



## ***Seeking Resolutions*** ***A parish complaints policy to maintain healthy relationships***

*15<sup>th</sup> September 2016*

### **Context and Rationale**

St Therese's Parish prayer commences with the words "In this place I am always welcome". As a parish we affirm the dignity of the individual and the nurturing of relationships within the parish community. Through prayer, rituals and social events the parish seeks to draw each individual into the faith life of our community.

This policy reflects the parish's commitment to practice the Gospel values of justice and hope. Its purpose is to provide parishioners with principles and procedures in responding to complaints and resolving disputes. This process is designed to ensure that complaints are treated seriously, respectfully and sensitively and that an honest dialogue can occur in the community. The parish welcomes open and transparent discussion and urges parishioners with genuine concerns to deal directly with the issue so that it can be resolved fairly and quickly.

For the purposes of the policy a complaint is a concern, grievance or issue that is raised by a member of the parish and which requires a resolution. Anonymous complaints will not be considered.

### **Principles**

In implementing this policy the parish will:

- a. respect the rights and responsibilities of all members of the community
- b. treat all complaints seriously and sensitively, having due regard to procedural fairness, confidentiality and privacy
- c. provide support to the person making the complaint and any person against whom a complaint is made
- d. seek to resolve a complaint as early as possible and directly with the people involved
- e. acknowledge the reciprocal expectations of all parishioners to act in a courteous, respectful, supportive and constructive manner towards one another
- f. if necessary, seek external support or involvement of relevant agencies in the resolution of a complaint
- g. facilitate any changes deemed to be necessary which arise from the resolution of a complaint.

## **Guidelines for Implementation**

St Therese's parish values direct communication and expects that individuals will, if possible, bring a complaint directly to the parties involved, and that those involved will make every effort to resolve the complaint. Wherever possible, complaints should be resolved by a process of discussion, cooperation and conciliation. The aim is to reach an acceptable outcome which restores and maintains good relationships.

1. Contact: The complainant should make contact with the member of the Parish who would be in the best position to resolve the complaint. In most cases this would be the person about whom the complaint is concerned but can also be one or more of the following:
  - Parish priest
  - Pastoral Assistants
  - Office Staff
  - Chair of the relevant committee

These matters are best discussed face to face at a mutually agreed time for each of the parties concerned. A confidential discussion is held and a suggested strategy is developed to deal with the complaint. At this stage the complaint is treated as informal.

2. If initial contact between the parties does not resolve the complaint then the complainant should:
  - a. Contact the parish priest to make an appointment for a face to face meeting
  - b. Outline the nature of the complaint either verbally or in writing and the steps taken to resolve it
  - c. Be aware that this is now entering a formal process which is outlined in step 3
  - d. Inform police if there is any allegation of a criminal matter
3. The Parish Priest will:
  - a. Respond in a timely manner to the complainant to organize a meeting
  - b. Keep all discussions confidential in limiting it to those directly involved
  - c. Fully document the complaint
  - d. Give a copy of the complaint to the complainant
  - e. Ensure that no one is victimized as a result of the complaint
  - f. If necessary enable the person making the complaint to have a support person
  - g. Inform the person about whom the complaint was made and the nature of the complaint. This information will not be disclosed without the prior knowledge of the complainant.
  - h. Organize a process of mediation via an independent facilitator if a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved by the parish

Where a complaint relates to an allegation of physical or sexual abuse or any other illegal activity, the complainant should report the matter directly to the police.

## **Avenues for Appeal**

Should the complaint be related to the Parish Priest and not be resolved after initial contact, the Parish will advise the complainant to take the matter to the Vicar General.

## **Possible Contacts**

Victoria Police (03) 9247 6666 Vicar General (03) 99265677 Catholic Care (03) 9287 5500  
Catholic Education Office (03) 92670228 Independent Commissioner (03) 9225 7979  
Towards Healing (03) 50236790 Department of Health and Human Services 1300650172