



Bullying and Harassment Policy¹

1. Introduction

Within our dispersed 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: professed, novices, and postulants. Our 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 few of the letters of the New Testament are written to the audience of dysfunctional church communities which are both damaged and damaging to the human relationships within these.

Sadly, illegitimate use of power, bullying and harassment sometimes occurs within a community, as in other areas of human society. In a community called to witness the eternal dignity of every human being, we have a unique responsibility to challenge such behaviour and create communities where each person has the sustained 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 a dispersed community under vows, we have committed ourselves to the spirit of that section of our Rule in *The Principles of the Third Order, Day 26:* "We have a special love and affection for members of the Third Order, praying for each other individually and seeking to grow in that love. We are on our guard against anything that might injure that love, and we

¹ Adapted from *Getting on Together*, Diocese of Chelmsford

seek reconciliation with those from whom we are estranged”.

Bullying and harassment, whether intentional or not, can greatly undermine the effectiveness of individuals and the groups to 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 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 Order is required by God to foster relationships of the utmost integrity truthfulness and trustworthiness. Abuse, harassment, and bullying – however rare – will not be tolerated. All complaints of abuse, harassment and bullying will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

3. Standards of Behaviour

(a) Those with pastoral responsibilities for 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, including those on leave of absence, 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, including those on Leave of Absence, 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 reviewing

this Policy for the Province as a whole. This policy applies to all brothers and sisters living in the Province, including those on Leave of Absence, expected to take personal responsibility for up-holding the principles of equal opportunity, to comply with the provisions of the policy and help others to achieve its aims. Any behaviour, involving the misuse of power, which an individual or group knows of, or ought to reasonably know of, could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group, and should be regarded as unacceptable.

- (a) 'Unacceptable behaviour' changes its label to 'bullying' or 'harassing behaviour' when it causes mental or physical harm or distress to the target(s), normally but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period. Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse, or negate the impact on the target(s), or the distress caused.
- (b) If it is not challenged it is likely to escalate and lead to significant difficulties for all concerned.
- (c) 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.
- (d) 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 also defined as bullying.
- (e) It is safest to take the view that if a brother or sister, including anyone on Leave of absence, is being bullied or harassed, then they have a grievance, which should be dealt with regardless of whether or not their complaint accords with the above definition.

- (f) 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. Therefore full support should be offered.

5. 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 suffering. 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, including those on leave of absence, It may be related to age, gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, religious belief (including theology or church tradition), nationality or any personal or physical characteristic of the individual. This unwanted conduct may appear to either be persistent or as an isolated incident. It is here important to note that while comments or actions made, might not be intended as being harmful by an individual, they might still be perceived as such by the recipient(s) or others.
- (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 to silence individuals.
- Sexual harassment: unsolicited or unwelcome sexual advances; requesting or pressurising a person to grant sexual favours using 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 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 group context. There may be occasions where shortcomings in the community 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.

6. Dealing with Bullying and Harassment

- (a) If a brother, sister, including anyone on leave of absence, 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 presently or have been in the past.

- (d) The target needs to consider what support and advice is available within the order or outside, if necessary, including a Harassment /Safeguarding Adviser/Provincial Safeguarding Officer of the relevant Diocese. 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.

7. First Informal Steps

- a) If either a professed, novice or postulant member including anyone on leave of absence, considers that they are the target of bullying or harassment, s/he should speak to the Provincial Safeguarding Officer (PSO), who will inform the Minister Provincial.
- b) 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.
- c) It is the duty of the Minister Provincial to delegate the investigation of the allegations to the appropriate person/s 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 ensure immediate 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 will here be considered as collusion with the person allegedly perpetrating the harassment and endorsement of their behaviour.
- d) 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.
- e) 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 while doing so.

- f) 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.
- g) 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.
- h) 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.
- i) 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.
- j) If a member, including anyone on Leave of Absence, 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. This may change as a new Bishop Protector is appointed- please seek clarification from the PSO.
- k) Any target approaching the PSO, Minister or Chapter member, or Harassment Adviser may be accompanied by a friend or colleague.

- l) It is expected that those involved in the process will each seek to ensure that it is surrounded by prayer at every stage.

8. 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 must be made in writing to the Minister Provincial, and dealt with by the *Procedure for Formal Complaints*:

Confidentiality

It is 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. (Unless there is a clear safeguarding or criminal issue that needs immediate action to prevent harm, therefore this must be explained to the Target at the outset).

9. Review

This *Policy* will be reviewed, together with all Safeguarding Policies, 3 yearly. (2023).

With thanks to; The first order SSF.

Mandy Hughes PSO TSSF European Province

October 2020.