



Swan Christian
EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Membership and Christian Lifestyle Policy

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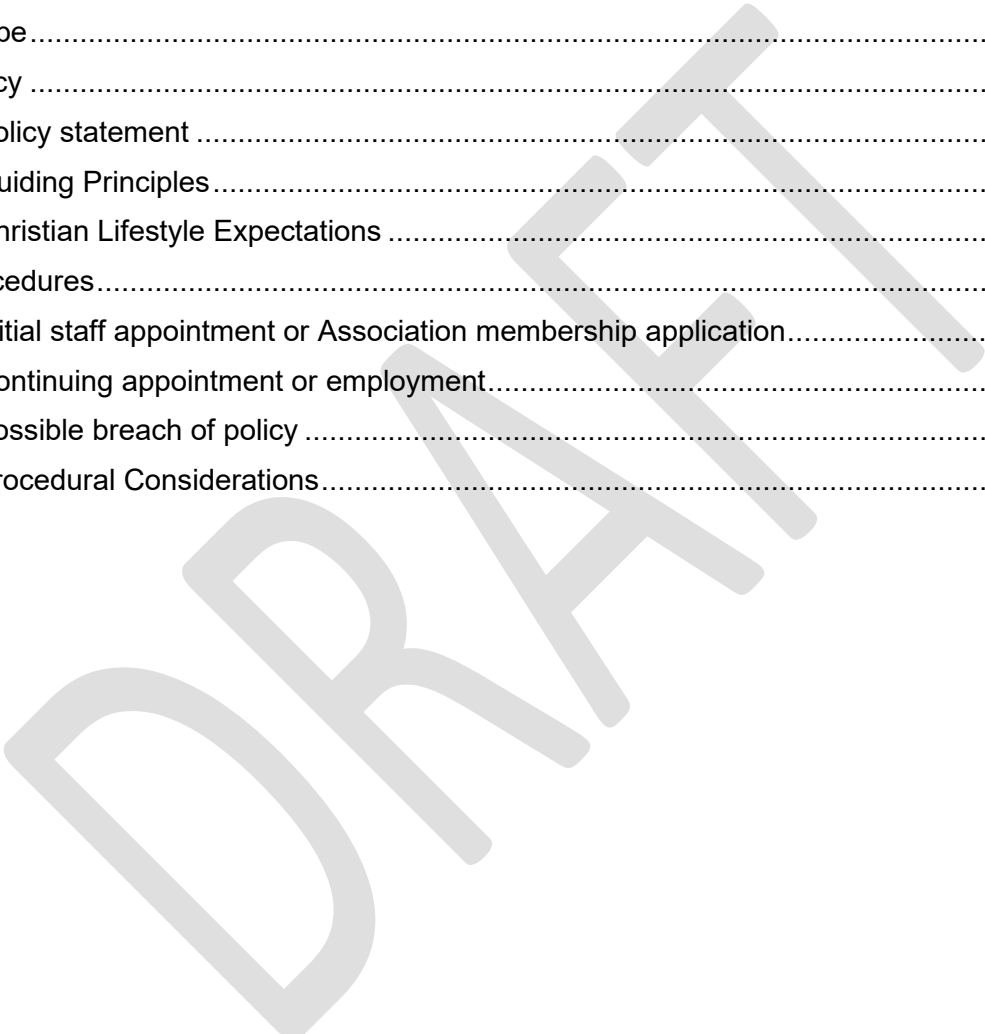
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Contents

- Contents..... 3
- Preamble..... 4
- Context..... 4
- Scope..... 5
- Policy 5
 - Policy statement 5
 - Guiding Principles 6
 - Christian Lifestyle Expectations 7
- Procedures..... 7
 - Initial staff appointment or Association membership application..... 7
 - Continuing appointment or employment..... 8
 - Possible breach of policy 8
 - Procedural Considerations..... 9



Preamble

This policy sets out the lifestyle expectations that Swan Christian Education Association Inc (SCEA) consider to be consistent with living life as a Christian. For the purpose of some legislation, these expectations are an important part of the organisation's 'religious beliefs and sensitivities' or its 'religious tenets'.

This policy is the SCEA Board's determination of how two classes of members of the Association should seek to live in response to the Association's Statement of Faith and in membership of the Association.

SCEA is a non-denominational Christian organisation. In determining a policy on lifestyle expectations for a Christian believer, the Association recognises and respects that other organisations and denominations may have different interpretations of how a similar Statement of Faith is applied in daily life. However, to qualify for, and continue in, particular classes of membership within SCEA, this policy is the definitive statement.

This policy recognises that this is a potentially complex area; and that, whilst some matters may be very clearly prescribed, other issues should be considered on a case-by-case basis. In these cases, the Guiding Principles, Lifestyle Expectations, processes and procedural considerations outlined in this policy should provide a safe and reasonably clear framework for all affected parties.

Context

Clause 10 of the SCEA Constitution recognises three categories of membership:

- 10.1 Membership of the Association is divided into three (3) categories being:*
- (a) School Membership,*
 - (b) Association Membership, and*
 - (c) Staff Membership.*

Subsequent clauses in the SCEA Constitution refer to conditions of membership:

With respect to Association Members, Clause 12 includes:

- 12.2 Notwithstanding the Board's then current policy in regard to each category of membership, persons wishing to be Association Members must declare their agreement with the Objects of the Association, agree with and accept the Statement of Faith, agree to abide by the Constitution, indicate clearly their acceptance of Christ personally as Saviour and Lord, and give evidence to the satisfaction of the Board or its delegated representatives that they are leading lives compatible with the Association's Christian Lifestyle Expectations as defined by the Board from time to time.*

With respect to Staff Members, Clause 13 includes:

- 13.1 Upon commencement of employment with the Association a person is admitted automatically into the category of Staff Membership. It shall be a condition of initial and continuing employment that Staff Members of the*

Association must declare and maintain their agreement with the Objects of the Association, agree with and accept the Statement of Faith, agree to abide by the Constitution, indicate clearly their acceptance of Christ personally as Saviour and Lord, and give evidence to the satisfaction of the Board or its delegated representatives that they are leading lives compatible with the Association's Christian Lifestyle Expectations as defined by the Board from time to time.

There is no condition for School Membership of needing to live a life 'compatible with the Association's Christian Lifestyle Expectations as defined by the Board from time to time'.

Clause 14.3 provides for the termination of Association Membership if the Board considers an Association Member is not living a life compatible with the Christian Lifestyle Expectations.

Similarly, the reference to a condition of 'continuing employment' in Clause 13.1 provides for the potential termination of Staff Membership if a Staff Member is not living a life compatible with the Christian Lifestyle Expectations.

Scope

This policy shall apply to all Association Members and Staff Members of SCEA.

While this policy does not apply directly to school members or volunteers, the CEO will ensure that the intentions of this policy are reflected in appropriate agreements with parents and volunteers.

Policy statement

The SCEA Constitution requires that Association Members and Staff Members shall, amongst other things, lead lives compatible with the Association's Christian Lifestyle Expectations as defined by the Board from time to time.

- The Board's definition of the Association's Christian Lifestyle Expectations is given in this policy.
- The Board, CEO and senior staff are required to ensure that Association Members and Staff Members are fully aware of these expectations on becoming Association Members or taking up a staff position with the Association, and that these Members continue to meet this requirement of membership and employment.
- In accepting Association Membership or employment as a Staff Member, Association and Staff Members recognise that the Board's definition of the Christian Lifestyle Expectations is made 'from time to time', and this means that the Board has absolute discretion to make a change to the definition which may result in a Member not being able to meet these Expectations and therefore no longer continue as an Association Member or employee. In such an event, the Board may, under certain circumstances, grant a grace period for a Staff Member to seek alternative employment.
- In instances where an Association Member or a Staff Member has declared or is considered to no longer meet this requirement, the Board, CEO and senior staff are expected to follow the Guiding Principles, Processes and Procedural Guidelines outlined in this policy and the Constitution.

- The Board, CEO and senior staff are required to ensure that documentary evidence of compliance with this policy is systematically collected and retained.
- Documentary evidence shall include signed declarations which Staff Members are required to complete annually, and Association Members shall complete biennially.

Guiding Principles

SCEA considers the following principles to be an important application of the Association's Statement of Faith with particular reference to Clause 3.1(c) of the Constitution, namely that *'the nature and plan of God is revealed in the Bible. Its sixty-six (66) books are divinely inspired, entirely trustworthy, authoritative and sufficient to guide us in all matters of faith and conduct.'*

- The supremacy of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As fallen, finite mortals, we cannot know God fully; but we acknowledge that He is sovereign over all creation, He is perfect and holy. He is the ultimate authority (the Lord).
- We are naturally separated from God by our thoughts, words and deeds; by what we do and by what we don't do (our sins). No effort of ours is sufficient to bridge this gap; only the sacrificial death of Jesus can achieve this.
- We are saved (justified) only through our faith in Jesus, not by our efforts or works or lifestyle.
- When we recognise God's abhorrence of sin and the immense price and pain of Jesus' sacrifice, our response should be to turn from what is wrong towards what is right. Not because we can earn God's favour, but in appreciation of what He has done. This process of seeking to live more in line with God's will (sanctification) is informed and assisted by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the study of God's revelation (the Bible) and the reflective counsel of other believers (the fellowship of the Church).
- As Jesus' Lordship extends over all of creation; we cannot compartmentalise life, either between sacred and secular, or between public and private; we should have an holistic, not dualistic, worldview
- The Christian lifestyle is therefore not a means of salvation; rather it is a reflection of our acknowledgement of the Lordship of God and a grateful and sincere desire to turn from those things that offend Him to those things that please Him (repentance).
- Although we are saved, we continue to fail. This does not mean we should not care; we should, deeply. Although God's grace is sufficient to cover anything, this grace cost God dearly on the cross; it is not cheap grace (Romans 6). Our reactions to our failures reflect our perspective on the significance of this sacrifice – is the reaction one of sorrow and remorse or defiant, self-justification?
- God is concerned about relationships and 'community'. He is three-in-one. We are borne into families. We are intended to be part of the family or body of Christ – the church. This is a stark contrast to a prevalent contemporary western culture of self-centredness and individualism.
- This inter-dependence means that we must consider the implications of our lifestyle on those around us; on those within the body of Christ, and those yet to join. We also have to recognise that we come under the delegated authority of others, and we may, in turn, have authority over others. With authority comes significant individual and mutual responsibility.

Christian Lifestyle Expectations

In the light of the above Principles and other Christian teachings, SCEA expects all Association and Staff Members:

- To believe and confess that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Saviour.
- To be in a church fellowship with a minimum expectation of attending church and/or **homegroup** Church Fellowship Group regularly (typically every week) in order to be disciplined and accountable to other believers and to play a role in the 'body of Christ'.
- To be living in obedience to the scriptures as interpreted by the traditions of Protestant Churches; and therefore, to this end, be regularly studying the Bible.
- To be positive in all relationships, seeking to build up and encourage others with grace, forgiveness and mercy.
- In order to be a role-model for students and others, the believer's lifestyle will include (but not be limited to):
 - Positive language which is respectful to God and neighbour.
 - Avoidance of addictive negative actions and habits.
 - For both single and married, positive biblical relationships with members of both sexes. SCEA affirms the biblical understanding of sexual activity as a gift from God, expressed only within marriage between a man and a woman. Staff are expected to adopt practices and viewpoints that reflect this understanding.
- Consistent with the biblical teaching on relationships and Christian community, it is unacceptable to be involved in persistent and/or unrepentant sexual immorality, idolatry, adultery, homosexual activity, greed, drunkenness, malicious gossip, thieving or cheating (1 Cor. 6:9-11).
- Staff Members will be expected to actively participate in the Christian life of the Association as expressed in and through activities such as (but not limited to) development of a distinctively Christian curriculum, staff devotions, mission programs, and being willing and able to share their faith in Christ with students, staff and members of their school community in appropriate circumstances.

Procedures

Initial staff appointment or Association membership application

SCEA requires that the processes for the initial appointment or employment of Staff Members and for approving membership for Association Members shall include evidence, on record, that show that:

- the Association or Staff Member believes and confesses the Statement of Faith, and that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Saviour. This evidence might include written statements, signed declarations or the written record of an interview by a selection panel.
- they have read, understood and agreed to abide by this Christian Lifestyle Expectation Policy.

Continuing appointment or employment

SCEA requires all Staff Members and all Association Members regularly sign a declaration that:

- they believe and confess the Statement of Faith and that Jesus is their Lord and Saviour, and
- they are aware of, and comply with, the Christian Lifestyle Expectation Policy.

Staff Members shall sign the declaration annually. Association Members shall sign biennially.

The first response when a Staff or Association Member is unable or unwilling to sign the declaration will be of pastoral care and with the objective of restoration. This does not preclude the possibility of the employment or membership being terminated either by mutual agreement or unilaterally by SCEA.

Possible breach of policy

When it is apparent, or there is a reasonable suspicion, that a Staff or an Association Member is breaching this Policy, it is expected that **the Board Chairperson**, Chief Executive Officer, Principal or line manager will consider and act on the following as appropriate:

- Clarification of facts – those involved in addressing a potential breach are required to ascertain the facts sensitively and confidentially from credible sources.
- Whilst hearsay may require investigation and resolution, it is not sufficient evidence.
- Differences in individual's perspectives mean that reports should be cross-referenced or triangulated against other sources (without unduly compromising confidentiality).
- It should be noted that some investigations can only lawfully be conducted by an appropriate external agency - particularly those involving sexual abuse or exploitation of children, including child pornography or other potentially criminal activities.
- Right of reply – at the earliest reasonable opportunity, the Staff or Association Member should know of any alleged breach of this Policy and be provided with an opportunity to address the allegations.
- It is important that the purpose of an interview with Staff or an Association member is clarified at the outset, and that this purpose is maintained. The meeting may be to establish facts and offer a right of reply, it might be solely for pastoral care, or it might be part of a formal performance management or discipline process.
- The offer of having a support person attending a meeting must be considered. The offer of a support person is mandatory where the meeting is part of a formal performance management or discipline process. A Staff or Association Member cannot be required to have a support person.
- Following an initial investigation, the Principal or line manager is expected to forward a written report to the Chief Executive Officer. The report should state the facts of the case, demonstrate that an appropriate process has been followed, and set out the Principal or line manager's reflections, preferences and/or recommendations which should address the relevant Procedural Considerations (below).
- The Chief Executive Officer will consult with the Board Chair if required in a timely manner.

- Where a breach of this policy is likely to lead to the termination of employment of a Staff Member, the Chief Executive Officer shall seek expert advice on the termination process.
- Where a breach of this policy is likely to lead to termination of membership of an Association Member, the Board shall ensure that the appropriate process outlined in the Clause 14 of the Constitution is followed.
- Appropriate notes and records shall be kept of each stage in this process and attached to the Staff records as appropriate.
- At all stages, those involved shall be mindful of the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of the Staff or Association Member.

Procedural Considerations

In implementing this policy, particularly regarding alleged or declared breaches, the following matters will be considered:

- Clarification of facts – those involved in addressing a potential breach are required to sensitively and confidentially ascertain the facts from credible sources.
- Right of reply – at the earliest reasonable time, the Staff or Association Member should know of any alleged breach of this Policy and must be provided with an opportunity to address the allegations.
- The potential long-term impact of any breach and its resolution on students and their welfare. This means that long-term student welfare should not be compromised by short-term administrative expediency.
- Protection of innocent third parties and victims.
- The reputation of SCEA and its schools.
- Reporting and whistle blowing – in the interest of the integrity and reputation of SCEA, anyone with evidence or reasonable suspicion of a breach of this policy is expected to report their concerns confidentially to the CEO, their principal or line manager. Under certain circumstances, anonymous reports may be appropriate, but they are generally not encouraged; anonymity can significantly impede resolution.
- Conflicts of interest – when resolving any potential breaches of this policy the relevant Chief Executive Officer, principal or line manager needs to consider their own potential conflicts of interest. They are likely to be personally close to their staff; they have an interest in minimising disruption of their staff, students or operations; and there is a degree of personal subjectivity in applying this policy. For these reasons, it is anticipated that, except for minor breaches, principals and line managers will seek the assistance and security of working with an appropriately experienced or qualified leader more at arm's length from the matter.
- Defamation, character damage, gossip and rumour-mongering. All allegations and breaches of this policy shall be handled confidentially to avoid risk of defamation or reputational damage. Malicious or vexatious allegations, gossip, rumour-mongering and breaches of confidence will be treated seriously and are potential disciplinary matters.
- Some breaches may be sufficiently serious to be considered gross misconduct which may warrant summary dismissal. These will include matters such as physical, emotional or verbal violence, inappropriate interactions with students, including

grooming, or any dishonest dealings. Some of these behaviours may be more appropriately addressed under another SCEA policy.

- SCEA is not an independent jurisdiction; it is expected that a report will be made to a relevant agency if an incident is required by law to be reported.
- The response of SCEA to a particular breach of this policy may have both short- and long-term legal ramifications. Where it is confirmed that a breach has occurred, the principal or line manager is required to consult the Chief Executive Officer who will liaise with the Board Chair if this is deemed appropriate. Principals and line managers are not authorised to make any undertakings on behalf of SCEA prior to a response from the Chief Executive Officer.

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