



Anglican Diocese of Gippsland Grievance Process



A PROCESS TO HELP RESOLVE DISAGREEMENT IN PARISH & DIOCESAN LIFE

Sadly, but inevitably, there will be times in church life where relationships break down and actions cause hurt. Sometimes this hurt is clearly a matter for investigation as part of a breach of the diocesan code of conduct 'Faithfulness in Service' via a complaint to the Director of Professional Standards. At other times these matters may not constitute a breach of 'Faithfulness in Service' but indicate a disagreement or dissatisfaction in the way church life is being conducted which is not able to be resolved locally.

It is important to deal with these grievances, however it can sometimes be unclear as to the best way to do so. In the contemporary context we are attuned to the way that the positions people occupy within the church can help or hinder attempts to find a satisfactory resolution to any grievance.

This grievance process has been informed by experience gained in the development and navigation of professional standards legislation in several parts of the Anglican Church of Australia. It is designed to allow for the careful management of matters which are of concern in parish life but do not involve an obvious or serious breach of 'Faithfulness in Service'. In these cases the complaints process under the Professional Standards Act is to be used through the independent processes available through the Director of Professional Standards and the Professional Standards Committee.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

In implementing this process 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 conflict
- Seeking to be Christ-like in our interactions with each other
- Extending grace to one other
- Focusing on restoration of relationships
- Seeking help where needed, to address grievances

This process is then designed to:

1. Give assurance that the various perspectives of a grievance have been explored and action has been taken.
2. Allow for the rebuilding or clarification of boundaries in relationship to promote harmonious parish life.
3. Address real problems that may not reach the threshold for a formal complaint in a timely manner.

PROCESS

The diocesan grievance process moves through four phases. Following the identification of the grievance the next steps allow for the proper articulation of the nature and contributing forces behind the disagreement or dissatisfaction, and the development of a report to the Bishop or their delegate from a suitably skilled person who is not part of the situation which has arisen. The final step involves the charting of the way ahead, whether this means restored relationships or simply clear expectations in conduct and activity from those involved.

THE FOUR STEPS

1. IDENTIFICATION OF A GRIEVANCE

- Through the Director of Professional Standards,
- Through an Archdeacon (or another leader), or
- Direct to the Bishop.

2. EXPLORATION OF ISSUES

- Bishop appoints an independent person to enquire into the nature of the disagreement or dissatisfaction.
- This is not an investigation of fact but a description of issues surrounding breakdown of relationship.
- They will:
 - Talk to the primary parties.
 - Talk with any others the parties may suggest.

3. REPORT TO BISHOP OR DELEGATE

- The independent enquirer will write a report outlining:
 - The story (from each perspective) of how the grievance arose,
 - The core issues to be addressed for a way ahead, and
 - Recommended actions or activities to assist improved relationship.

4. WAY AHEAD

- Following the independent report the Bishop or their delegate determines appropriate actions to ameliorate impacts of the grievance.
- Bishop or Bishop's delegate meets with parties to work through actions to be taken.
- A review of the matter following implementation of the actions advised will occur at a suitable point in time.
- The matter is concluded knowing that a complaint under the Professional Standards Act remains an option.

PEOPLE INVOLVED

PARTIES TO THE GRIEVANCE

- The person who has identified that they have a grievance or dissatisfaction at some level.
- The person about whom the grievance or dissatisfaction is raised.

THE 'ENQUIRER'

- A suitably qualified person who can listen to the parties to hear their respective understanding of the nature of the disagreement or dissatisfaction in the way church life is being conducted and why it has not been able to be resolved locally.
- A person outside of the context giving rise to the situation which is occurring and with no role in the oversight structure of the parish, ministry centre or diocesan organisation.
- The person who will write the report (including recommendations for action) to the Bishop / Bishop's delegate.

THE BISHOP (OR APPROPRIATE DELEGATE)

- The person ultimately responsible for the harmonious conduct of diocesan life.
- The person who will determine, following the recommendations from the enquirer and conversation with the parties, the appropriate actions to restore relationships or clarify boundaries within the parish/ministry centre involved.
- The person who will oversee (whether in person or delegated) the implementation of any such strategies.
- In circumstances where the grievance relates to the Bishop, delegation will be made to an appropriate person taking into account the nature of the grievance. The appropriate delegate may be the Vicar-General, the Registrar or some other suitable person. A Complaint under the Episcopal Standards Act is able to be made at any point in the process. A referral from the Director of Episcopal Standards to this Grievance Process is also able to be made.

OTHER PERSONS

- Secondary parties who may not hold a grievance but are identified by the parties as being able to assist the enquirer as to the full nature and contributing factors to the dissatisfaction.

DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE

- The independent Professional Standards office of the Diocese that handles complaints made under the Professional Standards Act.
- The Director of Professional Standards can be contacted on 0456 572 589