

## CHURCH@THEPEAK GRIEVANCE POLICY

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:31-32*

### 1. PREAMBLE

The purpose of this policy is to provide clarity around the principles and process for members of Church@thepeak to resolve grievances with one another when conflict arises. Its aim is to ensure that church members have a clear pathway to resolving their grievance in a biblical and loving way that leads to restored fellowship.

Resolving grievances and conflict is not to be avoided but should be seen as an opportunity to bring reconciliation, model the gospel of grace, be a light to our secular world, and bring transformation as we are shaped and matured as followers of Jesus.

### 2. STANDARD OF BEHAVIOUR & RESPONSES

Apart from the Bible's teaching outlined below, there are particular standards of behaviour of staff (paid and unpaid) and ministry leaders in our Diocese that are expected to be maintained. Such behaviour should be understood by reference to –

- 2.1 ***Faithfulness in Service as adopted by the Synod***, which is the code of personal behaviour for clergy and church workers in our Diocese<sup>1</sup>
- 2.2 ***Ministry Standards Ordinance 2017***, which is a diocesan process for dealing with allegations of misconduct by clergy and church workers that call the person's fitness for ministry into question.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.3 ***Safe Ministry Blueprints***, which are guidelines aimed at ensuring greater awareness, transparency, and accountability within our churches regarding a culture of safe ministry, with particular focus on ministry to children and youth<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.safeministry.org.au/faithfulness-in-service-code-of-conduct/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://tiny.cc/swihuz>

<sup>3</sup> <https://safeministry.org.au/blueprints/>

- 2.4 ***Church@thepeak Domestic Violence Policy***, which provides guidelines for responding to domestic abuse.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.5 ***Church@thepeak Social Contact Policy***, which provides guidelines for the appropriate use of social media, communication, and general social contact between church leaders and children and youth.

### 3. DEFINITION AND SCOPE

3.1 **Grievance** – a grievance is a matter of dispute or offence between two or more individuals or groups and may include but not limited to:

- (i) Disagreement about a matter of ministry practice
- (ii) Disagreement about theology or teaching
- (iii) Disagreement caused by a leader's decision
- (iv) Offence caused by a person's words or actions
- (v) Disagreement about a resolution of conflict between individuals or a group(s)

Some grievances may be minor (although still good to resolve), while others may be much more complex and serious (refer also to Note 2).

### 4. BIBLICAL TEACHING

God has much to say about how we are to relate to one another. In particular, he teaches us how we are to resolve grievances we have with others. The Bible teaches us that:

- 4.1 We are all sinful and fallen human beings, and therefore there will be times, even amongst the people of God, when we do things that hurt, offend, or cause distress to others. (Rom 3:23, Jam 3:2, 1 John 1:8). This ought to help us own our part of a conflict
- 4.2 As people made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28) all people are valuable and have dignity in the eyes of God, and therefore are worth making peace with. As one writer says:  
*"forgiveness flounders because I exclude my enemy from the community of humanity, and I exclude myself from the community of sinners"* (Miroslav Volf)
- 4.3 As God's people we are called on to:
- (i) love one another (John 13:34-35)
  - (ii) be patient with one another (Gal 5:22; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12)
  - (iii) bear with one another (Rom 15:1; Col 3:13)
  - (iv) look to the interest of others (Phil 2:4)
  - (v) be kind, gentle and compassionate with one another (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 4:32)

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.churchatthepeak.org.au/domestic-abuse.html>

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- (vi) do whatever we can to be at peace with one another (Rom 12:18)
- 4.4 God appoints pastors/elders/shepherds to lead his people and Christians are to honour those God has placed in positions of authority (Eph 4:11-13; 1 Tim 5:17-20; Heb 13:7, 17; 1 Thess 5:12-13)
- 4.5 Christian leaders are not beyond reproach, but rather are called to a higher standard and expected to set an example to the church (Mark 10:42-45; 1 Tim 3:2-3; 2 Tim 2:14-26; Titus 1:5-9; Jam 3:1-2; 1 Pet 5:1-4)
- 4.6 We should avoid triangulation<sup>5</sup>, gossip, slander, or grumbling about the person or grievance. We should guard ourselves against retribution by seeking to repay evil with evil or responding in malice. (Rom 1:29-32; 12:17-19; 2 Cor 12:20-21; Col 3:8; Jam 5:9).
- 4.7 We should seek to address our concerns directly with those involved, and where necessary with help from others in the church. (Matt 18:15-17)
- 4.8 Because God has reconciled himself to us, we should seek to be united in brotherly and sisterly love, and be reconciled to one another (Rom 5:10-11; Eph 4:1-6; Matt 5:23-24; Eph 2:14-16)
- 4.9 Remembering how much God has forgiven us, we are called to forgive our brothers and sisters when they repent, even if they have sinned against us more than once. (Matt 18:21-35; Luke 11:4, 17:3-4; Col 3:13)
- 4.10 When a brother or sister comes to us with a grievance, we should:
- (i) Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and not get defensive (Jam 1:19)
  - (ii) Remember it is loving when others point out our sin, because it is good for our growth and godliness (Prov 12:1, 15; 27:5, 17)
  - (iii) Be humble and open to rebuke or correction (Prov 25:12; 27:5; Eph 4:2; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 4:2; 1 Pet 3:8)
  - (iv) Repent of our sin and ask for forgiveness with those we have grieved (Luke 17:3-4)
- 4.11 When we go to a brother or sister who has grieved us, we should
- (i) Speak with gentleness and love (Prov 15:1; Eph 4:15; Gal 6:1; 2Tim 2:24)
  - (ii) Guard ourselves against self-righteousness or hypocrisy remembering to remove the plank from our own eye before trying to remove the speck from the eye of others (Luke 18:9-14; Matt 7:3-5)

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<sup>5</sup> Triangulation is where a person does not communicate directly with another person when they have a grievance, but instead speaks to a third person to relay communication to the second, thus forming a triangle.

### 5. PRINCIPLES

- 5.1 **Goal of reconciliation.** The goal of the processes outlined below is to help resolve grievances in a godly and loving way, so unity, peace, and fellowship is maintained amongst the people of God at Church@thepeak.
- 5.2 **Bible-based principles.** Where possible and appropriate, grievances should be dealt with in ways that are consistent with biblical principles outlined above.
- 5.3 **Raise issues early.** Where a grievance has occurred, it should be raised promptly. The longer a grievance is left unaddressed, the less likely it will be addressed at all, leading to bitterness and strained relationships. The person may want to seek advice from a wise Christian friend on a confidential basis first.
- 5.4 **Address issues in situ.** Grievances should first be dealt with in the same context in which they occurred, rather than being immediately escalated. For example, a grievance in a growth group ought to be addressed within the growth group, unless the nature of the allegation or the identity of the person about whom the allegation is made requires otherwise.
- 5.5 **Confidentiality.** This is an important aspect of grievance resolution. In general, it ought to be expected that matters remain confidential between those involved. However, there will be times when others need to be informed to assist with the reconciliation process, or matters need to be escalated.

In general confidentiality ought to be expected when:

- (i) A church member seeks advice from another about resolving a grievance. The 'wise friend' ought to keep the matter to themselves
- (ii) A church member (either staff or lay) is involved as a support person or to aid with the reconciliation process

Only those members of the staff team who are involved or required to know should be made aware of details. In addition, staff should not discuss details with their spouse.

There will be times when confidentiality cannot be maintained. This would include:

- (i) Where the matter needs to be referred to the Regional Bishop or Professional Standards Unit of the Diocese (PSU)
- (ii) Where the matter needs to be referred to the police or a government authority.
- (iii) Where the persons physical or mental health is of concern.

In the above situations, this would be done in conjunction with the senior minister. Should the grievance relate to the senior minister, this would be done in conjunction with one of the wardens.

- 5.6 **Cross checking claims.** A grievance should not be raised on the basis of hear-say or second-hand reports. The person ought to first clarify and/or seek confirmation of their concerns before initiating the conciliation process.
- 5.7 **Support persons.** At any meeting during the conciliation process, either or both parties may be accompanied by a support person, especially where there is a perceived or real power imbalance. The support person may speak with the permission of the person they are supporting, take notes, and clarify points when asked.
- 5.8 **Avoid generalisations (be specific).** In order to avoid miscommunication, any party bringing forward a grievance should do their best to articulate the exact conversation(s), event(s) and/or situation(s) that has caused their grievance. This allows to the other party to respond to the cause of the issue rather than the resulting feelings (disappointment, anger, sadness, etc.). Being specific also helps prevent creating complex narratives that are rooted in our feelings rather than the situation or events that actually occurred.

## 6. POWER DYNAMICS

It is important to recognise the reality of power dynamics that exist amongst a group of people, such as a church. These are rarely intended, but none-the-less exist because of a person's authority, position, role, influence, personality, gender, physical appearance, or physique relative to another.

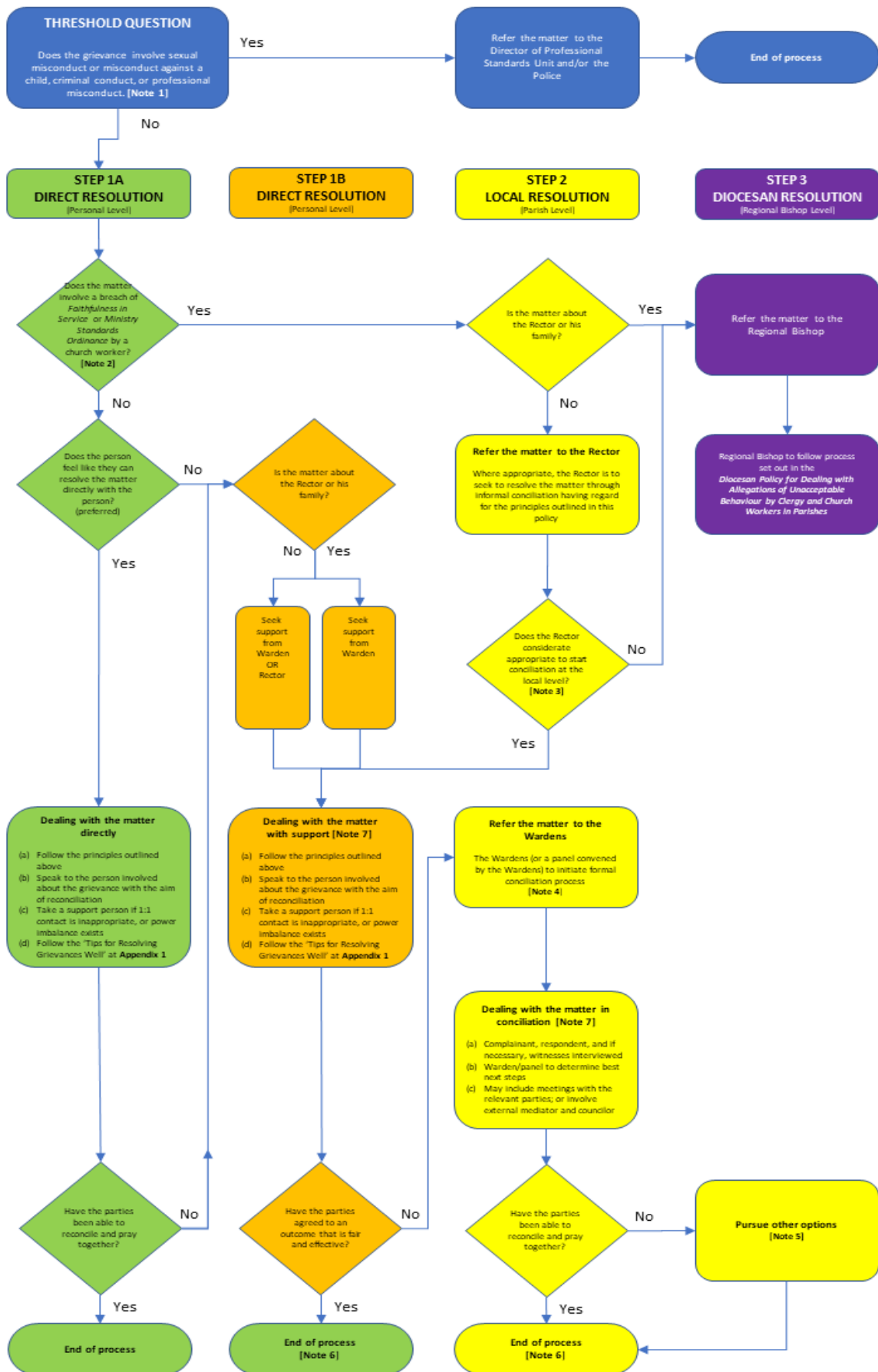
Examples of power imbalances between two people might include:

- (i) staff member vs church member;
- (ii) warden vs church member;
- (iii) youth leader vs youth;
- (iv) older male growth group leader vs younger female growth group member

It is important to be aware of the ways in which our power over others can impact the way our words or actions are perceived. It is also vital that we are aware how a power imbalance between two people can complicate the normal grievance and reconciliation process.

The grievance process outlined below aims to take in to account the reality of power dynamics and minimise power imbalances, to enable healthy reconciliation outcomes.

7. GRIEVANCE PROCESS



### **8. ACCOMPANYING NOTES TO GRIEVANCE PROCESS**

#### **Note 1. Threshold Question**

The complainant, Rector or Regional Bishop (as applicable) must promptly notify the Director of Professional Standards if they consider that the allegation involves:

- (a) sexual misconduct or misconduct involving children; or
- (b) criminal conduct, including sexual abuse or child abuse, and allegations of professional misconduct.

Unless the Director indicates that the matter may be dealt with under this policy, any further action in relation to the matter under this policy must cease.

Where the matter pertains to domestic abuse by church member, refer to the *Church@thepeak Domestic Violence Policy* for guidelines, responses, and processes.

#### **Note 2. Grievances Against Clergy or Church Workers**

Clergy are those ordained as presbyters and deacons. A church worker is a lay person (paid or unpaid) who holds a position of authority in the church including licensed preachers, parish councillors, wardens, or Synod rep.<sup>6</sup>

Grievances to be considered in this step of the process are significant matters of misconduct and include issues such as:

- (a) Inappropriate pastoral relationships and interactions
- (b) Bullying and/or abuse
- (c) Personal behaviour
- (d) Financial integrity<sup>6</sup>

Misconduct does not include:

- (e) refusing to appoint, correcting, disciplining, counselling, admonishing, transferring, demoting, suspending, retrenching or dismissing a person if done
  - (i) in good faith;
  - (ii) reasonably; and
  - (iii) in the normal and lawful discharge of the duties and functions;
- (f) respectfully disagreeing with or criticising someone's beliefs or opinions or actions<sup>7</sup>

Minor matters of disagreement or conflict ought to be resolved directly between the two parties under Step 1A.

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<sup>6</sup> Refer Faithfulness in Service for full definition

<sup>7</sup> Refer to Ministry Standards Ordinance for fuller definition

### **Note 3. Local Resolution: Conciliation by the Rector**

The Rector should not start or otherwise undertake conciliation of any matter at the local parish level if, having made due enquiry, the Rector considers:

- (a) it is not appropriate to deal with the allegation this way, for example because of its seriousness, or because of the relationship between the parties, or due to having a conflict of interest;
- (b) there is no reasonable prospect of resolving the matter this way, for example because one party refuses to participate in a conciliation: or
- (c) the allegation is trivial, malicious or demonstrably false.

If the Rector does not start (or otherwise ends) a conciliation process at the parish level, he should provide written reasons to the complainant and inform the complainant that they may refer the matter to the Regional Bishop. The Rector should also store any records relating to the matter in a confidential file.

### **Note 4. Local Resolution: Conciliation with Wardens or Panel**

The Wardens or a panel appointed by the Wardens will assist in the conciliation between those persons unable to resolve their conflict. To assist with this, the following process may be used:

- (a) Complainant to be interviewed and a statement taken
- (b) Witnesses (where necessary) to be interviewed and statements taken
- (c) Respondent to be interviewed and a statement taken
- (d) Other information as relevant to be considered

Once the fact-finding exercise has been completed, the Wardens / panel will determine the best next steps. This may include but not be limited to;

- (a) Between one and three meetings between both parties as agreed
- (b) Potential mediation with either a senior trusted member of the church family (agreeable to all parties) or mediation involving outside professional mediators or councilors if deemed necessary

### **Note 5. Pursue Other Options**

While it is always desirable that fellow brothers and sisters are reconciled and fellowship is restored, there may be times that this is not immediately possible. We see this in the NT where Paul has disagreement with Barnabas and Mark, and they part company (Acts 15:36-41). However, sometime later they were able to reconcile and fellowship together in ministry (Gal 2:1; Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; Phm 24).

Therefore, where reconciliation is not immediately possible, various options may be considered, including but not limited to:

- (a) Changing growth groups
- (b) Changing ministry teams
- (c) Changing congregations



- (d) Temporarily ceasing to attend church
- (e) Changing church

As with Paul, Barnabas, and Mark, such changes may be helpful for the short term, but ought to be done with the view of 'keeping the door open' for future restoration and reconciliation. This may or may not include continuing to fellowship together at Church@thepeak.

### **Note 6. Seek Feedback**

Where a grievance utilises the more formal steps of the process, (Step 1B or Step 2), the senior minister, warden, or appointed mediator should seek feedback from the parties involved as to the effectiveness of the policy and its processes. This feedback (on the process and policy, not the details of the grievance) ought to be considered by Parish Council in order to determine any amendments to the policy.

### **Note 7. Documentation**

Where a grievance utilises the more formal steps of the process, (Step 1B or Step 2), it is recommended appropriate notes are taken, summarising the key points and actions.

## **9. POLICY REVIEW**

The Grievance Policy will be reviewed and revised by Parish Council as often as needed, with a formal and detailed review every three years.

Parish Council must approve all reviews, amendments, and changes to this policy.

Approved – November 2021.

Last Reviewed –

## APPENDIX 1 – TIPS FOR RESOLVING GRIEVANCES WELL<sup>8</sup>

When seeking to resolve a grievance with another person, consider the following framework help you be restored and reconciled together.

### 1. Glorify God

When the Apostle Paul says in 1 Cor 10:31 – "*whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*", he was not talking about one hour in church on Sunday. He wants us to bring praise and honour to God in our day-to-day life. This applies also to the way we resolve grievances with others.



### 2. Get the log out of your own eye

One of the most challenging aspects of peacemaking is recognising the way we may have contributed to the conflict. Jesus says in Matt 7:5 "*You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*"



There are generally two kinds of 'logs' you need to look for when dealing with conflict. First, you need to ask whether you have had a critical, negative, or overly sensitive attitude that is lead to unnecessary conflict. The second kind of 'log' you must deal with it is actual sinful words and actions. Because we are often blind to our own sins, you may need to have an honest friend or advisor who can help you take an objective look at yourself and face up to our contribution to a conflict.

### 3. Graciously apologise

When you identify ways that you have wronged another person, it is important to admit you're wrong honestly and thoroughly. One way to do this is to use the '*Seven A's of Confession*':

- (i) **Address** everyone involved (Prov 28:13; 1 John 1:8-9)
- (ii) **Avoid** "if", "but", and "maybe". Don't make excuses as it undermines the authenticity of the apology (Luke 15:11-24)
- (iii) **Admit** specifically, both attitudes and actions
- (iv) **Apologise**, express sorrow for the way you are affected someone
- (v) **Accept** the consequences (Luke 19:1-9)
- (vi) **Alter** your behaviour, commit to changing harmful habits (Eph 4:22-32)
- (vii) **Ask** for forgiveness

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from [Peacemaking Principles](#), developed by PeaceWise

## 4. Gently Restore

Before rushing to confront someone over a grievance, remember that it is appropriate to overlook minor offences (see Prov 19:11, Col 3:13).

As a general rule, an offence should be overlooked if you can answer “No” to all of the following questions:

- (a) Is the offence seriously disordering God?
- (b) Has it damaged a relationship?
- (c) Is it hurting other people?
- (d) Is it hurting the offender himself or herself?

If you answer “Yes” to any of these questions an offence is too serious to overlook, in which case you ought to go and talk with the person privately and lovingly about the situation (refer Step 1A in flowchart). As you do so, remember to:

- (a) Pray for humility and wisdom
- (b) Plan your words carefully, think of how you would want to be confronted, and be gentle (Gal 6:1)
- (c) Choose the right time and place talk in person (face to face is always best)
- (d) Whenever possible assume the best about the person until you have the facts to prove otherwise (Prov 11:27)
- (e) Listen carefully (Prov 18.13)
- (f) Speak only to build others up (Eph 4:29)

If an initial confrontation does not resolve a conflict do not give up. Review what was said and done and look for ways to make a better approach during a follow-up conversation. It may also be wise to ask a spiritually mature friend for advice on how to approach the other person more effectively.

If repeated careful attempts at private discussions are not fruitful, you should ask one or two other people to meet with you and the person to help you resolve the grievance (refer Step 1A in flowchart).

## 5. Go and be reconciled

Even though Christians have experienced the greatest forgiveness in the world, we often fail to show that forgiveness to others. To cover up, we often use statements along the lines of, “*I forgive them, I just don't want to have anything to do with them again*”. Praise God, that's not what he does when he forgives us! (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13)



One way to imitate God's forgiveness is to make four specific promises when you forgive someone.

- (a) I will not continue to dwell on this incident
- (b) I will not bring this incident up and use it against you
- (c) I will not talk to others about this incident
- (d) I will not allow this incident the stand between us or hinder our personal relationship

Remember that forgiveness is a spiritual process that you cannot fully accomplish on your own. Therefore, as you seek to forgive others, continually ask God for grace to enable you to imitate his wonderful forgiveness toward you.

### **6. Be prepared for difficulties**

Whenever you are responding to conflict, you need to realise that other people may harden their hearts and refused to be reconciled to you. There are two ways you can prepare for this possibility.

First, remember that God does not measure success in terms of results, but in terms of faithful obedience. He knows that you cannot force other people to act in certain way. All you can do is be obedient to Romans 12:18 – *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."*

Second, resolve not to harden your heart towards the other person. If a dispute is not easily resolved, you may be tempted to say, "Well I tried, but they turned their back on trying to resolve things, so to hell with them!". Guard your heart against bitterness, anger, malice, slander, or rage when the other person doesn't respond well. Ask God to help you be gracious, compassionate, gentle, kind, and self-controlled (Gal 5:22-23), so that in all things, you might glorify him (1 Cor 10:31).

## **APPENDIX 2 – STEPS TO HAVING A HARD CONVERSATION**

Deciding to have a difficult conversation with someone about even the smallest of disagreements can sometimes be daunting. If you don't know where to start but you would like to address an issue, consider following these steps before having your conversation.

### **1. Reflect on what you're feeling**

Take the time to process what it is that's causing you to feel grieved. Consider praying through your thoughts out loud, writing a list of what you're feeling and why. Alternatively, you could talk to a trusted friend/councilor. The goal here is to be able to distill what you are feeling and why down to 2-3 sentences. Once you can do that, move on to the next step.

### **2. Check that you still want to have a conversation**

Sometimes just processing your thoughts on your own is enough to resolve the issue you're having – you might have a great epiphany about the whole situation while you're praying!

However, if you don't feel that your issue is resolved and you do have a clear understanding of what is causing you grief, run through this quick checklist about what you'd like to say when you address the other person:

- (a) Is what I'm about to say true?
- (b) Is it helpful (for me and for them) to raise this issue?
- (c) Is it kind?

If the answer to any of these is "no" then reflect on whether or not what you're planning on saying is the right thing to say.

### **3. Prepare what you are going to say**

It may feel silly but writing down and practicing what you are going to say can help you order your thoughts and prepare you for how you will feel when you have the conversation. The calmer you can be when having this conversation with the person the more likely you are to have a productive conversation with them.

Nobody likes to listen to a 1-on-1 monologue (especially when it's about them!) so try to condense the most important parts of your concerns down to a 30 second summary. There'll be plenty of time to go into more details during the conversation if required, but you're unlikely to get more than this much time before they start to respond anyway, so make sure the most important stuff is said upfront.

Here's a skeleton for what to say in your first 30 seconds

- (i) State the purpose of your conversation  
"I'd like to give you some feedback on the way you spoke to me yesterday"
- (ii) Give a few examples (spare the details at this point)
- (iii) Explain the effect or why you are bringing this up  
"I mention this because hearing you say that made me feel hurt"
- (iv) Explain what is at stake  
"If this continues, I'm not sure I can be on the same team as you"
- (v) Admit your contribution to the problem  
"I understand the way I acted may have put you on edge at the time"
- (vi) Articulate your intention to resolve the issue  
One helpful way of doing this is to use "DO" and "DO NOT" statements. This can help prevent the other person feeling attacked.  
"I *do* want us to be able to continue serving together and I *don't* want this to become an ongoing issue for us"
- (vii) Ask for their thoughts  
"I recognize that I'm viewing this through my own lens though and I want to hear what your thoughts are on what happened"

#### **4. Listen**

Once you've had your turn to speak, listen to what the other person has to say. A healthy conversation involves both parties speaking and listening equally with mutual respect.

When the person you're speaking with makes a point, 'reflect' back to them what they said in your own words before addressing their comment so that they know you've heard them. No-one wants to feel like they're in a one-sided conversation.

#### **5. Continue to manage your communication during the conversation**

As your conversation continues there may be moments of heightened emotion and stress. It's helpful to remember that we communicate with more than just the words we say, so try to keep track of your body language, facial expressions and the tone you're using to convey your openness to a resolution. Hunched shoulder, pointed fingers, and a sarcastic tone can make the other person feel threatened and derail your conversation. Open body language and affirmation when you agree with them can help move the conversation forwards.

#### **6. Pray together**

When both of you feel that your conversation has finished, pray for each other and remember that together we serve a God of restoration and of love.