

North Kent Methodist Circuit Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults

Positive Working Together

A Policy adopted by the North Kent Circuit on 19th March 2015

Introduction: why we need a policy

We do not yet have a truly safe and inclusive Church. Respondents to a recent survey of ministers and lay people in the Methodist Church in Britain indicated that 64% had suffered bullying and comments entered in the survey indicated that there are many instances of being treated badly in the life of the Methodist Church.

The early Church

It is clear from many letters in the New Testament that the early Christians faced such behaviour and were determined to deal with it. For example:

“But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labour among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you ...” (*1Thessalonians 5:12*)

“Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” (*Ephesians 4:31*)

The same determination is appropriate and necessary in the 21st century Church.

Positive Working Together – The Policy

This policy applies to all Church activity, formal and informal, wherever it takes place.

Our Shared Commitment

The Methodist Church strives to be diverse and inclusive and therefore welcomes difference, whilst recognising that to do so can be challenging. The Church draws people of many different ways of working and relating. Of relevance to this document is that people have different ways of dealing with disagreements and conflicts.

This document seeks to promote positive working together in order to create local church communities where all can be safe, be treated with respect, love, and dignity, and where no individual or group seeks to be dominant. (“Whoever wants to be first must be the servant of all”: Mark 10:44). It does not suggest that having differences of opinion or approach is unacceptable but rather that the sharing of difference in appropriate ways facilitates growth.

Foundation Values

1. *Everyone is equally important to God and must be treated with respect.*
2. *The Methodist Church recognises the equal value of everyone before God in every ethnic group, and whatever their sexual orientation, level of ability, gender, age, or faith.*
3. *As an inclusive church, it recognises and welcomes difference, and acknowledges that sometimes difference brings with it challenge.*
4. *The Methodist Church deliberately works in collaborative ways which generally involve sharing leadership and decision making.*

Our Commitment to work together positively

We commit ourselves to:

- listen carefully to each other, seeking to understand what we are saying to each other.
- speak and act respectfully towards each other, however different we may be in opinions or approach to life.
- value the uniqueness of each person.
- be courteous and respectful in all communications whether face to face, by email, or via social media.
- encourage each other to be open and confident in our relationships.

and

- not to behave in ways which involve, for example; shouting, insults, expletives, gossip, verbal or physical intimidation, exclusion, ridicule, or aggression.
- in the committees and councils of the Church to listen and speak with care and respect without interrupting others.
- if we disagree with others to continue to work together positively respecting our differences.

Our commitment to avoid inappropriate behaviours

All who serve the Church, whether as ministers, lay employees, or Church members, should be free to do so creatively and without being bullied or harassed. All have the right to be treated with respect and dignity and should have the right of access to a process through which such inappropriate behaviour can be addressed.

We commit ourselves to behave in ways that

- show respect for each other
- treat other people with dignity
- honour our cultural background
- affirm each other in our differences

and not to

- insult threaten undermine or intimidate anyone or
- to abuse in any way the power that we may have through our office or position in the church

and which the person who experiences such behaviour may consider amounts to harassment or bullying.

Harassment and bullying

We understand harassment and bullying to have the following characteristics.

1 Harassment

- 1.1. Harassment is any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. A single incident can amount to harassment.
- 1.2. It also includes treating someone less favourably because they have submitted or refused to submit to such behaviour in the past.
- 1.3. Unlawful harassment may involve conduct of a sexual nature (sexual harassment), or it may be related to age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Harassment is unacceptable even if it does not fall within any of these categories.
- 1.4. Harassment may include, for example:
 - unwanted physical conduct or "horseplay", including touching, pinching, pushing and grabbing;
 - unwelcome sexual advances or suggestive behaviour (which the harasser may

- perceive as harmless);
 - offensive e-mails, text messages or social media content;
 - mocking, mimicking or belittling a person's disability.
- 1.5. A person may be harassed even if they were not the intended "target". For example, a person may be harassed by racist jokes about a different ethnic group if the jokes create an offensive environment.

2 Bullying

- 2.1 Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving the misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority, but can include both personal strength and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation. Bullying can take the form of physical, verbal and non-verbal conduct. Bullying may include, by way of example:
- physical or psychological threats;
 - overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision;
 - inappropriate derogatory remarks about someone's performance;
- 2.2 Legitimate, reasonable and constructive criticism of a person's performance or behaviour, or reasonable instructions given to workers in the course of their employment, will not amount to bullying on their own.

3 If you consider that you are being harassed or bullied

- 3.1 If you believe that you are being harassed or bullied, consider whether you feel able to raise the problem informally with the person responsible. You should explain clearly to them that their behaviour is not welcome or makes you uncomfortable. If this is too difficult or embarrassing, you should speak to the safeguarding officer for your church, or if this is not possible the Circuit Safeguarding officer who can provide confidential advice and assistance in resolving the issue formally or informally.
- 3.2 If informal steps are not appropriate, or have not been successful, you should raise the matter formally as a complaint.
- 3.3 We will investigate complaints in a timely and confidential manner. The investigation will be conducted by someone with appropriate experience and no prior involvement in the complaint, where possible. Details of the investigation and the names of the person making the complaint and the person accused must only be disclosed on a "need to know" basis. We will consider whether any steps are necessary to manage any ongoing relationship between you and the person complained about during the investigation.
- 3.4 Once the investigation is complete, we will inform you of our decision. If we consider you have been harassed or bullied. If the harasser or bully is a third party, we will consider what action would be appropriate to deal with the problem. Whether or not your complaint is upheld, we will consider how best to manage any ongoing working relationship between you and the person concerned.
- 3.5 This does not prevent any person from raising a formal Complaint at any stage through the formal process provided by the Methodist Church. These procedures are to be found on the Methodist Church website under "Complaints and Discipline".

4 Protection and support for those involved

- 4.1 People who make complaints about harassment or bullying or who participate in good faith in any investigation must not suffer any form of retaliation or victimisation as a result.

5 Record keeping

- 5.1 Information about a complaint will be retained by the Circuit Safeguarding officer, along with a record of the outcome and of any notes or other documents compiled during the process. These will be processed in accordance with the Circuit's Data Protection Policy.

Our commitment to work positively where there is a dispute

Recognising that there is likely to be conflict between all people, including Christians, we commit ourselves:

- when in dispute with one another to endeavour to continue to work together positively as we committed ourselves to do when we disagree with each other.
- to participate in and value open discussion of different points of view as a way of working together to resolve our disputes.
- to acknowledge our mistakes and seek reconciliation, being ready to give and receive both apology and forgiveness.
- where appropriate to use the pattern for resolving disagreements proposed in Mt 18:15-17.

When seeking to resolve a dispute using this pattern:

- If the person involved feels able to, he/she shall speak with the person or persons concerned without bringing in others, recognising that this will require prayer and self-reflection, courage, and a willingness to be vulnerable.
- If the person involved does not feel able to undertake this first step or this does not bring reconciliation, he/she shall invite a trusted member of the church to assist.
- If the problem persists, use the process for reconciliation provided by the Methodist Church (see below).
- If any person involved is effectively excluding themselves from the church, ensure the church leadership is aware so that they can continue to care for them.
- Remember that Jesus promises to be present in this process (Mt 18:20) and that we are called to ask for forgiveness when we have been mistaken or hurtful, and to continue to strive to become more Christ-like.

Positive Working Together: with help from the Circuit and District

1. If the steps above are not effective in bringing about resolution of the dispute, the Methodist Church provides procedures in both the Circuit and District for resolving differences. These procedures are to be found on the Methodist Church website under "Complaints and Discipline".
2. If an inter-personal problem has been raised first in the local church and no resolution has been found, it can next be raised with any person in the local church or Circuit in whom the person with a concern (a 'complaint') has confidence. This may be the local complaints officer, who is the Superintendent Minister or a person appointed by the Superintendent. (Where the Superintendent is the person about whom the complaint is to be made the Complaints Officer is the District Chair.)
3. The person receiving the complaint will first seek to resolve the situation informally by whatever means seem appropriate. This may include consulting the District Reconciliation Group and /or suggesting mediation.
4. If this process does not lead to a resolution, there is a formal complaints procedure provided in the Standing Orders of the Methodist Church.
5. All people who are being caused distress by inappropriate behaviour are encouraged to seek pastoral care and/or counselling using the resources provided by Circuit, District, or Connexion.

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