

Anti-Bullying at St Mark's

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

Transformed by Grace

Under God, we at St Mark's aspire to be transformed by grace to love one another. And so, we seek to cultivate the fruit of the spirit in our interactions with one another. Our unity is to be an example to the world. But living out this unity will take significant effort. As such, after the example of Jesus himself:

- We speak the truth in love - directly, but for the other's benefit
- We make charitable assumptions about others, and are slow to condemn
- We are patient and forgiving
- We approach one another with gentleness
- We are quick to apologise, and slow to accuse
- We readily look to the specks in our own eyes
- We take responsibility for our own actions
- We are aware of our own tendency to justify our own actions
- We make a conscious effort to thank and praise others
- We seek reconciliation

Sadly, bullying occurs in churches as it does in other communities and workplaces. This is tragic, but not surprising. Our doctrine of sin should prepare us for it - not so that we accept it with resignation, but so that we can act to prevent it.

There has been a recent emphasis in the public discussion on instances where rectors have bullied their staff. However, bullying can affect any number of relationships in church life. Congregation members may be bullied by ministers. Bullying may occur from staff member to staff member. Bullying may be carried out by congregation members against ministry staff. Congregation members may bully one another.

The wardens, parish council, and the rector together have a responsibility not only not to be bullies themselves, but also to ensure that we do not ignore bullying in our midst. **In**

particular, that applies in regards to those for whom church is their workplace. We have a legal and Christian obligation to be a safe place to work. As the leadership team of St Mark's, we have a responsibility to be clear about unacceptable behaviour.

Intensifying/Aggravating Factors

While I do not think that bullying is pervasive at St Mark's, there are a number of underlying issues that make bullying more likely:

- We are currently experiencing conditions of heightened stress and anxiety for many people, owing to COVID19;
- People may feel that they cannot give honest and direct constructive feedback to the leadership of our church;
- Our local subculture is committed to high standards, as we are;
- People gather in church from a mix of different professions and backgrounds which may have different cultures of feedback;
- A church is a mix of people where volunteers and paid workers need to work side by side, with very different expectations and perceptions;
- There is sometimes a lack of clarity about roles (which is understandable in a small organisation).

We all need to be aware of ways in which **our power over others** may make us unaware of the way in which our words and actions are perceived. Ministry staff, wardens, and parish councillors exercise authority and influence over others. Sometimes these roles overlap in complicated ways.

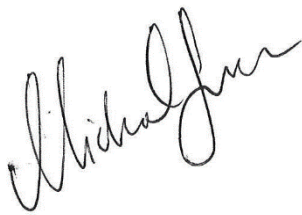
The description of bullying above outlines the kind of behaviours that are unacceptable amongst us. It must be emphasised that strong expressions of opinion, disagreement, correction, and direction are not bullying. We should not lose our ability to disagree robustly for the greater good. These are to be encouraged and warmly welcomed.

A Way Forward

What actions do we need to take?

- We should model 'speaking the truth in love' to one another and to others, seeking to speak with graciousness and gentleness;
- We should repent, where necessary, collectively and individually, and seek God's mercy;

- We should encourage appropriate channels of critical feedback on ministry staff performance. In particular, the rector should be conducting annual '360' performance reviews. Job descriptions should be clarified and agreed.
- The Parish Council should invite each ministry staff member to visit its meetings at least once a year for an informal discussion and prayer (not as an evaluation exercise but as an exercise in familiarity with the staff member's role and experience).
- The rector should likewise be subject to a periodical 360 review conducted by the Wardens (who may delegate this to a trusted person).



Rev Dr Michael P Jensen

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Defining Bullying

What is bullying? The Anglican Church's *Faithfulness in Service* code of conduct defines bullying in this way:

Bullying means behaviour directed to a person or persons which:

- *is repeated;*
- *is unreasonable (being behaviour that a reasonable person, having considered the circumstances, would see as unreasonable, including behaviour that is victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening); and*
- *creates a risk to a person's health and safety.*

Bullying can include:

- *making derogatory, demeaning or belittling comments or jokes about someone's appearance, lifestyle, background or capability;*

- *communicating in an abusive manner;*
- *spreading rumours or innuendo about someone or undermining in other ways their performance or reputation;*
- *dismissing or minimising someone's legitimate concerns or needs;*
- *inappropriate ignoring, or excluding someone from information or activities;*
- *touching someone threateningly or inappropriately;*
- *invading someone's personal space or interfering with their personal property;*
- *teasing someone, or playing pranks or practical jokes on someone;*
- *displaying or distributing written or visual material that degrades or offends.*
- *intention is irrelevant.*

*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.*

Raising a complaint

Principles

- Any complaint of bullying will be taken seriously but will be dealt with as an allegation until a fact finding exercise (local investigation) can take place to ascertain the facts.
- All parties to the complaint (complainant, respondent, witnesses) will be treated with respect and will be asked to maintain confidentiality - not to hide matters, but for the sake of unity.

- Parties are encouraged to meet with each other to talk about the behaviour and to seek resolution. A third party 'mediator' can be invited to be a part of this reconciliation process. The third party must be agreed to by the parties.
- Where complaints cannot be dealt with at their point, complaints can be raised in the following manner:

Who to complain to

Parishioner complaint against another Parishioner -Rector or a Warden.

Parishioner complaint against staff member -Rector or a Warden - unless the staff member referred to is the Rector in which case the complaint should be raised with the Bishop of South Sydney.

Staff member complaint against a Parishioner - Rector or a Warden.

All complaints will be actioned as appropriate and feedback provided to the complainant about the action.

Where the concerns relate to serious misconduct, they can be raised directly with the Bishop or PSU.

What steps are taken once a complaint is received

A decision will be made, in consultation with the complainant, on how best to address the concerns.

- Local fact finding exercise
 - Mediation
 - Informal coaching
- For more serious concerns, raising the matter with the Bishop of South Sydney or PSU - depending on severity of the complaint. [Often fact finding exercises are conducted at the request of the Bishop in order to identify the facts and make a clear decision on appropriate action].

Fact finding process

1. Complainant to be interviewed and a statement taken.
2. Witnesses to be interviewed and statements taken.

3. Respondent to be interviewed and a statement taken.
4. Other information as relevant to be considered
5. Decision made on facts (i.e. escalation to PSU; appropriate coaching/disciplinary outcomes)

Note, once the fact finding exercise has been completed, one of the outcomes may be a mediation between the parties, regardless of the facts to resolve any underlying conflict and restore relationships.

Follow up

Once matter is resolved, the appropriate person (Rector, Bishop) to follow up with the parties post mediation to provide support and see how the relationship is continuing.