Philip Street Chapel Guidelines for Pastoral Care

Introduction[1]

These guidelines are intended to establish good practice for pastoral care and discipleship within the church, especially in 1:1 situations.

These guidelines have been produced to prevent the misuse of authority or the use of control and coercion in regard to interpersonal relationships that are formed in the context of the church, whether formally or informally. Also, following these guidelines should provide some protection for church leaders and church members against false allegations of emotional or psychological abuse that may be termed 'spiritual abuse'.

These guidelines are to be read in conjunction with the church's safeguarding policies for youth and vulnerable adults.

These guidelines were agreed by the elders of the church on 17th June 2024

What is Pastoral Care?

Many pastoral matters can be dealt with by church members ministering to each other and we want to encourage such 'one anothering' within the congregation. However, there may be circumstances where additional pastoral support is required.

When interacting with those who are struggling, we can do so on at least two different levels.

A. *As a friend*; a brother or sister in Christ. As fellow believers we can 'spur one another on toward love and good deeds' (Heb 10:24)
B. *As a representative of the church*, who may have been approached for help because of a formal position that they hold (e.g. Pastor, Life Group Leader, Youth Leader, Biblical Counsellor) or because they are informally fulfilling the role Paul describes in Titus 2 of older Christians supporting those younger in the faith.

This document is primarily concerned with situation B: those representing the church in the role of one-to-one discipleship. This discipling relationship could be long term, or it could simply be for one meeting. When this is happening, the church representative needs to be aware of the power dynamic that exists between them and the person they are trying to help.

The matter being discussed could be from a wide range of issues, including mental health, sin, relational difficulties, major life decisions, how to grow in their relationship with Jesus, or any other matter where they want to apply their faith in Jesus to their life.

[1] This document is based on the Guidelines for Pastoral Care and Discipleship adopted by Carey Baptist Church on 13th April 2021

Guidelines

Posture

Scripture commands us: 'Let your gentleness be evident to all' (Phil 4:5). Our posture towards anyone being discipled should be marked by gentleness, respect, and humility.

1. Be humble and gentle in your interactions with individuals. Be loving and compassionate and gracious towards others.

2. Exercise particular care when meeting with someone with an over-sensitive conscience or with low self-esteem, mental health issues or who has memory loss or confusion

3. Don't be overbearing. Ensure that the advice and counsel you give to others is biblical. At times, this will require you to challenge someone over thinking and/or actions that are clearly unbiblical, but this must be done gently. Differentiate between issues where Scripture has clear commands or instructions, and those which fall into the area of wisdom and therefore are matters of conscience.

4. Ensure that when you discuss guilt and shame over sin, speak also of God's grace that offers full forgiveness where there is sincere repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

5. Discourage dependency and encourage personal independence and responsibility in decision making. Avoid exclusivity in relationships. Encourage fellowship with other believers and informal accountability with peer groups.

6. Do not make decisions for other people or force them to do something they do not want to do. You can give Biblically-informed opinions and wise advice, but decisions must be made by the individual and they should accept personal responsibility for their actions.

7. Be sensitive when discussing what the Bible teaches about same-sex relationships, gay marriage, and transgender issues. Never use homophobic or transphobic language. Remember how hard it may have been for the person you are speaking with to open up about these matters. If you feel out of your depth, then see if the person would be willing to talk with an elder or one of the safeguarding leads about these matters.

8. Be aware that some cultures are very deferential towards those in authority or senior to them in age. This may make them eager to please and will not always say how they are really feeling if they are finding a situation awkward or uncomfortable.

Practice

We want to be wise in how we relate to people who are struggling, and therefore these guidelines help prevent undue harm being caused to either or the people in the relationship.

9. Let one of the elders know if you are meeting regularly with someone for discipleship or if you are providing pastoral care to an individual.

10. Ideally, when meeting someone 1:1 in a long term counselling relationship, a man should meet with a man and a woman with a woman. This will not always be possible, especially if

an Elder is the counsellor. If this situation occurs it would be wise for the person being discipled to bring a friend to these meetings.

11. Wherever possible meet in a place where other adults are in the vicinity.

12. It might be the case that meeting in public is not appropriate, due to the issues being discussed. When meeting privately with someone, let one of the elders or the Safeguarding officers know where and when this meeting is occurring.

13. It may be necessary to recommend that the counselee seek professional medical help. Recognise that the counsellor is not in the position to suggest medicines or specific therapies. Point the counsellee toward a GP, if that would be beneficial.

14. Set a time scale for 1:1 discipleship. At the outset, agree how long and how frequently you will meet and set an achievable goal or specific focus such as a set number of Bible studies or to read through a Christian book. Continually review the arrangement and when the set timescale or task is completed, either set a new goal or conclude this discipleship relationship as appropriate. Both parties should have the opportunity to express a wish to continue or complete the arrangement, so people don't get stuck with something unhelpful or burdensome.

15. If someone is not very proficient in English, check that they have understood clearly what you have said.

Safeguarding

The Church has a designated safeguarding lead, to whom all safeguarding issues should be raised. If the issue concerns the safeguarding officer, then contact the deputy safeguarding officer.

16. Let the person you are meeting with know that they can contact an elder or the church's Safeguarding Co-ordinator if they have any concerns.

17. If someone is distressed or upset or angry by advice you give to them, inform one of the elders or the church's Safeguarding Lead.

18. If you have any safeguarding concerns about an individual, these should be reported as per the church's safeguarding policy. In most circumstances it is appropriate to tell the person you are raising those concerns.

Disclosing with others

There may be occasions where the issues raised by the person being discipled need to be shared with another person.

19. Before the sessions start it is important the person being discipled knows that not all information can be kept solely between the two people meeting. It should be made clear before the sessions begin the sorts of things that may need to be referred on and who they would be shared with.

20. While the usual practice of the Elders at PSC is to share pastoral information with one another and the Elders' wives, in discipling relationships this would only happen if the person being discipled gave permission for the information to be shared that widely.

21. When disclosing something that the person being discipled has shared, inform that person specifically who you're sharing with, and why you're sharing that.

22. If criminal activities are disclosed, and there is no immediate danger of harm to anyone, speak to one of the Safeguarding Officers or Elders about what to do next.

23. If criminal activities are disclosed and there is immediate danger of harm to anyone, ring 101 and ask to speak to the police for advice.

24. Where there is unrepentant sin, please refer to the church discipline policy.

25. Where you are giving advice in regard to significant life choices or any financial decision, if at all possible involve someone else in the discussion. If this is not practical,encourage the person seeking advice to talk to one of the elders or a trusted christian friend.