



## FACT SHEET

# Safe Ministry Questionnaire

Under changes arising from the Victorian and National enquiries into institutional responses to child abuse all organisations have a heightened duty of care to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those people involved in them. The new Victorian legislation (applicable across the Diocese of Wangaratta) specifically addresses the safety of children, but broader duty of care obligations extend to the protection of vulnerable people and any other individuals who work for, engage with or are under the care of an organisation.

The Anglican Church of Australia, through General Synod, developed a standardised form that includes a declaration of an individual's history relevant to involvement in a church role – the Safe Ministry Questionnaire. The Diocese of Wangaratta did not develop this questionnaire. The format and questions were determined at the national level, and are periodically reviewed nationally, with the expectation being that all dioceses across Australia adopt the questionnaire to ensure a nationally consistent approach to screening.

The Diocese recognises that some of the questions in the Safe Ministry Questionnaire might be confronting for some people. The following addresses the most commonly raised questions and concerns from within the Diocese:

- “Why do I have to fill this in? – I haven’t done anything wrong.”
  - The questionnaire forms part of a clearance system that must be applied consistently if it is to be effective. You are not being specifically targeted and no one suspects you of having done anything wrong.
  
- “I’m concerned about who will see my information.”
  - All clearance information is treated with the highest levels of confidentiality. Our duty of care extends to protecting any personal information collected for clearance purposes.
  - Within your parish, only the parish priest should be privy to the contents of your Safe Ministry Questionnaire. For most roles it is the parish priest who will recommend you for the role so it is important that the priest receives and reviews your Questionnaire. A4 envelopes marked Private and Confidential are available for added protection and can be provided by your parish or the Registry on request.
  - Your Questionnaire will then be forwarded to the Registrar where it is processed and stored securely in central records. Once at the Registry only people who are essential to the clearance process will have access to your Questionnaire.
  - If you are concerned about any questions on the form, you should speak with your parish priest about them. This provides you with an opportunity to discuss anything you are unsure of or concerned about in a pastoral setting.
  
- “Some things happened in my past that I don’t want anyone to know about. They happened a long time ago. Will I still be able to be involved with the church if I answer truthfully?”
  - If you are concerned about having to reveal anything unpleasant or confronting in the questionnaire it doesn’t necessarily mean you won’t be able to be involved in the church. The Director of Professional Standards will look into it and decide if the history poses an existing or future concern. Often the history revealed is considered to be no risk to current involvement. We treat the questionnaires confidentially so the information will never be disclosed to anyone else.

- “This form is invasive and I shouldn’t have to fill it in.”
  - There is evidence to show that applying screening processes consistently prevents potential abusers from targeting organisations. They will look for organisations that are “soft” targets – where they can ingratiate themselves without having to undergo screening that might reveal a questionable history. This form is one part of a screening system that can prevent abusers from targeting the Diocese or parishes.
  - Under the new legislative rules, the Diocese (including parishes) could be audited at any time by a government authority or General Synod to make sure we are doing everything possible to reduce the likelihood of abuse now or in the future. The questionnaire contributes to our documented due diligence processes, helping us to be aware of any potential issues.
  - The questionnaire enables the Diocese to respond from the outset in a fair and pastorally sensitive manner to anyone whose history might raise red flags.
  - All volunteers are considered to be church workers. The declaration in the questionnaire provides leverage to act should we find out that someone has lied about their history and actually or potentially put others at risk.
  - The questionnaire provides important information that is needed in order to conduct the National Register and Director of Professional Standards checks that some roles require.
  - Not all roles have been identified as requiring a police check and/or Working with Children Check. For these roles the questionnaire is the primary screening tool.

As with all elements of our safe church clearance systems, the use of Safe Ministry Questionnaires will be periodically reviewed. Any review will be guided by the expectations of the Anglican Church of Australia and legislative requirements, as well as how the Questionnaire fits within our broader clearance system.