



Epping Church of Christ

Grievance Resolution Policy

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to define the policy and principles for handling conflict at the Epping Church of Christ.

1.2 Scope

The policy is intended to apply to all staff, volunteers, members and attendees of the Epping Church of Christ.

1.3 Audience

- Epping Church of Christ leadership
- Epping Church of Christ membership
- Staff members employed by Epping Church of Christ
- Attendees of Epping Church of Christ: persons who regularly attend a ministry of the church (for example, Sunday services or Connect group).

2 General

1.1 Love and Personal Growth

Epping Church of Christ is part of the body of Christ, made up of individual members and attendees, people with different levels of faith and maturity in Christ, different visions and personalities. It is through this diversity that we can learn from each other and grow as we experience and begin to understand those differences and how they can benefit our growth. In Ephesians 3:10 we see that God's great plan is to be glorified through bringing all these differences together, working together. For us, as followers of Christ, it means we need to focus on the Great Commandments from Matthew 22:36-39 - to love God first and to love one another as ourselves. If we do this, we will learn to accept differences and understand others have different visions, different views and different desires. As we learn to love one another and to respect those differences, we will both grow and also move towards the ultimate goal of working together in all things.

1.2 Grievances Arise

Love for one another and respecting others' rights to have different opinions is fundamental for preventing grievances from occurring. Open discussion that promotes everyone's ability to express their opinion allows differences to be explored, and settled, without reaching the point of conflict. However, there will be times when grievances, complaints and disputes occur.

1.3 Commitment

This policy assumes commitment as individual members and as the body of Christ to the following actions based on Biblical principles:

- Go to the other...

Go directly to those with whom we disagree; avoiding behind-the-back criticism, waiting the other person out, or playing games about who should 'go first.' Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-20

- ...in a spirit of humility

Go in gentleness, patience and humility. Be prepared to own our part in the conflict instead of pointing out others' wrongdoing. We will be prepared to share our needs, interests and values. Galatians 6:1-5, Ephesians 4:25

- ...to seek and to offer forgiveness

We will be prepared to offer an apology for any hurts we have caused the other and to seek their forgiveness. We will be prepared to receive an apology, and before God, will seek to offer forgiveness as it is requested of us. Ephesians 4:32

- Be quick to listen

Listen carefully, ensuring we understand what is being said and why, before responding. We will seek as much to understand as to be understood. Proverbs 18:13, James 1:19

- Be slow to judge

We will suspend judgements and will avoid making assumptions of others' motives. Matthew 7:1, Romans 2:1-4; 14:13, Galatians 5:22-26

- Guard our tongues

We will avoid sharp, barbed comments or replies which are hurtful. We will take great care to guard against 'labelling', threats, or words that carry a negative connotation. Ephesians 4:29, James 3:5,

- Be willing to talk and work through differences

We will work through the disagreements constructively. We will grant space for all to reflect and think with compassion. We will find ways to honour each other's interests, needs, values and concerns. We will agree to a fair and reasonable process of how the outcome will be determined. We will engage in cooperative discussion about the options and consider each fully. We will accept the emerging outcome and work with it, not against it. Acts 15, Philippians 2:1-11

1.4 Policy Statement

Epping Church of Christ is committed to ensuring an authentic and grace-filled church environment by giving all members and attendees access to processes that allow for grievances, disputes, problems and complaints to be resolved. The Procedures outlined in this Policy form the basis of this commitment.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the Epping Church of Christ Safe Spaces Policy and Procedure and associated Code of Conduct for staff and volunteers.

2 Policy Principles

2.1 Application

Situations to which this policy applies include the following:

- a disagreement between two or more staff, volunteers, members or attendees of the Epping Church of Christ;
- a perceived offence caused by a staff member, volunteer, member or attendee to another;
- 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 is able to be resolved in a pastoral manner);
- dissatisfaction with the manner in which a staff member or volunteer has fulfilled their ministry role; and
- a complaint that a staff member or volunteer has committed a minor breach of the Code of Conduct.

It is important to identify some issues that cannot be resolved by following the Procedures set out in this Policy. They are not designed to:

- Resolve issues relating to domestic violence, family law matters before the Family Law Court (or similar body).
- Resolve complaints or concerns relating to abuse (including Child Sexual Abuse or Sexual Misconduct involving a Child) or other serious breaches of the Code of Conduct.

2.2 Principles

In seeking to resolve a situation of grievance, all parties are to be guided by the Commitments in Clause 2.3 in conjunction with the following principles:

- Seek to glorify God in our responses to each other.
- Strive to serve each other even amid our disunity.
- Seek to be Christ-like in our reactions to each other.
- Extend grace to each other.
- Focus on forgiveness and restoration of relationships where appropriate.
- Seek third party help where needed.

3 Procedure

3.1 General

The framework described by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 forms the basis for the procedure for resolving grievances at Epping Church of Christ:

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

The following provides clarification of that framework.

3.2 First Response

In the first instance, where disagreement arises, it is expected that the parties involved should communicate. Often, a conflict appears one-sided because one of the parties is unaware that a problem exists. This is why the passage, and this policy, makes it incumbent on the aggrieved to make a personal and private approach to the other party. This approach should always be handled sensitively and with love. Being reminded that the other party may not be aware of any problem, an approach needs to be polite, confidential and focused on the problem and not the person. Always being careful not to offend even if feeling offended yourself, the approach must be treated as the most important step in achieving a suitable outcome. Additionally, it must be understood that you should not expect a 'win' at any stage. The fundamental concept must be to resolve 'the problem', not to 'win' your argument or impose your view. Either opinion may win the day or a compromise may be reached, but the desired outcome is a resolution. Entering into discussion with this mindset will provide a platform from which resolution is possible without anyone losing.

3.3 Second Response

If this one-to-one meeting is unsuccessful, it is time to introduce a third party. The important factor here is that the third party should be impartial. Taking sides or building a team is not a loving way to proceed. As conflict has the potential to polarise groups and destroy the very foundations of a church, any third party must be impartial, mature and responsible. To this end, it is expected that an Elder, or Elders, should be the first choice. Failing availability, someone of maturity and respected by both parties may be chosen. The passage describes this scenario as one or more 'witnesses', and this is key to this phase of the process. The third party here is not a judge, but more appropriately a pure witness who may take a role as a mediator to assist both parties in their discussions about the problem. The third party should aim at all times to keep the discussion focused on the problem to avoid any personal issues clouding the real problem.

3.4 Third Response

If the second response process fails to resolve the problem, it is time to take the matter to the church. This should be done initially through the Eldership. In this instance, the Eldership will represent the church and their decision should be respected and accepted as the decision of the church. The witnesses to the second response process may be used to clarify the proceeding of the

earlier meetings and to provide insight into the problem. If this fails to provide a satisfactory resolution, the matter can be taken to the church as a whole.

3.5 Final Response

There may be times when a satisfactory resolution cannot be found. In that instance, the maturity of the parties in question may be challenged. As Christians, love is our overriding rule. We need to be able to love in spite of differences. If a conflict has the power to override our love for one another, we are losing sight of our faith. Matthew 18:15-17 says that in this event we are to treat that person as a pagan, meaning; to treat them as non-believers, to love them and try everything we can to bring them back to the love of Christ and to understand the principle that love is above all differences. If this stage is reached it is the time to suggest external assistance in the form of professional counselling. As a non-believer is not a member of the church, it is our duty to make every effort to try to bring them back to Christ.

END OF POLICY DOCUMENT