

Introduction to Safeguarding

Bible Teaching and Important considerations concerning Compliance.

We are all aware of the difficulties experienced by religious groups in recent years caused by their failure to act appropriately to protect vulnerable individuals within their communities and report incidents of abuse and criminal activity.

The Catholic Church, the Church of England and more recently the Jehovah's Witnesses have all faced criticism and legal action over their failures to follow proper safeguarding procedures which has more importantly resulted in irreparable damage to the victims of abusive control and to their families.

It may be a surprise to some to hear that we are not immune from these issues and have clear responsibilities to protect the innocent and deny opportunities for abusive controlling relationships to develop and go unreported.

This is why Safeguarding is so important and why robust and clear policies need to be adopted throughout our community

In connection with this we include our latest Safeguarding Policy document.

As a brotherhood, we wish to comply with the law of the country as instructed by Scripture unless this compliance is contrary to the teaching of our Lord and scripture. (Romans 13:1-3)

We have no wish under any circumstances to place a child at risk.

Responsibilities fall within two areas:

- a) Complying with published Government Statutory Guidance to ensure the safety of children
- b) A legal responsibility to register and check the status of individuals who work with children with the Disclosure and Baring Service

1. In the event of an allegation being made by a person, the ecclesial appointed Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) has a responsibility under Statutory Guidance to notify the Local Authority Children Board or relevant investigating agencies of the allegation.

This is set out in the current edition of the following government documentation: 'What to do if you are worried a child is being abused', (DFE-00124-2015); and 'Working together to Safeguard Children' (DFE-00130-2015 "A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children)

An Allegation is defined in our Safeguarding Document Appendix 1 Para 6.

If an allegation has been made, advice must be sought from the Ecclesia's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) immediately.

The DSL's responsibility is to contact the Local Authority Designated Officer for guidance.

But Scriptural guidance requires any accusations to be taken to the individual with two or three witnesses. (Matthew 18: 15-16 and I Timothy 5:19)

Here is the dilemma. One ecclesia has given careful consideration to scriptural exposition and has made their paper available at the end of this document.

The risk of discussing an allegation with the individual accused is that it may prejudice the child's safety and any criminal investigation. This would be taken very seriously by any investigating team.

The "two witness" of Matthew 18 teaching is also to protect the individual against false accusations.

Confidentiality in managing this allegation is of extreme importance and should be known to as few individuals as possible.

False accusations can destroy a person's reputation both professionally and in the ecclesia. In preparing this Safeguarding Policy template it has been decided to emphasise confidentiality and

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recommend that no persons in the ecclesia are informed of the accusation. This to include the Arranging Brothers. The Ecclesial appointed DSL takes responsibility for decisions.

It is suggested that the Ecclesia appoints a deputy DSL: possibly one of the Arranging Brothers to assist in these decisions.

2. The Disclosure and Barring Service

The effect of this is that if, as an ecclesia, Bible School or Youth camp, we are involved in what is known as a Regulated Activity, then there is a legal requirement to make an application to register individuals under the Disclosure and Barring Service or to check on any person who may be involved in a Regulated Activity.

Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (SVG) Act 2006 and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007, both as amended (in particular by, respectively, section 64 and Schedule 7, Part 5 Protection of Freedoms Act 2012).

Vetting and Barring Guidance 2010

"5.4. Regulated Activity Providers (RAPs) also have a legal duty to refer to the DBS any information about individuals who may pose a risk of harm to vulnerable groups, in particular if you remove someone from regulated activity or controlled activity for allegedly causing harm or posing a risk of harm"

"5.55. referrals should not be made on the basis of allegations that are suspected to be unfounded or malicious".

"5.58 Before making a referral, it is good practice to consult local children's services or adult social services, as appropriate. They may be able to offer helpful advice or have additional information that can be passed on to the DBS in a parallel or co-ordinated referral".

"5.51. In particular, the RAP or responsible person must refer the case to the DBS if they think that the individual has committed an offence that would lead them to be automatically included on a barred list under the automatic barring provisions. Failure to provide information to the DBS is a criminal offence and can result in a fine."

"5.57. The duty to provide information will override any obligation to withhold information on the grounds of confidentiality. Failure without reasonable excuse to provide required information is an offence, and the magistrates' court may impose a fine of up to £5,000 on anyone convicted"

"5.36. Failure to make the appropriate check will be a criminal offence, punishable by a fine of up to £5,000."

"5.39. Regulated Activity Providers (RAP) will commit a serious offence if they knowingly permit a barred person to work in regulated activity, either as a one-off or for any length of time"

Two questions arise.

Is the Ecclesia or its members involved in a Regulated Activity?

This is a brief summary

"Unsupervised activities: teach, train, instruct, care for or supervise children, or provide advice/guidance on well-being, or drive a vehicle only for children;

*(a) Teaching, training or instruction of children, carried out by the same person frequently (once a week or more often), or on 4 or more days in a 30-day period, or overnight. (Para 1(152) . *Sources: - once a*

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week: guidance, March 2010, Annex B, page 70 para B.12; - four or more days/ overnight: Schedule 4, para 10(1) as amended.)

(b) Care or supervision of children if carried out by the same person frequently (once a week or more often), or on 4 or more days in a 30-day period or overnight

In relation to teaching, training or instruction; care or supervision; or advice or guidance, it is also regulated activity if carried out (even once) at any time between 2am and 6am and with an opportunity for face-to-face contact with children. (Schedule 4, Para 10(2).)”

The conclusion is that this covers Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, youth weekends, Bible Schools and Youth camps.

It has been suggested that one person can be registered who would then “supervise” others.

From the examples given in the Statutory Guidance, the supervision “*must be constant and will be reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure the protection of children*”.

The view is that this is not a practical option.

Statutory guidance: Regulated Activity (children) - supervision of activity with children which is regulated activity when unsupervised

“This guidance applies when an organisation decides to supervise with the aim that the supervised work will not be regulated activity (when it would be, if not so supervised). In such a case, the law makes three main points:

- there must be supervision by a person who is in regulated activity*
- the supervision must be regular and day to day; and*
- the supervision must be “reasonable in all the circumstances to ensure the protection of children”.*

Groups of infrequent workers.

“B.19 The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act and Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Order give specific eligibility to regulated activity providers to check the DBS registration status of workers who would be working in regulated activity, except for the fact that it is infrequent. This allows employers and volunteer organisations to manage a pool of workers in a flexible way.”

This is taken from examples:

“A number of adults help at a Sunday school on a rota basis. Each adult helps out once every three weeks. That is not frequent and so registration is not required. However, see paragraph B.19 above. Rotas of this nature sometimes have to be adjusted at short notice, to cover sickness absence and unexpected absences. The church is able to check the DBS registration status of these volunteers and in this way establish a pool of helpers who can be called on flexibly without running the risk of committing offences.

Youth weekends. There is a view that if the ecclesia organises overnight accommodation for children/young people under 18, there is a requirement to DBS check the families offering that overnight accommodation. The alternative is that the families of children wishing to attend must arrange the accommodation directly themselves.

There is a responsibility to check the DBS registration status of all volunteers. Best practice and for the reassurance of parents why not register volunteers with the DBS?

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Scriptural Principles Regarding Child Protection

Thanks to Hall Green Birmingham Ecclesia for this document

Updated 16th January 2017

The committee who developed the Child Protection Policy, with input from a wider group representing all interested ecclesial committees sought to look at the policy through the eyes of scripture, since this is our ultimate guide. The points listed below are some of the main scriptural principles considered.

1. The protection of the vulnerable

The most important scriptural principle involved is the protection of a vulnerable person, in this case a child. Protection of the vulnerable is an extremely strong scriptural theme, as the selection of verses below show, even extending to the Lord's work in the kingdom.

Psalm 72v4 "He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, And will break in pieces the oppressor."

Isaiah 1v17 " Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow."

Proverbs 31v9 " Open your mouth, judge righteously, And plead the cause of the poor and needy."

Matt 18v5-6,10,14 " Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea..." "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven...Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

Mark 9v42 " "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea."

Luke 17v2 " It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones."

James 1v27 " Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

The verses above from the gospels contain some of Jesus' strongest ever language, directed against those who cause children to stumble. His words that it would be "better" for them if they were drowned by throwing them into the sea weighted down with a heavy object shows how seriously God views sins against children or acts that cause children to sin.

These gospel passages are also particularly helpful as they occur just before some other well known words. In Matthew 18 the section immediately following the verses about "little ones" describes the principle of how to deal with a brother who "sins against you". The first action we are told to do is to "tell him his fault between thee and him alone". This verse is sometimes used by those who believe no accusation should be received about a brother without him first being informed. They would argue that if a child makes a disclosure about a brother, then that brother should first be informed before the matter is escalated.

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However what we need to appreciate is that scripture is laying principles before us to enable us to "discern both good and evil". Sometimes these principles clash and we need to be use our scriptural wisdom in the right way to determine which is the greater principle. If a child makes a disclose about being abused by a brother, then telling this to the brother concerned could put the child at risk. So keeping confidentiality and telling the brother his sin alone could actually infringe the greater principle of protecting the vulnerable.

A good example of this clash of principles (that also happens to involve a child safeguarding issue) is found in Exodus 1. When Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all male babies they instead told a lie and disobeyed him. God blessed them for this. In this situation there was a clear clash of principles. Obeying the government and not telling lies are generally things we should do, however not at the expense of the greater principle - protection of a vulnerable child.

2. To give the right impression to non-Christadelphians

A child protection policy contains a number of measures that show a non-Christadelphian parent that we are doing what we can to ensure the safety of their children when left in our care. The principle of thinking about how things appear to unbelievers is mentioned several times in scripture.

1 Thess 4v2 "walk honestly toward them that are without"

Rom 12v17 "provide things honest in the sight of all men"

1 Pet 2v12 "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles"

2 Cor 8v21 "providing for honest things not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men"

So not only what we do, but also the impression we give to those outside is important.

This agrees with Paul's recommendation that a bishop or overseer (which means a position of authority within the ecclesia, so could include a CYC/SS leader) "must have a good report of them that are without" (1 Tim 3v7).

It is also aligned with 1 Thess 5v22 which advises that we should "abstain from all appearance of evil".

So how we **appear** to non-Christadelphians, the reputation they assign to us needs to be "honest" – (coming from a word that means good, fair, honest).

3. Doing to others as we want them to do to us

When sending our children to schools, sports clubs or any other organisation many of us would expect them to take child protection seriously and have a robust policy in place. If they didn't have such a policy or if their policy was "whatever the alleged crime, we would not be engaging the authorities" then we would probably think twice about leaving them with this group. If this is the case, then it behoves us to follow the teaching of Jesus in Mat 7v12 and do to other parents what I would have them do to us.

4. Complies with the law of the land

The ecclesia is currently registering as a charity. To do so we need to have a child protection policy. We are called to obey the law of the land whilst it doesn't contravene the law of Christ (Acts 4v19, Roms 13v1).

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In some serious crimes failure to report the offence can lead to accusations of perverting the cause of justice or aiding an offender. This is a trap that many organisations have fallen into from the Catholic Church to the Football Association.

As children of the light we should know better.