

**FAQs**  
**(Frequently Asked Questions)**  
**Title IV – Ecclesiastical Discipline**  
**In Plain Language**

**Who may be subject to a Title IV complaint?**

Any member of the clergy in the Episcopal Church, whether active or not in secular or religious work.

**What conditions or circumstances warrant filing a Title IV complaint?**

Knowingly violating church laws (canons), breach of conduct (i.e., confidentiality, financial malfeasance, sexual misconduct, heresy, criminal act, or any other conduct “unbecoming” of clergy).

**Who may file a Title IV complaint?**

Anyone, whether connected to the Episcopal Church or not.

**Who receives and reviews a Title IV complaint?**

An Intake Officer receives the complaint, completes a preliminary investigation to determine if the accusation constitutes an offense. If so, the Intake Officer submits a written intake report to the Reference Panel (bishop, intake officer, president of the Disciplinary Board) and church attorney.

**How long does it typically take for a Title IV complaint to be processed?**

Depending on the nature of the offense and the cooperation of the parties, the matter could span a few months or a few years.

**What’s the Episcopal Church’s role during a Title IV complaint process?**

If a complaint is local (for a clergy person other than a bishop), the Episcopal Church only gets involved if an appeal is requested by a Provincial Court of Review. In the case of a bishop, the Presiding Bishop’s Office handles the process and a diocese’s involvement is limited to cooperating with the investigation. The Disciplinary Board for Bishops comprised of bishops, priests, deacons, and lay people is also involved.

**What’s the diocese’s role and responsibility during a Title IV complaint process?**

Members of the diocese are interviewed witnesses. In some cases, former diocesan staffers are interviewed. In the case with Bishop Cook, this involved Bishop Sutton, some diocesan staffers, members of the Search Committee and Standing Committee, the Diocesan Chancellor, and Bishop Cook.

**When and how does the secular legal system factor into the church’s disciplinary process?**

The investigation would take into account criminal charges but would not necessarily have to wait until a secular trial if sufficient evidence is already known.

**What are the possible outcomes of a Title IV action?**

Dismissal, accord (mutually agreed-upon outcome of consequences) or order (decision by trial). Consequences range from discipline to suspension (reversible) to being deposed (permanent removal of ordination/holy orders).

**Why can't the diocese simply fire Bishop Cook?**

No Episcopal diocese may summarily fire clergy without following procedures of due process according to church (canon) law. We uphold the rule of law to ensure that every instance of misconduct is fully investigated.

**May multiple Title IV complaints be filed simultaneously against the same party?**

Yes, either as separate cases or as a case with multiple complainants or as a case with multiple complaints.

**What's the defense process for someone charged with a Title IV complaint?**

The Complainant is offered an advisor to support, assist, advise, and advocate. The Respondent may hire legal counsel at any step of the process but is not required to. Pastoral care is provided for both the Complainant and the Respondent.

**Is there a statute of limitations on filing a Title IV complaint?**

Yes, ten (10) years, with exceptions for criminal actions or sexual misconduct.

**Is the Title IV process substantively different when bishops are involved? If so, how?**

There are slightly different steps along the way, but the substantive difference is that it's handled by the denomination (i.e., Episcopal Church) rather than by the diocese. A bishop has the right to appeal just as does a priest or deacon.