

SCOPE:

This protocol describes the process to be followed when there is a grievanceⁱ or conflict between two or more membersⁱⁱ of our Diocese.

This process is not applicable where there is alleged criminal or professional misconduct, and/or alleged child or sexual abuse, and/or serious breach of the Diocesan Code of Conduct – Faithfulness in Service. In such instances the Professional Standards Director and/or police should be contacted and the appropriate diocesan protocol or procedure applied. (i.e. Professional Standards Ordinance for lay members, or Clergy Discipline Ordinance for clergy)

This document is to be read in conjunction with the Safe Ministry Policy.

A PATHWAYS APPROACH TO RESOLUTION

The Diocese commits to a case-by-case approach to the resolution of substantive issues and, where possible, appropriate restoration of relationships between all parties.

The pathway employed will depend upon:

- a) the nature of the conflict situation and/ or grievance;
- b) the positions/ roles of the parties involved; and
- c) the skills and/or capacity of the local church leader to address the situation.

The pathway employed does not prevent the parties to the grievance from seeking independent advice at any time, should they choose to do so.

1: LOCAL PARISH RESOLUTION

PROCESS:

Step 1. Speak to person directly

In the first instance, where a conflict situation arises between people and they feel able to address their concern, they are to go to one another and express their concern with a view to resolving their differences in accordance with biblical injunctions.

Schedule 1 provides Biblical foundations for behaviour.

Schedule 2 provides a model of conflict resolution based on PEACEWISE principles.

Step 2. Speak to a church leader

In some circumstances, you may not feel comfortable speaking to the other person, or you may have spoken to the other person and they did not stop the behaviour or conduct causing

ⁱ A grievance includes any type of problem, concern, dispute, or complaint that makes you feel as if you have been unfairly or unjustly treated. A grievance can also be about discrimination, harassment, bullying or any other behavior that you think is unfair, unjust or upsetting.

ⁱⁱ A member of the Diocese is a person who regularly worships in a Parish within the Diocese.

the grievance. In this case, you should speak to a church leader. They can give you advice, and may be able to help you to resolve the grievance.

In general, the church leader to address grievances and conflict will be the Vicar. However, a suitably skilled church warden, Parish Councillor or Ministry Co-ordinator may fulfil this role with the permission of the Vicar (or with the permission of the Bishop if the Vicar is a stakeholder in the conflict).

Step 3. Handling of a grievance.

- i. Where the church leader:
 - a. feels comfortable in assisting those impacted;
 - b. where all parties involved in the conflict or grievance are willing to work towards restoring relationships; and
 - c. the conflict is still at a low level, e.g. all parties are still amicable and able to talk calmly together and want to restore their relationship; then
- ii. the church leader is to:
 - a. Meet with each party separately.

During private meetings the church leader is to ensure that all parties are given a chance to tell their side of the story in private, and to work through the underlying concerns in moving towards resolution. (This might be called *conflict coaching* – or preparing for a resolution meeting.) The leader will also encourage all parties to consider the Biblical injunctions and to apply the principles as set out in schedules 1 and 2.
 - b. Clearly communicate to each party the process to be used during resolution meetings.
 - c. Hold resolution meetings with all the parties to work through the issues, seek to substantiate the grievance, and determine the course of action and desired outcomes.

The church leader is to keep in sight all material (substantive) issues, including relational issues.
 - d. Follow up the parties with a view to ensuring that the solutions are implemented.
 - e. At any stage throughout the process, the church leader may contact the Bishop for assistance or resourcing.

Step 4. Possible outcomes of the grievance

i. Grievance resolved- Your grievance may or may not have been substantiated, but you have been able to talk to the person and resolve the grievance between you. This may include you receiving an apology. Alternatively, you have been able to resolve the grievance with the assistance of the church leader to your satisfaction.

ii. Complaint substantiated- Where you have been unable to satisfactorily resolve your grievance with the other person and your complaint has been substantiated, the person who has caused the grievance may be counselled, warned and in very serious cases, disciplined.

iii. **Complaint unsubstantiated-** When the grievance has been unable to be satisfactorily resolved, and the complaint can not be substantiated due to differing accounts and lack of evidence, behaviours are to be monitored and appropriate systems are to be implemented to ensure that incidents do not occur in future. Depending on the circumstance, it may also be possible that no further action is taken in relation to the grievance.

2. DIOCESAN INTERVENTION AND RESOLUTION

Where the grievance or conflict has escalated beyond the capacity of a church leader to resolve the substantive and or relational issues, or where the local parish or any party involved wants independent help in moving towards addressing the grievance or responding to the conflict, then the church leader is to contact the Bishop, to implement Diocesan Intervention and Resolution in conjunction with the archdeacon(s).

The parties involved need to be advised that, as the process progresses, they can seek help from outside the Diocese if they feel the conflict is not being resolved.

The Diocese commits to a prayerful case by case approach to each matter.

PROCESS

2A. Assessment of the grievance and/or conflict

Upon receiving a request to assist with addressing a grievance or a conflict, an initial assessment of the situation will be made. This may include a review of correspondence, and holding briefing meetings with the parties to assist in:

- i. understanding the history and current status of the conflict/grievance;
- ii. ascertaining their willingness to address the grievance or conflict;
- iii. determining each person's conflict resolution style;
- iv. making judgements as to the intensity level of conflict; and
- v. determining the substantive issues.

2B. Pathway Recommendation Report

A **Pathway Recommendation Report** will be prepared. This report will include an outline of key issues, the level of conflict and the conflict resolution pathway that should be used.

2C. Bishop's decision on pathway towards resolution

Taking into account the *report*, and any other advice or submissions made by key stakeholders, the Bishop shall determine the resolution pathway that will be employed in this situation.

2D. Pathway employed

Depending on the Bishop's decision of pathway, appropriate resources will be allocated to assist the parties to bring about agreed solutions.

Where arbitration is the Bishop's decision, then the Bishop, or his delegate(s), together with other stakeholders will work on an arbitrated solution to the substantive issues. It is to be noted that, dependent upon the level of conflict and issues involved, this step may take several meetings and some time to work through.

2E. Implementation of solutions

Once all parties are in agreement, as far as is possible, regarding solutions, the Bishop will decide to ratify or modify the solutions, communicate any modifications to all parties, then authorise implementation of the solutions.

2F. Ongoing monitoring of the situation

The Bishop, or his delegate(s), will, in negotiation with the parties, make health checks on the situation to ensure that the solutions that have been employed are working.

REVIEW OF PROTOCOL

This Protocol is to be reviewed prior to December 2022.

Schedule 1

Biblical Foundations for behaviour

In the Bible, God has much to say about the requirements and responsibilities of Christian life and leadership, especially when one has a grievance against another Christian.

Covering all this – especially in the face of a grievance – is the priority of love, forgiveness and humility (Galatians 5:22-6:4; Philippians 2:1-5; Colossians 3:12-14; James 1:19-21). These priorities are well illustrated by Ephesians 4:31-32 –

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. (NRSV)

Jesus is clear on the warning of anger against a brother or sister as this leads to judgement, and he then calls people to be reconciled before coming to worship in Matthew 5:21-24

The Bible encourages us to examine our own hearts before speaking to anyone, as illustrated in Matt 7:3-5

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Prior to any discipline process, the Bible encourages Christians to speak directly with a person whom he or she believes may be sinning. For example, Matthew 18:15-17 says:

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (NRSV)

In particular, Christians are to rightly honour those God has placed in positions of authority (1 Timothy 5:17-20; Hebrews 13:7, 17). For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 says:

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. (NRSV)

Of course, the Bible expects high standards of Christian leaders (Mark 10:42-45; 2 Timothy 2:14-26; Titus 1:5-9; James 3:1-2; 1 Peter 5:1-4). In particular, 1 Timothy 3:2-3 indicates, among other matters, that any bullying behaviour is unacceptable. It says:

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. (NIV)

Schedule 2

Model of Conflict resolution



PEACEMAKING PRINCIPLES

The Bible provides us with a simple yet powerful system for resolving conflict.

These principles are so simple that they can be used to resolve the most basic conflicts of daily life. But they are so powerful that they have been used to address church divisions, breakdowns in school and tertiary college working relationships, ministry team breakups, divorce and child custody actions, embezzlement situations, multi-million dollar business disputes and negligence lawsuits. These principles are briefly discussed below.

1. See conflict as an opportunity

Conflict is not necessarily bad or destructive. Even when conflict is caused by sin and causes a great deal of stress, God can use it for good (see Rom. 8:28-29). As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, conflict actually provides three significant opportunities. By God's grace, you can use conflict to:

- Glorify God (by trusting, obeying, and imitating him)
- Serve other people (by helping to bear their burdens or by confronting them in love)
- Grow to be like Christ (by confessing sin and turning from attitudes that promote conflict).

These concepts are totally overlooked in most conflicts because people naturally focus on escaping from the situation or overcoming their opponent. Therefore, it is wise to periodically step back from a conflict and ask yourself whether you are doing all that you can to take advantage of these special opportunities.

2. Glorify God

When the Apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to live "to the glory of God," he was not talking about one hour on Sunday morning. He wanted them to show God honour and bring him praise in day-to-day life, especially by the way that they resolved personal conflicts (see 1 Cor. 10:31).

As mentioned above, you can glorify God in the midst of conflict by trusting him, obeying him, and imitating him (see Prov. 3:4-6; John 14:15; Eph. 5:1). One of the best ways to keep these concerns uppermost in your mind is to regularly ask yourself this focusing question: "How can I please and honor the Lord in this situation?"

For further assistance, please contact us at PeaceWise on 1300 IPEACE (1300 173223) or 02 9808 3771 or email us at contact@peacewise.org.au

3. Get the log out of your own eye

One of the most challenging principles of peacemaking is set forth in Matthew 7:5, where Jesus says, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

There are generally two kinds of "logs" you need to look for when dealing with conflict. First, you need to ask whether you have had a critical, negative, or overly sensitive attitude that has led to unnecessary conflict. One of the best ways to do this is to spend some time meditating on Philippians 4:2-9, which describes the kind of attitude Christians should have even when they are involved in a conflict. The second kind of log you must deal with is actual sinful words and actions. Because you are often blind to your own sins, you may need an honest friend or advisor who will help you to take an objective look at yourself and face up to your contribution to a conflict.

When you identify ways that you have wronged another person, it is important to admit your wrongs honestly and thoroughly. One way to do this is to use the "Seven A's of Confession:"

- Address everyone involved (Prov. 28:13; I John 1:8-9)
- Avoid if, but, and maybe (don't make excuses; Luke 15:11-24)
- Admit specifically (both attitudes and actions)
- Apologize (express sorrow for the way you affected someone)
- Accept the consequences (Luke 19:1-9)
- Alter your behaviour (commit to changing harmful habits; Eph. 4:22-32)
- Ask for forgiveness

The most important aspect of getting the log out of your own eye is to go beyond the confession of wrong behaviour and face up to the root cause of that behaviour. The Bible teaches that conflict comes from the desires that battle in your heart (James 4:1-3; Matt. 15:18-19). Some of these desires are obviously sinful, such as wanting to conceal the truth, bend others to your will, or have revenge. In many situations, however, conflict is fueled by good desires that you have elevated to sinful demands, such as a craving to be understood, loved, respected, or vindicated.

Any time you become excessively preoccupied with something, even a good thing, and seek to find happiness, security or fulfillment in it rather than in God, you are guilty of idolatry. Idolatry inevitably leads to conflict with God ("You shall have no other gods before me"). It also causes conflict with other people. As James writes, when we want something but don't get it, we kill and covet, quarrel and fight (James 4:1-4).

There are three basic steps you can take to overcome the idolatry that fuels conflict.

- First, you should ask God to help you see where you have been guilty of wrong worship, that is, where you are focusing your love, attention, and energy on something other than God.
- Second, you should specifically identify and renounce each of the desires contributing to the conflict.
- Third, you should deliberately pursue right worship, that is, to fix your heart and mind on God and to seek joy, fulfillment, and satisfaction in him alone.

As God guides and empowers these efforts, you can find freedom from the idols that fuel conflict and be motivated to make choices that will please and honour Christ. This change in heart will usually speed a resolution to a present problem, and at the same time improve your ability to avoid similar conflicts in the future.

4. Gently restore

Another key principle of peacemaking involves an effort to help others understand how they have contributed to a conflict. Before you rush off to confront someone, however, remember that it is appropriate to overlook minor offences (see Prov. 19:11). As a general rule, an offence should be overlooked if you can answer "no" to all of the following questions:

- Is the offence seriously dishonouring God?
- Has it permanently damaged a relationship?
- Is it seriously hurting other people? and
- Is it seriously hurting the offender himself or herself?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, an offence is too serious to overlook, in which case God commands you to go and talk with the offender privately and lovingly about the situation (see Matt. 18:15). As you do so, remember to:

- Pray for humility and wisdom
- Plan your words carefully (think of how you would want to be confronted)
- Anticipate likely reactions and plan appropriate responses (rehearsals can be very helpful)
- Choose the right time and place (talk in person whenever possible)
- Assume the best about the other person until you have facts to prove otherwise (Prov. 11:27)
- Listen carefully (Prov. 18:13)
- Speak only to build others up (Eph. 4:29)
- Ask for feedback from the other person
- Recognize your limits (only God can change people; see Rom. 12:18; 2 Tim. 2:24-26)

If an initial confrontation does not resolve a conflict, do not give up. Review what was said and done, and look for ways to make a better approach during a follow up conversation. It may also be wise to ask a spiritually mature friend for advice on how to approach the other person more effectively. Then try again with even stronger prayer support.

If repeated, careful attempts at a private discussion are not fruitful, and if the matter is still too serious to overlook, you should ask one or two other people to meet with you and your opponent and help you to resolve your differences through mediation, arbitration, or church discipline (see Matt. 18:16-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8).

5. Go and be reconciled

One of the most unique features of biblical peacemaking is the pursuit of genuine forgiveness and reconciliation.

Even though Christians have experienced the greatest forgiveness in the world, we often fail to show that forgiveness to others. To cover up our disobedience we often use the shallow statement, "I forgive her—I just don't want to have anything to do with her again." Just think, however, how you would feel if God said to you, "I forgive you; I just don't want to have anything to do with you again"? Praise God that he never says this! Instead, he forgives you totally and opens the way for genuine reconciliation. He calls you to forgive others in exactly the same way: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against

one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:12-14; see also 1 Cor. 13:5; Psalm 103:12; Isa. 43:25).

One way to imitate God's forgiveness is to make four specific promises when you forgive someone:

- I will not think about this incident.
- I will not bring this incident up and use it against you.
- I will not talk to others about this incident.
- I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

Remember that forgiveness is a spiritual process that you cannot fully accomplish on your own. Therefore, as you seek to forgive others, continually ask God for grace to enable you to imitate his wonderful forgiveness toward you.

6. Negotiate in a biblical manner

Even when you manage to resolve personal offences through confession and forgiveness, you may still need to deal with substantive issues, which may involve money, property, or the exercise of certain rights. These issues should not be swept under the carpet or automatically passed to a higher authority. Instead, they should be negotiated in a biblically faithful manner.

As a general rule, you should try to negotiate substantive issues in a cooperative manner rather than a competitive manner. In other words, instead of aggressively pursuing your own interests and letting others look out for themselves, you should deliberately look for solutions that are beneficial to everyone involved.

As the Apostle Paul put it, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4; see Matt. 22:39; 1 Cor. 13:5; Matt. 7:12).

A biblical approach to negotiation may be summarised in five basic steps, which we refer to as the PAUSE Principle:

- Prepare (pray, get the facts, seek godly counsel, develop options)
- Affirm relationships (show genuine concern and respect for others)
- Understand interests (identify others' concerns, desires, needs, limitations, or fears)
- Search for creative solutions (prayerful brainstorming)
- Evaluate options objectively and reasonably (evaluate, don't argue)

If you have never used this approach to negotiation before, it will take time and practice (and sometimes advice from others) to become proficient at it. But it is well worth the effort, because learning the PAUSE principle will help you not only to resolve your present dispute but also to negotiate more effectively in all areas of your life.

7. Be prepared for unreasonable people

Whenever you are responding to conflict, you need to realize that other people may harden their hearts and refuse to be reconciled to you.

There are two ways you can prepare for this possibility.

First, remember that God does not measure success in terms of results but in terms of faithful obedience. He knows that you cannot force other people to act in a certain way. Therefore he will not hold you responsible for their actions or for the ultimate outcome of a conflict. All God expects of you is to obey his revealed will as faithfully as possible (see Rom. 12:18). If you do that, no matter how the conflict turns out, you can walk away with a clear conscience before God, knowing that his appraisal is, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Second, resolve that you will not give up on finding a biblical solution. If a dispute is not easily resolved, you may be tempted to say, "Well, I tried all the biblical principles I know, and they just didn't work. It looks like I'll have to handle this another way (meaning, 'the world's way')."

A Christian should never close the Bible. When you try to resolve a conflict but do not see the results you desire, you should seek God even more earnestly through prayer, the study of his Word, and the counsel of his church. As you do so, it is essential to keep your focus on Christ and all that he has already done for you (see Col. 3:1-4). It is also helpful to follow five principles for overcoming evil, which are described in Romans 12:14-21:

- Control your tongue ("Bless those who curse you;" see also Eph. 4:29)
- Seek godly advisors (identify with others and do not become isolated)
- Keep doing what is right (see 1 Pet. 2:12, 15; 3:15b-16)
- Recognize your limits (instead of retaliating, stay within proper biblical channels)
- Use the ultimate weapon: deliberate, focused love (see also John 3:16; Luke 6:27-31)
- At the very least, these steps will protect you from being consumed by the acid of your own bitterness and resentment if others continue to oppose you. And in some cases, God may eventually use such actions to bring another person to repentance (see 1 Sam. 24:1-22).

Even if other people persist in doing wrong, you can continue to trust that God is in control and will deal with them in his time (see Psalms 10 and 37). This kind of patience in the face of suffering is commended by God (see 1 Pet. 2:19) and ultimately results in our good and his glory.

8. Get help from above

None of us can make complete and lasting peace with others in our own strength. We must have help from God. But before we can receive that help, we need to be at peace with God himself.

Peace with God does not come automatically, because all of us have sinned and alienated ourselves from him (see Isa. 59:1-2). Instead of living the perfect lives needed to enjoy fellowship with him, each of us has a record stained with sin (see Matt. 5:48; Rom. 3:23). As a result, we deserve to be eternally separated from God (Rom. 6:23a). That is the bad news.

The good news is that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Believing in Jesus means more than being baptised, going to church, or trying to be a good person. None of these activities can erase the sins you have already committed and will continue to commit throughout your life.

Believing in Jesus means, first of all, admitting that you are a sinner and acknowledging that there is no way you can earn God's approval by your own works (Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8–9). Second, it means believing that Jesus paid the full penalty for your sins when he died on the cross (Isa. 53:1–12; I Peter 2:24–25). In other words, believing in Jesus means trusting that he exchanged records with you at Calvary—that is, he took your sinful record on himself and paid for it in full, giving you his perfect record.

When you believe in Jesus and receive his perfect record of righteousness, you can really have true peace with God. As you receive this peace, God will give you an increasing ability to make peace with others by following the peacemaking principles he gives us in Scripture, many of which are described above (see Phil. 4:7; Matt. 5:9).

If you have never confessed your sin to God and believed in Jesus Christ as your Saviour, Lord, and King, you can do so right now by sincerely praying this prayer:

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner, and I realize that my good deeds could never make up for my wrongs. I need your forgiveness. I believe that you died for my sins, and I want to turn away from them. I trust you now to be my Saviour, and I will follow you as my Lord and King, in the fellowship of your church.

If you have prayed this prayer, it is essential that you find fellowship with other Christians in a church where the Bible is faithfully taught and applied. This fellowship will help you to learn more about God, grow in your faith, and obey what he commands, even when you are involved in a difficult conflict.

9. Get help from the Church

As God helps you to practice his peacemaking principles, you will be able to resolve most of the normal conflicts of daily life on your own. Sometimes, however, you will encounter situations that you do not know how to handle. In such situations, it is appropriate to turn to a spiritually mature person within the church who can give you advice on how you might be able to apply these principles more effectively.

In most cases, such "coaching" will enable you to go back to the other person in the conflict and work out your differences in private. If the person from whom you seek advice does not have much experience in conflict resolution, it may be helpful to give him or her a copy of *Guiding people through conflict*, which provides practical, nuts-and-bolts guidance on how to help other people resolve conflict.

When individual advice does not enable you to resolve a dispute, you should ask one or two mutually respected friends to meet with you and your opponent to help you settle your difference through mediation or arbitration (see Matt. 18:16-17; I Cor. 6:1-8). For more information on how to get guidance and assistance in resolving a dispute, click [Contact Us](#) in the main menu.

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