

PARISH of St. THOMAS MORE BELGRAVE CHILD SAFETY PRACTICES: May our children flourish

ENSURING THE SAFETY AND WELL BEING OF CHILDREN IN OUR CARE

The Victorian Government in response to the 2013 Betrayal of Trust Enquiry has mandated that all organisations that provide services to children adhere to a series of seven standards, which are aimed at promoting children's wellbeing, protecting children from abuse and effectively managing abuse allegations. An explanation of each of the standards will address the legal secular requirements and also explicate a whole of Parish approach, which together are consistent with the mission of Jesus Christ with love, justice and sanctity of each human person at the heart of the Gospel and must each be embedded in everyday Parish thinking and practice. All the standards, require compulsory legislative compliance with the principles of promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, children from culturally/and or linguistically diverse backgrounds and promotion of the safety of children with a disability. The aim is to strive to create an environment where children are safe, respected and cared for, which is a fundamental responsibility of the Church. To this end we have appointed a Parish Professional Standards Coordinator who can be contacted for assistance with any child safety issues.

1. Embedding an organisational culture of child safety through effective leadership arrangements

The aim of the St. Thomas More Belgrave Parish Community is to create a culture, which can be suitably defined, as a set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterise an institution, organisation or group. The Priest, the Parish Council and the Parish Professional Standards Coordinator, are to ensure that the Parish has the appropriate policies, procedures and culture in place to safeguard against the risk of child abuse and respond effectively if abuse is suspected or confirmed. These include such measures as fostering a culture of equality, openness and transparency in regard to implementation of child safety policies and procedures which support ongoing assessment and amelioration of risk, empowerment of children, defining of appropriate boundaries in relationships between children and adults, guidance on reporting of any inappropriate conduct and regular written and verbal communication with parents and the wider Parish community. All of these principles, which establish a culture and require leadership, will be addressed with practical application in the compulsorily required Child Safe Policy (Appendix 1) and Code of Conduct (Appendix 2).

2. Child Safety Policy

The mandatory legislative requirements of a Child Safety Policy, for all organisations that include children, together with the specific child safety requirements of the Parish are provided in the Child Safety Policy: May our children flourish-Code of Conduct for Caring for Children, (Appendix1).

3. Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct also has mandatory legislative requirements and is accompanied by Parish specific obligations and is contained in the Code of Conduct (Appendix 2). This code of conduct clearly states the expectations we have of all adults in their dealings with our children. An individual copy is available from our Parish Professional Standards Coordinator.

4. Reducing the risk of child abuse

The following mandatory and Parish specific procedures, which in essence, are a response to the vulnerable and are part of the living gospel, are required to be in place to reduce the risk of child abuse:

- i) a rigorous process, is to be adopted, where appropriate, in the engagement of all the priests, employees and volunteers involved in child-connected work, including as required legally or by the protocols of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, police checks, working with children checks and research into a person's history of and motives for working with children
- ii) an annual audit of the currency of Working with Children Checks of all our clergy, employees and volunteers who assist in the Parish
- iii) all personnel working with children are to be carefully instructed regarding the contents of the Parish of St. Thomas More Belgrave Child Safety Policy and Code of Conduct and also fully aware of their reporting of child abuse obligations
- iv) the formation of a committee, which includes a staff member, some members of the Parish Council, parents and carers, to identify and manage risk, thereby promoting responsibility, accountability, compassion and support to the Parish community
- v) periodic performance reviews of our physical environment, staff and volunteers are to be undertaken so as to ensure risk management strategies for child safety can be changed as needed
- vi) the undertaking by our clergy and the Parish Professional Standards Coordinator of annual training in child safety issues

5. Reporting of child abuse

Victorian Legislation requires mandatory reporting of child abuse, (as defined in the Victorian state legislation and set out in the Parish of St. Thomas More Belgrave Child Safety Policy), by medical practitioners, nurses, teachers, principals and police and voluntary reporting by any person who has a significant concern for the wellbeing of a child. The legislation also protects those persons who make reports, "in good faith." Reporting abuse applies to allegations or disclosures made by or in relation to a child, staff, visitors or anyone connected to the Parish. The following are the procedures to be adopted, (aiming always to minimise the risks to the child), by members of the community of

the Parish of St. Thomas More Belgrave in reporting abuse, by ensuring the following methods are adhered to, as well as the protocols of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, when applicable. (Appendix3):

- i) If the risk to the child is immediate, any member of the Parish community must promptly contact the police
- ii) immediately contact the Parish office and if unattended, a member of the committee appointed to respond to child abuse whomsoever must initiate all reporting procedures
- iii) whilst obtaining details of the allegation, providing support to the child and their family, confirming with them the rights of the child and offering counselling
- iv) ensure that the alleged offender is accorded procedural fairness but is immediately suspended from any contact with children within the Parish
- v) consult with police to determine if it is appropriate to undertake an immediate internal investigation
- vi) work concurrently with the police and child protection agencies, (if required), while conducting an internal investigation
- vii) maintain an accurate and safe kept child abuse report
- viii) regularly monitor overall compliance with reporting procedures, including provision of alternate procedures, particularly when an incident has occurred
- ix) recognise that fulfilling the roles and responsibilities in the procedures does not displace or discharge any other obligations that arise if a person reasonably believes a child is at risk.

6. Identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse

This legislative standard is aimed at each sector of the Parish being cognisant, in their particular Parish environment, of any risks of child abuse and formulating the means by which those risks can be reduced or removed. The specific circumstances and activities of each Mass centre require a separate response. An addendum is provided for the various Parish centres to identify on an ongoing basis, any risk of child abuse and their required means of reducing or removing that risk. Overall the Parish community must meet this standard by:

- i) ensuring children know who they can go to with their concerns
- ii) children always being accompanied in the Parish grounds by a parent or teacher, staff member or volunteer all of whom, as suitable persons have signed the Code of Conduct and are aware of these standards and the Child Safety Policy
- iii) mitigating the risk of child abuse, by encouragement to address signs of early awareness of abuse
- iv) the Parish Council regularly discussing potential child abuse risks and the means of their reduction or removal
- v) recognising the extra risk requirements, especially language barriers of Aboriginal children, children from culturally diverse backgrounds and children with a disability
- vi) recruitment of all staff and volunteers, including contractors who are to be carefully scrutinised as being committed to child safety and whose job description refers to risk management

7. Empowerment of children

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 where they are safe and feel safe. The United Nations Rights of the Child and Victorian legislation expound children's rights and these rights and the Catholic Church's responsibilities are to be elaborated on in Parish practices by:

- i) children being made aware of inappropriate adult behaviour, by being provided with accessible and user-friendly to children, information about the nature of child abuse
- ii) assisting children to understand their rights to feel safe and to making decisions about their body and their privacy
- iii) encouraging children to feel confident enough to come forward with concerns regarding adult behaviour
- iv) making children aware to whom at the Parish they need to report inappropriate adult behaviour and that it is safe to do so
- v) listening to children, by creating opportunities for children to be involved in policy planning and decision making regarding child safety
- vi) referring to children's rights in homilies and the Parish Newsletter
- vii) obtaining children's feedback about child protection policies and whether they feel safe to raise concerns

APPENDIX 1

CHILD SAFETY POLICY: May our children flourish-Code of Conduct for Caring for Children

The Parish of St. Thomas More Belgrave: holds the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people as a central and fundamental responsibility of our church. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent in the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and sanctity of all human persons at the heart of the gospel.

Our Parish:

- i) At all times, promotes the protection of children, within its community from abuse and neglect. All children, regardless of their gender, race religious beliefs, age, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, are to have equal rights to protection from abuse. Child abuse is referred to by statute as any act committed against a child involving a sexual offence, grooming of a child, the infliction on a child of physical violence, serious emotional or psychological harm or serious neglect of a child¹

¹ Child sexual abuse is defined under Victorian law as, "any sexual activity between a child under the age of consent, (16 years) and an adult older person that is a person two or more years older than the victim.

- ii) Has zero tolerance for child abuse. The Priest, Parish Council, staff and volunteers have a shared responsibility for the protection of the children within our care and reporting information about suspected child abuse and all allegations and safety concerns are to be treated seriously and are to be reported in line with our legal obligations, our moral obligations and our Church policies
- iii) Supports and respects all children, staff and volunteers and is committed to the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, and those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and provides a safe environment for children with a disability
- iv) Ensures that the adult community is aware of their obligations to report suspected child abuse and that appropriate confidentiality arrangements are in place
- v) Considers the opinions of children and uses their opinions to develop child protection policies
- vi) Engages openly with children's families, carers and the Parish community about keeping children safe from harm
- vii) Makes available reporting of abuse contact information on our website, notice boards and newsletters, to facilitate assisting anyone who believes a child is in risk of abuse and If the risk is immediate, contact is to be made to OOO
- viii) Complies with all Victorian legislative requirements that relate to the risk management of child abuse
- ix) Undertakes regular reviews, of our child safety policies and procedures, including the Code of Conduct to constantly improve our systems of protecting children from abuse
- x) Provides a copy, of the Child Safety Policy document, to all staff and volunteers, including a copy to children, in child friendly design and language

APPENDIX 2

CODE OF CONDUCT

All personnel of the Parish of St Thomas More Belgrave are required to observe child safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children and are responsible for supporting the safety, participation, wellbeing and empowerment of children by:

- i) Upholding the Parish of St. Thomas More Belgrave commitment to child safety at all times
- ii) taking all reasonable steps to protect children from abuse, particularly through active supervision
- iii) treating everyone with respect specially following the gospel values in all aspects of life
- iv) listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child has been abused and/or are worried about their safety or the safety of another, such as instances of bullying or cyber bullying

- v) promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children, children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and children with a disability by having a zero tolerance for all forms of discrimination
- vi) ensuring all persons who attend any weekday morning Mass at St. Pauls Monbulk, during school terms, sign an attendance book
- vii) reporting any child safety concerns to the Priest and/or Parish Councillor at your Mass Centre
- viii) reporting any allegations of child abuse to the Priest and/or Parish Councillor at your Mass centre and ensuring any allegation is mandatorily reported to the police or child protection
- ix) ensuring as quickly as possible, if an allegation of child abuse is made, that the child is safe and provided with support
- x) respecting the right to privacy where personal information is held regarding staff, children and families, by ethical storage of incident reports

Staff and volunteers must not:

- I) develop any “special relationships,” with children that could be seen as favouritism
- II) exhibit behaviours with children which may be construed as unnecessarily physical
- III) put children at risk of abuse, by ensuring children are not left alone with an adult, except where they can be seen and heard by another adult
- IV) do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves, such as toileting or changing clothes
- V) use inappropriate language in the presence of children
- VI) express personal views on cultures, race or sexuality in the presence of children
- VII) have any contact including any online contact with a child outside of our Parish community without the knowledge and consent of the child’s family
- VIII) work with children under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- IX) ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse

By observing these standards you acknowledge your responsibility to immediately report any breach of this code to the Priest and/or Parish Councillor at your Mass Centre.

I agree to adhere to this Code of Conduct:

Name:

Signature:

Date:

ADDENDUM

ALL MASS CENTRES:

The only persons permitted to attend Children's Liturgy at all of the Mass Centres are a Children's Liturgy Co-Ordinator, Children's Liturgy Provider, (all of whom are required to have current Working with Children Checks, details of which have been recorded at the Parish Office), or a parent or a guardian, (recognised and acknowledged by the Children's Liturgy Co-Ordinator) of children attending Children's Liturgy. If an unauthorised person is asked to leave and doesn't comply, the Children's Liturgy Co-Ordinator can call on another Parishioner to intervene and failing that intervention, call the police.

Priests, Altar Servers and any adults accessing the Sacristy must sign an attendance book.

BELGRAVE & MONBULK MASS CENTRES:

All persons attending Mass at the Belgrave and Monbulk Mass Centres on school days, or attending to Church cleaning and flower arranging duties on school days, are to comply with the requirements of the relevant school including signing in on the school system.

MONBULK MASS CENTRE:

Any adult person attending Children's Liturgy at the Monbulk Mass Centre, is required to sign a Children's Liturgy attendance book.

The Monbulk sacristy lavatory is only to be used by those persons signed into the sacristy.