

Complaints procedure

Approved by PCC on 25th January 2022. To be reviewed annually

Latest review: 10th February 2024

What counts as a complaint?

A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about an action, or lack of action, by a person acting on behalf of the church, or about the policies and procedures of the church. A complaint may include an allegation that a person has behaved in an unacceptable way.

When the complaint is made by someone who is a paid employee, it is usually referred to as a grievance, and resolution should be sought through the separate Grievance Procedure. This is included in the St Mary's staff handbook.

Complaints and grievances against clergy are handled through the Clergy Discipline Measure. Complaints or grievances against clergy should be addressed to the archdeacon or the area bishop.

Complaints against licensed or commissioned ministers (Readers, Southwark Pastoral Auxiliaries, Church Army Officers) are handled through a separate Diocesan procedure. These complaints should be addressed to the Incumbent of the parish.

Problem-solving

We are committed to dealing effectively with any concerns or complaints raised about the way in which we work, what we do and/or the services we provide. Where possible, we will seek to put right any mistakes we may have made. If we get something wrong, we will apologise and where possible we will try to put things right. We also aim to learn from our mistakes and use the information we gain to improve the way we work in future.

The aim always, when responding to complaints, is to enable them to be resolved informally, speedily and fairly by discussion, problem-solving, mediation and negotiation. Problems should therefore be brought direct to the person(s) deemed responsible for the area of dissatisfaction or disquiet, and will hopefully be resolved in this way.

If, however, a complaint relates to or includes an allegation that a child or adult who may be vulnerable has been harmed or is at risk of harm, or that an adult or another child may have caused harm to a child or adult who may be vulnerable, it must be reported to the Parish Safeguarding Officer and responded to through the Diocesan procedures for handling allegations of abuse.

If the complaint does not concern a child or adult who may be vulnerable, and the person bringing it is not satisfied with the outcome at the problem-solving stage, he/she may then invoke this formal procedure.

We will not victimise or harass any complainant.

Formal procedure for complaints – stage 1

A complaint should be submitted in writing to a Churchwarden of the parish (who is not him/herself the subject of the complaint).

The person bringing the complaint has the opportunity to state his or her case; and to be represented, if they wish, at any meeting by a friend or other supporter.

The Churchwarden will meet with the complainant to listen to and note the facts of the complaint. He/she will then give the facts relating to the complaint to its subject. The Churchwarden will then interview the subject of the complaint, who may also be represented by a friend or other supporter if they wish, to listen to their response to the complaint against them. The Churchwarden may then interview any other relevant parties.

The Churchwarden then draws conclusions and informs the complainant and the subject of the complaint of the outcome, ideally within a week of the complaint being made.

Formal procedure for complaints – stage 2

If the reply given at stage 1 does not satisfactorily resolve the complaint, it should be put in writing to a Churchwarden, who will take it to the PCC. The PCC will form a panel of three of its members who have not been involved in the process before.

The panel will establish why the complainant continues to feel aggrieved, and receive all the documentation from the previous investigation at stage 1. The panel will then meet with the complainant and his/her supporter, the subject of the complaint and his/her supporter, and the Churchwarden who investigated the complaint at the first stage. Witnesses may be called.

The panel members will then sit alone to form a judgement and make a decision about the complaint. They will inform the complainant, the subject of the complaint and the Churchwarden of the outcome within a month of the complaint being made.

The decision of the panel representing the PCC will be final.

As a result of an investigation into a complaint, it may be necessary to address the matter with employees of the PCC through the Disciplinary Procedure.