

# DIGNITY AT WORK POLICY

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## DIGNITY AT WORK AND IN CHURCH LIFE:

### MAINTAINING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE DIOCESE OF CHESTER.

#### REPORT

*“Good personal relationships are a significant form of witness to the gospel. As we are called to honour God so we reflect our honouring of Him in our honouring of other human beings. We believe that all forms of abuse, harassment and bullying are intolerable in the Christian Church.*

*Within the life of the church there will be times of disagreement and difference and this can be a sign of health and life as much as a sign of weakness.*

*We are all unique individuals in the eyes of God and our personality, life experience, and our discipleship invites us to honour and celebrate that difference. How we then conduct our relationships within the Christian community can assist the attraction to Christian discipleship or it can discourage. It is important for church members to recognise that many people who enquire or want to explore discipleship arrive at our churches with high expectations of the nature of the relationships they will encounter. Sadly sometimes they leave disillusioned.”*

The Archbishop's Council requested all dioceses to consider a framework to deal with the rare circumstances where relationships have been impaired, and to have in place preventative measures. In 2008 the Committee for Social Responsibility was requested to consider the report from the Archbishop's Council and to make recommendations to assist our Diocese in putting in place a culture that minimizes conflict in our parishes. In addition there is a legal necessity to have a policy in place to deal with conflicts between employees and their employer, and although clergy are not employees this good practice is now required under Common Tenure.

The nationally recommended Grievance Policy refers to the need to have a Diocesan Dignity at Work Procedure, and the policy meets this need for clergy and lay workers, as well as having a wider remit for all church relationships. There is a separate draft policy for DBF staff which is being consulted on.

The Human Resources Committee considered the draft policy prepared by the Working Group and has referred it to the Clergy Consultative Group for comment before being sent to the Bishop's Council. They also appreciated that in order to embed good practice there was a need to communicate the policy as widely as possible and ensure that it was covered in appropriate training events for clergy and lay leaders.

## **POLICY:**

### **DIGNITY AT WORK AND IN CHURCH LIFE: MAINTAINING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS IN THE DIOCESE OF CHESTER**

#### **Statement of commitment**

The Church is required by God to foster relationships of integrity, truthfulness and trustworthiness. The abuse of this obligation by harassment or bullying will not be tolerated in the Diocese as it undermines the love we should demonstrate for each other and our Christian witness to the world. However infrequently it happens, therefore, all complaints of abuse, harassment and bullying will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

I would like to emphasize that most relationship problems in parishes are minor, and would normally be dealt with by the parish priest. The Rural Dean or Archdeacon often mediate where they know of problems that they can address quickly to nip the problem in the bud. This policy covers serious situations which need more formal external support to resolve.

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#### **What is bullying and harassment?**

1. Any behaviour that could potentially undermine someone's dignity and respect should be regarded as unacceptable. If it is not challenged the person who is doing the alleged bullying or harassing may not understand how the behaviour is perceived and it has the potential to escalate and lead to significant difficulties for all concerned.
2. In establishing the links between "unacceptable behaviour", "bullying" and "harassment" this broad definition may be helpful:

"any behaviour, involving a misuse of power, which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group should be regarded as unacceptable in the church community, both to those who are paid or to members of the church.

"Unacceptable behaviour" changes its label to "bullying" or "harassing behaviour" when it causes actual harm or distress to the person to whom it is addressed, normally but not exclusively after a series of incidents over a period of time.

Lack of intent is not an excuse, but the degree of intent is relevant in terms of how the behaviour should be challenged and the issues subsequently resolved."

#### **How can bullying and harassment be recognised?**

3. Bullying is more easily seen when it is continuous, frequent, repetitive and part of an overall pattern. However some abuse is serious enough to be recognised even if the behaviour occurred only once and is therefore not defined as bullying.

4. Bullying may manifest itself in a variety of different ways, it is usually persistent, and often unpredictable, and can amount to severe psychological intimidation. It is insidious, and undermines the ability and confidence of the person suffering from it. It can lead to a variety of symptoms including fear, isolation, demotivation, poor concentration and symptoms of stress. Another consequence can be ill health leading to absence from work or a stubborn attendance when obviously unwell, and psychological emotional and physical harm can be done.

### **Examples of bullying behaviour**

5. This list of behaviours is not exhaustive but gives a clear indication of the sorts of actions that may constitute bullying or harassment:
  - consistently attacking someone's professional or personal or religious standing
  - isolating someone or deliberately ignoring or excluding them from activities
  - removing areas of responsibility without discussion or notice
  - setting out to make someone appear incompetent
  - deliberately withholding information or providing incorrect information in order to demean another
  - over loading with work and or reducing deadlines without paying attention to any protest
  - persistently picking on someone in front of others
  - spreading malicious rumours to third parties
  - public humiliation by constant innuendo, belittling and "putting down"
  - frequent use of emails to an individual rather than face to face discussion to reprimand, insult or otherwise inform someone of their apparent failing, and/or copying this in appropriately to third parties
  - personal insults and name-calling
  - making false accusations
  - aggressive gestures, verbal threats and intimidation
  - talking/shouting directly into someone's face
  - direct physical intimidation

The most serious incidents might result in:

- creating an unsafe working or church environment
- ignoring signs of overwork and extreme stress
- putting someone's health physically, emotionally or psychologically at risk by making them upset, frightened and or ridiculed

## **Distinguishing bullying from reasonable behaviour**

6. It is important to distinguish between bullying and behaviour that is reasonable in a particular context. For example there may be occasions where shortcomings in performance are being addressed and more incisive behaviour is interpreted as bullying simply because the recipient is unused to being challenged or asked to account for their actions.
7. Harassment, in general terms, is the unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women. It may be related to disability, race, gender, age, religious belief (including theology or churchmanship), nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual and may be persistent or an isolated incident. What is important is that the actions or comments are viewed by the recipient as demeaning and unacceptable.
8. On the whole it is safest to take the view that if a person complains that they are being bullied or harassed, then they have a grievance which should be dealt with, regardless of whether or not their complaint accords with a standard definition. It is important to understand why they feel as they do and look for a solution to the problem and/or an improvement in the relationship. If we are to model a loving church community then the way that we deal with such situations and incidents will demonstrate our belief in repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

## **Standards of behaviour**

9. Those with pastoral responsibilities for the clergy in this diocese: rural deans, archdeacons, dean and bishops recognise the importance of being good role models in the way that they interact with those for whom they have pastoral care and/or managerial oversight. A culture of support and empowerment where there is consultation and real discussion of problems and their solutions is one which should discourage bullying and harassment. They recognise that training in this area is important and commit themselves to this.
10. The laity of this diocese recognises the importance of good relationships in their church life and discipleship, and that poor behaviour can set back the mission of the church. They undertake to challenge poor behaviour, seek help when this does not stop and participate in any investigation or mediation to end the problem.
11. The clergy of this diocese recognise the importance of good relationships in their church life and discipleship, and that poor behaviour can set back the mission of the church. They undertake to challenge poor behaviour, seek help when this does not stop and participate in any investigation or mediation, or use the appropriate procedure to end the problem.

## **Communication and training**

12. The Diocesan Director of Human Resources is responsible for encouraging and monitoring the implementation of the policy. The Director will ensure that this policy is included in the diocesan clergy information, is on the diocesan website, and that suitable resources to facilitate discussion and promote understanding are available for use by PCCs, Deaneries and other groups.
13. The Diocesan Director of Human Resources and the Director of Ministry will source and facilitate suitable training for clergy, laity and those with pastoral responsibility for the clergy. They will encourage Supporters to come forward and will ensure that suitable training is available for them.

## **Supporters and other support**

14. This diocese is committed to the encouragement and training of Supporters. The Supporters are concerned members of the clergy and laity who have volunteered and been accepted to undertake these duties. They have received special training for this role and have the full support of the Bishop. They are available to any member of the clergy or laity to offer, in confidence, advice and information as required. They are also able to channel complaints and, if suitably trained, to negotiate or mediate between the parties concerned.
15. Supporters will not make judgments, recommendations or reports, they will listen to the person in an informal atmosphere and they will allow them to decide what action they may want to take and the support that may be needed. Those who use the Supporters may also have their own source of support eg a trade union representative, and they may access the confidential Diocesan Counselling Service, details of which are on the web site.

## **Confidentiality**

16. It is Diocesan Policy that these matters are to be treated with absolute confidentiality and that no action will be taken without the willing consent of the person who feels he or she has been a target.

## **Fair procedures**

17. When both the perpetrator and the recipient is a clergy person or a licensed lay minister, complaints of bullying or harassment may with the recipient's consent be brought under the Grievance Procedure for Licensed Ministers. It has been developed by the church to deal with grievances of various kinds between ministers. When the perpetrator is a clergy person it may be more appropriate for the recipient or an archdeacon with their consent, to make a complaint under the Clergy Disciplinary Measure 2003.
18. When the perpetrator is a layperson, and the recipient is either ordained or lay, complaints of bullying and harassment may, with the recipient's consent, be dealt with in one of a number of ways according to the circumstances eg the use of the Mediation Service, referral to the Counselling Service, meeting with the Archdeacon to hear both sides of the allegations.

## **False accusations**

19. False accusations are a serious matter. The behaviour of anyone who is found to have made an unfounded, deliberately malicious complaint or allegation will be regarded with the utmost seriousness and where possible formal action taken. In the case of a clergy person this may be a complaint under the Clergy Disciplinary Measure 2003. A member of either the clergy or laity could be subject to an action for defamation if they have made false accusations against someone else.

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## **Annex A**

### **I think I have been the target of bullying or harassment, what can I do?**

If you are experiencing bullying or harassment you should not suffer in silence or feel that you are to blame in some way for inviting the behaviour.

#### **What to do if you are experiencing bullying**

1. Keep a factual log of all incidents of bullying: dates, times, nature of incident, details of accusations, criticisms, emails, text messages and any other correspondence. This may be needed as evidence should harassment, victimisation or bullying continue or subsequently recur.
2. Try to get witnesses to bullying incidents and avoid situations where you are alone with the perpetrator. Find out if you are the only recipient of the behaviour or whether other people are also affected now, or have been in the past.
3. If possible, clarify your role description to check that your responsibilities match it.
4. Use the available informal and formal options open to you. You can seek advice and support from the following: colleagues, members of the clergy, Archdeacon, the counselling service, trades union representatives, mediation service, Supporters. Supporters are volunteers who are fully trained and will work with you in confidence to advise on procedures for dealing with bullying and harassment and to clarify the impact of the behaviour you are experiencing so that you can decide what you want to do about it.

#### **Informal Action**

5. Try to resolve the complaint informally at first by explaining directly to the perpetrator the effect their behaviour is having and that you want it to stop. By trying the informal route the perpetrator may stop their behaviour and so prevent the matter becoming public, or escalating. You can also consult a Supporter and discuss with them whether to confront the alleged perpetrator, alone or with their support or whether you would like them to talk to the alleged perpetrator on your behalf.
6. Every effort should be made to use informal means, including considering mediation before formal procedures are invoked. But if the behaviour continues, make it clear that you will make a formal complaint. This may be enough to resolve the matter, particularly if the person was unaware their behaviour was causing offence.
7. Whenever possible, any complaint or harassment should be notified, in confidence to your parish priest, if it involves lay members of the church or to your rural dean or archdeacon if it involves a member of the clergy. Once an outcome has been agreed between the parties, the situation will be monitored as appropriate.

## **Formal action**

8. Where clergy are involved and it is decided by the rural dean or archdeacon that the matter is sufficiently serious or constitutes gross misconduct, they will make a file note of action taken and with your permission, institute an investigation under the formal procedures.
9. Formal procedures are not dependent on you having to take personal action to ask the perpetrator to stop their behaviour. It is recognised that by its very nature bullying is something that happens over a prolonged period of time and the longer it goes on the more difficult it is to take personal action to confront the behaviour.
10. If the perpetrator is a clergy person or licensed lay worker and an informal approach has either failed to help resolve the matter, or has not been possible for any reason, it may be appropriate to use the Grievance Procedure for Licensed Ministers or, in the case of clergy, the Clergy Discipline Measure, 2003. The Diocesan Director of Human Resources should be contacted in this instance.
11. If the perpetrator is a lay person discuss this with your parish priest who will advise on the formal procedures in place.

**REMEMBER -The earlier action is taken the better for all concerned.**

## **ANNEX B**

### **I have been accused of bullying or harassment, what can I do?**

1. Bullying and harassment are matters that must be taken seriously. An accusation does not necessarily signify a judgement that you are guilty and there will need to be a discussion with you in order to establish the true nature of the situation. It is possible there might be a problem that has arisen because you have not realised the effect of your actions or you may not have intended the effects complained of.
2. The perception of the person complaining of bullying or harassment is, however, an important factor in determining whether or not harassment has taken place. Simply to deny there is a problem or that the problem lies with the person making the complaint is not normally sufficient.
3. If you are a member of the clergy and accused of harassment, you are encouraged to contact your rural dean, archdeacon, suffragan or diocesan bishop. Lay members of the church should approach contact their parish priest in the first instance. The aim of the person you contact will be to facilitate discussion with a view to resolving the problem at source, if possible.
4. You are strongly advised to contact one of the Diocesan Supporters who are available to offer support in cases of bullying and harassment. Supporters are fully trained, guarantee confidentiality and will meet with you in private to talk through your position. They will advise you on procedures for dealing with claims of bullying and harassment and help you to clarify the impact your behaviour may be having so that you can decide on your course of action.
5. Every effort will be made to resolve the problem quickly through informal discussion. You will be asked to reflect on your behaviour and the possibility that you might be at fault, whether consciously or not.
6. The diocese will ensure that any formal procedures are fairly and properly followed. Details relating to the circumstances that gave rise to the complaint, the evidence of witnesses and the nature of the professional relationship between the person making the complaint and yourself will all be taken into account.
7. If you are a clergy person or licensed lay minister accused of bullying another minister, a formal complaint may be made under the Grievance Procedure for Licensed Ministers. If you are a clergy person accused of bullying other clergy or laity there will be consideration of whether the matter constitutes misconduct under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003.

8. If you are a lay person accused of bullying a minister or another member of the laity this will be dealt with in different ways depending upon your position, which could involve mediation, counselling support and/or a meeting with the Archdeacon to hear both sides of the allegations.
9. Throughout any informal or formal procedures the principal objective is to identify the underlying issues and eliminate the cause of the offence as quickly as possible and with minimal recrimination.
10. As a result of informal and formal action you may be offered help to recognise, understand and modify your behaviour; and you are strongly advised to accept this help.

## APPENDIX A Types of Support

Type of support	Description
Therapeutic Counselling	Focus on personal difficulties – confidential, self-referral. Different approaches offered eg CBT, person centred therapy. Time and duration to suit individual needs. Team of counsellors organised by Chester Diocese.
Inter Diocesan Counselling Service	As above but provided collaboratively by 5 NW Dioceses
Consultative Support	Part of therapeutic counselling service – self referral, main focus work issues to enable the individual to come up with appropriate strategies. Working agreement tailored to individual needs. Also opportunity to discuss the impact of confidential stressful/needy situations or people in the parish
Coaching	To help develop skills and expertise, may observe practice, give structured tasks/advice, provide feedback and enable learning from doing to improve competence. Currently provided by training incumbents, placement supervisors – but not in place outside training parishes. Could use experienced priests with specific and specialist areas more
Mentoring	Guidance from experienced practitioner helping reflection on own practice and consideration of solutions that may improve work issues, help to assess what works well and where there are training and development needs to be addressed. Curates and pastoral workers currently have mentors – only used sporadically outside people in training. Could use experienced priests more systematically
Mediation Service	For solving serious problems where conflict is arising between parish and priest/members of parish but priest feels unable to solve problem without support. Trained mediators who will undertake a confidential structured process involving the individuals who are in conflict.
Ministerial Development Review	Biennial peer developmental review, compulsory for all on Common Tenure and an expectation all will participate (except for curates who have their own process). Outcomes will be objectives for following two years and individual development plan.
Continuing Ministerial Education	This is supported by the Director of Ministry and a team of staff. There are a range of programmes which they deliver as well as a budget to enable all clergy to have some financial support for courses/retreats they want to attend.
Work supervision	Monitoring ability to fulfil role description, set targets, assess performance and give feedback and ensure appropriate development undertaken. Only happens for curates/central posts/chaplaincies. Will this need to become more widely used under Common Tenure? Clergy office holders so close direction not usual.
Capability Procedure	Under Common Tenure issues of capability, work or health, will trigger use of structured process for monitoring, helping to improve capability and proscribed development with the aim of supporting and helping the person to function well again.
Dignity at Work Procedure	Procedure to deal with cases of bullying/harassment, not just for clergy but for all involved in parish life. Outcomes may involve using some of above support.
Spiritual Direction/Companion	Ongoing commitment agreement with an experienced priest or lay person for regular advice and support to enable the clergy to maintain a nurturing spiritual life. The Diocesan Adviser has a list of those who will act as Spiritual Directors/Companions and the person can choose the most appropriate.