

## **Complaints Procedure**

### **1 What counts as a complaint?**

**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.

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

**Complaints against clergy** are handled through the Clergy Discipline Measure. Complaints or grievances against clergy should be addressed to the team rector or the archdeacon or the area bishop.

**Complaints against licensed or commissioned ministers** (Readers, Southwark Pastoral Auxiliaries, Church Army Officers) are handled through a separate Diocesan procedure. These complaints should be addressed to the incumbent of the parish.

### **2 Problem-solving**

The aim always, when responding to complaints, is to enable them to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly by discussion, problem solving, mediation and negotiation. Problems should therefore be brought direct to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, and will hopefully be resolved in this way.

**If, however, a complaint 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.**

If the complaint 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, s/he may then invoke this formal procedure.

### **3 Formal procedure for complaints**

#### **Stage 1**

A complaint should be submitted in writing to a churchwarden of the parish (who is not him or herself the subject of the complaint).

The person bringing the complaint has the opportunity to state his or her case; and to be represented, if they wish at any meeting, by a friend or other supporter.

The church warden will meet with the complainant to listen to and note the facts of the complaint. S/he will then give to the subject of the complaint the facts relating to it. The church warden or line manager will then interview the subject of the complaint, who may also be represented by a friend

or other supporter if they wish, to listen to their response to the complaint brought against them. The churchwarden/line manager may then interview any other relevant parties.

The churchwarden/line manager then draws conclusions and informs the complainant and the subject of the complaint of the outcome, ideally within a week of the complaint being made.

## **Stage 2**

If the reply given at stage 1 does not satisfactorily resolve the complaint, the complaint should be put in writing to a churchwarden, who will take the complaint to the PCC. The PCC will form a panel of three of its members who have not been involved in the process before.

The panel will establish why the complainant continues to feel aggrieved, and receive all the documentation from the previous investigation at Stage 1. The panel will then meet with the complainant and his/her supporter, the subject of the complaint and his/her supporter, and the churchwarden or line manager who investigated the complaint at the first stage. Witnesses may be called.

The panel members will then sit alone to form a judgement and make a decision about the complaint or grievance. They will inform the complainant and the subject of the complaint of the outcome, within a month of the complaint being made.

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

As a result of an investigation into a complaint, it may be necessary to address the matter through the disciplinary procedure.