



North Canberra

Baptist Church

Procedure for Conflict Resolution

Adopted by North Canberra Baptist Church on 17 January 2024

Purpose

The *Procedure for Conflict Resolution* (the **Procedure**) sets out a procedure for resolving conflict between two or more staff members, volunteers, Church members or attendees of the Church in a pastoral and restorative manner rather than through a formal complaint-handling procedure.

It is important to identify that some issues cannot be resolved in this manner, and this Procedure is **not** designed to:

- resolve issues relating to domestic violence or family law matters before the Family Law Court (or similar body).
- resolve complaints or concerns relating to abuse (including child abuse or sexual misconduct involving a child) or other serious breaches of the *Code of Conduct*, including matters that could constitute criminal conduct, which are to be resolved following the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers*; or
- replace any process set out in the Constitution of the Church in relation to the disciplining or removal of members from membership of the Church.

Scope

The Procedure applies to all staff, volunteers, members and attendees of the Church.

An attendee is a person who regularly attends (at least once a month) a ministry of the Church (for example, Sunday services, Bible study, Friday night youth group).

The Procedure should be read in conjunction with the *Safe Church Policy* and:

- *Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers*
- *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff or Volunteers*

- *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns*

When does this Procedure apply?

Situations to which this Procedure applies include the following:

- a) a personal disagreement between two or more staff, volunteers, members or attendees of the Church.
- b) a perceived offence caused by a staff member, volunteer, member or attendee to another.
- c) a perception by one person that they have been bullied by a staff member, volunteer, member, or attendee (and that it is a matter that can be resolved in a pastoral manner).
- d) dissatisfaction with how a staff member or volunteer has fulfilled their ministry role and
- e) a complaint that a staff member or volunteer has committed a minor breach of the *Code of Conduct*.

Raising an issue

Anyone may raise an issue:

- with a person directly (see **Pathway 1**).
- with Church leadership or the Safe Church Team to seek assistance in resolving the issue (see **Pathway 2**).

If the concern relates to a member of the Church leadership or the Safe Church Team, the person should raise their concern with another member of the Church leadership or Safe Church Team.

Key Principles

In raising an issue, all parties are to be guided by the following key principles:

- Seeking to glorify God in our responses to each other.
- Striving to serve each other even in our disunity.
- Seeking to be Christ-like in our reactions to each other.
- Extending grace to each other.
- Focusing on forgiveness and restoration of relationships where appropriate.
- Seeking help, where needed, to address grievances.

The Church acknowledges that:

- the nature of relationship breakdown means that it is necessary to respond sensitively and with care for all parties involved.

- in many conflict situations, to help each party understand the key issues and ways forward, the assistance of a neutral third party becomes essential.
- many issues are specific to a particular context and relationship and so must be responsive to this, seeking resolution of the substantive problems and, where possible, appropriate restoration of relationships between all parties and
- the pathway recommended by Church leadership will depend upon the nature of the issue, the positions or roles of the parties involved and the skills and capacity of Church leadership to address the situation.

Pathway 1 – Personal Approach

- a) Where an issue arises between a staff member, volunteer, member or attendee and another, and the parties feel able to address their concerns without involving other parties, they are to go to the other person and express their concerns to resolve their differences in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17.
- b) The person initiating the personal approach should consider seeking counsel from a wise and unbiased senior leader (from within the church community or externally) or receiving conflict coaching before approaching the other person.
- c) This approach may help address personal disagreements and perceived offences. This pathway will not be appropriate where there are concerns about significant power imbalances or where there is a risk of harm.

Pathway 2 – Locally-assisted Approach

Notifying Church leadership

Church leadership should be notified where:

- Pathway 1 is unsuccessful in restoring the relationship and/or
- the issue relates to perceived bullying or harassment and/or
- the issue relates to dissatisfaction with how a staff member or volunteer has performed their ministry role.

Church leadership to provide support and appoint a person to assist.

Church leadership are to provide support to all parties.

Where the Church leadership considers the issue sufficiently severe, they are to appoint a suitably skilled person to resolve the conflict. This may be a senior member of the pastoral staff. Church leadership are to avoid conflicts of interest when selecting this person, including being mindful of the relationships involved. In some cases, for example, where the conflict involves the Senior Pastor, the church leadership may appoint a church consultant from the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT.

Appointed person to assist parties in resolving the conflict

Where all parties involved in the matter are willing to work towards restoring relationships, the person appointed to assist in resolving the conflict will:

- value confidentiality at all times.
- meet with each person separately to ensure they are given a chance to tell their story privately, working through their underlying concerns to reach a resolution.
- clearly communicate the process for each party during resolution meetings.
- hold a meeting with the parties to identify common ground, work through the issues and determine the course of action.
- follow up to ensure that the solutions are being implemented and
- if appropriate, monitor the situation over the following weeks, including check-in with the parties to ensure that the situation is resolved and that relationships are restored.

At any stage throughout the process, the person appointed to assist resolve the issue may contact Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT for assistance or resourcing. After a conflict resolution process, the person appointed to assist in resolving the conflict will provide to the Church leadership a summary of the process and brief outcome, which will be stored securely in the Church's records.

Escalation to *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff or Volunteers*

During resolving a concern following this Procedure, it may be necessary to escalate the matter in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers*.

There may be several reasons this is required, including:

- that on inquiry into the issue, it is identified that the conduct complained of would more appropriately be characterised as a serious breach of the *Code of Conduct* or
- the subject of the concern is a staff member or volunteer, and they are not willing to participate in this Procedure (as required under the *Code of Conduct*).

Escalation to membership removal process

During the course of resolving an issue in accordance with this Procedure, it may be necessary to escalate the matter to the process of removing someone from membership of the Church as prescribed in the Constitution of the Church (if any).