



RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

The basics of this section are listen, do something, and follow the law—but the manner in which that is done may vary. Many churches have found that having a Response Team is helpful when concerns, allegations or complaints are brought forward. Some have standing Response Teams so that no time is lost in establishing one when needed. Five members works best, any three of which might respond to a given concern. Five members on stand-by allows for gender diversity and spare members if there might be a conflict of interest. This sample policy uses a Response Team. Others use the pastor as the lead responder, which often exhausts the emotional resources of the pastor who is already full-time in serving the church. Discuss carefully which approach works best for your congregation.

SAMPLE POLICY TEXT BELOW



Right Relationships

At St. Sanctuary we commit to being an inclusive community—welcoming all without regard to human distinctions of race, class, gender, ability, or sexual orientation. While we welcome everyone into our doors, we recognize that not everyone is willing or able to adhere to our shared core values expressed in our membership pledge (or some other document). Therefore, at St. Sanctuary we subscribe to the following policy based on the biblical recommendations found in Matthew 18:15-17 to avoid gossip, rumor and triangulation. .

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.

Please go directly to someone with whom you have a disagreement. If the concern related to an issue within the congregation, go to the person directly responsible for the activity or program related to that concern.

But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

However, if direct conversation doesn't address the issue, having others involved in the conversation may facilitate the communication. Those individuals may be others who are known to give wise counsel, related to the concern themselves (like another

parent), or a congregational staff member. Notice scripture says “take...others along with you.” These individuals must be present in the conversation—not just named by you as in agreement with you. Worse yet, it is unethical to simply say “many others agree with me” if those “many others” are not willing to join the conversation.

If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; ...

If there continues to be a concern after those efforts, then the concern needs to be brought to the attention of the appropriate congregational body.

For example:

- If the concern relates to the pastor and you have not been able to resolve it with him or her, talk to a member of the _____ (Mutual Ministry, Pastor-Parish Relations, etc.) Committee.
- If the concern relates to youth programming and you have not been able to resolve it with the youth director, talk to the chair of the youth ministry team.
- If the concern relates to governance, talk to a Council member.
- If the concern relates to worship, talk to the worship committee.

That congregational body can design a response process.

... and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.

If those efforts have still failed to resolve the concern, the Council has the right to ask the person to leave the community.

However, if the nature of the concern relates to someone possibly harming him or herself or anyone else, that concern should be brought immediately to the attention of the pastor, law enforcement, or another professional. Those concerns include:

- child abuse
- elder abuse
- domestic violence
- sexual harassment
- abuse of a dependent adult.