



ST. THOMAS MAR THOMA CHURCH

Stackpool Road, Southville, BRISTOL, BS3 1NW

UNITED KINGDOM - Regd. Charity No. 1122211

Diocese of North America & Europe & UK-Europe Zone of the Mar Thoma Church

Vicarage: 24 Sherbourne Avenue, Bradley Stoke, Bristol BS32 8BB Tel. +44 (0) 117 9834521

Anti-harassment and bullying Policy

1. Purpose and general policy

- 1.1 The Trustees of St Thomas Mar Thoma Church acknowledge that the responsibility for the management and control of the Church rests with them, and that an integral part of this management and control is the development of a policy to prevent harassment and bullying.
- 1.2 This policy is intended to encourage and support the biblical principles of loving others in the same way that Christ loves the church, of servant-hearted leadership and treatment of others that enables each person to say what they genuinely think and to enable them to use the gifts and wisdom God has given them, without fear and without grievance. The New Testament demonstrates the way Jesus acted and spoke among those who supported him and those who opposed him, and it is towards these attitudes that this policy is intended to point.
- 1.3 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all staff, volunteers and members of the Church or those with whom the Church works are treated with dignity and respect, free from harassment or other forms of bullying. It sets out examples of the type of conduct that may constitute harassment or bullying, and our commitment to eliminating such conduct.
- 1.4 In constructing this policy, the Trustees have paid due consideration to the Charity Commission guidance on bullying and harassment.

2. Identifying and assessing harassment and bullying

- 2.1 Harassment is any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating the recipient's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.
- 2.2 Examples of harassment include:
 - ignoring or shunning someone, for example, by deliberately excluding them from a conversation, forum or a Church social activity;
 - the sending or displaying of material that some individuals or groups may find offensive or indicates a hierarchical control which suggests that an individual should 'understand their place' or otherwise suggest that it would be best for them to remain silent or similarly 'bow to another individual's views or opinions';
 - inappropriate behaviour whether in the form of offensive or intimidating comments or gestures or insensitive jokes or pranks;



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- unwanted physical conduct or "horseplay", including but not limited to unwelcome sexual behaviour.

2.3 Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour which, through the abuse or misuse of power, makes the recipient feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated and threatened.

2.4 Legitimate and constructive criticism of a worker's performance or behaviour, or reasonable requests made of workers in the course of their employment, will not constitute bullying.

2.5 Examples of bullying include:

- shouting at, being sarcastic towards, ridiculing or demeaning others;
- physical or psychological threats;
- extreme emotional reactions to situations where criticism is made;
- overbearing and intimidating levels of supervision;
- inappropriate and/or derogatory remarks about someone's performance;
- abuse of authority or power by those in positions of seniority;
- comments or statements made as part of preaching and teaching sessions;
- unjustifiably excluding colleagues from meetings or communications.

2.6 This policy covers harassment or bullying which occurs both in the workplace and in settings outside the workplace, such as public Church meetings, trips, events or social functions organised for or on the Church's behalf and whether on or off the Church premises.

3. Informal steps to resolve bullying or harassment

3.1 If an employee, volunteer or other individual considers that they are being bullied or harassed, they should initially attempt to resolve the problem informally with the person responsible, if they feel able (Matthew 18), and explain clearly to them that their behaviour is not welcome or makes them uncomfortable. If this is too difficult or embarrassing to do without support, they should seek support from the Vicar or other member of the Senior Leadership Team, again seeking to emulate the Matthew 18 example of resolution through involvement of other Christians.

4. Responsibilities should informal steps not resolve the issue

4.1 If informal steps have not been successful or would not be appropriate:

- If an employee: they should follow the formal grievance procedure.



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- If a volunteer: they should speak to the individual to whom they report, unless that person is the cause of the issue, in which case this should be raised with the Vicar or a member of the Senior Leadership Team
- If neither of those: they should speak to the Vicar or a member of the Senior Leadership Team

4.2 They are also entitled to make a formal complaint, which would also be dealt with under the Church's Complaints Handling policy.

4.3 Where harassment or bullying is shown to have taken place by an employee, it will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure as a form of misconduct. In some cases, it may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal of those responsible. This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment, and it may be amended at any time.

4.4 Trustees should be kept informed as to the action being [planned/ taken / outcome of actions] to enable any advice to be given, obtained in advance or adjusted (depending upon the seriousness of the issue).

4.5 Issues that turn into formal complaints should be handled in line with the Church's complaints policy and a copy of that policy provided to the complainant.

5. Protection for those making a complaint or assisting with an investigation

5.1 Staff, volunteers or other individuals who make complaints or who participate in good faith in any investigation conducted under this policy will be protected from any form of intimidation or victimisation as a result of their involvement.

5.2 Confidentiality is an important part of the procedures provided under this policy. Everyone involved in the operation of the policy, whether making a complaint or involved in any investigation, is responsible for observing the high level of confidentiality that is required.

5.3 Where it is considered that public statements need to be made (e.g. to church/charity members) the Trustees should consider whether advice is required on the relevant rights of individuals and what can be detailed in any statements.

6. Adoption of this policy

6.1 The Trustees of St Thomas Mar Thoma Church Bristol formally accepted this policy at the Executive Committee meeting held on 24th of March, 2024



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Appendix 1

Practical guidance for handling verbal complaints (including those of bullying and harassment)

This guidance has been drawn indirectly from a variety of good governance approaches adapted to be more appropriate for Christian churches/charities.

When dealing with someone who is making a complaint, regardless of its form, it is helpful if you can:

1. Make the complainant feel comfortable talking to you;
2. Be helpful and friendly;
3. Deal with complaints fairly, equitably, and consistently;
4. Keep the complainant informed, as far as possible, about progress and how to pursue their complaint further, if not satisfied with outcome;
5. Record details at all stages of complaints.

Practically:

- 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 back 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; e.g. "I understand that this situation is frustrating for you";
- If you feel that an apology is deserved for something that was the responsibility of your church/charity, 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 requests cannot be met;
- Make sure that the person understands what they have been told;
- Inform the person of the existence of this policy and offer to provide them with a copy.