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### Leadership Guides No. 7

# Ethics / Pastoral Care

## Pastoral Care

The following guidance is adapted from the *Code of Ministerial Practice* promoted within the Church of England.

[The word *minister* in this text applies to any servant of the assemblies.]

*"Every minister is first and foremost a disciple of Jesus Christ, and at the heart of every ministry is the maintenance of that discipleship in prayer, Bible study, worship and a readiness to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit. To this end ministers need to make sure that time and resources are available to 'feed' their own spiritual life. They must also thoroughly understand the proper use of the authority and responsibility which is a part of their role".*

### ***Ministers must:***

- behave so as to enhance and embody the communication of the Gospel
- uphold and enhance the good standing of the assembly and related associations
- maintain public trust and confidence
- be responsible for their own on-going training and development
- stay within their own competence
- be willing to refer to appropriate external professional advice
- work co-operatively, not in competition, with ministerial colleagues
- seek the good of the brethren and others in their pastoral care
- encourage the brethren to discern and develop their spiritual gifts
- involve the brethren in all assembly activities
- maintain confidentiality concerning brethren and regarding information from colleagues (See below)
- attend to careful record-keeping, and reply to enquiries promptly
- ensure the highest standard of probity in all financial matters
- constantly review personal work methods, and seek external appraisal
- be fully accountable for your advice and counsel (you may be sued!)
- be even-handed with all brethren including ministerial colleagues (I Timothy 5:19-20)

***Ministers must NOT:***

- undertake professional duties while influenced by alcohol or other recreational drugs
- abuse their privileged relationships with the brethren or colleagues
- blur the distinction between personal and assembly finances
- enter or continue in a relationship for personal advantage or gain - monetary, emotional, sexual or material
- present a personal opinion or viewpoint as official church teaching

**Guidelines for Pastoral Care**

*The overall aims of pastoral care are to increase the bonds of love between the brethren, to nurture their faith, to help them cope with life and live successfully in Christ.*

- recognize the importance of your own spiritual life as the foundation for successful pastoral care
- behave in a professional, competent and ethical manner
- be ready to seek appropriate outside support and further training
- be aware of your own emotional needs and the vulnerability of the other person
- act with compassion, while keeping a proper emotional and psychological distance
- clarify what help is being sought, working towards a clear understanding by all parties of the help being sought and offered. Offer only what is in your competence
- encourage maturity and growth in the counseled - not dependency
- be aware that you are perceived to exercise authority as pastor, spiritual guide and representative of the faith. *Don't abuse it!*
- Avoid competitiveness with colleagues, and be clear about areas of responsibility

***Situations to avoid:***

- Unless you are accompanied don't visit someone alone at home, or invite a visit when you are alone. Ensure that a pastoral visit is known to others within the bounds of confidentiality
- don't spend time with a child or children except when other adults are in the vicinity
- avoid a pastoral relationship with one half of a marriage partnership. Work with *the couple* wherever possible
- be careful that a pastoral relationship doesn't damage the life and well-being of the assembly - or affect the wider community

**Guidelines on Confidentiality**

*Sensitivity to the issue of confidentiality is vital. What must be confidential is often a matter of personal judgement. To nourish trust there must be absolute confidence that what is discussed will be in confidence, and when it is essential to share the confidence (in restricted appropriate places) it should be with informed consent.*

- Data, names *etc* that could identify should usually be removed or disguised when pastoral work is discussed with an external consultant, professional, expert. In discussion with involved colleagues it may be necessary to identify individuals - but always with consent.
- Be aware you may be manipulated by the sharing of one-sided information by the counseled.
- Except by agreement, information should not be shared with the minister's family or friends.
- Disclosure of information may be a legal necessity - e.g. with regard to the safety of children, serious criminality. But consult with your experienced spiritual peers before taking such action. Be aware of legal requirements where you live. (A dilemma may arise when the one offended doesn't want disclosure.)

***Ministers should:***

- assume personal information is to be treated as confidential
- only divulge information, usually, with the other party's consent. If you judge the information must be disclosed, then tell the individual you are doing so
- be sure consent is properly informed by all parties
- written records - and computer records - are also confidential and you are responsible for their fairness and accuracy. They should be open to examination by the subject. In the UK they are subject to the provisions of the *Data Protection Act*. You may need to register under the Act. Other countries have their own regulations, and you should be familiar with your own.

***Further Reading***

The various books by **Jay E Adams** are very helpful for counseling from a Biblical viewpoint: e.g. *Shepherding God's Flock*, *Christian Counseling Manual*

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