



The Joys and Responsibilities of being a Christian in this Parish

Code of Practice for Congregations

*Being a disciple of Christ is a joy and a responsibility.
Becoming truly human will engage us all our days.
Our transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit.*

Document adopted February 2011

Policy Status

This document was adopted by the Council of the Diocese in February 2011 and comes into operation immediately.

Copies can be obtained from the Diocesan Registry:

Phone: 03 5443 4711

Email: reception@bendigoanglican.org.au

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Please note:

This policy only applies in parishes, congregations and churches in the Diocese of Bendigo.

The Joys and Responsibilities of being a Christian in this Parish

(Code of Practice for Congregations)

This document explores some of the practices which will encourage our growth in faith, as well as ways by which we might deal with the challenges of being part of a Christian community.

Christian communities frequently operate on the understanding that the Christian faith determines what they do. Many think, therefore, that there is no need to spell this out. However, each person's theology (*what we understand about God*), each person's interpretation of the Scriptures, and each person's experience of the Church and life may vary considerably.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are central to the Christian faith. Yet Christian communities are often poorly equipped to deal with conflict, and they can struggle to overcome differences. People may walk away from a particular church, or the Church as a whole, because of unresolved grief and grievances. At the other end of the spectrum, church members can tolerate behaviour that is entirely unacceptable, thinking that accepting it is what love demands.

Where do we start?

There is no fixed set of rules to answer every occasion. We have to think carefully and prayerfully. We could however begin with the Two Great Commandments:

Jesus answered a scribe, "The first commandment is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12: 29-31)

Even citing this saying of Jesus does not resolve all the questions, however. As noted above, one interpretation of love might lead one person to tolerate abuse from another. For this reason, the Parish Council has resolved to make explicit what behaviour is acceptable, and how behaviour that falls outside some general principles might be dealt with.

Enriching our life in Christ

But first, here are some practices which will strengthen us as Christians, and enrich our life of faith.

Prayer and the worship of God:

- Each member (i.e. living organ of the Body of Christ, not of a 'church club') is encouraged to set aside time daily for prayer and the study of the Scriptures, and to commit themselves to receiving the sacraments of the Church.
- Each member is encouraged to seek out the counsel of their parish priest, or another suitable person of their choosing, to deepen and enrich their practice of prayer, and to reflect upon the way their relationship with God and their understanding of the Scriptures influences their life.
- Each member is encouraged to set aside time for nurturing significant relationships, and for their service of others.
- Each member is encouraged to share their faith in Christ with others, when appropriate, with gentleness and sensitivity.

Personal regard for others:

- Each member will treat each other member with respect and dignity, as befits the people of God.
- Each member is regarded as an equal before God, irrespective of abilities, gender, race, age or financial commitment.
- Each member will presume goodwill as the basis for the action of the other, until proved otherwise.

Communal life:

- Each member will seek the common good and the health of the whole community of faith, not just their own interests and agendas.
- Each member will respect the confidences of others and refrain from speculation and gossip about them.
- Each member is encouraged to be committed first to the worship and love of God, and then to the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church, and to the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ.
- Each member is encouraged to discern, with the Church, the gifts that God has given them through God's Spirit, and to use them to the glory of God and the benefit of all people.
- Each member is encouraged to think about sacrificial giving, and to act according to their means and prayerful insights.
- Each member is encouraged to be thoughtful about his or her physical interactions with one another. All members are encouraged to take note of the effect of their behaviour on others.

Long standing friends may enjoy a degree of intimacy which both find acceptable. Care should always be taken about this. However, the whole community may want to consider the effect of effusive greetings between some, from which new members are almost entirely excluded.

Please note: Clergy and office bearers are expected to behave properly and professionally. A failure to do so can become the subject of a formal complaint: see the enclosed leaflet for the means of making a complaint.

Guarding against bullying

- Each member is here in a voluntary capacity, drawn by the love of God. There is no place for the use of coercion. An inability to do some task within the Church (or outside it) will not be in itself be an occasion for guilt. *A different response is required when my conscience tells me that I have committed a sin of omission.*
- Each member is encouraged to respect differing theological perspectives, working at all times for understanding, and recognising that no individual, or even the Church, holds all the truth about God.
- Every member is encouraged to respect different approaches to worship and acts of personal piety. For example, whether someone fasts or not, or genuflects or not, is not an indicator of faith, but merely an aid to worship.
- Each member is entitled to express his or her opinion about the life and direction of the parish. Each member is entitled to disagree with the decisions of Parish Council. It is sufficient to state the points of difference and their reason(s).

Threats to leave, to withdraw services or financial support, however expressed, will not be given any weight in the review of decisions, because these are a form of bullying.

- Every member is expected to provide the same courtesies as outlined above to members of the clergy.

Reconciliation

- Each member is encouraged to seek the forgiveness of others, when he or she is aware that he or she has committed an offence towards another.
- Each member who has been offended by the actions or words of another is encouraged to seek reconciliation and to offer forgiveness, recognising that each one of us falls short of the glory of God and is in need of God's grace.

Dealing with unacceptable behaviour

When unacceptable behaviour occurs – for example, bullying, threatening behaviour, the spread of gossip founded or unfounded, inappropriate expressions of anger, sexual harassment – every attempt will be made to resolve the matter in order that the member or members may remain part of the Body of Christ.

As far as possible, and ensuring that any legal, professional or ethical requirements have been met, such matters will remain **confidential**. The nature of what has occurred will determine the appropriate steps:

Disagreements between parishioners

- If two people have had a disagreement, they should endeavour to resolve this between themselves as soon as possible.
- They could enlist the aid of a third person of their choosing: the parish priest, or another parishioner whom they both trust and feel is competent to assist.
- If resolution is not reached, then professional assistance could be sought. This would be approved by the Parish Council, and the costs agreed to by them prior to any action being taken.

Disagreements with the Parish Council

- If a person is dissatisfied with a decision of the Parish Council, in the first instance they can speak with any member of the Council to express their views. Concerns may also be expressed in writing. The Council should reply to the concerns.
- If the concern is about the failure of due process being followed, this concern can be taken to the Bishop for investigation.

Dereliction of duty by the priest

- In the first instance, this should be reported to the Churchwardens, as they have the power to act regarding this under the *Parish Administration Act*. If necessary, they will then report to the Bishop.

Matters of bullying or harassment

- If the bullying is by another parishioner, the person who has been bullied or harassed could seek the aid of the parish priest or another parishioner to resolve this matter. Professional assistance could also be sought with the agreement of the Parish Council, as noted above.
- If the bullying is by the parish priest or an office holder, the person has the right to contact the Director of Professional Standards and to make a formal complaint. This would then be dealt with by the Director (or his or her delegate).
- If a cleric is being bullied by a member of the parish, s/he may seek the support and help of the Churchwardens, or if necessary, the Bishop.

If a cleric is being bullied by the Bishop or another cleric, this may be referred to the Director of Professional Standards.

- If the cleric is a victim of sexual abuse by a parishioner, this should be referred to the Bishop. If a crime has been committed, the matter must be referred to the police for action.

If the bullying is by another cleric, this may be referred to the Director of Professional Standards.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse should be referred to the Director of Professional Standards for action. If a crime has been committed, the matter must also be referred to the police for action.

Contact number for the Director of Professional Standards: **1800 135 246**

Scripture passages from which these Guidelines are drawn

Genesis 1:27 – we are all, male and female, made in the image of God

Matthew 5:43-45; 6:9-16, 19-21 – the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 18:15-20 – resolving differences, praying together

Matthew 28:18-20 – the Great Commission

Mark 12:29-31 – the Two Great Commandments

Luke 15:11-32 – the parable of the lost sons and the waiting father

John 15:12-17 – the New Commandment

Romans 5:1-11 – God's love poured into our hearts through the Spirit

1 Corinthians 1:10; 8:1-13; 11:23-26; 12:4-7,12-13; 13:4-6 – Paul teaches about church divisions, food, Holy Communion, gifts of the Spirit, and love

Galatians 5:19-6.6 – the fruit of the Spirit, and our mutual responsibilities

James 3:1-12 – the power of the tongue

James 5:13-16 – prayer and anointing for the sick.



For further information or enquiries:

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