

# **Bullying and Harassment Policy<sup>1</sup>**

## **I. Introduction**

Within the Community are ‘all sorts and conditions’ of human beings: diverse in age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, education and with different kinds of ability and in different stages of membership: life professed, first professed, novices, and postulants, The Community is a body whose members acknowledge their individual needs and which recognises the human capacity for even the best to go wrong. Indeed, a number of the letters of the New Testament are written to dysfunctional church communities struggling with damaged and damaging human relationships.

Sadly, illegitimate use of power, bullying and harassment sometimes occurs within the Community as in other areas of human society. In a Community called to witness to the eternal dignity of every human being, we have a unique responsibility to challenge such behaviour and create communities where each person has the sustaining reassurance that they will be treated with the respect that is due to all human beings made in the image of God and precious to God.

The commandment to ‘love one another as I have loved you’ (John 13.34) is central to our Christian discipleship. As brothers and sisters, living in Community under vows, we have committed ourselves to the spirit of that section of our Rule in *The Principles of the First Order*, Day 27:

‘The Master says: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Love is thus the distinguishing feature of all true disciples of Christ. . . . They must be on their guard against all that injures this love: the bitter thought, the hasty retort, the angry gesture; and never fail to ask forgiveness of any against whom they have sinned’.

Bullying and harassment, whether intentional or not, can greatly undermine the effectiveness of individuals and the Community to

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Getting on Together*, Diocese of Chelmsford

which they belong, as well as being extremely hurtful to those involved.

The purpose of this policy is to set out a framework in which, wherever possible, relationships can be rebuilt and trust restored. In this, as in everything we depend on the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to form each of us more into the likeness of Christ.

## **2. Statement of Commitment**

The Community is required by God to foster relationships of the utmost integrity truthfulness and trustworthiness. Abuse, harassment and bullying – however rare – will not be tolerated in the Community. All complaints of abuse, harassment and bullying will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

## **3. Standards of Behaviour**

- (a) Those with pastoral responsibilities for Community members in the Province: Ministers, Novice Guardians and Guardians commit themselves to do all in their power to build a culture of mutual respect where individuals: professed, novices, postulants, those living with us and guests, feel respected and safe, and treat one another with dignity. They recognise the importance of setting a good example in this work and undertake to participate in training in support of this policy.
- (b) The Provincial Chapters are committed to doing all in their power to contribute to a culture of mutual respect where individuals: professed, novices, postulants, those living with us and guests, feel respected and safe, and treat one another with dignity. They recognise the importance of setting a good example in this work and undertake to participate in training in support of this policy.

## **4. Responsibility**

The Ministers Provincial together with the Provincial Chapters are responsible for establishing and annually reviewing this Policy for the Province as a whole. This policy applies to all brothers and sisters living in the Province who have personal responsibility for up-holding the principles of equal opportunity. They are expected to comply with the provisions of the policy and help others to achieve its aims. Every member of the Community, every person living with us and every guest is responsible for conducting themselves in a manner consistent with this Policy in all Community-related activities.

## 5. Definitions

- (a) Any behaviour, always involving the misuse of power, which an individual or group knows, or ought to reasonably know, could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group should be regarded as unacceptable.
- (b) 'Unacceptable behaviour' changes its label to 'bullying' or 'harassing behaviour' when it causes actual harm or distress to the target(s), normally but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period of time. Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse or negate the impact on the target or the distress caused.
- (c) If it is not challenged it is likely to escalate and lead to significant difficulties for all concerned.
- (d) The legal definition of harassment – as applied to gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and race and ethnic and national origin is: 'unwanted conduct that violates people's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment'. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 makes it illegal for someone to pursue a course of conduct which amounts to harassment: bullying has been successfully claimed as harassment under this Act.
- (e) Bullying is most easily identified when it is continuous, frequent, repetitive and part of an overall pattern. However, some abuse is serious enough to be recognised even if the behaviour occurred only once and is therefore defined as bullying.
- (f) It is safest to take the view that if a brother, sister, a person living with us or a guest complains that they are being bullied or harassed, then they have a grievance, which should be dealt with regardless of whether or not their complaint accords with a standard definition.
- (g) Every complaint of bullying or harassment will be taken seriously, and investigated appropriately. It may be difficult for someone who is a target to make a complaint.

## 6. Recognition

- (a) Bullying may manifest itself in a variety of different ways. It is usually persistent, and often unpredictable, and can amount to severe psychological intimidation. It is insidious, and undermines the ability and confidence of the person suffering from it. It can lead to fear, isolation, demotivation and reduced ability to work,

poor concentration, symptoms of stress, sickness, and psychological, emotional and physical harm.

- (b) Harassment in general terms, is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of brothers, sisters, those living with us or guests. It may be related to age, gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, religious belief (including theology or church tradition), nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be a persistent or an isolated incident. Differences of gender or ethnic background for example, may mean that what is said or done is not understood or heard as it was intended. The important point is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable by the recipient.
- (c) A list of behaviours, though not exhaustive, which give a clear indication of actions that constitute bullying or harassment include:
- Removing areas of responsibility without discussion or notice;
  - Isolation or non-cooperation;
  - Persistently picking on someone in front of others;
  - Overloading with work without paying attention to any protest;
  - Verbal or written harassment – offensive jokes or language, gossip and slander;
  - Spreading malicious rumours to third parties; making false accusations;
  - Coercive or menacing behaviour;
  - Unwanted physical contact ranging from touching to serious assault;
  - Demanding confidentiality in order to silence individuals;
  - Sexual harassment: unsolicited or unwelcome sexual advances; requesting or pressurising a person to grant sexual favours by the use of threats or inducements; inappropriate sexual jokes or stories;
  - Racial harassment: any hostile or offensive act or expression by a person of one racial or ethnic origin against a person of another racial group

The most serious incidents might result in:

- Creating an unsafe working and/or living environment;
- Ignoring signs of overwork and extreme stress;

- Putting a person's health physically, emotionally or psychologically at risk by making them upset, frightened and/or ridiculed.
- (d) It is important to distinguish between bullying and behaviour that is reasonable in a Community context. There may be occasions where shortcomings in community living are being addressed and more incisive behaviour is interpreted as bullying simply because the recipient is unused to being challenged or asked to account for their actions.

## **7. Dealing with Bullying and Harassment**

- (a) If a brother, sister, a person living with the Community or a guest is experiencing bullying or harassment s/he should not suffer in silence or feel that they are to blame in some way for inviting bullying behaviour.
- (b) The target should keep a factual log of all incidents of bullying – dates, times, nature of incident, details of accusations, criticisms, emails and other correspondence. This may be needed in evidence should harassment, victimisation or bullying continue or subsequently recur.
- (c) The target should try to get witnesses to bullying incidents and avoid situations where they are alone with the bully. They may be able to find out if they are the only person being bullied or whether other people are also affected now, or have been in the past. By talking to others they might discover if others will offer support.
- (d) The target needs to consider what support and advice is available within the Community or outside, if necessary, including an Harassment Adviser of the Diocese of Chelmsford. They will advise on procedures for dealing with claims of bullying and harassment and help to clarify the impact of the behaviour being experienced so that the person can decide what s/he wants to do about it.

## **8. First Informal Steps**

- a) If either a professed, novice or postulant member considers that they are the target of bullying or harassment, s/he should speak to the Minister Provincial. If the Minister Provincial is the alleged perpetrator, then the Assistant Minister or a member of Chapter should be contacted.
- If either a person living with us or a guest considers that they are

the target of bullying or harassment, s/he should speak to a member of the Community, who should inform the Minister Provincial as soon as possible.

It is helpful to aim to speak to this person as soon as possible after the incident concerned. It is, however, recognised that complaints of this nature may relate to cumulative actions taking place over a period of time. The person who considers themselves a target may also contact one of the Harassment Advisers of Chelmsford Diocese.

- b) It is the duty of the Minister Provincial to investigate the allegations and, if there is sufficient evidence to justify a complaint, to speak to the person allegedly perpetrating the harassment. It is the Minister's responsibility to take speedy action to stop harassment and it is important that it is made clear to the perpetrator that such behaviour is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Silence or inaction can be seen as collusion and endorsement of such behaviour.
- c) By trying the informal route it may be possible to get the harasser or bully to stop their behaviour and so prevent the matter becoming public, or of escalating and making the victim's situation more difficult.
- d) Those investigating claims of harassment should consider all the circumstances before reaching a conclusion, and particularly the perception of the complainant, as harassment is often felt differently by different people. Having gathered all the evidence those investigating should ask themselves 'could what has taken place be reasonably considered to have caused offence?' In some cases it may be possible to rectify matters informally. Sometimes people are not aware that their behaviour is unwelcome and an informal discussion can lead to greater understanding and an agreement that the behaviour will cease. It may be that the individual will choose to do this themselves, or they may need support.
- e) Every effort should be made to use informal means, including considering alternative dispute resolution such as mediation or restorative justice to stop the offensive behaviour before formal procedures are invoked. But it should also be made clear that if the behaviour continues a formal complaint will be made. This may be enough to sort things out, particularly if the person(s) involved was/were unaware that their behaviour was causing offence.

- f) It is recommended that electronic communication such as email should only be used, if at all, for administrative purposes such as setting up meetings, and not for discussion of any allegations made.
- g) All investigators should balance the importance of a swift response to allegations of bullying and harassment, with the need to spend appropriate time investigating and reflecting on the issues.
- h) Ministers and Chapter members are strongly encouraged to draw on the advice and support offered by Harassment Advisers who have been trained for this work and appointed by the Provincial Bishop Protector.
- i) If a member, a person living with us or a guest complaining about bullying or harassment considers the process followed to have been inadequate, s/he should next approach a Harassment Adviser of the Diocese of Chelmsford.
- j) Any target approaching the Minister or Chapter member or Harassment Adviser may be accompanied by a friend or colleague.
- k) It is expected that those involved in the process will each seek to ensure that it is surrounded by prayer at every stage.

## **9. Formal Procedures**

If an informal approach does not achieve satisfactory results, or the nature of the incident(s) prompts the target to make a more formal approach, a formal complaint should be made in writing to the Minister Provincial, and dealt with by the *Procedure for Formal Complaints: Guidelines Number 5E*.

## **10. Confidentiality**

It is Community policy that these matters are to be treated with absolute confidentiality and that no action will be taken by anyone without the willing consent of the person who feels that s/he has been a target.

## **11. Review**

This *Policy* will be reviewed, together with all Safeguarding Policies, each year at the Joint Meeting of the Provincial Chapters.

*Pentecost 2018*