

## **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEER LEADERS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Every church worker and volunteer of St Catharine's should understand that electronic communications, just like verbal interactions and other types of written communications, are conversations in a ministry context and are regarded as pastoral encounters. They must always consider the appropriateness and the effect of their words and actions.

Church worker and volunteers use different types of electronic communications within ministry every day. It is essential that these forms of communications are used appropriately and are beyond reproach. They have a duty to act in a manner that will uphold and enhance the good standing of the Church and their colleagues.

Each church worker and volunteer has authority conferred by their appointment and/or licensing and has a duty to understand and responsibly exercise the power and trust inherent in all pastoral and personal relationships. This applies to all ministry relationships regardless of the age of the people involved.

With electronic communications, boundaries can be more easily blurred with the consequence of moving beyond appropriate levels of intimacy, e.g. of influence, power and trust. Electronic communications can also be used to cultivate relationships making it possible for someone to inappropriately influence a vulnerable person.

All electronic communication leaves a trail that may allow the full recovery of the contents of the interchange.

### **APPLICATION**

Church Workers and Church Volunteers as described in the *Professional Standards Act* (2009), amended 2012 (see Appendix 1).

## PURPOSES

The parish recognizes that:

- a. Electronic media represents an important and growing form of communication for the Parish. It wishes to ensure that electronic communication in its ministry is conducted in a manner that ensures the safety of the participants and meets the guidelines of Faithfulness in Service and The Code of Good Practice
- b. The creation of new Apps can provide new mediums for electronic communication as well as new challenges and it must respond appropriately by reviewing its policies and practices when this occurs
- c. There is a need to exercise particular care when using electronic communication with children. The Churchwardens will be responsible for oversight of parish communications.

The Parish Employee Privacy Policy defines confidential information.

## SCOPE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

There are many types of electronic communications in use including telephone calls, email, SMS (texting), blogs, Twitter and social networking sites e.g. Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook. Apps and social networking tools evolve quickly and constantly add to the availability of possible electronic communication channels.

Principles for appropriate use of electronic communications for church workers and volunteers Ensure transparency and accountability in interactions

- a. Be courteous and engage in respectful interactions
- b. Be knowledgeable about and practise privacy principles
- c. Be knowledgeable about and take care in social networking

## ENSURING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN INTERACTIONS

Electronic communications are open to misinterpretation so it is especially important that transparency and accountability are accepted as necessary. The way this is managed will depend on the existing relationship between those engaged in the communication, but this is a particularly important consideration when there is an imbalance of power between the parties e.g. vicar, church worker or volunteer communicating with a parishioner; a youth leader communicating with a youth. The church worker or volunteer must communicate appropriately and be perceived to be communicating appropriately.

Church workers and volunteers must be careful not to knowingly transmit, retrieve or store any communication that is discriminatory, harassing, derogatory, obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic, defamatory or threatening, in violation of any license governing the use of software or for any purpose which is contrary to the Code of Good Practice or Faithfulness in Service. Guidelines for interactions with children and youth can be found in Section 5 of Faithfulness in Service.

The Lead Pastor should receive copies of electronic communications or have access to blogs/websites and monitor their contents.

If the content of the communication is confidential, then it may be unwise to communicate electronically. If the exchange is lengthy then arranging a meeting may be appropriate.

## **ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEER LEADERS: INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

### INTRODUCTION

*Faithfulness in Service* states

5.32 "When meeting a child privately, you should:

- have parental or guardian consent, where practicable;
- ensure where appropriate that a parent, guardian or suitable adult is present;
- inform another member of the clergy, an adult church worker or another adult of the time, location and duration of the meeting; and
- not invite or have children to your home or visit children in their home when no other adult is present;
- Make a record of the time, location, duration and circumstances of any meeting where it is impracticable to follow these guidelines."<sup>1</sup>

Pastoral care and general communication is an integral part of youth and children's ministry and something that is to be encouraged in ministry. Pastoral care for youth and children will be, primarily, through face to face contact. However, this is not always possible and church workers may have to 'meet' with children and young people through electronic communication. Section 5 of *Faithfulness in Service* outlines Standards and Guidelines for relating to children and young people.

### 1. GENERAL ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

- Interaction with children/young people in these forms should be kept to a minimum:
- Parental permission must be sought before a church worker communicates to a child/young person with electronic communication;
- Church workers must not knowingly transmit, retrieve or store any communication that is
  1. discriminatory or harassing;
  2. derogatory to any individual or group;
  3. obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic;
  4. defamatory or threatening

- 5. in violation of any license governing the use of software;
  - 6. for any purpose that is illegal or in contradiction to the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne Safe Ministry Guidelines (*Faithfulness in Service*).
- Church workers must not send any electronic communication that attempts to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else.

## 2. TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION

- Always, when contacting the child/young person by phone, call on the home phone if possible.
- Ensure, whenever possible, that the parents/guardians are aware of the phone call.
- Mobile phone use should be kept to a minimum and should never be used for long calls, especially for pastoral care.
- If a child/young person initiates a mobile phone call which will require a long conversation then, at an appropriate time, transfer the call to the home phone line.

## 3. EMAIL COMMUNICATION

- All emails to children/young people should have the Lead Pastor carbon copied into them.
- Emails should generally be restricted to purpose only emails e.g. "meet at this place, at this time" or general conversations e.g. "how was the excursion today?" Deeper conversations regarding more personal issues should be face to face.
- As far as possible save all emails to and from children/young people in a separate soft copy folder.

## 4. SMS COMMUNICATION

- SMS communication should generally be restricted to purpose only communication e.g. "meet at this place, at this time".
- If a longer SMS conversation begins ring the child/young person, preferably on the home phone.

## 5. SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES (E.G. FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM, TWITTER ETC)

- Internal mail should be restricted to purpose only messages:
- Writing on 'walls' should be kept to a minimum and only of a broad nature e.g. "hey, hope you're having a good week, cya Sunday" or other light conversations.

- Do not give out any details of children/young people on 'walls' e.g.name of school, email address, home address, phone numbers, etc.

Think carefully about the reasons for 'socialising' with children and adolescents in such forums. Does this give the message that socialising with Youth Workers (paid or voluntary) is appropriate in any forum, and that youth workers do not have their own 'space' for socialising?

## 6. INTERNET CHAT ROOMS/PROGRAMS (E.G. MSN, ICQ ETC)

- Church workers should not enter into a closed one on one conversation with a child/young person. If a child/young person invites you in to a conversation you should bring in a third party:
- Church workers should use discernment and wisdom when having a multi-person conversation. Your conversation should be above reproach.

## 7. PHOTOGRAPHS

- Any photos of youth/children's ministry activities should be taken by someone appointed by the Minister and with parental consent:
- Do not photograph any child/young person who has asked not to be photographed:
- Photography should focus on the activity and not on a particular child/young person:
- Photos should focus on small groups rather than individuals:
- Do not identify in writing the person/s in the photograph:
- All children/young people must be appropriately dressed when photographed:
- Never post photos of children/young people on the internet:
- If you do find a photo of a youth/children's activity posted on the internet by a young person, gently ask them if they have permission from everyone in the photo to post it. If they don't then advise them to either seek permission or remove it from the internet.
- Do not allow children/young people to take a photo of church workers with their mobile phones:
- Do not take photos of children/young people with your mobile phone.

## 8. VIDEO PHONING (MOBILE PHONE/INTERNET)

- Church workers should not enter into conversations of this nature with children/young people.

## APPENDIX 1

### CHURCH WORKER AS DEFINED BY THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS ACT 2009 (AMENDED 2012)

Church worker means a person who is or who at any relevant time was:

- (a) a member of the clergy;
- (b) a lay minister;
- (c) a church warden or vestry member, whether elected by the general meeting of a parish or appointed by the incumbent or appointed by the vestry or the incumbent to fill a vacancy;
- (d) a treasurer appointed by the churchwardens;
- (e) a person aged 18 or more years holding in a congregation or parish or in the Cathedral the role position or office described below or carrying out in substance the duties inherent in that role position or office—
  - (i) Children's group leader or co-ordinator;
  - (ii) Crèche leader or co-ordinator;
  - (iii) Director or co-ordinator of the choir or other music group;
  - (iv) Director or co-ordinator of music;
  - (v) Home visit leader or co-ordinator;
  - (vi) Nursing home visit leader or co-ordinator;
  - (vii) Organist or pianist;
  - (viii) Salaried or otherwise remunerated lay person;
  - (ix) Superintendent or other person in charge of a Sunday school or other educational programme;
  - (x) Youth group leader or co-ordinator;
- (f) a person employed or appointed by a Church body (other than a person referred to in paragraph (e)) within a class of persons prescribed from time to time by the Archbishop-in-Council in a protocol; or
- (g) any other person holding a position or performing a function, whether voluntarily or for payment with the actual or apparent authority of a Church authority or Church body, within a class of persons prescribed from time to time by the Archbishop-in-Council in a protocol— resident in the Diocese or holding a license or permission to officiate or other authority from a Church authority but excludes a bishop subject to the jurisdiction of the Special Tribunal of the Church.