

## **FOR THE IMMEDIATE ATTENTION OF ALL CLERGY / LAY CHAIRS OF DEANERY SYNODS:**

**Clergy, please bring this matter to the attention of your Churchwardens and parish officers.**

### **PROBLEM PHONE CALLER:**

A number of clergy and lay officers have been receiving problem telephone calls. Over recent months the activity of a particular caller in the Diocese has intensified. This note contains general advice on handling problem phone calls and more specific information about one caller.

### **Advice on handling problem telephone calls:**

#### *In general...*

- Do not give your telephone number or name when you answer a call.
- Please do not give personal information about other clergy or lay officers unless you know the person who is calling you. Please do not confirm when a person is sick, away or on holiday.
- You do not have to accept nuisance or abusive calls. If a caller begins to behave inappropriately, keep calm. Warn them that you will put the phone down if they continue. Do not be afraid to put the phone down on such callers and not answer if they ring back.
- If you are uncertain about a caller, ask for their number so you can call them back, end the call and then phone them back. A genuine caller will usually give their number if they need to contact you and you could explain that you have been having a number of bogus calls – but only if necessary.
- You do not have to accept threatening calls. In these circumstances end the call quickly – just put the phone down – and inform BT or the Police. Please also inform your Area Dean or someone else you trust so that pastoral support can be given.
- Caller Display is now free of charge on BT lines and may be helpful, but some nuisance callers withhold their telephone number.
- BT's Choose To Refuse Service costs £10.05 per quarter (free for the first month) and allows you to block calls from up to ten numbers – even if the caller withholds their number. BT advise that many nuisance callers cease calling if their calls are blocked for a month – in the “free” period. If you register to use this service, you must cancel it after a month or you will be charged for the service. See below for more information.
- BT Nuisance Call Advisors are available to give advice free of charge, anytime of the day or night on **Freefone 0800 661 441**.
- If you are bothered by marketing calls you can register free of charge with the Telephone Preference Scheme on **Freefone 0800 398 893**.
- BT advises that most silent calls are generated by computerised call centres. But if you require further assistance with silent calls, advice is available on **Freefone 0800 661 441**.

### ***In Particular ...***

Following complaints from many clergy and lay officers across the Diocese, please note that there appears to be a persistent caller who makes calls across the Diocese, including all the bishops' and archdeacons' offices, clergy, lay chairs of deanery synods and parish officers.

He has not so far proved threatening or violent, but can be abusive, often projects unpleasant motives onto his callers and takes up large amounts of time. We believe that he uses a number of different names and is adopts different personas and accents. He often poses as someone who has recently moved into the area or someone with relatives in the parish or deanery. His voice will become recognisable if you have taken several calls from him, as will his manner and the subject matter of the calls.

### **How to recognise his calls:**

- He will often seem to know personal details of clergy and their histories, minute details about parochial, deanery, diocesan and national Church of England matters. His apparently detailed knowledge of personal histories and contexts can be quite unnerving. He also has a detailed knowledge of cricket scores and history.
- He does not seem to pause for breath and rarely gives an opportunity to give a proper response to his questions. It can seem impossible to bring the phone call to an end and he usually takes up huge amounts of time. An innocent opening such as a request for help or information often leads to a tirade against something or someone, and the call will go on to draw in more and more issues the longer the phone call goes on.
- He has a number of complaints relating to the Roman Catholic Church; catholic/liberal traditions within the Church of England; details of supposed diocesan policy – for example in appointing or not appointing black clergy; complaints about what an incumbent, the bishops or the Church of England are doing; homosexuality; inter-faith co-operation; war and pacifism; prejudice against 'white, working class protestant people'; Bishop Ryle is often mentioned; the Church's alleged denigration of servicemen and women ... He has also caused problems in a number of parishes by making complaints against individuals, parish decisions or appointments. His command of detail, along with the intonation are notable. He appears to be a great conspiracy theorist.
- He always blocks access to his phone number.

### **Advice on how to handle the calls:**

- Challenging him as to the fact that he has called under different names is not recommended, as he will deny this. It is probably best to listen to his opening comments and when his voice/identity has been recognised, try to bring the phone call to an end as soon as possible.
- Despite any provoking comments/accusations, try not to get drawn into an angry response, as this is likely to increase the chance of him calling again or becoming abusive.
- Inviting him to put his complaint in writing so that you can consider it and give a proper response, has proved an effective way of ending the phone call. He has not so far taken up any invitation to write. The less you give him in terms of information or opinion, the less he is likely to home in on you and various issues in what may be an obsessive way.
- If he becomes abusive, tell him that you will not listen and put the phone down. He may try phoning back immediately – but do not answer.
- If you are concerned about any call you receive and want to take it further, make a note of the time, duration, content of the call and what concerned you, how you would describe his voice, and any background noise and talk to BT. If you need pastoral support, do not hesitate to contact your area dean, archdeacon or suffragan bishop.

## **Advice On Nuisance Calls From the BT Website**

At BT we want to help everyone stay in touch, but if you are unfortunate enough to receive malicious or nuisance calls, we're here to help. Even one malicious call is one too many and we are determined to find a solution.

Malicious calls can be offensive, threatening, or simply very annoying. They may also be a criminal offence under Section 127 of the Telecommunications Act 2003 (see below).

Whatever the nature of the calls, we are extremely concerned about the distress and inconvenience caused to our customers. This guide outlines how we can work together to take positive action against malicious calls.

### **What can you do to help**

Some malicious callers may dial your number at random. Others may actually know you. But whichever group they fall into, remember - you are in control. You can help by taking these few simple precautions whenever you answer your phone.

### **Keep calm**

Most malicious callers gain pleasure by getting an emotional response from you. So keep calm and don't show any emotion.

### **Don't give out your number**

When you answer your telephone, just say "hello". Never give any information about yourself unless you are certain you know the caller. This may prevent a caller who dials your number at random from remembering it and calling again. Make sure callers identify themselves first. If you have a telephone answering machine, don't put your name and number in your opening message.

If a caller asks "What number is this?", ask what number they want and then tell them whether they are right or wrong. Don't give your number unless you know the caller. Tell other members of your household to follow the same procedure and never answer any questions on the telephone, no matter how innocent they may seem, unless the caller is known.

Answering machine messages should never say that you are out, on holiday or away on business. They should just say that you can't answer the telephone at the moment. If the message is recorded by a male voice it may deter malicious or nuisance calls.

### **Don't talk to malicious callers**

If, after following these general precautions, the telephone rings again, don't say anything when you answer it. A genuine caller will speak first. A malicious caller will probably hang up.

If you are a woman, avoid giving details of your sex or marital status in your telephone book entry. Just use your initials instead of your first name.

Some malicious callers may want nothing more than to have a conversation. So put the handset calmly down beside the telephone and ignore it for a few minutes before replacing it. If you have a telephone with a new style socket, you can simply unplug it for a short while. Don't forget to disconnect extension telephones too.

Remember, malicious callers use the telephone to hide behind because most would be too frightened to say the same things to your face.

## **Silent Calls**

Most silent calls are generated by companies using automated diallers in Call Centres, which generate a large volume of calls. Some of these calls fail to connect to an advisor with the Call Centre, which results in you receiving a silent or hang up call, the number is usually withheld when you dial 1471. These calls normally occur between 8.30am and 9.30pm and it is not uncommon to receive several calls a day. These calls are not of a malicious nature and the Call Centre may eventually be successful in connecting with yourself.

To help reduce the number of silent and hang up calls it is recommended that you register with the Telephone Preference Scheme on Freefone 0800 398 893. If you require further assistance in dealing with silent calls please dial Freefone 0800 661 441.

## **Someone to Call**

Call our Nuisance Call Advisors free of charge, anytime of the day or night on **Freefone 0800 661 441** they will offer you simple advice on the most suitable action to take, tailored to the particular difficulties you are experiencing. You may be connected to a trained specialist who will work with you, using their knowledge and experience to tackle the problem. In extreme cases they can also work with the Police to trace your calls.

## **Choose to refuse**

You may wish to consider BT's Choose To Refuse Service. Choose To Refuse is a quarterly rental service which enables a customer to bar the telephone number of the last incoming call, following termination of the call. Up to ten telephone numbers can be stored in a personal data store which can be accessed using a PIN (Personal Identification Number), to enable the customer to review, add to, and edit the information held. The service allows customers more control over their incoming calls and may be useful for recipients of malicious or nuisance calls. For more information call us on **Freefone 0800 169 2707**.

<p>This service is free for first month then £10.05 inc VAT per quarter. You can bar calls from up to 10 lines by entering 14258** immediately after the call and this will work even if the number was withheld. If you use the service it will be charged after one month unless cancelled. BT advise that one month's barring usually stops a nuisance caller, but this depends on the frequency of their calls.</p>
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## **Taking action**

If malicious calls become a problem, or you receive just one particularly menacing call, you may decide to report the matter to BT and it will receive our closest attention. We'll talk with you and help you decide the best course of action. This may include tracing future calls or changing your telephone number.

Almost all malicious calls can now be traced, whether they come from private, public or even mobile telephones, anywhere in the country. A dedicated team of specially trained BT people will work with the Police to put an end to the distress caused by the caller.

In such cases, it will be helpful to the Police and to any subsequent prosecution of the malicious caller, if you keep a written record of the calls. Make notes of the date, time of day, whether the voice was a man's or a woman's, what was said and whether you heard any background noises and so on.

You may need to be prepared to give evidence if the malicious caller is traced, charged and brought to court.

Remember - don't suffer in silence. Tell us so we can help.

## **Telecommunications Act - Section 127**

### **Improper use of public electronic communications network**

(1) A person is guilty of an offence if he-

- (a) sends by means of a public electronic communications network a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character; or
- (b) causes any such message or matter to be so sent.

(2) A person is guilty of an offence if, for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another, he-

(a) sends by means of a public electronic communications network, a message that he knows to be false,

(b) causes such a message to be sent; or

(c) persistently makes use of a public electronic communications network.

(3) A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable, on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, or to both.

(4) Subsections (1) and (2) do not apply to anything done in the course of providing a programme service (within the meaning of the Broadcasting Act 1990 (c. 42)).