



**DIGNITY**  
IN CHURCH LIFE

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**Prevention  
of Bullying &  
Harassment  
Policy**

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# Prevention of Bullying & Harassment Policy

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## 1. Our Policy

In keeping with the Dignity in Church Life Charter, the Church of Ireland is committed to promoting and implementing measures to protect the dignity of all and to encourage respect for others. This policy has been developed to ensure the activities of the Church of Ireland take place in a non-threatening environment that is free from bullying, harassment and disrespectful behaviour. Everyone has a right to be treated with dignity and respect, while equally all members of the Church of Ireland have a responsibility to maintain an environment free from bullying and harassment.

The Church of Ireland will not tolerate bullying or harassment irrespective of a given reason. Any member of the Church of Ireland who experiences bullying or harassment while participating in Church life will be supported in bringing such unwanted behaviour to a close. It is also the aim of this policy to ensure that where allegations of bullying or harassment may arise, they are dealt with promptly, sensitively and fairly.

## 2. Who has responsibility for this policy?

As outlined in the Dignity in Church Life Charter, all who participate in Church life have a duty and a responsibility to uphold the principles of this policy. Those who hold offices in the Church of Ireland have a particular responsibility for encouraging and monitoring the implementation of this policy.

## 3. Who is protected by this policy?

It is recognised that, as in any organisation, inappropriate behaviour may occur within a Church community at any level. This policy applies to all members of the clergy, archbishops and bishops and members of the laity who participate in the life of the Church of Ireland. *Note: This policy should only be used where there is no Contract of Employment or other Contract governing the relationship between the person making the allegation and the person against whom it has been made. If such a Contract exists, the procedures provided for in that Contract shall apply. In circumstances where there is no prevention of bullying and harassment procedure associated with the Contract, then the prevention of bullying and harassment procedure as outlined in this policy may be adopted, subject to the agreement of all parties to that Contract.*

## 4. What is 'Bullying' and 'Harassment'?

### Bullying

For the purposes of this policy, bullying is defined as repeated inappropriate behaviour, direct or indirect, whether verbal, physical or otherwise. It may be conducted by one or more persons against another or others and is behaviour which could reasonably be regarded as undermining the individual's right to dignity. An isolated incident of the behaviour described in this definition may be an affront to dignity but as a once-off incident is not considered to be bullying. The carrying out of managerial or supervisory duties within the context of Church life or adhering to the ethos of the Church of Ireland while carrying out pastoral duties would not normally be regarded as bullying or harassment. Examples of bullying in the real or virtual world include:

- repeated personal insults or name calling
- constant humiliation or belittling a person, often in front of others
- showing hostility through sustained unfriendly contact or exclusion

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- aggressive bodily posture or intimidatory physical behaviour
- repeated verbal abuse.

### Harassment

For the purposes of this policy, harassment is defined as any form of unwanted conduct related to any of the discriminatory grounds listed here which can reasonably be regarded as having the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person.

The discriminatory grounds are: age, disability, religious belief (including theology or churchmanship), nationality, family status, gender, sexual orientation, race or membership of the traveller community. The harassment may be persistent or an isolated incident.

Sexual harassment is defined as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person. It is the unwanted nature of sexual harassment which distinguishes it from behaviour that is welcome and reciprocal.

Sexual harassment can take the form of requests for sexual favours or suggestive remarks, physical touching/gesturing of a sexual nature or indecent exposure. A single incident may constitute sexual harassment.

### 5. Prevention

Bullying or harassing behaviour can have a devastating impact on both individuals and/or groups where it occurs. As a consequence of the impact of these behaviours on the individual and the wider community it is necessary to take steps to prevent such behaviours, for example: reinforcing positive behaviours consistent with Gospel values as outlined in the Dignity in Church Life Charter; raising awareness of the types of behaviours which constitute bullying and harassment; handling conflict effectively when it arises; providing training and education for those involved in managing this policy; ensuring adequate follow up and aiming for reconciliation between the parties if at all possible where issues have arisen.

### 6. Dealing with allegations of Bullying and Harassment - our procedure

All allegations of bullying and harassment will be dealt with sensitively by the Church and as promptly as possible. Allegations should be raised within six months of the alleged offensive behaviour taking place. Allegations of bullying and harassment should, in most cases, be dealt with at parish level. There may be occasions where it is more appropriate to deal with the allegation at diocesan level.

The principle applies that the persons/group dealing with the accusation should not be connected with either of the parties to the allegation and therefore should have no direct involvement with the issues giving rise to the complaint. Fair procedures will be observed at all stages in the process with due respect for the rights of all parties. All parties involved in the process must respect its confidentiality.

The parish may at all times seek the guidance and advice of Central HR who has been appointed centrally within the Church to act as advisor in the implementation of this policy. The contact details for Central HR are set out at the end of this policy.

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## Raising a concern about bullying or harassment

If you have a concern that you are being bullied or harassed you have the option of approaching the Rector, a member of the Select Vestry, or Central HR in the first instance. They will provide you with advice on a confidential basis about the procedures for raising your concern. There are both informal and formal procedures to deal with incidents of bullying and harassment.

A parish sub-group (the "Parish Sub-Group") of three members of the select vestry will be appointed by the select vestry to deal with the issue in the first instance. In the event the Parish Sub-Group considers the issues are such that it should be dealt with at diocesan level, the Parish Sub-Group may refer the issue to the diocese. In that event, a sub-group consisting of (i) the archdeacon or other senior member of the clergy and (ii) two members of the diocesan council (the "Diocesan Sub-Group") shall be appointed by the bishop and diocesan honorary secretaries to deal with the matter. All allegations against members of the clergy shall be referred to the Diocesan Sub-Group.

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.

There may be other instances where the allegation is such that the parish considers it is more appropriate to deal with the issues giving rise to the complaint under a separate policy and the right is reserved to do so. For example, if the harassment or bullying is indicative of disciplinary or other issues, it may be dealt with under the Church's disciplinary procedure.

## Mediation

Mediation is the preferred method for resolving incidents of bullying or harassment. Mediation is aimed at resolving the matter promptly, confidentially and without recourse to formal investigation. The process can lessen feelings of conflict and stress and it can help to maintain the relationship between two people or groups. Mediation can be attempted at any point in the procedure to deal with allegations of bullying or harassment.

## The informal process

The Parish or Diocesan Sub-Group will endeavour to deal with complaints informally at first. It is preferable that incidents of bullying and harassment are dealt with informally and as locally as possible as this is more likely to resolve issues expeditiously and be more effective in terms of preserving relationships.

Informal resolution of issues can be dealt with in a number of ways including: the person who believes that he or she is the subject of bullying or harassment may bring the behaviour complained of directly to the alleged perpetrator's attention and request them to stop the offensive behaviour; he/she may ask those responsible for handling the issue to approach the alleged perpetrator on his or her behalf; those handling the issue may also facilitate supportive, non-confrontational meetings between the parties to resolve the matter. Any agreed course of action arising from an informal resolution will be clearly set out to ensure appropriate follow up and that the matter has been satisfactorily resolved for all parties.

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## The formal process

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

Formal allegations should be in writing giving precise details of the alleged issue. In some instances, the Parish Sub-Group may decide that the allegation should be dealt with at diocesan level, while all allegations against members of the clergy shall be dealt with at diocesan level. A formal investigation procedure will then be carried out. Further action or outcomes will be decided on the basis of the investigation report, to include such sanctions as may be deemed appropriate.

If either party is unhappy with the outcome, either party may appeal the decision by setting out the grounds of their appeal in writing to the relevant appeal body within twenty days of the decision being communicated to them. If the appeal is against a decision made by a Parish Sub-Group, 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, an appeal may be made to a Central Sub-Group of three members consisting of a bishop or archbishop as appropriate, an honorary secretary of General Synod and the Chief Officer and Secretary of the RCB (the "Central Sub-Group") to deal with the appeal and whose decision shall be final. If an allegation is made against a bishop or archbishop, the formal allegation should be made in writing to the Central Sub-Group in the first instance and its decision will be final.

## 7. Malicious Complaints

The Church recognises that false accusations can have serious effects on the individual against whom they are made. Where it is established that an individual has made a malicious allegation or has made an allegation with the intention of damaging someone's reputation then, following investigation, this may result in appropriate action being taken.

## 8. Support & Reconciliation

The Church of Ireland is committed to providing an appropriate level of care and support for those involved in an allegation of bullying or harassment. The person subjected to the inappropriate behaviour may require support, while the perpetrator may also need support with an emphasis on resolution rather than blame. There will also be ongoing monitoring of any recommended outcomes arising from the procedures.

## 9. Useful Contacts

For further explanation on the implementation of this policy, see 'Guidelines on the Prevention of Bullying and Harassment Policy'.

If you have any queries regarding the implementation of this policy please contact Central HR as outlined below.

**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.*