



# CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND

## Complaints Procedure

### Preamble

As human beings we live and work together. Relationships are complex. There will always be times when people disagree or want to raise a complaint. This process can be something positive helping produce greater harmony and happiness for all involved. This will happen if complaints are investigated in an open, fair and transparent manner where all parties are treated with respect and given the opportunity to give their side of the story. Even during the Exodus, Moses was the subject of complaints but took the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, to seek the help of others in trying to resolve them.

Against this background, we must ask - is there a Christian way of complaining?

*Jesus said, If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. Mt 18: 15-17*

As a Church, we claim to be a healing community, and in this scripture Jesus offers us steps to deal with those who offend us:

- talk with the person one on one;
- if that does not work, find a support person or two and meet with the person thought to have offended;
- if that does not work, bring in the wider community or a higher authority to the discussion;
- only then, distance yourself from the person. Jesus' approach places responsibility on the aggrieved party to sort the problem out as much as possible before running off with complaints to others.

At the same time, we understand it is important that the Church should not sweep complaints under the carpet nor put problems in the "too hard" basket. The following is offered as a procedure for dealing with complaints.

### 1. Aim

The aim of this guideline is to offer a transparent and effective process for handling complaints about any matter relating to parishes or communities within the pastoral care of the diocese.

There is a separate clearly defined process, outlined in *Te Houhanga Rongo – a Path to Healing*, for dealing with sexual abuse complaints.

## **2. Proposal**

To establish a single point at an appropriate authority level in the Diocese to receive and manage the processing of a formal complaint from a member of the diocese.

The process is designed to receive, appropriately investigate, and bring resolution or satisfactory closure to each complaint.

## **3. Definition of Complaint**

A formal protest or expression of resentment or serious displeasure by way of accusation or grievance.

## **4. Criteria**

4.1 The essence of the complaint must be serious or significant.

4.2 The complainant/s shall identify themselves.

4.3 The complaint shall be in writing, and comprise:

- i. a description of the issue giving rise to a complaint;
- ii. factual data with supporting evidence if available;
- iii. persons involved in the issue;
- iv. a suggested resolution that would readily resolve the issue for the complainant.

## **5. Process**

The complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made should endeavour to discuss the problem themselves. If necessary, the complainant/s and a support person should make an appointment with the person against whom the complaint is made, who is also entitled to have a support person present. Those present at this meeting should endeavour to resolve the issue at the local level.

If the issue is not resolved, the complaint should be addressed to the Chancellor or the Leader of Pastoral Services at the Auckland Catholic Diocese who shall be responsible for managing the process in a timely and effective way.

5.1 The Chancellor or Leader of Pastoral Services will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing to the complainant within two weeks.

5.2 The person against whom the complaint is made will be notified and invited to respond. This of necessity involves disclosure of the complainant's name unless the anonymity of the complainant needs to be preserved.

5.3 The Chancellor or Leader of Pastoral Services will review the essence of the complaint.

5.4 The Chancellor or Leader of Pastoral Services will either investigate the circumstances or, in consultation with the Bishop, request an appropriate person to investigate and report findings with recommendations for an optimal resolution for all concerned. The Chancellor or Leader of Pastoral Services will consult with the Bishop on an appropriate resolution.

- 5.5 The Chancellor or the Leader of Pastoral Services shall, within two weeks of acknowledging the complaint, advise the complainant of a resolution or progress towards one.
- 5.6 The complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made may be requested by the Chancellor or the Leader of Pastoral Services to attend a meeting or meetings or mediation to seek an appropriate resolution.
- 5.7 If possible, the appropriate resolution will be recorded in writing by the Chancellor or the Leader of Pastoral Services and conveyed to the complainant and the person against whom the complaint is made, and any other affected parties as deemed appropriate by the Chancellor or the Leader of Pastoral Services.

If the complaint relates to the Chancellor or the Leader of Pastoral Services, then it shall be referred to the Bishop to action.

## **6 Canon Law and Diocesan Norms**

This process is not a substitute for any provisions contained in the Canon Law of the Catholic Church or Diocesan Norms.

## **7 Catholic schools in the Diocese**

Complaints should be referred to the Vicar for Education. A separate set of procedures apply.

## **8 Conclusion**

This guideline is a starting point and may be flexible. It can be reviewed and altered to be more effective in the light of experience.

Voted as policy for the Diocese by COP, 15 Feb 2011  
Reviewed and updated 2021