

Child Protection Policy



Mar Thoma Church Brisbane Inc.
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Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar

(Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand Diocese)

(Approved in the Special General Body Meeting dated 13th December 2020)

1. Introduction

The **Mar Thoma Church Brisbane Inc** is a part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Mar Thoma Syrian Church of the Diocese consisting of Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand. We recognise and uphold the dignity and rights of all children and vulnerable adults, committing, prioritising, and ensuring their safety and well-being. The Mar Thoma Church Brisbane recognises each child as a gift from God and values and encourages the participation of children in all activities that enhance their spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual and social development.

The Church ministry constantly points out the need to respect the dignity of children. In the Church, which is a community of brothers and sisters in Christ, special attention must be devoted to the children by developing a profound esteem for their personal dignity, and a great respect and generous concern for their rights. As established by Jesus, when his disciples were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest, directed his attention to a little child and said to his disciples, He said:

'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me' (Mark 9.37).

2. Policy Statement

As **Mar Thoma Church Brisbane**, it is the central and fundamental responsibility to hold the care, safety and wellbeing of children and young people of our parish. Our commitment is drawn from and inherent in the teaching and mission of Jesus Christ, with love, justice and the sanctity of each human person at the heart of the gospel.

We are committed to ensuring that the welfare, protection and support of all children and vulnerable persons are paramount. In keeping with this, we will work to do all in our power, in co-operation with parents/guardians, to create a safe environment for our children and the young people engaged in the life of our parish. This is a commitment binding on priests and on those who work in our parish (either employed or volunteers). It extends to all the many and varied ways that children share in the life of the Church. It is the utmost responsibility and commitment of the whole church community to safeguard the welfare of the children within the parish.

Relevant Engagement Services Within Our Parish

Our primary services that includes engagement with children are:

- Sunday school
- Parish Choir
- Yuvajana Sakhyam (Youth League)

These activities typically take place before/during/after a Sunday worship service at the operating church premises, (which may include hired Churches, parish hall from other denominations, with other church organisations, or any other suitable venue). During the time of the service, the children will be supervised by Sunday School teachers, concerned Sub-Organisational representatives and their Parents/Carers/Volunteers who remain in the service. Occasionally, Family Day/Retreat or Outing /Picnic, may also be organised by the Parish in which the supervision of their parent and teachers, or the authorised representative is a must.

3. Purpose of the policy

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the strong commitment and obligation of the **Mar Thoma Church Brisbane Inc.** to promoting and striving to provide a safe, supportive and ethical environment for all the children in our parish. It provides an outline of the policies, procedures and strategies developed to keep children safe from harm, including all forms of abuse in our parish environment, on site, online and in other locations used by the parish.

This policy applies to all parish personnel, including volunteers, contractors and clergy.

4. Legal and Church Requirements

This policy statement has been prepared to comply with the requirements of the Queensland State legislation. The *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000* and *Child Protection Act 1999* requires to work or volunteer in regulated child-related employment or operate a regulated child related business in Queensland all persons who are employed or work voluntarily in certain child related employment situation or who conduct child-related business in Queensland to be screened through blue card service. This check includes a person criminal history, any charges or convictions. Also, according to the recently passed law (on 31st August 2020), the *No Card, No Start* law requires those who work/volunteer in child-related employment must obtain a Blue Card prior to the start of the work.

Our Church Requirements

By acknowledging and abiding the legal obligations stated above, **Mar Thoma Church Brisbane** will require that:

- All clergy and all persons who are employed or work voluntarily in certain child related employment environment engaged in a paid or unpaid capacity with the church **must obtain** Blue card prior to start the work.

- Blue card can be applied online (<http://bluecard.qld.gov.au>) or can be submitted by a paper application. Anyone holding a blue card and work in any other child related organisation must update/link the organisation details/contact details with blue card services. Those who do not require blue card (teachers/police etc.) must obtain an exemption card/certificate.
- When recruiting and selecting employees (other than the Vicar who is appointed by the Holy Synod of the Mar Thoma Church in India), references must be provided in writing from previous employers, organisations or individuals of good standing.
- Those members (who have attended the Church for at least 6 months) who wish to volunteer at the Church in positions involving work with Children, two references must be obtained by verbal confirmation with the Vicar and any other member of good standing who can attest the character of the individual (to the best of their knowledge).
- The Sub-organisations of the Church must also abide and comply with the above stated legislation and maintain necessary records, information and necessary forms (such as Consent Forms, Medical information Forms, First Aid Treatment Forms, Accident and Incident Report Forms) as and when required.
- Initial formal training (or refresher training) regarding the Child Protection Policy and Safety must be conducted prior to work, for all teachers/adults, carers/leaders and youth workers that are volunteering or employed with child-related work. Marthoma Church can source/seek assistance from Anglican Church for any training related matters, if required.
- The Child Protection Policy must be revised or updated by the management committee within **3 years** or sooner if necessary. Also, a history of the revisions or updates made to the policy must also be recorded and maintained.
- The reporting procedure and policy of the Church must be followed, and welfare concerns are referred promptly to the concerned Department.
- The policy should be readily accessible all parents and guardian. The updated version of the Child Protection Policy of the Church will also be available through the Church Website.
- For any person working within the Church (employed and voluntary), if they have prior conviction involving violence or sexually related offences, they must be prohibited from the service.
- All the blue card related documentation must be updated and properly maintained by the church leadership/church organisations

5. Principles

The Mar Thoma Church Brisbane has a moral, legal and mission-driven responsibility to create nurturing environments where children and young people are respected, their voices are heard and they are safe and feel safe. The Policy is based on the following principles.

Protection of Children

- Marthoma Church Brisbane Inc. will take all appropriate measures to protect children from all forms of abuse.
- Behaviours which exploits the special position of trust and authority between an employee/volunteer and a child (such as of a sexual, physical or psychological nature and neglect) is a breach of this Policy.
- Marthoma Church Brisbane will cooperate with Queensland authorities in matters relevant to the protection of children.
- Abusive acts by anyone in a position of authority in relation to a child are a breach of trust and professional misconduct - in addition to any breach of criminal law.
- Our parish works in partnership with families and the community to ensure that they are engaged in decision-making processes, particularly those that have an impact on child safety and protection.

Right of children

- All adults in our parish, including clergy, volunteers, parishioners and contractors, have a responsibility to care for children and young people to positively promote their wellbeing and to protect them from any kind of harm or abuse.
- All children have rights which include the right to privacy, safety and respect. All children are entitled to the safety and protection from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- Children are expected to show respect to leaders/workers/teachers/volunteers and other children and to comply with safe practices.

Reporting abuse

- Disciplinary action will be taken against anyone who found to have abused a child. Our parish has zero tolerance of child abuse or sexual abuse / molestation. This is considered as a serious criminal offence and will always be reported to the police.
- Behaviour between a child and an adult and between one child and another that can be reasonably considered to indicate abuse or an unacceptable risk of abuse must be reported immediately to the Church leadership, the police, and/or also notify to the Church insurance services.
- All workers/volunteers (including the respondent) involved in situations where abuse is disclosed or suspected must be treated in accordance with the principle of natural justice and with dignity, sensitivity, respect and is obligated to observe appropriate confidentiality.
- The complainant and respondent will be kept informed of the progress in resolving any complaint.
- On the basis of all information available, if it is believed that there is an unacceptable risk of harm being done, or if they are under investigation (either internally or by the police) a worker/volunteer will not be permitted to continue work in his/her position.

6. Commitments and Obligations

All children at **Mar Thoma Church Brisbane** have the right to feel safe and be safe. The wellbeing of children in our care will always be our first priority and we do not and will not tolerate child abuse. We aim to create a child-safe and child-friendly environment where children are free to enjoy life to the full without any concern for their safety. There is particular attention paid to the most vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who may visit our parish, children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with a disability.

Our Commitment to our Children

- We commit to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in our parish.
- We commit to providing children and young people with positive and nurturing experiences.

- We commit to listening to children and young people and empowering them by taking their views seriously, and addressing any concerns that they raise with us.
- We commit to taking action to ensure that children and young people are protected from abuse or harm.
- We commit to seeking input and feedback from children regarding the creation of a safe parish environment.

Our commitment to Parents and Carers

- We commit to communicating honestly and openly with parents and carers about the wellbeing and safety of their children.
- We commit to engaging with, and listening to, the views of parents and carers about our child- safety practice, policies and procedures.
- We commit to transparency in our decision-making with parents and carers where it will not compromise the safety of children or young people.
- We commit to acknowledging the cultural diversity of our parishioners and being sensitive to how this may impact on child safety issues.
- We commit to continuously reviewing and improving our systems to protect children from abuse.

Our commitment to our parish staff, volunteers, contractors and clergy

- We commit to providing all Mar Thoma Church Brisbane volunteers and clergy with the necessary support to enable them to fulfil their roles. This will include regular and appropriate learning opportunities.
- We commit to providing regular opportunities to clarify and confirm policy and procedures in relation to child safety and young people's protection and wellbeing. This will include training when needed in the principles and intent of the Child Protection Policy, and staff responsibilities to report concerns.
- We commit to listening to all concerns voiced by Mar Thoma Church Brisbane parishioners and staff about keeping children and young people safe from harm.
- We commit to providing opportunities for all workers and volunteers at Mar Thoma Church Brisbane to receive formal debriefing and counselling arising from incidents of the abuse of a child or young person.

7. Responsibilities

All workers (employed or volunteering) at Mar Thoma Church Brisbane has a responsibility to understand the important and significant role he/she plays individually and collectively to ensure that the wellbeing and safety of all children is at the forefront of all they do and every decision they make.

Responsibilities of Parish Leadership (Executive Committee)

The parish priest and the Parish Executive Committee at Mar Thoma Church Brisbane recognise their particular responsibility to ensure the development of preventative and proactive strategies that promote a culture of openness, awareness of, and shared responsibility for, child safety. Therefore,

- creating an environment for children and young people to be safe and to feel safe
- upholding high principles and standards for all staff
- promoting models of behaviour between adults and children and young people based on mutual respect and consideration
- ensuring that thorough and rigorous practices are applied in the recruitment, screening and ongoing professional learning of staff
- ensuring that parish staff have regular and appropriate learning to develop their knowledge of, openness to and ability to address child safety matter
- ensuring the parish meets the specific requirements of the Queensland Child Safe Standards.
- ensuring that this policy is adhered to all parish activities and behaviours.

Responsibilities of Parish Members / Volunteers in Child Related Work

Responsibilities of Parishioners, Employees, or Volunteers include:

- treating children and young people with dignity and respect, acting with propriety, exercising their duty of care, and protecting children and young people in their care
- following the legislative and parish processes if, in the course of their work, they form a reasonable belief that a child or young person has been or is being abused or neglected
- providing a physically and psychologically safe environment where the wellbeing of children and young people is nurtured

- undertaking regular training in order to understand their individual responsibilities in relation to child safety and the wellbeing of children and young people
- assisting children and young people to develop positive, responsible and caring attitudes and behaviours which recognise the rights of all people to be safe and free from abuse following the parish's Child Protection Policy.

8. Code of Conduct

This Code of Conduct has a specific focus on safeguarding children and young people at Mar Thoma Church Brisbane against sexual, physical, psychological and emotional abuse or neglect. All staff, volunteers, contractors, clergy and parish Executive Committee members at Mar Thoma Church Brisbane are expected to actively contribute to a parish culture that respects the dignity of its members and affirms the Gospel values of love, care for others, compassion and justice. They are required to observe child-safe principles and expectations for appropriate behaviour towards and in the company of children, as noted below.

Acceptable Behaviours

All volunteers, contractors, clergy and parish members are responsible for supporting the safety of children by:

- adhering to the parish Child Protection Policy and upholding the parish's Policy Statement of Commitment to child safety at all times
- taking all reasonable steps to ensure and protect children from abuse and harm
- treating everyone in the parish community with respect in a manner that sustains a safe pastoral environment
- listening and responding to the views and concerns of children, particularly if they are telling you that they or another child have been abused or that they are worried about their safety/the safety of another child
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- promoting the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children with culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- promoting the safety, participation and empowerment of children with any kinds of disability

- reporting any child safety concerns to the parish priest and any allegations of child abuse to the police ensuring as quickly as possible that the child(ren) are safe.
- understanding and complying with all reporting obligations as they relate to mandatory reporting and reporting under the Child Protection Act (1999) and all child-related legislations in Queensland

Unacceptable Behaviours

All volunteers, contractors, clergy and parish members must not:

- ignore or disregard any suspected or disclosed child abuse
- be engaged in the inappropriate giving of gifts to children
- put children at risk of abuse
- initiate unnecessary physical contact with children or do things of a personal nature that a child can do for themselves
- manage disruptive or unsafe behaviour by degrading or isolating a child; corporal punishment is never acceptable. Physical restraint should only be used as a last resort or in an emergency
- work with children while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- consume drugs on parish premises or at parish events.
- engage in open discussions of a mature or adult nature in the presence of children (for example, private personal details or social activities)
- photograph or video a child without the consent of the parent or guardians (such as in a private place)
- use inappropriate language in the presence of children
- discriminate against any child because of age, gender, race, culture, vulnerability, sexuality, ethnicity or disability

9. Reporting and Responding

Our parish records any child safety complaints, disclosures or breaches of the Child Protection Policy, and stores the records in accordance with security and privacy requirements.

- Where an employee / volunteer is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this Mar Thoma Church Brisbane Policy, this may result in disciplinary consequences.
- Where the parish priest is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, it is advised to contact the Bishop of the Mar Thoma Diocese of Australia. If there is any reasonable belief that a criminal act has been committed, it is advised to contact Queensland Police.
- Where any other member of the parish community is suspected of breaching any obligation, duty or responsibility within this policy, the parish priest is to take appropriate action. In the inevitable absence of the Vicar from the Parish for indefinite periods due to job transfer, etc., it is deemed necessary to appoint a second “Person” (a member of the Executive Committee) to work together with the Vicar. In the absence of the Vicar, this second “Person” will have the authority to act alone.

Our parish’s Child Protection Policy sets out the actions required under the relevant legislation when there is a reasonable belief that a child in our parish environment is in need of protection or a criminal offence has been committed, and provides guidance and procedures on how to make a report.

We work to ensure all children, families and staff know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, or if they notice inappropriate behaviour. Our parish has also established internal processes to ensure that appropriate action is taken to respond to concerns about the wellbeing and/or safety of a child.