



Complaints Review Policy

SLE Church seeks to be a church with a leadership culture that is healthy, humble and holy. Healthy in living out good works consistent with sound teaching (Tit 2:1); humble in leading under the rule of Christ the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:1-9); and holy in showing sincere brotherly love for each other (1 Pet 1:22-23).

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide a fair, efficient and effective process for addressing complaints related to the conduct of leaders at SLE Church.

This Policy is to be read alongside the Code of Conduct (**Code**) which sets the standard of behaviour to which our leaders can be held accountable. Any complaint made under this Policy must specify the section(s) of the Code which the complainant alleges has been breached.

This Policy does not seek to cover interpersonal conflicts between members and/or leaders or safe ministry concerns which are addressed by our Conflict Management Procedure and Safe Ministry Policy respectively.

Where a complainant alleges any criminal conduct, he or she is encouraged to report the matter to the relevant law enforcement agency. SLE Church will at all times comply with our mandatory reporting obligations under law.

2. Scope

This Policy applies to all staff members and any leaders of ministries, including volunteers who serve in any leadership position (hereby defined as “leaders”) of SLE Church. A complaint can be made under this Policy by anyone connected or not connected with SLE Church including any members, visitors, or the general public. Complaints made under this Policy may not be anonymous and must be personally signed by the complainant.

3. Principles

The following principles will guide the manner in which all complaints are handled under this Policy:

- a. **Sensitivity and Care:** all parties should be treated with loving respect and dignity. An appropriate level of pastoral care should be offered to both the complainant and the respondent during and after the resolution of a complaint.
- b. **Promptness and Timeliness:** as far as reasonably practicable, a complaint should be received, considered, investigated (if necessary), and decided upon promptly and without undue delay.

- c. **Confidentiality and Discretion:** the facts and details of a complaint should be kept strictly confidential to the greatest extent possible. All parties should limit disclosure to those persons directly involved in resolving it or who are providing pastoral care.
- d. **Impartiality and Fairness:** all complaints should be handled in an impartial manner, all parties should be fairly heard, and all persons involved in resolving the complaint should be free of any actual or apprehended bias.
- e. **Free of Repercussions:** no person should be subject to victimisation or adverse treatment for making a complaint or participating in an investigation in good faith under this Policy.

4. Review Committee

The Review Committee (**Committee**) is responsible for receiving, considering, and if necessary, investigating a complaint made under this Policy. The Committee will be established only to consider the cases assigned to it by the Church Council, thereafter, it is dissolved upon completion of its duties.

The Committee will comprise at least three persons who are appointed by the Church Council. Where a position on the Committee becomes vacant during the course of its duties, the Council may appoint another suitable person to fill that position. The Committee is to comprise at least:

- a. an elder who is also the Chair of the Committee (**Chair**);
- b. a deacon or deaconess;¹ and
- c. a respected member of SLE Church.²

In appointing members of the Committee, the Council should take reasonable steps to check that Committee members should not be directly or indirectly involved in the complaint, or have a real or perceived conflict of interest in relation to the complaint. The Council should also ensure that there is a mix of both male and female members in the Committee to allow differences in opinions to be considered.

In the event the complaint is against the Church Council, the Review Committee could comprise members from other suitable churches within FIEC Australia.

5. Complaints Procedure

If you are concerned about the conduct of a leader covered by the Code, you should follow the steps set out below and in Appendix A of this Policy.

5.1 *Prayerfully reflect on the matter*

Take time to prayerfully bring this concern before the Lord. It is a very serious matter to bring an accusation against a church leader, especially if it is not supported by evidence (1 Tim 5:17-21).

Prayerfully ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I aware of all the facts?

¹ This should be a woman in a leadership position within the church formally recognised by the church as a deaconess. It can also include women serving as a grow group leader, a kids church leader, or a ministry team leader who are not formally elected by the church..

² This should be a man or woman who is an ordinary member of the church whose integrity is trusted by the majority of the congregation and who can be seen to bring impartiality from outside the leadership structure.

- Is this an interpersonal conflict that should be resolved through the Conflict Management Procedure
- Is there clear evidence or witnesses to support the alleged misconduct?
- Can I demonstrate that the leader has breached a section of the Code?

5.2 Submit a formal complaint to an elder of SLE Church

a. Step 1: Submitting a formal complaint

If, after prayerful reflection, you decide to make a formal complaint, you should submit it to an elder of SLE Church.

Your complaint must be in the form prescribed by Appendix B. Specifically, it must be in writing, personally signed, and include the following information:

- your name and contact details, and the nature of your relationship with SLE Church and the respondent;
- the name of the person you are alleging has breached the Code;
- the specific section(s) of the Code that you allege the respondent has breached;
- details of the alleged breach including when, where, and how this breach is alleged to have occurred; and
- any evidence of or witnesses to the alleged breach.

b. Step 2: Church Council convenes the Review Committee

Upon receiving the complaint, the elder is to inform the Church Council, and the Church Council is to convene the Committee for initial consideration of the matter. The Committee is to consider whether on initial examination, there is sufficient evidence for the complaint to be both:

- a matter of substance: it describes specific conduct, an incident, or a pattern of conduct that can be verified; and
- a matter of consequence: it describes specific conduct, an incident, or a pattern of conduct that, if substantiated, would constitute a breach of the Code and which would have consequences for the respondent and for SLE Church.

If on initial examination, the Committee determines that the complaint is not a matter of both substance and consequence, it is to dismiss the complaint and advise the complainant and the Church Council of its decision.

However, if the Committee, on initial examination, determines that the complaint is a matter of both substance and consequence, it must refer the complaint to the Church Council and provide it with a preliminary report of its initial determination.

The Committee will seek to make its initial determination within four weeks of receiving the complaint, and will inform the complainant and Church Council of its determination as soon as reasonably practicable.

c. Step 3: Investigating a formal complaint

If the Committee determines that the complaint is, on initial examination, a matter of both substance and consequence and refers it to the Church Council, the Church Council will consider the Committee's preliminary report and either:

- i. dismiss the complaint as lacking in actual substance or consequence; or
- ii. uphold the initial determination and direct the Committee to conduct a formal investigation into the complaint.

As part of its investigation, the Committee may interview the complainant, the respondent, and any appropriate witnesses. It may also, with the approval of the Church Council, engage an external party to assist with the investigation.

Following its investigation into the complaint, the Committee is to provide a report including any initial findings of fact and recommendations to the Church Council. The report must make a preliminary determination whether the alleged conduct contained in the complaint is in whole or in part:

- Sustained: the evidence supports a finding that the alleged conduct did in fact occur.
- Not sustained: there is not sufficient evidence to establish whether the alleged conduct did or did not occur.
- False: the evidence supports a finding that the alleged conduct did not occur.
- Vexatious: the evidence supports a finding that the complaint was made without reasonable grounds or was designed to harass, annoy, or cause delay or detriment to the respondent.
- Misconceived: the evidence supports a finding that the complaint was made in good faith but was based on a misunderstanding of the facts.

The Committee must seek to provide this report to the Church Council within four weeks of commencing the investigation. If additional time is required, the Committee is to seek the approval of the Church Council for an extension of time.

d. Step 4: Determining a formal complaint

Upon receiving the report from the Committee, the Church Council is to make a final determination in relation to the complaint.

Where the respondent is found to have breached the Code, the Church Council may take appropriate disciplinary action against the respondent including but not limited to:

- i. In the case of any leaders who are volunteers: a warning, suspension or removal from office.
- ii. In the case of any leaders who are paid staff of SLE Church: a warning, suspension or removal from office, or disciplinary action against an employee permitted under contract or by law.

The Church Council is to advise the complainant and the respondent of the final determination including any action taken by the Church Council in relation to the complaint. It will seek to do so within four weeks of receiving the Committee's report.

5.3 Accept the outcome or if appropriate, appeal to an external body

Whatever the outcome, you should acknowledge that your complaint has been taken seriously and accept the final determination of the Church Council.

If, however, you are unable to accept the outcome, you may seek recourse under civil law or raise a relevant concern with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission. If your complaint is in relation to the conduct of the Senior Pastor and you are unable to accept the outcome, you may also seek recourse under the Complaints Policy of FIEC Australia. This can be found at fiec.org.au/complaints.

6. Own Motion Investigations

Where the Senior Pastor, or in the case of the Senior Pastor, one of the elders, receives information and forms a reasonable belief that a leader of SLE Church has acted in breach of the Code, he may refer the matter to the Church Council to convene the Committee, and then for the Committee to make an initial consideration and if appropriate, investigation and then determination by the Church Council, according to the process set out from section 5.2b to 5.3 of this Policy.

7. Vexatious Complaints

This Policy should not be used by any person to make vexatious complaints. Vexatious complaints include complaints that are an abuse of the process set out in this Policy, submitted or continued without reasonable grounds, or designed to harass, annoy, or cause delay or detriment.

If the Committee determines that a complaint submitted by a member or attendee of SLE Church is vexatious, it may recommend that the Church Council exercise church discipline against the member or attendee.

SLE Church is under no obligation to consider or investigate a complaint any further once all avenues under this Policy have been exhausted.

8. Record Keeping

All records including the complaint, investigation reports, interviews, correspondence and file notes will be securely kept by SLE Church during and after the resolution of the matter.

All personal information will be handled in accordance with the Australian Privacy Principles and where appropriate will be de-identified and destroyed after a data retention period of 2 years from the formal conclusion of the matter.

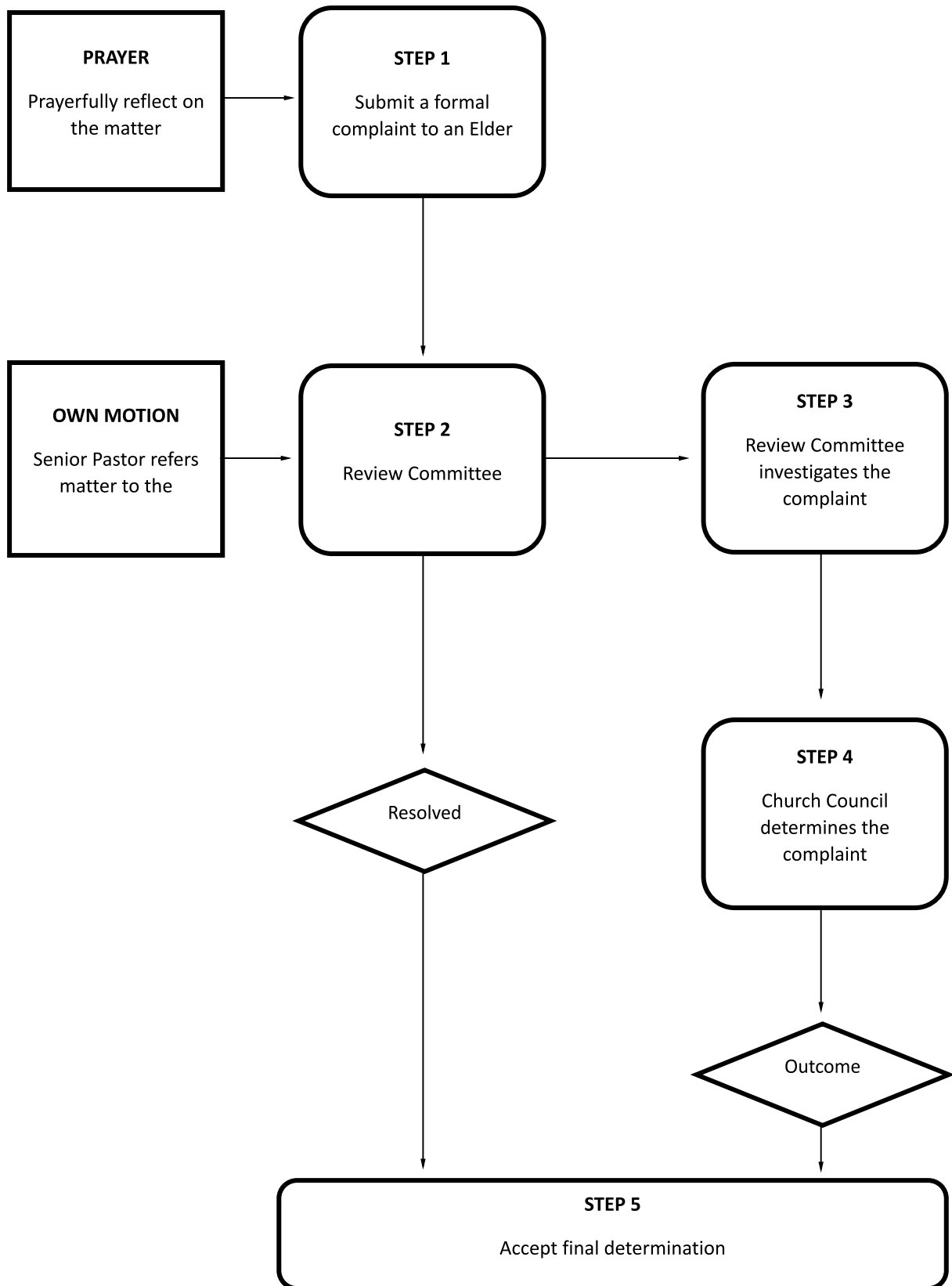
9. Review

The Church Council will monitor the effectiveness of this Policy and make any appropriate amendments from time to time.

Last Reviewed: 25 September 2024

Version	Clauses	Approval	Approval Date	Description
1.0	All	SLE Church Council	September 2024	New document

Appendix A: Formal Complaint Process



Appendix B: Formal Complaint Form

YOUR DETAILS	
Name:	
Address:	Phone:
	Email:

YOUR COMPLAINT		
Name of the person who is the subject of your complaint:		
Category (please tick): <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Pastor <input type="checkbox"/> Pastor <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> [INSERT: e.g. Elder, Deacon, Grow Group Leader]	Your relationship with the respondent:	
Specific section of the Code alleged to have been breached:		
Details of your complaint: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write what happened, when (dates) and where • Provide the contact details or statements of any witnesses • Explain what impact this conduct had or you fear may have on you or others • Provide any additional information that you believe might be helpful 		
Have you tried to resolve this issue informally?	YES	NO

If not, please explain why you have not tried to resolve this issue informally:

If you did try to resolve this issue informally, what happened?

State whom you dealt with, when and where, what information you provided to them, and what you felt was unsatisfactory about the outcome.

What actions do you want taken in response to this complaint and what type of resolution are you seeking?

Signature:

Date:

SLE Church will handle your information in accordance with the Australian Privacy Principles and where appropriate will de-identify and destroy any personal information .