



PROCEDURE FOR RESOLVING CONCERNS

Use for Resolving Church Concerns, Grievances or Conflicts

Introduction

As Christians, we are asked to follow the directions in Matthew 18:15-22. This policy is intended to provide such a procedure through which most concerns or interpersonal conflicts within the congregation of St. Sanctuary can be addressed. However, if there is reasonable suspicion of illegal or dangerous activity, anyone within the church to whom this behavior becomes apparent is directed to report this immediately to the Pastor or to other appropriate authorities.

Informal Discussion

Informal discussion is often successful in defusing and resolving concerns without having the difficulty escalate to a more serious problem. The individual with a concern or complaint should first contact the subject of the concern (person or group) directly first. Since it is appropriate to assume that everyone wants what is best for St. Sanctuary, it will help if the approach is in the spirit of pursuing a common goal, not of confrontation.

Resolution

Not all concerns can be resolved to the satisfaction of all involved. If every effort toward reconciliation or resolving the problem has failed, it is hoped that the procedure outlined below will allow those involved to establish the terms of their future interactions without animosity.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality during this procedure is necessary to protect the privacy and dignity of everyone involved. Everyone dealing with a concern, conflict or grievance (whether they are filing a complaint, having one filed against them, or are acting in one capacity or another to resolve the concern) must refrain from discussing the matter with others who not involved in the process.

Conflict of Interest

The Staff-Parish Relations Committee or other committees may be called upon to help resolve a problem or address a concern within the congregation. In any situation in which a member or members of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee or another St. Sanctuary committee/group are involved in a complaint being dealt with by that same group, those members will temporarily recuse themselves from the process.

Principles

All concerns, conflicts and grievances shall be:

- handled with utmost care, concern and confidentiality,
- attended to in a timely manner
- responded to first by the appropriate individual or committee (see the list below)

- elevated to the _____'s (governing body's) attention with mutual consent of the parties involved.

Once a written complaint has been submitted, all communication regarding that concern shall be in writing and maintained in a limited access file.

Procedure

1. Informal Resolution

In all conflicts, please first contact the person or group directly and tell them what is perceived to be wrong. Assume that the other person also wants what is best for the church and may not have seen things from your perspective.

2. Formal Grievance

A formal Concern Advisory Form (see the Attachment) shall be completed if informal discussion is not successful in resolving the problem. Comments written on the form should be as specific as possible in recording what happened to raise the concern or complaint, who was involved, what was done to try to resolve it, and what response is desired. The finished form should then be submitted to the responsible party as noted below.

3. Specific Grievances with Individuals

- a) If a member of the congregation or employee has a concern, conflict or grievance *against the Pastor* and has failed to come to a solution with informal methods of resolution:
 - 1) The individual must be submit their concerns in writing to the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee. A copy of this grievance will be given by the Chair to the Pastor against whom the complaint has been made. After an initial review of the complaint, the Committee will assign four of its members as a Conflict Resolution Team (CRT) and add two additional members, one selected by the person bringing the grievance and one by the Pastor.
 - 2) The CRT will then hear from the complainant and the Pastor individually, make a recommendation, and bring both the complainant and Pastor together to explain the CRT's recommendations, which may include:
 - necessary changes in behavior
 - return to informal discussions with one or more of the committee members present
 - referral of the situation to a subcommittee of _____ (governing body)
 - elevation of the judicatory level in cases of professional misconduct or harassment, or to civil authorities if related to illegal activities.
 - 3) If recommendations are unsatisfactory to bring resolution, the complain may be elevated to the _____ (governing body) for review and resolution.
- b) If a member of the congregation has a concern, conflict or grievance *against an employee* other than the Pastor and has failed to come to a solution with informal methods or resolution:
 - 1) The individual must be submit their concerns in writing to the Pastor. The Pastors will help with clarifying job terms, conditions, and boundaries, and assist the employee and the congregation member in resolving the complaint.

- 2) If the situation cannot be resolved with the Pastor's assistance, the complainant must then submit the written grievance to the Chair of the Personnel Committee.
- c) If the Pastor has a concern about an employee and has failed to come to a solution with informal methods or resolution, the Pastor will refer the concern to the church's Personnel Committee, which will follow appropriate human resource practices and the church's personnel policy to address the issue.
- d) If a member of the congregation has a grievance against another member and has failed to come to a solution with informal methods or resolution ...
 (Denominational rules may determine appropriate intervention for conflicts between members, including the possibility of asking a church member to leave the congregation because of his or her disruption. Please check your Book of Order, Manual on Ministry, Book of Discipline, etc. for the procedure that best fits your polity and theology.)
- e) If the Pastor has a grievance against a member of the congregation and has failed to come to a solution with informal methods of resolution...
 (Denominational rules may determine appropriate pastoral boundaries for resolving disputes with parishioners, including the possibility of asking a church member or the pastor to leave the congregation because of his or her disruption. Please check your Book of Order, Manual on Ministry, Book of Discipline, etc. for the procedure that best fits your polity and theology.)

4. Concerns Related to Issues Rather than an Individual

Many concerns may not involve an individual, but a situation within the church. The concern, conflict or grievance should first be raised with the chair of the committee with responsibility for that area of church life. If the issue cannot be resolved satisfactorily, then whole committee should become involved. If the issues is still unresolved, the concern may be raised with _____ (governing body).

(Here you will have to create the appropriate communication "map" for your church with the correct staff, volunteer and committee names.)

ISSUE	RESPONSIBLE PERSON/COMMITTEE
Christian Education	Director of Christian Education Christian Education Committee
Youth Program	Director of Youth Programs Christian Education Committee
Worship	Pastor Deacons
Music	Minister of Music/Organist
Building and Grounds	
General church direction	Executive Committee of Council

Not all conflicts can be resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned. If every effort has been made to reconcile and individuals cannot be at peace together, they may need to decide to be apart (see Matthew 18:17). This may be an occasion for grief, but is not necessarily a failure of the process, or of anyone who sincerely seeks to resolve the concern, conflict or grievance. We hope that this resolution procedure will allow those involved to establish their future interactions without animosity.