

Evangelism: Legal Guidelines

Privacy*

All evangelists holding personal information about the people they engage with should be familiar with the Privacy Act.

What should evangelists know about privacy regulation? ✨

People have a right to privacy in their personal information. This information should only be collected from people for a lawful purpose and people should be informed how their information will be stored and held and for how long it will be kept.

Personal information is information about an identifiable individual. This covers all sorts of information including photos, emails, notes and film recordings. Where evangelists film their work and wish to publish it, they should provide an option for people to opt out of being filmed or have their images published. A practical option is to consider using technology with editing functions able to remove or anonymise those people's images.

Where individuals are concerned about the way their personal information has been handled, they can complain to the Privacy Commissioner who will investigate the complaint. Evangelists are obliged to notify the Privacy Commissioner where a serious breach of the Privacy Act has occurred. A serious breach is a breach that has caused or is likely to cause serious harm.

How might privacy law apply to an evangelist? ✨

Scenario – online video of street preaching

An evangelist has a YouTube channel and posts content usually twice a week. Midweek the evangelist posts a scripture and video of a short sermon about what the passage of scripture means. On Fridays the evangelist likes to go out late at night and brings a colleague with him to film his sermon and the interactions that occur as people pass by on their way home from clubs and bars. He has a growing number of followers because the Friday film clips have become quite popular with people interested in the unscripted responses he gets.

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In this case, it is unlikely that the midweek content will cause privacy complaints as the scripture-based message is not about other people. The Friday night content, where identifiable individuals are filmed, raises privacy concerns.

When using other people’s images, it is preferable to be cautious and transparent about what might happen with the footage. The evangelist in this scenario should place a privacy notice near him and his colleague when filming which tells people that they are filming videos which may be posted online. A privacy notice shows the evangelist has respect for and is concerned for other people’s right to privacy. Where someone tells the evangelist not to use their image online the evangelist could edit the image so the person is not identifiable or the evangelist may choose not to use the footage.

How might an evangelist manage the collection and protection of personal information?

PERSONAL INFORMATION	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE PRIVACY PROTECTIONS
Home addresses or private contact details collected on sign-up sheets	To follow up with information or invitations to future events.	<p>Explain to people why the information is being collected and obtain recorded permission to collect it.</p> <p>Limit the information request to name and preferred contact. No need for example to capture a birth date or copy of an identification document.</p> <p>Don’t leave sign-up sheets unattended or allow others to see the personal details entered on them. Individual cards may be better than forms with multiple people’s details.</p>
Notes of conversations identifying people and the details discussed	To support agreed follow-up conversations or for internal reasons such as data collection about the type and frequency of issues being raised where that would help evangelists prepare topics for future work.	<p>Tell people that notes will be made about the conversation.</p> <p>Consider if it is necessary to include a name against the note or not. If it isn’t, the information is less likely to be about an ‘identifiable’ person.</p> <p>Ensure the notes are securely kept and that only authorised people have access.</p>
Images or video of people and their conversations with the evangelist captured on film (such as a mobile phone or body camera)	<p>Filming for health and safety reasons to act as a deterrent to aggressive or violent behaviour.</p> <p>Evidence gathering to provide information to the police in the event of an issue which needs to be reported to police or to respond to police on a complaint against the evangelist.</p>	<p>Tell people that body cameras are used and why. E.g. place a written notice beside where the evangelist is working.</p> <p>Use technology with editing capability to protect the identities of people who have not given permission for their images to be used.</p>

This information sheet summarises material in Evangelism: Legal Guidelines, a resource to inform evangelists about the laws likely to affect public ministry. If this topic is relevant to your ministry, we recommend reading the relevant section in the full guidelines.

If you are involved in evangelism and have a question that our guidelines don’t answer, feel free to get in touch by emailing contact@ethosalliance.nz.