

SECTION 1: POLICY FOR SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Introduction

1. St Patrick's Parish Pakenham (the Parish) holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults as an absolutely necessary responsibility. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent in the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel (Diocese of Sale Commitment Statement).
2. The Church's social doctrine constantly points out the need to respect the dignity of children. 'In the family, which is a community of persons, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights' (Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris Consortio, 26). Indeed, it was Jesus who, when his disciples were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest, directed his attention to a little child and said to his disciples, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me' (Mark 9.37).

Purpose of the policy

3. The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of the Parish to the care, safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, with special concern for children, vulnerable adults. It provides an outline of the Parish policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep children safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in the Parish environment, on site, online and in other locations used by the Parish. This policy applies to all Parish personnel, including employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

"I wish to assure you that the Diocese of Sale is wholly committed to ensuring the safety, well-being and dignity of all children and vulnerable adults and acknowledges its important spiritual, moral responsibility to create a safe and nurturing environment in our Parishes and Schools for everyone."

Bishop Patrick O'Regan, Bishop of Sale

Principles

4. The Catholic Church has a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing environments where children and vulnerable adults are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe
5. The following principles underpin our commitment to the safety of children and vulnerable adults in the Parish:
 - a) A zero tolerance of the abuse of children or vulnerable adults.
 - b) All children and vulnerable adults are entitled to, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
 - c) All adults in the Parish, including staff, clergy, volunteers, parishioners, contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and vulnerable adults and to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
 - d) The policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of children and vulnerable adults are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults and children and vulnerable adults.
 - e) All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
 - f) Staff, clergy, volunteers, parents, Parishioners including children and contractors should be free to raise concerns about safety, knowing these will be taken seriously by the Parish leadership.
 - g) Appropriate confidentiality will be maintained, with information being provided to those who have a right or a need to be informed, either legally or pastorally.

Commitments

6. All children have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in the care of the Parish is a non-negotiable and top priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety.
7. Our commitment to our children and vulnerable adults
 - a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and vulnerable adults in our Parish.
 - b) We commit to providing children and vulnerable adults with positive and nurturing experiences.
 - c) We commit to listening to children and vulnerable adults and empowering them by taking their views seriously, and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.

- d) We commit to taking action to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are protected from abuse or harm.
- e) We commit to give particular attention to the most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability.

*When children were asked what worried them when they thought that an adult might hurt them, they said they needed To know what to do and say
 ...To have a trusted adult to go to, talk to and get help from
For another adult to notice that they aren't OK and
For an adult to believe them when they tell them they're not safe*

8. Our commitment to Parishioners

- a) We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.
- b) We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our child-safety practices, policies and procedures.
- c) We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of our Parishioners and being sensitive to how this may impact on safety issues.
- d) We commit to ongoing review and improvement of our systems to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse.

9. Our commitment to our Parish staff and volunteers

- a) We commit to providing all St Patrick's Parish staff with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.
- b) We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to the safety, protection and wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults. This will include training in the principles and intent of the Child Safety Policy and Child Safety Code of Conduct, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- c) We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by St Patrick's Parishioners and staff about keeping children and vulnerable adults safe from harm.
- d) We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by St Patrick's Parishioners and staff about keeping children and vulnerable adults safe from harm.

Responsibilities

10. Everyone employed or volunteering at St Patrick's Parish has a responsibility to understand the important and significant role they play individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children and vulnerable adults is a non-negotiable and top priority.
11. Responsibilities of Parish Leadership. The Parish Priest and the Parish Pastoral Council at St Patrick's Parish recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of, and shared responsibility, for child safety. Responsibilities include:
 - a) Creating an environment for children and vulnerable adults to be safe and to feel safe
 - b) Promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and vulnerable adults based on mutual respect and consideration
 - c) Ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff
 - d) Ensuring that Parish personnel have regular and appropriate opportunities to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address, child safety matters
 - e) Providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to child and vulnerable adults protection and wellbeing
 - f) Ensuring the Parish meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards.
 - g) Ensuring that an audit of Parish procedures and practices relating to the safety of children and vulnerable adults is undertaken annually.
12. Responsibilities of Parish Volunteers and Staff. Responsibilities of Parish staff include:
 - a) Treating children and vulnerable adults with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, exercising their duty of care, and protecting children and vulnerable adults in their care
 - b) Following the legislative (including mandatory reporting obligations where appropriate) and Diocesan processes if, in the course of their work, they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected
 - c) Providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults is nurtured

- d) Undertaking regular training and education in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of children and vulnerable adults
- e) Assisting children and vulnerable adults to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse
- f) Abiding by and promoting the Parish's Code of Conduct for Child Safety and for Vulnerable Adults

13. Responsibilities of Parish Safety Officer. The Parish Safety Officer is responsible primarily to develop, facilitate and evaluate the implementation of policies and procedures of the Diocese in relation to the Victorian Government's Child Safe Standards and to ensure a safe environment for children. The major responsibilities of the Parish Safety Officer include:

- a) Working closely with the Parish Priest, Staff, Parish Pastoral Council and volunteers to develop, facilitate and evaluate the implementation of policies and procedures with a particular focus on children and vulnerable adults within the Parish.
- b) Ensuring that the Parish has systems and processes in place that comply with the Victorian Government's Child Safe Standards and other Child Protection legislation.
- c) Developing and implement training and workshop initiatives to assist the Parish staff and volunteers in understanding their obligations and responsibilities under the Child Safe Standards and other Child Protection legislation.
- d) Developing and implementing a model Code of Conduct for all Parish staff or volunteers.
- e) Ensuring that accessible records are maintained to allow Parish leadership and ministry coordinators to check the currency of volunteer clearances so that only those with clearances are able to exercise Lay Ministry in the Parish.
- f) Being an integral part of the reporting process, under relevant legislation, when there is a reasonable belief that a child in our Parish environment is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed, and to provide guidance and procedures on how to make a report.
- g) Monitoring legislation and regulatory standards and develop plans to respond to these.

All children and vulnerable adults are entitled to, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
St Patrick's Principle on the Care of Children and Vulnerable Adults

Working With Children Checks

14. Diocesan Policy requires that “all people including employees, contractors, volunteers, clergy, seminarians, and religious brothers and sisters who work or volunteer in Church activities that involve children are required to hold a current Working With Children Check (WWC Check) under the Working With Children Act 2005 and under the Policy of Catholic Diocese of Sale’s”
15. As a consequence of Diocesan Policy, Parish policy is that all staff and any volunteer in any Parish lay ministry must obtain a Working with Children Check before being able to exercise that ministry in the Parish. These ministries include Eucharist Ministers, Lectors/Readers, Collectors, Cleaners, Musicians, Choir, Children’s Liturgy, Group Coordinators of Social groups, Seniors Groups, Youth Groups and Play Groups.
16. Any contractors undertaking commercial activities in the Parish plus any persons or businesses that hire Parish facilities must also have WWWC and ensure that these are produced and recorded at the Parish Office.
17. It is essential to remember that the mere fact of holding a current WWC Check does not of itself imply that a person is suitable to care for children. Holding a WWC Check simply indicates (in general terms) that the holder has neither been convicted of certain sexual, violent or drug related offences, nor has charges for such offences pending. It does not guarantee or imply that a person has the skills or personal attributes of a responsible carer. Clergy, Parish staff, volunteers and parents must maintain constant vigilance in assessing the suitability of all persons (both those with, and those without, a WWC Check) for taking children into their care. Clergy, Parish staff, volunteers and parents should not discount the value of their instincts or observations.

Annual Parish Audit

18. It is a requirement of the Diocese of Sale that all Parishes conduct an audit of processes and practices on an annual basis. Rather than obtaining a negative compliance comment after the occurrence on an annual basis, the Parish intends to conduct a quarterly cyclic audit so that any remedial action can be undertaken immediately.
19. The Audit should in part ensure that:
 - a) All whose names have appeared in the weekly Parish Bulletin have current WWCC.
 - b) Processes in place to record newly gained WWCC and to remove those whose WWCC had expired.
 - c) Action was taken to follow-up existing Parishioners whose WWCC was due to expire.

- d) Adequate training and workshops were planned or conducted to meet Parish Policy.
- e) Any allegations of inappropriate behaviour were handled in accordance with Parish and Diocesan Policies
- f) A child safety risk assessment of Parish facilities and programs has been conducted.