

Clergy Complaints

From time to time complaints are received by the Bishop or other members of staff about clergy. Those of a serious nature follow a route through the Clergy Discipline Measure; those about safeguarding matters are immediately referred to the Safeguarding Team and those about DBF employees follow the DBF staff route.

However other complaints follow the route below, with an awareness that beneficed clergy have no line manager and are office holders rather than employees. Neither bishops nor archdeacons manage clergy in the traditional sense.

Once a complaint is received it will normally be passed to the Bishop's Chaplain who will allocate it to either an archdeacon or other senior member of the clergy. On occasions this may include Rural Deans or others.

The person to whom the complaint is allocated will contact the complainant and ascertain that the complainant is prepared to be identified to the respondent, along with the substance of their complaint. Unless of a safeguarding nature, anonymous complaints will not be considered in the interests of natural justice.

There are a number of informal routes depending on the nature of the complaint. Clergy are, rightly, held to a high standard of action and behaviour, much of which is described in detail in the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy. Wrongdoing does take place despite this, although there are also occasional malicious or unfounded complaints too.

One or more of the following routes are likely to be appropriate, following an initial contact with the complainant:

1. An explanation to the complainant as to why their complaint does not identify wrongdoing.
2. If appropriate, the archdeacon or other senior member of the clergy meeting with or otherwise discussing the complaint with the complainant
3. The priest who is the subject of the complaint meeting with the archdeacon (or other senior member of clergy) or discussing the complaint in writing/by phone
4. The archdeacon or other senior member of the clergy then suggesting a number of courses of action which may include an apology, the diocesan mediation service, dismissal of the complaint, referral for further investigation, escalating the complaint via the Clergy Discipline Measure, or some alternative course of action.

At all times those involved in addressing the complaint will set aside reasonable time to gain a clear picture of all the issues raised, individuals will have opportunities to put their views, where it is possible reconciliation will be achieved, and appropriate support and advice will be offered. In addition it is important that each complaint is followed up appropriately within a fair and informal process, with pastoral sensitivity, and in which all parties are afforded the opportunity to share or report their concerns.

Nothing in this policy or document precludes the complainant moving directly to the formal CDM process.

The Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/clergy-resources/guidelines-professional-conduct-clergy>

Dignity in Ministry:

https://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/dignity_in_ministry_june_2016.pdf

Code of Conduct for meetings:

<https://www.dioceseofnorwich.org/churches/roles/clergy/working-with-conflict/creating-a-code-of-conduct-for-meetings-groups-teams-or-committees/>