

Welcome, Dignity and Fair Treatment Policy

St Peter's, Colchester

Adopted by the PCC: [tbc]

Review date: [3 years]

Policy owner: The Parochial Church Council

1. Purpose

This policy explains how St Peter's seeks to welcome people, treat one another with dignity, and act fairly in our common life.

The Parochial Church Council has responsibility for the governance and oversight of St Peter's. As a Church of England church in the city of Colchester, we seek to be faithful to Jesus Christ, the Holy Scriptures, and the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England.

As disciples of Jesus, we seek to be faithful in all that we say and do. That includes the way we welcome newcomers, care for the vulnerable, speak with one another, handle disagreement, exercise authority, respond to concerns, and make decisions about participation, service and leadership.

This policy is intended to help shape the culture of the church, guide staff and volunteers, support good pastoral practice, and provide a basis for challenging behaviour that is unkind, unfair, dismissive, bullying, coercive, abusive, discriminatory, or inconsistent with Christian discipleship.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the life of St Peter's, including:

- public worship;
- church groups and activities;
- pastoral care;
- children's and youth work;
- PCC, committee and working group activity;
- volunteering and ministry involvement;
- employment;
- church communications and social media connected with church life;
- use of church buildings, hall and parish premises;
- church events, courses and meetings.

It applies, as relevant, to:

- clergy, licensed and authorised ministers;
- employed staff;
- PCC members;
- churchwardens and other elected or appointed officers;
- ministry leaders;
- volunteers;
- regular attenders;
- visitors;
- hirers and users of church premises.

This policy should be read alongside St Peter's Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct, Volunteer Policy, Social Media Policy, Complaints Policy, Whistleblowing Policy, Equal Opportunities Policy, Staff Handbook and other relevant PCC policies.

3. Theological foundation

Our welcome is rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe that every person is made in the image of God and should therefore be treated with dignity, patience, honesty and care.

We also believe that the church is called to be holy, truthful, loving and hospitable, speaking the truth in love and bearing with one another in humility.

The Apostle Paul writes:

"I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some."
 – 1 Corinthians 9:22, ESV

In context, Paul does not abandon gospel truth, but willingly gives up personal preferences and removes unnecessary barriers so that others may hear and respond to Christ. In the same spirit, we seek to practise a missionary welcome: warm, accessible, patient and understandable to those who come among us, especially newcomers, children, those unfamiliar with church, and those who may otherwise feel overlooked or unwelcome.

Our commitment to welcome does not mean that every belief, lifestyle, action or form of behaviour is affirmed. Nor does it mean that every person is eligible for every role in the life of the church. Our teaching, leadership, pastoral care and ministry practice are governed by Scripture, the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, safeguarding responsibilities, charity law, employment law, and the agreed policies of the PCC.

We therefore seek to hold together conviction and compassion, truth and grace, welcome and holiness, pastoral care and proper boundaries.

4. Our convictions as a Church of England parish

St Peter's is a Church of England church. Our basis of faith and statement of doctrine are those of the Church of England. Our theological convictions are shaped by our belief in the authority

of Scripture and by what Scripture teaches concerning the gospel, salvation, holiness, the church, and the ordering of our common life.

We recognise that some of the convictions we hold may be difficult, unpopular, or offensive to others, including some who come among us. These include our belief that Jesus Christ is uniquely Lord and Saviour; that all people stand before God's judgement and need his mercy; that heaven and hell are real; that repentance and faith in Christ are necessary; and that Christian discipleship involves submitting every area of life to the teaching of Scripture.

Some of our convictions are contested within wider society and within parts of the Church of England, including convictions concerning marriage, sexuality, and the ordering of ministry. St Peter's seeks to act in accordance with the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, the resolutions adopted by the PCC, and the pastoral and sacramental provision under which the church currently receives ministry.¹

These convictions shape our teaching, leadership and ministry practice, but they must be held and expressed with humility, clarity and charity.

We have no wish to cause unnecessary offence, nor to be defined primarily by contested issues. We want to be known above all as a church seeking to be faithful to Christ, united in the gospel, and generous in our life together.

Our convictions must never be used to excuse discourtesy, dismissiveness, partiality, exclusion, unfair treatment, harshness, contempt, bullying, abuse, or the misuse of power.

Women and men alike, and all who come among us, are to be welcomed warmly, listened to carefully, treated with dignity, and encouraged to respond to Christ in the fellowship of his church.

5. Our commitment to welcome, dignity and fair treatment

We seek to welcome all who come among us, whether they are long-standing Christians, new believers, exploring faith, returning to church after time away, members of another church, or simply visiting.

We will seek to treat people with dignity and fairness, in accordance with our Christian convictions and our legal responsibilities, including where applicable in relation to:

- age;
- disability;

¹ In keeping with the doctrine of the Church of England, St Peter's believes that marriage is between one man and one woman, and for that reason does not support the use of *Prayers of Love and Faith* at St Peter's. The parish has also passed a resolution under the *House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests* and receives the pastoral and sacramental ministry of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet. This reflects the parish's conviction that, while women and men are equal in the sight of God and saved in the same manner through faith in Christ, suitably qualified men should bear primary responsibility for Christ-like leadership and teaching in the church.

- gender reassignment;
- marriage and civil partnership;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation;
- personal background;
- nationality;
- language;
- family circumstances;
- education;
- employment;
- poverty or wealth;
- physical or mental health;
- neurodiversity;
- church background;
- past history;
- personal struggles;
- any other aspect of a person's circumstances that should not be used as a basis for unfair treatment.

In practice, this means that we will seek to:

- welcome newcomers warmly and help them understand what is happening;
- avoid unnecessary insider language, assumptions or social cliques;
- listen carefully to people's questions, concerns and experiences;
- speak truthfully and graciously;
- avoid mockery, contempt, gossip, stereotyping and harsh judgement;
- make reasonable efforts to include and assist those with practical, physical, sensory, social, emotional or communication needs;
- protect the vulnerable and those at risk;
- challenge behaviour that is unkind, unsafe, unfair, bullying, abusive, coercive, discriminatory or demeaning;
- use authority and responsibility for service, not self-interest.

We recognise that people come to church from many different circumstances. Some may carry experiences of grief, loneliness, poverty, family breakdown, disability, poor mental health, addiction, abuse, exclusion, shame, or disappointment with the church. We want to respond with compassion, while also recognising the limits of what the church can provide and signposting to appropriate professional, statutory or charitable support where necessary.

6. Conduct expected in our life together

Everyone who belongs to, serves in, or regularly attends St Peter's is expected to contribute to a culture of Christian grace, truthfulness, humility and care.

We expect members of the church family, staff, clergy, PCC members, volunteers and regular attenders to:

- treat others with courtesy, patience and respect;
- speak about others truthfully and charitably;
- avoid gossip, slander, contempt, mockery and unnecessary suspicion;
- be especially careful in the use of humour, criticism and public comment;
- listen before judging or correcting;
- respect appropriate personal, pastoral, emotional and physical boundaries;
- respect safeguarding boundaries and confidentiality;
- avoid favouritism based on class, education, race, family status, age, confidence, theological knowledge, personality, friendship group or length of time in the church;
- seek, where safe and appropriate, to address concerns directly and graciously in the spirit of Matthew 18;
- raise concerns through proper channels rather than through gossip, rumour, pressure groups or factional behaviour;
- accept correction where behaviour has been harmful, unwise, unkind or unfair.

We will not tolerate:

- bullying;
- harassment;
- intimidation;
- abuse;
- coercive control;
- spiritual manipulation;
- racism;
- sexism;
- demeaning language;
- sexual misconduct;
- threats;
- victimisation;
- misuse of position or power;
- repeated or deliberate behaviour that humiliates, excludes, silences, pressures or undermines others.

Disagreement is not the same as mistreatment. The church must remain a place where Scripture can be taught clearly, difficult questions can be asked honestly, and moral and theological disagreements can be handled with charity. However, disagreement must not be used as an

excuse for cruelty, contempt, personal attack, shaming, bullying, manipulation or refusal to listen.

7. Participation, service and leadership

A warm welcome to worship and church life does not mean that every person is automatically eligible for every role.

We distinguish between:

Attendance and ordinary welcome. Public worship and many church activities are open to all, subject to safeguarding, good order and appropriate conduct.

Participation in church life. People may participate in groups, ministries, fellowship and service in ways appropriate to their circumstances, gifts, maturity, safeguarding requirements and the nature of the activity.

Representative leadership and public ministry. Some roles carry particular responsibility because they represent the church publicly, involve teaching or pastoral care, involve children or vulnerable adults, involve trust or governance, or shape the spiritual life of the congregation.

Eligibility for leadership, employment, public ministry or ministry roles may therefore include consideration of:

- Christian profession and maturity;
- character and conduct;
- competence and gifting;
- safeguarding suitability, including safer recruitment checks where required;
- training and willingness to work under authority;
- agreement with the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England;
- willingness to uphold the ethos, convictions, policies and ministry expectations of St Peter's;
- the particular requirements of the role.

This applies, as appropriate, to clergy, licensed or authorised ministers, staff, PCC members, churchwardens, trustees, children's and youth workers, small-group leaders, pastoral visitors, music leaders, service leaders, preachers, teachers, welcomers, and others serving in public or representative ministry.

The PCC intends this policy to be read alongside the church's Safeguarding Policy, safer recruitment practice, employment policies, Volunteer Policy, Ministry Role Descriptions, Code of Conduct and any ministry expectations document adopted by the PCC.

8. Safeguarding, boundaries and protection

Our commitment to welcome is always subject to our safeguarding responsibilities.

Where a person's behaviour, history or circumstances present a risk to children, young people, vulnerable adults, survivors, staff, volunteers or the wider congregation, the church may set

appropriate boundaries. These may include restricting access to particular activities, requiring supervision, agreeing a written safeguarding contract, limiting contact with certain people, or excluding someone from particular settings.

Safeguarding concerns must be handled under the Safeguarding Policy and referred to the Parish Safeguarding Officer, Vicar, churchwardens, diocesan safeguarding team, statutory authorities, or other appropriate bodies as required.

No one should promise absolute confidentiality where there is a safeguarding concern, risk of harm, abuse, coercion, criminal behaviour, or danger to a child, young person or vulnerable adult.

A person may be challenged, restricted or, in serious cases, excluded from church activities where their behaviour is abusive, unsafe, persistently disruptive, threatening, sexually inappropriate, manipulative, coercive, or seriously damaging to the welfare of others or the good order of the church.

Such action should be taken carefully, proportionately, and with appropriate advice, especially where safeguarding, employment, clergy discipline, charity law, or legal responsibilities may be involved.

9. Accessibility and practical welcome

We seek to remove unnecessary barriers that make it harder for people to come to church, understand what is happening, participate appropriately, or receive pastoral care.

As resources allow, we will seek to give attention to:

- clear information for visitors;
- accessible entrances, seating and facilities;
- provision for those with hearing, sight, mobility or communication needs;
- support for children, older people, disabled people and neurodivergent people;
- sensitivity to those who find crowds, noise, social interaction or unfamiliar settings difficult;
- accessible language in notices, services and communication;
- hospitality that does not depend on social confidence, family status, education, class, or prior church knowledge.

We recognise that we will not always get this right. We welcome gracious feedback and will seek to respond constructively.

10. Hall and church hire

The church hall, church building and other parish premises are made available to outside groups at the discretion of the PCC and in accordance with the church's hire agreements, safeguarding expectations for hirers, insurance obligations, charitable purposes, and Christian ethos.

Hirers are expected to treat the premises, staff, volunteers, neighbours and other users with respect. They must comply with applicable safeguarding, health and safety, insurance and conduct requirements.

The PCC may decline, restrict, cancel or terminate a booking where the proposed or actual use is unlawful, unsafe, contrary to safeguarding requirements, likely to cause serious disorder or harm, damaging to the church's witness, or incompatible with the charitable purposes and Christian ethos of the church.

Use of church premises by an outside group does not imply endorsement of all views, activities or purposes of that group.

11. Raising concerns

As Christians, we seek to handle concerns, disagreements and grievances in a manner shaped by the teaching of Jesus, including the pattern of Matthew 18:15-17. Where it is safe, appropriate and proportionate to do so, a person who has been hurt, offended or concerned by another's behaviour should normally seek to speak directly and graciously with that person, with the aim of repentance, understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace.

Sometimes, however, it will not be wise or appropriate to speak directly to the person first. This may be the case where there is a safeguarding concern, bullying, abuse, coercion, intimidation, a significant power imbalance, repeated behaviour, fear of retaliation, or where the matter involves a church officer, staff member, volunteer leader or person in authority.

Concerns about unkind, unfair, bullying, coercive, discriminatory, abusive or otherwise inappropriate behaviour should normally be raised with the Vicar, churchwardens or another appropriate person if they cannot be resolved directly, or if direct conversation would be inappropriate.

Where the concern involves the Vicar, churchwardens, staff member, PCC member, volunteer leader or another person in authority, the concern should be raised with whichever appropriate church officer is not involved. Where local resolution is inappropriate or impossible, advice may be sought from the archdeacon or relevant diocesan officer.

Safeguarding concerns must be raised under the Safeguarding Policy and should not be handled merely as ordinary complaints or interpersonal disagreements. No one should be expected to address safeguarding concerns, abuse, coercive or threatening behaviour, or serious misconduct by private confrontation alone.

The church will seek to respond to concerns fairly, carefully and proportionately. Those who raise concerns in good faith should not be victimised or treated adversely for doing so. Equally, concerns should be raised truthfully, responsibly and without malice.

Where appropriate, the response may include direct conversation, pastoral support, apology, mediation, repentance, forgiveness, correction, training, change of role, safeguarding action, employment or volunteer process, disciplinary process, referral to diocesan or statutory bodies, or other proportionate steps.

12. Related policies and documents

This policy should be read alongside, where applicable:

- Safeguarding Policy;
- Safer Recruitment arrangements;
- Code of Conduct;
- Equal Opportunities Policy;
- Social Media Policy;
- Volunteer Policy;
- Volunteer Agreement;
- Ministry Role Descriptions;
- Staff Handbook and employment policies;
- Complaints Policy;
- Whistleblowing Policy;
- Conflict of Interest Policy;
- Data Protection Policy;
- Privacy Notice;
- Data Retention Policy;
- Hall and Church Hire Terms and Conditions;
- Safeguarding Expectations for Hirers;
- Health and Safety Policy;
- relevant risk assessments;
- PCC trustee responsibilities;
- relevant Church of England and diocesan safeguarding guidance.

13. Review

This policy will be reviewed by the PCC every three years, or sooner if required by changes in law, Church of England guidance, diocesan guidance, safeguarding requirements, parish practice or pastoral need.

The PCC will seek appropriate diocesan, legal, safeguarding or HR advice where the application of this policy may engage equality law, employment law, charity law, safeguarding duties, clergy discipline, or other legal responsibilities.

The PCC is responsible for ensuring that this policy remains faithful to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, consistent with our parish convictions, legally responsible, pastorally wise, and practically useful in shaping the life of the church.

Welcome, Dignity and Fair Treatment

St Peter's is a Church of England church seeking to be faithful to Jesus Christ, the Holy Scriptures, and the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England. We warmly welcome all who come among us: long-standing Christians, new believers, those exploring faith, those returning to church, and visitors.

We believe every person is made in the image of God and should be treated with dignity, patience, honesty and care. We want our church life to be marked by kindness, truthfulness, humility, hospitality and respect.

Our welcome is shaped by the gospel. We seek to remove unnecessary barriers so that people may hear of Christ and encounter his people with warmth, clarity and grace.

Our Christian convictions shape our teaching, leadership and ministry practice. Some of these convictions may be difficult or contested, including convictions concerning the uniqueness of Christ, discipleship, marriage, sexuality and the ordering of ministry. These convictions must never be used to excuse unkindness, dismissiveness, partiality, bullying, harassment, abuse or unfair treatment.

We are committed to welcoming women and men, children and adults, newcomers and long-standing members, and people of every background and circumstance. We seek to make St Peter's a place where people are heard, protected, encouraged and treated fairly.

A warm welcome does not mean that every person is automatically eligible for every role. Some roles carry particular responsibility because they involve teaching, pastoral care, safeguarding, trust, governance or public representation of the church.

If someone has a concern about behaviour within the life of the church, they should, where safe and appropriate, seek to speak directly and graciously with the person concerned. Where this would not be appropriate, or where the concern is serious, repeated, involves someone in authority, or relates to safeguarding, they may speak to the Vicar, churchwardens, Parish Safeguarding Officer, or another appropriate person.

Safeguarding concerns should always be raised under the Safeguarding Policy.