

CAREGIVING POLICY

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Introduction

The Berwick Church of Christ (the Church) is committed to being a safe and welcoming place for everyone, especially children and those who are most vulnerable. Caregiving is a key tenet of the Christian faith and an important part of being a Christ follower.

Purpose

This policy has been written to set direction under which we provide consistent caregiving that reflects the calling of Christ to love one another, and minister healing and freedom while complying with relevant legislation.

Scope

This Policy applies to everyone involved in a Ministry capacity and engaged in the act of caregiving, otherwise known as a Caregiver.

Relational caregiving outside of a ministry context is between persons not acting as a Caregiver and care receiver and does not fall under the covering or responsibility of the Church. Nonetheless people in this situation, for example after Sunday service praying with one another, may find the content of this policy helpful.

Definitions

Please refer to the General Definitions document.

In addition to the General Definitions, the following definition is relevant to this policy:

"Caregiver" means anyone aged 18 or over giving care within a ministry context either as a staff member or volunteer. This includes Pastors, Elders, and Ministry Leaders, such as Life Groups, Prayer Ministry, as well as volunteers acting under a Pastor or Leader in a recognised place of authority.

"Private Setting" means any place where other people are not in the vicinity or area. This includes but is not limited to:

- An individual office when no other staff are working (i.e. out of normal business hours);
- Any room, area or location at the Church when no one else is nearby or on the premises;
- At a home, with no other family or household members present;
- In a motor vehicle.

"Vulnerable Individual" is a child under the age of 18 years or an adult who is or may be unable to take care of themselves or protect themselves against harm or exploitation, in respect of capability, capacity, environment or circumstance. Refer to the ACNC definition of vulnerable persons or people <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/topic-guides/vulnerable-persons-or-people>.

Policy

1. What is Caregiving?

Caregiving in general terms would be any form of assistance formally given to an individual by a representative of Berwick Church of Christ that constitutes help in affairs relating to their wellbeing.

It includes:

- helping people live life in all its fullness, in the strength of and according to the example of Jesus (*John 10:10-11*).
- teaching, equipping, leading and guiding God's people (*1 Peter 5:2*) to spiritual maturity (*Ephesians 4:11-13*)
- occasionally it involves, some degree of admonishment in accordance with Scripture (*1 Thessalonians 5:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17*)
- strengthening, comforting, encouraging and urging believers to live a life of faith that is pleasing to God (*1 Thessalonians 2:12 & 3:2*).
- helping others by listening, responding, praying or providing practical support.

2. Values of Caregiving

- The caregiving values support the organisational values of being loving, helpful, hopeful and humble. We demonstrate God's love and care for every person in grace and truth.
- Caregiving needs to be rooted in love, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (*1 Corinthians 13:4, Galatians 5:22*)
- We provide care with the utmost humility, kindness, gentleness and patience (*Colossians 3:12-17*).
- With an emphasis on listening more than speaking (*James 1:19-27*).
- We recognise that we give care in partnership with the Holy Spirit, who comforts and guides us into all truth, is the only one that can transform us to be Christ-like and shows us where we need to repent and change our ways. (*John 16:13*)
- Caregiving is not judgemental but compassionate and facilitates forgiveness. (*Matthew 7:3-5*)
- Caregiving protects and does no harm. (*1 Corinthians 13:4-7*)

3. Principles of Caregiving

Caregiving

- responds to signals of distress (spiritually, physically, emotionally or interpersonally) and checks whether the person is requiring care before it is acted upon
- discerns if there is any potential imbalance of power in the relationship
- aims to always have someone of the same gender involved in the caregiving process
- when in a private setting, always has someone of the same gender involved, by either:
 - organising for a Carer of the same gender as the client to attend;
 - being accompanied by someone of the same gender as the client; or
 - in an unavoidable situation setting up an accountability arrangement (i.e. inform a Pastor).
- is seen as part of our mission and therefore includes faith-based practices like:
 - prayer,
 - laying on of hands,
 - anointing with oil,
 - encouragement to follow biblical practices,
 - sharing of resources,
 - establishing supporting relationships, and
 - ministering deliverance as the individual requires of us.

Caregivers

- Should not force themselves or caregiving on any individual.
- Must never touch anyone without seeking their explicit consent first.
- Should give feedback as soon as possible to their leader or Pastor, anytime they have concerns or questions about an incident related to a caregiving situation.
- Point people to Christ and encourage them to seek God for their needs. (*Matthew 7:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:12*)
- Avoid situations that may compromise one's reputation and/or integrity (i.e. one-on-one situations, driving someone home in a car, visiting someone on your own, etc.).
- Are mindful of a person's emotional and spiritual state.
- Seek God's wisdom in how to pray and lead in any given situation.

Important for all caregivers

- a. Position yourself for ministry: When you pray for someone stand a bit to the side of the person as you pray for them. You must ask permission to place your hand on the person's shoulder or ask if you can hold their hands while you pray. It is important to only touch them on their hands or shoulders to maintain integrity and comfort.
- b. When praying for someone in the area of sexuality, allow them to use their own words in areas of forgiveness and repentance.
- c. Ensure that when anyone seeks advice, that you provide biblical examples/teaching and personal opinions/experience only. At no point are you to expressly tell someone what they should or need to do, or what their decision should be in any situation. The individual must be able to make their own decisions.
- d. Acknowledge when the care needed is beyond your capacity and capability and requires more experienced help or professional support. Seek professional support options through the relevant Pastor or Ministry Leader.

Physical Contact in Caregiving

- Physical contact such as hugging, handholding, or placing hands on someone during prayer can be a meaningful expression of care and comfort. However, all physical contact must be appropriate, consensual, and respectful of personal boundaries.

- Before initiating any physical contact, always seek explicit consent. Use clear language such as "Is it okay if I hold your hand while we talk?" or "Would it be helpful if I placed my hand on your shoulder while we pray?" or "Would a hug be comforting for you right now?".
- Accept "no" graciously without questioning or persuading. Non-verbal cues such as stepping back, crossed arms, or tensing should be treated as withdrawal of consent.
- Recognize that comfort with physical contact varies significantly between individuals, cultures, and personal histories. Never assume consent based on previous interactions.
- Where possible, physical contact should be provided by a caregiver of the same gender as the care receiver.

Important Note: Good intentions do not override the need for consent. Unwelcome physical contact, regardless of intent, may constitute harassment under anti-discrimination law and Church policy.

4. Responsibilities of a Caregiver

- Ensure you know the Leader to whom you are accountable to in each Ministry setting where you serve, as well as ensuring you know your role and understand what is expected of you in any position you hold.
- Understand the parameters of your delegated authority in held positions
- Be a Partner or seek to become a Partner by attending a Partnership Class within 6 months of becoming a volunteer.
- Know the vision and mission of the Church.
- Undergo Training as requested by the Church.
- Maintain your spiritual health.

5. Duty of Care

- The Church takes seriously the care of children and vulnerable people. Caregivers must read all relevant policies and sign the Code of Conduct, which includes obtaining a valid Working With Children Check (WWCC). Relevant policies are available on the Church website - berwickchurch.org.au/policies.
- Caregivers engaged in caregiving to children under the age of 18 years or to vulnerable people are required to undergo Safe Ministry Check Online Training within 3 months of them commencing in their role/ministry.

6. Mandatory Reporting

As a Caregiver, if you form a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed in Victoria by an adult against a child under 16 years of age you **must report that information to police** unless you have a reasonable excuse. A reasonable excuse may include fear for safety or where the information has already been reported. A Caregiver where appropriate should advise the person receiving care of such obligations. Penalties exist for failing to do so.

Please refer to the policy document "Mandatory Reporting for Pastors, Staff, Leaders and Volunteers (Updated in 2020)" located on the church website - berwickchurch.org.au/policies.

7. Confidentiality

Notwithstanding Mandatory Reporting, the Caregiver is not at liberty to share confidential information with their spouse, family, friends, or other Caregivers, other than the relevant Ministry Leader, Pastor, Safety Contact Person and/or Elders. However, in the course of caregiving it may become apparent that it is of benefit to the person receiving care to have another Caregiver with a particular gifting or skill involved. This should be discussed with the person receiving care and if appropriate the relevant authority above them.

Where a Caregiver forms a reasonable belief that a vulnerable person may be at risk of harm, they are ethically bound to take action to protect the safety and wellbeing of that vulnerable person. A Risk of Significant Harm Form must be completed and submitted to the Safety Contact Person and any immediate danger must be reported to the Police by calling 000.

Caregiving Policy – Declaration

I _____ acknowledge that I have read and understand the Caregiving Policy and other relevant policies (included in the Policy Induction), and I agree that in the course of my acting as a Caregiver, in any setting representing the Church, that I will undertake to conduct myself in accordance with this Policy. I also understand that there may be disciplinary measures and/or legal consequences if I am found to be in breach of this Policy.

Signature _____

Date ____/____/____

Safety Contact Person

Name:	Karen Fletcher
Phone number:	0438 886 337
Email:	karenf@bcoc.com.au
Other contact details:	Church Office: 9702 1011 (Mondays to Thursdays)

Applicable Legislation, References and Other Policies

Item	Description
Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021	New Act introduction in 2021.
Equal Opportunity Act 2010	The Equal Opportunity Act 2010 aims to make public life free from discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation.
Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001	The Racial and Religious Tolerance Act makes it against the law to vilify a person or group of people because of their race or religion.
Berwick Church of Christ Policies relevant to the Caregiving Policy	Privacy Policy, Social Media Policy Code of Conduct Bullying & Sexual Harassment Policy & Procedure Risk Management Policy

Scripture References:

John 10:10-11 – The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

1 Peter 5:2 – Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;

Ephesians 4:11-13 – So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 – Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God[[a](#)] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

1 Thessalonians 2:12 – encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 – We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith,

John 16:13 – But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

1 Corinthians 13:4 – Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Galatians 5:22 – But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Colossians 3:12-17 – Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

James 1:19-27 – My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

John 16:13 – But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Matthew 7:3-5 – “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 – Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Matthew 7:7 – Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

1 Thessalonians 4:12 – so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.