



**DIGNITY**  
IN CHURCH LIFE

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**Clergy  
Grievance  
Procedure**

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*Guidelines*



# Clergy Grievance Procedure - Guidelines

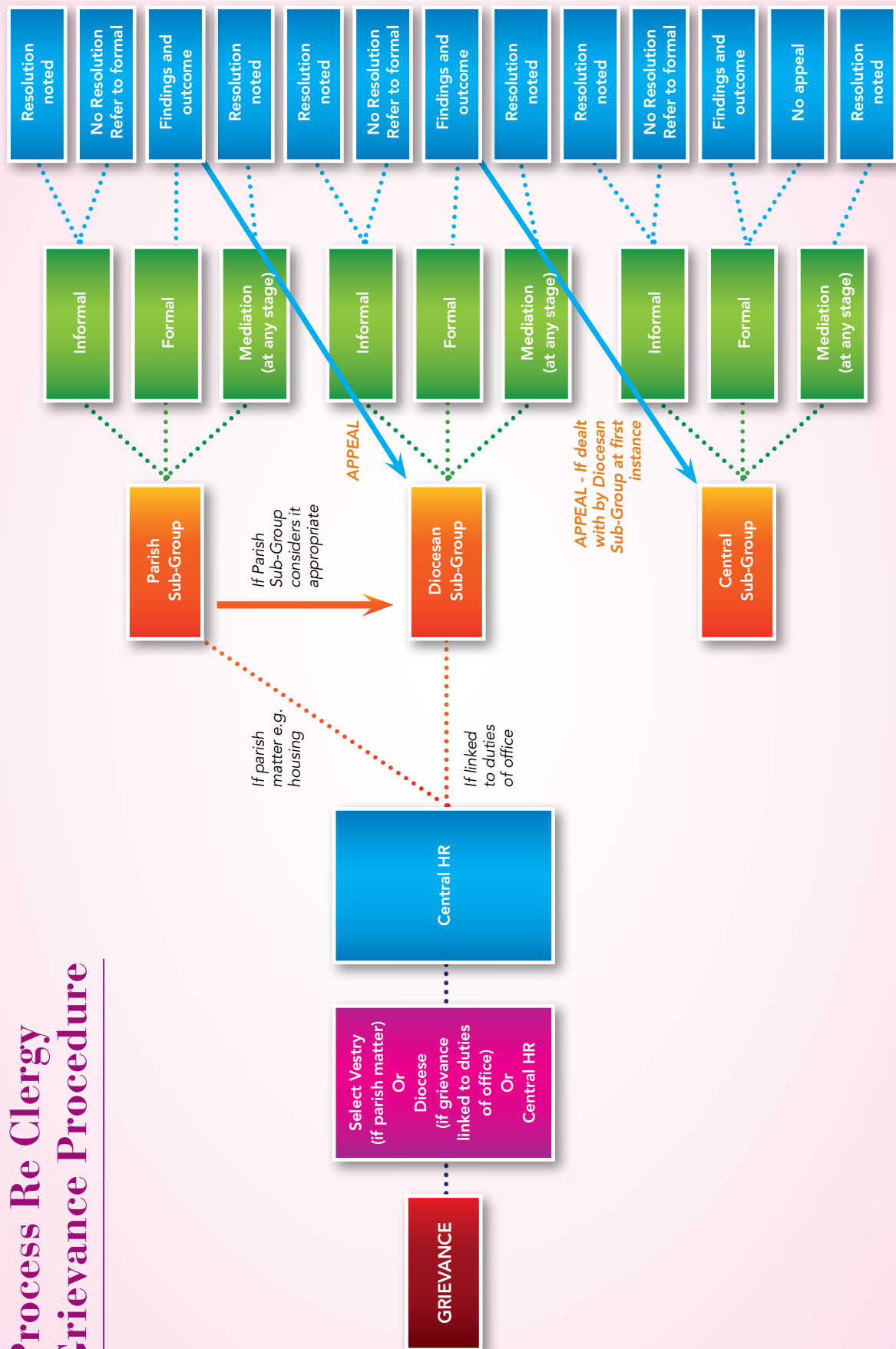
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# Process Re Clergy Grievance Procedure

## Clergy Grievance Procedure - Guidelines





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## 1. Introduction

In the Dignity in Church Life Charter, the Church of Ireland states its commitment to building and supporting harmonious relationships that are indicative of our gospel values. We also recognise that these relationships may be imperfect and at times subject to conflict so that reconciliation is needed. The Church recognises that grievances should be treated seriously due to the significance to the person concerned and to the potential damage which may be caused in day-to-day relationships. It is a fundamental principle that all parties to the grievance should be reconciled if at all possible.

This Clergy Grievance Procedure provides an important mechanism for handling grievances that may arise from time to time. Grievances may be pursued without fear of sanctions and taking into account the legitimate interests of all concerned. The purpose of such a procedure is to promote good working relationships within the Church.

These guidelines explain in greater detail our procedures for dealing with grievances for members of the clergy, where they arise. They explain how a grievance will be handled so that a person who has a grievance will have an opportunity to have it examined as expeditiously and effectively as possible.

These guidelines are therefore intended as a reference document to support the implementation of our Clergy Grievance Procedure.

## 2. The Grievance Procedure

### 2.1 Background

In 2015 the Church of Ireland formally adopted the 'Dignity in Church Life Charter'. This Charter enables the Representative Church Body to develop policies, regulations and rules to give effect to the Charter. The Grievance Procedure is one such policy. Each policy and the rules and regulations attached to it, together with any amendments, must be approved by Standing Committee prior to being implemented in the Church.

### 2.2 What is it?

The Clergy Grievance Procedure explains the Church's position on grievances raised by members of the clergy and sets out that any such grievances will be dealt with sensitively, fairly and as expeditiously as possible within the Church.

### 2.3 To whom does the policy apply?

This policy is available to all members of the clergy except those employed under a Contract of Employment or Contract for Services. Where such a Contract exists, the grievance procedure under that Contract applies. In circumstances where there is no grievance procedure associated with the Contract, then the grievance procedure as outlined in this policy may be adopted, subject to the agreement of all parties to that Contract. Where a member of the House of Bishops wishes to raise a grievance arising from his or her duties within the Church, such a grievance should be raised with the House of Bishops.

### 2.4 Our policy statement

The Church's policy in relation to grievances of members of the clergy is very clear:

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The Church of Ireland recognises that grievances may occur within the Church as in any organisation. The aims of this policy are:

- To promote good working relationships and to respond to grievances of the clergy as expeditiously as possible, taking into account the legitimate interests of all concerned and
- To ensure that no-one is disadvantaged by raising a grievance.

Full recognition is given to the significance of assuring members of the clergy who have a grievance that their concerns will be treated seriously. The grievance will be addressed fairly and without undue delay, taking into account the legitimate interests of all concerned so that no-one should be disadvantaged for raising a grievance. The aim of this procedure is to promote a culture of open communications and good working relationships. The focus should at all times be on the issues giving rise to the grievance and not on the personalities involved. The option of resolving the grievance through mediation should be considered at every stage.

### 2.5 What is a Grievance?

In many cases where a member of the clergy is concerned about an issue arising from their duties within the Church, it can be resolved through ongoing dialogue. The Clergy Grievance Procedure provides a mechanism for addressing those issues which cannot be resolved in the normal course of events. It enables an issue to be addressed early on and before it may potentially escalate into a larger dispute. Grievances could include the following types of issues:

- Issues arising from an increase/decrease of duties, or a change in status
- Personal financial matters
- Access to opportunities within the Church
- Relationship issues with fellow members of the clergy
- Unfair treatment
- Conditions of housing
- Health and safety concerns.

The list is not exhaustive. There may also be situations where it is more appropriate to deal with the grievance under another policy, for example, under a disciplinary procedure or under an anti-bullying and harassment policy. The Church therefore reserves the right to deal with the grievance under another policy as the circumstances may dictate.

## 3. Roles & Responsibilities under the Grievance Procedure

### 3.1 Who is responsible for the policy?

The Dignity Charter outlines that everyone who participates in Church life has a duty under the Constitution of the Church of Ireland to uphold the Charter together with such policies, regulations and rules as may be adopted to uphold its principles.

Those who hold offices within the Church including members of the clergy and of the laity have a specific responsibility to promote the provisions.

The specific roles associated with the implementation of the policy are as follows:



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### 3.2 Central HR

The Central HR function has a responsibility to support the implementation of the Church's policy, which includes:

- Raising awareness of the Church's HR policies and developing best practice in the implementation of the policy
- Ensuring consistency in application of the policy across the Church
- Providing advice and support to members of clergy and of laity with responsibility for handling grievances where they arise
- Providing advice to those who may wish to raise a grievance
- Briefing referrals to mediation as required
- Ensuring adequate and appropriate records are kept and to ensure that the relevant parties are kept informed as appropriate.

### 3.3 Members of a Parish, Diocesan or Central Sub-Group

These groups will be responsible for handling grievances when they arise. The relevant Sub-Group will be convened to manage the grievance procedure either on an informal or formal basis. They will be supported by Central HR throughout the process.

### 3.4 Formation of a Parish, Diocesan or Central Sub-Group to deal with a grievance

- **Parish Level** - If the grievance concerns a parish matter, a Parish Sub-Group of three members of the select vestry will be appointed. The select vestry elects a Sub-Group of three from among its members, including the incumbent / priest in charge, where possible. The Parish Sub-Group will have responsibility for dealing with the grievance.
- **Diocesan Level** - In the event the Parish Sub-Group considers the issues are such that it should be dealt with at diocesan level, or in the event of an appeal of a decision made by the Parish Sub-Group, they may refer the issue to the diocese. A Diocesan Sub-Group will be appointed by the bishop and diocesan honorary secretaries and will be comprised of (i) the archdeacon or another senior member of the clergy (ii) two members of the diocesan council. Where an appeal is heard by the Diocesan Sub-Group, the appeal shall be final.

Up to two people from outside the select vestry or the diocesan council who have relevant expertise may be co-opted on to either Sub-Group but the Sub-Group shall not exceed three people at any time.

- **Central Level** - If a grievance is commenced initially at diocesan level, an appeal may be made to a Central Sub-Group. The Central Sub-Group will be comprised of three members consisting of an archbishop or bishop as appropriate, an honorary secretary of General Synod nominated from among their number and the Chief Officer and Secretary of the RCB. The Central Sub-Group shall deal with the appeal and its decision shall be final.

Before proceeding with a Clergy Grievance Procedure, the Sub-Group appointed to deal with the grievance should consult with Central HR.

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### 3.5 Briefing

It is important that those responsible for dealing with grievances receive appropriate support. As a Parish or Diocesan Sub-Group will convene on a 'as needs' (i.e. as required) basis, training will be provided to the relevant Sub-Group once formed. They will receive a detailed briefing on how to handle a grievance procedure as well as support throughout the process.

### 4. Best Practice

The aim of the Clergy Grievance Procedure is to provide a member of the clergy who considers that he or she has a grievance with an opportunity to have it examined quickly and effectively and with a view to having it resolved, if possible, at the earliest practicable opportunity.

#### 4.1 Resolve the Grievance in a timely manner

It is important for grievances to be dealt with as soon as is practicable, as failure to do so may result in a minor grievance escalating. Delays in handling issues can also become an additional source of agitation. Recommended timelines are set out to deal with appeals in the interest of all parties to the grievance.

#### 4.2 Resolve as locally as possible

It is generally agreed that grievances are best handled as near to their source as possible in order to have the best chance of preserving relationships. Because a grievance can be upsetting to those affected by it, the temptation is to escalate it to the most senior levels within the Church. However, the best chance of resolution is to address it at either the parish or diocesan level, as appropriate.

#### 4.3 Use informal procedures first

It is envisaged that in the first instance, the majority of grievances can be settled through informal discussions to the satisfaction of all concerned without recourse to formal procedures. An informal approach offers the best chance of low level, local resolution with as little damage as possible to the relationship between parties involved. However, the person raising the grievance has the right to proceed straight to the formal stage if they wish but they may find it helpful to discuss the implications of doing this with Central HR.

#### 4.4 Confidentiality

All those who become involved with a grievance procedure are reminded of the importance of maintaining confidentiality throughout the process. The rights of all those involved in the process must be maintained. If you are affected by a grievance, it is natural to want to speak to colleagues and friends. Confidantes should be carefully chosen and limited in number. You are encouraged to seek help from any of the persons within the Church assigned to deal with the grievance, in order to gain support as soon as possible.

#### 4.5 Record keeping

Records relating to the implementation of this policy will be retained, as appropriate, by Central HR and in line with Data Protection legislation.



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### 4.6 Accompanied by a colleague

A member of the clergy may be accompanied by a colleague during a formal grievance procedure. The colleague should not be someone with an involvement in the case as they may be brought into the case at a later stage.

## 5. Our Procedures

### 5.1 Raising a grievance

As outlined previously, grievances relating to parish matters will be dealt with by a Parish Sub-Group. In this instance, a grievance may be raised with a member of the select vestry or with Central HR. Grievances relating to duties of office should be dealt with by a Diocesan Sub-Group, in which case the grievance may be raised with the archdeacon or with Central HR. In some circumstances, the Parish Sub-Group may consider the issue is such that it should be dealt with at diocesan level, and they may refer the issue to the diocese to seek to resolve the matter at the informal stage.

There are informal and formal procedures to deal with grievances. Additionally, a member of the clergy may opt to have the matter dealt with through mediation.

### 5.2 Informal Resolution

Most problems can be handled without recourse to a formal grievance procedure. Every effort should be made to resolve a grievance through the informal process initially either by the person raising the grievance, by the Parish Sub-Group or by the Diocesan Sub-Group. The objective of this approach is to resolve difficulties with the minimum of conflict and stress for the individuals involved.

A member of the clergy may attempt to discuss his or her grievance with the person responsible for the matter which has given rise to the concern or with the rural dean in order to explore whether and how the matter might be resolved informally. It may be helpful to prepare an outline of the nature and extent of the grievance, in advance.

Alternatively, the member of the clergy raising the grievance may opt to have the matter dealt with by the relevant Sub-Group on an informal basis. If this is the case, a meeting will be arranged to discuss the grievance and seek to resolve matters. The Parish or Diocesan Sub-Group may seek further information in order to consider the matter. They may also convene a meeting with both parties, where relevant, to try to resolve the grievance on an informal basis.

#### **Agreement**

Any agreed course of action within a specified timeframe (for example, within 28 days with a provision for this to be extended by mutual agreement) will be clearly set out. The Sub-Group responsible for dealing with the issue will ensure that the agreed actions are implemented as promptly as possible and that the matter has been satisfactorily resolved for all parties, as far as is possible.

#### **Recording**

A record of the grievance raised should be recorded by the chair of the Sub-Group responsible for dealing with the grievance and forwarded to Central HR, who will in turn notify the diocesan secretary (see form attached at Appendix 1). No details of parties or names are recorded in relation to an informal grievance. The record will be kept



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in accordance with data protection policy. Should the grievance be resolved through mediation, the fact that resolution was reached will be recorded but with no further details.

### 5.3 Mediation

Mediation is an extremely useful method for resolving grievances. It is aimed at resolving the matter promptly, confidentially and without recourse to formal procedures. Further detail on the mediation process is provided in Section 4.

### 5.4 Stage 1 - Formal

The formal procedure should be used if efforts to resolve the grievance through the informal procedure have not resolved the matter or if the person raising the grievance chooses to use it in preference to the informal procedure.

The member of the clergy raising the grievance should detail the grievance in writing to a member of the select vestry, the archdeacon or Central HR, as appropriate. This should include details of any informal steps that have been taken to try to resolve the issue. They may also, if they so wish, include what remedies if any that he or she might find acceptable as a route to resolution.

The Sub-Group responsible for handling the grievance will arrange a meeting with the aggrieved member of the clergy to discuss the grievance. The appropriate Sub-Group will meet with any other party involved in the grievance. At the appropriate time, the Sub-Group may also convene a meeting with both parties, where relevant, to try to resolve the grievance. All parties to the grievance may also be accompanied by a colleague at the meeting.

#### Outcome

All parties to the grievance will be notified in writing of the outcome of the grievance, including any agreed course of action, as soon as possible.

#### Record

The Chair of the Sub-Group dealing with the issue will complete the form set out at Appendix 1 and forward it to Central HR, who will inform the diocesan secretary that the issue has been dealt with on a formal basis.

### 5.5 Stage 2 - Formal Appeal

If the member of the clergy is unhappy with the outcome of Stage 1, he or she may appeal the outcome.

If the appeal is against a decision made by a Parish Sub-Group in the first instance, an appeal may be made to the diocese and the bishop and diocesan honorary secretaries will appoint a Diocesan Sub-Group to deal with the appeal. If the appeal is against a decision made by a Diocesan Sub-Group in the first instance, an appeal may be made to a Central Sub-Group to deal with the appeal and whose decision shall be final. Such a referral must be made in writing within twenty days of receiving the decision of the Parish Sub-Group/Diocesan Sub-Group, as appropriate, and must state the reasons for the continued grievance.

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The appointed Sub-Group may convene a meeting with either or both of the parties to try to resolve the grievance. The meeting will be held without unreasonable delay whilst allowing the member of clergy and any other party to the grievance reasonable time to prepare.

Fair procedures will apply which include maintaining a written record of the grievance and allowing members of the clergy raising a grievance or against whom a grievance has been raised to bring a lay or ordained colleague to any meeting. All those involved in the process should respect the confidentiality of the process. Discussions should not be entered into relating to the grievance with any person or group outside the framework of the meetings arranged in accordance with this policy.

This is the final stage of the grievance procedure and the decision of the Central Sub-Group will be final with no further right of appeal.

### **Outcome**

All parties to the grievance will be notified in writing of the outcome of the grievance, including any agreed course of action, as soon as possible. The outcome will be recorded by the diocesan secretary and forwarded to Central HR.

### **Recording**

A full record of the formal allegation will be kept along with a detailed record of the process followed and outcome decided and will be sent directly to Central HR. The Chair of the Sub-Group dealing with the issue will complete the form attached at Appendix 1 and forward it to Central HR, who will inform the diocesan secretary that the issue has been dealt with on a Stage 2 formal appeal basis.

## **6. Mediation**

Mediation is a well-established process for resolving disagreements in which an impartial third party (the mediator) helps people in dispute to find a mutually acceptable resolution. It is the preferred method for resolution of grievances that are not capable of being resolved locally or at the informal level.

The objective of mediation is to resolve the matter as expeditiously as possible and confidentially without recourse to formal procedures and with the minimum of conflict and stress for the individuals involved. The aim is to maintain the relationship between two people or groups, if at all possible, and so mediation is about establishing common ground which can build towards improved behaviours between the parties, the focus being on the future and not the past and acknowledging feelings as well as facts. It works by enabling participants to be aware of the need to look at their own behaviour as well as that of other people. It also enables the participants to come up with their own practical solutions. It allows those involved to rebuild relationships as they work together to find an agreement. Those responsible for dealing with a grievance at parish, diocesan, or central level may refer the matter for mediation in consultation with Central HR.

A mediated solution will typically have a review mechanism built in to monitor progress for a period following the agreement. It is not unusual to have these reviews chaired by the Mediator initially and then handed back to those responsible for handling the grievance (the Parish or Diocesan Sub-Group) who can carry out subsequent periodic reviews in a supportive manner.



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Mediation can be attempted at any point in the grievance procedure. It is a voluntary process and is most likely to work when those in dispute are willing to take part in an open and honest way. A mediated solution will not result in the issues being dealt with under any disciplinary policy. Minimal paperwork and/or record will be generated by the process. If the mediation process does not produce a satisfactory outcome, the person making the allegation may seek to have the matter resolved through formal procedure. Mediation may also be attempted again during or following the formal grievance procedure.

### 7. Resolution & Follow Up

Responsibilities should not end with the conclusion of an informal, formal or mediated process. As a Church community, we are committed to providing support to the parties involved and to try to repair those relationships where they may have broken down as a result of disagreement.

#### 7.1 Reconciliation

The Church's Dignity Charter outlines how the Church aspires to model relationships which are indicative of gospel values including, where necessary, the manner in which interpersonal boundaries are respected, conflict is addressed and reconciliation is pursued. Reconciliation involves the rebuilding of damaged relationships and should be pursued at the end of a grievance procedure if required. As set out above, mediation is a very useful tool to assist in the rebuilding of relationships and therefore could also be considered at this stage of the process.

#### 7.2 Support for those involved

Involvement with a grievance case may be difficult for all parties, particularly where formal procedures have been used. The parish or diocese may also consider providing support in the form of either pastoral care or counselling (or similar type intervention), as appropriate. This may be required for the person raising the grievance, those who are the subject of the grievance or those who had to deal with the grievance case. On some occasions support may be required for a wider group within the parish or diocese that have been affected by a more serious dispute. This should be done in conjunction with those responsible for handling the case within the Church e.g. the Parish Sub-Group.

### 8. Ongoing Monitoring and Review

The monitoring of grievances can provide important information on the nature of an organisation or particular parts of it. Monitoring can include: monitoring the number and types of grievance that arise; understanding the nature of grievances in order to improve the management of issues; and, if necessary, making changes to address issues more effectively.

This is why it is important that the Church maintains appropriate records of grievances and that these are kept centrally. This also helps to ensure consistency of approach.

#### 8.1 Reducing the incidence of grievances

The aim of any grievance procedure is to promote good relationships and to deal with issues when they arise. Some grievances may be avoided through regular ongoing open communications. Feedback and review sessions can very often provide a forum

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to air issues that may be of concern. Additionally, adopting good conflict management practices by addressing issues early on, differentiating healthy and unhealthy conflict as well as other conflict management competencies (for more details see Prevention of Bullying & Harassment Guidelines) can do much to offset disagreements growing into larger disputes.

### 8.2 Review

Progress on the implementation and effectiveness of the Clergy Grievance Procedure will be regularly reviewed. If you wish to comment on any aspect of the Procedure, its guidelines or its implementation you may contact Central HR or the diocesan secretary.

### 9. Useful Contacts

If you have any queries regarding the implementation of this policy please contact Central HR as follows:

**Telephone: +353 (1) 4125 655**

**Email: [hr@ireland.anglican.org](mailto:hr@ireland.anglican.org)**

*This policy will be subject to review on a regular basis.*



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## Appendix 1

### Dignity in Church Life - Policies' Record Form

This form is used to record issues raised under the **Prevention of Bullying & Harassment** and **Clergy Grievance** Policies. Once an issue is raised under either policy, the form should be completed by the Chairperson of the Parish, Diocesan or Central Sub-Group that is dealing with the issue. When all procedures have been concluded, the form should be signed and sent to Central HR who will inform the diocesan secretary that the process has been completed.

#### 1. NOTIFICATION

Name of Parish/Diocese or Central Sub-Group:.....

Date issue was raised:.....

Nature of issue: Bullying  Harassment  Sexual Harassment  Clergy Grievance

Names of members appointed to Parish/Diocese/Central Sub-Group:  
.....

#### 2. INFORMAL PROCESS

To be completed where the complainant has chosen an informal process to resolve the issue.

Date of commencement of informal process:.....

Date action under informal process ceased:.....

Was issue resolved to the satisfaction of complainant? Yes  No

If No, please outline intended next steps (i.e. mediation, formal intervention or other):  
.....

#### 3. MEDIATION

To be completed where mediation has been agreed as a means of resolving the issue.

Date of commencement of mediation:.....

Date mediation ceased:.....

Name of Mediator: .....

Was issue resolved to the satisfaction of both parties? Yes  No

If no, please outline intended next steps (i.e. formal intervention or other):  
.....

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### 4. FORMAL PROCESS

To be completed where complainant has chosen a formal process to resolve the issue as a first step or following either procedure at 2 & 3 above

Date formal complaint was received: .....

Name of complainant: .....

Name of person against whom complaint was made: .....

Date of commencement of investigation: .....

Name of Investigator: .....

Was complaint upheld? Yes  No

Please explain outcome: .....

.....

*Note: Please attach full details of the formal procedure carried out including the full investigation report and outcome reached with this completed form.*

### 5. FORMAL APPEAL

This section should be completed by the Chairperson of the body (either the Diocesan or Central Sub-Group) handling the appeal.

Date of receipt of formal appeal: .....

Name of person making the appeal: .....

Date of commencement of appeal hearing: .....

Names of members appointed to Parish/Diocese/Central Sub-Group:

.....

Was the decision upheld? Yes  No

Please explain outcome: .....

.....

*Note: Please attach full details of the appeal procedure carried out, including full report and outcome reached with this completed form.*



