



Dr Mark Zirnsak,

JIM Unit,

Uniting Church Synod of Vic/Tas

Melbourne

30 August 30, 2020

Dear Mark,

Thank you very much for your prompt reply to our submission to the consultation in 'Safety in Cyberspace'. Warnambool Church Council is deeply appreciative of the work of the JIM Unit and our members appreciate that it is stressful and often lonely work. We hope that the Covid 19 crisis is not affecting you too deeply and that you remain safe and well.

As a Church Council, we would like to reaffirm our total support for the suggested Recommended Position for the Synod in the Regulation of the Online World.

In particular, in response to your email, we would like to reaffirm that we are very aware of the need for the laws governing social media and the online space to give law enforcement agencies timely access to evidence, as stated in Item2(c) (i). We in no way wanted to have their investigative process delayed by the need to obtain a warrant through the court, which you have indicated is likely to be a lengthy process. The information we had received in this regard locally had indicated that court warrants for police to obtain identity data could be obtained in a timely manner, and as a consequence not hold up the police in their investigations, but this is obviously not your experience. If this process is indeed a lengthy and time consuming one, we suggest that it needs to be streamlined, and this may be a topic for further advocacy.

Our comment "Government agencies should require a warrant to obtain private information as a measure of accountability" was made in an attempt to emphasize that we thought that there need to be checks and balances in place for reasons of accountability, as you have also indicated in Recommendations 2(c) (ii)-(iv). Inadvertently and unintentionally, we have led you to believe that we were being critical of the current 'modus operandi', which is definitely not the case. It might also help your understanding of our situation to know that several members of our Church Council have had a great deal of experience working with police, sexual assault victims and courts, victims of domestic violence and working with people with long term psychiatric conditions including having roles as Manager of a CASA Centre, a Police Chaplain, a Safe Church Officer and a Secondary School Chaplain of 25 years. Unfortunately, in their experiences over many years, there have unfortunately been incidences of where in the process of law enforcement in this area of concern, a few police members have not given sufficient regard to matters of privacy of innocent people, and damage has been done.

We would again like to reaffirm our total support for the church's existing position as it stands: that the protection of children and adults from sexual abuse takes priority over other concerns such as privacy. We are also very supportive of the recommendations which give consideration to online privacy and support safeguards over the powers law enforcement agencies are granted online.

Warrnambool UC Church Council,

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