Wellington Baptist Church

Policy on promoting good working relationships and managing conflict in the church

This policy is designed to promote positive working and good conflict management within the context of bullying and harassment within the church.

The aim is to provide informal approaches to dealing with these issues.

As a church we recognise the serious impact which poor behaviour and badly managed conflict can have on individuals, communities and on the church more widely. We recognise the importance of promoting a more proactive approach, helping people work together to prevent bullying and harassment, and manage conflict well at an informal level.

We affirm that a positive and proactive approach can help avoid everyday, low level poor behaviour escalating into highly damaging conflicts, without reaching a point where individuals feel they have no option but to raise a formal grievance.

Definitions:

Any behaviour, always involving a misuse of power, which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group should be regarded as unacceptable.

'Unacceptable behaviour' changes its label to 'bullying' or 'harassing behaviour' when it causes actual harm or distress to the target(s), normally, but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period of time.

Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse or negate the impact on the target or the distress caused. The degree of intent is only relevant in terms of how the behaviour should be challenged and the issues subsequently resolved.

Beginning with God's people – modelling right behaviour

We believe that this should start with us! Each member of the Church needs to behave in a manner which models the very highest standards of human interaction and relationships. On an everyday basis high standards of behaviour require attention to how individuals communicate with each other, how people are treated, how information is managed and shared and how difference is understood and embraced.

This policy is based in 3 main biblical foundations:

1. shared humanity;
2. journeying together in learning and understanding;
3. humanity's need of God's grace.

Typical causes of conflict in church settings

In seeking to make this policy work, it is useful to understand some typical examples of conflict in church settings:

Power struggles - people will take sides with the leader or worker that they personally support.

Spiritual bullying - sometimes leaders or those in authority use their position to claim superior spirituality which they believe gives them the right to be directive about how others should live.

Different perspectives - everyone sees the world a little bit differently.

Different goals - people think they are saying the same thing, yet they have very different goals.

Different values – whilst we are all part of one Church which holds a core set of beliefs in common, we sometimes hold values which are at odds with the values of others in the Church.

Personality clashes - certain personalities struggle to function effectively together.

Unrealistic expectations – whilst some people expect church to be a place for quiet prayer and reflection, others expect it to be lively and loud.

Personal issues and insecurities – individuals who have experienced difficult or dysfunctional parental relationships may struggle to relate to males or females in leadership roles.

Ideological and theological differences – the inclusive and democratic traditions of the Methodist Church can enable debate, but also conflict, on a wide range of theological issues.

Communication – some examples of right behaviour:

- paying attention to how we greet and address each other on an everyday basis, ensuring that we are at all times courteous, respectful and appropriate, regardless of the medium
- being mindful of the impact our communication has on others and making efforts to understand our communication from the perspective of how it is received by others
- being aware of how our power over others is communicated and taking measures to ensure that such power is not misused or abused
- only communicating about other people what we would be prepared to communicate to them face-to-face unless there are overriding and justifiable reasons not to do so
- making an effort to check with others whenever we fear we may have upset or offended them in order to promote confidence and clarity in our relationships with others
- making time to genuinely listen to what others communicate to us, particularly when the situation is sensitive or personally challenging to us.

How we treat each other – values and actions:

By committing ourselves to this policy, we ourselves will be

- treating every person fairly, equally and with dignity and respect
- behaving at all times with integrity, honesty and openness
- adjusting our behaviour, including language, if we understand it to be causing offence
- bringing unfair treatment to the attention of others so as to avoid it being repeated
- challenging inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour we have witnessed and doing this in a constructive, sensitive and proportionate way
- responding to criticism of our own behaviour by genuinely listening to what is being said, remaining calm and reflecting honestly on its potential validity before responding
- being aware that at times we may lack self-awareness and that this may impact negatively on our behaviour.

Inappropriate behaviour

Inappropriate or unacceptable behaviour often arises from a context where conflict is not dealt with well. We recognise that conflict is an inevitable part of life. However, when it is handled badly it often leads to poor behaviour. Although informal approaches to dealing with conflict are offered here, in some situations, due to the gravity of what is alleged to have occurred, it may be necessary to move quickly to formal processes to ensure that individuals are properly held to account.

Dealing with conflict: The importance of seeking support

It is extremely important to seek support if you need it when experiencing negative behaviour from someone, or when you are seeking to challenge someone about their behaviour. In many situations it is sufficient to talk matters over with a trusted friend or colleague who is outside your immediate environment. This will often give you a fresh perspective on your situation. Dealing with issues of bullying and harassment, whether you feel you are the victim or the alleged perpetrator, can often be very stressful and it is important to ensure that you have appropriate support in place.

Good support can be helpful in many ways, for example, in restoring a sense of control when you feel out of control in a situation; achieving a sense of empowerment so that you feel that you have choices and options in a situation; providing a way of separating the negative behaviours themselves from the impact they have on you; reflecting on difficult issues of power, victimhood and forgiveness and understanding that one's response (which might include tears or loss of confidence) is a normal response to abnormal circumstances or poor treatment.

Sources of support

Support is often best provided informally by a friend or colleague, working with you in a peer capacity. However, it is important to be mindful of the role of the Minister as a source of both oversight and support in these matters. If individuals feel that these people are the sources of difficulty then it would better to have support from outside the church.

This policy is derived from "Positive Working Together" by The Methodist Church.

Signed at the AGM

July 2023

Rev Sam Griffiths

Pastor