



Grievance Policy

Dealing with breaches to TBC Codes of Conduct

This code outlines expectations of behaviour and appropriate boundaries for all members and in particular for leaders of a church. However, in every community there are situations where issues arise and behaviour occurs that can cause offense or hurt between individuals. It is important that as Christian communities, we ensure that the response to this behaviour is appropriate to the severity of the breach, but also offers the opportunity for individuals to find a godly and appropriate pathway to see their issues and concerns addressed.

This code is to be applied in conjunction with:

Core Biblical Values: The core Biblical values that underpin this process are:

- Truth-telling (Ephesians 4:15,25).
- Justice-seeking (Micah 6:8).
- Grace-giving (Colossians 3:13).
- Peace-making (Matt 5:9, Eph 4:2-3).

Matthew 18:15-20 provides an outline for the overall process where Jesus indicates both God's presence in the process of resolution and also the significance which God places on the outcome reached. Note: The reference in Matthew 18:17 of treating people like "tax collectors and sinners" does not mean rejecting them from the church. It means that if a person consistently does not behave like a Christian, then we do not expect them to behave like a Christian and we adjust our expectations for them. That is, that if the expectations we would normally have of Christian disciples, (i.e., that they demonstrate grace, truthfulness, humility and a willingness to see and respond to personal sinfulness) are not being seen in their behaviour, we minister to them as if they were still to join the community like tax collectors and sinners. They are treated with kindness, gentleness but invited to repent and respond to the forgiveness of God, and to begin the journey of Christian discipleship.

It is recommended that where concerns have been identified, they are dealt with quickly to ensure that the matter does not become more complex.

The recommended process below is adapted and used with permission from John Mark Ministries (<http://johnmark.net.au/jm/>).

Recommended Process:

Step One: Personal Reflection

Take some time before God to pray and reflect on the offence or injury you have received. In some situations, you may decide not to take the matter further, in other situations important principles may be at stake and the situation needs to be taken further.

(Optional Step): Wisdom and Accountability

If you are unsure about the right response and feel the need to seek wise counsel for yourself before taking the situation further, it is appropriate to do so. Seek a godly counsellor, pastor, leader or mentor to share with. The focus of this is to gain clarity on the right path to take and

to be accountable in the situation to act with integrity, wisdom and towards making peace. This consultation must be distinguished from gossip or sharing the incident with others in order to gain sympathy and support. These are inappropriate.

Step Two: Informal Discussion

A key step in resolution is to go to the other person informally and in private and share your concern. Seek to understand the perspective and viewpoint of the other. Be willing to receive an apology or respond to the process of restoration if it is offered. If the matter is resolved, no further action is needed. If you are on the receiving end of a discussion of this nature, be quick to listen, make sure you understand what the person is sharing. Guard yourself from simply reacting. If you need time to reflect, ask for it. If you can see what you have done and can accept responsibility for it, apologise and seek forgiveness.

Step Three: Formal Discussions

If step two fails to reach a resolution, ask that it move to a formal process. Here others may be invited to be involved as either support people or informal facilitators. At this level it is appropriate that some record be kept of what occurs. If resolved, no further action is required. Normally the church leadership would be notified that this has happened. The meeting should be pre-arranged and both parties have the opportunity for support people present.

Step Four: Formal Mediation

If step three fails, then the church (elders or pastor) should be notified and with the agreement of all, a trained mediator should be appointed who will meet with both parties and then facilitate a discussion together. Opportunities for interpersonal reconciliation are usually given. Points of agreement and disagreement are usually documented along with the outcome. Usually, a solution which is acceptable to both is negotiated. If agreement is reached, no further action is required. A confidential report is given to the church leadership as well as to the individuals.

Keeping the agreement is a matter of trust on both sides.

Step Five: Arbitration

If step four fails, the church and both parties may agree to abide by the ruling of an appointed and agreed arbiter or arbitration panel. Again, this person or panel is appointed by the church. In this scenario the arbiter interviews both parties and may ask for further witnesses. The case is examined and principles of justice applied. A judgement is given and the parties by their own agreement should abide by it. If this step fails, the situation has moved beyond the ability of the community to handle it internally and it must be referred to the civil courts. Within a church environment, both parties would then normally stand down from any leadership positions.

Further considerations regarding the severity of a breach:

- i. Minor: Everyone is capable of sin but can repent and be forgiven (1 John 1:8-9). It stands to reason then, that the code can be breached. When this happens in an area that is not a breach of civil or criminal law, simply cease the conduct. If this is difficult, the person should see their team leader or supervisor about receiving help (e.g., counselling). In some cases, it may be necessary to step a person aside from their duties whilst this takes place. It is crucial to deal with such matters confidentially and sensitively.

- ii. Unknown: Not all leaders will understand ‘unacceptable’ behaviours. Even after explaining the code, some may be unaware they are exhibiting unacceptable behaviours. Leaders need to be open to correction and humble enough to modify behaviours so as to not discredit the gospel. As above, stepping a person aside from their duties may be necessary.
- iii. Constant: There are breaches that are not a breach of civil or criminal law, but still unacceptable behaviour in a ministry context. Where a leader has been made aware of their behaviour and yet refuses to change:
 - a. The ministry coordinator meets with the person for behaviour review meetings. Communicate required behaviour change (no more than 3 meetings).
 - b. If behaviour continues, a small group of church leaders are to arrange a meeting to address the behaviour. Stepping aside is appropriate at this point.
 - c. If the behaviour/s continue beyond this meeting, then respectfully, and upholding confidentiality, the person will be stood down for a set period. They will be offered help in changing their behaviour via counselling if they are willing. NB. Written notes of all meetings to be carefully taken and a copy given to all parties.
- iv. Breaches of the law or allegations of abuse: Allegations of abuse or serious misconduct are to be referred to the appropriate government authorities, in line with the TBC and Baptist Union of Victoria processes.

Adopted from the BUV Safe Church Manual

Relevant TBC Policy/BUV Documents:

- PP06 Safe Church Policy.
- PP09 Code of Conduct (1) – Volunteers.
- PP08 Code of Conduct (2) – Leaders.
- PP03 Code of Conduct (3) – Pastors & Staff
- BUV Guidelines for Healthy Church Pastor Relationships.
- BUV Code of Ethics and Companion Guide for Pastoral Leaders.
- BUV Guide to Developing a Code of Conduct for Church Leaders.

Policy No.: PP11	Version: 1.1
Author: Karen Lazar & Diane Ayton	Approved on: 2 nd January 2025

All Templestowe Baptist Church Policies can be obtained from the Church Office.