

Date policy produced	Name of Policy Writer	Frequency of Review	Date reviewed on / by whom	
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Complaints and Reconciliation Policy

1. Purpose of this complaints policy

The primary purpose of the Cambray Baptist Church Complaint and Reconciliation policy and procedure is to provide a process for dealing with disputes or complaints relating to the behaviour of, or activities and decisions taken by, the church's staff, trustees, or volunteers which have not been resolved by informal meeting between individuals.

This policy and procedures aim to provide staff and volunteers, Elders and Deacons (Trustees) with clear and simple instructions as to how respond to a complaint and how concerns should be handled.

This policy outlines

- How seriously Cambray Baptist Church takes complaints;
- How Cambray Baptist Church will deal with them appropriately;
- How Cambray Baptist Church will use them as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future.

2. The Biblical Basis

The Biblical Basis for dealing with disputes or complaints is based on the Grace of God towards us as believers – that we forgive one another as He has forgiven us (Eph 4:32), bear with one another in love (Col 3:13), make every effort to maintain unity in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3), putting bitterness or wrath away from us (Eph 4:31), in love for one another (Mt 22:39, 1 Jn 4:7-8).

Nonetheless, as fallen yet redeemed people we do fail (1 Jn 1:9) and there may be difficulties that arise. Jesus gave us the pattern for resolving these difficulties in Matt 18:15-17: Talking to one another one to one to seek resolution, Bringing in others to help in finding a Godly solution, and then bringing the matter to the Elders and ultimately to the Church.

This Policy seeks to encompass these three steps, encouraging resolution through talking one to one unless it is necessary to involve others through the procedure given in this policy.

3. Cambray Baptist Church's commitment

This policy applies to everyone who works on behalf of Cambray Baptist Church whether they are trustees, leaders, group / ministry leaders, paid staff, volunteers, or others working or volunteering within Cambray Baptist Church.

Cambray Baptist Church will provide a fair Complaints and Reconciliation Procedure which is clear, transparent, and easy for anyone wishing to make a complaint.

We will publicise the existence of our Complaints and Reconciliation Policy and Procedure so that people know how/who to contact us to make a complaint.

We will ensure everyone at Cambray Baptist Church knows who to pass a complaint to when one is received.

Cambray Baptist Church will ensure all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely way, following the policies and processes laid out in this document.

- Any investigation of the concerns must adhere to Cambray Baptist Church procedures in relation to conflict of interest. *In this context, a conflict of interest would be anything that inhibits, or could be seen to inhibit, a fair and impartial examination of the complaint. For example: a family relationship (spouse, parent, child, brother, sister). If there was an allegation against the whole Eldership – one of the Elders could not investigate. Also, if the complaint was around a particular area of ministry, it can't be investigated by someone also involved in that ministry area.*
- Any person(s) appointed to investigate the complaint must have sufficient authority within Cambray Baptist Church to avoid either intentional or unintentional interference with the process including existing relationships.

We will ensure that complaints are, wherever possible, resolved and do our best to see that relationships are repaired.

Cambray Baptist Church's Elders and Deacons will reflect on the experiences to help improve what we do and how we do it.

N.B. This complaints policy only covers complaints, it does not cover allegations against staff or volunteer misconduct, whistleblowing, or the raising of safeguarding concerns, which are each dealt with by the appropriate policies of Cambray Baptist Church.

4. The definition of a complaint and escalation stages of a complaint

A complaint is any expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not, about any aspect of church life. This can be about a person, or persons, an activity, or a group or about a service provided by the church.

This complaints policy outlines a **three-stage complaints procedure**:

- **Stage One** is part of this Complaint and Reconciliation procedure, but resolution of the complaint or issues is achieved by informal conversations rather than a formal investigation. We encourage everyone to seek to resolve issues in this way. We provide the trifold handout "Dealing with hurts" to help guide individuals through this Stage.
- **Stage Two**: This is the stage where the formal procedures given in this document should be used, including an investigation by others into the complaint and help to resolve the complaint and move to reconciliation.
- **Stage Three**: Appeal

5. Source of complaints

Complaints may be received from several sources (e.g., phone, in person, email, etc.). The Church Secretary or their nominee will establish whether the complainant can be encouraged to commence at Stage One (informal resolution) or it is necessary to move to Stage Two (formal investigation).

6. Responsibility

- So that we have a clear point of contact, the Church Secretary is the primary person responsible for receiving complaints, barring conflict of interest. If the complaint involves the Church Secretary, any of the Elders can receive the complaint.
- The person receiving the complaint may nominate another person to coordinate the running of the Complaints and Reconciliation Procedure, ensuring that there is no conflict of interest for the nominee.

- The decision-making group will normally be taken from among the Elders and Deacons, barring conflict of interest (see above).
- The management and oversight for this policy and its implementation sits with the Trustees of Cambray Baptist Church, using the Governance Sub-Committee where appropriate.

7. Receiving Complaints

The church has a specific form for recording formal complaints and ideally, they should be raised using the specific form provided. If, however, the church receives a written complaint which is not on the correct form, the Church Secretary or their nominee will ensure that all the information required for the form has been included. If not, they will request the additional information that would have been provided had the form been completed. If, for reasons of inability, a verbal complaint is received the Church Secretary or their nominee will:

1. Complete the complaint form, normally within 48 hours of the receipt of complaint.
2. Write down the facts and circumstances of the complaint and any relevant background information.
3. Take the complainant's name, address and telephone number and names of any others involved.
4. Note down the relationship of the complainant to Cambray Baptist Church (for example: attendee, member, parent).
5. Signpost the complainant to these procedures so that they understand the process that will be followed.
6. Advise the complainant what will happen next and give an estimate of how long it will take.
7. Confirm with the complainant that the record accurately reflects the conversations that took place and that it captures adequately the concern that they are raising.
8. Establish with the complainant their desired outcome of the complaint (e.g. an apology, some other form of restoration or actions they wish to see taken such as changes to policies or procedures, etc.).

8. Formal acknowledgement

A formal acknowledgement of receipt of the complaint will normally be issued to the complainant by the Church Secretary or their nominee within 7 days.

9. Plan Response

A decision needs to be made about the nature of the complaint and how it will be handled. The decision will consider such factors as:

- Has the threshold for reporting to statutory services been met?
- Has the threshold for any regulatory reporting been met?
- Has the threshold for an internal investigation been met and if so?
 - Who will be involved?
 - How we will we resolve this?
 - By when?

10. Communicate Response

Once the planned actions in point 9 above have been agreed, then:

- Communicate the process to the complainant.
- Communicate who is their point of contact.

Procedures – Resolving Complaints

Stage One: Informal Resolution

Wherever possible, the strong desire in Cambray Baptist Church is to follow the Scriptural principles for reconciling differences (see, for example, Matthew 18). Where a complaint is received formally in which no attempt has been made to informally reconcile, the complainant will be encouraged, as Stage One of this Procedure to meet informally with the subject(s) of the complaint. Guidelines for how to do this are included in our leaflet “Dealing with hurts”, available in the Church Welcome Area and the church website.

It is hoped that during this stage (Stage One) most complaints can be resolved by talking, sharing, and achieving a shared understanding of the issues. We will offer to provide pastoral support to the complainant and any other party involved to help in the process of meeting informally.

Please note, this procedure does not prevent issues being discussed over multiple meetings if this is acceptable to both the complainant and those at whom the complaint is directed.

Once the discussions are complete, the outcome should be agreed. Possible outcomes would be:

- **Resolved:** agreement has been reached and any follow-up actions clearly agreed, including time-frames for the actions and how completion will be communicated to the complainant
- **Partially resolved:** Some of the issues have been resolved or some aspects have been agreed but others could not be resolved
- **Unresolved:** agreement could not be reached

A written summary of the discussions, along with any decisions and actions agreed and areas that are unresolved will be produced, a copy of which will be provided to the complainant and a further copy for the church’s own records.

The complainant will be asked to confirm that the record is accurate, and the church’s record will be kept securely for future reference.

If the matter is not fully resolved, the complainant has the option to escalate the matter to Stage Two. If so, the procedure detailed below (Stage Two) will normally be followed.

If the complainant does not wish to escalate beyond Stage One, the Church Secretary or their nominee should consider whether there are outstanding issues that need to be considered formally. (It is possible that the complainant does not wish to escalate the complaint for a variety of legitimate reasons. However, issues may have been raised that are of concern to the church and so the church may wish to continue to investigate or address the issues outside the formal process.) In such circumstances, a formal record should be kept of decisions taken and actions completed.

Stage Two: Escalation and Investigation Process

Where the complainant wishes to escalate from Stage One, the complaint, once clarified, will be considered by the Church Secretary or their nominee. Where the Church Secretary is involved or there is a conflict of interest one of the non-Pastor Elders will be asked to consider it.

If the complainant feels that the issue has not been satisfactorily resolved at Stage One, they should formally notify the Church Secretary or their nominee within 14 days. The complainant must clearly indicate the nature of their concerns and the reason for seeking a more formal response. Where, due to complexity or circumstance, this 14-day

period is unrealistic, a longer time-frame can be negotiated between the Church Secretary (or their nominee) and the complainants.

- The complainant must set out in writing the details of the complaint including supporting evidence.
- Written acknowledgement of receipt of a request for Stage 2 will be provided within 7 days.
- The acknowledgement will name a specific contact person and will indicate the time-frame for a decision on how the matter will be handled.
 - Pastoral support will normally be offered to the complainants and to anyone else concerned.
- The Church Secretary (or their nominee) will decide on an individual or team to investigate and will define the scope and process of the investigation.
- The Church Secretary (or their nominee) will then notify the complainant in writing of the investigation process and anticipated timeframe.
- If the complaint relates to a specific person, they will be informed, and they will be given opportunity to respond.
- Written notes of interviews must be taken and held securely.
- The person against whom the complaint has been made should be kept informed at all stages of the investigation and of the outcome.
- If there are delays to the timeframe, a progress report should be sent as soon as possible to the complainant with an indication of when a full response will be complete.
- Whether the complaint is upheld or not, the reply to the complainant should describe:
 - the action taken to investigate the complaint,
 - the conclusions from the investigation,
 - any action taken as a result of the complaint.

Stage Three: Appeal Process

If the complainant is still dissatisfied with the process or outcome of the investigation, they can appeal the decision in writing to the Church Secretary / the Church Secretary's nominee within 28 days of receipt of the outcome.

- The complainants appeal must clearly state the reasons for the appeal and provide evidence as to why they disagree with the outcome of the investigation.
 - The appeal is NOT a reinvestigation of the original complaint.
- The Church Secretary or their nominee, should identify a new group to examine the appeal. This will normally be a group of Elders not previously involved at Stage Two, unless there is conflict of interest. This group, should then:
 - Establish the scope and process of the appeal.
 - Review the process and findings of the stage 2 complaint to establish whether any further investigation is required.
 - Complete a final decision on the robustness and reliability of the stage 2 process and findings.
- The outcome of the appeal should be reported back to the Trustees who will check and sign off the appeal.
- The complainant is then notified of the outcome.
 - The complainant will be notified of any options to raise the concerns further, these would include:
 - a) a complaint or referral to the Charity Commission, or
 - b) a complaint or referral to statutory services if they believe those thresholds were met.
- **The decision taken at this stage is final.**

Vexatious Complaints

If the group established to consider the complaint at Stage 2 or 3 conclude that a complaint is vexatious (i.e., unreasonable, and repeated, once the above processes have been exhausted) the Trustees may be asked to consider exercising church discipline if the complainant is a Church Member. If the complainant is not a Church Member, the church is under no obligation to investigate further the complaint made once all available avenues of resolution have been explored.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

All complaints must be handled sensitively and confidentially. Information concerning the complaint should only be shared on a need-to-know basis. Share only with those who need to know the information and ensure that you are following any relevant data protection procedures or GDPR requirements.

Practical Guidance for Handling Verbal Complaints

- Remain calm and respectful throughout the conversation.
- Listen – allow the person to talk about the complaint in their own words. Sometimes a person just wants to “let off steam.”
- Don’t debate the facts in the first instance, especially if the person is angry.
- Show an interest in what is being said.
- Obtain details about the complaint before any personal details.
- Ask for clarification wherever necessary.
- Show that you have understood the complaint by reflecting what you have noted down.
- Acknowledge the person’s feelings (even if you feel that they are being unreasonable) – you can do this without making a comment on the complaint itself or making any admission of fault on behalf of the organisation
 - “I understand that this situation is difficult.”
 - “We hope to be able to come to a swift conclusion”
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your organisation, then apologise.
- Ask the person what they would like done to resolve the issue.
- Be clear about what you can do, how long it will take, and what it will involve.
- Don’t promise things you can’t deliver.
- Give clear and valid reasons why unreasonable requests cannot be met.
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told.
- Wherever appropriate, inform the person about the available avenues of review or appeal.

Cambray Baptist Church Complaint and Reconciliation Form

Your details

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

If anyone else is involved in raising this complaint or are you raising the complaint on behalf of someone else, please give details:

About the complaint

Date(s):

Person(s) involved:

Complaint about: (please clearly describe the nature of your complaint)

Supporting information:

- *State the matter or name of the person who is the subject of the complaint.*
- *What happened, when and where.*
- *Provide the contact details or statements of any witnesses.*
- *If complaining about a decision, explain what the decision was about, when it was taken, and who made it.*
 - *Explain what impact this decision has had, or you may fear will have, and upon whom.*
- *Provide any additional information that you believe would be helpful.*

Q1. Have you tried to resolve this matter informally? YES/NO

If YES, please move to Q2.

If NO, please explain briefly why you decided not to try to resolve the matter informally, then move to Q3.

Q2. If you tried to resolve this matter informally, what happened?

State who you dealt with, when and where, what information you provided to them, and what you felt was unsatisfactory about the outcome.

Q3. What actions are you wanting the church to take and what outcomes are you seeking?

Whilst the Trustees cannot make any commitment to do what you ask, it would be helpful to understand what resolution you are seeking.

Cambray Baptist Church will treat your data carefully and in accordance with their data protection policy. However we church cannot guarantee to keep the facts and details of your complaint confidential if it is necessary and proportionate to share your data in order to review and resolve your complaint.

Signature of complainant:

Date:

Complaint Acknowledgement Letter Template



[Date]

Dear [insert name],

Thank you for your letter to **Cambray Baptist Church** dated [insert date].

We are sorry that you have had to raise a complaint [include a brief summary of complaint].

Cambray Baptist Church, will review your complaint in accordance with our Complaints and Reconciliation Policy [insert link].

[Insert the name of the responsible person(s)] will be in touch with you within 7 days to begin a review of your complaint.

The Church will treat the facts and content of your complaint carefully and in line with our data protection policy (https://www.cambray.org/mp3_sermons/CBC-files/policies-statutory/Data-Protection-Policy-2018-11.pdf).

However, occasionally, the Church may need to make a public statement about the subject matter of the complaint or to report the matter to the statutory authorities and consequently the church cannot guarantee to keep the facts of or details of your complaint confidential. Where this may be necessary, you will be kept informed.

You should maintain all reasonable confidentiality as to the nature and content of your complaint, other than to seek professional advice if required. You should allow the Complaints and Reconciliation Process to run, refraining from seeking to further deal personally with the person complained about while the matter is being reviewed.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact [insert name/email] in writing.

Yours sincerely,

[Name and signature]