

Holy Ascension Orthodox Church Child Safe Policy and Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Introduction

We acknowledge the Bunurong Country, the land of the Yalukit Willam people of the Kulin Nation on who's land we gather for worship. We pay our respects to their Elder, past, present and emerging. One land under God.

The purpose of this *Child Safe Policy and Statement of Commitment to Child Safety* is to help our clergy, office-bearers, and volunteers make Holy Ascension Orthodox Church a safe place for children. It expresses our commitment to child safety and, to this end, supports compliance with Victorian law and the *Child-Safe Policy* of the Diocese to which our parish belongs.

Definitions

References in this Policy and Statement of Commitment to:	Should be taken to mean:
<i>Child or Children</i>	<i>A young person or young people under the age of 18</i>
<i>Clergy</i>	<i>Priests, deacons, subdeacons, and readers</i>
<i>Dean</i>	<i>The senior priest in the Southern Deanery, appointed to this position by the Diocesan Bishop, and having administrative oversight over the parishes in Victoria</i>
<i>Diocese and Diocesan policy</i>	<i>The Australian-New Zealand Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia and its policies</i>
<i>Diocesan authorities</i>	<i>All officials of the Diocese</i>
<i>Diocesan Bishop</i>	<i>The Ruling Bishop of the Australian-New Zealand Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, appointed to this position by the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia</i>
<i>Office-bearers</i>	<i>People elected to the Parish Committee or appointed to other formal non-ministry roles in the parish</i>
<i>Parish Committee</i>	<i>The parish administrative body formed as an Incorporated Association in</i>

	<i>accordance with the Victorian Department of Justice and Consumer Affairs Victoria</i>
<i>Parish and Parish life</i>	<i>Holy Ascension Orthodox Church and its activities</i>
<i>Parish Rector</i>	<i>The senior priest of the parish, appointed to this role by the Diocesan Bishop</i>
<i>Volunteers</i>	<i>People contributing time and expertise to the life of the parish and who receive no payment for that work. This includes altar servers and choir leaders</i>

Statement of Commitment to Child Safety

Our parish is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children.

For the children who belong to or visit our parish, we will provide a child safe environment. This means that we will act to ensure that children feel safe, are safe, and can participate appropriately, actively, and confidently in the divine services and in the broader life of our parish.

We have zero tolerance for any form of harm to or abuse of children. This includes emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse.

Our parish is multi-cultural and brings together families and individuals of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and needs. We value both our unity and our diversity and are committed to words and actions that make this clear to our children and the children who visit us.

We have publicly available policies and procedures in place to support these commitments, and we will provide our clergy, office-bearers, and volunteers with the necessary information, training, and other resources to ensure that they are met.

We take allegations and safety concerns seriously and will deal with them promptly and respectfully. They will be handled in accordance with our policies and procedures and, whenever necessary, Victorian, and other applicable Australian law.

We will engage sensitively with survivors of abuse and actively seek their input into our policies, procedures, and training.

All who belong to or visit our parish will be advised of our commitment to child safety and of their role in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children while here.

Children's Participation in the Life of the Parish

Our Orthodox Christian tradition is rich and multi-faceted. In the life of our parish, we preserve rites and customs developed over many centuries and in significantly different cultural settings. We value these things, the living expression of our Orthodox Christian Faith, as a precious inheritance that we, in turn, hope to pass to our children and to their children.

To make this possible, we want our children to participate appropriately, actively, and confidently in the divine services and in the broader life of our parish. To this end, we will answer their questions, listen to their views, respect what they say, and provide them with opportunities to learn, read, sing, serve, and help.

Child Safety Contact Persons

Each year the parish rector will appoint two Child Safety Contact Persons. The duties of the Child Safety Contact Persons are set out in the *Child Safety Contact Person Role Description*. Prior to an appointment being made, expressions of interest in the role will be sought from amongst parish members, and the approval of the Parish Committee will be obtained.

The Child Safety Contact Persons will be trusted parish members who have a demonstrated rapport with children and who have been assessed as suitable to work with them. Ideally, one Child Safety Contact Person will be female and the other male.

To the extent possible in a small parish, the rector should ensure that the Child Safety Contact Persons are independent of family or other connections with parish clergy that may raise reasonable concerns as to their independence.

The Parish Committee will ensure that the Child Safety Contact Persons are able to securely store records and that they are provided with all other necessary resources and support to perform their duties.

A Child Safe Code of Conduct

The Diocese has a Code of Conduct that encompasses contact with children, and which is binding on all parish clergy.

Our parish has a separate *Child Safe Code of Conduct* to give effect to this parish *Child Safe Policy and Statement of Commitment to Child Safety*.

The parish *Child Safe Code of Conduct* sets out the types of conduct that are acceptable and unacceptable in relation to children. It also contains important specific provisions to guide priests who hear confessions and give spiritual guidance in our parish.

Assessing the suitability of clergy and others to work with children

Our parish is committed to ensuring that our clergy and others who work with children are suitable to do so.

No clergy or other person will be permitted to work with children in our parish unless they have been assessed as suitable to do so.

Priests and deacons are appointed to a parish by the Diocesan Bishop. When clergy of that rank are to be appointed to our parish, the rector or another senior parish clergy will, together with the Child Safety Contact Persons and relevant parish office-bearers, engage proactively with the Diocesan authorities to ensure the suitability of that clergy to work with children.

Readers and subdeacons are tonsured or ordained by the Diocesan Bishop for service in the parish on the recommendation of the parish rector. Before recommending any candidate for tonsure or ordination to the Diocesan Bishop, the rector, together with the Child Safety Contact Persons and parish office-bearers, will take steps to ensure the suitability of the candidate to work with children.

In our parish, others who work with children include the Child Safety Contact Persons themselves. Before appointing any person to one of those roles, the rector, together with parish office-bearers and the Child Safety Contact Persons (unless, of course, it is the suitability of one of the Child Safety Contact Persons themselves that is being considered) will take steps to ensure the suitability of that person to work with children.

An assessment of suitability *must* consider:

- A current Victorian Working with Children Check
- A current National Police History Check Report
- For clergy only – A signed statement of assent to the Diocesan Child-Safe Policy and the Code of Conduct
- A signed statement of assent to this Policy and Statement of Commitment
- A signed statement of assent to the parish Child Safe Code of Conduct

An assessment of suitability *may* consider:

- an interview
- referee reports
- any other information that may be relevant to the assessment

The decision to conduct an interview, request referee reports, or consider other relevant information will be made:

- in the case of clergy – in consultation with the Diocesan Bishop or the Diocesan authorities
- in the case of any other person – by the parish rector in consultation with the Parish Committee and the Child Safe Contact Persons

If a referee report or other relevant information is to be considered, the person whose suitability to work with children is being assessed will be advised.

Action to be taken upon assessing that clergy or others are suitable to work with children

As of 4 August 2024, if clergy or other person has been assessed as suitable to work with children, he or she may only commence in the role following formal verification of his or her Working With Children check by the Parish Committee together with the Child Safety Contact Persons.

Formal verification of a Working With Children Check is undertaken via the Working With Children Check Portal at <https://service.vic.gov.au/services/working-with-children-check-status-checker/home> and <https://www.vic.gov.au/working-with-children-check> .

Verification will include an assessment of the applicability of the class of the check to the work being undertaken.

A failure to verify a Working With Children Check prior to commencement of work is in breach of the Worker Screening Act (2020) and the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005) and could result in a penalty notice being issued or the initiation of prosecution action by the Commission for Children and Young People.

Verifying the ongoing suitability of clergy and others to work with children

The renewal of any Working With Children Check must be verified by the parish officials with responsibility for doing so within 5 days of the expiration date of the previous check.

As of 4 August 2024, annual Parish Committee Meetings will be held specifically dedicated to Due Diligence with particular focus on Child Safety to ensure validity and verifiability of Working With Children Checks.

Formal verification of a Working With Children Check is undertaken via the Working With Children Check Portal at <https://service.vic.gov.au/services/working-with-children-check-status-checker/home> and <https://www.vic.gov.au/working-with-children-check>

Verification will include an assessment of the continuing applicability of the class of the check to the work being undertaken.

A failure to verify renewal of a Working With Children check within 5 days of the expiration date of the previous check is in breach of the Worker Screening Act (2020) and the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act (2005) and could result in a penalty notice being issued or the initiation of prosecution action by the Commission for Children and Young People.

Dealing with barred workers

The Commission for Children and Young People may decide that a person is barred from working with children. A person may be permanently barred or interim barred. Regardless of the status of the bar, a barred person **must not** work with children. For clergy, this means undertaking any public ministry.

If a person previously granted a Working With Children clearance is barred from working with children, the parish will be advised by the Commission for Children and Young People. In this parish, that advice will be provided by email to the Relevant Parish Official and Relevant Head of Entity.

If the person barred from working with children is the parish rector, a family member of the parish rector, or another person with close personal links to the parish rector, the Diocesan Bishop and the Dean of Victoria is to be advised immediately. The

Diocesan Bishop or Dean will advise the rector and the Parish Committee of the bar and of the arrangements that are to be put in place for the duration of the bar. If the person barred from working with children is any other person, the parish rector is to be advised immediately. The rector will advise the clergy or worker and the Parish Committee of the bar and of the arrangements that are to be put in place for the duration of the bar.

If clergy are barred, the rector will decide these arrangements in consultation with the Diocesan Bishop or the Dean.

Complaints management and reporting

Our *Child Safe Complaints Management Procedure* sets out the procedures for making and managing complaints and concerns.

Training, support and supervision of clergy and others who work with children

Our priests and deacons will undertake all training mandated by the Diocesan authorities. The parish will provide or facilitate appropriate training for our subdeacons and readers, for our Child Safety Contact Officers, and for others who work with children. The Parish Committee will provide support to our clergy and others in both their work with children and in their supervision of other clergy and persons who work with children.

Record-keeping

All records relating to this policy will be retained securely for at least seven years. Record-keeping by the Secretary and the Child Safety Contact Persons will be monitored by the Parish Committee.

List of related parish policies and documents

The following parish documents are related to this Policy and Statement:

- Child Safety Contact Person Role Description
- Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Child Safe Complaints Management Procedure
- Child Safe discussion points for Parish Committee meetings

List of related legislation and Diocesan policies

The following Victorian legislation is relevant to this Policy and Statement:

- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Sections 182(1), 184 and 162(1)(c)-(d) of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic)
- Family Law Act 1975 (Cth)
- Worker Screening Act 2020 (Vic)
- Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012 (Vic)

The following Diocesan policies are relevant to this Policy and Statement:

- [The Australian and New Zealand Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia: Child Safe Policy](#)
- [The Australian and New Zealand Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia: Code of Conduct](#)

- [Policy and Procedure concerning the National Criminal History Check](#)
- [Policy on Working with Children Checks](#)

Communication

Primary responsibility for communicating this Policy and Statement rests with the parish rector and the Child Safety Contact Persons.

This Policy and Statement will be discussed with all parish clergy, office bearers, volunteers, and members.

Our Statement will also be explained to our children by collaborating with parents to talk to their children and share in an appropriate manner.

These discussions and information sessions may coincide with other activities such as religious education for our children or general meetings of parish members.

A copy of this Policy and Statement will be posted on our parish website. A copy of the Statement will also be posted visibly in our parish. It will be regularly promoted with activities, events and meetings.

A sign will be displayed at the entrance to the parish church that clearly communicates the fact that the parish is child safe.

Monitoring and review

Child safety will be a standing agenda item at every meeting of the Parish Committee and every Annual General Meeting. A series of points to guide discussion are set out in our Child Safe discussion points for Parish Committee meetings.

At least once each quarter, the Child Contact Safety Persons should attend a meeting of the Parish Committee to report on the performance of their duties and to advise the Parish Committee of the need for additional resources or for changes to this Policy and Statement or any other parish policy.

With the assistance of the Child Safety Contact Persons, this Policy and Statement will be reviewed by the Parish Committee at least every two years. To the extent possible, review of the statement will consider comments and suggestions from children; parish clergy, office-bearers, volunteers, and members; the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People; the Diocesan authorities; and the parish insurer.

We will particularly endeavour to draw on the experience of survivors of abuse in our own Orthodox Christian community here in Australia. Consideration will also be given to information prepared by organisations advocating for child safety.

Affirmation

I have read this *Child Safe Policy and Statement of Commitment* for working with children in parish life.

I understand my responsibilities in working with children and undertake to abide by this *Child Safe Policy and Statement of Commitment*.

Name:

Signature:

Date: