Anglican Diocese of
BENDIGO

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Version: 1.1	*Date of Issue:* August 2015
Contact: Registrar	*Review Date:* August 2025

Introduction

Electronic communication is in prevalent use in the community especially amongst adolescents. However, electronic communication has the potential to be misused to test and over step relational boundaries. Any communication with children or adolescents should have the parental or guardian consent and records should be maintained.

Therefore, electronic communication guidelines are in place for all church leaders/workers, Parish members and volunteers who work with children, adolescents and vulnerable people.

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 clergy, an adult church worker or another adult of time, location and duration of 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 time, location, duration and circumstances of any meeting where it is impracticable to follow these guidelines

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 need to communicate 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 Communications Guidelines
- Parental permission must be sought before a church worker communicates to a child/young person via electronic communication (use Parental/Guardian permission form). Generally, permission should be obtained upon registration for a program or event.

- Church workers must not knowingly transmit, retrieve or store (except when the information is evidence, which must be retained) any communication that is:
  - racist, discriminatory or harassing;
  - derogatory to any individual or group
  - obscene, sexually explicit or pornographic;
  - defamatory or threatening;
  - breach an individual's right to privacy
  - in violation of any licence governing the use of software;
- For any purpose that is illegal or contrary to the Church Codes of Practice-Joys & Responsibilities and Faithfulness in Service.
- Church workers (leaders) must not send any electronic communication that attempts to hide the identity of the sender or represent the sender as someone else.
- Church workers (leaders) should be aware of the needs of all children/young people, especially those with disability, those who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, those who identify as LGBTQI , those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, those experiencing family breakdown or in out of home care and others who may be more vulnerable and susceptible to online harms.

2. Telephone Communications

- When calling a child/young person call to the home phone if possible, or call the mobile of the parent/guardian.

- Whenever possible ensure that the parents/guardians are aware of any phone call, by seeking their approval before making contact with the child/young person.

- Mobile phone use should be kept to a minimum and never be used for long calls, especially for pastoral care.

3. Email Communication

- Emails should generally be restricted to purpose-only emails e.g. "meet at this place "or general conversations e.g. "how was the excursion today?" Pastoral care/deeper conversations regarding more personal issues should be face to face and appropriate records maintained

  All emails to children/young people should have a church email address copied into them. Note: When copying (cc) the parish email address consider the most appropriate email address. An email address could be set-up for this specific purpose and be monitored by a church leader within the parish.

- As far as possible, save all emails to and from children/young people in an electronic folder for record keeping purposes

4. Communication via Text Messages

- Communication via text messages should generally be restricted to purpose only communication e.g. "meet at this place, at this time"

- If a longer text message conversation begins, phone the child/young person, preferably to the home phone or mobile of the parent/guardian and seek permission from the parent/guardian to speak with the child.

5. Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram etc)

- Think carefully about the reasons for "socialising" with children and adolescents on such social networking platforms

- Direct messages (inboxes/DMs/private messages) should be restricted to church purpose - only messages

- Writing messages that can be viewed by others (eg. writing a comment, tagging someone or a message that appears in the news feed) 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 where it can be viewed by others e.g.name of school, email address, home address, phone numbers, etc.

- Do not use social media platforms where a record of the communication is not retained eg Snapchat

- Parish websites and social media sites should have a moderator appointed to ensure all content is appropriate and doesn't breach laws or individual privacy.

- Inappropriate comments on parish social media sites are to be removed and follow up with the person who posted the comment.

- Parish social media sites should be as public as possible and remind others that it is a public site.

6. Internet Chat Rooms/Programs (e.g. MSN, ICQ etc)

- Church leaders/workers should not enter into a closed 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 leaders/workers should use discernment and wisdom when having a multi-person conversation. Your conversation should be above reproach.

7. Video Calls (mobile phone/internet/Zoom/FaceTime/Skype)

- Video calls should only be used when face to face contact is not possible eg. participants are geographically distant, in-person contact is not possible

- The purpose of the video call must be as part of ordinary ministry duties such as pastoral care or youth and children's ministry programs

- Two church leaders/workers must be present on the video call for the duration of the call

- Church leaders/workers should not enter into conversations of this nature with children/young people one on one. If this is necessary, a parent/guardian must also join the call.

- Children/young people should not be left on video calls unsupervised eg. ensure all participants have left the meeting before ending a Zoom call

- Where possible ensure participants are joining a video call from an open space eg. the living room of their house rather than their private bedroom

- Ensure that the parents/guardians are aware of any video call, by seeking their approval before making contact with the child/young person.

- If choosing to record the video call, inform all participants and receive their consent first

8. Photography

- Taking photos of children/young people by any person at church activities without consent, whether on a mobile phone or other device is to be discouraged. Publishing, posting or distribution of images of children/young person could present a risk to the child/young person's safety in certain circumstances.

- Any photos of youth/children's ministry activities should be taken by someone appointed by the Minister or ministry coordinator and with parental consent.

- Do not photograph any child/young person who has asked not to be photographed.

- Photography should focus on the activity or small groups rather than individuals.

- Do not identify in writing the person/s in the photograph without consent. Generally, identification of children should be limited to first name only.

- All children/young people must be appropriately dressed when photographed.

- Never post photos of children/young people using applications such as Snapchat, Instagram etc.

- Before posting or publishing any photos of children/young person, careful consideration should be given to the purpose/need, appropriateness and whether the church has consent

- 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.

- Discourage children/young people from taking photos of church workers and leaders. Photos should only be permitted in the context of a church related activity.

9. Online Safety

It is important that everyone has the right to be safe online and free from harm. Online safety issues should not prevent parishes and churches from utilising the benefits of being online.

The Australian Government has introduced the Online Safety Act 2021, along with the eSafety Commissioner, to protect all Australians online.

Online safety issues can include:
- Adult cyber abuse
- Peer to peer abuse

Anglican Diocese of
BENDIGO

- Grooming
- Cyber bullying
- Image-based abuse
- Illegal and restricted content
- Abuse based on cultural or religious beliefs
- Abuse based on sexuality
- Abuse based on disability

If someone in our church is experiencing online safety issues:
- Consider if it could be misconduct of a church worker. If so call Kooyoora.
- If you become aware of child abuse material you must not copy or share this information. This can sometimes inadvertently occur when reporting however it can be a crime of producing and transmitting child abuse material.
- A person experiencing serious online abuse or cyber bullying must first report the material to the service provider or platform
- If the service provider doesn't remove the material, a report can be made directly to eSafety.gov.au
- Image based abuse and illegal or restricted content can be reported to eSafety straight away

eSafety works with online platforms to remove the harmful content. This can include social media companies, websites, messaging services, chatrooms and gaming platforms. The harmful content can include posts, comments, emails, messages, memes, images and videos.

Acknowledgement
These guidelines are an adaption of the Professional Standards Unit of the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney. We thank them for their work in this area and their willingness to share it with the wider church.

Disclaimer
This is not legal advice but rather good practice advice for holistic Safe Church ministry produced by the NCCA_SCTA Unit 2010. If you are concerned about legal issues you are advised to seek your own legal opinion.

Policy Scope
These guidelines apply to all Church leaders/workers, parish members and volunteers associated with ministry in our church. The guidelines should be read in conjunction with other Diocesan policies designed to embed Safe Church Ministry:

- Communication Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Safe Church Program & Policy
- Codes of Practice - Joys and Responsibilities
- Faithfulness in Service

Policy Responsibility

Bishop in Council is responsible for the implementation and review of these guidelines.

Approved by Bishop in Council: August 2015

Amended by Bishop in Council: May 2022

Policy History	
Policy created	August 2015
Policy reviewed	May 2022
Policy amended	May 2022