ICT (Information and Communication Technology) Safety.

Background
In recent years the huge increase in the use of, and accessibility to, different types of information and communication technology (ICT[1]) has created more effective and speedier methods of connecting with each other and introduced new ways in which to transmit information. However, along with the positive implications of these new communication technologies, we also find ourselves aware of how they can be misused, particularly in working with children and young people.

Today 41% of children aged 8-11 regularly use the internet, and over 75% of 11 year olds have their own television, games console and mobile phone[2]. These proportions have increased over the years and it has become the norm for our children and young people to own mobiles, be extremely computer literate and to own their own part of cyberspace, whether that is through a social networking site or having their own webpage.
It is unsurprising that they would want to use these new and very accessible methods of ICT in order to contact their peers, family and those who work with them through church activities so, as the Church, we have a responsibility to communicate professionally, accountably and effectively with the children and young people we serve through these methods.
In light of the recent tragic events involving cyber bullying and grooming through Facebook in the news,this document is intended to increase awareness and understanding of information and communication technology and thereby creating a greater sense of accountability in our use of it. As in all our ministries amongst the parishes and communities of this diocese, we seek to place the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults at the very highest level.

General protocols for ICT communication
• Consent should be obtained by leaders[3] from the parents or guardians of any young people or children they wish to communicate with through ICT.
• Clear and unambiguous language should be used. Many abbreviations are currently used which are open to misinterpretation, for example „lol" could mean „laugh out loud" or „lots of love". Nuance and tone in communication can sometimes be hard to read, so ensure that language is clear and not open to misunderstanding.

Use of emails and Instant Messenger (IM)
• When using emails and IM, such as MSN, in communicating with children and young people, you should ensure that the general protocols for ICT communication should be taken into account.
• Another leader should always be copied into all emails which are sent to children and young people to ensure accountability. If no other appropriate adult within the parish is available to be accountable, then a suitable substitute should be found such as the parish priest or churchwarden.
• When communicating with a group of children or young people, use a group email and not individual ones. This saves time, and ensures there is no favouritism as everyone will receive the same message.
• A specific email account should be used to communicate with children and young people. The address should be known by the young person or child, their parent or guardian, and other leaders. This should not be your personal email account.

[1] ICT are electronic devices such as personal computers (PC), mobile phones, smartphones, Personal Digital Assistants (PDA),
games consoles and digital cameras that allow communication via websites, email, instant messenger, voice and texts.
[2] Statistics from OFCOM
[3] **Leaders** include children's and youth leaders, clergy, Parish Child Protection Officers and other people with a responsibility for work with children and young people

• There should be an agreed length of time for a conversation with a child or young person through instant messaging, and an agreed curfew when no communication should take place, for example between 10pm and 7am.
• Log all conversations in a text/Word file and ensure that it is saved in a specific area on your computer. At the beginning of each IM conversation, you should inform the child or young person you are communicating with that the content of your conversation will be saved.

Mobile Phones
• When using mobile phones in communicating with children and young people, you should ensure that the general protocols for ICT communication should be taken into account.
• If a child or young person owns a phone, it is possible that parents may not wish leaders to know the number, so it is important to obtain consent to contact their child on that particular number or on any other mobile number given.
• Where *at all possible* use group rather than individual texting.
• As with emailing and use of IM, ensure that your language is not open to misinterpretation and avoid using emoticons or abbreviations that could be misunderstood.
• Any text messages that are received which cause concern should be saved and passed to your Parish CPO.
• Most mobile phones now come with built in digital cameras. As with all cameras used by leaders you should ensure you have parental consent to take and use photographs taken of children and young people.

Social Networking Sites (SNS)
• Sites such as Facebook, Bebo, Snapchat and others create further issues which are not covered in previous sections. Again, guidance around consent, accountability, curfew and language should be followed in using social networking sites.
• It is recommended that on SNS, leaders should either have two profiles; one for personal use and the other for work use. Leaders should only accept „friend requests" from young people they know on their work profile. When using your work profile on any SNS, you should ensure that use of any IM/chat facility is restricted to emergency use only.
• Communication should be in the public domain wherever possible by using group mailing and public wall posts.
• Where groups are set up on SNS, they should be in a closed status and not open to the general public. Administrative rights to the group should be retained by the leader/s who should undertake regular moderation and evaluation of the group.
• Any content in conversations, wall posts or messages that causes concern should be saved, printed and passed onto your Parish CPO.