



COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Charity Trustees approved this version of the Complaints Policy on 23 January 2024.

This policy is based in part on a model complaints policy produced by the FIEC in partnership with Christian Safeguarding Services and will be reviewed and updated from time to time.

Background

The Gate Church (the '**Church**') is committed to standards of best practice in ethical, moral and legal conduct in all areas of Church life and relationships. However, we also recognise that individuals, institutions and cultures can fall below these standards at times.

This Complaints Policy (the '**Policy**') has been prepared and implemented out of a desire to '*learn to do right; seek justice*' (Isaiah 1:17) and '*to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God*' (Micah 6:8). It is our aim that the Church is a community where righteousness and justice are established and upheld and that we take the opportunity to learn and grow in this together where shortcomings are identified.

This Policy establishes an avenue for anyone to raise a Complaint about standards not being met by a person or persons acting on behalf of the Church or in any aspect of Church life. It is designed to give confidence to those raising Complaints as well as Church members and Church leaders, whilst managing expectations and ensuring that there is an agreed process for these matters to be investigated, brought to resolution and appropriately responded to. This Policy is published so that people, especially covenant members of the Church, know how to raise a Complaint.

This Complaints Policy is not intended to replace informal resolution of most issues in Church life and should only be relied upon as a means of final resort in relation to resolving any such issues. For example, we would encourage and expect any appropriate Biblical avenues for resolution to have been followed first – if a grievance is against a fellow Church member it should first be dealt with in the manner of Matthew 18:10-35 and/or Philippians 4:2, and if a grievance is in relation to a Pastor or Elder then 1 Timothy 5:17-25 should be followed. It is only once these Biblical and more informal resolution processes have been exhausted that a formal Complaint should be raised under this Complaints Policy.

Where a Complaint or issue raised involves alleged or potential breaches of our Safeguarding Policy (including any relevant legal standards) it will be handled according to our Safeguarding Policy and not this Complaints Policy. Where a Complaint is an employment-related grievance brought by a member of the Vocational Ministry Team it will be handled in accordance with our staff grievance procedure and not this Complaints Policy.

Contents

Definitions	2
1. Purpose of Complaints Policy	2
2. Commitments regarding Complaints.....	2
3. Processing Complaints.....	3
4. Review and Renewal.....	5
APPENDIX A	6
APPENDIX B	7
APPENDIX C	9

Definitions

In this Complaints Policy the following words have the following meanings:

Charity Trustee: the Charity Trustees at any given time of the Charitable Incorporated Organisation operated by the Church (reg no: 1171487).

Complaint: an expression of dissatisfaction, whether it subsequently proves to be justified or not, that a person or persons acting on behalf of the Church or an aspect of Church life has fallen significantly below standards of best practice in ethical, moral and/or legal conduct as set out in our Pastoral Code of Best Practice (Appendix A), including that someone has been treated unfairly, unsatisfactorily or inappropriately.

Complainant: a person or group making a complaint – which may include covenant members, visitors to the church or someone from the general public.

Deacon: someone recognised as a Deacon by the Church at any given time in accordance with the terms of the Church Covenant.

Elder: someone recognised as an Elder by the Church at any given time in accordance with the terms of the Church Covenant.

Respondent: a person or group against whom a Complaint is made.

Vocational Ministry Team: the members of the Church who are set aside in some vocational capacity (whether paid or unpaid) to equip the members of the Church for the work of ministry and take a lead undertaking the ministry of the Church – this team currently includes a vocational pastor, an evangelist, and the Campus Outreach team leader.

Volunteer Ministry Team: the covenant members of the church at any given time, formally recognised in accordance with our Church covenant.

1. Purpose of Complaints Policy

- 1.1 The primary purpose of the Complaints Policy is to provide a fair complaints procedure which is clear, transparent, and easy for anyone wishing to make a Complaint related to Church life. This Policy sets out the procedures for submitting, receiving and resolving informal and formal complaints.
- 1.2 This Policy does not apply to safeguarding concerns or allegations about Church members, the ministry team or in relation to Church life more generally which will be dealt with according to the Church Safeguarding Policy.
- 1.3 This Policy applies to everyone who works on the Church's behalf whether as part of the Vocational Ministry Team or the Volunteer Ministry Team. This includes Elders, Charity Trustees, Deacons, Covenant Members or other volunteers representing the Church or working on our behalf.

2. Commitments regarding Complaints

2.1 Oversight

The Charity Trustees are responsible for oversight of this Policy and its implementation. The Charity Trustees commit to:

- handling Complaints carefully, with consistency and sensitivity;
- investigating Complaints fairly and in a timely way, following the processes set out in this Policy;
- wherever possible seeking resolution and reconciliation through the process; and
- using Complaints as an opportunity to learn and improve for the future.

The Charity Trustees appoint the following people as those who Complaints should be directed to:

- The Elders (or any individual Elder); or
- Where it relates to the Elders the Deacon for Operations

2.2 Pastoral care

Following a Complaint, the Elders will offer counsel and pastoral care for both the Complainant and the Respondent. If possible this will be provided from within the Church, but if necessary or requested this will be sought from outside the Church (although we cannot guarantee this can be arranged). This will include the pursuit of reconciliation where possible.

2.3 Confidentiality

Every attempt will be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained by the Church and the Complainant. Ordinarily, information relating to the Complaint will only be shared with those directly involved and those investigating and/or resolving the Complaint. However, circumstances giving rise to the Complaint may be such that it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality. In particular, on occasion the Church may need to make a public statement about the subject matter of the Complaint, report it to statutory authorities or seek professional advice, and consequently the Church cannot guarantee to keep your Complaint confidential. Should this be the case, the situation will be explained to the Complainant. The Church will adhere to its Privacy Policy, including in the handling of sensitive information. You should maintain reasonable confidentiality as to the nature and content of your Complaint, other than to seek professional advice if required.

3 . P r o c e s s i n g C o m p l a i n t s

3.1 Receiving Complaints

3.1.1 Complaints may be received from any person, either verbally or in writing. Complaints must be raised with or passed to either an Elder or the Deacon for Operations (the '**Recipient**' of the Complaint). If a Complainant would like support when raising a Complaint they can ask someone to accompany them when doing so – for example, this could be a friend (whether a church member or not) or a female Deacon if a female Complainant would appreciate support of this type when raising a Complaint.

3.1.2 On receiving the Complaint the Recipient will:

1. Confirm with the Complainant whether their issue is best resolved by means other than making a formal Complaint under this Policy. As a Church we encourage those with an issue to seek to resolve it informally, speedily and fairly through discussion, problem solving, mediation and negotiation, without recourse to the formal procedure set out in this Policy.

2. Where the Complainant does wish to make a formal Complaint under this Policy, invite the Complainant to complete a Formal Complaint Form (see Appendix C), or if they are not able to do so the Recipient will complete the form on their behalf within 72 hours of receipt of the Complaint. This is to ensure that all the necessary information is included.
3. Confirm with the Complainant that the Formal Complaint Form accurately reflects the conversations that took place or their written Complaint and that it captures adequately the concern that they are raising. The Complainant will be asked to sign the Formal Complaint Form once they are happy it is a true record of their Complaint.
4. Signpost the Complainant to these procedures so that they understand the process that will be followed.
5. Discuss the Complainant's needs and wishes for pastoral care in accordance with paragraph 2.2 above.
6. Advise the Complainant what will happen next and how long it will take.

3.1.3 Where a Complaint relates to an issue that poses an immediate risk, the Recipient will seek to resolve it as soon as possible including contacting any relevant authorities.

3.1.4 A written acknowledgment of receipt of the Complaint should be issued to the Complainant within 7 days of the Formal Complaint Form being signed.

3.2 Responding to Complaints

3.2.1 The Complaint will be reviewed by the Recipient. They will assess the nature of the Complaint and how it can best be handled and assign at least two Elders and/or Deacons to handle the Complaint (the '**Complaint Team**'). The Recipient may also invite a church member and/or a person from outside of the Church (such as a pastor of another church or a representative of the FIEC or Acts 29) to be part of, or act as an advisor to, the Complaint Team where they have suitable experience and/or knowledge. The Recipient will give due consideration to any requests from the Complainant regarding who is or is not on the Complaint Team.

3.2.2 Any person(s) appointed to handle the Complaint further to paragraph 3.2.1 must have sufficient authority within the Church to avoid either intentional or unintentional interference with the process including existing relationships and must not directly be the subject of the Complaint or have a conflict of interest in relation to it.

3.2.3 The Complaint Team will assess whether the threshold for any regulatory reporting has been met and if it has make any necessary report.

3.2.4 The Complaint Team will assess whether the Complaint should commence at Stage One (collaborative resolution) or Stage Two (formal investigation) of the Complaints Procedure (Appendix B). The Church has a preference for Complaints to commence at Stage One, but if the Complainant wishes the process to start at Stage Two and can demonstrate why this is necessary then this will be honoured.

3.2.5 The Complaint Team will notify the Complainant of how the Complaint will be processed and who their point of contact is.

3.2.6 If the police investigate the person who is the subject of the Complaint in relation to the same or related matters, the Church may not be able to begin or complete the process until the police have completed their investigations.

3.3 Resolving Complaints

- 3.3.1 The Complaint Team will follow the Complaint Procedure set out in Appendix B and keep the Complainant informed of progress.
- 3.3.2 The Complaint Team will uphold the principles of the Pastoral Conduct Code of Best Practice in their handling of the Complaint.
- 3.3.3 The Complaint Team will seek to bring every Complaint to a resolution and will confirm the outcome in writing to the Complainant and to the Elders and Charity Trustees. Where possible, the resolution of the Complaint will also be discussed in a meeting with the Complainant and Respondent (where appropriate).
- 3.3.4 All Complaints must be handled sensitively and confidentially. Information concerning the Complaint will only be shared on a need-to-know basis and where possible anonymity of the Complainant will be maintained.
- 3.3.5 After a Complaint has been resolved or a final decision has been issued, the Church will reflect on the matter with the aim of learning from the process, improving, and preventing actions that could lead to further Complaints of similar nature. This may include determining whether there are grounds for disciplinary procedures in relation to any staff or volunteers.

3.4 Vexatious Complaints

- 3.4.1 If the Recipient or Complaint Team concludes that a Complaint is vexatious (for example, unreasonable, inappropriately repeated, without evidence, clearly not pertaining to the Pastoral Code of Best Practice, or an unwillingness to engage in informal resolution where appropriate) the Church may inform them that we will no longer respond to their Complaints of this nature.
- 3.4.2 If the Complainant is a covenant member and their conduct in relation to a Complaint is particularly disruptive to the Church the Elders may consider exercising church discipline.
- 3.4.3 If the Complainant is not a covenant member, the Church is under no obligation to investigate the Complaint further once all reasonable avenues of resolution have been explored.

4 . R e v i e w a n d R e n e w a l

- 4.1 The Charity Trustees will monitor the effectiveness of the Complaints Policy and review it at appropriate intervals. The Policy will be updated if necessary, but existing Complaints will be handled under the Policy in force at the time the Formal Complaint Form was submitted.

Policy approved: 23 January 2024

APPENDIX A

Pastoral Conduct Code of Best Practice

Pastoral care is the support given to someone for personal needs, be that spiritual, emotional and/or physical. As a Church we are committed to respectful and careful pastoral care conducted with grace and love for all people to whom we minister.

The Biblical pictures of spiritual leadership are those of a shepherd, devoted parent, and servant. The ultimate example is the Lord Jesus Christ who gives himself sacrificially for the good of others. We seek to promote Biblical teaching and practice, so that believers grow to maturity in Christ. We commit ourselves to promoting safe practices by those in positions of trust. We recognise that those providing pastoral care need to understand that they often hold a position of power and influence, even if they do not feel that is the case.

We seek to minimise the risks of vulnerable people being coerced, taken advantage of or pressured in any way (as well as the risk of false allegations of harm against those providing care) by:

- Working in partnership – ministering in teams, or where this is not possible offering an individual the opportunity for a trusted friend to join them in any pastoral meeting or conversation
- Recognising and where necessary clarifying the nature of the relationship and the purpose of the interactions – this is particularly important where ministry is embedded in strong relational networks, as it often is in Church ministry
- Clarifying the purpose and appropriateness of the meeting/interaction – in particular, recognising the limits of an individual in any given situation and considering where other support or referrals are necessary
- Encouraging an appropriate level of personal responsibility – aware of the dangers of dependency in pastoral relationships we will seek to help and empower those to whom we minister to take ownership and personal responsibility for how they respond to their situation
- Honouring confidentiality of personal disclosures – recognising that there may be situations in which sharing the disclosure with others is necessary for legal reasons or to safeguard others, in which case we will notify the individual of any such disclosures

We recognise that everyone has different levels of vulnerability and that each of us may be regarded as vulnerable at some time in our lives. We commit ourselves to safeguarding people who may be vulnerable, ensuring their well-being in the life of this Church. It is the responsibility of each of us to seek to prevent the physical, emotional, sexual, financial and spiritual abuse of vulnerable people and to consider whether we should report any such abuse that we discover or suspect.

We are committed to the following practices when entering into potentially difficult conversations with one another:

- Entering the conversation in a spirit of prayer, having prayed before and throughout the conversation
- Listening, allowing the person to talk in their own words and being curious to learn from their perspective or experience
- Remaining calm and respectful throughout the conversation, and acknowledging the feelings expressed by other people
- Seeking to be humble and take ownership for any failings or weaknesses we can, making a clear apology for these things

APPENDIX B

Complaints Procedure

Stage One: Collaborative Resolution

Resolution of the Complaint or issues by informal conversation(s) rather than a formal investigation.

It is hoped that during this stage most Complaints can be resolved by talking, sharing, and achieving a shared understanding of the issues and any actions that need to be taken.

The Complaint Team will decide on the most appropriate way to facilitate this conversation or series of conversations and give careful consideration to (including asking the Complainant's opinion):

- who is involved in these conversations in addition to the Complainant and Respondent, including whether the Complainant would benefit from a friend or other person joining them or representing them in any discussions;
- the environment and setting being conducive to constructive discussion; and
- the most appropriate format for the discussions (e.g. in person meeting, video call, phone call etc).

Pastoral support should be offered to the Complainant and any other party involved.

Once the discussions are complete, the outcome needs to be agreed. Possible outcomes are:

- **Resolved:** agreement has been reached and any follow up actions clearly agreed, including timeframes for the actions and how completion will be communicated to the Complainant, reconciliation is achieved where possible
- **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 kept, 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 by signing a copy, and the Church's record will be kept securely for future reference.

If the matter is not fully resolved, the Complainant should be asked whether they wish to escalate the matter to Stage Two and must formally notify the Complaint Team within 14 days if they wish to do so. The Complainant must clearly indicate the nature of their concerns and the reason for seeking a more formal response. Following this, the Stage Two procedure will be followed.

If the Complainant does not wish to escalate, the Church should consider whether there are outstanding issues that need to be considered formally. (It is possible that the Complainant does not wish to escalate for a variety of legitimate reasons, however, issues that have been raised are of concern to the Church and so they 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: Formal Investigation

Resolution of the Complaint by a formal investigation.

The Complaint Team will decide on the most appropriate way to investigate the Complaint and define in writing the scope and process of the investigation. The Complainant and Charity Trustees

will be notified in writing of the investigation process and anticipated timeframes (which will depend on the nature of the Complaint).

If the Complaint relates to a specific person, they should be informed, and they will be given opportunity to respond in the investigation.

Written notes of interviews must be taken and held securely.

Pastoral support should be offered to the Complainant and any other party involved.

The Complaint Team will seek to progress the investigation in accordance with the anticipated timescales and if there are delays to the timeframe an update will be provided as soon as reasonably possible to the Complainant.

Once the investigation is complete, the Complaint Team will provide a written report to the Complainant and Charity Trustees summarising:

- the Complaint;
- the action taken to investigate the Complaint;
- the outcomes/conclusions from the investigation; and
- any action taken or recommended as a result of the Complaint.

The Complainant will be asked to confirm that the report is accurate by signing a copy, and the Church's record will be kept securely for future reference.

Stage Three: Appeal

If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the process or outcome of the investigation after Stage Two, they can appeal the decision in writing to the Chair of Trustees within 28 days of receipt of the outcome (or if it relates to the Chair of Trustees, to the Charity Trustees as a whole).

The Complainant's 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, unless new evidence has come to light since the completion of the investigation.

The Chair of Trustees (or a Charity Trustee), supported as required by other nominated individuals, should then:

- establish the scope and process of the appeal;
- review the process and findings of the investigation to establish whether any further investigation is required;
- consider whether any support or advice would be beneficial from appropriate external organisations or individuals;
- once any necessary inquiries are complete, make 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 Charity Trustees who will sign off on the appeal. The Complainant will then be notified of the outcome and will be notified of their ability to raise the concerns further, which will include referring the Complaint to the Charity Commission, or statutory services if they believe those thresholds were met.

The decision taken at this stage is final.

APPENDIX C

THE GATE CHURCH

Formal Complaint Form

YOUR DETAILS

Name:	
Address:	Phone:
	Email:
Your relationship to the Church: (e.g. Covenant Member, visitor, parent etc)	
If anyone else is involved in raising this Complaint or are you raising the Complaint on behalf of someone else, please give details:	

DETAILS OF YOUR COMPLAINT

Date(s):
Person(s) involved:
Details of Complaint: (please clearly describe the nature of your complaint)
Supporting information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State the matter or name of the person(s) who is the subject of the Complaint. • Include what happened, when and where. • Please explain how you believe the standards set out in our Pastoral Code of Best Practice have not been met • 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. • Please provide any additional information that you believe would be helpful.

RESOLVING THE COMPLAINT

Have you tried to resolve this matter informally?	YES	NO
If you did try to resolve the issue informally, what happened?		

<p><i>(State who you dealt with, when and where, what information you provided to them, and what you felt was unsatisfactory about the outcome.)</i></p>	
<p>If you did not to try to resolve this issue informally, please explain why:</p>	
<p>What actions do you want taken and what type of resolution are you are seeking?</p> <p><i>(For example, an apology, some other form of restoration or changes to policies or procedures. Whilst the Charity Trustees cannot promise to do what you ask, it would be helpful to understand what resolution you are seeking.)</i></p>	
Signature:	
Date:	
<p>The Church will treat your data carefully and in accordance with the Church's Privacy Policy (available at https://www.thegatechurch.co.uk/privacy-policy).</p> <p>The Church cannot guarantee to keep the fact and details of your Complaint confidential if it is necessary and proportionate to share your data in order to review and resolve your Complaint.</p>	