

News release for Provincial website / Facebook page / Twitter feed

The Church's Canon Law Council has recommended to the Archbishop that the process of laying complaints of sexual abuse and harassment against those who minister or hold office in the church should be made easier.

The Council is now working on specific proposals aimed at achieving this objective. It is also reviewing, with a view to making recommendations, how the Church can prevent sexual abuse and harassment and how it can initiate early intervention in such cases, including providing support services, a helpline and crisis and survivor support.

The Council's recommendations have been made in response to a request for advice by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba after a number of individuals spoke out in the media about harassment and abuse they said they suffered in the past. The Council comprises experienced lawyers who serve the Church as legal advisors and other Church representatives.

The Council told the Archbishop that the Pastoral Standards adopted by the Church in 2002, which provide comprehensive guidance and rules for those who minister, already set out a sound basis on which to receive and handle complaints against alleged lay, clerical and episcopal offenders. But its report suggested further action was needed.

As an immediate step, the Archbishop has directed that the Pastoral Standards be published in full on the Church's website. Until now they have been available only in booklet form. The Pastoral Standards, and a fuller report on the Council's work, can now be found on the website:

[Pastoral Standards, Values and Practices >>](#)

[Safe Church Guide >>](#)

Link to re-worded document below, to be posted on the website:

In 2002, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa published updated procedures spelling out the standards expected of clergy and other office-bearers in the Church as they minister to God's people. These are known as the Church's Pastoral Standards and are incorporated in the Church's laws (Canon Law). They apply to all clergy and lay people who hold licences to minister.

In the light of reports published early in 2018 of sexual abuse in parishes, institutions and organisations of the Church, the Archbishop and Metropolitan asked the Canon Law Council of Southern Africa – which includes senior and experienced lawyers who are also members of the Church – to assess the efficacy of the Church's procedures and practices with a view to ensuring that the Pastoral Standards are effectively upheld and disciplinary procedures fairly and firmly enforced when there are contraventions of the standards.

The Canon Law Council has reported that it believes the Pastoral Standards set out a sound basis on which to receive and handle complaints against alleged lay, clerical and episcopal offenders. However, the Council believes that the Church needs to make it easier for complainants to access the process laid down by the Pastoral Standards and the Canons, and to provide support for complainants along the way. The Council is working on the details of how that can be achieved.

The Council is also reviewing, with a view to making recommendations where necessary, on how the Church can:

- Prevent sexual abuse and harassment, through communication, awareness and education;
- Initiate early intervention in cases, including providing support services, a helpline and crisis and survivor support; and

- Provide for internal and statutory intervention in relation to the Pastoral Standards, Church discipline, the implementation of criminal law and post-intervention support.

Details of the helpline will be announced once it has been established and training provided for those who will staff it. Pending further advice from the Canon Law Council, the Council has recommended that the Pastoral Standards be published more widely by posting them [on the Church's website](#). Of particular relevance are Sections 4 (Pastoral Standards, Values and Practices) and 5 (Procedures for Clergy and Laity in Ministry).

Already [available on the website are the Canons](#) providing for judicial proceedings (Canons 36 to 41) when a cleric is alleged to have committed an offence. Of particular relevance in the Canons are:

- Canon 36: Ecclesiastical Tribunals – Introductory Affirmations
- Canon 36: Of The Tribunals Of The Church
- Canon 37: Of Judicial Proceedings
- Canon 39: Of Proceedings Against Priests And Deacons
- Canon 40: Of Judicial Sentences

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa is a member of the of the Anglican Communion Safe Church Commission, an international body representing Anglican churches around the world which provides resources to educate church members about the issue of abuse and misconduct in churches and equips and supports those working to make their churches safe for all.

We celebrate, as a community in penitence, God's reconciling and life-giving mission through the creative, costly and faithful witness and ministry of men, women and children, past and present. Yet we are keenly aware that our common life and engagement in God's mission are tainted with shortcomings and failures, such as abuse of power and privilege and human weakness.

The time has come for the Church to take a stand in faithfulness to God's mission. Our Church is committed to taking seriously every complaint of abuse and to ensuring that we develop a comprehensive and holistic response to the scourge.

We will do all we can to provide practical measures and procedures to assure our people that the Church cares and is committed to create an environment that achieves the wholeness of human life, a wholeness which is aware of incompleteness and partiality, successes and failures, but which reflects Jesus's assurance that He came that we "may have life, and have it abundantly." (*John 10:10*)