

totnes united free church

Complaints Policy and Procedure

The Charity Trustees approved the following complaints policy and procedure in

January 2025

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of this complaints procedure is to provide a process for dealing with complaints relating to the behaviour of, or activities and decisions taken by:

- the church's pastor (though please note section 5 below);
- the church's staff;
- the charity trustees; or
- volunteers.

The church's aim is:

- to provide a fair complaints policy which is clear and easy to follow;
- to publish this policy on the church's website and to ensure that all church members are aware of what to do in the event that a complaint is received;
- to make sure that all complaints are investigated fairly and in a timely manner;
- to resolve complaints wherever possible and to restore relationships; ● to gather information which helps us to improve what we do.

2. General Principles

Wherever possible the church would prefer to follow Scriptural principles of reconciling differences. However, occasionally attempts to resolve an issue informally may fail or may not be appropriate. A formal complaints process is available for such cases.

3. Can I make a complaint?

Yes. You do not have to be a member of the church to make a complaint. If you believe you

have reasonable grounds to make a complaint and you cannot resolve the issue informally or believe it would not be appropriate to do so, you can make a complaint.

4. What kind of complaint can I make using this procedure?

You can make a complaint about:

4.1 The services that the church provides. *For example dirty facilities or a failure of health & safety requirements.*

4.2 The behaviour of a church employee, trustee or volunteer that has affected you or someone for whom you are responsible. *For example inappropriate language or behaviour, persistent late payment of bills, sexual harassment or unlawful discrimination.*

4.3 The application of church policies and procedures, or decisions made by the church, that affect you or someone for whom you are responsible. *For example, the church withdrawing support for a community group.*

5. Complaints about the pastor

The Baptist Union of Great Britain has a specific complaints procedure for complaints about a nationally accredited Baptist Minister, Baptist Minister in Training, Nationally Accredited Baptist Church Worker, or a Nationally Recognised Baptist Pastor. That procedure is available at: https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/520969/Complaint_against_Accredited.aspx

If a complaint about the pastor of the church is received by the trustees, either they or the pastor may choose that the complaint is dealt with under that procedure instead.

You can find out if someone is a nationally accredited Baptist Minister by looking them up on the directory of nationally accredited Baptist Ministers at <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/504943/Ministries.aspx>.

6. What kind of complaints are not suitable for this procedure?

6.1 Safeguarding concerns relating to child or adult protection. *Any safeguarding concern should be reported to church's safeguarding officer following the church's safeguarding procedure. Please contact safeguarding@totnesunitedfree.org.uk*

6.2 An employment grievance. *The church has a staff grievance procedure which is set out in the employee's contract of employment. Employment-related grievances should be dealt with in accordance with that grievance procedure.*

7. How do I make a complaint and how will the church deal with it?

You should submit your complaint in writing to the chair of trustees or, if the complaint is about the chair, to any other of the trustees.

On receipt of your complaint, the church, acting through its charity trustees (but excluding

any trustee who may be the subject of a specific complaint) will:

- Acknowledge your complaint and tell you who will review it within 7 days of receipt;
- Within 14 days, begin the review, contacting you for further information if needed; finding out what happened, when it happened, and who was involved, and if necessary, interviewing people involved;
- Inform any person who is the subject of the complaint about the nature of the complaint unless this would seriously prejudice the review;
- Recommend what remedial action, if any, should be taken, giving reasons;
- Write to you informing you of the outcome of the review.

The church may, on occasion, receive related complaints, or several people may make the same complaint. Depending upon the nature of the complaint and when each complaint is received, the trustees may decide to consolidate the review or to deal with the earliest complaint first.

The more complex the complaint is, the longer it may take the church to respond. This is especially likely if the complaint relates to historic matters or several people need to be interviewed. Please understand that if the police investigate the person who is the subject of the complaint in relation to the same or related matters, the church may not be able to begin or complete the review until the police have completed their investigations.

Please be aware that the church may decide that it is under a duty to report the matter to statutory authorities or the Charity Commission. If this is the case, the church will write to you to tell you this.

The church will treat the facts and content of your complaint carefully and in line with the church's data protection policy. However, on occasion, the church may need to make a public statement about the subject matter of the complaint, report it to statutory authorities or seek professional advice, and consequently the church cannot guarantee to keep your complaint confidential. You should maintain reasonable confidentiality as to the nature and content of your complaint, other than to seek professional advice if required. Once you have submitted your complaint and while the matter is being reviewed, you should avoid communicating with the person complained about.

8. What if I am not happy with how the church deals with my complaint?

You should write to the chair of the trustees or, if the complaint is about the chair, to any other of the trustees, stating that you want to appeal and the grounds for your appeal. The church leadership will then meet to determine if another member of the leadership team and independent Association Regional Minister can review your appeal, and if so, how long it will take for that person to review your appeal. If the church is unable to allocate someone to review your appeal, you will be informed, and advised instead to consider contacting the Charity Commission. An appeal should not include new evidence, unless you could not with reasonable diligence have provided that evidence when you first complained.

If you are unhappy with how the church deals with your complaint, you may choose to

contact the Charity Commission, the regulator of charities, using the following form:
<https://www.gov.uk/complain-aboutcharity/>

9. Vexatious Complaints

If the church concludes that your complaint is vexatious and:

- you are a church member, the church will do all it can to resolve the matter through in person meetings and mediation. If the issue cannot be resolved in this way, and if further complaints are made the church may decline to consider them further.
- you are not a church member, the church may not answer any further complaints you make.