

Grievance Procedures for Baptist Ministers in Pastoral Charge

An outline of the stages involved should a minister have a grievance with the church in which they hold office.

In general, it is hoped that informal and pastoral processes will be used when a minister has some grievance with the Church in which they hold office, or its leadership. Where these internal processes fail to resolve matters, the Regional Minister should be formally invited to adjudicate. They will then apply the latter stages of the formal grievance procedure as outlined below. The process should generally be conducted by meeting with the minister, and all decisions should be reported in writing.

The purpose of a grievance procedure for ministers is to give a legitimate place of complaint and to solve the problems as quickly and as simply as possible, preferably within the structures of the local church. It is important that grievances are treated seriously, because they are genuine to the person concerned and it is important to discover whether the grievance is legitimate at the earliest stage.

Stage 1

If a minister in pastoral charge feels they have a grievance they should first report this to a senior Church Officer, who should arrange to meet with the minister.

Stage 2

If the grievance is not resolved by consultation with that senior Church Officer, it is then the responsibility of the Diaconate or Eldership, or whatever group constitutes the managing trustees of the church, to try and resolve the grievance within four weeks. This attempt at resolution should comprise a meeting with the minister, and a separate, and subsequent meeting to decide upon the course of action.

Stage 3

If the matter remains unresolved, then the senior Church Officer should report this to the Regional Minister with responsibility for pastoral matters in the Association. The Regional Minister should meet with the minister and senior Church Officer, normally within four weeks of the grievance being brought to their attention. The minister may be accompanied by another person, preferably not a professional lawyer, to that meeting.

Stage 4

If the matter remains unresolved it may be reported to the Department of Ministry of the Baptist Union, who will seek to find a resolution within a reasonable period of time (dependent upon, for instance, proximity to Didcot or the time of year, the meetings required might be slower or quicker to arrange.) If at the end of this stage matters remain unresolved, an option might be to use mediation provided by other Associations or the Mennonites. An alternative will be for the Departmental enquiry to arbitrate, which will be final.

Careful notes, which by mutual agreement could be taken by an independent person, should be kept at all stages of the ensuing enquiries. Where matters impinge upon legal requirements, legal advice may be sought, but the use of lawyers to represent parties should be a last resort rather than a first resort.

Grievance Procedures for Baptist Ministers in Assistant posts in local churches

In general, it is hoped that informal and pastoral processes will be used when a minister has some grievance with the Church in which they hold office, or its leadership. Where these internal processes fail to resolve matters, the Regional Minister should be formally invited to adjudicate. They will then apply the latter stages of the formal grievance procedure as outlined below.

The purpose of a grievance procedure for ministers is to give a legitimate place of complaint and to solve the problems as quickly and as simply as possible, preferably within the structures of the local church. It is important that grievances are treated seriously, because they are genuine to the person concerned and it is important to discover whether the grievance is legitimate at the earliest stage.

Stage 1

If an assistant or associate minister feels they have a grievance they should first report this to the Senior Minister, who should meet with the minister concerned.

Stage 2

If the grievance is not resolved by consultation with the Senior Minister, the matter should be referred to a senior Church Officer, who should meet with the minister concerned.

Stage 3

If the grievance is not resolved by consultation with the senior Church Officer, it is then the responsibility of the Diaconate or Eldership, or whatever group constitutes the managing trustees of the church, to try to resolve the grievance within four weeks. This attempt at resolution should comprise a meeting with the minister, and a separate and subsequent meeting to decide upon the course of action.

Stage 4

If the matter remains unresolved, then the senior Church Officer should report this to the Regional Minister with responsibility for pastoral matters in the Association. The Regional Minister should meet with the minister and senior Church Officer, normally within four weeks of the grievance being brought to their attention. The minister may be accompanied by another person, preferably not a professional lawyer, to that meeting. If at the end of this stage matters remain unresolved, an option might be to use mediation provided by Association or the Mennonites. An alternative will be for the Regional Minister to arbitrate, which will be final.

Careful notes, which by mutual agreement could be taken by an independent person, should be kept at all stages of the ensuing enquiries. Where matters impinge upon legal requirements, legal advice may be sought, but the use of lawyers to represent parties should be a last resort rather than a first resort.

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Dealing with Conflict and Resolving Disagreement

Advice in applying the Baptist Union Model Grievance Procedure

Introduction

1. The Baptist Union have adopted model grievance procedures which provide a formal framework for Ministers and Churches to deal with grievances from Ministers and resolve disagreements in a structured way. Grievances within a church family may be very different to those in other organisations, but because our expectations of each other are higher they may be even more challenging to deal with. Churches can however learn from experience elsewhere.
2. There is wide experience that as soon as grievances become formal, positions tend to become polarised and difficult to resolve to the satisfaction of the parties concerned. It is therefore wise to make every effort to resolve disagreements before they become established as formal grievances.
3. In these guidelines reference is made to "the church leadership"- in the context of this document this means the leadership group apart from the Minister. In a church with a traditional organisation this will be the church officers and diaconate, but it is recognised that organisations and forms of leadership vary. In applying this advice churches will recognise which bodies and individuals are relevant in their own case.
4. This advice is essentially procedural, but in a church family the expectation is that matters of disagreement and grievance would be approached in a spirit of prayerful concern for those affected by the disagreement and with a mutual commitment to seeking unity within the fellowship while upholding the right of Ministers to raise concerns. Disagreements and grievances need to be faced and dealt with promptly, not left to fester.
5. Churches are recommended to formally adopt the model grievance procedure recommended by the Baptist Union so that both Minister and church leadership know in advance how they will deal with any grievance that may arise. While it may rarely be necessary to use these procedures, it is always better to have clarity on the approach to any such issue before a problem emerges. Details of the procedure adopted should be included with the terms of appointment of any newly appointed Minister.

Prevention is better than Cure

6. To resolve disagreements informally it is vital that Minister and church leadership feel able to discuss any problems in an open way so that both parties are able to raise concerns in a non threatening environment. This will be most effective if there are healthy relationships between the Minister, church leadership and the membership. Working together on this aspect of church life may prevent most potential problems from ever growing into complaints.
7. Although as a whole this advice refers to a procedure where the Minister is registering the grievance, this section of the advice could also inform the approach to other sorts of relationship issues within the leadership group.
8. To use an analogy from preventative medicine it may be a good idea once a year to have on the agenda for the church leadership (including the Minister) a "relationship health check". This could be very effective if part of an annual review of the life of the church.
9. This process has been adopted by a number of churches where ministers and the lay leadership of the church meet together to look back at what has been achieved over the past 12 months; what went well ; what needs improving and to make plans for the next year. The focus of such discussion should be "How are **we** doing" and is not a

performance appraisal of any individual. Including the "relationship health check" as part of this process and making it a matter of routine could take some of the tension out of such discussions. While an open discussion of the state of relationships may not be without its difficulties, ignoring emerging problems may be more risky than exploring such sensitive matters. Some teams have found it helpful to ask an independent facilitator to chair this sort of meeting

10. If concerns are identified it may be wise to ask someone from outside the church to help improve relationships. Ministers and churches should talk to their Regional Minister as to how this can be facilitated.
11. Not all concerns that can lead to a grievance arise from impaired relationships, but an unaddressed issue will contribute to impairing relationships for the future. Catching problems early and dealing with them quickly is important for the church leadership. They need to recognise when a grumble is a symptom of something more serious. There are the twin dangers of failing to recognise a developing sense of grievance and of over reacting to an individual "just letting off steam".
12. Relationships and effective team working do not just happen and they need to be worked on. Ministers and leadership teams may benefit by spending time together in training and learning together, to reflect on how they are working together and how this might be improved. Such reflection may also include how the leadership relates to the wider membership and the quality of relationships within the membership. Minister and individual members of the church leadership also need to understand and reflect on how they are accountable to each other and what that means in practice.
13. The Baptist Union have produced training resources on dealing with conflict and Regional Ministers can advise on other training that may be helpful in particular situations.

GUIDELINES ON THE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Seeking Informal Resolution

14. Once a concern or complaint is identified, even informally, the Church needs to take action to deal with it. It is important that the Church provides an environment where the Minister's concerns can be listened to and perhaps as importantly where the Minister feels listened to. A meeting with the full diaconate may not be the most effective way to create this environment. One or two church leaders who have the confidence both of the Minister and the full leadership might be asked to discuss the matter with the Minister and report back with a view to resolving the concern/complaint.
15. In dealing with any such issue the first step is listening to the Minister and what he or she says. Nothing should be dismissed as trivial or unimportant until the full picture has emerged from these conversations. If a Minister regards an issue as important enough to be a potential complaint then it must be taken seriously and an appropriate response given.
16. It is good practice in considering any concern, complaint or grievance to ask what the Minister would regard as a satisfactory remedy. Sometimes it may be very clear what the issue is that is causing concern, and what the remedy is that is required. In other cases the concern expressed may be a symptom of wider issues that may need to be teased out either as a part of dealing with the current concern or as pastoral matters within the church family.
17. As soon as it appears that the matter is moving towards a grievance it would be good practice to let the Regional Minister know of the emerging situation so that he/she can support the Church and the Minister with advice and in prayer. It has been the experience of Regional Ministers that it is always better for them to hear sooner rather than later about emerging issues. Talking to your Regional Minister may be helpful even

in the informal stages, although it is recognised that in some cases issues may be resolved by internal conversations without needing to raise their profile by involving others.

The Formal Procedures

18. The first stage of the agreed procedure for Ministers is for the Minister to approach a Church Officer. Churches in adopting the model procedure may wish to nominate a Church Officer as Grievance officer - the person the Minister should normally approach to handle any grievance. If the grievance is effectively against that person then the Minister may approach another Church officer who should take the matter forward. If there has been no previous informal discussions the nominated Church officer should explore with the Minister whether he or she would wish to seek to resolve the matter informally, before moving to formal stages. However a rapid response is important.
19. The informal processes described in the paragraphs above could be seen as equating to the first stage of the formal procedure for Ministers. If the Minister indicates, following this informal stage that she or he wishes to move the matter into formal grievance then the Church Officers should agree with the Minister whether there should be a further meeting with the Nominated Church Officer before moving to Stage 2. If either party believe that such a meeting would be useful, then it should take place. However if both parties agree it is more sensible to move to Stage 2 immediately then this would not invalidate the procedure.
20. In arranging a meeting at Stage 2 between the Minister and the church leadership it may be helpful to ask someone independent to chair the meeting. The Minister should have the opportunity to fully state her/his case and to ask questions of the church leadership. An open exchange of views would be helpful, and an independent chair could ensure that matters are addressed in an effective way in the meeting with the Minister. While proceedings in the subsequent meeting of the Church leadership may need to remain confidential, and any decision must be that of the Church, asking the independent chair to continue at that meeting too could add validity to any response emerging from the meeting.
21. If it is not immediately apparent what the facts are which lie behind the grievance it may be necessary to investigate what actually happened to cause the complaint. It may be possible to ask a member of the church leadership who has not previously been involved in the matter to investigate. However where there has already been wide involvement of members of the church family in the matter it may be necessary to ask an independent person from outside the church to investigate.
22. Where such an investigation is commissioned by the church, the results should always be shared with the Minister as far as practicable at the same time as the report back to the church leadership.
23. While the model procedures see mediation as a possibility at the end of the procedure, in some circumstances a grievance/disagreement which cannot be resolved at Stage 2 may be more effectively dealt with by mediation by someone outside the fellowship. Regional Ministers may be able to help facilitate this process.
24. At stage 3 in the procedure the Regional Minister may be called upon to adjudicate on the grievance. If this is the first time the Regional Minister has been involved in the issue then this is straightforward. Where a Regional Minister has been significantly involved in the matter prior to stage 3 then he or she should ask a colleague Regional Minister to hear the matter. This may be a Regional Minister from the same Association or where this is not possible a Regional Minister from a neighbouring Association. The parties will need to accept some delay may result if it is necessary to involve someone from another Association.

Assistant Ministers

25. The procedure for grievances from Assistant Ministers is similar to that for Ministers in pastoral charge, but with the initial stage that the matter should be raised with the Senior Minister first. Even where the grievance is expressed as against the Senior Minister it is important that the Assistant Minister has met with and discussed the issue with the Senior Minister before the matter progresses further in the procedure. The Church Leadership should be wary of the Senior Minister being bypassed without him/her having the opportunity to resolve the matter personally.
26. If the issue illustrates a problem of relationships between the Senior Minister and the Assistant, which the church leadership feel they are not able to address then advice should be sought from the Regional Minister.

27. Summary

In dealing with concerns raised by their Minister, the Church leadership should

- Make sure that any disagreements or problems are addressed promptly and informally.
- Listen to what the Minister sees as a problem
- Treat it seriously.
- Ask what remedy he/she would see as appropriate.
- Don't take a view until all relevant information is to hand.
- Consider if the particular issue stands on its own or is a symptom of something deeper.
- Avoid delay
- Take responsibility for deciding the issue, but recognise that there is support available through your Regional Minister
- Recognise the value of getting help from an independent person at appropriate stages in the process.
- Take advice if you are unsure as how to proceed

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