



*Our Lady of the Way Church, Kingsbury*  
*Child Safety Policy*

# **Child Safety Policy**

*Date of policy: December 2016*



## ***Our Lady of the Way Church, Kingsbury***

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#### **1. Introduction**

At Our Lady of the Way, we hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of our church. Our commitment is drawn from the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ – love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel.

The Church's social doctrine constantly points out the need to respect the dignity of children. 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).

#### **2. Purpose of the Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment of Our Lady of the Way to the care, safety and wellbeing of all children in our parish. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep children safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our parish environment, onsite, online and in other locations used by the parish.

This policy applies to parish personnel, including parish employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy.

#### **3. Principles**

The Catholic Church has a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe (CAM Commitment Statement to Child Safety).

The following principles underpin our commitment to child safety at Our Lady of the Way Church:

- Our parish has zero tolerance of child abuse.
- All children are entitled to, as a fundamental right, safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.



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- Our parish works in partnership with families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and protection.
- All adults in our parish, including staff, clergy, volunteers, parishioners, contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people, to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- The policies, guidelines and codes of conduct for the care, wellbeing and protection of all children are based on honest, respectful and trusting relationships between adults, children and young people.
- All persons involved in situations where harm is suspected or disclosed must be treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect.
- Staff, clergy, volunteers, parents, parishioners including children and contractors should be free to raise concerns about child safety, knowing these will be taken seriously by the parish leadership.
- 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.

#### **4. Definitions**

**Child:** A person below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

**Child abuse:** includes

- (a) any act committed against a child involving:
  - (i) a sexual offence
  - (ii) an offence under section 49B(2) of the **Crimes Act 1958** (grooming)
- (b) the infliction, on a child, of:
  - (i) physical violence
  - (ii) serious emotional or psychological harm
- (c) serious neglect of a child

**Child safety** encompasses matters related to protecting all children from child abuse, managing the risk of child abuse, providing support to a child at risk of child abuse, and responding to incidents or allegations of child abuse.



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**Child neglect:** The failure by a parent or caregiver to provide a child (where they are in a position to do so) with the conditions that are culturally accepted as being essential for their physical and emotional development and wellbeing.

**Child physical abuse:** Generally, child physical abuse refers to the non-accidental use of physical force against a child that results in harm to the child. Physically abusive behaviours include shoving, hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, punching, kicking, biting, burning, strangling and poisoning. The fabrication or induction of an illness by a parent or carer (previously known as Munchausen syndrome by proxy) is also considered physically abusive behaviour.

**Child protection:** Statutory services designed to protect children who are at risk of serious harm.

**Child sexual abuse:** Any sexual activity between a child under the age of consent (16) and an adult or older person (i.e. a person five or more years older than the victim) is child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse can also be:

- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult in a position of power or authority over them (e.g. a teacher); the age of consent laws do not apply in such instances due to the strong imbalance of power that exists between young people and authority figures, as well as the breaching of both personal and public trust that occurs when professional boundaries are violated
- any sexual behaviour between a child and an adult family member, regardless of issues of consent, equality or coercion
- sexual activity between peers that is non-consensual or involves the use of power or coercion
- non-consensual sexual activity between minors (e.g. a 14-year old and an 11-year old), or any sexual behaviour between a child and another child or adolescent who, due to their age or stage of development, is in a position of power, trust or responsibility over the victim. Sexual activity between adolescents at a similar developmental level is not intended to be included in this definition of "Child sexual abuse".

**Mandatory Reporting:** The legal requirement to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect is known as mandatory reporting. Mandated persons include teachers, nurses, police, psychologists, psychiatrists and medical practitioners.

**Reasonable Belief:** When an adult is concerned about the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person, they must assess that concern to determine if a report should be made to the relevant agency.



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This process of considering all relevant information and observations is known as forming a 'reasonable belief'. A 'reasonable belief' or a 'belief on reasonable grounds' is not the same as having proof but is more than mere rumour or speculation. A 'reasonable belief' is formed if a reasonable person in the same position would have formed the belief on the same grounds.

#### **5. Policy Commitments**

All children at Our Lady of the Way parish have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first 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. There is particular attention paid 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.

#### **Our commitment to all our children**

- (a) We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in our parish.
- (b) We commit to providing all children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.
- (c) We commit to listening to all children and young people 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 young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- (e) We commit to teaching children and young people the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety and wellbeing.
- (f) We commit to seeking input and feedback from children regarding the creation of a safe parish environment.

#### **Our commitment to parents and carers**

- (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.



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- (c) We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- (d) We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of our parishioners and being sensitive to how this may impact on child safety issues.
- (e) We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

### **Our commitment to our parish employees, volunteers, contractors and clergy (called “staff” for the purpose of this policy)**

- (a) We commit to providing all Our Lady of the Way 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 child safety and young people’s protection and wellbeing. This will include annual 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 Our Lady of the Way parishioners and staff about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- (d) We commit to providing opportunities for Our Lady of the Way’s staff to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young

## **6. Responsibilities and Organisational Arrangements**

Everyone employed or volunteering at Our Lady of the Way parish has the responsibility to understand the important and specific role she/he plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children is at the forefront of all that they do and of every decision that they make.



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#### **6.1 Guide to Responsibilities of Parish Leadership**

The parish priest and the Child Safety Co-ordinator of Our Lady of the Way 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:

- creating an environment for all children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff and clergy
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration
- ensuring thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff
- ensuring that parish personnel have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matters
- providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm legislative obligations, policy and procedures in relation to child and young people's protection and wellbeing
- ensuring the parish meets the specific requirements of the Victorian Child Safe Standards

#### **6.2 Organisational Arrangements**

Our Lady of the Way's Child Safety will be managed by a Child Safety Team as follows:

- The Parish Priest – Father Terry Bergin
- Child Safety Coordinator – Pauline Thambu ([pauline.thambu@gmail.com](mailto:pauline.thambu@gmail.com))
- Child Safety Policy Adviser – Galiann Benjamin ([gailann.johnson@gmail.com](mailto:gailann.johnson@gmail.com))
- Child Safety Reporting Officer – Mr Shane Crawford ([sands.crawford@bigpond.com](mailto:sands.crawford@bigpond.com))

### **7. Child Safety and Participation**

At Our Lady of the Way parish we actively encourage all children to openly express their views and feel comfortable about giving voice to the things that are important to them. We discuss with our children what they can do if they feel unsafe and enable them to understand, identify, discuss and report on child safety. We listen to and act on any concerns children or their parents or carers, raise with us.



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#### **8. Reporting and Responding**

Our parish records any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Child Safety Code of Conduct, and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements. Our parish complies with legal obligations that relate to managing the risk of child abuse under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic.), the *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) Our parish's **Child Protection – Reporting Policy**, sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child at our parish is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed, and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report.

To discuss any concerns relating to child safety, please contact any member of the Child Safety Team.

#### **9. Related Policies and Government Requirements**

Our Lady of the Way parish will adhere to the policies of the Catholic Archdiocese and the State of Victoria:

- Working with Children check Protocols
- Child Protection – Reporting Obligations
- National Police Record Check Policy
- Code of Conduct for caring for children “May our children flourish”
- Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, *Commitment Statement to Child Safety*
- State of Victoria 2016, *Child Safe Standards*
- *Crimes Act 1958* (Vic.) – Three new criminal offences have been introduced under this Act.
- Victorian Government Department of Justice 2016, *Betrayal of Trust Implementation*
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#### **10. Review of this Child Safety Policy**

At Our Lady of the Way parish we are committed to continuous improvement of our child safety systems and practices. We intend this policy to be a dynamic document that will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is working in practice and updated to accommodate changes in legislation or circumstance.



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We will maintain a history of updates to the policy.

#### **History of Updates to Policy**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Comment (e.g. major review, minor review)</b>