



# Strengthening

## Our Parish Communities

RC DIOCESE OF CALGARY



### OUR VOLUNTEERS SAY, “HERE I AM LORD!”

by Silvana Dick, Our Lady of Grace Parish • Volunteer Screening Coordinator

*“Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.”*

Immediately recognizable, “Here I am Lord” has become synonymous with volunteering. It resonates in the hearts and souls of those in God’s service; and its message depicting Isaiah’s willingness to step forward when God tapped him on the shoulder echoes daily worldwide. Thousands of years after His words were spoken and thirty years after they were written in Dan Schutte’s hymn, God’s question endures “Whom shall I send?” ... and some 10,000 Catholic volunteers throughout Southern Alberta are answering with ready hearts.

In February this year the Diocese rolled out the “Strengthening Our Parish Communities” Volunteer Screening Program. Referred to by Bishop Henry as another step to “becoming mature as a Catholic community of faith,” it calls upon volunteers, staff and clergy to agree to a Model Code of Conduct in order to properly care for and protect participants. Furthermore, interviews, references, police checks and rigorous supervision practices will support a safe environment for all.

In Canada, the legal principle of “Duty of Care” obliges us to very thoroughly screen those who do paid or unpaid work with children, youth and vulnerable adults. Throughout Alberta, schools, hospitals, churches, and community groups have established screening for volunteers and staff. In 2007 the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops recommended screening and other protocols for creating a safe environment for pastoral activities. The concept of screening has woven its way into the fabric of the entire nation.

Implementation of our new Diocesan initiative can be witnessed from parish to parish throughout southern Alberta. The nine parishes in the Fr. Naphin Pastoral Zone (Calgary NE) have had particular success where volunteers have been gathering for a series of meetings to discuss the program in great detail. While each parish decides the best method to implement the program, Our Lady of Grace chose to start with members of their parish council. A meeting was held in March to describe the program and was immediately followed by a meeting with ministry leaders. In April and May individual ministry members, staff and clergy were then called together to learn about the program and to raise questions or concerns.

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*“I will go Lord,  
if you lead me.*

*I will hold your people  
in my heart.”*

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Volunteer Suchillar Prevatt prepares children for their First Holy Communion during their Retreat

Throughout the process volunteers have engaged in open and candid dialog about the pros and cons of the initiative. To date, almost 150 volunteers have been screened, all recognizing the need to keep Our Lady of Grace a vibrant and safe community of faith.

Five months into implementing the Volunteer Screening Program, the experience has been a relatively painless one. “The concept used for volunteer screening was very well prepared for our Church,” said Suchillar Prevatt, Sacramental Preparation Coordinator. “The meeting with ministry leaders was quite explicit and the individual meeting with catechists was informative and all questions were thor-



*Volunteers and parents pose with children from our Bike Safety Rally*



*Volunteers from this year's production of The Passion*

oughly answered.” Suchillar went on to say she felt all the forms were relatively simple to complete and necessary, stressing the importance of being screened especially when volunteering with children. Impending changes include the requirement for two screened adults to be present for every 15 children.

“Many other volunteer organizations are doing this as well,” said Suchillar. “I have been screened before so that I could volunteer in a school program and never felt offended in being asked to do it.”

The volunteers at Our Lady of Grace serve as examples of

selflessness, each one accepting God’s call to put their gifts to the service of each other in a safe and caring manner.

Not only should we be honoured to serve God alongside them but also alongside the thousands of volunteers throughout the entire Diocese who have participated in the screening process thus far.

For more information contact your Parish Volunteer Screening Coordinator or search “Volunteer Screening” at [www.calgarydiocese.ca](http://www.calgarydiocese.ca) and please see Diocesan Dates, October 1, on page 13 for details on the upcoming Fall Workshop.