



Reporting A Serious Concern Policy

Introduction

St Mary's Church is committed to openness, honesty, integrity and accountability in church life. We expect all involved to maintain the highest standards of service and ethical practice where everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

Sometimes a church member may become concerned about something which has happened to them in St Mary's or that they have become aware of, which they consider to be serious, and they want to know what they should do about this.

This policy has been written to help you raise such concerns in a safe environment. (St Mary's Church does have a formal Whistleblowing Policy specifically for the staff and the link is available at the end of this document).

Any person reporting a concern will be taken seriously and the church will investigate and remedy any wrongdoing associated with its activities and take all appropriate action.

Scope

At the outset it must be emphasised that this policy is not a vehicle to question policy decisions made by the clergy, PCC, or staff team, or to raise something you are not happy about within the routine life of the church. You should raise this sort of concern through the normal channels by contacting the Clergy Team, Ministry Leader, a Churchwarden or PCC Secretary who will respond to the matter you are raising as soon as possible.

The policy is designed to enable and encourage everyone, and anyone involved in the life and ministry of St Mary's to raise concerns or disclose information confidentially, without fear of reprisal. This is a positive act that can add value to church life and an early intervention could well protect the well-being and safety of others. Even if you are unsure about the validity of your concern it is always better to report it.



Safeguarding

St Mary's has specific policies for the safeguarding of children and young people, vulnerable adults and domestic violence which are available on the church website or printed copy from the church office.

It is the case that a ministry team or church family member may be the first to recognise that something is wrong but may not feel able to express concerns, thinking that this would be disloyal. However, it is essential that needs of a child or vulnerable adult are put before any personal reservations. Early identification and reporting may prevent harm or further harm occurring.

If you experience, have experienced, observed, been told about or have suspicions about any of the following:

- Physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect
- Incident of domestic violence
- Concern about a vulnerable adult
- Any behaviour which you believe to be inappropriate

This must be reported to the Vicar or the Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSO) immediately. If you are not sure what to do please contact either of them for advice. Reports made direct to the PSO will be passed to the Vicar unless the concern is about the Vicar.

If you are unhappy with the response from either the Vicar or PSO you may contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer at the Diocesan Office.

What else should be reported?

Any serious concern about the conduct or practice of the Clergy, staff, church officers* or members that:

- Makes you feel uncomfortable
- Is not in keeping with the Church's ethos and practice
- Appears to be breaking the law



These might relate to:

- Unauthorised use of church funds or other assets
- Possible fraud or corruption
- Health & Safety breaches which endanger people or cause damage to the environment
- Conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law (a criminal offence has been committed or there is a failure to comply with any other legal obligation)
- Any form of discrimination e.g. racial, sexual, disability
- Malicious accusation or defamation of character
- Wrongful treatment of any person
- Pestering of church members for money or goods
- Breaches of church law e.g. conducting an illegal marriage, altering building without appropriate permission
- Integrity of clergy leadership e.g. breaching a pastoral confidence, manipulative or harsh pastoral advice
- Apparent cover up of or failure to address issues of malpractice or impropriety

This list is not exhaustive.

* A "Church Officer" is anyone appointed/elected by or on behalf of the Church to a post or role, whether they are ordained or lay, paid or unpaid

Confidentiality & Support

St Mary's will treat all reported concerns with discretion and sensitivity. The identity of the individual raising the concern will be kept confidential as far as is possible. However, the investigation process may need to reveal the source of the information and the individual making the disclosure may need to provide a statement. If you feel that you must have anonymity then you are still encouraged to raise your concern, but any action, if taken, may therefore be limited.

St Mary's wishes to encourage a culture of openness and will provide appropriate support to anyone who raises genuine concerns, even if they turn out to be mistaken.



How do I raise a concern?

You may raise your concern in writing, by email, in person or by telephone – whatever is most appropriate for you. Please give brief details or outline the nature of the concern. Please ensure you leave details of how you would like to be contacted. (Initially you may find it helpful to contact anyone listed below for informal advice on an issue without disclosing names.)

Who should I raise my concern with?

We recognise that people may find it easier to talk to some people rather than others.

Any one of the following would be appropriate:

- Vicar*
- Parish Safeguarding Officers
- Member of the clergy
- Churchwardens

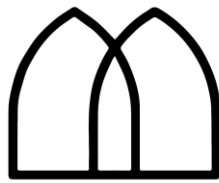
*If your concern relates to the Vicar this must be reported to a Churchwarden who will refer the matter to the Archdeacon.

If you would not be comfortable in approaching anyone of the people listed above, you may find it helpful to confide in a trusted friend or your small group leader and ask them to assist in raising your concerns, or you could contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer. The most important thing is that matters are not swept under the carpet.

What will happen next?

You will receive a written acknowledgement of your expression of concern as soon as possible, but certainly within seven days. The person who you contacted will need to meet with you to discuss and clarify details of your concern.

Further action will depend on the nature of the concern you have raised, and further investigation may be appropriate. You will be advised of how the matter will be dealt with, ongoing progress and eventual outcome including any action to be taken from lessons learned.





ST. MARY'S BEARWOOD

The PCC will only be made aware of relevant information appropriate to them in their role as trustees.

Vicar:


Revd Ben Baker

 vicar@stmarysbearwood.org

 07726 956901

Parish Safeguarding Officer:


Alison Carter

 safeguarding@stmarysbearwood.org

 07900 101595

Rebecca Dawkins


 safeguarding@stmarysbearwood.org

 07753 863665

Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor:

Steph Haynes

 stephH@cofebirmingham.com

 07432 993844

This policy will be reviewed and adopted annually.

Signed by: Ben Baker

Chair of St Mary's PCC

Date: 13th November 2023