



Seeking Resolutions

A Parish Complaint policy to maintain healthy relationships

29 March 2017

Context and Rationale

At St. Monica's Parish Moonee Ponds we affirm the dignity of the individual and the nurturing of relationships within the parish community. Through prayer, rituals and social events the parish seeks to draw each individual into the faith life of our community.

This policy reflects the parish's commitment to practice the Gospel values of justice and hope. Its purpose is to provide parishioners with principles and procedures in responding to complaints and resolving disputes. This process is designed to ensure complaints are treated seriously, respectfully and sensitively and that an honest dialogue can occur in the community. The parish welcomes open and transparent discussion and urges parishioners with genuine concerns to deal directly with the issue so that it can be resolved fairly and quickly.

For the purposes of the policy a complaint is a concern, grievance or issue that is raised by a member of the parish and which requires a resolution. Anonymous complaints will not be considered.

Principles

In implementing this policy the parish will:

- a) Respect the rights and responsibilities of all members of the community.
- b) Treat all complaints seriously and sensitively, having due regard to procedural fairness, confidentiality and privacy
- c) Provide support to the person making the complaint and any person against whom a complaint is made
- d) Seek to resolve a complaint as early as possible and directly with the people involved
- e) Acknowledge the reciprocal expectations of all parishioners to act in a courteous, respectful, supportive and constructive manner towards one another.
- f) If necessary, seek external support or involvement of relevant agencies in the resolution of a complaint

- g) Facilitate any changes deemed to be necessary which arise from the resolution of a complaint

Guidelines for Implementation

St. Monica's parish Moonee Ponds values direct communication and expects all individuals will, if possible, bring a complaint directly to the parties involved, and that those involved will make every effort to resolve the complaint. Wherever possible, complaints should be resolved by a process of discussion, cooperation and conciliation. The aim is to reach an acceptable outcome which restores and maintains good relationships.

1. Contact: The complainant should make contact with the member of the Parish who would be in the best position to resolve the complaint. In most cases this would be the person about whom the complaint is concerned but can also be one or more of the following:
 - Parish Priest
 - Pastoral Assistants
 - Office Staff
 - Chair of the relevant committee

These matters are best discussed face to face at a mutually agreed time for each of the parties concerned. A confidential discussion is held and a suggested strategy is developed to deal with the complaint. At this stage the complaint is treated as informal.

2. If initial contact between the parties does not resolve then the complainant should:
 - a) Contact the parish priest to make an appointment for a face to face meeting
 - b) Outline the nature of the complaint either verbally or in writing and the steps taken to resolve it
 - c) Be aware that this is now entering a formal process which is outlined in step 3
 - d) Inform police if there is any allegation of a criminal matter
3. The Parish Priest will:
 - a) Respond in a timely manner to the complainant to organize a meeting
 - b) A witness may be invited by either party to observe any such meeting
 - c) Keep all discussions confidential in limiting it to those directly involved
 - d) Fully document the complaint
 - e) Give a copy of the complaint to the complainant
 - f) Ensure that no one is victimized as a result of the complaint
 - g) If necessary enable the person making the complaint to have a support person
 - h) Inform the person about whom the complaint was made and the nature of the complaint. This information will not be disclosed without the prior knowledge of the complainant.

- i) Organize a process of mediation via an independent facilitator if a complaint can not be satisfactorily resolved by the parish

When the complaint relates to an allegation of physical or sexual abuse or any other illegal activity, the complainant should report the matter directly to the police.

Avenues for Appeal

Should the complaint be related to the Parish Priest and not be resolved after initial contact, the Parish will advise the complainant to take the matter to the Vicar General.

Possible Contacts

Victoria Police (03) 9247 6666 Vicar General (03) 992 65677 Catholic Care (03)9287 5500
Catholic Education Office (03) 9267 0228 Independent commissioner (03) 9225 7979
Towards Healing (03) 5023 6790 Department of Health and Human Services 1300 650 172

Policy to be reviewed August 2018