The attached resources are provided for the consideration of all Parish Councils. They cover 2 areas, namely Privacy and Social Media.

We have set out below some background notes and information concerning these resources:

1. **Privacy**

The Commonwealth Privacy Act commenced in 1989. Since then it has been through some significant amendments, the most recent being in 2012 (which amendments took effect from 12 March 2014).

Whilst most (if not all) parishes are exempt from the legislation, loss of exemption will mean that a parish must comply with the legislation. Furthermore, we believe that community expectations are such that, whether they are exempt or not, parishes will handle privacy matters appropriately (ie in ways consistent with the Privacy legislation).

Many parish activities are impacted by privacy considerations including church directories, websites (which more than ½ of our parishes have), newsletters, display of photographs, personal information held by a parish and parish registers.

It may have been some time since some Parish Councils reviewed their approach to privacy matters, and so the following documents are provided for their consideration:

1. ‘***Armidale privacy guidelines for parishes***’ – which sets out some information on the background to the Privacy legislation, notes about some of the exemptions, discussion of privacy considerations for specific parish activities; and a summary of the Australian Privacy Principles. This document has been modelled on an earlier version circulated by Sydney Diocese to their parishes.

We **recommend** that parish councils read these guidelines and consider what action they may need to take.

1. A draft ‘***Parish Privacy Policy’*** – which provides parishes with a policy document succinctly covering the main privacy areas (this draft policy has been based on policies from Hurstville Grove and North Sydney Anglican churches).

We **recommend** that parish councils consider adopting a Privacy Policy (either based on the one attached, or in a different form) if they do not already have one.

We further **recommend** that such policy, once adopted, be communicated to members of the parish, and be referenced on the Parish website (where such a website exists) and be reviewed regularly (eg annually).

1. **Social media**

Social media has proven to be a great tool to engage with our communities. But as with all technology there are risks. Sydney Diocese’s legal team released a circular to Sydney Diocesan parishes a few weeks ago highlighting the implications of a recent High Court case (*Fairfax & Ors v Voller (2021) HCA 27*). Whilst the case concerned a defamation action for Facebook user comments posted on the public Facebook pages of several media outlets, the principles outlined in the judgement have a wider application to all organisations which host a website or maintain social media pages – and this will include a majority of our parishes.

The key points arising from the case (insofar as they may impact upon parish activities) were:

1. Officeholders of a parish (Vicar, wardens, parish council – wherever there is an office) which hosts a website or maintains social media pages may be held liable for defamatory comments made by third parties on those platforms (although it should also be noted that Diocesan insurance policies stand behind such officeholders where they act in good faith, etc); and
2. Given the potential liability for defamation, parishes should review their approach to social media engagement and make any necessary adjustments, including adopting a social media policy.

Sydney Diocese suggested that parishes may wish to consider:

1. Using moderation features on social media platforms to block keywords, hide offensive comments and restrict posts on the parish’s website and public social media pages;
2. appointing administrators to manage posts on the parish’s public and private social media pages, and disabling posts (especially on public forums) if moderation is not possible; and
3. adopting a social media policy and training staff in the policy to equip them to engage with others on social media in a responsible manner.

We **recommend** that all parish councils reflect on the matters noted above, in light of social media use in their context. A draft ‘***Social Media Policy template’*** is attached hereto – which parishes may wish to adopt (either amended or unamended). If adopted we recommend that the policy be communicated to all members of the parish, and especially any staff and/or any volunteers responsible for managing parish, or parish ministry, social media sites (Parish Council may want to engage such staff and volunteers in discussion about any proposed policy before it is finally adopted). Once adopted we suggest parish Council communicate the existence of the policy and the reasons for it to the parish, together with an explanation of the measures being implemented under the terms of the policy.

Thank you for giving attention to these matters as we work together to keep people safe and to honour the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Should you have any questions about these resources please do not hesitate to contact the Bishop’s Assistant, Ian Millican, or the Registrar, Christopher Pears.

Rev Ian Millican

16 February, 2022