



GRACE COMMUNION
INTERNATIONAL

Grievance Procedure

This procedure is supplemented by the document *Grievance Process Background and Step 1*, which hopefully will help obviate the need for, pursuance of further steps in this Procedure. The Church's policy and clear intention is that its members should always seek to resolve their conflicts within the spirit of Jesus' admonitions as enunciated in Matthew 18.

Therefore, we sincerely request that you take the time to absorb and reflect on what is covered in that document. We pray that your conflict can be resolved based on those principles.

Should this not be the case and you feel you must proceed further in the Conflict Resolution Procedure, your decision to do so necessarily escalates the above request to a requirement.

Thank you.

Preamble

Conflict is an inevitable part of life. Conflict can be constructive or destructive, depending to a large degree on how it is handled. Our goal is to provide the best ways for the healthy resolution of conflict within our church community. This document is an attempt to provide a workable, fair and sensitive denominational process, which will produce the best outcomes, both for the individuals involved and for the family of our fellowship. It is not intended to be a legal document; rather it outlines approaches to take and suggests a process, which will operate within the church's existing structure. The process described below is intended to cover conflicts arising between a church:

1. lay member and another lay member
2. lay member and employee/officer
3. employee/officer and another employee/officer

Approach

Christians are admonished to "accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (Rom 15:7). The love and grace of God are to characterise a Christian's relationships with others. Healthy personality differences and different giftings provide a rich source of enjoyment and diversity within the body of Christ.

Any conflict then is to be approached in a spirit of grace and humility, desiring both to see the other party's point of view and to arrive at a resolution which results in restored relationships. A spirit of condemnation, or an attitude demanding punishment or retribution, will not be helpful. An approach that demands the "blood" of another will not bring about the best results; it is the blood of Christ that should be our focus.

Any attempt to resolve conflict in the church community should be approached prayerfully, considering our shared needs before the throne of grace.

Grounds for Allegations

Differences in personality or style are not grounds for recourse to the denominational grievance process. It should be clear that frivolous or vexatious allegations will not be accepted. Acceptable grounds for the registering of a grievance would have to do with matters that constitute a serious fundamental breach of the denomination's Statement of Beliefs, the Code of Ethics for Elders or the Definition of Membership Statement.

Process

Because this is not a legal process but one concerned ultimately with the health and unity of the church community, appropriate confidentiality must be observed at every stage of the process. If one or both parties make the allegations public knowledge, or attempt to rally support for their cause against another, they automatically forgo their right to pursue the church's review process.

An explanation of the process shall be given to both parties in writing. Pastoral care shall be offered to both parties at every stage of the process. Every effort shall be made to reach reconciliation and restoration of relationships.

The Review process shall consist of 7 steps, namely:

1. Based on the approach in (1), every effort should be made to reach resolution by the parties themselves.
2. If this is unsuccessful, both parties may agree to the appointment of a neutral mediator by the denomination's regional pastoral department to facilitate resolution.

3. If this fails, the complainant shall address a signed, written statement of the allegation to the pastoral department. (Note: In the interests of fairness and equity, the pastoral department cannot accept that submission of an allegation guarantees *prima facie* that steps 1 and 2 have been genuinely pursued. Therefore, the complainant will need to provide the pastoral department with a documented account showing exactly what reconciliation they have thus far attempted. If the complainant chooses to skip steps 1 & 2, the church's own review process cannot proceed unless this step is taken. Refusal to comply with this step ends the matter for the church, at which point the pastoral department shall provide recommendation and referral to professional mediation from outside, eg, the Alternative Dispute Resolution in Queensland, in a final bid to encourage fair and equitable process and impartial decision for those cases deemed by the to fall outside its reasonable capacity to resolve) The denomination would expect that most conflict would be resolved at stages 4.1 and 4.2. Only serious cases covered in 3 (Grounds for Allegations) should proceed to the next steps.

Note: Since proceeding further is asking the Church to act beyond its scripturally preferred role of mediation into arbitration, the matter can proceed further only once the complainant has agreed to cooperate with whatever decision the Review Committee may reach.

4. The department shall refer the allegation to a Review Committee consisting of the church's appointed grievance officer and such other members deemed suitable for inclusion by the church's pastoral department and notify the person complained against of the allegation, its nature and source. The Committee shall confer to decide if the allegation has sufficient substance to proceed. If the Committee decides such substance is lacking, both parties shall be notified in writing. If the Committee determines otherwise, both parties shall be requested to proceed to the next step.

Note: Once the complainant has reached this point, he or she will be reminded by a member of the Review Committee that the scriptural basis for this resolution process introduces the possibility of discipline either way, depending on the Review Committee's finding. He or she will be asked to confirm whether or not they still wish to proceed at this point.

5. Both parties shall appear before the Review Committee. Since the complainant has, by reaching this point, chosen to pursue the matter with the church rather than through the secular courts, no legal representation shall be present. After prayer, the following process shall occur:

- 5.1. The complainant shall have opportunity to present their allegations. A reasonable time limit shall be observed. According to the principles of Matt 1 8:16 and 1 Tim 5:19, witnesses may be engaged for corroboration.

Note: “Witnesses” refers here, as in the two passages cited above, to people already in some way involved in the substance of the allegation, thus credible for purposes of corroboration. They are neither spectators nor moral supporters for one side of the dispute. This is not a legal forum. At all times in the process, the Church’s goal is resolution and attempted reconciliation.

- 5.2. The person complained against shall have opportunity to respond. Again, a reasonable time limit shall be observed. Since there has been prior notification of the allegations, supporting witnesses may be engaged. (See note on 4.5.1 regarding “witnesses”).
- 5.3. The Review Committee shall have opportunity to ask questions of either party.
- 5.4. The complainant shall have opportunity to present any closing comments.
- 5.5. The person complained against shall have opportunity to present any closing comments.
- 5.6. The Review Committee shall meet to prayerfully consider the matter and reach a decision. Options include:
 - finding the allegation unproved
 - finding the allegation proved.
6. The Committee shall notify both parties in writing of its decision.
7. Disciplinary action may be taken where appropriate.

Appeals

Either party shall be able to appeal the decision to a National (or Regional) Review Committee. A last appeal may be made to the denomination’s worldwide headquarters. Both the regional and worldwide administrations may refuse to hear an appeal if the previous steps in the process are not followed. The decision of the denominational headquarters is final and ends the church’s involvement in the matter.