



Safe Environment Procedure Manual

Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards

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Safe Environment Certification Manual

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Section 1

Introduction

Why Do We Need to Complete the Essential 3 for Safe Environment?

The Diocese of Crookston and its parishes have an obligation to create a safe environment for the children and vulnerable adults who are in our care.

One vital component of creating and maintaining safe environments is background checks. Background checks are done to ensure that anyone who comes into contact with a child or vulnerable adult in our care does not have a history of criminal offenses that may make them a danger. Background checks are also done on employees to search for evidence of criminal history that may adversely affect their work for a parish, school, diocese, or associated entity.

The second vital component of the Essential 3 is the safe environment training. **The diocese considers all its employees and volunteers to be mandated reporters; therefore, we train them to be able to identify, prevent abuse, and to report abuse.**

The third vital component is the Acknowledgment and Consent Form that is signed acknowledging the Diocese of Crookston's Code of Conduct for Church Leaders.

Safe Environment Manual

The purpose of this manual is to help parishes comply with the Essential 3 for Safe Environment requirements of the Safe Environment Policy. The manual does this in the following ways:

- Provides additional clarification of the standards presented in the Safe Environment Policy.
- Provides additional clarification of the positions required to complete the Essential 3.
- Details the types of background checks that will be completed to comply with the Safe Environment Policy and state law.
- Provides a set of instructions detailing how the background checks are conducted.

Parish Safe Environment Coordinator

The Safe Environment Coordinator is the person at the parish level who is responsible for ensuring that all positions requiring completion of the Essential 3 are filled by volunteers/employees who have completed the Essential 3; Background Check, Safe Environment Training, and Acknowledgment and Consent.

- With the pastor's assistance, identify all positions in the parish/school that require completion of the Essential 3.
- Ensure that anyone volunteering/employed in a position has completed the Essential 3. To be current, the individual must have a valid background check, and completed the safe environment training, as well as the Acknowledgment and Consent Form. If someone else is providing paperwork to an individual in need of certification, the Safe Environment Coordinator will be notified regarding the results of the background check, and completion of the safe environment training.
- Maintain online files on all employees and volunteers.
- Ensure all information remains confidential.
- Complete compliance reports in December and May for the Diocese of Crookston Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards Office.

Notes Regarding Terms Used

When used in this manual, the terms “diocesan”, “diocesan clergy”, “diocesan personnel”, “diocesan volunteers”, “parish personnel”, “parish volunteer”, and “minor” are used in accordance with the definitions given for these terms in the Safe Environment Policy.

When used in this manual, the term “background check” refers to the entire background check package ran on a volunteer or employee. For employees, this includes the criminal background check, the employment background check (ER), and BCA check (if employee at a parish with a school) For volunteers this will be a criminal background check.

Role Definitions

Priest/Deacons – Religious order or diocesan priests/deacons in active or supply ministry (including “retired” clerics who continue in ministry), incardinated diocesan priests/deacons living outside of the diocese, and international clerics.

Candidates for Ordination – Includes seminarians and diaconal candidates.

Educators – salaried teachers, principals, and administrators in diocesan/eparchial and parish schools.

Employees – Paid persons (other than priests/deacons or educators) who are employed by and work directly for the diocese/eparchy or parishes/schools such as central office/chancery/pastoral center personnel, youth ministers who are paid, parish ministers, school support staff, rectory personnel, etc.

Volunteers – unpaid persons who assist the diocese/eparchy (including parishes and schools) such as catechists, youth ministers, homebound/hospital ministers, coaches, Diocesan School lunch/classroom/field trip helpers etc.

Independent Contractors – when completing safe environment training should select *employee as their USCCB Role* ex: *Substitute teachers, public school teachers providing services, speakers, freelance writers.*

Section 2

Safe Environment Certification

Anyone wishing to perform one of the duties outlined in Section 3 of this manual must be in compliance with Essential 3 (Safe Environment Training, Acknowledgment & Consent, and Background Check)

- Must have a background check through the Diocese of Crookston. Section 4 of this manual discusses background check requirements.
- Must complete all applicable Safe Environment training.
- Must complete the Acknowledgment and Consent Form which is included in the CMG Connect training.

The safe environment requirements are found on the Diocese of Crookston website at <https://www.crookston.org/secertification>

Safe Environment Certification

Once a person has completed the background check, Safe Environment training, and Acknowledgment and Consent Form they will have completed the Essential 3 and cleared for ministry. This verifies that the volunteer/employee has completed all requirements. **No person will be allowed to work/volunteer in a position requiring Safe Environment Certification unless the parish, parish school, or diocese has a valid Safe Environment Certification for that person.**

Whenever the parish/school, or diocese has a new employee/volunteer apply for a position requiring Safe Environment Certification, the institution should first verify with the Parish Safe Environment Coordinator that they have met all requirements of the Essential 3 prior to working/volunteering. New employees will need an Employment Background Check and a BCA Check if working at a parish with a school.

A Safe Environment Certificate is valid for one year from the date it was completed. Each year employees/volunteers/independent contractors must complete the annual safe environment training requirements. A background check is valid for five years and needs to be renewed at that time.

Conditionally Cleared Employees

As stated above no person will be allowed to work/volunteer in a position requiring the Essential 3 without Safe Environment Certification. An employee is conditionally cleared for employment once they have completed the Essential 3 and can begin working. The Employment background check and BCA (if at a parish/school) can be in process.

Section 3

Positions Requiring Safe Environment Certification

The Diocese of Crookston Safe Environment Policy details a number of background check and training requirements that must be met for positions in the diocese. These background checks and training requirements are referred to as Essential 3. Any employee, volunteer, and independent contractors in a position that requires the Essential 3 must complete the requirements; refusal to do so prohibits the employee or volunteer from ministry.

The categories for positions requiring the Essential 3 are employees, volunteers, and independent contractors. This section provides a definition of each category. For additional guidance, refer to the Suggested List of Positions That Require Compliance with the Essential 3 in Appendix A. Note that this is only a suggested list, it is not meant to be all-inclusive or to cover all situations that may occur at the parish, parish school, the diocese, or associated entities. **Remember that the goal is to require the Essential 3 for anyone with potential for unmonitored access to children and vulnerable adults. The definition of a vulnerable adult is any person in a state of infirmity, physical or mental deficiency, or deprivation of personal liberty which, in fact, even occasionally, limits their ability to understand or to want or otherwise resist the offense.**

Please note that the Diocese of Crookston Safe Environment Policy gives the Bishop's Delegate the authority to require completion of the Essential 3 on potential personnel or volunteers.

Definitions for each Role

Employees: paid persons (other than priests/deacons or educators) who are employed by and work directly for the diocese or parishes/schools such as; central office/chancery/pastoral center personnel, youth ministers, school support staff, substitute teachers, rectory personnel, etc.

Priests/Deacons: Religious order or diocesan priests/deacons in active ministry (including "retired" clerics who continue minister), diocesan priests/deacons who are living outside of the diocese, and international clerics.

Candidates for Ordination: All seminarians and diaconate candidates.

Educators: Salaried teachers, principals, and administrators in diocesan/eparchial and parish schools.

Volunteers working with Minors: All persons who wish to volunteer in a position involving contact with minors, potential contact with minors, or who have unmonitored access to

minors. Unpaid persons who assist the diocese (including parishes and schools) such as catechists, youth ministers, coaches, etc.

Volunteers working with Vulnerable Adults: All persons who wish to volunteer in a position that includes ministry to elderly or vulnerable adults.

Volunteers who are Minors: The Essential 3 is not required for any volunteer under the age of 18 years of age. Minors volunteering cannot be given unmonitored access to other minors in a parish, parish school, or diocesan setting. Any access these volunteers have to other minors must be directly supervised by an adult in compliance with the Essential 3. This means the adult must be in the same room with the minor volunteer when he/she is around other minors.

Special Note on Visitors: A visitor is someone who comes to the parish, parish school, or diocese to attend an event. Examples: include parents/grandparents attending a school/RE event or having lunch with their child at school. A visitor is not required to complete the Essential 3. To be classified as a visitor, the person must have **no responsibility or authority, either explicit or implicit**. That means the visitor cannot help in any way or be responsible for the children. The visitor must also never be left alone with any child but their own. If this person is helping with an event or is in any way responsible for children, that person is a volunteer, and must be in compliance with the Essential 3.

Independent Contractors: Independent contractors are people who work for a firm that the parish or diocese has a contract with. This can include building contractors, bus driving companies, and cleaning companies. Any independent contractor who is working in a position involving contact with minors must be in compliance with the Essential 3. This is required for all independent contractors who may potentially have unmonitored access to minors in a parish, parish school, or diocesan setting. The Essential 3 are required for all independent contractors who will be working with the elderly or vulnerable adults on behalf of the parish, parish school, diocese, or associated entity.

Student Teachers: Student teachers are treated as independent contractors and must be in compliance with the Essential 3.

Public School Employees: On occasion, public school employees will come into contact with children during the parish school day. Examples include public school employees who give band lessons to the students or provide special educational services. If you have a situation where this occurs, contact the Diocese of Crookston Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards to determine if they need to be in compliance with the Essential 3.

Visiting Clergy: Visiting clergy must have a letter of suitability, supplied to the Chancellor for review and approval. If in the diocese 14 days or longer, the visiting cleric must be in compliance with the Essential 3.

Section 4

Background Checks

The diocesan office responsible for background checks is the Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards. All questions concerning background check policies and procedures should be directed to this office. You can find the Safe Environment Background Check policy here

<https://files.ecatholic.com/37398/documents/2025/2/background%20Checks%20.pdf?t=1738617771000>

Components of Background Check

The term “background check” refers to the entire background check package performed on a person. For employees, this includes the criminal background check, employment background check, and Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) check. BCA checks are required for employees of a parish with a school. For volunteers and independent contractors, this includes a criminal background check.

Criminal Background Check: The diocese has contracted with Selections.com to perform criminal background checks. The criminal background check has three components:

- **Selections.com National Criminal File:** This check searches the following databases: Department of Corrections, Prison, Parole & Release Files; Administrative Office of Courts; Department of Public Safety (DPS); Federal Fugitive File & Government Watch Lists; and Sex and Violent Offender Register/Predator Records.
- **County Courthouse Check:** The National Criminal File (NCF) is built through updates from the various county courthouses. Any offenses that have occurred since the county last sent an update would not be in the NCF. For this reason, the NCF check is supplemented with a county courthouse check for every county the applicant has lived in.
- **Social Security Number Verification:** Because some of the databases searched by Selections.com are referenced by Social Security Number, a Social Security Number Verification is done.

Employment Background Check: In addition to the criminal background check, the Safe Environment Policy also requires an employment background check for all new employees. This check involves sending a short questionnaire to the employee’s former or current employer along with a Employers Response Form (ER) which they will send back to the Diocese. If the employee has been unemployed or self-employed for more than 3 years

prior to starting employment, then this check is not necessary. In this instance, the employee is still required to complete the Employment Background Check form. In the blank labeled “Name of Previous/Other Current Employer”, the employee should write N/A, then sign and date the form in appropriate places.

BCA Check: All employees at parishes with schools must have a background check through the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, pursuant to Minn. Stat. §123B.03 (Note that this requirement applies to all employees at a parish with a school, whether the employee is working for the school or not)

A school hiring authority shall request a criminal history background check from the superintendent of the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension on all individuals who are offered employment in a school and on all individuals, except enrolled student volunteers, who are offered the opportunity to provide athletic coaching services or other extracurricular academic coaching services to a school, regardless of whether any compensation is paid. In order for an individual to be eligible for employment or to provide the services, the individual must provide an executed criminal history consent form and a money order or check

Overview of Background Check Procedures

The background checks are performed and results are processed at the diocesan level.

The criminal background check is done through Selections.com using an online system. The employment background check and BCA checks are sent out by the Parish Safe Environment Coordinator (if necessary). The results of these checks are sent to the Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards, which reviews these results. They are filed at the diocesan level and marked in CMG Connect that they have been received.

Sections 5,6, and 7 of this manual contain a detailed set of instructions for performing background checks for each category: employee, volunteer, and independent contractor.

The Fair Credit Reporting Act establishes strict guidelines that must be followed if a person is not cleared for ministry based on information obtained in a background check. If this occurs, the Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards will handle the issue to ensure that all legal requirements are met.

Background Check Forms

There are two forms that have to be completed in order to process a background check. These forms are available online at

<https://www.crookston.org/coordinators>

- Acknowledgment and Consent Form: This form contains three things:
 - A background questionnaire concerning sexual abuse.
 - An acknowledgment that the person has been notified of the Safe Environment Policies and has received a copy of the Diocese of Crookston Code of Conduct for Church Leaders, and that the person agrees to conduct him/herself in accordance with these policies.
 - Authorization for the diocese to complete a background check on the individual.

There is only one version of this form which is used for employees, volunteers and independent contractors.

- Employment Background Check Form: This form only needs to be completed by new employees. It authorizes the parish, parish school, and the Diocese to do a background check with the person's previous/current employer. If the employee has been unemployed or self-employed for more than three years prior to starting employment, the person should write "N/A" in the blank labeled "Name the Previous/Current Employer", then sign and date the form in the appropriate places.

The Acknowledgment and Consent Form and Employment Background Check Form (if applicable) must be completed at the time of hire; one copy of the form is kept in the parish's files and one copy is sent to the diocese. The Acknowledgment and Consent Form must also be completed on an annual basis. This is completed annually when renewing the safe environment online training module through CMG Connect. All files are held in the CMG Connect database.

Minimum Standards

For purposes of determining eligibility for ministry, the Diocese of Crookston has adopted the standards set forth in Minnesota statute 245C.15, Disqualifying Crimes or Conduct, as our minimum standards. Anyone whose background check contains an offense listed in this statute will not be cleared for ministry. The person will be given the opportunity to appeal the decision. See Section 8 of this manual for more information on the appeal process.

Keep in mind that statute 245C.15 is the *minimum* standard. The Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards has the right to take action for offenses not listed in this statute.

Effect of Previous Background Checks

A background check that an individual has done through some other agency does not meet the requirements set forth by the Diocese of Crookston safe environment policies. All people desiring to work/volunteer in a position requiring the Essential 3 must have a background check done through the diocese in order to be in compliance with the Essential 3.

Yearly Completion of Forms

The Acknowledgment and Consent Form must be completed yearly by all people desiring to work/volunteer in positions that require the Essential 3. These forms are completed when renewing safe environment training through CMG Connect and are housed in this database.

Renewing Background Checks

Individuals must complete a criminal background check through the Diocese of Crookston Safe Environment process prior to employment or volunteering. The criminal background check must be renewed every five (5) years.

Although the Diocese of Crookston is only required to run a background check on an employee or volunteer every five (5) years, one can be done at any time at the discretion of the pastor or the Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards. When individuals complete the Acknowledgment and Consent Form online through CMG Connect, they are consenting to a criminal background check. This is renewed yearly.

Security of Information

The background check procedure gives the Diocese of Crookston access to information that is highly confidential. The diocese must establish procedures to safeguard this information.

Criminal background checks are performed by Selections.com through CMG Connect's platform and are housed in this database. For security purposes, only the Diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator and Director of the Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards will be able to view access results of a criminal background check.

The database will contain the following information:

- Completed Acknowledgment and Consent Forms
- Safe Environment Certificate

Completed Employment Background Check Forms (employees only) are housed at the diocesan level.

Social Security Numbers

Selections.com accesses a wide variety of databases when performing a criminal background check. Because some of these databases are indexed by Social Security Number, it is necessary for individuals to enter their social security number when filling out the criminal background check through CMG Connect.

The Diocese of Crookston recognizes the very real threat of identity theft and appreciates the concerns of people trying to protect themselves from this crime. The diocese also has an obligation to create a safe environment for all minors and vulnerable adults entrusted to our care. A vital part of creating this safe environment is performing background checks on people who will come into contact with minors and/or vulnerable adults while they are in our care. A Social Security number is necessary for this. Therefore, we must strive to achieve our goals of creating safe environments through background checks without causing harm to those we are checking.

This is why the security measures detailed in this manual are vitally important. All information gathered must be securely stored and access to this information is limited. By following these procedures, we are doing everything in our power to protect individuals so they can feel safe and secure in their decision to entrust vital information to the Diocese of Crookston.

Background Checks can actually help stop identity theft. One component of the background check process is a Social Security Number (SSN) Verification. Selections.com first validates the SSN through the Social Security Administration and then traces it through Transunion to give residence and identity history.

Section 5

Procedures for Performing an Employee Background Check

1. The employee fills out the necessary paperwork. These forms are available at <https://www.crookston.org/coordinators>
 - a. Acknowledgment and Consent Form
 - b. Employment Background Check Form
2. Complete a criminal background check
 - a. This is completed through CMG Connect platform by Selections.com
3. Perform a BCA Check (**only parishes with a school**)
 - a. Prepare a letter to the BCA. A sample cover letter is available at <https://www.crookston.org/coordinators>
 - On the line in the upper-right-hand corner, put today's date.
 - On the lines in the middle of the letter, list all employees/volunteers that are requesting a background check
 - Write your phone number in the box at the end of the last sentence.
 - Print your name and sign the form.
 - Make a copy of the completed letter for your files.
 - b. Mail the following items addressed to the MN BCA:
 - Cover Letter to BCA.
 - Copy of the Acknowledgment and Consent Form. Form is found here: <https://www.crookston.org/coordinators>
 - A check made out to MN BCA for the amount of \$8.00 per BCA background check.
 - Include a stamped envelope addressed to The Diocese of Crookston, Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards Office, PO Box 610, Crookston, MN 56716.
 - If you are requesting more than one BCA background check, make sure you have adequate postage on the return envelope. Assume that two pieces of paper will be sent back for every BCA background check requested.
4. File one copy of the following forms in the employee's file and send a copy to the Diocese of Crookston, Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards Office
 - a. Acknowledgment and Consent Form
 - b. Employment Background Check Form

- c. Letter to the BCA (if applicable)
- 5. Occasionally the Social Security Number Verification will report a discrepancy for the employee's Social Security Number. There are three possible reasons for this discrepancy:
 - a. The employee's Social Security Number is not found.
 - b. The employee's Social Security Number is shown as registered to someone else.
 - c. The employee's Social Security Number is shown as registered to more than one person.

If any of these situations occur, the Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards will request that the Parish Safe Environment Coordinator personally verify the employee's Social Security Number. To do this, the employee will need to show their Social Security card to the Parish Safe Environment Coordinator. The Parish Safe Environment Coordinator will then complete the Social Security Number Validation Form available at

<https://www.crookston.org/coordinators>

One copy of the Validation Form should be sent to the Diocese of Crookston, Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards and one copy will go in the employee's file.

- 6. Once the background check has been completed and all other requirements are in compliance with the Essential 3 the Diocese Safe Environment Coordinator will update their status to be "yes" and a date in CMG Connect.

Section 6

Procedures for Performing a Background Check for a Volunteer

1. Volunteers will complete the Criminal Background Check through Selections.com on the CMG Connect platform.
2. The background check will be filed on the CMG Connect platform. The Diocese of Crookston Safe Environment Coordinator and Bishop's Delegate are the only ones that have access to the completed background check.
3. Occasionally the Social Security Number Verification will report a discrepancy for the employee's Social Security Number. There are three possible reasons for this discrepancy:
 - a. The employee's Social Security Number is not found.
 - b. The employee's Social Security Number is shown as registered to someone else.
 - c. The employee's Social Security Number is shown as registered to more than one person.

If any of these situations occur, the Office of Safe Environment & Ministerial Standards will request that the Parish Safe Environment Coordinator personally verify the employee's Social Security Number. To do this, the employees will need to show their Social Security card to the Parish Safe Environment Coordinator. The Parish Safe Environment Coordinator will then complete the Social Security Number Validation Form available at

<https://www.crookston.org/coordinators>

One copy of the Validation Form should be sent to the Diocese of Crookston Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards and one copy will go in the employee's file.

4. Once the background check has been completed and all other requirements are in compliance with the Essential 3, the diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator will update the individual's status to be "yes" and the completion date in CMG Connect.

Section 7

Procedures for Performing a Background Check – Independent Contractor

1. Volunteers will complete the Criminal Background Check through Selections.com on the CMG Connect platform.
2. The background check will be filed on the CMG Connect platform. The Diocese of Crookston Safe Environment Coordinator and Director of the Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards are the only individuals with access to the completed background check.
3. Occasionally the Social Security Number Verification will report a discrepancy for the employee's Social Security Number. There are three possible reasons for this discrepancy:
 - a. The employee's Social Security Number is not found.
 - b. The employee's Social Security Number is shown as registered to someone else.
 - c. The employee's Social Security Number is shown as registered to more than one person.

If any of these situations occur, the Office of Safe Environment & Ministerial Standards will request that the Parish Safe Environment Coordinator personally verify the employee's Social Security Number. To do this, the employees will need to show their Social Security card to the Parish Safe Environment Coordinator. The Parish Safe Environment Coordinator will then complete the Social Security Number Validation Form available at <https://www.crookston.org/coordinators>

One copy of the Validation Form should be sent to the Diocese of Crookston, Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards and one copy will go in the employee's file.

4. Once the background check has been completed and all other requirements are in compliance with the Essential 3, the diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator will update their status to be "yes" and a completion date in CMG Connect.

Section 8

Procedures for Background Checks that come back with a Record

All results from background checks are reviewed by the Diocese of Crookston Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards. The diocese is responsible for handling background checks that come back with a record.

For purposes of determining eligibility for ministry, the Diocese of Crookston has adopted the standards set forth in Minnesota Statute 245C.15, Disqualifying Crimes or Conduct, as our minimum standards. Anyone whose background check contains an offense listed in this statute will not be cleared for ministry. The individual will be given the opportunity to appeal this decision.

If a background check reveals that the individual applying for ministry has a disqualifying offense, the following steps will be taken:

1. A pre-adverse action notice is sent to the person by the Diocese of Crookston Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards as required under the Fair Credit Reporting Act. This notice informs the individual that a record has been uncovered during the background check and that adverse action will be taken because of this. Accompanying the notice are a copy of the background check report, a copy of the individual rights under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, and a decision review application for the individual to use if they wish to appeal the decision.
2. The individual then has a reasonable period of time to appeal the decision to the diocese using the decision review application.
3. If the individual appeals the decision, the case will be taken to the Director of the Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards for review. They will make the final decision as to whether the person will be cleared for ministry.
4. If the individual has not appealed the decision in a reasonable period of time, or if the appeal has been denied by the Director of the Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards, or the Bishop of Crookston, the individual will be prohibited from ministry. The following steps will be taken:
 - a. The Diocese of Crookston Office of Safe Environment and Ministerial Standards will send an adverse action notice to the person informing them of the decision.
 - b. A letter will be sent to the pastor notifying him that the individual will not be cleared for ministry.
 - A copy of this letter will be retained in the individual's file at the Diocese of Crookston.

Appendix A

Suggested List of Positions that Require Compliance with the Essential 3

Employees

All employees

Diocesan and Religious Order Clerics

Consecrated Religious

Volunteers

Religious Education/Faith Formation Coordinator or Director

Religious Education/Faith Formation Teacher/Catechist

Teacher Aide (School or Religious Education/Faith Formation)

Classroom Helper (School & Religious Education/Faith Formation)

Coach/Assistant Coaches

Parish Nurse

Anyone working with an after-school or daycare program

Drivers

Chaperones

Anyone working with youth choir/band

Anyone working with youth to put on a program

Liturgical Trainers

Maintenance Worker/Custodian

Office Staff

Minister to the Homebound

Hospital/Nursing Home Visitors

BeFriender or similar ministers

Independent Contractor

Student Teachers

Public school employees who work with students from parochial schools (band, choir, special ed, etc.)

Public Health Nurse/Other Medical Personnel

Employees of Firm contracted for maintenance/custodial services