

## **DIRECT DEALING POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

### **CONTEXT**

At Northern Lights MCC, we try to provide an environment where two aims are compatible - Everyone should feel comfortable being themselves.  
No-one should feel uncomfortable because of the inappropriate words or actions of another.

Sometimes insensitivity by one person, or over-sensitivity by another, might cause a misunderstanding which can be quickly resolved.  
At the other end of the spectrum, the behaviour of a person might be so clearly unacceptable that decisive action is immediately required.  
Northern Lights Church has established the Direct Dealing Policy and Procedure as a framework for resolution of situations between these two extremes.

### **The DIRECT DEALING POLICY**

The “Direct Dealing” Policy is a commitment to ensure appropriate and sensitive behaviour between all individuals associated with Northern Lights MCC.

It is about respecting the rights and freedom of other people, and about taking responsibility for our own words and actions when we may not have sufficiently respected these rights and freedoms.

It is also about all Members and friends of the Church upholding the values of Northern Lights MCC; about everyone setting an example to each other; and about mutual support.

It is the responsibility and duty of the Board of Directors and other Church leaders -

- to ensure that guidance and support is provided for all individuals associated with the Church who are made to feel uncomfortable due the words or actions of others
- to ensure that inappropriate or insensitive behaviour in Church, or during activities associated with the Church, is identified and dealt with promptly.

### **The DIRECT DEALING PROCEDURE**

Situations occasionally arise when you think that words or actions should be challenged.

If you regard another person’s words or actions as inappropriate -

You are encouraged to raise the matter privately as soon as possible in a conversation with the other person *provided that* you feel able to do so, *and provided that* you feel able to do so calmly.

Often this conversation can immediately resolve a difference of perception. However, not everyone feels comfortable doing this, and it's important that you don't try to repress your concern and upset yourself by continually mulling over what happened.

If

*either* you don't feel able to deal with the matter by calmly raising your concern with the other person

*or* you don't think that you should deal with the matter yourself because it seems serious\* the following stages are recommended for handling behaviour by one individual (or sometimes more than one individual) in Church, or during activities associated with the Church, which someone else regards as inappropriate.

*(There are some very serious \* situations where it is essential that assertive action is taken at once, such as when the concern is about an individual being disruptive due to drugs or alcohol consumption. In these circumstances, it is important that you don't try to deal with the matter by yourself, and that you immediately involve one or more of the Church leaders.)*

## 1. INFORMAL STAGE

You are encouraged to mention your concern quietly to another person, such as a Board Member or another Church Leader, as soon as possible. This person should be able to provide an independent and confidential perspective, but at this stage the Leader is acting as a friend, rather than as a representative of the Church.

One of the possible outcomes of your discussion with the Church Leader may be that the Leader suggests accompanying you when you speak to the person whose words or actions do not seem appropriate to you. Depending on the circumstances and the individuals involved, it may be advisable to have such a conversation quickly, or it may be advisable to first have a time of reflection.

When the conversation takes place, you should explain calmly and clearly why you think that the words or actions do not seem appropriate to you.

The person who is approached is expected to listen to what is said, and

*either* apologise immediately

*or* say that the concern will be thought about and responded to later, at a time and by whatever means may be agreed between you.

At this stage, it is very important that all individuals try to avoid getting into an argument.

## 2. FACILITATION STAGE

If the initial, informal approach does not lead to a resolution which is acceptable to both individuals, either during the initial conversation, or within the timescale agreed, or within a reasonable period, you should inform a member of the Board or another Church Leader about your concern.

This may be the same person or a different person to the individual you previously invited to be involved at the informal stage.

This person should not only be someone you feel comfortable with, but also someone who is likely to have experience of dealing discreetly and tactfully with sensitive issues. The aim is to identify an individual whose independence is likely to be recognised not only by you, but also by the person whose behaviour seems inappropriate to you. At the Facilitation Stage, the person is still acting as a friend, rather than as an official representative of the Church Leadership

When the Church Leader you approached has agreed to assist in this way, you will be expected to explain again to the Leader why you think that the words or actions do not seem appropriate to you. This time you will have longer to discuss the matter between the two of you, and you will have time to consider together how best to proceed.

The Leader will then have a conversation with the person whose words or actions seem inappropriate to you - either just these two people alone, or with you also participating in the conversation.

In this way, the Leader will try to facilitate mutual agreement on a way forward which is acceptable to everyone and compatible with the principles of the Direct Dealing Policy.

## 3. RESOLUTION STAGE

If the Facilitation Stage has not resulted in an agreed way forward, the Church Leader identified at the Facilitation Stage is expected to present the matter formally to the full Board of Directors in a written report.

The Board may ask you to write to the Board outlining your concerns, and/ or you may be asked to attend a meeting of the Board to explain what has happened.

In investigating the issue, the Board may ask the person whose conduct you regard as inappropriate to also write to the Board, and / or to attend a meeting of the Board to provide their alternative perspective.

The outcome may include a disciplinary sanction, in accordance with the Harassment Policy and the Constitution of Northern Lights MCC. Whatever the Board decides as the best way forward is the final decision on the matter, even if one or both parties is dissatisfied with the outcome.

## **EXAMPLES of INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR**

### **Careless Talk and / or Gossip**

Any derogatory or malicious comments about another person can quickly involve other people and cause conflict throughout the congregation. Sexism, racism, sexual remarks (including sexual humour), or any other personal comments around age, sexuality, ability, or any other equality issue, are unacceptable. They directly contravene the principle of inclusivity of Northern lights MCC and UFMCC.

### **Alcohol and/or Substance Abuse**

Those whose behaviour in Church or at another NLMCC function is noticeably affected by the use of drink or drugs can place their Church neighbours in an unpleasant situation which adversely affects their right to a safe, welcoming and comfortable environment.

### **Cruising**

People attend Church in order to open their minds to God and to share their thoughts with like-minded Christians and other interested individuals. People should not be subjected to the unwanted attention of others at Church.

### **Harassment**

Some people are more easily offended than others, but harassment can include unwanted attention of any kind. Harassment is what the offended person may believe is inappropriate, rather than what the person creating the situation believes to be inappropriate.

### **Divisiveness**

Divisiveness may include attacks upon the leadership of the Church which are self-centred and/or designed to undermine the ministry and effectiveness of particular leaders. If left unchallenged, such behaviour could seriously damage the mental and/or physical health of those subjected to allegations which are primarily personal, rather than honest disagreements about policy. (Diversity and dissent on matters of principle, if expressed openly and transparently, is honourable and welcome, subject to acceptance of majority decisions.)

**N.B. These are only examples.**

**If you believe that words or actions are not appropriate, the fact that your situation does not appear similar to any of these examples should not deter you from following the Direct Dealing Procedure.**

