



DIRECT DEALING POLICY

River of Life Metropolitan Community Church Dorchester



**ADOPTED BY THE
BOARD OF TRUSTEES 26th AUGUST 2008**

List of Contents

- 1: What is Direct Dealing?
- 2: The Biblical Model
- 3: How It Works – Some Sample Issues
- 4: Confidentiality in Church
- 5: Expectations
 - Of the Wider Community
 - Of Guests and Attendees
 - Of Members
 - Of Team Leaders, Co-ordinators, Board Members and Lay-delegates
 - Of the Pastor
- 5: Complaints
 - Against a Member or Attendee
 - Against a Leader (not on Board) or Co-ordinator
 - Against a Board Member or Lay Delegate
 - Against the Pastor

1: WHAT IS DIRECT DEALING?

- 1:1 Direct Dealing is a way of behaving in church which follows Biblical truths, respects our rights and freedoms and reminds us of our responsibility to model healthy appropriate behaviour.
- 1:2 The mission and ministries of all Metropolitan Community Churches are important and worth safeguarding. Our denomination saves lives. There are numerous recorded cases in which people who felt their lives were no longer worth living have gained self-esteem, self-worth and a new freedom by receiving the unconditional love of God at the hands of people from a Metropolitan Community Church.
- 1.3: The Book of Exodus tells us that it took God only one night to remove the Jewish people from the Land of Egypt but over 40 years to remove the land of Egypt from the Jewish people! The Jewish people suffered from oppression sickness when they went into the wilderness. They had learnt ways of coping with their oppression which may have helped them in one situation but which became unhealthy and destructive when they were free.
- 1.4 In Metropolitan Community Church we recognise that many of those who come through our doors have journeyed through experiences of pain, rejection, abuse and self-loathing: not through any fault of their own, but as a result of what society, or other groups, or other individuals have done to them. Above all, they are vulnerable. Some of these experiences affect how we then go on to deal with others whilst others affect how we expect to be dealt with. This policy explains how our church interprets its responsibilities to those people - because "they" are "us".

2: THE BIBLICAL MODEL

2:1: Jesus said:

"If your sister or brother sins against you, go and show them their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won your sister or brother over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they refuse to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

St Matthew 18: 15-18

2:2 The passage comes from a section of St Matthew's gospel where Jesus is instructing the disciples about a number of things. This teaching is about discipline in the Church. We are not used to thinking

about discipline in the Church, as the Church is supposed to be a place of freedom. However, in order for us to be free, we need to have some common expectations around how we will behave together.

2:3 In Jesus' model we are first told to go and raise a matter on our own with the person who has infringed against freedom in some way. If that clears the matter up all is well and good. Experience says that often a quiet chat between the pastor and a person who has not realised how their actions have been seen usually does the trick! However, if that approach does not work Jesus tells us to take one or two others along so that everything can be sorted. At this point it would be normal for the pastor to take a respected Board member or other recognised officer of the church along too. If this does not work Jesus tells us to "take it to the Church". In MCC's structure this would mean taking the matter to the Board of Trustees who are elected by the congregation to be the administrative leaders of the congregation. The Board would then take appropriate action which might include a written reprimand, removal from a team, or even removal of membership. If membership is removed then it is usual that the removed member would have a right of appeal to the entire membership. This last option is only ever used for the most serious offences.

2:4 This three stage approach is a healthy one to follow. The rest of this policy gives various patterns, resources and expectations to make this three stage approach clearer for everyone to ensure consistency and transparency.

3: HOW IT WORKS – SOME SAMPLE ISSUES

3:1 Whenever people mix together in community, situations occasionally arise which require some form of mediation, or in which actions need to be challenged. From our own experience, we have found that early, honest and direct responses to difficulties between people invariably help to avoid deep-seated conflict at a later stage.

3:2 We believe that all who attend our church have the right to be treated with equality, to spend their time with us in a healthy and affirming atmosphere, and to be free from any form of disturbance or harassment. You have those rights in MCC so does your neighbour. Any actions which deny you, or your neighbour, those rights will be quickly, honestly and directly challenged.

3:3 Careless talk - Any unfair criticism or malicious comments about another person can quickly involve other folk and cause conflict throughout the congregation. Sexism, racism or any other unjust comments around equality issues directly contravene MCC's position on inclusivity and are unacceptable.

- 3:4 Alcohol and/or substance abuse - Those whose behaviour in church is noticeably affected by the use of drink or drugs are putting their neighbours in an often unpleasant and unfair situation which impinges upon their right to a safe environment.
- 3:5 Cruising - Vulnerable people attending church should not be subjected to the romantic attentions of others when they are trying to open their minds to God and share their thoughts with their fellow-Christians. Also, it is damaging to both parties if some source of conflict within a casual relationship causes one of the parties to fall away from the church as a result.
- 3:6 Harassment - This can include unwanted attentions of any kind. It is damaging to the church as people do not come here to be harassed and will stop attending.
- 3:7 Causing Division and Discontent – Those who wish to cause division in a church use a variety of tactics. These may include: inappropriate use of confidentiality so that “facts” or “others who feel this way” cannot be verified, attacks upon the leadership of the church which is selfish in nature and designed to undermine the authority and ministry of a leader or pastor and which causes the church to be distracted from its God-given mission. Such behaviour puts healthy people off coming to church and, if left unchallenged, can seriously damage the mental and physical health of those being attacked. True diversity and dissent is honourable, open and transparent. Those who are honourable in their disagreements will live with a majority decision or, if the issue is so important to them, will honourably find a different congregation whose values they share.

4: HOW IT WORKS – SOME SAMPLE RESPONSES

- 4:1 With the sole motive of protecting those people who come to MCC to be safe, at peace and in communion with God, and recognising their needs and rights in balance with the needs of the person(s) causing a problem, any of the following challenges might be made to a specific situation:
- 4:2 An informal chat with the Pastor and/or other person **authorised by the Board of Trustees** - to indicate that a problem exists and consider a way forward;
- 4:3 A formal interview with the Pastor and one or more Members of the Board of Trustees or other recognised officer - as a preliminary stage in the formal consideration of the issue by the Board;
- 4:4 A written Contract of Behaviour - in which an individual promises to alter his/her behaviour on various specific points;

4:5 Exclusion from church - **temporary or permanent**, which can be imposed at any time on non-members without right of appeal. Members have the right of appeal against exclusion in accordance with the Articles of Association however the Board of Trustees' decision is final

4:6 Formal cancellation of Membership - by the Board of Trustees in accordance with the provisions of the church's Articles of Association. Exclusion from church might follow.

5: CONFIDENTIALITY IN CHURCH

5:1 All Christian churches provide opportunities for adherents to unburden themselves with a priest, minister or elder and offer a guarantee that such conversations are confidential. The most famous examples of these are the Seal of the Confessional in the Catholic Church or the words spoken at the Mercy Seat in the Salvation Army.

5:2 MCC recognises that many people who are part of our life and ministry have this expectation upon us. We try to give support to people who come along to us and to provide a base level of pastoral care. Most of us are not counsellors and will therefore have to make referrals for counselling to appropriately qualified members of the church or external agencies where appropriate.

5:3 Matters discussed by members or attendees with members of the Pastoral Team. The subject of the matters discussed may be shared with other members of the Team but only after the person has been informed of this. This is to stop needy people playing off members of the Team against each other and also to allow the Team to be fully aware of situations as they arise within church. The Pastoral Team members will not keep confidential any information which indicates that the person is a danger to self or others.

5:4 The Pastor can be expected to hold an absolute confidence if requested in accordance with limited confidentiality. However, the Pastor is free to raise the general issue with a supervisor or another appropriate person who would be external to the local congregation. If the pastor feels that it would be inappropriate to keep any information which indicates the person is a danger to self or others, s/he will make this very clear to the person concerned.

5:5 From time to time a request may be made to keep certain information confidential from the pastor. This may be because a complainant is trying to undermine the pastor in some way. **No information that relates directly to the running of the church or to the pastor should ever be kept confidential from the pastor.** Any complaints or concerns should be raised directly with the pastor. If a complainant feels nervous or unsure they could ask a Board member or other

officer of the church to sit in with them as an “honest broker”. No Board, or team, discussion or action can be kept confidential from the pastor. If a complainant has a serious concern and if they are not able to resolve this with the pastor directly they should be invited to make a complaint using the Fellowship Judiciary process which is fair and transparent (please find this on the MCC Website). They should not attempt to build a body of support for their opinion within the church - such behaviour is disloyal and divisive.

6: EXPECTATIONS

6:1 The Board of Trustees has an expectation of those who would like to serve in a position of Leadership. In the Bible (in the book of James 3:1), we are told that Leaders are held accountable to a higher standard than others. No Christian is required to be a Leader, but if we answer God’s call to a Leadership position then we must accept the responsibility as well as the honour. As more and more of the pyramid of the church rests on you, it is essential that the Church knows it can count on you.

-----Wider Community-----
---Guests and Attendees of the Local Church--
---Membership of the Local Church ---
-Leadership of Teams and Ministries-
--Board of Trustees--
-Pastor-

6:2 We have no expectations of the wider community!

6:3 Guests and Attendees are expected to behave appropriately within church and to respect our life and ministry. As they become more involved and learn more about us we expect them to show respect to our beliefs, structures and ethos.

6:4 Members of River of Life MCC must be baptized Christians who have completed classes for instruction in the beliefs and doctrines of the Church, under the direction of the Pastor and in accordance with the MCC By-Laws; and who pledge to strive to protect the unity of the Church; share responsibility for the work of the Church; attend services of worship regularly; and financially support the work of the Church.

6:5 Leaders, Coordinators, Board Members and the Lay Delegate are those who are elected, or appointed, to office who fulfill their membership vows; accept corporate responsibility; exemplify positive faith; deal directly with those with whom they disagree; grow spiritually as people; pray for the Pastor, Board members and other leaders; live morally mature lives; agree to be mutually accountable to other Board members; and maintain appropriate confidentiality as defined by the Board.

6:6: The Pastor is expected to adhere to the same standards as Leaders of Teams, Members of the Board and the Lay Delegate AND to uphold the Code of Conduct required of MCC clergy.

7: COMPLAINTS

7:1 From time to time an issue may arise where someone wishes to complain about the behaviour of another. These complaints should be made, and dealt with, in a spirit of love which models health and openness.

7:2 Church members pledge to keep solemn vows. The Board of Trustees, regularly, review the attendance records of the church and may remove any member for whom there is no record of regular attendance, of financial support for the Church, of having contributed to or served the Church in some identifiable way or who has failed to demonstrate interest and loyalty within the preceding period of six months. At that time the Board of Trustees shall notify this member either by direct contact or in writing that she/he has been placed on such a list and is not eligible to vote at any business meeting of the church. If the member continues to demonstrate a lack interest or loyalty during the two months immediately following notification, the Board of Trustees shall have the authority, at their discretion, to drop any such member from the local church roll of active members.

7:3 The Board of Trustees may also remove, by majority vote, any member or friend who is guilty of disloyalty or unbecoming conduct, or take such appropriate disciplinary action against them as it deems necessary. The action of the Board of Trustees may be appealed to a General Meeting of the Church, PROVIDED THAT, such appeal is received by the Secretary within FOURTEEN days of the decision of the Board.

7:4 Any concern about a Team Leader appointed by the Board should first be raised with that person. If that conversation does not produce a resolution the complainant should speak to the pastor and seek their view. The pastor should, if appropriate, arrange a meeting between the complainant the person being complained about and her/himself. If this does not produce a resolution a formal complaint of disloyalty, unbecoming conduct or dereliction of duty can be made by means of a petition submitted to the Board and signed by 55% of the active members of the congregation. Any such petition shall not be signed by any member of the Board. The Board shall validate the signatures on any such petition and shall have the authority to procure any further information that is required for a fair investigation of the complaint. The Board will then resolve the complaint by a majority vote. The Board may also have the power to initiate a complaint without the need for a petition. The Board shall have the power to reprimand or remove from office any Team Leader.

7:5 Any concern about a Board Member or Lay delegate should first be raised with that person. If that conversation does not produce a resolution the complainant should speak to the pastor and seek their view. The pastor should, if appropriate, arrange a meeting between the complainant, the person being complained about and her/himself. If this does not produce a resolution a formal complaint of disloyalty, unbecoming conduct or dereliction of duty can be made by means of a petition submitted to the Board and signed by 55% of the active members of the congregation. Any such petition shall not be signed by any member of the Board. The Board shall validate the signatures on any such petition and shall have the authority to procure any further information that is required for a fair investigation of the complaint. The Board will then resolve the complaint by a majority vote. The Board may also have the power to initiate a complaint without the need for a petition. The Board shall have the power to reprimand or remove from office any member of the Board (except the pastor) and any Lay Delegate. Any person removed from elected office in this way shall have the right of appeal to a General Meeting of the Church, PROVIDED THAT any such appeal is received by the Secretary, or in his/her absence by the Lay Delegate, within 14 days of the removal from office.

7:6 Any concern about the pastor should be raised, in the first instance with the pastor. If that approach does not produce a resolution, or if the complainant feels that they are not able to go alone to see the pastor, then they should ask the pastor to nominate a mutually agreeable member of the Board to sit in on the meeting. If this meeting does not produce an effective resolution the complainant may wish to approach the Regional Elder or file a formal misconduct charge against the pastor if they feel that the pastor has breached the MCC Code of Conduct for clergy. This is a grave step and the complainant may be liable to pay for the cost of any investigation if it is felt to be frivolous.

8: CONCLUSION

8:1 This Church believes that God wants our people to thrive, and that those elected by the congregation to manage the day-to-day affairs of the church have a responsibility to create a suitable environment for that purpose. Facing issues as they arise, holding in balance the needs and expectations of all our people, and dealing directly, honestly and assertively with difficult situations is both good pastoral practice, good stewardship, and firmly scriptural. Please pray for those you elect to achieve this in your name.