Complaints Policy for Wellington South Baptist Church

1. Every person, including every child and young person, is entitled to be safe from harassment and abuse, especially when practicing their faith and participating in the life of our church.

2. This policy sets out guidelines for how the Wellington South Baptist Church will respond to and treat complaints. Each complaint will involve its own set of facts, and our goal is to respond sensitively and compassionately to all involved in a complaint, whilst following robust processes.

Purpose

3. The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear and simple process for church members, attendees, volunteers, staff, and visitors to raise concerns or complaints about any aspect of the ministry, conduct, or operations of Wellington South Baptist Church.

Scope

4. This policy applies to complaints about:
    a. the behaviour or decisions of leaders, staff, or volunteers;
    b. the way a ministry, programme, or service is carried out;
    c. breaches of church policies, codes of conduct, or safeguarding expectations; and
    d. health and safety concerns within church activities.

5. This policy does not replace legal or statutory reporting obligations (for example, reporting abuse or criminal behaviour to the New Zealand Police or relevant authorities).

Guiding principles

6. Our approach to complaints is guided by the following principles:
    a. Respect – All people will be treated with dignity and courtesy.
    b. Safety – We prioritise the physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual safety of all, particularly children and vulnerable adults.
    c. Fairness – Complaints will be considered impartially and without retaliation.
    d. Confidentiality – Information will be shared only with those who need to know in order to respond.
    e. Timeliness – Complaints will be acknowledged and addressed as promptly as is reasonably practical.
    f. Restoration – Wherever possible, we seek reconciliation, healing, and restoration.

Making a complaint

7. You can raise a complaint against anyone in leadership and/or authority positions within our church's ministries with your choice of the following by emailing:

WSBC Leadership Team

Elders

Heather Miller – heathermiller@wsbc.org.nz
Peter Noble – peternoble@wsbc.org.nz
Thea Jacobs – theajacobs@wsbc.org.nz

Pastor

Steven Goulstone – steven@wsbc.org.nz

If you feel uncomfortable with contacting the WSBC Leadership Team, you are welcome to contact your choice of the following:

Lower North Island Baptist Association Regional Leader

Mike Warring – mike.warring@baptist.org.nz

Alternatively, you are welcome to contact the Baptist Union of New Zealand directly at complaints@baptist.org.nz.

Response to a complaint

8. When we receive a complaint, the well-being, protection and safety of the complainant and victim(s) is our first consideration.

9. If as a result of a complaint being made it is believed that the safety of others may be at risk, the wishes of the complainant or victim will be weighed against other factors in deciding upon any course of action.

10. If we assess that there is risk of immediate harm or danger to anyone, we will contact Emergency Services by calling 111.

11. The complainant's view will be taken into account on whether a formal or informal process is followed in relation to the complaint.

12. We will notify the National Support Centre (complaints@baptist.org.nz) and our Regional Leader about the complaint as soon as possible to seek their advice around process and practical next steps.

13. Where a complaint could amount to an allegation of serious misconduct against a pastoral staff member under the Baptist Union of New Zealand Serious Misconduct Process ("SM Process"), we will discuss with the complainant referring the matter to the National Support Centre Complaints Team, in line with that process.

14. If the matter is referred to the National Support Centre under that SM Process at any point, and the SM Process is initiated, that process will be followed rather than continuing a process under this policy.

15. We will appoint an appropriate point person(s) to manage the complaint (including referring it to the National Support Centre Complaints Team, if appropriate).

16. If criminal offending is alleged, we will advise the Police, or assist the complainant or victim to do this, as appropriate.

Guidelines in relation to complainants

17. Each person who makes a complaint will have their own individual set of circumstances, and experience, requiring different responses.

18. Nevertheless, we will endeavor to:
    a. treat each complainant with respect and take their complaint seriously;
    b. provide each complainant/victim with appropriate pastoral care;
    c. provide each complainant with information regarding the process we intend to follow, and keep them informed as the matter progresses; and
    d. ask for their views before an allegation is handed on to any outside agency, except in cases requiring mandatory reporting. In cases of mandatory reporting, the complainant will be told that the reporting is happening.

Guidelines in relation to a person who is the subject of a complaint

19. We will endeavor to ensure that every person complained against (respondent):
    a. is treated with respect and dealt with in a manner that is fair and just in the circumstances;
    b. is informed regarding the substance of the allegation against them, and is given a fair opportunity to respond to them;
    c. receives timely information regarding any processes in relation to the complaint, and is advised of the actions that are going to be taken, including whether the church is reporting the matter under its mandatory reporting obligations; and
    d. is provided with an appropriate level of support.

Investigation principles

20. If an investigation is warranted and we intent to conduct it, we will appoint an investigator, in consultation with the Baptist Union National Support Centre.
21. In conducting investigations, we will ensure that they are conducted in accordance with the principles of natural justice.
22. An investigation will make findings of facts as to what happened, on the balance of probabilities, and set out what those facts are, together with any relevant recommendations.

Confidentiality

23. So far as it is consistent with the resolution of any complaint or report or the need for accountability or the safety of others, complaints and investigations shall be kept confidential to those who are reasonably required to be informed.

24. Records of any complaint and of any investigation will be held securely by the church. We will also pass the complaint and any investigation report to the National Support Centre, to inform National Council (as appropriate).