

How to Raise a Concern around Leadership and Ministry Decision Making in a Trinity Network Church

All churches and particularly their pastoral leaders have a desire to see growth and transformation in people’s lives. While this is positive and healthy, it often means change and challenge for church members. There are times when church members have a concern that they would like to raise with church leadership which is not primarily personal but rather about a sermon, a change, an incident which occurred or a question of leadership or ministry practice. It can be unrealistic or not the most helpful approach to expect the Senior Pastor to deal personally with each of these matters. The following process is meant to assist church members with an appropriate way to raise and get a response to issues of concern.

You are Welcome to Raise a Concern, Question or Complaint

If you have a concern, question or even a complaint about leadership, ministry, change, an incident and or direction the church is taking, this is normal, and you are welcome to raise this in a responsible manner.

Process for Raising a Concern or Complaint

<p>Step 1</p>	<p>Personal Reflection Take some time to pray and reflect on the concern or complaint. In some situations it is appropriate to overlook the concern or complaint, in other situations important principles or matters of scripture may be at stake and the situation needs to be taken further.</p> <p>Please consider carefully whether your concern or complaint has real substance. In other words, is it true rather than an assumption based on inaccurate or incomplete information? It should not be based on hearsay or other’s assumptions, perceptions or comments. Spend some time in reflection on the matter and consider it carefully and objectively. If, after prayerful consideration, you choose to raise the matter, commit to doing so in a godly way. If you choose, on reflection, to overlook it or let it pass, decide to let the matter drop and commit to not discussing it with others.</p>
<p>Step 2</p>	<p>Commit to dealing with interpersonal issues directly with the person Commit to dealing with interpersonal issues directly with the person who has hurt you following our grievance policy and process.</p> <p>If someone raises a concern with you about another person, ascertain immediately whether they have dealt with the other person directly before coming to you. If they have not, direct them to the grievance procedure. Do not be party to gossip, malicious talk or speaking ill of others. An exception to this is if someone, in good faith, is asking your advice on how to go about raising their concern with the other person.</p>
<p>Step 3</p>	<p>Put your concern in writing If the matter is not essentially interpersonal but an issue of concern, be prepared to put the concern in writing with a clear, objective and non-inflammatory explanation of what the issue is for you and why it is an issue. Be prepared to be responsible for your words and the style of your communication. Avoid making threats about what you will do if your concern is not responded to with your preferred outcome.</p>
<p>Step 4</p>	<p>Submit your concern Submit your concern to the person designated by the to receive and respond to questions or issues of concern.</p>

	<p>Who you submit your concern to will depend on the nature of the concern and who it involves. See below as a guide as to who to submit your concern to.</p> <p>The Trinity Network may appoint a group to handle certain types of concerns.</p>
Step 5	<p>Accept the outcome.</p> <p>If you are the only person with this concern or the group collectively believes the concern to be unwarranted, please accept the assessment, wisdom and discernment of the ministry area leader, pastor or Leadership Team. If your concern has also been raised by others or forms part of a wider pattern, others may get involved to seek to understand the issue and then escalate the matter if appropriate. A Trinity Network appointed group or representative may become involved depending on the nature of the matter. The group may contact you for further information and insight if they feel this is required.</p>
Step 6	<p>Appeal. If you are unable to accept the outcome of the process, you may, following the end of this process, write a formal letter to the Leadership Team. The letter outlining the concern will be raised at an appropriate leadership meeting and responded to at that level. Be prepared to be held to account for your action in doing so.</p>

Please Note:

This process is primarily for issues related to leadership, ministry, or teaching in the church. These are the majority of issues raised. Occasionally, pastoral leaders will act or say things directly to another person that cause an interpersonal issue with that person. The above process is not for dealing with issues of interpersonal offence, and these should be dealt with according to the Trinity Network Grievance policy.

Informing the Church How to Raise a Concern

It is important that each church Leadership Team ensure that members of the church are informed about the existence of this process and the Grievance process and how concerns can be raised or concerns made known.

Who to Raise Your Concern With

The table below provides a framework for who to speak to or how to raise a concern depending on what the concern is about or who it might relate to.

If the concern or complaint is with a decision by:	The concern should be raised with
Ministry Leader	Relevant Ministry Pastor or Ministry Area Leader
Ministry Area Leader	Senior Pastor
Associate Pastor / Ministry Pastor	The Senior Pastor who will advise the centre Leadership Team and the Senior Network Pastor.
Senior Pastor	The Centre Leadership Team and the Senior Network Pastor
Centre Leadership Team	The Centre Leadership Team and the Senior Network Pastor who will advise the Network Board.

	If there is internal conflict amongst the Centre Leadership Team, ie. a member of the Leadership Team has a concern about, or with the Leadership Team, they should first raise it with the Leadership Team. If unresolved, then raise it with the Senior Network Pastor who will inform the Board.
Network Executive	The Senior Network Pastor who will advise the Board
Senior Network Pastor	The Chairperson of the Network Board.

A Trinity Network Conflict Resolution Team

Being the pastor and leader in a local church congregation is a challenging role. It is different in many respects to other forms of leadership which operate in our contemporary corporate and organisational environments.

The church has a diversity of volunteers who gather together around deeply held spiritual beliefs and values. The church meets important spiritual, social and personal needs through providing members with a place to belong, significant roles and meaningful relationships of support. Because churches are a refuge for many, from the rapidly changing and sometimes confronting culture of the world, members may find change in the church especially challenging. As a result, congregations can be more prone to conflict than other comparative groups.

Churches, particularly through their pastors, have a desire to see change, growth and transformation in people's lives and in the locality the church serves. For these reasons, pastors will often have to respond to a wide range of criticisms and complaints around their ministries, around changes they propose, around their competency and their personal styles of leadership and communication.

From time to time the Trinity Network Board may appoint a small group of wise and respected individuals to deal with particular concerns or conflict that have arisen in a church over communication, conflict and change issues.

1. The group may deal with leadership and decision-making complaints / concerns that have not been able to be resolved satisfactorily at a local church level.
2. The group would normally comprise of 2-3 members who are appointed by the Trinity Network Board.

The appointment should be for a term of some years (2-3).

3. The group should be trained and supported in discernment, conflict resolution, communication and change management skills.
4. The group is formally authorised and empowered to respond to concerns themselves where-ever possible and to judge which concerns should be escalated to the Network Board and Senior Network Pastor and how this should happen. Issues will be assessed on their substance (is there clarity around what actually happened and is this, in fact, true?) and consequence (if it is true does it raise significant questions that need to be responded to?).