

Hometown Church

Complaint and Grievance Procedures

10/29/2020

Principles that guide these complaint and grievance procedures:

1. The plurality of elders/pastors (two or more elders/pastors sharing the leadership and decision-making authority) is the primary means of pastoral accountability. Paul instructs the elders at Ephesus to “guard” one another (Acts 20:28).
2. The elders/pastors are also to “guard” the flock (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2, Titus 1:9-14). The flock is not instructed to “guard” the pastors. However, since all believers are empowered to be priests, all believers have a first loyalty to Jesus. Believers are to evaluate the lives and teaching of leaders (Acts 17:11, Acts 6:1-6, Hebrews 13:7) and follow those who are worthy to follow. Also, all believers have a general responsibility to guard each other (Galatians 6:1-3).
3. God, as well as our culture, expects the pastors to be held accountable by the church. *“For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.”* (2 Corinthians 8:21, NIV84)
4. The importance of the autonomy of the local church. We should be careful about giving decision-making authority to people or groups of people who are outside of Hometown Church. This would constitute giving up autonomy.
5. Jesus instructs leaders to excel in humility and servanthood. This implies that leaders learn from church members and from people outside of the church, even if concerns are expressed in a harsh or improper way.
6. We are to “help the weak” and “be patient with all men.” 1 Thessalonians 5:14
7. The clearest “grievance procedure” in the Bible is Matthew 18:15-17. This principle ought to be emphasized first and foremost.
¹⁵ “If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. ¹⁶ But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church’s decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.
Matthew 18:15-17, NLT

Where do you go if you have a concern, complaint or grievance with a pastor or an employee of Hometown Church?

Interpersonal communication and relationships can be challenging. We all make mistakes. We all misunderstand each other from time to time. We all hurt and are hurt by each other. We all sin against each other. This is true of pastors, employees of Hometown, and church members.

In general, we encourage as the preferred option, the procedure described in Matthew 18:15-17 (above). However, we understand that there may be significant challenges in following this procedure due to the relational dynamic between members and leaders – which is why the Board of Trustees is to be informed of any situation involving the following:

- 1) misconduct, mismanagement, dishonesty, embezzlement, fraud, theft
- 2) sexual harassment or impropriety
- 3) other matters of a serious nature

To help facilitate healthy resolution of any concern, complaint, or grievance with a pastor or employee of Hometown Church, we encourage you to follow the procedures described below:

1. In keeping with the biblical procedure described in Matthew 18:15-17, the first step is to go to the person directly. Clearly communicate to him/her your thoughts and feelings on the particular matter. Listen to his/her thoughts and feelings. Taking this action with them first will often give clarity and bring reconciliation. All believers have the responsibility to obey Matthew 18:15-17 as much as possible. If going to the person directly is not successful, take someone else with you to meet with the person (Matthew 18:16). Seek reconciliation together. If the situation is not resolved to your satisfaction, proceed to #2 directly below. If the matter is resolved, the person raising the complaint and the Hometown pastor or employee to whom the complaint was addressed shall inform the Board of Trustees in writing that the matter was resolved, also stating any follow-up actions required or promised.
2. If you think your concern, complaint or grievance was not listened to by the pastor or employee adequately OR the necessary action was not taken, OR if you feel fearful or intimidated about approaching a pastor or employee directly, then contact one of the people below under "People to Contact".
3. We understand that there are exceptions to the biblical procedure described in Matthew 18:15-17 due to the nature of the grievance (see examples listed above). Additional help may be necessary to find a resolution and assure a healthy and thorough process. In these cases, you may also contact one of the people below under "People to Contact".

People to Contact

1. If you have a concern, complaint or grievance related to an employee or pastor of Hometown that has not been resolved to your satisfaction, or you are unwilling for any reason to engage in a Matthew 18:15-17 process with that person directly, please contact the Executive Pastor, Rob Busse (rbusse@hometownchurch.com).
2. In the special case of a sexual harassment concern, complaint, or grievance about any employee or pastor of Hometown, please contact either female Board of Trustees member Teri Polson (tpolson@usfamily.net) or Finance Director and Board of Trustees member Jim Bird (jbird@hometownchurch.com).
3. If you have a concern, complaint, or a grievance related to the Lead Teaching Pastor, Brent Knox, or the Executive Pastor, Rob Busse, please contact Finance Director and Board of Trustees member, Jim Bird (jbird@hometownchurch.com).
4. If you have a concern, complaint or grievance about the church or a pastor or employee of Hometown, and you feel that your matter is sensitive and delicate enough to contact someone outside of Hometown Church, please contact one of the individuals listed below:
 - Rob Gerber (pastorob@yahoo.com), Pastor at Cedar Creek Community Church in Eau Claire, WI and a Northlands Regional Leader.
 - Richard Lundborg (dick@lundborg.org), Owner of Lundborg Foundation and former chairman of the board for Grace Church.

The person contacted with the complaint, including someone contacted outside of Hometown Church, will follow the steps outlined below. This assumes that a Matthew 18:15-17 process has not already taken place.

Once a complaint is communicated to one of the “People to Contact” above, a meeting should be scheduled to receive the complaint in person. The person bringing the complaint is free to bring someone along for emotional support and help with clear communication.

1. Make sure the person making the complaint has read these complaint and grievance procedures.
2. There should always be at least two people present to receive a complaint or in any follow-up meetings. The person initially receiving the complaint can choose, taking into consideration input from the person with the concern, who the additional person(s) will be (board member, staff pastor, lay pastor, qualified person, etc.).
3. Listen to and document the person’s concerns.
4. Document whether there were any other witnesses.
5. If the complaint is of a serious nature (i.e. misconduct, mismanagement, dishonesty, embezzlement, fraud, theft, sexual harassment, impropriety, etc.), the person contacted with the complaint will:
 - immediately report the complaint to the Board of Trustees to determine the next steps.
 - work with the Board of Trustees to determine if this complaint needs to be reported to local authorities.
6. If the complaint can be handled with typical biblical “peacemaking” procedures (Matthew 18:15-17), then:
 - The person contacted with the complaint will encourage the person making the complaint to take the first step of Matthew 18:15-17.
 - The person contacted with the complaint will follow through with the person making the complaint to help them with this process.
 - If Matthew 18:15-17 is not being followed, the person contacted will report the complaint and any action taken to the Board of Trustees.
 - The Board of Trustees will consider the nature of the complaint and determine next steps should it require actions to resolve beyond Matthew 18:15-17.
 - If the matter is resolved, the person raising the complaint and the Hometown pastor or employee to whom the complaint was addressed shall inform the Board of Trustees in writing that the matter was resolved, also stating any follow-up actions required or promised.

After the meeting is completed, the person with the grievance or complaint can choose one of three options:

1. Option #1: No further action. It is possible that the person with the grievance will talk to the person contacted (listeners) for the purpose of prayer and for counsel, with no other actions taken. It is possible that this meeting will settle the concern. If this option is chosen, confidentiality is promised unless the person contacted determines that damage may come to another person or a state law may have been violated, in which case the details of the grievance will be shared with the Board of Trustees to determine what steps need to be taken. (NOTE: If the person contacted thinks more steps should be taken by the person with the grievance, then they can ask he/she to meet with a mutually agreed upon third person to talk through this issue. If he/she refuses or if after talking to a third person he/she does not want to take any more steps, confidentiality will be maintained, unless damage will come to another person, or a state law is being violated.)

2. Option #2: *Talk with the pastor or employee who is at issue.* The person with the grievance may opt to meet with the pastor or employee with whom he/she has a complaint. This option may be chosen in order to bring about a resolution or reconciliation. This option fits best with the spirit of Matthew 18:15-17. Overall, it would be his/her choice on where to meet and with whom to meet. It would be a standard policy that the person contacted would offer to meet with the person with the grievance when he/she meets with the employee or pastor. It would also be the standard policy that all employees and pastors, when they meet with the person with the grievance, will respond with empathy and humility. If this meeting does not resolve the concern, then this matter would be brought to the Board of Trustees. If the matter is resolved, the person raising the complaint and the Hometown pastor or employee to whom the complaint was addressed shall inform the Board of Trustees in writing that the matter was resolved, also stating any follow-up actions required or promised.
3. Option #3: *Talk with a board member or pastor who is not at issue.* This option would be chosen by the person with the grievance to express concerns to a board member or pastor as one in authority in the church (see "People to Contact" above). The goal is to seek that board member's or pastor's help to resolve the concern. The person contacted would offer to attend that meeting. If the matter is resolved, the person raising the complaint and the Hometown pastor or employee to whom the complaint was addressed shall inform the Board of Trustees in writing that the matter was resolved, also stating any follow-up actions required or promised.

If Option #1, #2, or #3 do not successfully resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the person bearing the grievance, then he/she has the right to appeal to the Board of Trustees if they have not already been made aware of the complaint nor been involved in helping to bring resolution to the issue.