

**SafeR Church:**  
**Prevention of and Response to Abuse**  
Resource Materials, October 2013

**Part I: SafeR Church—  
Background and Preparation**

For Parishes in the Anglican Diocese  
of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

**Part I: SafeR Church—Background and Preparation**

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**(1) Resource Materials Package, May 2013**

That document

- Introduced the work of creating parish plans aimed at preventing and responding to the threat of abuse;
- Outlined basic facts about abuse;
- Discussed the reasons that abusers often actively target churches;
- Reaffirmed the moral, ethical, and legal obligations of parishes to protect people, especially vulnerable people, from harm, including abuse;
- Identified the basic legal standard that parishes must meet.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:**

**Parishes must deliberately take active, prudent, reasonable, appropriate, and effective measures, tailored to the circumstances of the situation, seeking to protect people involved with the parish from harm that might come**

- **on church premises:** This includes not only the church building but other locations where church-related activities take place (e.g., camp, etc.);

- **in church programs:** This includes activities for which the parish is solely and directly responsible (e.g., Sunday School, etc.), but also activities less directly controlled by the parish, in which parishioners participate;

- **from people, in particular those involved in church activities,** including people acting on behalf of the parish (e.g., clergy, parish council members, etc.), as well as other people who may be on church premises temporarily (e.g., performing repairs or making a delivery, etc.)

**Two preliminary tasks for parishes were identified in that document** (they are actually the tasks of Step 1 of this process, as will be outlined in this Guide.)

**(1) Gather background information:**

- Create a file for the parish's abuse prevention and response plan (now the "SafeR Church" Plan—see below).
- Gather copies of
  - (a) Documents that describe or govern all programs, services, and activities that involve or serve children, youth, or vulnerable adults (e.g., policies, procedures, guidelines, etc.);
  - (b) Terms of reference of committees or work groups responsible for or involved in these programs, services, or activities;
  - (c) Descriptions, terms of reference, evaluation tools, etc. for all positions in all programs, services, and activities;
  - (d) Information about measures your parish is currently taking to respond to or prevent abuse or other forms of harm (e.g., protocols for reporting allegations, screening processes, etc.); and
  - (e) Any other information you think will be helpful to the development of your Plan.

**(2) Consider who might be able and willing to serve on a working group to create your parish's Plan:**

This group should include laypeople and clergy, people who have a broad experience of the church, in particular its programs, services, and activities that involve or serve children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

The most important criterion is a keen interest in, and commitment to, creating SafeR Church.

## (2) SafeR Church: Background

### • What is “SafeR Church”?

These resource materials—offered to parishes to assist them in their ongoing work of responding to the threat of abuse—now have a name: **SafeR Church**. Here’s the abridged version of what it means and why it was chosen. (See the more detailed discussion on the SafeR Church Blog, set to go online in November.)

#### SafeR Church is a vision:

Of church as a community of trust and a trustworthy community, where people care for one another, and where all may find healing and hope.

#### SafeR Church is a mission:

To create, restore, build, nourish, and sustain communities of trust and trustworthy communities in our parishes and diocese; to make our church a SafeR Church and our churches SafeR Churches.

### Why is this work being reframed as “SafeR Church”?

To respond to questions and concerns raised over the past year, especially by clergy during the risk management workshops held across the diocese; to expand and properly orient our focus to the real goal of abuse prevention and response.

**The real goal of this work is *not* to create a policy or procedures, or even a plan. It is to create SafeR Church and SafeR Churches.** Plans and policies are means to that end; they are not the goal.

Yes, the work ahead *will* involve creating or enhancing specific abuse prevention and response measures. But if it is to be truly fruitful and have a lasting and deep impact, the impetus and ultimate focus and goal of the effort must be *positive*—developing communities of trust and trustworthy communities in and of our parishes, i.e., SafeR Church—rather than something that feels, and often is, so *negative*—namely, dealing with the risk of abuse.

There’s a second reason for reframing this work: To clarify its full and proper scope. SafeR Church work is, absolutely, about facing the threat of sexual abuse of children, youth, and other vulnerable people, but it has a larger purpose.

**The purpose of this work is to create, restore, build, nourish, and sustain communities of trust and trustworthy communities in our parishes and diocese—to create SafeR Church *for everyone*, by taking active measures to prevent and respond to the threat of**

- *all forms of abuse—sexual, physical, spiritual, psychological, emotional, etc.—including bullying and harassment;*

**committed**

- *by anyone involved in our parishes and diocese—children, youth, adults, seniors, men, women, laypeople, and clergy;*

**committed**

- *against anyone involved in our parishes and diocese—children, youth, adults, seniors, men, women, laypeople, and clergy.*

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• **Why “SafeR Church”?**

Does it remind you of “Messy Church”? The echo is intentional. Messy Church encompasses and communicates the vision and mission of building the church by gathering and involving people of all ages in activities that engage the heart as well as the mind, in an effort that can’t be contained in a neat and tidy package.

SafeR Church is similar work. It too must engage our hearts and our minds and involve people of all ages. It will also definitely be messy: It won’t fit neatly into a box or a binder (and there’s no need to try and force it to do so).

The use of the word “SafeR” is also deliberate. It is impossible to make church (or any relationship, organization, or community, for that matter) “safe,” i.e., free of all threats and hazards. We can, however, and must always seek to make it safeR: The “r” is intentionally capitalized as a reminder of that obligation.

**What does this reframing mean in terms of the work to be done and the supports that will be offered to parishes?**

It means that, rather than focussing solely on reducing threats, we will also be focussing on increasing opportunities to create, restore, build, nourish, and sustain SafeR Church, and on involving the whole community in the effort.

**Is absolutely everything we need to create a SafeR Church Plan in this document?**

No. A document that provided “everything” would run about 300 pages, and even then it would be incomplete.

Additional resources are already in the works, and others will be designed and created in response to requests from parishes as you develop your SafeR Church Plans. What is in this Guide and Tool Kit is what you need to get started.

**Each parish needs its own, tailor-made SafeR Church Plan, but some work can be shared ...**

Conducting audits (basically analyzing the who, what, where, when, why, how, etc.) of parish activities and programs (e.g., Sunday School, Friendly Visiting, etc.) and positions (e.g., Sunday School Teacher, Friendly Visitor, etc.)—is one of the primary steps in developing a parish’s SafeR Church Plan, as you will see below.

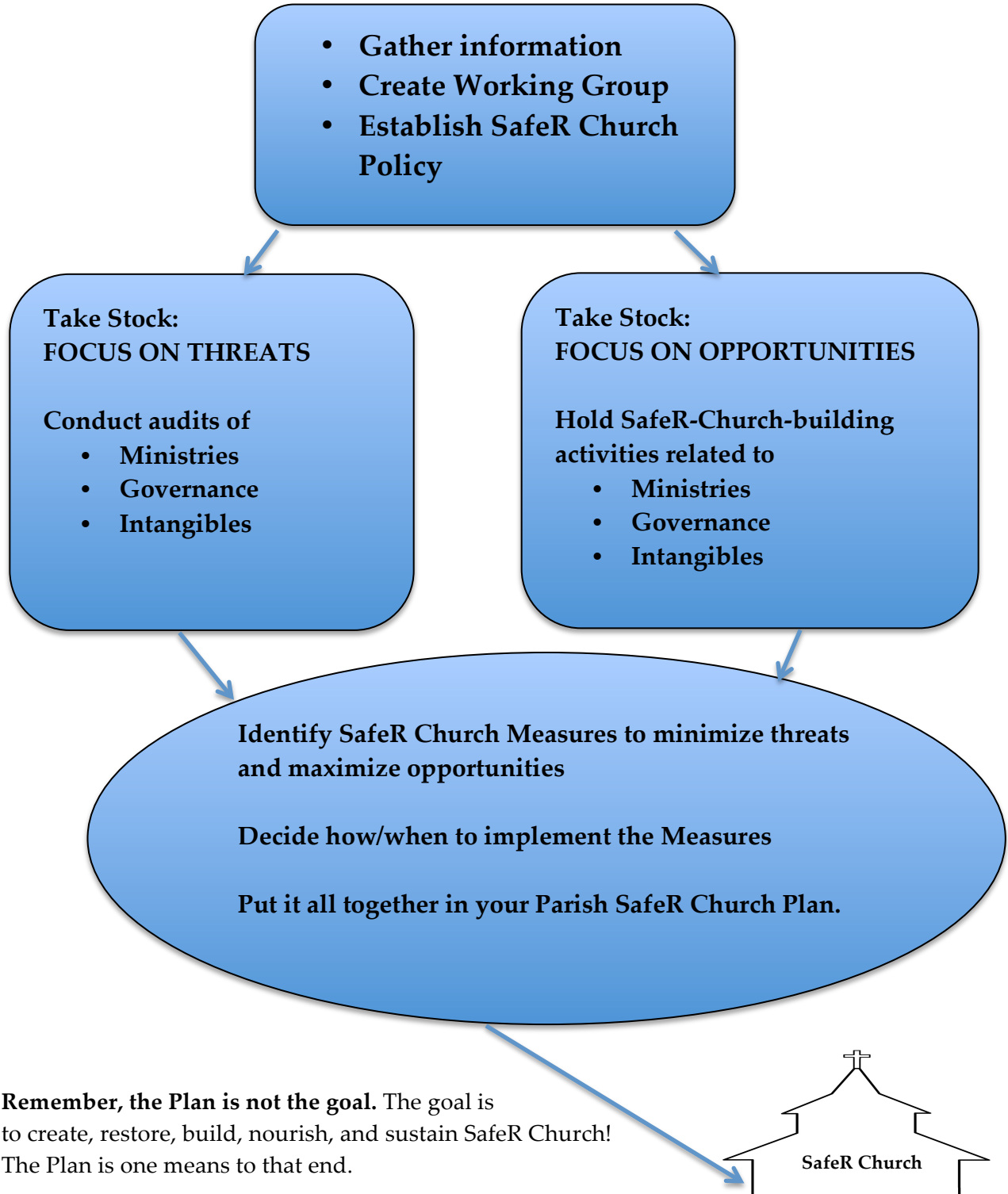
Given that many parishes have similar programs and positions, parishes could share this work by conducting audits together and sharing the information across the diocese. Parishes could use that information as a starting point for their own audits and then tailor the information to their own circumstances and realities.

**In fact, a number of audits have already been started or largely completed. The information generated from them will be posted on the SafeR Church Blog in November.**

**SafeR Church activities in 2014? ...**

In addition, depending on the interest and capacity of parishes, groups of parishes, and/or regions across the diocese, a number of larger SafeR Church activities may be held in 2014.

• **Preview: Path to Creating a SafeR Church Plan**



## • Further Supports and Resources for Parishes

### (1) Additional Resource Materials:

Other resource materials will be made available to parishes over the coming year, distributed as electronic documents, in hard copy, and/or as posts on the SafeR Church Blog. Materials now in the works include

- Partially-completed audits you can tailor to your parish's realities
- More detailed outlines of SafeR Church activities
- Information about specific topics (e.g., confidentiality and privacy, police records checks, etc.)
- Templates and samples—e.g., incident report forms, etc.

### (2) SafeR Church Blog:

The blog will provide a forum for questions and discussion about the process of developing parish Plans, and for requests for further information, tools, etc., that would be helpful.

Answers and resource materials will be posted on the blog and made available in other formats as well.

If you have a question you do not wish to post on a blog, you are invited to contact the project consultant, Lorraine Street, directly, at [lstreetrhc@gmail.com](mailto:lstreetrhc@gmail.com).

### (3) Webinars:

We are looking into holding a number of webinars over the next 15 months and hope to hold the first one in November. Details to follow.

### A final word of introduction ... ... and a reminder

The obvious focus of abuse prevention and response efforts is the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

But parishes also have moral, ethical, and legal obligations to take measures to prevent and respond to risks of abuse to *everyone*: children, youth, adults, seniors, men, women, laypeople, and clergy.

Therefore, SafeR Church is a vision and mission for *all* parishes, not only those with ministries to children and youth. Every parish needs to create a SafeR Church Plan because the ultimate goal is SafeR Church for *all*.

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• **Glossary**

Some of the words and terms used in this document may be unfamiliar. In addition, we are using some in specific ways. Here are the working definitions of the most important of them.

• **ABUSE:** There is no one single, common definition of abuse used by everyone, everywhere. Unless otherwise specified, the word “abuse” in these materials refers to mistreatment of individuals—sexual, physical, spiritual, psychological, emotional, etc.—including bullying and harassment.

• **DUTY OF CARE:** The legal obligation to take reasonable care to avoid causing harm, damage, loss, or injury. The duty of care in any situation depends on the nature of the relationship between the individuals and/or organizations involved.

• **ENTERPRISE RISK MANAGEMENT:** An organization’s deliberate, organized efforts to exercise reasonable care in relation to the inherent and foreseeable risks generated by its enterprises (i.e., what it does, produces, provides, etc.).

• **FORESEEABLE:** Predictable, something that one is aware of or can see beforehand, e.g., getting hit by a puck is a foreseeable risk in hockey, etc.

• **GOVERNANCE:** The way(s) an organization is organized, controlled, structured, managed, administered, etc., including its structures and processes.

• **INHERENT:** Existing in something as a permanent or characteristic attribute, e.g., abuse is an inherent risk of positions of trust.

• **INTANGIBLES:** A reality—e.g., trust—that has no physical being, that cannot be touched or precisely measured, but that affects some, many, or all aspects of the life of individuals and organizations.

• **MEASURES:** The specific actions a parish takes in the effort to prevent and respond to abuse and to create SafeR Church. For example, measures include increasing the ratio of adults to youth on a trip, putting windows in the doors of offices, screening for all positions, etc.

• **MINISTRIES:** A collective term that encompasses all the programs, services, and activities that a parish undertakes.

• **OBLIGATION:** A duty—i.e., something one is morally, ethically, or legally (or some combination of the three) required to do.

• **POSITION OF TRUST:** A situation in which one person is relied on—i.e., a position in which “faith or confidence is placed in the loyalty, veracity, reliability, strength, [good character], etc., of a person” (*Canadian Oxford Dictionary*).

A position of trust describes a situation in which one person is given a significant degree of power, control, or influence over another person, usually someone more vulnerable because of age, the nature of the relationship, disability, etc. The duty of care in such relationships is intense and the standard of care to be met is high.



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- **REASONABLE CARE:** What a reasonable person (i.e., an individual or an organization) would be expected to do in a given situation, “considering the circumstances and the foreseeable consequences.” (*Oxford Dictionary of Law*)

- **RISK:** Uncertainty or possibility. Until recently, only the negative side of risk has been stressed, i.e., risk as “a chance or possibility of danger, loss, injury or other adverse consequences ....” (*Canadian Oxford Dictionary*).

But risk—uncertainty, possibility, etc.—also has a positive side, i.e., risk as the chance or possibility of flourishing, of benefit, etc. That’s how we will look at risk here, using the following terms:

- **THREAT:** A “negative” risk—i.e., the risk of harm, loss, injury, or damage, the risk that something will go wrong or badly.

- **OPPORTUNITY:** A “positive” risk—i.e., the risk of benefit, gain, flourishing, the risk that something will go right or well.

- **RISK MANAGEMENT:** Risk management is the active, deliberate, organized response of individuals and organizations to risk, and to the harm or good that those risks may entail.

Traditionally, risk management involved identifying and implementing prudent, reasonable, appropriate, and effective measures to prevent or minimize risks and the extent of harm that might be done if they are realized (i.e., the negative side of risk).

The definition of risk management has become broader in recent years and now includes seeking to increase the likelihood and extent to which things will go well (i.e., the positive side of risk).

- **STANDARD OF CARE:** The nature and degree of care required in a specific situation. The standard of care depends primarily on the nature, character, and intensity of the relationship between individuals and/or organizations. The standard of care in relation to positions of trust over vulnerable persons is always high.

- **TRUST:** Reliance, confidence, faith placed in someone or something, in the absence of certainty or guarantees about the outcome.

- **VULNERABLE PERSON:** An individual who, by reason of age, disability, or other circumstance is particularly susceptible to influence or harm, especially from people who occupy positions of trust.

### **(3) Getting to SafeR Church: Preparation**

This is a journey, so let's take a look at the starting point, the destination, what the terrain looks like, and how we're going to get there.

The starting point is wherever *your* parish is right now—it's your location, size, history, demographics, culture, traditions, structure, your own particular mix of ministries, governance, intangible realities—everything that makes your parish unique.

The destination is SafeR Church—whatever that might look like in your parish.

Although there will no doubt be many common elements across the parishes of our diocese, each parish will create its own unique SafeR Church Plan with its own mix of specific abuse prevention and response measures in the effort to create, restore, build, nourish, and sustain its unique SafeR Church.

#### **“Measures”? Does that mean screening volunteers through police records checks?**

Right about now (if you haven't already asked the question) you may be wondering when we're going to talk about screening volunteers through police records checks, because that's the most important thing we do to respond to and prevent abuse, isn't it?

It may come as a surprise, but the answer to that question is no, it's not. This is a widespread misconception, and we have to get past it so we can see the real terrain.

Screening volunteers through the use of police records checks is often painted as the most significant abuse prevention and response measure an organization can take, but in reality it is only a small piece—of only one part—of what must be done by organizations, including churches.

Who says so? The Supreme Court of Canada.

#### **• Getting to SafeR Church through Enterprise Risk Management**

In 1999, in a landmark judgment in a case (*Bazley v. Curry*) of historical sexual abuse of a child, the Supreme Court of Canada established explicitly that all organizations—small or large, commercial or charitable, not-for-profits, businesses, and public institutions—are required to manage the risks generated by their enterprises. All parishes are subject to this obligation, just as are all other not-for-profit organizations and charities.

The Supreme Court's judgment reinforced longstanding legal obligations outlined in the first Resource Materials Package: Parishes (like all other organizations) must take active measures to protect people from harm that might come to them

- on church *premises*
- in church *programs*
- from *people* involved in or associated with the church in some way.

Recognition of these obligations underlies this approach and these materials, and it will shape parish efforts to create, build, restore, nourish, and sustain SafeR Church.

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**What does “manage risks” mean?**

Here’s what it does *not* mean: To “manage risk” *does not mean* to “do everything humanly possible to ensure that nothing bad ever happens here.” This is not the standard set by the court (and it’s impossible to achieve!).

Here’s what it does mean: To “manage risk” traditionally meant to make deliberate, organized efforts to take prudent, reasonable, appropriate and, above all, effective measures to respond to threats, dangers, and hazards of harm, damage, injury, or loss.

Screening, especially screening for positions of trust with vulnerable people, is absolutely an essential part of abuse prevention and response efforts, but it’s not the whole picture. According to the Supreme Court, the whole picture is management of *all* the risks generated by the enterprises an organization creates or undertakes.

“Enterprise Risk Management” may be an unfamiliar term, but here’s how it basically breaks down:

- **Enterprise:** All the things that an organization does, provides, produces, etc., (and how it does them, for whom, by whom, etc.)
- **Risk Management:** Traditionally, the deliberate, active, organized efforts of individuals and organizations to address the threats, hazards, and dangers inherent or foreseeable in a given situation.

• **Enterprise Risk Management meets SafeR Church: Risk as Threat and Opportunity**

Again, it’s very common for people to understand “risk” as something that can go wrong. But risk cuts both ways: In any given situation, there are risks—i.e., threats, hazards, and dangers—of harm or loss, but there are also risks—i.e., opportunities—for flourishing, benefit, and gain. Risk management, even in business, is now commonly the effort to both reduce threats *and* increase opportunities.

That’s how enterprise risk management will meet up with the positive side of abuse prevention and response in SafeR Church efforts. We’re going to look at risk in both its positive and negative aspects:

- **THREATS**—that’s the collective name given here to the things that might go wrong, to the risks that make church less safe.
- **OPPORTUNITIES**—that’s the collective name given here to things that might go right, to the risks that build SafeR Church.

*Parish enterprise risk management will seek*

- *to identify, assess, and prioritize inherent and foreseeable threats and opportunities, and*
- *to take prudent, reasonable, appropriate, and effective measures in an effort to reduce the threats to, and enhance the opportunities for, creating, restoring, building, nourishing, and sustaining a community of trust and a trustworthy community, i.e., SafeR Church.*

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**We do lots of risky things. Does this mean that we have to stop doing them?**

This work is definitely *not* about getting rid of all negative risks—threats, hazards, and dangers. It’s not possible, for one thing. Rather, the goal is for parishes to be smart about this, to not take risks (negative or positive!) blindly, to learn how to manage risk, to make deliberate decisions about risk, to decide what to try and prevent or avoid or eliminate, what to accept, and what to encourage and try to foster, in keeping with trying to fulfill the calling and reality of being church.

**“Is it worth the risk?”**

Some threats, dangers, and hazards are more likely to be realized (to “ripen into harm” — as the Supreme Court put it in the *Bazley* decision) than others. Some threats, if realized, will produce serious, devastating, even life-threatening harm, loss, damage, or injury. The harm caused when someone is abused can be and often is that serious. But does that mean we should eliminate any situation in which sexual abuse could occur? Not necessarily. We all decide, at times, individually or collectively, that some risks (and some of them are huge) are worth taking.

Think of any situation in which a vulnerable person is paired with another person as friend, mentor, counsellor, etc. To eliminate situations in which sexual (or other) abuse might happen would require that we eliminate these kinds of programs, services, or activities.

If we were to do that, we would also be eliminating the positive risk—i.e., the opportunity—of wonderful things happening as a result of that relationship: that’s every bit as much a risk as that harm could be done.

Here is an important reality: *If an organization absolutely cannot take measures to protect the vulnerable and reduce the likelihood of abuse happening in such a situation, then it must consider whether changing it or even eliminating it is the appropriate response to the threat(s).* That’s a fundamental, if hard, reality emerging from the courts, echoed in the Supreme Court’s *Bazley* decision.

Let’s be clear about this too. *Most organizations, including churches, can take significant measures to reduce these kinds of serious threats.* One part of the work we’re embarking on is directed at this very thing—eliminating, avoiding, preventing, transferring, or minimizing these threats.

**Isn’t it risky to try to build “communities of trust and trustworthy communities”?**

Yes. By definition, to trust—to act, to rely on someone or some thing in the face of uncertainty—in other words, to have faith, is to take a risk, sometimes a massive risk.

We all know what it means to life when our trust in others (or theirs in us) is honoured—and when it is betrayed. Trust honoured can give and nourish life; trust betrayed can devastate and destroy it.

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Nevertheless, trust is an essential and indispensable element of every human relationship. Many would argue that trust is in fact the most fundamental building block in the development of human beings.

This work is not about encouraging blind trust, but it is about recognizing that trust is essential to life and central to human flourishing, and that we shouldn't try to stamp it out. In fact, trying to eliminate trust will make our churches less safe.

*Communities of mistrust and suspicion are among the most unsafe situations imaginable.*

So, we are between a rock and a hard place. Trust is fundamental to human flourishing, and trust—for ultimately, faith *is* trust—is fundamental and of the very essence of church. Trust is also fundamental to the way we operate as church. Think about all that goes on in a parish—all the things that depend to some smaller or larger degree on trust. There's not much that doesn't.

Do we want to foster distrust or suspicion, to be communities of mistrust or distrust? Or do we want to be communities that foster trust and trustworthiness? Seeking to build communities of trust and trustworthy communities actually entails both negative and positive risk, to be sure, but if we're going to continue to be church, these are necessary risks and risks worth taking.

Our best efforts are to directly, actively, deliberately, and *in an organized fashion*, identify and assess those risks—the threats and opportunities—and make decisions about how to reduce the threats to, and

increase the opportunities for, creating, restoring, building, nourishing, and sustaining SafeR Church.

• **The SafeR Church Framework**

One of the most common problems with efforts to manage risk is that they are often disorganized, incomplete, scattered, and sometimes contradictory. Measures are often chosen because “we've always done this,” because “everyone else is doing this,” because it's inexpensive or not time-consuming, or familiar to us.

There is usually no lack of effort or good intentions here: What's usually missing is a specific, appropriate framework, a way to organize the work of identifying threats and opportunities and, importantly, a structure that will require examination of *all* areas of the parish, not just the obvious ones. There are many different ways to describe the layers of a parish. The framework we'll use here includes these three layers:

- Parish **Ministries**
- Parish **Governance**
- Parish **Intangibles**

It looks like this, and it's where Part II of this Guide starts to outline the steps to creating a SafeR Church Plan.

