



POLICY

Rationale

Our parishes try very hard to operate in a way that provides a safe environment for all who worship. The welfare of our parish community is best addressed by concerns and complaints being openly and clearly expressed. Early intervention often reaps the best results.

The aim of this document is to provide the diocesan parishes with policy, procedures, processes, and a structure so that a concern raised, or a complaint made about any matter whether person, events, activities or property, under the control or authority of the parish is attended to promptly, culturally, respectfully and to the highest pastoral and professional standard.

This policy adheres to the principle of subsidiarity, where concerns and complaints will be resolved at the closest and lowest level which is appropriate in the circumstances.

Scope

This policy applies to all parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch. It is intended for use in connection with concerns or complaints about actions (or inactions) on the part of a parish about the people or the organisation processes of the parish. This policy is not intended for complaints of sexual abuse. (If the sexual abuse complaint relates to a priest, clergy or religious it should be referred to the police or the National Office for Professional Standards, 0800 144 622 or prof.standards@nzcbc.org.nz)

Guiding Principles

- In resolving complaints and concerns, the parish is guided by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, (natural justice and subsidiarity).
- Concerns and complaints will be resolved at the closest and simplest level which is appropriate in the circumstances with a view to a restorative rather than a punitive outcome. In practice people should be encouraged to resolve an issue directly with the person or group concerned but only if it is safe and if they feel able to do so.
- If a concern or complaint is prematurely directed to the Diocesan Complaints Officer (DPO), the DPO may redirect the party to the relevant parish. The principle of subsidiarity applies at all stages of the process.
- The parishes of the Diocese of Christchurch are committed to the principles of Te Tiriti O Waitangi and a meaningful relationship between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti.
- The purpose of any person raising a concern or complaint should lead to enable clarification or reassurance of the issue by the parish or the person who is the subject of the complaint.
- All actions taken in the concerns or complaints process will comply with New Zealand Law.
- The person to whom the concern or complaint is referred to will ensure timely updates.
- Restoration, with justice, of the dignity of each person and the relationship between the person complaining, and the person complained about, will be given high priority. Communication should take place in an environment that supports open, honest, and effective discussion.
- A complaint is more likely to require corrective measures or disciplinary action, although this may also be an outcome from a concern.
- The parish priest or a relevant delegate may seek external advice and support in the appropriate management of the concern or complaint e.g. Leadership Team, Parish Council, Finance committee or the Diocesan Complaints Officer.



- If appropriate, advice from a culture aspect will be sought.
- Information should be given in a form, language and manner that can be understood by all parties. All parties are entitled to have a support person.
- Information about how and with whom to raise a concern or complaint will be well publicised.

Definitions

Concern or Complaint:

A concern may be an issue that causes a person some anxiety or confusion for which they may be seeking some reassurance without escalating the matter to a formal complaint. A concern is most likely to be resolved by discussion, clarification, information or very low-level corrective measures only and not disciplinary action.

A complaint is a more serious grievance or expression of dissatisfaction about a specific matter, incident, person or spiritual advice received (or not received), and where further action is sought by the complainant. Complaints will be triaged according to their level of seriousness. A complaint is more likely to require corrective measures.

Natural Justice:

The Catholic Church in handling concerns and complaints are guided by the principles of Natural Justice. This involves:

- Providing an environment where complainants feel valued, heard, and understood.
- Holding all parish representatives to account to safely embrace appropriate boundaries, behaviors, and practices.
- Responding to complaints promptly and with compassion.
- Modelling the principle of natural justice to ensure fairness and transparency.
- Ensuring that people subject to the complaint or adverse findings have a proper opportunity to respond to ensure that the management of the complaint is fair and accurate.

The parish in adopting this practise is required to be independent and impartial and the procedure is required to be fair, this is defined as:

- All parties have the right to be heard' and
- 'No person may judge their own case'.

**Principle of Subsidiarity:**

The principle of subsidiarity is a Catholic Church principle that states that “a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life and community of a lower order”. This means that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest, or least centralised competent authority rather than by a higher and more distant one, whenever possible.

The social teaching of the Church is based on the human person as the principle subject and object of every social organisation. Subsidiarity is one of the core principles of this teaching.

Parish Representation:

This term includes all priests, religious, employers, volunteers and contractors who are working on behalf of the parish.



Nature of Concerns and Complaints

The nature of concerns and complaints can differ widely. It is important that a concern or complaint is directed to the right person to respond appropriately and in a timely manner. The list below is not exhaustive, it offers direction to whom in the parish or diocese may be responsible for the management of a concern/complaint depending on its nature.

| Type of Concern/Complaint | Who is responsible |
|---|--|
| General | Talk with the person, make this direct approach as soon as possible. If this does not resolve the matter or you are not able to approach the person concerned, an approach can be made to the parish priest, a parish representative or another person who may communicate with the person involved or refer to another party depending on the matter raised. |
| Safeguarding | Contact the Local Safeguarding Representative for the parish, or report online through the diocesan safeguarding website CONTACT Safeguarding (cdocsafeguarding.nz) |
| Privacy | All privacy breaches, no matter how insignificant, should be raised with the Diocesan Privacy Officer to ensure our systems and procedures are compliant with privacy legislation. Refer to the Diocesan Privacy Policy for further policy guidelines. Privacy - Parish Resources (chchcatholic.nz) |
| Sexual abuse/misconduct of clergy or religious | Sexual abuse/misconduct of clergy or religious The National Office for Professional Standards (NOPS) is responsible for ensuring that all complaints of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct by clergy or members of a religious order whether alive or deceased, are dealt with in accordance with a protocol called Te Houhanga Ronga - A-Path-to-Healing.Edition-Feb-2020.pdf (catholic.org.nz) . Any complaint of this nature, received by the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch, will be referred to the National Office for Professional Standards for investigation. Home - National Office for Professional Standards Home - National Office for Professional Standards (catholic.org.nz) |
| Sexual abuse/misconduct of lay people | Any complaint of sexual abuse by anyone, people are encouraged to go to the Police or the Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children). |
| Health & Safety | Parish Priest or relevant delegate |
| Property | Parish Priest or relevant delegate |

If you wish to raise a concern or make a complaint and are not sure who the person responsible noted in the table above is, or how to contact them, then contact your parish office who will direct you to the correct person to speak to.

Review: This policy was approved by Simon Thompson/Diocesan Complaints Officer. It is due for review every three years.



PROCEDURE

Is it a Concern or Complaint?

No concern should be considered too small if it is causing you worry or to feel discontented. The parish priest or parish representative will discern if the matter is a concern or a complaint if it is unclear from the information submitted.

Raising a Concern or Complaint Process [Click here to view flowchart](#)

Where appropriate the parish priest or parish representative will handle a concerns or complaint informally in the first instance. This is an opportunity to listen to each other's point of view. It is the hope that through a process of talking and discussion, parties will find the space to listen, learn and where possible be reconciled with each other. There may be instances where the concern raised amounts to a formal complaint or serious allegation. A concern may be treated as a formal complaint and the person managing the process may address the concern using a Formal Complaint or Serious Allegation procedure.

Raise the Concern with the right person to work towards a resolution

In most cases, concerns can be resolved informally and with constructive discussions.

- Be prepared to make a time to discuss the concern if the person involved is unable to talk straight away. If the person making the concern/complaint does not wish to approach the person involved, the parish priest or parish representative may be contacted to discuss the concern. The parish representative may then communicate with the person involved.
- If the matter concerns the parish priest or another priest in the parish and it has not been first resolved by discussion, or the complainant does not feel comfortable directly approaching the priest, contact with the Diocesan Complaints Officer is the appropriate next step.
- Openness to listening to the other side of the story can avoid communication breakdowns.

After raising the initial concern, parties involved in the process should not communicate about the matter with each other until all parties agree to an appropriate way to discuss or resolve the matter. Follow-up actions or later check-ins may be able to be agreed where appropriate between the parties involved in the resolution.

Concern Resolved?

- YES** - provide feedback to the parties involved in the resolution as to whether you were satisfied with the outcome or not to ensure that the matter is resolved.
- NO** - If you are unhappy with the outcome of your initial meeting, contact the parish priest or parish representative to discuss the possible pathway for a solution that is acceptable to both parties.

If the Issue remains unresolved by the previous steps then you may now have a COMPLAINT



APPROACH TO COMPLAINTS

- PROCESS MATTERS -

- Formal complaints should be made in writing by letter or email to ensure the parish is able to meet legal and ethical obligations including complying with the requirements of natural justice.
- It will not usually be possible to effectively investigate complaints that are made anonymously.
- If formal complaints or serious concerns received are not made in writing, the person who receives the complaint may make a written record of the complaint.
- If it is unclear whether someone is making a formal complaint, the parish may clarify this by asking if it should be considered as a formal complaint.
- The person who receives the complaint may:
 - Ask the person raising a complaint to provide more information to clarify the information provided.
 - Explain the process for responding to a formal complaint.
- All parties should respect privacy and confidentiality, including avoiding the use of social media to promote a point of view. Information about a complaint will be shared strictly on a “need to know” basis only.



HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

Put the specific complaint in writing and include contact details. Give as many facts and details as possible as well as any steps taken to resolve the matter. If there are specific concerns about personal identity being disclosed, then include this concern in the formal complaint so that they can be discussed directly with the party making the complaint.

The written complaint should be marked “confidential” and sent to:

- The parish priest if the complaint is about a member of staff, volunteer, or a member of the parish.
- The Diocesan Complaints Officer if it is about a priest or religious and not related to sexual abuse or sexual misconduct.
- The National Office for professional standards if it is about sexual abuse or sexual misconduct regarding a priest, religious or clergy. Home - National Office for Professional Standards [Home - National Office for Professional Standards \(catholic.org.nz\)](https://www.catholic.org.nz)
- The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer if it is a concern regarding harm of a child, young person, or vulnerable adult in the Church. [CONTACT | Safeguarding \(cdcsafeguarding.nz\)](https://www.cdcsafeguarding.nz) or contact Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for children) [Oranga Tamariki — Ministry for Children](https://www.ot.govt.nz) or the Police [New Zealand Police | Nga Pirihimana O Aotearoa](https://www.nzpolice.govt.nz)

What happens with your complaint?

The parish priest or parish representative will check that your complaint has come to the correct person and then send you an acknowledgement of receipt within 7 working days.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, the first steps may include:

- asking you for more details about your complaint so that your concerns can be investigated effectively.
- establishing whether the complaint is within the jurisdiction of the parish and is properly capable of being addressed by the parish.
- establishing whether informal resolution is possible, by discussion or other agreed meetings.
- determining appropriate procedures including further investigation. The details of the process of the investigation of the complaint, and who will be dealing with the complaint will be advised to the complainant.
- The parish priest or parish representative and any delegates must act in accordance with the principles of natural justice and will provide a copy of the complaint or detail of the complaint to the individuals involved in the complaint, unless there is a good reason not to do so.
- All investigations will be carried out in such a way as to preserve the privacy, mana and dignity of the individuals involved. Confidentiality will be maintained as far as possible, except where it would breach natural justice.

Having received the report (or result) of an investigation, the decision-maker will consider the report and determine whether to uphold the complaint. The outcome of the investigation will be communicated in writing to all relevant parties.

If resolution is not met, write to the Diocesan Complaints Officer outlining the complaint or issue in detail, all the actions that have been taken and any other relevant documentation.

Diocesan Complaints Officer: Simon Thompson
Email: sthompson@cdoc.nz / Phone: 03 378 3643