
Procedures for Resolving Grievances of Church Staff

Purpose

This policy is designed to promote improvements in staff team relations. Complaints arising in the workplace should be resolved fairly and promptly.

Conflicts and grievances are inevitable and can result in positive or negative experiences. This document was compiled to foster positive and redemptive outcomes. We have different spiritual gifts, hearts (i.e. passions), abilities, personalities, and life experiences. We also are a body with different backgrounds, leadership styles, spiritual maturity levels, perspectives, and expectations. These differences are meant to compliment the uniqueness and abilities of each but may at times lead to conflict.

Guiding principles for interrelationships are found in the following Scriptures: Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Corinthians 12:4-25 and Romans 12:3-11. God designed us to be different to bring out the best in the body, however we need to heed the warning of Scripture about Satan's desire to destroy the body. Regardless of facts, accusations carry the power to destroy credibility, unity, and ministry effectiveness.

Working together is going to result in complaints, conflicts, and accusations. Therefore, we need to covet together to manage differences in a healthy and biblical process. That process begins with active listening to assess the situation and understanding what a person needs. The purpose of this document is to address grievances for the purpose of redemption, reconciliation, restoration, and healing.

Parameters of Grievance

A grievance is a complaint or concern expressed by an individual or group about a personal or workplace issue. It may be about any act, omission, situation, or decision that is considered unfair, discriminatory, or unjustified.

This procedure does not apply to the specific issues of Unlawful Harassment (062), Personnel Policies (060), or Formal Grievance Procedures (061) as outlined in the Policies and Procedures Manual.

Guiding Principles

Overlook and forgive minor offenses when possible and be willing to give up personal rights. (Leviticus 19:17; Proverbs 27:5-7; Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20)

Before proceeding, ask the following questions:

- A. Is the offense dishonoring God?
- B. Will the offense damage the relationship between the two of you?
- C. Is the offense hurting others?
- D. Is the offense hurting the offender?

The following values should be endorsed by each party involved in a conflict. This will provide a basis for a healthy and satisfactory resolution.

- Accept that people are different and will have differences with one another.
- Accept that conflict or disagreement will be an experience of life and that it can be healthy when reconciliation is the goal.
- Recognize that avoiding issues or relationships solely because there may be conflict is unhealthy.
- Seek to deal with conflict in a calm and timely manner.
- Show love, respect, and self-control toward the other person(s) seeking God's leadership in finding the most appropriate way to approach the person(s).
- Recognize that change may need to take place in me first before progress can be made.
- Commit to honesty, openness, confession, and forgiveness while seeking to understand others and experience together God's grace and reconciliation.
- Seek to build the kind of trust upon which reconciliation may be built.
- Allow a person to know his/her accuser(s); to learn in detail what his/her accuser's concerns are; and to respond to those accusers.
- Begin the process in dedicated prayer, praying for self and the other person(s) involved.
- Use "I" statements in describing one's point of view.
- Describe concerns in a way that captures attention, appeals to values, gives hope that the issue can be resolved constructively.
- Take the initiative to reach resolution, regardless of who you may believe to be at fault.

An accusation against an elder requires one other witness (1 Timothy 5:19-20). There is a three-step process if the allegation is against a brother or sister (Matthew 18:15-17).

Identifying the Level of Accusation

Level one accusations are identified as complaints or personality differences. Level one accusations are single-incident issues that do not entail moral failures. Hurt feelings may be involved, but there has been no criminal or malicious act.

Level two accusations deal with skill performance or a level one accusation that continues to arise. The accusations may be against members of the team by other team members and/or members of the congregation. Level two accusations may include poor decision making, conduct inappropriate for a minister, or deficiency in certain ministry skills.

Level three accusations are based upon allegations of moral failures, unethical behaviors, or unresolved level two accusations. Level three accusations are potentially the most destructive.

Grievance Handling Procedures

Level One Accusation: Complaints or personality differences

Step One: Parties meet privately to overcome difficulties. (Matthew 18:15)

Step Two: Two or three serve as witnesses and encouragers to try and solve the problem. (Matthew 18:16)

Step Three: The church attempts to settle the disagreement. (Matthew 18: 17-22)

Level Two Accusation: Skill performances or recurring level one accusations

Step One: Intake from the person making the accusation, including the following:

- Listen to the accuser to assess the situation (1 Timothy 5:19)
- Try to get the parties to meet face-to-face to resolve the issues.
- Ask for documentation and ask the accuser to fill out a Ministry Incident Report, Form #063A.
- Get permission from the accuser to share the information with the team member in question. If the accuser does not grant permission, the team leader must put the responsibility of reconciliation back to the accuser.
- If permission is given to share the information, the team leader takes a copy of the notes from the intake session along with copies of the Ministry Incident Report and schedules a meeting with the team member in question. (Ministry Incident Report may be given in advance of meeting) The team member returns in writing his/her view of the situation to the team leader prior to their scheduled meeting.
- The team leader is the Lead Pastor unless the accusation is against the Lead Pastor, in which case the team leader is the Chair of the Diaconate.

Step Two: Interview the team member

- Pray together.
- Affirm and relay your appreciation to the team member for his/her willingness to discuss the documented incident.
- Invite the team member to say anything before discussing the incident.
- Discern whether the offense was minor, a misunderstanding based on something innocently done (or not done), or a major pattern of incompetence that has developed.

Step Three: Investigation

- Identify the disparity between the accuser and the team member's response.
- Get the two parties to meet face-to-face to discuss the issue.
- Resolve disparity by involving other resources if necessary (other committees, staff members, etc.)
- After all data has been gathered there will be a collective decision made by the team leader (Diaconate if the Lead Pastor is involved) and/or the Personnel Committee on the appropriate course of action. If it is determined that the accuser has a misperception or unwarranted expectation, the team leader and/or personnel committee will communicate their findings to the accuser. If it is determined that the team member has room for improvement, the actions of Step Four will be taken, as necessary.

Step Four: Instruction (one or more of the following)

- Team leader and/or personnel committee, if needed, decide a course of action that includes feedback to the accuser. Some actions might include close supervision, mentoring, instruction, and/or a probationary period.
- Require the team member to complete courses that will improve skills and competencies.
- Outline steps of reconciliation.
- Remind the team member and the accuser of the biblical standard to see reconciliation so that the cause of Christ will not suffer in them personally or corporately. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Step Five: Inspection

- Hold the team member accountable by observing and inspecting the progress and productivity.
- Celebrate the progress and transformation of the team member's job performance leading to a healthier ministry.

Level Three Accusations: Moral or unethical behaviors

Step One: Express appropriate concern for the individual harmed, but do not say anything that could further implicate the individual team member, other members of the team, or the church.

Step Two: Stay calm and remember that unless you have first-hand knowledge assume the team member is innocent.

Step Three: Listen to the charge being made carefully, gathering all the information available such as dates, times, places, persons involved and witnesses who can corroborate or clarify the accusation.

Step Four: Critically evaluate the evidence.

Step Five: Examine the credibility of the witnesses(s).

Step Six: Confront the incident in a controlled and formal way, utilizing the following as a guideline:

- Keep the accuser and the accused in separate settings until you know more fully the overall situation.
- Involve others, such as lay leaders from the congregation and in some extreme cases law enforcement personnel, when conducting a formal confrontation.
- Minister and protect the families of all involved.

Step Seven: Determine the most effective strategy for dealing with a Level Three accusation that is valid but not terminal.

Step Eight: Refer to the Diaconate and/or Personnel Committee to determine if the accused has fallen into a pattern of sin that disqualifies him/her from spiritual leadership. Some issues that might qualify could include, but not be limited to, sexual misconduct, compulsive behavior disorders or even persistent laziness.

Attachment: 063A Ministry Incident Report Form

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Ministry Incident Report

1. Name of the person submitting this Report:

2. Names of persons involved in this incident:

3. Date, Time, and Place of Incident:

4. In one paragraph, describe the Incident:

5. If not detailed in the above paragraph, how did you become involved in the Incident:

6. What was your response? Do you feel your response was justified? Why or why not?

7. What happened because of your response?

8. What is the present situation/status to this Incident?

9. What could have been done differently to prevent this Incident?

10. What could be done by all the parties involved to redeem this Incident, correct the problem, and reconcile the relationships involved?

I attest that the facts stated above are correct and true to the best of my understanding.

Signature

Date

063A Ministry Incident Report Form