



As part of our focus on building family, we are committed to being a community where everyone knows they are valued, respected, and treated appropriately. As well as being a community where we encourage and challenge each other to grow to be more like Jesus.

As part of being a healthy and safe community, safeguarding is something we are committed to and so we have policies in place for safeguarding. These policies are designed to ensure children as well as adults with care and support needs are properly protected; while our whistleblowing policy provides a process for people to raise concerns about things they see that they do not believe are right. These policies are important and are available from Ruth Grimshaw.

But we want to ensure that as well as being safe, we are a place where everyone can flourish and grow into all that God has called them to be. We want to be a healthy Christian community, where everyone is valued, nurtured and respected. We are all part of the body at WSCF and as such we all have a role to play in the healthy culture and community we want to be. This is exciting, an opportunity to think about how we reflect the Kingdom and the God we love in the way that we live. This includes being committed to reflecting on our behaviours and conversations, and the way we treat each other. We need to ensure that the way we speak to each other, the way we engage with each other is not about what we might think is acceptable but how the other person receives it.

A few examples of what this might mean:

- That we use words that are designed to build up and not to belittle
- That we speak positively about, and to, people of other genders, ethnicity and orientation with each person being recognised and accepted for who they are
- That our teasing and banter (which is often a natural part of conversation with people we know well) only goes as far as the other person is happy with
- That the way we use touch is something the recipient is happy with
- That it is ok for someone to say to someone else respectfully that they found what was said or done unhelpful
- Recognising that life and circumstances change and so what someone might be happy with one day is something they might find difficult another day – and this involves seeking to be sensitive to how others are doing and feeling
- That we are each involved in building this caring, healthy, culture and are prepared to speak out – gently and clearly - when we see things that would threaten it

We do recognise that, from time to time, unhelpful or inappropriate things may be said and done. (Here we are not talking about where harm or abuse is suspected, as this needs to be passed to the safeguarding lead.)

The biblical principle outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 is that if someone feels hurt, or someone sees actions taken that could cause hurt, they will raise it with the other person involved seeking to find resolution. Where this is possible, this is the right action to take and one we would encourage. But we are also aware that, sometimes, this may not be possible and we should never pressure anyone to do this if they feel unhappy or unsafe in doing so. If someone has been hurt and feels unable to address it themselves, we would encourage them to speak with someone they trust. This is not to gossip but to address issues and to be part of building healthy cultures.

When we become aware of issues, we will work to address them so that we can grow as family together. This may involve difficult conversations, it may involve changing habits that have developed over many years, it may involve the need for repentance and reconciliation. Let's do this in a spirit of grace and humility, seeking to build up and to repair.

And, as part of building this culture, we need to be prepared to forgive each other – for those things that are done or said to us that cause upset or offense. This is something which Jesus clearly calls us to: as he speaks about forgiving others as we seek forgiveness from God (Matthew 6:14-15); as he calls on his followers to be willing to forgive and to continue to forgive (Matthew 18:21-22). Paul picks up this theme when he encourages believers to forgive in the same way that God has forgiven them (Colossians 3:13). But we also need to recognise that, for some people and in some situations, forgiveness can be a process that can take a long time – particularly if the hurt received was very deep. We can encourage people to move to a place of forgiveness, but we cannot impose it on them – we can, and should, walk with others as they seek to get to a place of forgiveness.

One of the privileges we have, as a body of God's people, is to encourage each other into a closer relationship with God. Paul points to this as he calls on believers to "teach and admonish one another with all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16). And sometimes this involves speaking out against something that is wrong and unhealthy in someone else's life. Ideally this happens from a place of relationship – where we have committed to speak truth into the life of someone close to us and where they have agreed for us to do so; but sometimes others might ask us about things they are doing, seeking guidance as to how they should live. And it is vitally important that we are free to respond truthfully, honestly and based on our best understanding of scripture and the example of Jesus so that we can help each other grow closer to him. As we do so, let's follow the example of Jesus who was recognised as being "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

In summary:

- In the words of Jesus, let's love our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:39)
- In the words of Paul, let's hate what is evil, be devoted to each other, honour others above ourselves (Romans 12:9-10)

There's a lot to think over here but there is also an exciting opportunity to recognise the many good things about our church family and to keep doing those but also to address areas where we can become healthier, more honouring and valuing and look forward with hope to a future which is even healthier and safer and which is a place where people are drawn to because of how well we treat and love each other.

From the leadership team