WOLLONGONG
BAPTIST CHURCH

Procedure for Conflict Resolution

Adopted by the Eldership on 23 January 2024

Purpose

The *Procedure for Conflict Resolution* (the **Procedure**) sets out a procedure for resolving conflict between two or more staff members, volunteers, Church members or attendees of the Church in a pastoral and restorative manner, rather than through a formal complaint handling procedure.

It is important to identify that some issues cannot be resolved in this manner, and this Procedure is **not** designed to:

- resolve issues relating to domestic violence or family law matters before the Family Law Court (or similar body)
- resolve complaints or concerns relating to abuse (including child abuse or sexual misconduct involving a child) or other serious breaches of the *Code of Conduct*, including matters which could constitute criminal conduct, which are to be resolved in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff and Volunteers*, or
- replace any process set out in the Constitution of the Church in relation to the disciplining or removal of members from membership of the Church.

Scope

The Procedure applies to all staff, volunteers, members, and attendees of the Church.

An attendee is a person who regularly attends (at least once a month) a ministry of the Church (for example, Sunday services, Bible study, Friday night youth group).

The Procedure should be read in conjunction with the *Safe Church Policy* and*:*

- *Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers*
- *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff or Volunteers*
- *Procedure for Responding to Child Protection Concerns*

When does this Procedure apply?

Situations to which this Procedure applies include the following:

a) a personal disagreement between two or more staff, volunteers, members or attendees of the Church

b) a perceived offence caused by a staff member, volunteer, member or attendee to another

c) a perception by one person that they have been bullied by a staff member, volunteer, member or attendee (and that it is a matter that is able to be resolved in a pastoral manner)

d) dissatisfaction with the manner in which a staff member or volunteer has fulfilled their ministry role, and

e) a complaint that a staff member or volunteer has committed a minor breach of the *Code of Conduct*.

Raising an issue

Anyone may raise an issue:

- with a person directly (see Pathway 1)
- with Church leadership or the Safe Church Team in order to seek assistance in resolving the issue (see Pathway 2).

If the concern relates to a member of the Church leadership or the Safe Church Team, the person should raise their concern with another member of the Church leadership or Safe Church Team.

Key Principles

In raising an issue, all parties are to be guided by the following key principles:

- Seeking to glorify God in our responses to each other
- Striving to serve each other even in the midst of our disunity
- Seeking to be Christ-like in our reactions to each other
- Extending grace to each other
- Focusing on forgiveness and restoration of relationships where appropriate
- Seeking help where needed, to address grievances.

The Church acknowledges that:

- the nature of relationship breakdown means that it is necessary to respond sensitively and with care for all parties involved
- in many conflict situations, to help each party understand the key issues and ways forward, the assistance of a neutral third party becomes essential
- many issues are specific to a particular context and relationship and so must be responsive to this, seeking resolution of substantive issues and where possible, appropriate restoration of relationships between all parties, and
- the pathway recommended by Church leadership will depend upon the nature of the issue, the positions or roles of the parties involved and the skills and capacity of Church leadership to address the situation.

Pathway 1 – Personal Approach

a) Where an issue arises between a staff member, volunteer, member or attendee and another and the parties feel able to address their concerns without involving other parties, they are to go to the other person and express their concerns with a view to resolving their differences in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17.

b) The person initiating the personal approach should consider seeking counsel from a wise and unbiased senior leader (from within the church community or externally) or receiving conflict coaching before approaching the other person.

c) This approach may be useful for addressing personal disagreements and perceived offences. This pathway will not be appropriate where there are concerns about significant power imbalances or there is risk of harm.

Pathway 2 – Locally-assisted Approach

Notifying Church leadership

Church leadership should be notified where:

- Pathway 1 is unsuccessful in restoring relationship, and/or
- the issue relates to perceived bullying or harassment, and/or
- the issue relates to dissatisfaction with the way a staff member or volunteer has performed their ministry role.

Church leadership to provide support and appoint person to assist

Church leadership are to provide support to all parties.

Where the Church leadership considers the issue to be sufficiently serious, they are to appoint a suitably skilled person to assist in resolving the conflict. This may be a senior member of the pastoral staff. Church leadership are to avoid conflicts of interest where possible when selecting this person, including being mindful of the relationships involved. In some cases, for example, where the conflict involves the Senior Pastor, the church leadership may appoint a church consultant from the Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT.

Appointed person to assist parties resolve the conflict

Where all parties involved in the matter are willing to work towards restoring relationships, the person appointed to assist in resolving the conflict will:

- value confidentiality at all times
- meet with each person separately to ensure they are given a chance to tell their story in private, working through their underlying concerns in moving towards resolution
- clearly communicate the process to be used to each party during resolution meetings
- hold a meeting with the parties together to identify common ground, work through the issues and determine the course of action
- follow up to ensure that the solutions are being implemented, and
- if appropriate, monitor the situation over the following weeks, including to check-in with the parties to ensure that the situation is resolving and that relationships are being restored.

At any stage throughout the process, the person appointed to assist resolve the issue may contact Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT for assistance or resourcing. At the conclusion of a conflict resolution process the person appointed to assist in resolving the conflict will provide to the Church leadership a summary of the process and brief outcome which will be stored securely in the Church's records.

Escalation to *Procedure for Handling Complaints against Staff or Volunteers*

During the course of resolving a concern in accordance with this Procedure, it may be necessary to escalate the matter in accordance with the *Procedure for Handling Complaints Against Staff and Volunteers.*

There may be several reasons this is required, including:

- that on inquiry into the issue, it is identified that the conduct complained about would more appropriately be characterised as a serious breach of the *Code of Conduct*, or
- the subject of the concern is a staff member or volunteer, and they are not willing to participate in this Procedure (as required under the *Code of Conduct*).

Escalation to membership removal process

During the course of resolving an issue in accordance with this Procedure, it may be necessary to escalate the matter to the process for removing someone from membership of the Church as prescribed in the Constitution of the Church (if any).