

# St Mark's Anti-Bullying Policy

## **Transformed by Grace to Love One Another**

*“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:31–32)*

At St Mark's, we are a community transformed by grace to love one another. As those united in Christ, we are called to reflect His kindness, compassion, and forgiveness in all our interactions—whether in person, online, or in ministry.

Following the example of Jesus:

- We speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), with humility and for the other's good.
- We show patience, gentleness, and a readiness to forgive (Colossians 3:12–13).
- We assume the best of others, slow to judge and quick to reconcile (James 1:19–20).
- We take responsibility for our own actions (Galatians 6:4–5).
- We practice gratitude, self-examination, and mutual encouragement (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Recognising that *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23), we acknowledge that bullying can occur even within the church, among staff, volunteers, or members. Such behaviour damages individuals and undermines the unity we are called to display. As a church, we are committed to cultivating a culture of safety, grace, and mutual respect.

Bullying can occur in any direction—between ministers, staff, and congregation members. As the leadership team of St Mark's, we have a Christian and legal responsibility to ensure a safe, respectful environment, especially for those whose workplace is the church. Those in leadership roles must be mindful of how their words and actions may be perceived, given their influence. While bullying is never acceptable, respectful disagreement, correction, and robust discussion are essential and should be welcomed.

This policy sets out how we define bullying, how we respond to it, and the steps we take to prevent it—so that all who belong to or work in our church can flourish in safety and grace.

## Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- All members of the St Mark's community, including staff, volunteers, parishioners, and ministry leaders;

- All settings and relationships connected to St Mark's, including church property, digital platforms, ministry events, and off-site interactions stemming from church involvement.

It should be read alongside other relevant policies, including those relating to safe ministry, staff conduct, domestic and family violence (DFV), and conflict resolution.

## Understanding Bullying

In line with the **Faithfulness in Service** Code of Conduct, bullying is defined as: **behaviour directed at a person or persons that:**

- is **repeated**;
- is **unreasonable** (as judged by a reasonable person considering the context), including victimising, humiliating, intimidating, or threatening behaviour; and
- creates a **risk to a person's health and safety**.

Bullying **may include** (but is not limited to):

- Derogatory, belittling or mocking comments or jokes about someone's appearance, background, lifestyle, or capabilities
- Abusive or hostile communication
- Spreading rumours or damaging a person's reputation
- Ignoring or excluding someone from relevant information or activities
- Undermining someone's performance or minimising their concerns
- Inappropriate or threatening physical contact
- Invading personal space or tampering with personal property
- Playing pranks or engaging in teasing
- Sharing or displaying offensive written or visual material

**Note:** The intention behind the behaviour is not determinative; harm may occur regardless of intent.

Bullying **does not include** lawful conduct of clergy or church workers carried out in a reasonable manner, such as:

- disagreeing with or criticising someone's belief or opinions or actions in an honest and respectful way;
- giving information about inappropriate behaviour in an objective way to the person or persons concerned and to any other person with a proper reason for having that information;
- setting reasonable performance goals, standards or deadlines;
- giving information about unsatisfactory performance in an honest and constructive way;
- taking legitimate disciplinary action.

## Principles for Responding to Concerns

1. **All complaints are taken seriously.**  
Allegations will be reviewed through a fact-finding process to clarify what occurred.
2. **All parties are treated with dignity.**  
This includes the complainant, respondent, and any witnesses, with an expectation of confidentiality to protect both individuals and the unity of the church.
3. **Reconciliation is encouraged where possible.**  
Early, informal resolution is preferred. A neutral third-party mediator may be used where appropriate.
4. **Formal processes are available.**  
If informal resolution is not possible, a formal complaint process may be initiated.

## Who to Speak To

- **Parishioner about another parishioner:** Rector or Warden
- **Parishioner about a staff member:** Rector or Warden
  - If the concern is about the **Rector**, contact the **Bishop of South Sydney**
- **Staff member about a parishioner:** Rector or Warden

**Serious misconduct** may be reported directly to the **Bishop** or the **Professional Standards Unit (PSU)**.

All concerns will be acknowledged and responded to appropriately. Those raising concerns will be kept informed about any actions taken, while respecting confidentiality obligations.

## What Happens After a Complaint Is Received

Upon receiving a complaint, the leadership team will determine the most appropriate course of action, which may include:

- A local fact-finding process
- Mediation or facilitated conversation
- Informal coaching, supervision, or support
- Referral to the **Bishop of South Sydney** or **Professional Standards Unit (PSU)** for more serious issues

In some instances, the Bishop may request an initial fact-finding process to guide appropriate next steps.

## Fact-Finding Process

Where a fact-finding process is needed, it may involve:

1. Interviewing the complainant and recording a formal statement

2. Speaking with relevant witnesses
3. Interviewing the respondent and obtaining their perspective
4. Reviewing any documentation or supporting information
5. Assessing the facts and determining appropriate responses, which may include referral, coaching, mediation, or disciplinary action

Even following a formal process, **mediation** may still be recommended to foster relational healing.

## Follow-Up and Support

After resolution:

- The **Rector** (or Bishop, if involved) will follow up with those involved
- Pastoral care and support will be offered
- Ongoing attention will be paid to the health of relationships and the restoration of community trust

## Commitment to Continuous Improvement

St Mark's is committed to:

- Regularly reviewing and refining this policy
- Providing ongoing training for leaders, staff, and volunteers
- Gathering feedback and insights from the community
- Ensuring alignment with best practices in safe ministry and anti-bullying approaches

## Closing Affirmation

In all things, we seek to be a community where grace transforms behaviour, and where love is the norm in our words, actions, and relationships.

*"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."* — Colossians 3:14

## Related Policies and Contacts

- [Faithfulness in Service Code of Conduct](#)
- [Safe Ministry Policy](#)
- [Domestic & Family Violence Support Policy](#)
- Professional Standards Unit: 02 9265 1555
- Bishop of South Sydney: Bishop Michael Stead – 02 9265 1555

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