

METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND ANTI BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY

Background

The Methodist Church in Ireland affirms that every individual is uniquely created by God and made in his image and likeness. As a result, everyone should be treated with dignity and respect in the Church.

The Church recognises that individuals, working within the context of the church, interact with each other in a number of different ways, including, but not limited to:

- As employees of the church and colleagues of other employees
- As Ministers and volunteers

The overarching aim of the church in opposing bullying and harassment is to follow biblical teaching, to promote good relationships and to provide a platform for restoring relationships where problems arise.

The church also recognises that, in an employment context, there are legal considerations that are not present in other contexts. Therefore, the church has adopted separate policies intended to resolve issues of bullying and harassment, depending upon whether the issue has arisen in the context of a legal (employment) relationship or not (in the case of a minister or volunteer). This is in no way intended to diminish the significance and seriousness with which issues outside the legal context will be considered and dealt with but is simply a response to what the law will require in an employment context.

POLICY ON ANTI BULLYING AND HARASSMENT FOR PERSONS WITHIN THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND WHO ARE NOT EMPLOYEES

Introduction and scope

This policy applies to all Ordained Ministers, probationers, volunteers and others in the Methodist Church in Ireland who are not deemed to be “employees” or “workers” as defined by law. Those deemed to be “employees” or “workers” are covered under the Anti Bullying and harassment policy as set out in the employee manual.

This policy sets out what is expected of you in relation to how you behave towards others and how you can expect other people to treat you. It also gives guidance on the steps to be taken if you wish to raise an issue under this policy or if someone raises an issue about you.

Definitions

Bullying and harassment of any kind will not be tolerated in the Methodist Church in Ireland. This policy aims to identify what is meant by “bullying” and “harassment” and sets out our position in relation to combating them.

“Bullying” and “harassment” for the purposes of this policy are defined as offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour which makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable. Excluding and/or ignoring someone can also constitute bullying or harassment.

Conduct will be regarded as bullying or harassment only if, having regard to all the circumstances, and in particular the alleged victim’s perception, it should be considered reasonably as bullying or harassment.

The following is an illustrative, non-exhaustive list of behaviours that may constitute bullying and harassment.

- a. physical contact ranging from touching to serious assault;
- b. verbal and written harassment through jokes, racist remarks, offensive language, gossip and slander, sectarian songs, threats and letters;
- c. visual displays of posters, graffiti, obscene gestures, flags, bunting or emblems or any type of offensive material;
- d. isolation or non co-operation, or exclusion from social activities;
- e. coercion, including pressure for sexual favours, pressure to participate in political or religious groups; and
- f. intrusion by pestering, spying, following etc.

You should note that it is the impact of the behaviour which is relevant and not the motive or intent behind it.

Your responsibilities

Everyone in the church has a responsibility to help ensure a working environment in which the dignity of everyone else is respected. You must comply with this policy and should take care to ensure that your behaviour does not cause offence.

You should note that individuals can be held personally liable for harassment of employees and workers. Employers have a defence to claims in the event that they can demonstrate that all reasonable steps were taken by the employer to ensure that harassment did not occur. The Methodist Church in Ireland is committed to taking all such reasonable steps.

You should discourage bullying and harassment by making it clear that you find such behaviour unacceptable and by supporting any individual who suffers such treatment or is considering making a complaint. You should report any concern you may have about how any employee, minister, volunteer or other person within the church is being treated to the circuit or to the district superintendent, if the concern relates to the circuit superintendent.

The church's commitment

The church is committed to implementing this policy and making every effort to ensure that bullying and harassment do not occur. The church will ensure that ministers, volunteers and employees are made aware of and understand the terms of this policy and will support anyone who makes a complaint. Where updates to this policy or further training on this policy are required, we will clearly communicate these and provide appropriate training.

Procedure to be followed

The church looks to Jesus' model for resolving disputes in Matthew 18:15-17

If you are feeling bullied or harassed

If you are feeling bullied or harassed by another person within the Methodist Church in Ireland and you feel able to approach the person yourself to discuss the matter, you are encouraged to do so in the hope of resolving the matter between the two of you. This may not be appropriate, depending upon the nature of the issue. If an informal discussion resolves the issue, the matter is closed.

If you have tried to resolve the matter with the other person and this has not led to the desired resolution or if you do not feel it is appropriate to raise the matter in a one to one context, you should consider approaching the individual in the presence of one or two other Christian people who you can trust (for example a minister, Society Steward or other mature Christian). If this leads to the desired resolution, the matter is closed.

If talking to the individual concerned in the presence of one or two others does not lead to the desired resolution or if, because of the nature of the issue, you do not consider this to be an appropriate way of trying to resolve the issue, you should report the matter to the circuit superintendent or if the circuit superintendent is the subject matter of your complaint, to the district superintendent.

When the matter is brought to the church for resolution, the church will respond as quickly, sensitively and with the maximum confidentiality possible and will carry out an investigation in as impartial and independent a manner as possible. The procedure to be followed in investigating the complaint will be determined on a case by case basis and appropriate advice may be sought by the church in dealing with the issue.

At all times the overriding aim is to assist in the resolving of issues and, where possible, assist in the restoration of relationships. Where the individual who you are complaining about is found, after investigation, to have been in the wrong, appropriate church discipline may be exercised.

If you are accused of bullying or harassing another person

The church recognises that it can be upsetting to face such an accusation. If someone approached you and makes an allegation, you should remain calm and listen to what they are saying. You should reflect on what they are saying and, if appropriate, repent of your actions that have caused hurt and seek forgiveness. If you do not believe that your actions could reasonably have caused hurt, you should try to explain your position as sensitively as possible.

If a more formal investigation is invoked by the church following a complaint being made against you, you are expected to submit to the authority of those appointed to deal with the matter and to accept any recommendations or sanctions imposed, which will be designed to restore relationships.