



Complaints Against Clergy

I Have a Complaint About a Member of the Clergy - What Can I Do?

We expect a high standard of integrity and service from all our clergy. Mostly that standard is met, but occasionally individual clergy fall short of what is expected of them. Unfortunately, there are times when, in this context, someone might feel that they have not been treated in an appropriate way, or that a clergy person has done something which they should not have done, or has not done something which they should have done. When this happens, the options below are available.

What the Outcome Might Be

Complaints understandably can arise for all kinds of reasons; it can be helpful to consider what a satisfactory outcome might be. This is partly about clarifying the most helpful process to follow and also about managing expectations.

The Status of Clergy

When considering expectations it is important to understand the relatively unusual status of clergy. Clergy are office holders, not employees, who hold office under Common Tenure.^[1] This is part of a framework of terms of service that provides clergy, who are not subject to employment law, certain legal rights and obligations. Under Common Tenure the great majority of office holders may remain in a particular post until they resign or retire. All clergy are subject to the same standards as outlined in the Clergy discipline measure and Guidelines for the Conduct of Clergy.^[2]

Matters Relating to the Pastoral Breakdown or a Specific Matter Relating to the Clergy person

Another often useful discernment is whether the concern/complaint is a specific complaint on a specific matter relating to the clergy person or something wider. In the former case one of the options below is probably the right process to follow; in the latter case what is needed may involve the Archdeacon, Suffragan Bishop or others to work with the clergy person and PCC to help address the underlying issues.

Processes for a Complaint

The Church of England lays out the following guidance for a complaint:

Informal Stage

When an incident occurs, you are encouraged to share your disappointment with the clergy person concerned and do your best to resolve the problem together. If, however, the situation remains unresolved, please contact your Archdeacon or Area Dean.

^[1] [Common Tenure FAQs | The Church of England](#)

^[2] [Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy | The Church of England](#)

The Archdeacon or Area Dean will speak to the member of clergy so that the matter can be dealt with and sorted out informally. This can be done in a variety of ways, including the possibility of having a facilitated discussion or mediation.

At the end of this process, the Archdeacon or Area Dean will ask you whether your complaint has been resolved.

The informal route prevents the matter from becoming public or escalating and making the situation more difficult.

Formal Stage

If the complaint has not been resolved through the informal stage, then the complainant may wish to make a formal complaint in line with the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM). Please note that this stage will begin a legal process which this policy therefore signposts and does not determine. All admitted to Holy Orders in the Church of England are covered by the Measure, whether or not in active ministry.

Further information about the Clergy Discipline Measure can be found on the Church of England's website.^[1]

This contains information about the CDM process, including:

- grounds for a formal complaint under CDM
- who can complain
- how to make a formal complaint using forms and information available
- the time limits for the procedure
- what happens next

At whatever level you are concerned, please be assured that your complaint will be taken seriously.

^[1] [Clergy Discipline | The Church of England](#)