

## 06.04

# Complaints Handling Policy

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### Theological Foundation

The completed work of Christ in his life, death, resurrection and ascension is the foundation and focus of our Christian life and activity (2 Cor 5:16). Through faith in Jesus Christ, human beings become reconciled to God, and to one another. Nevertheless, our old sinful nature continues to lead us into situations of conflict<sup>1</sup> with one another. This makes reconciliation an ongoing challenge. Because we are reconciled to God, we have the opportunity to share God's ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–19). Christians can experience complaints, disputes and concerns as opportunities to glorify God (1 Cor 10:31), to serve others (Gal 6:2) and to grow to be more like Christ (1 Cor 11:1). In enacting this complaints handling policy the Church remains mindful of the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:15–17: *'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. 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. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; 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.'* (NRSV) The three-step process<sup>2</sup> outlined in this passage has proven beneficial to countless Christians over the centuries as they have established healthy patterns of complaint, reconciliation and healing.

### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to enable the Lutheran Church of Australia (the Church) to provide an environment where complaints and concerns can be raised and addressed in an appropriate manner and consistent with scriptural principles.

### Relevant to

The policy and procedures apply to:

- All ministries and activities of the Church
- All pastors, lay workers, employees, members, volunteers and visitors

### Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Promote reconciliation of relationships and resolution of issues based on sound scriptural guidelines
- Encourage an environment in which a complaint or concern can be raised without fear of reprisal or unfair treatment
- Enable the complainant and the respondent to be provided with pastoral care and support
- Enable all complaints to be addressed in accordance with principles of natural justice

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<sup>1</sup> Conflict is broadly defined to encompass disagreements and/or differences of opinion. It is not restricted to disputes of a personal nature between individuals.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the last step is not intended as retribution. It is effectively a command to continue to love the other unconditionally, just as Jesus did the 'gentiles and tax collectors' his day.

- Enable a process where confidentiality is maintained in the assessment or investigation of complaints
- Enable a fair, impartial and transparent process which is applied in a consistent manner

### **Policy Statement**

The Church is committed to providing a safe, fair, responsive, accessible and transparent environment in which complaints and concerns can be raised, addressed by means of a professional and effective process, and resolved appropriately.

### **Definitions**

A complaint may be defined as:

*An expression of dissatisfaction with the Church's policies, procedures, quality of service provided or with a person or persons acting for or on behalf of the Church where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.*

*Complaints may be expressed in the form of disclosures, reports, allegations and the like. Complaints may be about acts of a person, a group of people, an agency of the Church, and involve systems and procedures.*

### **Procedural Principles**

The application of the policy will provide for:

- The safety and welfare of children to be absolutely paramount, where a complaint pertains to a child
- All complaints to be addressed in accordance with scriptural principles and consistent with the Constitution and By-Laws of the Church
- Clear and transparent procedures for lodgement and processing of complaints
- The handling of complaints in a confidential and respectful manner that safeguards the integrity and dignity of both complainants and the respondents
- The availability of pastoral care and support to all parties during the complaints handling process
- Timely response to complaints
- A system that ensures appropriate records are maintained
- Follow up and learning process to improve policies, procedures and practice
- Effective external communication of the policy

### **Responsible Person/s**

- General Church Council (GCC) is responsible for implementing this policy and associated procedures across the Church.
- District Church Councils are responsible for implementing this policy and associated procedures within their respective Districts.
- Congregation/Parish Councils are responsible for implementing this policy and associated procedures within their congregations/parishes.
- Governance boards of all Church related entities are responsible for implementing complaints handling policies and procedures that meet their particular requirements, but are consistent with the Church's Complaints Handling Policy and associated procedures.

### **Document Controls**

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