

Pastoral Care Policy – Grace Church

General principles

We aim to provide appropriate pastoral care to members and attenders at Grace Church. This is given as part of our life together a church seeking to care for each other and aid each other in Christian discipleship. We desire to conduct such pastoral care with integrity, love for the individual/s and families concerned, and the glory of God within our church.

We recognise that pastoral care in the Christian context is fundamentally relational and hence it is difficult to specify precise guidelines for every situation. Furthermore, we expect pastoral care to operate within the church in variety of ways. Much will be *ad hoc* care between church members by way of informal advice and counsel. Some will involve more regular meetings at the mutual agreement of two or more members. Some will be conducted by those in positions of leadership, such as home group leaders or lay elders, and some by those employed by the church. Hence there is spectrum from informal to more established pastoral care. The guidelines below are aimed at the more established end of this spectrum, but we recognise a fluidity in what qualifies as such.

The guidelines give orientation to good practice within the context of Grace Church but do not denote our pastoral care as a regulated practice or give a code of professional conduct.

Guidelines

1. Awareness of meetings

Regular meetings by staff or elders should be known to exist by others. This is usually achieved by discussion within staff meetings and elders' meetings. Where home group leaders are giving ongoing pastoral care they should inform the elders. Communication is only with regard to the fact of meeting and not the content.

2. Setting for meetings

When meeting with a member of the opposite sex meetings will not take place behind 'closed doors'. There are a variety of ways such meetings can be arranged e.g. in public settings. There are a variety of potential exceptions to this such as visiting an elderly church member.

3. Medical evaluation

Individuals will be encouraged to seek medical evaluation if appropriate e.g. if there is concern over an individual's mental health. This would normally involve suggesting the individual speak to their GP but could involve attending emergency services if necessary.

4. Appropriate confidentiality

There is a general presumption of confidentiality in what is discussed in pastoral care meetings. However, confidentiality does not necessarily mean secrecy. There is a requirement for appropriate sharing of information where there is concern that an individual may cause harm to others or themselves. It can also sometimes be appropriate for some information to be shared with others e.g. the leadership of the church. It is considered standard to seek the consent of the person involved before this happens. However, there may be exceptional cases where the leadership ought to be notified (because of their responsibility to oversee the whole church) even when the individual

refuses consent. If an individual requests pastoral care or counsel on the condition of total confidentiality, then the potential carer should decline.

5. Avoidance of bad practice

Within pastoral care the following will be avoided: exploitation, unhealthy dependency, or emotional abuse of any kind. If a carer has any concern that they may be straying into bad practice or that unhelpful dynamics are being generated they have a responsibility to discuss the situation with the church leadership.

Where it is known that a conversation will involve a significant challenge to an individual over their Christian discipleship, giving warnings of some kind, or similar, an additional person should be in attendance.

If any conversation includes mention of accusations, details of serious events, or similar, the carer should make written notes of what was said either within the meeting or immediately afterwards.

6. Seeking advice

Where a carer has concerns over what advice to give or feels 'out of their depth' they will seek advice from the church leadership.

7. Second opinions

If an individual expresses questions or concerns over any advice being given, they will be encouraged to speak to one of the church leaders to gain a second opinion.

8. Children and vulnerable adults

For pastoral care of children and vulnerable adults please see the additional guidelines and expectations in our safeguarding policy.

9. Keeping of information

All notes and other information related to pastoral care meetings are subject to our GDPR policy.