

ST MARK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, NORTHBRIDGE

DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY



Date approved: December 2023

Date to be reviewed: 3 years after approval (December 2026)

1. Commitment

All forms of domestic abuse are wrong. Perpetrators must stop.

The primary focus of this Policy is abusive or intimidating behaviour inflicted by an adult against a current or former spouse or partner. (Abuse involving children should follow child protection procedures.) **Domestic abuse** involves a pattern of behaviour that seeks to coerce, control, intimidate, hurt or frighten a person in an intimate or family relationship. Domestic abuse may include, but is not limited to emotional, verbal, financial, psychological, spiritual, cultural, physical and sexual abuse. It can also include social isolation, stalking, image-based or technology facilitated abuse, and threats to harm other people including children, property or pets.

2. Safe Places

We are committed to safe places which:

- Recognise equality amongst people,
- Promote a culture of healthy relationships of mutual responsibility in marriages, families and congregations,
- Ensure that all people feel welcomed, respected and safe from abuse,
- Strive to follow good practice in protecting those experiencing domestic abuse,
- Refuse to condone any form of abuse, and
- Enable concerns to be raised and responded to appropriately and consistently.

3. Faithfulness in Service

We uphold *Faithfulness in Service* as our national code of conduct for clergy and church workers, specifically its affirmations that:

- Abuse of power is at the heart of many relationship problems in the Church and in the community. In essence, abuse is one person's misuse of power over another. Sometimes abuse will be a one-off event and at other times it will be a pattern of behaviour, (6.2)
- The personal behaviour and relationships of clergy and church workers have a significant impact on the Church and the community because they are a model to others (6.1), and
- You are not to abuse your spouse, children or other members of your family (6.6).

4. Serious response

We recognise that domestic abuse requires a serious response:

- All forms of domestic abuse cause damage to the victim and are wrong,
- Domestic abuse can occur in all communities, including churches,
- Domestic abuse, if witnessed or overheard by a child, is a form of child abuse by the perpetrator of the abusive behaviour,
- Working in partnership with vulnerable adults and children, statutory authorities and specialist agencies is essential in promoting the welfare of any child or adult suffering abuse,
- Clergy and lay ministers need to obtain advice from those with professional expertise when faced with situations of domestic abuse,

- Clergy should ensure the provision of training about domestic abuse by appropriately qualified professionals or programs to those in leadership positions, safe ministry roles and other pastoral roles, with periodic 'refresher' training.
- Our response should also include 'primary prevention', challenging disrespect and other attitudes or stereotypes, and other social or cultural factors which may allow individual misconduct to flourish.
- Where mistakes in caring for people in difficult situations are made, an apology should be offered and advice sought on how to address any harm caused.

5. Respect those who come to us

We respect people who come to us for help by:

- Valuing, respecting and listening to victims of domestic abuse;
- Valuing, respecting and listening to alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse;
- Appreciating the need to ensure a distance is kept between the two; and
- Refusing to condone the perpetration or continuation of any form of abuse.

6. Scripture

We uphold Scripture and its abhorrence of abuse in our words and public statements by:

- Clearly teaching that domestic abuse is wrong and that the Bible should never be interpreted to justify or excuse any form of abuse. Rather a relationship between a husband and wife is to be characterised by love, care and kindness;
- Clearly teaching that the Bible does not condone abuse and should not be interpreted to demand a spouse tolerate or submit to domestic abuse;
- Clearly teaching that the Bible encourages victims to seek safety, that separation for such reason is an appropriate step to take, and that divorce may properly be a way of protecting victims in such tragic circumstances.

7. Safety first

We ensure safety first by:

- Ensuring that those who have experienced domestic abuse can find safety and informed help as a first priority, and can continue to stay safe,
- Taking it seriously: ensuring that any disclosures of abuse are taken seriously and not dismissed; also noting that a perpetrator may deliberately undermine a victim by making their own allegation first,
- Getting help from outside: working with the appropriate statutory authorities during an investigation into domestic abuse, including when allegations are made against a member of the church community,
- Keeping it confidential: respecting the need for confidentiality within the bounds of good Safe Ministry practice, noting that reporting requirements exist where there is an immediate danger, where a child is at risk of serious harm or where the matter involves a clergy person or church worker as an alleged offender; where a report is required, this should first be discussed with the victim wherever possible, and
- Challenging with care: carefully challenging inappropriate behaviour, but only after receiving professional advice, and only in a way that does not place any individual, especially a victim, at increased risk.

8. Pastoral support

We offer pastoral support to those in our care by:

- Raising awareness of domestic violence agencies, support services, crisis accommodation, resources and expertise.

- Offering informed care: ensuring that informed and appropriate pastoral care and professional help is offered to any adult, child or young person who has suffered domestic abuse,
- Being guided by the victim: never pressuring any victim of domestic abuse to forgive, submit to, or restore a relationship with an offender,
- Understanding that reconciliation comes with conditions: any reconciliation between victim and offender is dependent principally upon genuine repentance and reformation of the offender,
- Coordinating the care: being familiar with appropriate pastoral care relationships for both victims and alleged or known perpetrators of domestic abuse, identifying and helping provide any specialist support, including separate and independent support for any children involved, and,
- Recognising cultural differences: understanding how cultural norms and values may affect victims or can contribute to abuse being perpetuated.

If you have any concerns or need to talk to anyone please contact...

- The Police: dial 000
 - 24/7 in emergencies where safety is at risk.
- 1800 RESPECT national helpline: 1800 737 732 or 1800respect.org.au
 - 24/7 for sexual assault & domestic violence counselling and advice.
- Child Protection Helpline: 132 111 or <https://reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg>
 - If you think a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse.
- Lifeline: 131 114 or www.lifeline.org.au/get-help
 - 24-hour telephone crisis line.
- Office of the Director of Safe Ministry 9265 1604 or safeministry.org.au
 - Advice about abuse involving Anglican clergy or church workers.

This policy is based on the policy recommended by the Diocese of Sydney and has been adapted and adopted for use by St Mark's Northbridge.