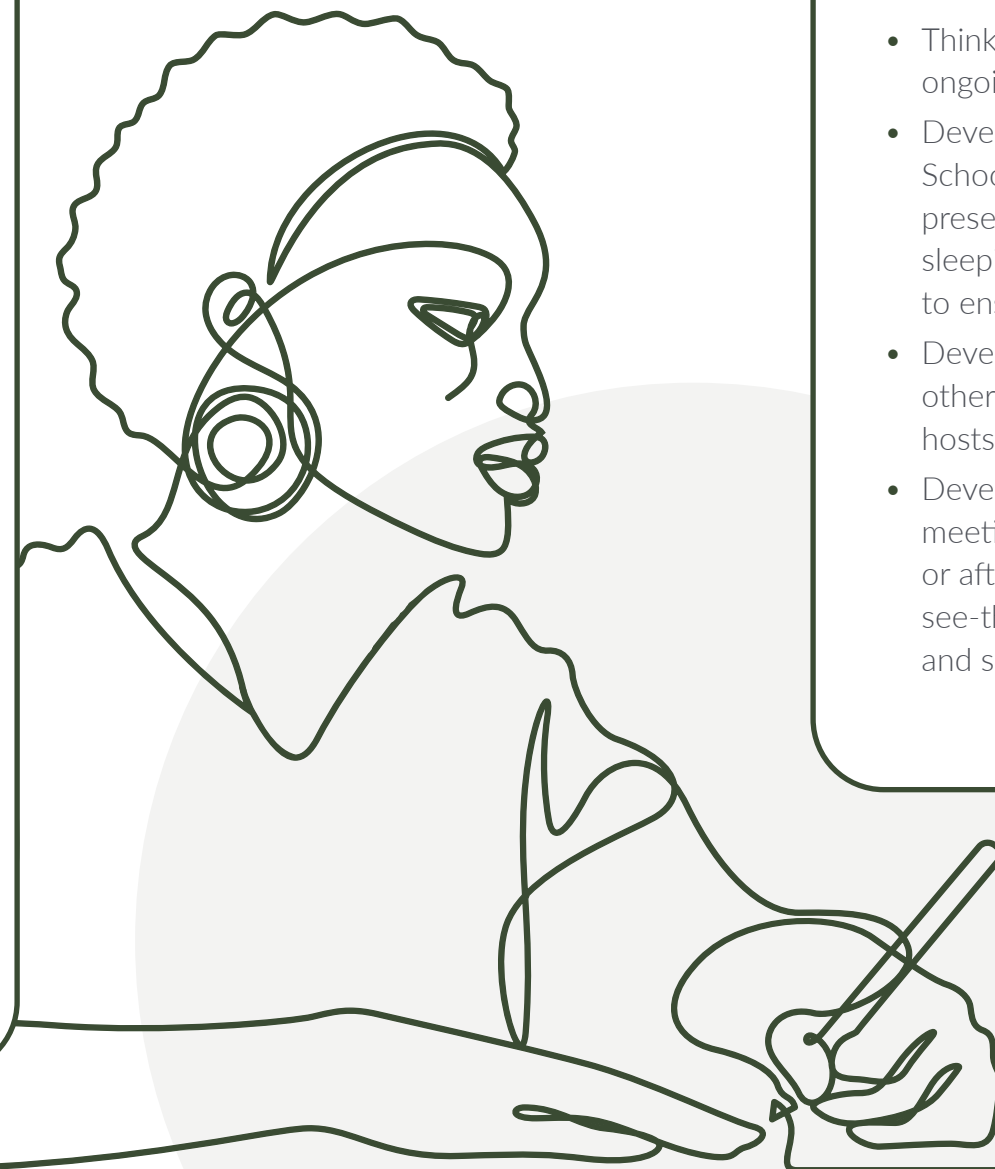
Guidance on how to apply the provincial/diocesan safer recruitment policy should be provided to those responsible for making appointments, whether clergy or lay appointments, so that a consistent approach to recruitment is followed throughout your province or diocese.

7 Putting policies and procedures in place to manage church activities

Safe Church work takes time to implement and it is important to keep communicating with our church communities about the steps that we are taking. Safe Church work will gradually infuse everything the church does rather than being an extra or added on activity.

Over time, it would be ideal to:

- Do a risk assessment before any significant event/camp/outreach: assess all the potential risks and put measures in place to decrease or eliminate the risks.
- Think about potential safeguarding concerns for all existing and ongoing activities in the life of the church community.
- Develop policies for safeguarding practices on camps and Sunday School events e.g. changeroom/bathroom policy (always two adults present if they have to be present when children are changing/sleeping), being clear about the best ratio of adults to young people to ensure that there is proper supervision.
- Develop policies for safeguarding practices when hosting visitors from other places. Have procedures for screening/vetting those who will be hosts and those who will be hosted.
- Develop a policy about privacy and transparency in pastoral care meetings e.g. be visible, avoid meeting one-on-one in private places or after hours, keep doors open if the door does not have glass/see-through panels, make sure a colleague is aware of the meeting and so on.



8 In summary

In order to prevent abuse in a church community, it is necessary to take action and put certain Safe Church measures in place. In this document we have highlighted the following aspects of Safe Church work:

1. Having conversations about abuse within the parish/diocese
2. Conducting risk assessments in order to identify where abuse might happen and take steps to prevent abuse
3. Implementing background checking in order to assess whether someone is suitable for the ministry role they are going to take up
4. Developing a code of conduct for clergy and lay leaders in ministry roles in the church
5. Developing Safe Church policies and procedures for preventing and responding effectively to abuse within a church community
6. Requiring Safe Church training for all those in ministry roles in the church community
7. Implementing Safe Church policies and procedures to prevent abuse within all aspects of the life of the church.

All of these measures are effective safeguards that will reduce the risk of abuse being perpetrated by church leaders, but no community will ever be completely free from abuse. For this reason churches also need to have policies on responding well and dealing with allegations of abuse.

Changing mindsets and existing practices takes time and Safe Church work will take time to implement.

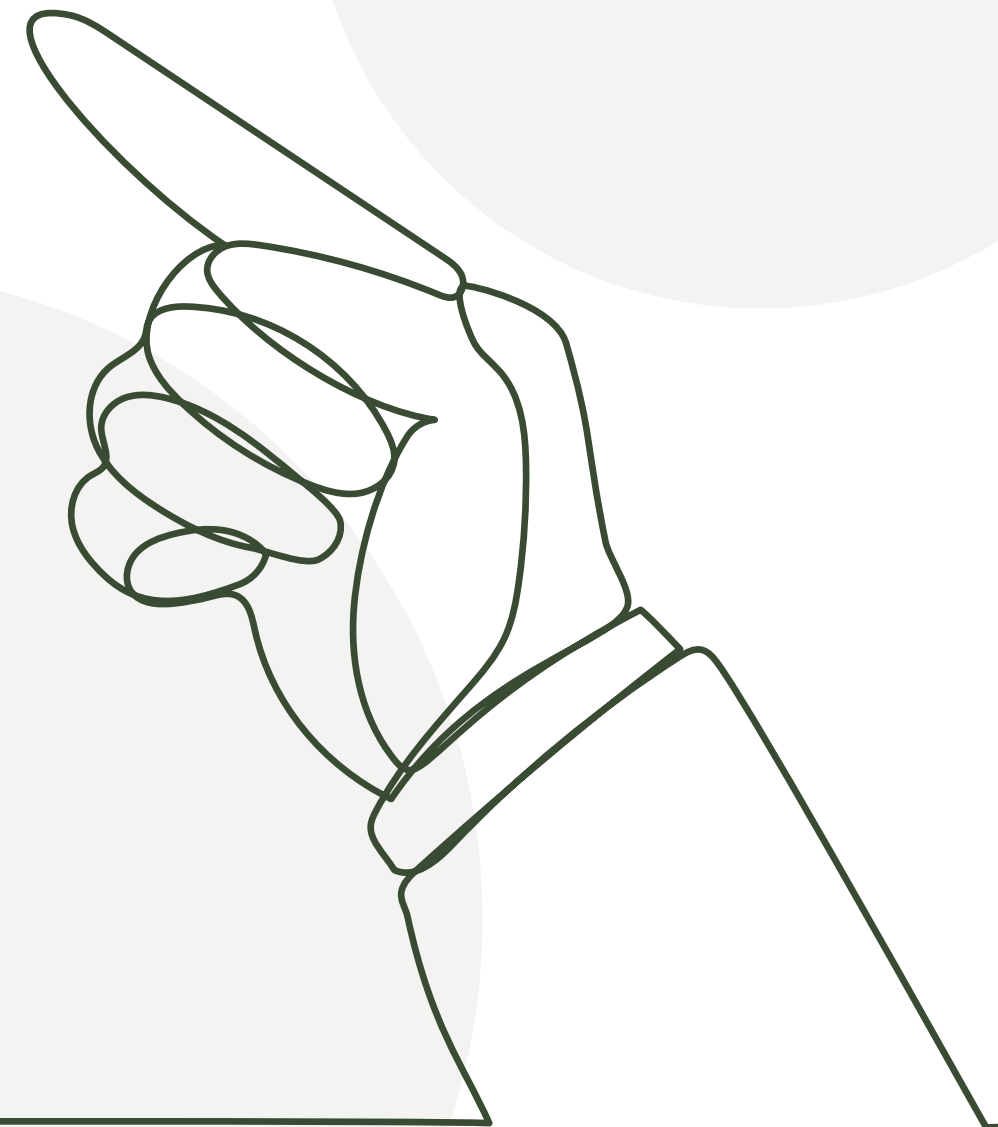
It is most important to:

- a. recognise how essential it is to keep our church communities safe;
- b. develop a plan for implementing the work;
- c. begin the work;
- d. remain committed to the work, even when things get busy and other important things require our attention.

9 Moving forward

There are other resources to help you as you continue your work on the Safe Church Commission website www.anglicancommunion.org/scc

Please contact the Safe Church Commission at scc@anglicancommunion.org if you have suggestions, questions or would like to have a conversation about the Safe Church work you are doing.



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