



St Thomas' Church, Kilnhurst Complaints and Grievance Procedure

Principles

The bible calls all Christians to live lives of holiness and to act blamelessly (Eph 5:1-5). While sin remains a reality in all of us, leaders are called to set an example to others (Mt 5:16; 2 Tim 5:15) and to conduct themselves in a way that is above reproach (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:6).

"Since an overseer is entrusted with God's word, they must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather they must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. They must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught." Titus 1:7-9a

What counts as a complaint and a grievance?

A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, or lack of action by a person acting on behalf of the church, or about the policies and procedures of the church. When the complaint is made by someone who is employed within the parish, whether paid or holding unremunerated office, it is usually referred to as a grievance.

A complaint or a grievance may include an allegation that a person has behaved in an unacceptable way.

- Complaints and grievances against clergy are handled through the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) and should be addressed directly to the archdeacon or the bishop.
- Complaints and grievances against licensed or commissioned ministers (Readers, Church Army Officers) are handled through a separate Diocesan procedure. These complaints or grievances should be addressed to the Incumbent of the parish.
- Complaints and grievances against the Churchwardens should be addressed to the Incumbent who will invoke the necessary actions.
- All other complaints or grievances should be submitted in writing to the Incumbent or one of the Churchwardens
- At all stages the investigation and panel hearings must be kept strictly confidential and the content and process must not be discussed outside the hearings.

Problem-solving Informally

The aim always, when responding to complaints and grievances, is to enable them to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly by discussion, problem solving, mediation and negotiation and without recourse to the formal procedure set out later in this policy. The biblical pattern for addressing issues that may lead to a complaint or grievance is laid out in Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Timothy 5:19-21 and we encourage these passages to shape any actions.

Follow Jesus' pattern (Mt 18:15-20) problems should be brought direct to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet and will hopefully be resolved in this way (v.15). If this informal conversation does not resolve things, then one or two others should be taken along (v.16). If that does not lead to reconciliation the matter is to be taken to the church more formally (v.16-17).

If, however, a complaint or grievance relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that an adult or another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, it must be responded to through the Diocesan procedures for handling allegations of abuse (see the separate Safeguarding policies). If the complaint or grievance does not concern a child or adult who may be vulnerable, and the person bringing it is not satisfied with the outcome at the problem-solving stage, that person may then invoke the formal procedure.

A complaint or grievance does not automatically result in disciplinary action; however, as a result of an investigation into a complaint or a grievance, it may be necessary to address the matter through the disciplinary procedure. If this is necessary, it will be a separate process under the disciplinary procedures.

Formal procedure for complaints and grievances

If the informal steps modelled by Matthew 18:15-20 have not been successful (or the matter is serious enough to require immediate escalation), the following steps will be taken:

Stage One

- On receipt of a complaint the Incumbent or Churchwarden will arrange to meet with the complainant to listen to and note the facts of the complaint or grievance. A record of this meeting will be kept recording all the relevant facts and evidence; a copy of this will be given to the complainant, who must agree that the record is an accurate statement of the complaint.
- The Incumbent /Churchwarden will then interview the subject of the complaint or grievance, who may also be accompanied by a friend or other supporter if they wish, to listen to their response to the complaint or grievance brought against them. A record of this meeting will be kept and given to the subject of the complaint or grievance who must agree by signing the record of the meeting that it is accurate.
- The Incumbent /Churchwarden may then interview any other relevant parties and record the outcome of the interviews.
- The Incumbent /Churchwarden then draws conclusions and informs the complainant and the subject of the complaint or grievance of the outcome of the investigation orally and in writing. This should be done ideally within one (1) week of the complaint or grievance being made, but will be subject to the availability of all parties concerned

Stage Two

- If the conclusions reached at Stage One do not satisfactorily resolve the complaint or grievance, the complaint or grievance should be put in writing to the Incumbent or the other Churchwarden, who will convene and chair a panel of two (2) PCC members who have not been involved in the process before.
- The panel will repeat the Stage One process, meeting separately with the complainant, the subject of the complaint or grievance and additionally with the Incumbent or Churchwarden who conducted the initial investigation.
- The panel may also separately call other witnesses as necessary.
- The panel members will then sit alone to form a judgement and make a decision about the complaint or grievance. The Chair of the panel will inform the complainant and the subject of the complaint or grievance of the outcome of the investigation orally and in writing. This should be done ideally within one (1) month of the original complaint being made, but will be subject to the availability of all parties concerned.

The decision of the panel representing the PCC will be final.

Reverend Matthew Lawes, Vicar (Interim)

Dr Simon Langmead, Church Warden

Mr Paul Bulman, Church Warden

Date: