Moorends and Thorne Pentecostal Church

Complaints Policy and Procedures

Policy last reviewed	Last review conducted/approved by

Introduction

By raising a formal complaint with a church, you are asking them to devote time and resources and potentially finance to properly addressing your concerns. In some cases, this will be perfectly legitimate, but a formal complaint **should only be raised** after all other methods of resolution have been exhausted. In other words, raising a formal complaint should be the last step taken, not the first.

It is further assumed that all Biblical avenues for resolution have already been exhausted. If a grievance is against a fellow church member, it should first be dealt with in the manner of Matthew 18.

If it is in relation to a pastor or elder, then 1 Timothy 5 should be followed. It is only once these Biblical and informal resolution processes have been followed that a formal complaint should be raised.

A formal complaint is not the same as raising a concern. The latter can often be dealt with by taking the matter up with the leader or leaders at the church long before there is a need to raise it to the level of a formal complaint.

Definitions

It is important to understand what these mean:

A Complaint

A complaint is a **claim** that someone has been treated **unfairly, unsatisfactorily, inappropriately,** or that they are dissatisfied in some way with their treatment.

An Allegation

1- **An allegation**, in law, is a claim of an unproven fact by a party in a pleading, charge, or defence. Until they can be proved, allegations remain merely assertions

2- **A Safeguarding allegation:** A concern or claim that an adult who has access to vulnerable people (*children, young people under 18 and adults at risk of abuse)* has caused them harm. Safeguarding policies and procedures should be followed.

Whistleblowing

A concern that **practices or procedures** in the church or charity places people at risk. **Whistleblowing** is the act of telling someone internal to the organisation or to the public that the organisation you work for either in a paid or voluntary capacity is doing something illegal, immoral, illicit, unsafe or fraudulent, or out of line with the standards set in the governing documents. A whistle-blower is a person who comes forward and shares his/her knowledge on any wrongdoing which he/she thinks is happening in the whole organisation or in a specific department. A whistle-blower could be an employee, volunteer or a person accessing the organisation who becomes aware of the activities listed above. A whistleblowing policy should form part of your church's safeguarding polices. Personal grievances (for example bullying, harassment, discrimination) are not covered by whistleblowing law.

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Complaints Policy

1. Purpose of this complaints policy

The primary purpose of the 'MTPC' complaints policy and procedure is to provide a process for dealing with complaints relating to the behaviour of, or activities and decisions taken by, the church's staff, trustees, or volunteers.

This policy and procedures aim to provide staff and volunteers, Elders, Deacons, or Officers/Trustees with clear and simple instructions as to how respond to a complaint and how concerns should be handled.

N.B They are not provided for training purposes and will not be used as a substitute for training.

This policy outlines how seriously 'MTPC' take complaints

- How 'MTPC' will deal with them appropriately.
- How 'MTPC' will and use them as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future.

2. MTPC Commitment

This policy applies to everyone who works on our behalf with whether they are trustees, senior leaders, group / ministry leaders, paid staff, volunteers, or others working on our behalf.

'MTPC' will provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear, transparent, and easy for anyone wishing to make a complaint.

We will publicise the existence of our complaints policy and procedure so that people know how/who to contact us to make a complaint.

We will ensure everyone at 'MTPC' knows who to pass a complaint to if one is received.

'MTPC' will ensure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way, following the policies and processes laid out here:

- Any investigation of the concerns must adhere to 'MTPC' procedures in relation to conflict of interest. *In this context, a conflict of interest would be anything that inhibits or could be seen to inhibit a fair and impartial examination of the complaint. For example: a family relationship (spouse, parent, child, brother, sister). It there was an allegation against the whole eldership – one of the elders could not investigate. Also, if the complaint was around a particular area of ministry, it can't be investigated by someone also involved in that ministry area.*

- Any person(s) appointed to investigate the complaint must have sufficient authority within the 'MTPC' to avoid either intentional or unintentional interference with the process including existing relationships.

We will ensure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and do our best to see that relationships are repaired.

'MTPC' leaders/trustees/officers will reflect on the experiences to help improve what we do and how we do it.

3. The definition of a complaint and escalation stages of a complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of church life. This can be about a person, or persons, an activity, or a group or about a service provided by the church.

This complaints policy outlines a **three-stage complaints procedure**:

- **Stage One** is part of the formal complaints' procedure but resolution of the complaint or issues is achieved by informal conversations rather than a formal investigation. Please note that this stage is optional and that if the complainant wishes to commence at Stage Two, they have every right to do so. However, the complainant must be able to demonstrate why Stage Two is necessary. Failure to provide the evidence would mean that the complaint would not escalate but would commence at Stage One.

- **Stage Two: Formal Stage.** This is the stage where formal processes should be used which includes an investigation into the complaint.

- **Stage Three**: Appeal

4. Source of complaints

Complaints may be received from several sources (e.g., phone, in person, email, etc.). 'MTPC' will establish whether the complainant wishes to commence at Stage One (informal resolution) or Stage Two (formal investigation).

5. Responsibility

- 'MTPC' leaders/trustees/officers will appoint a person responsible for receiving complaints.

THAT PERSON IS.....

- The decision-making group will be (e.g. The trustees, or a representative of the trustees and other senior leaders).
- The management and oversight for this policy and its implementation sits with the board of trustees of 'MTPC'.

6. Receiving Complaints

The church has a specific form for recording complaints and ideally, they should be raised using the specific form below and contained within this document. If, however, the church receives a written complaint which is not on the correct form, the person designated to receive the complaints will ensure that all the information required for the form has been included. If not, they will request the additional information that would have been provided had the form been completed. Complaints can also be made verbally, where a verbal complaint is received: the nominated recipient of complaints will:

1. Complete the complaint form within 48 hours of the receipt of complaint.
2. Write down the facts and circumstances of the complaint and any relevant background information.
3. Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number and names of any other involved.
4. Note down the relationship of the complainant to 'MTPC' (for example: attendee, member, parent).
5. Signpost the complainant to these procedures so that they understand the process that will be followed.
6. Advise the complainant what will happen next and how long it will take.
7. Confirm with the complainant that the record accurately reflects the conversations that took place and that it captures adequately the concern that they are raising.
8. Establish with the complainant their desired outcome of the complaint (e.g. an apology, some other form of restoration or actions they wish to see taken such as changes to policies or procedures, etc.).

7. Formal acknowledgement

A formal acknowledgment of receipt of the complaint should be issued to the complainant within 7 days.

8. Plan Response

A decision needs to be made about the nature of the complaint and how it will be handled. The flowchart available alongside this policy will help you with this. Your decision will consider such factors as:

- Has the threshold for reporting to statutory services been met?
- Has the threshold for any regulatory reporting been met?
- Has the threshold for an internal investigation been met and if so?
    - Who will be involved?
    - How we will we resolve this?
    - By when?

9. Communicate Response

Once the planned actions in point 8 above have been agreed, then:

- Communicate the process to the complainant.
- Communicate who is their point of contact.

Procedures – Resolving Complaints

Stage One: Informal Resolution

Wherever possible, the preference for 'MTPC' is to follow the Scriptural principles for reconciling differences (e.g. Matthew 18).

However, on occasion, attempts to resolve an issue informally may fail or may not even be appropriate.

A formal complaints process is available for such cases. It is hoped that during this stage, at Stage One, most complaints can be resolved by talking, sharing, and achieving a shared understanding of the issues.

It would normally be advisable to meet or speak with the complainant to try to resolve the issue at this initial, informal stage. Care will be taken to ensure that the environment is conducive to constructive discussion.

For example, it would not generally be appropriate to ask a person to attend a meeting with all the elders/officers of the church. This would result in a significant level of intimidation which could prevent an impartial and balanced outcome.

Pastoral support should be offered to the complainant and any other party involved and the complainant should be invited to bring along a friend to support them should they wish to.

Please note, this procedure does not prevent issues being discussed over multiple meetings if this acceptable to both the complainant and the church's representative.

Once the discussions are complete, the outcome needs to be agreed. Possible outcomes would be:

- **Resolved**: agreement has been reached and any follow up actions clearly agreed, including timeframes for the actions and how completion will be communicated to the complainant
- **Partially resolved**: Some of the issues have been resolved or some aspects have been agreed but others could not be resolved
- **Unresolved**: agreement could not be reached

A written summary of the discussions, along with any decisions and actions agreed and areas that are unresolved will be kept, a copy of which will be provided to the complainant and a further copy for the church's own records.

The complainant will be asked to confirm that the record is accurate, and the church's record will be kept securely for future reference.

If the matter is not fully resolved, the complainant should be asked whether they wish to escalate the matter to Stage Two. If so, the procedure detailed below (Stage Two) should be followed.

If the complainant does not wish to escalate, the church should consider whether there are outstanding issues that need to be considered formally. (It is possible that the complainant does not wish to escalate for a variety of legitimate reasons, however, issues have been raised are of concern to the church and so they may wish to continue to investigate or address the issues outside the formal process. In such circumstances, a formal record should be kept of decisions taken and actions completed)

Stage Two: Escalation and Investigation Process

Where the complainant wishes to bypass Stage One, the complaint, once clarified, will be considered by **[named responsible person/or trustee]**.

If the complainant feels that the issue has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they must formally notify **[the named responsible person]** within 14 days. The complainant must clearly indicate the nature of their concerns and the reason for seeking a more formal response. Where, due to complexity or circumstance, this 14-day period is unrealistic, a longer timeframe can be negotiated between the church and the complainants but however this extension must be requested within the 14-day period.

- The complainant must set out in writing the details of the complaint including supporting evidence.
- Written acknowledgement of receipt of a request for Stage 2 will be provided within 7 days.
- The acknowledgement will name a specific contact person and will indicate the timeframe for a decision on how the matter will be handled.
    - Pastoral support should be offered to the complainants and to anyone else concerned.
- The committee/trustees overseeing the complaint will decide on an individual or team to investigate and will define the scope and process of the investigation.
- The committee then notify the complainant in writing of the investigation process and anticipated timeframes.
- If the complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed, and they will be given opportunity to respond.
- Written notes of interviews must be taken and held securely.
- The person against whom the complaint has been made should also be informed at all stages of the investigation and of the outcome.
- If there are delays to the timeframe, a progress report should be sent as soon as possible to the complainant with an indication of when a full response will be complete.
- Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe:

- the action taken to investigate the complaint,
- the conclusions from the investigation,
- and any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Three: Appeal Process

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the process or outcome of the investigation, they can appeal the decision in writing to the **Chair of Trustees** within 28 days of receipt of the outcome.

- The complainants appeal must clearly state the reasons for the appeal and provide evidence as to why they disagree with the outcome of the investigation.
  - The appeal is NOT a reinvestigation of the original complaint.
- The **Chair of Trustees**, supported as required by other nominated individuals, should then:
  - Establish the scope and process of the appeal.
  - Review the process and findings of the stage 3 complaint to establish as to whether any further investigation is required.
  - Once any necessary inquiries/investigations are complete a final decision will be made on the robustness and reliability of the stage 2 process and findings.
- The outcome of the appeal should be reported back to the committee/trustees who will sign off on the appeal.
- The complainant is then notified of the outcome.
  - The complainant will be notified of any options to raise the concerns further, these would include:
    a) a complaint or a referral to the charity commission, or
    b) statutory services if they believe those thresholds were met.
- **The decision taken at this stage is final.**

Vexatious Complaints

If the church leadership and trustees conclude that a complaint is vexatious (i.e., unreasonable, and repeated, once the above processes have been exhausted) the church may consider exercising church discipline if the complainant is a member. If the complainant is not a church member, the church is under no obligation to investigate further the complaint made once all available avenues of resolution have been explored.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

All complaints must be handled sensitively and confidentially. Information concerning the complaint should only be shared on a need-to-know basis. Share only with those who need to know the information and ensure that you are following any relevant data protection procedures or GDPR requirements.

Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen – allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to "let off steam."
- Don't debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details.
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary.
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) – you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation
    - "I understand that this situation is difficult."
    - We hope to be able to come to a swift conclusion for them
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise.
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take, and what it will involve.
- Don't promise things you can't deliver.
- Give clear and valid reasons why unreasonable requests cannot be met.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.

Sample Complaints Form

Moorends And Throne Church Complaint Form

Your details

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

If anyone else is involved in raising this complaint or are you raising the complaint on behalf of someone else, please give details:

About the complaint

Date(s):

Person(s) involved:

Complaint about: (please clearly describe the nature of your complaint)

Supporting information:

- *State the matter or name of the person who is the subject of the complaint.*
- *What happened, when and where.*
- *Provide the contact details or statements of any witnesses.*
- *If complaining about a decision, explain what the decision was about, when it was taken, and who made it.*
    - *Explain what impact this decision has had, or you may fear will have, and upon whom.*
- *Provide any additional information that you believe would be helpful.*

Q1. Have you tried to resolve this matter informally? YES/NO

If YES, please move to Q2.

If NO, please explain briefly why you decided not to try to resolve the matter informally, then move to Q3.

Q2. If you tried to resolve this matter informally, what happened?

State who you dealt with, when and where, what information you provided to them, and what you felt was unsatisfactory about the outcome.

Q3. What actions are you wanting the church to take and what outcomes are you seeking?

Whilst the charity trustees cannot promise to do what you ask, it would be helpful to understand what resolution you are seeking.

The church will treat your data carefully and in accordance with the church's data protection policy **[insert link to church data protection policy]**. The church cannot guarantee to keep the fact and details of your complaint confidential if it is necessary and proportionate to share your data to review and resolve your complaint.

Signature of complainant:

Date:

Complaint Acknowledgement Letter Template

[Date]

Dear **[insert name]**,

Thank you for your letter to **[church name or name of specific person]** dated **[insert date]**.

We are sorry that you have had to raise a compliant **[include a brief summary of complaint]**.

The Church, acting through our charity trustees, will review your complaint in accordance with our complaints policy **[insert link]**.

[Insert the name of the responsible person(s)] will be in touch with you within 7 days to begin a review of your complaint.

The Church will treat the facts and content of your complaint carefully and in line with our data protection policy **[insert link to church data protection policy]**. However, on occasion the Church may need to make a public statement about the subject matter of the complaint or to report the matter to the statutory authorities and consequently the church cannot guarantee to keep the fact of or details of your complaint confidential. Where this may be necessary, you will be kept informed.

You should maintain reasonable confidentiality as to the nature and content of your complaint, other than to seek professional advice if required, and now that you have submitted your complaint, you should avoid communicating with the person complained about while the matter is being reviewed.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact **[insert name/email]** in writing.

Yours sincerely,

[Name and signature]