Dignity at Work – Preamble to Manchester Policy

“The Church is required by God to foster relationships of the utmost integrity, truthfulness and trustworthiness. Abuse, harassment and bullying will not be tolerated within the Church of England. All complaints of abuse, harassment and bullying are to be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.” – House of Bishops 2001

Dignity at Work is important for all employees and Office Holders. It means we should work in an environment where we do not suffer from bullying or harassment.

Bullying can be described as action(s) by another person (or group) that constantly undermine and belittle the person. It is typically thought of as being done by a person senior to us or in a position of power but it can also be done by subordinates or peers. An example might be constant and unwarranted criticism of your performance by a colleague. Bullying is normally ongoing and repeated behaviour but it could also be a single incident.

Harassment is usually the term to describe unwanted attention or behaviour towards us, and is normally used to describe behaviour that relates to a characteristic such as our gender or a disability. An example might be unwanted sexual attention. It might be about a perceived characteristic, for example, unfavourable treatment due to our sexuality even if the perpetrator had made a wrong assumption.

The policy refers to bullying and harassment. It could also be used if you were being victimised. This would normally mean you were being targeted in an unfair way because you had raised a complaint or stood up for a colleague.

The policy describes the person being bullied or harassed as the target of bullying or harassment. This term is used as it is not emotive and does not try to describe the impact on the person which can be read into terms like “victim”.

The Policy

This policy is in place to protect Office Holders (including Church Army Captains), both stipendiary and self-supporting. It is not intended to cover all aspects of church life such as relationships between lay people. The policy contains as Appendix One a guide to what action might be taken. Appendix Two details additional resources.

Office holders work in a unique environment in that much of their contact is with individuals over whom the Diocese has little control. A typical worker has colleagues who are also under contracts of employment; they can therefore take
out a grievance against them for their behaviour if required. An Office Holder can take out a grievance against another Office Holder but not the array of other people you are in contact with – lay members of the parish, school staff, and so on. That is not to say they should suffer unreasonable behaviour – Office Holders should be protected from third party harassment and bullying.

The policy describes an informal stage – a set of principles we can use to try and put things right. These could be used in any situation. If these are not successful or you feel they would not work, you can use the grievance procedure (or Clergy Discipline Measure) if the perpetrator is an Office Holder. If the perpetrator is a third party you can ask the Diocese for support; if it fails you may have a grievance with the person at the Diocese who failed to act on your behalf. In practice, if it is a third party you may need to resort to other action and the policy guides you in that direction. You would be encouraged to do this with the support of the Diocese.

Taking Things Forward

Inevitably each case has its own twist or complication. It might be hard to see the way forward. Read the policy and as a starting point discuss the issue with your Archdeacon, or with Human Resources. Human Resources will be able to explain any areas of the policy you are unsure about and help you decide which approach you wish to take. This may be particularly useful if you feel you are being bullied or harassed by someone who you would in normal circumstances report the bullying or harassment to, for example, an Archdeacon or training Incumbent. It might also be useful if your case is over something of a more time related or process issue, for example, if you were being put under pressure to spend more time than you could reasonably give as a self- supporting office holder. You may contact your trade union or one of the supporters referred to in the policy. The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) has a helpline you can contact to discuss issues with on 0845 47 47 47 or visit www.acas.org.uk

Above all, do not suffer in silence – if you ignore bullying or harassment it often gets worse.