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Association of Christian Counsellors and Pastoral Care UK

## Safeguarding in Pastoral Care

By Simon Bass

Every pastoral encounter should be conducted in a safe manner which promotes wellbeing. What we understand as pastoral care can be found in the ACC Framework for Good Practice in Pastoral Care, which uses Roger Hurding (1993) definition as:

'The practical expression of the Church's concerns for the everyday and ultimate needs of both its members and the community'

Pastoral care is not the sole domain of the clergy but rather the entire church has responsibility for the soul care of everyone. Pastoral care happens when Christians help others by listening, praying and providing caring support. This can be in environments with clear structures and boundaries, but we should also acknowledge that it can also happen less formally.

### Safeguarding Policies

One means of ensuring that safeguarding is addressed in pastoral care is in having a safeguarding policy. Churches, and para-church organisations have for many years had policies and procedures in place. Many church denominations produced their first child protection policies in 1994 in response to the 1993 Home Office publication 'Safe from Harm', which provided a template



for voluntary organisations. These safeguarding policies have been in response to our understanding of child abuse including neglect and physical, emotional and sexual harm.

Today we recognise that abuse happens within the church, and as the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movements have highlighted, abuse has been committed by those in positions of power and authority, including ministers of religion. The clerical abuse scandals have heightened the need to ensure all are safe within our churches, with safeguarding policies reflecting this.

Safeguarding policies have developed in response to society's understanding of the causes of abuse, and the importance of creating safer environments for all who may be vulnerable, especially children and young people.

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When considering safeguarding within any aspect of pastoral care, the protection of both children and adults needs to be considered.

Whilst there has understandably been a greater emphasis on the protection of children, this has broadened with our understanding that adults can be harmed too. As data from the Church of England demonstrates in their analysis of the Diocesan Safeguarding Assessment of all the safeguarding concerns in 2017 it found that out of 3287 concerns the majority (2030) were about adults, which represents 61.75%.

We perhaps should not be surprised by this, because although the church is one of the largest providers of children's work, this also reflects the scope of pastoral ministry within our churches and faith communities, which includes working with those who are homeless or those who need help and support through debt advice and managing financial issues. The majority of food banks operate out of churches and in many towns across the UK care is offered in the evening through Street Pastors and other such initiatives. Care, support, advice and counsel and training are features of many aspects of the work undertaken in churches. As churches work with those who may have vulnerabilities, including adults with disabilities, those with mental health issues and those with dementia, they can equally be susceptible to being abused and neglected.

### **Abuse of trust and boundaries**

We have to recognise that within church pastoral care takes place in an informal, unofficial way as Christians seek to help in practical ways and to encourage one another in faith. This differs from that which is formal or official church-sanctioned pastoral care carried out by church representatives on behalf of the church community. It has not always been easy to draw a boundary line between the two.

Adults have been abused within relationships of trust, such as counselling, pastoral care or through direction of those in authority within the church. There is greater awareness of the spiritual harm that can occur in all aspects of abuse and the abuse which is perpetrated by those with spiritual authority over another.

Maintaining appropriate professional boundaries when holding a position of responsibility, or any church office, is vital; though such is the nature of church that the blurring of boundaries can often result. The murder conviction of Benjamin Field in 2019 is a stark demonstration of this. Using church as a cover, and holding the role of church warden, he murdered a fellow parishioner whom he engaged in a relationship with, in order to benefit from his will. Similarly, in March 2013, the Korris Report looked into 'a complaint made by a vulnerable adult against a church warden in a parish on Jersey' which demonstrated a lack of adherence to

safeguarding policy and recommended the need for safeguarding training.

In whatever way a relationship is defined within the context of pastoral care, it is important to establish clear boundaries. This helps keep safe those we are providing care for and ensures that the relationship isn't damaged through unexpected actions. For example, clarity is essential in the area of confidentiality and this is especially important where safeguarding concerns exist. Developing a pastoral care policy provides clarity in distinguishing those activities which are formal, and sanctioned, and provides for a clear line of accountability and reporting mechanisms.

Those in receipt of pastoral care may want to thank the person providing this and give a gift such as chocolates or flowers or similar small value items in gratitude. Having clear guidelines about what can be accepted is vital to ensure that pastoral care is seen as altruistic without expectation of reward. Such policies would stipulate that small gifts can be accepted but not expensive items or promise of future reward such as being included within a will. This removes the accusation that it has resulted from any undue influence or coercion.

### **Policy content**

A pastoral care policy should outline the activities or services being offered, include safer recruitment, a code of conduct with clear boundaries and expectations for all workers (whether paid or volunteer) including confidentiality. The policy should also include how to respond to allegations or disclosure of abuse, stating who to report concerns to, and the actions they will follow in informing the statutory safeguarding authorities.

The advantage of developing a policy is that it can highlight issues around good practice and the safety of all, and can encourage the authentic care of, and inclusion of, those who for various reasons are on the periphery of the church and can encourage inclusivity and challenge prejudice.

### **Safer Recruitment**

All those working in pastoral care should be suitably recruited in accordance with the role and position they hold in recognition of the power differential that may exist within any pastoral care relationship. This should include asking all those engaged in pastoral care to complete an application form, be interviewed, provide references, and be given a clear role description along with a copy of the safeguarding policy, and for criminal record checks to be undertaken commensurate with the role. In England and Wales criminal record checks are obtained through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), in Scotland through Disclosure Scotland and in Northern Ireland through AccessNI.

These criminal record checks range from a basic check providing conviction data to an enhanced disclosure with barred list check, which provides information contained on the police national computer, including both spent and non-spent convictions, whether a person is on either of the two barred lists (children and adults) and non-conviction data held by the police. An enhanced disclosure with barred list check is available for those in regulated activity.

Through having a clear role or job description, including any person specification for the activities and tasks the person will be completing, this should give sufficient information to inform what level of criminal record disclosure should be required. A discussion should be had with the registered body, or umbrella body undertaking the criminal record checks on behalf of the church or organisation to ascertain the appropriate criminal record check required.

### **Code of behaviour**

It is helpful to provide those undertaking pastoral care with a code of behaviour, which should be tailored to the particular circumstances. Such a code could include:

- Ensuring their own safety when undertaking pastoral visits, ensuring someone knows the time and location of the visit and its expected duration, always having a charged mobile phone and checking signal coverage before entering a building
- Being aware of the possibility of dependency developing, and discussing this with a pastoral supervisor, along with strategies to disengage where necessary
- Being aware of their own limits, and that of the role – pastoral care is not counselling. Some people may need professional advice and support
- Avoiding any behaviour which might give the impression of favouritism, or the development of a relationship which falls outside that expected of pastoral care, such as a romantic attachment
- Not undertaking any pastoral ministry whilst under the influence of drink or non-prescribed drugs. Similarly, re-arranging appointments where the person receiving pastoral care is under the influence of drink or drugs

### **Referrals to adult social services**

Whilst pastoral care involves children and young people many pastoral care encounters involve adults. Vulnerability in adults can be permanent, for example caused by physical disability, or temporary such as caused by a particularly difficult situation or set of symptoms which will pass over time such as mental illness. It is therefore sometimes difficult and complex to recognise adults who may be vulnerable within our communities. Safeguarding legislation across the UK has strengthened in relation to the care and wellbeing of adults. There has been a move away from using the term

‘vulnerable adults’, which is seen as having negative connotations, to using adult at risk, or adult in need of protection, which emphasises the need to support wellbeing. This is seen within the legislation in England and Wales with the Care Act 2014, with similar legislation across the UK. The Act defines an adult at risk of harm as someone who meets a three-point test for whether there is a potential safeguarding concern:

- The adult has care and support needs
- They are experiencing abuse or neglect or are at risk of abuse or neglect and
- They are unable to protect themselves due to their care and support needs (which may include lack of capacity or being under duress)

### **Definitions of abuse for adults at risk**

Safeguarding means protecting an adult’s right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect. It is about people and organisations working together to prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect, while at the same time making sure that the adult’s wellbeing is promoted including, where appropriate, having regard to their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs in deciding on any action. Statutory guidance for the protection of adults use the following definitions of abuse:

**Physical abuse** – including assault, hitting, slapping, pushing, misuse of medication, restraint or inappropriate physical sanctions.

**Domestic violence** – including psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional abuse; so-called ‘honour’ based violence. This includes coercion and control.

**Sexual abuse** – including rape, indecent exposure, sexual harassment, inappropriate looking or touching, sexual teasing or innuendo, sexual photography, subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts, indecent exposure and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting.

**Psychological abuse** – including emotional abuse, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, cyber bullying, isolation or unreasonable and unjustified withdrawal of services or supportive networks.

**Financial or material abuse** – including theft, fraud, internet scamming, coercion in relation to an adult’s financial affairs or arrangements, including in connection with wills, property, inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.

**Modern slavery** – encompassing slavery, human trafficking, forced labour and domestic servitude. Traffickers and slave masters use whatever means they have at their disposal to coerce, deceive and force

individuals into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment.

**Discriminatory abuse** – including forms of harassment, slurs or similar treatment; because of race, gender and gender identity, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion.

**Organisational abuse** – including neglect and poor care practice within an institution or specific care setting such as a hospital or care home, for example, or in relation to care provided in one's own home. This may range from one-off incidents to on-going ill-treatment. It can be through neglect or poor professional practice as a result of the structure, policies, processes and practices within an organisation.

**Neglect and acts of omission** – including ignoring medical, emotional or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health care and support or educational services, the withholding of the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.

**Self-neglect** – this covers a wide range of behaviour neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes behaviour such as hoarding.

## Conclusion

We safeguard those we provide pastoral care for and protect ourselves when doing so under accountability structures found within a safeguarding policy. In providing pastoral care this brings us into contact with many who are vulnerable, and within a context where there is a power imbalance, very often. The nature of pastoral care is such that clarity is needed to distinguish what is formal and informal, so that boundaries are clear.

Church Safeguarding Consultancy can assist with developing suitable policies and procedures in ensuring that those working in pastoral care are doing so safely.

Email [info@churchsafeguarding.com](mailto:info@churchsafeguarding.com) or visit

[www.churchsafeguarding.com](http://www.churchsafeguarding.com)

## Footnotes:

Roger Hurding (1993) *The Bible and Counselling*, Hodder and Stoughton Page 45 found in the ACC Framework for Good Practice in Pastoral Care.

Independent Review of a Safeguarding Complaint for the Diocese of Winchester, March 2013. This Review was written by Jan Korris.

Department of Health and Social Care 'Care and support statutory guidance' under the Care Act 2014. Updated 26 October 2018. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-statutory-guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance>

Simon Bass BA (Hons), MA, CQSW, PGCert, has a background in social work. He is the Director of Church Safeguarding Consultancy, and previously was the CEO of CCPAS. He has extensive experience of safeguarding within churches, faith-based organisations and missions.

