

WWEC GUIDELINES - Safe Ministry Management

Purpose

The purpose of the Safe Ministry Management Guidelines, is to provide additional information to Wagga Wagga Evangelical Church (WWEC) Safe Ministry Contacts (SMC) when they are implementing WWECs Procedure - Safe Ministry Management (SMM).

The additional information in these guidelines aims to supplement the information found within the SMM procedure in relation to both completion of the *investigation* and *resolution* of a safe ministry case.

The SMCs will assess each Safe Ministry Case on a case by case basis, utilising these guidelines as appropriate to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the SMM process.

1. Safe Ministry Case Investigation

1.1 Upon receiving a Safe Ministry Report (Appendix A of the SMM procedure) as outlined in the SMM procedure, the SMCs are to determine if there are reasonable grounds to proceed with an investigation. This may be determined by reviewing WWECs Code of Conduct and assessing whether the alleged inappropriate behaviour constitutes a breach of this code.

1.2 Where the allegation is deemed as not requiring an investigation (i.e. the allegation does not describe inappropriate behaviour in breach of the code of conduct) the SMC is to inform the complainant of this decision and close the case. In these cases the SMC's may identify those involved may require further support and, where appropriate, will refer the matter to relevant WWEC leaders.

1.3 In cases where external agencies have been notified of the safe ministry case, the SMCs are advised to seek guidance from these agencies as to what further action should be taken by WWEC whilst the matter is before the authorities. All action by the SMCs may need to be suspended dependent on the advice received.

1.4 Where the allegation is to be investigated a SMC is recommended to meet with the person making the allegation to confirm the details on the Safe Ministry Report and gather further details. As a result the Safe Ministry Report (Appendix A), may need updating. The final report of the allegation should be verified by the person making the allegation (by email/signature).

1.5 A SMC is to meet with the person who is the subject of the allegation (respondent) and;

1. notify the person of the allegation
2. provide the respondent with details of the allegations
3. give the respondent an opportunity to respond to the allegations in writing and/or in person
4. allow the respondent to have a support person attend any meeting convened for the purpose of investigating the allegations.

1.6 Where;

- the respondent disputes the allegations
- the suspected behaviour is deemed as severe misconduct or
- the respondent is a WWEC leader at a high level within the organisation

it may be appropriate for the SMC to arrange an Independent Investigator (with a level of transparency and separation from the organisation) to investigate the allegation.

1.7 An independent investigator is to be suitably qualified as an assessor; formally trained and accredited in investigation processes and procedural fairness. The investigator will consider the allegations and will contact those involved in the allegation, as he/she deems necessary, for further information. The independent investigator will make an assessment of facts on the burden of proof, that is on the 'balance of probabilities'. This means the independent investigator must be reasonably satisfied that what is alleged did happen before finding that the allegation is sustained. After their assessment is completed, the independent investigator shall provide a written report to the SMCs and a recommendation as to a case investigation determination, providing reasons for their conclusions.

1.8 The SMCs during the investigation process may also gain confidential advice and/or input from WWEC's Board of Reference.

2. Safe Ministry Case Resolution

2.1 The SMCs make a determination of the case, based on their own assessment and where applicable, the recommendation of the independent investigator.

2.2 The determination of the SMC investigation may state whether the allegations are:

- **Sustained:** where the evidence supports a finding that the alleged conduct did occur
- **Not sustained:** where there is not sufficient evidence to establish whether the alleged conduct did or did not occur
- **False:** where the evidence supports a finding that the alleged conduct did not occur
- **Vexatious:** where the evidence supports a finding that the allegation was made without substance and with the intent of being malicious or to cause distress to the respondent
- **Misconceived:** where the evidence supports a finding that, even though the allegation was made in good faith, it was based on a misunderstanding of what actually occurred

2.3 A Safe Ministry Case Report will be completed which will outline the case determination and any further actions to be taken as a result of the outcome. This should be provided to all involved parties.

2.4 Where the finding is **sustained** the SMCs will determine further actions to be completed. This may involve one or more of the following; restorative justice, conciliation, mediation, facilitation (helping the person making allegation with their healing). The response by the church to the person impacted by the inappropriate behaviour is dependent on the seriousness of the case. Consideration of the appropriate discipline of the respondent will also take place, e.g. move matter to criminal proceedings, suspension or permanent removal from position, education.

2.5 Where the finding is **not sustained, false, vexatious or misconceived** the SMC will consider if a formal and/or public apology to the respondent is appropriate. As outlined in the SMM Procedure, the respondent may be reinstated to their position of leadership, dependent on the approval of appropriate external bodies.