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16th June 2021

The “New Normal” –When we meet again.

Suggested ecclesial guidelines on social and physical distancing.

As ecclesias consider their return to physical meetings, the need is evident for all those attending to maintain a certain distance from each other for some time to come, especially while the coronavirus remains active and the national vaccination programme is incomplete. Handshakes, and closer expressions of friendship like hugging and kissing, are necessarily to be treated with caution for some time to come.

Ecclesial leaders will also recognise that many individuals' appreciation of risk and their concern for personal space has changed, and so have altered perceptions of what is and isn't acceptable to them in terms of physical contact. We all need to be aware of this and take this into account in our future meetings

Safeguarding Matters - Physical contact with children and young people

Recent media events continue to demonstrate the need for excellent safeguarding practice in relation to children and young people as well as vulnerable adults. Great care and consideration is needed when thinking about what is and isn't appropriate in today's climate regarding adults touching, hugging or kissing children and young people and others.

It is important that ecclesias manage this carefully, ensuring that they both enable and listen to our children and young people, allowing them to express their views and ensuring these are respected.

This is a deep and complex topic and further advice and guidance can be found on the CSN website (<https://www.chsn.org.uk/working-with-children-and-vulnerable-adults>). It will be a significant component of the annual Safeguarding training event noted below.

Physical contact between members

Ecclesias also need to be aware that embracing between adults may increasingly be considered by some, particularly but not solely in the current circumstances, as unwanted or even inappropriate behaviour.

It is becoming evident to CSN from discussions both online and in private counselling that such unwanted physical contact actually causes a significant proportion of -- mainly -- female members to feel uncomfortable and distressed and is being spoken of as a real disincentive to their return to hall-based fellowship.

No ecclesia would want sisters to feel uncomfortable or unwilling to attend services because of such behaviours, even if previously a common practice in our community.

CSN recommends that each ecclesia initiates a conversation, led by female members especially, to establish their feelings about behaviours which involve physical contact.

It is wholly appropriate to ask a sister to lead this. Hopefully the discussion will yield insight and appropriate guidance for the ecclesia to ensure that everyone can meet together without experiencing distress or anxiety.

We all seek to maintain a friendly, welcoming and safe environment where we can meet and worship together in love and peace. Such conversations as described above, while initially difficult, will help to ensure that as many as possible of each congregation will happily return from isolation ready to fully participate in the many positive benefits of meeting together in fellowship.

During the last, very difficult, fifteen months the Christadelphian Support Network has continued its confidential work providing support to individuals in our community calling or emailing for help and for prayers. We have supported ecclesias with specific issues, and ran the annual safeguarding refresher training for ecclesial Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) last October.

The importance of the DSL role in today's society and media scrutiny is ever clearer, and we do encourage all ecclesias with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults to recognise the need for this role and make a suitable appointment. Information about this year's training is given here.

2021 Safeguarding training event

Recent Safeguarding training has necessarily been delivered via Zoom; this proved successful with a greater attendance, and was appreciated by participants. CSN will repeat that this year, and for 2021 will include a separate session for ecclesial leaders.

Please note the date for this year's training -- Saturday 16 October 2021 God willing

AM session: Annual update and refresher training for ecclesial Designated Safety Leads (DSL's) as usual. If your ecclesia does not have a DSL, yet has children, young people and vulnerable adults in your ecclesial family, then you need to think seriously about appointing one.

PM session: We invite ecclesial leaders to join us to discuss your leadership responsibilities in Safeguarding -- of children, young people and vulnerable in all ecclesial settings. We will also discuss other mental health issues, including recent legislation and the growing awareness of coercive control.

Booking arrangements will be circulated at a later date.

With love in our Lord

Andrew

Andrew Collinge

DSL on behalf of the CSN Committee

<https://www.chsn.org.uk/trustees>

Underpinned by the faith we share, the Christadelphian Support Network (CSN) aims to:

Offer loving support and guidance at difficult times of life, raise awareness of problems we face in life,

and encourage compassionate care in our community

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