

St Martin with St Peter

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1. Statement of Commitment

St Martin's commits that all those holding office (paid or unpaid) ensure that everyone, whether undertaking those roles, attending for worship or other Church activities is treated with respect and dignity in an environment which is free from bullying and harassment. St Martin's PCC is clear on the following principles.

2. Principles:

- 2.1 The ethos of this policy is that everyone is treated with dignity and respect in a place of worship which is free from bullying and harassment, and it applies to everyone regardless of position or status.
- 2.2 Any form of bullying and harassment is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
- 2.3 Any complaints, evidence or suggestion of such behaviour will be taken seriously.
- 2.4 Matters will be dealt with promptly and confidentially and in line with this Policy and its procedures.
- 2.5 The policy applies not just to behaviour in Church but also to Church run activities, outside the physical Church building, social media and when representing St Martin's at events.
- 2.6 All members of the PCC, Committee Chairs and Leaders will familiarise themselves with the provision of this policy, their responsibilities, and ensure a positive response.
- 2.7 Anyone who makes a complaint under this policy, in good faith, will not suffer any retaliation, victimisation or less favourable treatment.

3. Definitions

3.1 **Harassment** – The Equality Act 2010 defines harassment as “... unwanted conduct which is related to a relevant protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity OR creating an intimidating, hostile or degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.” In addition Under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 there is a type of harassment which is separate to the Equality Act 2010 and does not rely upon harassment relating to protected characteristics only that it causes alarm or distress.

3.1.1 **Protective Characteristics are:** Age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

3.1.2 It is important to note that to make a complaint of harassment relating to the Equality Act 2010, the complainant doesn't need to possess the relevant characteristic themselves, it can be because of their association with a person who has a protected characteristic, or because they are wrongly perceived to have one or are treated as if they do.

3.2 Bullying – the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) defines bullying as “..... offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.”

4. Points for consideration:

4.1 It is important to recognise that it is not necessary for a series of events or incidents to happen for it to qualify as either harassment or bullying. An individual can also experience this by way of one singular serious act. Also bullying and harassment can be by way of any form of interaction, face to face, by letter, by email or social media, by phone, and includes excluding someone without due cause.

4.2 A person's perception is their reality and therefore if they perceive someone's behaviour as unacceptable then it is the impact of the behaviour that is paramount not the intention.

4.3 What one person finds acceptable another may not, so it is important to treat everyone with respect particularly as the behaviour, whilst usually directed at an individual, also creates an environment which is intimidating and offensive for those who witness the behaviour. This is not acceptable in any environment but particularly distasteful in a Christian environment. We all need to model and measure our behaviour against Christian values.

4.4 Sometimes an individual may not be the target for harassment or bullying but may witness such behaviour. It is important that such individuals take responsibility and report such behaviour. Failure to do so only condones the behaviour and indirectly makes it acceptable behaviour.

5. Procedure for dealing with Harassment and Bullying

If you feel you have been or are a victim of harassment or bullying, in the first instance consider if you feel able to address the issue with the individual yourself. Often this is not possible so be assured that support is there for you and, whilst the nature of that support will be consistent, there will be different routes depending on who the perceived perpetrator is. In most cases the support person will be either the Incumbent or the Church Warden.

5.1 Informal Procedure and Sanctions

5.1.1 In the moment try not to retaliate or react but instead distance yourself whether that is physically, e.g. by moving away from the individual or virtually e.g. not responding to an email.

5.1.2 If, after you have had time to reflect and you feel able, then you should tell the individual that you find their behaviour unacceptable and why. They need to understand that their behaviour is unwelcome, unacceptable, or is causing offence, that it makes you feel

uncomfortable and request that the behaviour stops. It is recognised that this can be difficult and therefore might not be possible.

- 5.1.3 It would be useful for you to make a note of the incident including nature, date, time, who else saw or heard the behaviour. If the harassment or bullying is via social media or email etc. it is important to save, or screen shot the exchange. Your identified support person will advise you on how, with your agreement, the matter can be dealt with.
- 5.1.4 As soon as is possible you should inform the Incumbent or Church Warden
- 5.1.5 If you are unable to communicate directly with the perceived perpetrator the next step would be for the Incumbent or Church Warden to arrange for an informal meeting with the perceived perpetrator. If you feel unable to attend this meeting then they will conduct this meeting without you. The meeting will allow the individual to respond to the allegation and a view to be taken on the likelihood that harassment and bullying has taken place. It should be remembered that there may be an element of an individual not realising their behaviour has been experienced as inappropriate. In these circumstances once they have been made aware it is hoped that their behaviour will change. There may also be unknown circumstances which might explain their behaviour even though it will not make it acceptable. If needed and there is no positive change in their behaviour it will prompt further action.
- 5.1.6 The situation will continue to be monitored for an agreed period, that period will depend on the nature and seriousness of the behaviour. Both the perpetrator and the victim will be made aware of this, but it is expected that all concerned will maintain confidentiality throughout.
- 5.1.7 If the informal steps to resolving the issue do not yield a satisfactory result or if the issue is too serious for the informal stage then the matter will be dealt with formally.

5.2 Formal Procedure and Sanctions

If the behaviour is deemed to be covered under the definitions given in item **3** above and it continues despite efforts to resolve matters informally OR if the behaviour is more serious then matters will be dealt with under the formal stage of the procedure. Except for Clergy and the Church Warden, who report to officers in the Diocese, the following procedure will be followed.

- 5.2.1 The individual will be seen by the incumbent and Church Warden. They may bring a member of the congregation, who is on the electoral roll, with them for support.
- 5.2.2 The meeting will explore the reasons for the behaviour relating to the incident/s, referring to any discussions under the informal procedure, the seriousness of the behaviour, the impact it has had on an individual/s, the impact it has in relation to the environment in which it occurred, e.g. place of worship. If no reasonable explanation can be identified the individual will be informed that such behaviour will not be tolerated in the future.
- 5.2.3 A further recurrence of such inappropriate behaviour, or similar, will lead to the pursuit of a written agreement with the individual. The written agreement will seek to ensure that

their conduct whilst in Church, at Church run activities outside the physical Church building, social media activities and when representing St Martin's at events is not as described in item **3** above. Failure to reach agreement or a breach of the agreement is most likely to conclude with exclusion from Church.

5.3 Other Sanctions and Considerations

- 5.3.1 When the perpetrator is a Chair of one of the Church Committees they will be asked to stand down from that role with immediate effect if the matter reaches the formal stage of this procedure. On occasions this might also be a course of action whilst the matter is dealt with under the informal procedure.
- 5.3.2 If the perpetrator is the Incumbent or other Clergy then they are subject to their own terms and conditions. If the issue relates to something that may be dealt with at the informal stage then the Church Warden should be informed and will take appropriate advice for dealing with matters.
- 5.3.3 If the perpetrator is the Church Warden then they answer to the Bishop or their nominated officer, normally the Archdeacon. If the issue relates to something that may be dealt with at the informal stage then the Incumbent should be informed and will take appropriate advice for dealing with matters.
- 5.3.4 When the perpetrator is a paid member of staff the Incumbent or Church Warden should be informed, and matters will be dealt with in line with the individual's terms and conditions of employment identified in their employment contract. They will also be subject to usual employment law regulations.
- 5.3.5 The Parish Safeguarding Officer will be informed if any harassment or bullying behaviour includes safeguarding concerns for either vulnerable adults or children.

6. False Complaints

If it is deemed that the complaint received is knowingly false or has been made in bad faith then the person making the complaint may be deemed as behaving in a way which is described in item **3** above and dealt with accordingly.

Whilst harassment and bullying may not, hopefully, be common at St Martin's we all have a responsibility to ensure we model Christian values and call out any behaviour that challenges those values.

Approved by PCC March 2025

Review on or before March 2028