

OVERVIEW

In every community, there are times when issues arise, misunderstandings happen, and sometimes hurtful or offensive behaviour occurs between individuals. This is normal in human life and interaction. Knowing this, COCWA has formed this document and process to help churches find godly and appropriate pathways to see their issues and concerns addressed.

The core biblical values supporting this process are truth-telling (Ephesians 4:15-25), justice-seeking (Micah 6:8), grace-giving (Colossians 3:13), and peace-making (Matthew 5:9; Ephesians 4:2-3). The process is seen in operation in Matthew 18:15-20. It is a process that is not to be used as a weapon or demand but exemplifies how Jesus sees God's presence in the process of resolution, and the significance that God places on finding restoration of relationship.

Once begun, such a process should be followed with care and a commitment to walk through the process step by step so that it does not become too drawn out or complex. At all times, commitment to the values outlined above need to anchor all actions and discussions.

A process like this can guide any individuals or groups wishing to restore relationship. However, within a ministry context and particularly among leaders, it needs to be agreed that leaders will be held accountable to follow it through. In some circumstances, depending on the severity, potential impact and under the oversight of the Church Board, parties may be asked to stand down from their roles or aspects of their roles whilst this is being done.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

STEP	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	FOLLOW THROUGH
1	Personal Reflection	Offended party takes time to pray and reflect on the offence or injury received. In some situations, it is appropriate to overlook the offence. In other situations, important principles may be at stake and the situation needs to be taken further.	May or may not choose to lodge a grievance with no request for further action.
2	Wisdom & Accountability	<p>If you are unsure about your response and feel the need for wise counsel then this is often appropriate. The focus is on gaining clarity about the offence and the next step; all the while making sure you are accountable to act with integrity, wisdom and peacemaking.</p> <p>We can help by proposing a godly counsellor, pastor, leader or mentor. This is a way of distinguishing this consultation from gossip or sharing to gain sympathy or biased support. This is inappropriate.</p>	Approach Senior Church Leader or Church Board Member for recommended person.

NB: The reference in Matthew 18:17 of treating people like "tax collectors and sinners" does not mean rejecting them from the church. It means ministering to such people like Jesus did – treating them with kindness, gentleness, and invitation to join the forgiveness story of Christian discipleship.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

STEP	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	FOLLOW THROUGH
3	Informal Discussion	<p>A key step is to go to the other person informally and in private to share your concern. The attitude is to be one of trying to understand the perspective and viewpoint of the other person. Be willing to hear and receive an apology or respond to an offer of restoration if it is offered. If the matter is resolved, no further action is necessary.</p> <p>If you are the perceived "offender", be quick to listen and ensure you understand what the person is sharing. Guard yourself from simply reacting. If you need time to reflect then ask for it. If you can take responsibility then do so, or ask to meet again.</p>	Private discussion and offers of forgiveness or apology.
4	Formal Discussion	<p>If either party is feeling threatened, overpowered or unable to communicate clearly their position. This most often means involving a third party. Others are invited into the process. This most often means involving a third party. Others are invited into the process as support people or informal facilitators. They are not advocates or mouthpieces for the complainant's positions.</p> <p>The meeting is pre-arranged and both people have the opportunity to have support people present.</p> <p>At this level, it is appropriate that some formal records are kept and that Senior Church Leadership including the Board is notified that this has happened.</p> <p>If resolved, then no further action is taken.</p>	<p>Formal meeting.</p> <p>Pre-arranged.</p> <p>Support persons as requested.</p> <p>Facilitator Records kept.</p> <p>Board informed.</p>
5	Formal Mediation	<p>If formal discussions fail, then the Church Board is officially notified and with the agreement of all, a trained mediator should be appointed to facilitate a safe and open discussion. Opportunities for interpersonal reconciliation are given.</p> <p>Points of agreement and disagreement are recorded along with the outcome. Most often, it is anticipated, the two parties will come together and find a solution of grace, compromise, and kindness. Keeping the agreement is a matter of trust on both sides.</p> <p>If agreement is reached, no further action required. A confidential report provided to Church Board as well as individuals.</p>	<p>Board officially notified.</p> <p>Trained mediator.</p> <p>Agreements and disagreements noted.</p> <p>Formal confidential report to the Church Board.</p>

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

STEP	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	FOLLOW THROUGH
6	Arbitration	<p>On other occasions, there continues to be a lack of acceptance of the charge or the apology. When this occurs, it is the responsibility to the Church Board to make an assessment of the next step.</p> <p>The Board may choose to interview both parties again and hear from witnesses OR the Board may choose to appoint a Third Party to conduct the investigation on its behalf. The Board will use this information in its assessment of the given dispute.</p> <p>The case is examined and principles of justice applied. A judgement is given and both parties are called on to agree with the decision.</p> <p>This may mean dismissal for one or more of the parties.</p>	<p>Board process</p> <p>Interview parties and witnesses</p> <p>Board arbitrates and makes recommendation</p>
7	Civil Action	<p>If the above step fails then the situation has moved beyond the ability of the community to handle it internally. It must be referred to civil courts or independent external mediators engaged by one or both of the respective parties. Both parties would normally stand down from any leadership positions whilst this was in process.</p>	<p>Parties stand down</p> <p>Proceeds to external court</p>