



Anglican Diocese of Canberra & Goulburn

Protocol for Addressing Grievances (SM008)

Protocol for Addressing Grievances

1. Scope:

A grievance **includes but is not limited** to:

1. A disagreement (including a conflict) between two or more people where at least one person is a member¹ of the Diocese
2. A perceived offence has been caused by a member of the Diocese

In most instances grievances should be resolved expeditiously through Ministry Unit Resolution strategies, as found in Section 4.

If a grievance is unable to be resolved at a Ministry Unit level, then the process in Section 5 is to be followed.

This protocol is not applicable where:

- a. there is a Professional Standards complaint against church worker (the definition of a church worker is found in Schedule A1 of the Professional Standards Ordinance), in such instances the Professional Standards Ordinance will be used.
- b. there is an allegation of bullying behaviour by a church worker, in such instances the Protocol for Responding to Allegation of Bullying Behaviours by Church Workers (SM009) is to be used.

2. Our Commitment

Our commitment is to provide a protocol for church leaders to address grievances within the church, in a Godly, loving, compassionate and procedurally fair manner.

The nature of grievances means that it is necessary to respond sensitively and with care for all parties involved. The process must serve people, not the other way around.

In implementing this protocol we apply the **overarching principles** of:

- Seeking to glorify God in our responses to each other
- Striving to serve each other even in the midst of our disunity
- Seeking to grow Christ-like in our reactions to each other
- Extending grace to each other
- Focussing on restoration of relationships
- Seeking help where needed, to address grievances

¹ For the purposes of this protocol only a member of this Diocese means a person who regularly worships in a ministry unit within the Diocese.

3. Resolving Grievances:

Grievances and conflicts are a part of life and learning to resolve them early and gracefully is an important part of maintaining good relationships.

The peacemaking principles of glorifying God, serving each other and growing in Christ-likeness should be the focus in the attempts to resolve conflicts and grievances.

Often Christians when addressing a grievance or a conflict situation will quote Matthew 18. This passage refers to a person who has 'sinned against you'. In many cases Matthew 18:15-20 does provides a great process for correcting poor behaviours, 'restoring the person who has sinned'.

Dr Ken Newburger of the Institute for Reconciliation and Peacemaker Training takes the misapplication of Matthew 18 a step further. Dr Newburger asserts that:

“Looking for a way out of their quandary many church members and leaders misapply Matthew 18. They confuse this judicial church discipline process with a general model for conflict resolution. The problem with such an approach is that the church discipline process outlined in Matthew 18 is only for sin serious enough to remove a member from fellowship (v. 17).

Jesus' words are wrongly used if applied to issues or disputes that do not involve sin (e.g. Acts 15:36-41). Indeed, when this judicial church discipline process is inappropriately applied to disputes over church goals, policies, allocation of resources, building projects, etc., expect an escalation of the conflict.”²

In short, Matthew 18:15-20 is one pathway for addressing person grievances but needs careful and prayerful consideration. It is not the only pathway for addressing conflict or grievances.

For example in cases where positional power exists between the parties or where abuse or perceived bullying behaviours have been experienced, this is often counter-productive to bringing about long-term restoration of relationships which is often necessary at the Parish or local level where the parties may have to continue being in a relationship or have contact with each other. In many conflict situations, the assistance of a neutral third party is essential to help each party understand the key issues and ways forward.

² **Matthew 18:15-17 – The Most Misapplied Passage on Church Conflict.** © Copyright 2013. Dr. Ken Newburger. Institute for Reconciliation and Peacemaker Training. All Rights Reserved.

In preparing to address a grievance it is important the complainant takes the time to seek advice on the most appropriate approach based on

- a. the nature of the grievance
- b. the positions/ roles of the parties involved
- c. the skills and/or capacity of the local church leader to address the situation

Advice can be accessed from:

- i. the Rector or Ministry Unit Leader (if the grievance is with a member of the Ministry Unit other than the Rector),
- ii. a Parish warden
- iii. an Archdeacon
- iv. the Safe Ministry Unit
- v. the Safe Ministry Helpline 1800 070 511

4. Resolving Grievances - Ministry Unit Resolution

A grievance can often be resolved by quick and local action if not too serious and before the situation gets out-of-hand or is escalated or exacerbated by the disaffection that its non-resolution can cause.

It is preferable to try and address a grievance in a Ministry Unit, especially between members of the Unit, at the local level if possible.

a. Personal Approach

In the first instance, where a grievance arises between one person and another, leader/s or other church person/s, and they feel able to address their concern, they should go to the other person and express their concern with a view to resolving their differences.

It is strongly recommended that prior to initiating the personal approach, the person seeking to use this approach does some preparation. This can include seeking counsel from a wise and unbiased senior leader in the Parish or an external person, or engaging in some preparation, for example 'conflict coaching', before approaching the other party/ies in order to clearly convey your concerns and how these may be addressed towards restored relationship.

b. Assisted Approach

Where a person feels for any reason that they require help in resolving the grievance, they may speak privately to a senior parish leader who is not a stakeholder in the grievance, to request assistance in addressing their grievance.

In general, the senior parish leader to address grievances will be the Rector or Parish Priest in Charge. However, a suitably skilled church warden, Parish Councillor, or Ministry Co-ordinator may fulfil this role with the permission of the Rector.

Wherever a matter is raised with a Rector, Ministry Unity Leader or Archdeacon, prior to attempting to engaged in the assisted resolution, they will contact the Safe Ministry Helpline (1800 070 511) to classify the matter appropriately as a grievance, a Professional Standards complaint, or an allegation of bullying behaviour by a church worker.

Where the senior parish leader feels comfortable in assisting those impacted and where all parties involved in the grievance are willing to work towards restoring relationships, the senior parish leader should:

1. Meet with each party separately to ensure that all parties are given a chance to tell their story in private, work through the underlying concerns in moving towards resolution.
2. Clearly communicate the process to be used to each party during resolution meetings.
3. Hold meeting/s with all the parties to work through the issues and determine the course of action and desired outcomes
4. Follow up. Ensure that the strategies are implemented.
5. Monitor the situation. Over time check in with the parties to ensure they are going well with the past situation.

If at any stage throughout the process the senior parish leader needs assistance, or if the attempts at resolution breakdown, or the situation becomes untenable, the senior parish leader can contact the Safe Ministry Helpline (1800 070 511), the HR Director or an Archdeacon.

5. DIOCESAN ASSISTED RESOLUTION

The Diocese commits to a case-by-case resolution of substantive issues and where possible and appropriate restoration of relationships between parties.

a. Notification and request for Diocesan assisted resolution

Where the grievance has:

- escalated beyond the ability or capacity of the local ministry unit to resolve the substantive and or relational issues, or
- where the local ministry unit or any party involved wants independent help in moving towards addressing the grievance,

any party involved in the grievance can contact the Safe Ministry Helpline (1800 070 511) to request a Diocesan assisted resolution using this Protocol.

Where a Rector (or Priest in Charge) or Archdeacon becomes aware of a grievance that has escalated to the level where Diocesan assistance may be required, they will contact the Director of Professional Standards to request an initial assessment of the matter.

b. Assessment of the matter

i. Upon receiving a request to assist with addressing a matter the Archdeacon or Safe Ministry Helpline will provide initial assistance and pastoral advice and then refer the matter to the Safe Ministry Unit.

ii. In matters where there are possible Professional Standards Complaints alleged including, child abuse being alleged, or sexual misconduct being alleged against a church worker, the Director of Professional Standards will follow relevant sections of the Professional Standards Ordinance to classify the matter either as a Professional Standards 'complaint', a 'grievance' to be addressed using this protocol, or an allegation of bullying by a church worker to be addressed using the Protocol for Addressing Allegations of Bullying Behaviour by a Church Worker.

iii. The Human Resources Director or Safe Ministry Unit, will appoint a 'Grievance Assessor' who will make enquires, identify the substantive and relational issues in the matter and produce a recommendations report towards resolution.

c. Selection of a resolution strategy to be used to address the Grievance

The Grievance Assessor will complete a recommendations report to be considered by Human Resources Director and/or Safe Ministry Unit, who will then determine the resolution strategies.

Resolution strategies may include one or more of the following:

- conflict coaching,
- facilitated reconciliation,
- negotiation of agreed outcomes towards resolution,
- conciliation (via mediation)
- arbitration (by the Bishop or delegate)
- referral to disciplinary process (Professional Standards)
- referral to other Diocese Protocol, such as Protocol for addressing allegations of bullying behaviours.

d. Resolution strategies employed

- (i) Where the decision is for any of conflict coaching, reconciliation, negotiation, or conciliation (mediation), then the Human Resources Director and/or Safe Ministry Unit, in consultation with the Bishop shall appoint an appropriately skilled and experienced facilitator to work with the parties on resolution actions to bring about agreed solutions.
- (ii) Where arbitration is to be used, the Bishop (or the Bishop's appointee) will be the arbitrator. The decision of the arbitrator will be final.

e. Communication of outcomes

The Human Resources Director and/or Safe Ministry Unit (or appointee) will communicate with all parties in relation to the outcomes and provide direction as to the ongoing implementation of the resolution outcomes.

Matters meeting the threshold for reporting to the Diocesan Insurance or the Risk and Audit Office will be recorded in the Diocesan Incident reporting system.

f. On-going monitoring of the situation

In cases where it is deemed necessary, the Bishop (or appointee), in negotiation with the parties, will check on the situation to ensure that the solutions that have been employed are working.

REVIEW OF PROTOCOL

This protocol was endorsed by Bishop-in-Council on **12 August 2022** and is to be reviewed and adjusted as required periodically by the PSRG.