

Concerns and Complaints Procedure

Introduction

As a church, we always aim to ensure that all activities, interactions, ministries and programmes operate smoothly and to the genuine benefit of those involved – all to the glory of God. We aim to live out our values and vision of being 'like Jesus' in all that we do.

However, we acknowledge that none of us are perfect, and, on occasions, church partners or others may have concerns or issues with how an aspect of NLBC life is working. This document sets out the process by which individuals should raise such concerns, and the actions that will be taken by staff and the elders / trustees in response.

Obviously, we acknowledge that every case will be different and thus this document is only a 'guide'; adjustments may be made to the process to ensure all concerns are treated appropriately.

Biblical Principles

This policy is underpinned by a number of Biblical principles:

- 1) The importance of **grace** – “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” – *Colossians 4:6*
- 2) The importance of **integrity and openness** - “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.” – *Matthew 18:15*
- 3) The importance of **listening** – “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” – *James 1:19*
- 4) The importance of **collective authentication** – “A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”- *Deuteronomy 19:15b*

What to do if I have a concern / complaint?

Issues related to safeguarding children

If your concern is in regards to any issue relating to safeguarding or child protection, please follow the procedures outlined in the church's 'Safe to Grow' policy, including contacting the Safe To Grow Co-ordinator, Helen Miers. The church office can provide contact details.

All other issues

If your concern is not a safeguarding issue, please follow the guidance in this policy. *Please do not raise complaints and concerns casually or carelessly within the congregation.* We are part of the body of Christ and want to maintain a spirit of unity.

Instead, please follow the process outlined below. If this process is not followed, the elders / leaders reserve the right to refuse to engage with a concern until the steps described below have been undertaken.

Concern / Complaints Process

Throughout the following process, please be sensitive to the best time and place to raise an issue / concern - after a Sunday service or during busy sessions will rarely be an appropriate time; nor is an appropriate location a very public arena where others may overhear the discussion. Do not leave it too long to report your concern because it can be difficult to investigate something that happened some time ago.

1) With the individual

- Always try to raise your issue directly with the individual concerned initially. The vast majority of concerns can be addressed in this way, without the need to involve others.
- This may be achieved through an informal discussion, a meeting, or during a scheduled 1:1 session.

2) With a Team Leader

- If you have raised your issue with the individual it concerns and an acceptable resolution has not been found, please take your concern to the relevant Team Leader (e.g., if relating to kids' work - Jen, if relating to youth work - Greg, if relating to pastoral care - Kerry etc.)

3) With the Senior Pastor / a Lay Elder

- If the Team Leader has been unable to resolve the issue, or if your issue relates to a Team Leader or a member of staff (and is unresolved at stage 1), please bring it to the Senior Pastor, who is the Line Manager for all staff.
- If your issue concerns the Senior Pastor, please raise it with one of the Lay Elders.

What will happen after I raise my concern / complaint?

Obviously, every case is unique, and will be handled accordingly. However, the principles that Team Leaders / Staff / Elders will follow are:

- 1) **Listen with care** – no concern will be disregarded, and time will be given to attentively listen to the issue raised
- 2) **Investigate thoroughly** – this may involve discussions with others involved, seeking witnesses to an event or examining records
- 3) **Maintain appropriate confidentiality** – concerns will be discussed on a 'need to know' basis only. This does not mean that the issue will be kept 'secret', but that only those who it is important to inform will be included in discussions. This is a matter for the Team Leader / Pastor / Elder to determine
- 4) **Act with grace** – actions taken to resolve concerns / complaints will be taken with grace – this is not to say that issues will not be dealt with, but that the most compassionate and gentle approach will be taken
- 5) **Establish any pattern** – if the issue / concern raised is part of a wider pattern and/or has been raised by others, this will be established and actions taken accordingly
- 6) **Amend policies / practice** – if the concern requires an adjustment to a church policy or practice, these will be considered and amended if deemed necessary

Please be aware that in some cases, it will not be appropriate to share details of how a concern / complaint has been addressed. This may be particularly relevant to the line management of staff, who are protected by employment law and are entitled to privacy.

However, wherever possible, leaders will explain to complainants / those who have raised concerns a brief outline of how they intend to pursue or resolve the issue, or explain why further actions are deemed not to be appropriate.

What if I have raised the issue with the Senior Pastor and I am still concerned?

You may write formally to the Elders to state your issue, and the process you have undertaken according to the policy. The Elders will then consider what steps (if any) they intend to take, and will acknowledge the concern in writing. Please direct any such communication via the church office, marked 'Confidential: The Lay Elders'.

If, after a response, you are still concerned, a church partner may avail themselves of the provisions within the constitution to bring the matter to the partnership as a whole. For further details, please see the constitution document available from the office.

Summary

As stated at the outset, as a fellowship, it is our hope that we can successfully serve the church partners and community without issues arising. On the rare occasions where concerns do need to be aired, we hope that this policy will allow this to take place in the most Biblical and Christ-like manner, so that all in our fellowship can better fulfil our vision of being 'like Jesus in the heart of North Yorkshire'.