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Association of
Christians in Counselling
and Linked Professions

Guidelines for Good Practice in Pastoral Care

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1 Introduction

These Guidelines recognise:

- 1) Christian pastoral care is fundamentally and intensely relational in nature and practice and offered from the gift of God's love for us which brings healing, liberation and reconciliation.
- 2) Christian pastoral carers are offering this love and care in multiple contexts and ways and in response to an ever-increasing world of complexity and uncertainty.
- 3) Christian pastoral carers will, to greater or lesser extents, inevitably experience some of the human struggle they care for in others.
- 4) Christian pastoral care needs to be offered in the light of best and responsible practice, Godly wisdom and biblical principles to maintain the integrity and witness of the church.

These Guidelines are intended to be:

- 5) A resource for churches, denominations and Christian organisations to adopt or to inform the development of guidelines for good practice in pastoral care within their local context (in the latter instance, please make appropriate acknowledgement of the source).
- 6) A resource which will enable individual pastoral care members to intentionally consider their practice and be accountable to their local church, denomination or Christian organisation.
- 7) A resource which will hold churches and organisations who have sole affiliate membership with ACC accountable (i.e. who are not held accountable by any overarching denominational or organisational structure).

These Guidelines are not intended to:

- 8) Denote pastoral care as a regulated profession.
- 9) Act as a professional code of ethics and practice for pastoral carers.
- 10) Be part of an ACC formal complaints procedure for individual ACC Pastoral Care members or non sole affiliates.

2 Terms Used

Pastoral Care: Care being provided by Christians in a variety of contexts – as used in this document it does not include the wider secular use of 'pastoral', e.g. as in pastoral tutor.

Pastoral Carer: A Christian who provides pastoral care to another person who may or may not hold a Christian faith.

Person: For the sake of brevity and clarity the word 'person' is used to indicate the person being cared for.

Note on Spiritual Direction: In some church/denominational traditions, Spiritual Direction might be seen as a separate function of a few specifically trained people, some of whom will use the title Spiritual Director and may have written agreements with directees setting out the purpose and boundaries of their respective roles.

Note on Counselling: Counselling is a specialised function which requires specialised training, involves a contractual agreement between the counsellor and their client, and is subject to a separate code of ethics and practice – see ACC's Ethics and Practice.

3 Definition and Scope of Pastoral Care

Christian pastoral care:

- 1) Is the activity which flows from the attitude and commitment to love one another because we ourselves, are first loved by God.
- 2) Is ultimately concerned with developing quality relationships and enabling one another to more fully recognise and experience God's love.
- 3) Participates in God's missional activity to reconcile the world to Himself.
- 4) Embraces a wide range of activity in support of one another, in and beyond the church, i.e. in gathered and dispersed church.
- 5) Might involve sustaining others through prolonged difficulty or immediate critical need, enabling the journey of healing and wholeness, considering the process of reconciliation with God, self and others, offering guidance about other resources and enabling different perspectives to be gained.
- 6) Might take the form of listening, encouraging, visiting, hospitality, advocacy, inclusion, mentoring, befriending, celebrating, practically helping, prayer, comforting, enabling, discipling.
- 7) Might happen formally in planned and organised ways, or informally through everyday spontaneous moments, in both the ordinary and extraordinary.
- 8) Might be offered by an individual, by small groups, through a particular ministry, through an outreach project, by one church or a group of churches.

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Definition of a Christian Pastoral Carer

A Christian Pastoral Carer is someone who either formally, as part of a pastoral team, group or network or informally, as part of their fellowship group or everyday relationships in the community, offers care and support to another, in the knowledge of being loved themselves by God and in the hope of sharing that love with others.

Christian Pastoral Carers might be seen as part of the ALL, SOME and FEW of the Body of Christ:

- 1) The 'All' - All Christians, as members of the Body of Christ, have a God given responsibility to grow and maintain Christ centred loving relationship with others which includes offering loving care. This loving care will mostly happen in informal and organic ways rather than within formalised pastoral structures or systems and in the ordinary daily encounters of life. The ALL help to grow pastoral churches and communities.
- 2) The 'Some' - Some Christians are particularly gifted and called by God to provide pastoral care in a more focussed way. This might include offering and providing pastoral care in more planned or formal ways, perhaps as part of a dedicated team of pastoral carers. It might involve the Pastoral Carer undertaking training and/or developing knowledge, insights, skills and expertise in pastoral care at a greater depth than 'the all'. The SOME use their gifts for the good of the whole body.
- 3) The 'Few' - A few Christians are particularly called and gifted to resource, lead or co-ordinate the work of pastoral care in planned, structured and formalised ways. The FEW may have specialist training, knowledge, experience and skill to enable, encourage and equip the pastoral care work of the ALL and the SOME. For example, they may provide training, leadership, support and help to reflect on pastoral care practice. The FEW help to uphold and develop the SOME and may be called to deepen or expand the reach of pastoral care in their communities.

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Christian Worldview for Pastoral Care

Whilst these Guidelines do not intend to make Christian pastoral carers think or act in the same way, they do carry expectation that they will hold a specifically Christian worldview which will underpin their care of others. These may be implicit or explicit and consistent with ecumenical teaching and belief about the nature and activity of God, and God's desire for His people to work to bring about healing and wholeness of spirit, mind and body.

Taking the above into account, Christian Pastoral Carers are called to:

- 1) Value others as created uniquely in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), with purpose, potential and capacity to live life to the full with the saving grace of God (John 10:10).
- 2) Love others through Christ-like love (John 13:34-35, Romans 12:10, Romans 13:8), led and living by the Holy Spirit, manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit and informed by the indwelling Word of God (Galatians 5:13-26).
- 3) Bear burdens with and for others, whilst not creating dependency or denying the person their responsibilities and capabilities (Galatians 6:1-5).
- 4) Build up the Body of Christ in love and with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (e.g. Ephesians 4:11-16, Colossians 3:12-14).
- 5) Participate in the reconciliatory missional work of God (e.g. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21).



Ethical Values for Pastoral Carers

Pastoral Carers are ethically required to understand the principles of difference and diversity and to:

- 1) Respect and affirm the rights and dignity of every person as a unique individual, equal with them in the sight of God and regardless of race, religion, nationality, language, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, size, employment, income, disability, health, abode, or criminal record.
- 2) Cultivate knowledge and awareness of how discrimination, prejudice and bias operate (including unconscious bias), constructively reflect on their own actions and assumptions, seek to actively avoid discrimination and challenge it when observed around them.
- 3) Accept a person without critical judgement and to allow them the safety, freedom and space to express themselves and to make their own decisions without force or manipulation, even when they disagree with the persons thinking, actions and lifestyle.
- 4) Listen carefully and act honestly, openly, justly, compassionately, courageously, mercifully and with integrity.
- 5) Maintain confidentiality, understanding that confidentiality does not necessarily mean secrecy (see Section 7 below) and to exercise discretion.
- 6) Hold appropriate boundaries and be confidently assertive when required, without aggression.
- 7) Ensure that a person is safeguarded as far as is practically reasonable and that appropriate steps are taken to seek suitable medical, legal or other professional assistance where required (refer to Section 10 in relation to safeguarding responsibilities).

- 8) Ensure that they do not misuse or abuse the trust that is bestowed upon them by a person.
- 9) Not subject any person to physical, psychological, verbal or spiritual harassment and not tolerate such behaviour by others. Harassment can include physical, psychological, emotional, sexual or spiritual abuse including insults, unwelcome sexual behaviour, language or jokes, display of offensive materials, words, pictures, symbols, behaviour, gestures, or signals.
- 10) Not exploit people they are helping financially, sexually, emotionally, or in any other way.
- 11) Understand the limits of what they can offer in help, support and accompaniment to a person, resisting being pulled into roles calling for specialist knowledge and experience.
- 12) Avoid creating unhealthy dependencies for either themselves or the persons to whom they are offering pastoral care. Develop compassionate self-awareness in order to avoid patterns where e.g. a carer meets their own needs through the needs of others, or alternatively feels that other people's needs always outweigh their own.

Confidentiality

- 1) Confidentiality is a critical boundary which protects the privacy of a person, establishes trust, creates a safe space for God to work and maintains the integrity of pastoral work in our church or organisation.
- 2) Confidentiality ensures the information a person reveals to us is not disclosed to anyone else, without the person's prior knowledge and consent, apart from exceptional circumstances where safeguarding is necessary.
- 3) Confidentiality does not need to be confused with secrecy, i.e. concealing information which could be significantly harmful to others or collusion, i.e. explicitly or inherently cooperating with illegal behaviour to deceive others.
- 4) Pastoral Carers working in a formal pastoral care role need to make a person aware of the boundaries of confidentiality from the onset of any care or support offered.
- 5) Pastoral Care offered informally in the everyday contexts of life, needs to assume that what is spoken by the person is to be kept confidential. Where there is any doubt, the Pastoral Carer needs to assume responsibility for clarifying this, e.g. would the person like their situation to be kept confidential, be shared with other members of the pastoral/leadership team, be prayed for by a group of intercessors who would keep their details confidential or do they want it communicated more widely, e.g. in the weekly news sheet. When information is being shared, it should be agreed with the person exactly what is to be shared.
- 6) Confidentiality in pastoral care might need to be worked out not only by the Pastoral Carer and the person being cared for but with church leaders, organisational managers, pastoral team coordinators, other pastoral carers, the person's family members and friends, the Pastoral Carer's own family members and friends, prayer groups, fellowship groups.
- 7) Confidentiality guidelines for various individuals and groups, might involve formal written guidelines policies and procedures, explicit verbal explanations, inherent role modelling.

- 8) Confidentiality also extends to any written or electronic records and the safeguarding of these to protect the privacy of a person.
- 9) Written or electronic records should only be kept for the specific purpose and time needed. They need to be accurate, up to date, adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purpose for which they are intended and where appropriate without any identifiable information.
- 10) Care should be taken about access to and use of shared computers, backup systems and emails, iPads, mobile phones, social networks, photocopying, faxing and shredding. It can be, for instance, a breach of confidentiality to copy others into certain e-mails when the person has not given their permission for you to do so and where they contain personal content, or to leave a letter inadvertently in the photocopier, or to leave a thank you card visible to others which give away information about a person cared for.
- 11) Individuals, churches and organisations need to be aware of their responsibilities under any current data protection legislation and of the rights of individuals about whom information is processed and stored. Information is available on these rights and responsibilities at the Information Commissioner's Office www.ico.org.



Dual Relationships

- 1) A dual relationship is where a Pastoral Carer holds more than one role with a person, e.g. a pastoral listener might also be a person's health care professional in the community or may be the friend of a family member. Dual relationships can also occur within the church or organisation where a Pastoral Carer may find themselves in a small group, worship team, committee, etc. with a person they are offering care for, or may hold a leadership/decision making role that impacts on a person they have offered pastoral care to.
- 2) Dual relationships, particularly in small communities, are not always avoidable and should be managed with care and consideration for both the carer, the person and any others involved.
- 3) Where a dual relationship is apparent, the pastoral carer needs to take the initiative for this consideration, being mindful of any position of power they hold in relation to the person and how this might be impacted, protecting any confidences they are ethically bound to and putting in place any arrangements to avoid potential problems.
- 4) Depending on circumstances, this may entail checking whether another Pastoral Carer is available to offer support to preserve the primary relationship, checking their own thoughts and feelings within a confidential pastoral support/supervision relationship to develop their awareness, checking the thoughts and feelings of the person themselves to ascertain if they have any concerns about the duality, establishing where necessary, clarity about roles and contexts at any one time and the boundaries needed to keep safe space.



Care for the Pastoral Carer

- 1) Pastoral Carers need to ensure they are taking care of their own health and well-being (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and relationally) as they offer care to others. This includes obtaining sufficient rest, exercise and sleep and looking after their own relationships. It also includes ensuring they have sufficient regular space to grow in relationship with God, mature in faith and develop self-awareness themselves through reflective practice.
- 2) Pastoral Carers need to monitor they are working within their abilities and competencies, that they are not working out of their depth in a detrimental way to themselves or the person and that they are prepared to refer or signpost a person to others when needed.
- 3) Pastoral Carers need to regularly reflect upon, identify and undertake training which is relevant to their work. This process is ideally undertaken with the help of the carers support systems. ACC Pastoral Care has resources available to train individuals, churches and organisations (www.acc-uk.org).
- 4) Pastoral Carers need to ensure any person for whom they are caring, is aware they are not offering counselling and need to be prepared to refer a person to a counsellor where needed and desired. If the Pastoral Carer is a trained counsellor, they should discuss this with their counselling supervisor before offering to provide the person with counselling themselves and shifting the relationship into a formal counselling agreement. In such circumstances the Pastoral Carer needs to ensure that the person understands the contractual/formalised boundaries and conditions of counselling.
- 5) Pastoral Carers who are regularly providing formal pastoral care as one of the 'some' or the 'few' in a designated role, should be accountable to their church or organisation and be resourced themselves through regular, appropriate oversight and support for their pastoral care work.

- 6) It is essential that confidentiality is maintained within any oversight/support/supervisory arrangement for the Pastoral Carer and therefore careful consideration needs to be given to the most appropriate source of such support. For some it may be more appropriate to access support from outside their own church congregation to help ensure that confidentiality is not compromised. ACC Pastoral Care has online, confidential, facilitated Pastoral Support Groups available (www.acc-uk.org).
- 7) Pastoral Carers need to feel safe themselves, and in some instances, have a right to decline offering care and or seeing someone on their own, e.g. with a person who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs or who are 'acting out' aggressively.
- 8) Pastoral Carers should not offer care to a person when their own functioning is impaired due to personal or emotional difficulties, illness, alcohol, drugs or for any other reason.
- 9) Pastoral Carers who are working formally may want to ensure their church has adequate insurance to cover their activities or to take out their own indemnity insurance with a suitable insurance company.

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Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 1) Every church, denomination and Christian organisation should have a clear, written, safeguarding policy for children, young people and vulnerable adults, which should clarify the pastoral roles that the church, denomination or Christian organisation require to undergo the appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. There is guidance on www.gov.uk on the level of checking suitable for different roles.
- 2) ACC Pastoral Care strongly recommends that churches, denominations and Christian organisations seek independent guidance on the creation and ongoing maintenance of their safeguarding policy for children, young people and vulnerable adults, from a specialist safeguarding advice agency such as thirtyone:eight (<https://thirtyoneeight.org>; previously known as CCPAS – the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service) who will also advise on best practice according to current legislation, directives and understandings.
- 3) Pastoral Carers who are called to provide pastoral care to children, young people and vulnerable adults must do so within the guidelines of their church's, denomination's or Christian organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures, and should be made aware of these and receive appropriate safeguarding training.
- 4) Pastoral Carers need to be aware of the people who hold safeguarding roles in their church, denomination or Christian organisation, how and where to access them and when it is appropriate to do so.
- 5) If a Pastoral Carer receives a disclosure or allegation of abuse or has any reason to suspect that a child, young person or vulnerable adult has in the past been abused, or might be at risk of abuse or is currently being abused, they must act promptly within their churches, denominations or Christian organisations safeguarding policies and procedures.
- 6) Pastoral Carers, churches and Christian denominations are encouraged to develop policies for responding to risks and vulnerabilities that may not be covered within the scope of standard safeguarding procedures and the definition of vulnerable adults. These may include people being subject to domestic abuse and violence, modern slavery and other oppressive practices. Some denominations may have these policies, which should be followed.

11 Complaints

- 1) Individual pastoral care members of ACC are required to demonstrate that they are working within a framework for good practice in pastoral care within their church, denomination or Christian organisation which does not contravene the Guidelines here. Where such a framework does not exist the individual will be required to adopt these Guidelines and will need to declare they are still working to these at the point of membership renewal.
- 2) ACC Pastoral Care does not receive and respond to complaints made against its individual pastoral care members and recognises that it is the responsibility of the church, denomination or Christian organisation to receive and address complaints brought against their pastoral workers.
- 3) Churches, denominations and Christian organisations affiliated to ACC are required to demonstrate that they are working with a framework for good practice in pastoral care within their church, denomination or organisation, which does not contravene the Guidelines here. Where such a framework does not exist the affiliate will be required to adopt these Guidelines and will need to declare they are still working to these at the point of membership renewal.
- 4) ACC Pastoral Care does not receive and respond to complaints made against an affiliated church or organisation for its pastoral work and recognises that it is the responsibility of the central denomination or organisation to receive and address complaints brought against its churches or branch organisations.
- 5) ACC Pastoral Care does hold a complaints process for sole affiliated churches or organisations who are not accountable to a denominational or wider organisational structure and where the complaint is about the churches or organisations actions or their handling of a complaint of one of their pastoral workers.
- 6) ACC Pastoral Care does hold a complaints process for ACC Pastoral Care trainers and facilitators.

12 ACC Pastoral Care

- 1) ACC Pastoral Care is part of the Association of Christians in Counselling and Linked Professions (ACC).
- 2) Whilst pastoral care is seen as distinctive to counselling, it draws upon the rich counselling heritage of the organisation to inform its practice.
- 3) Individuals, churches and organisations who become members of ACC therefore would be expected not to contravene ACC's Ethics and Practice in respect of any counselling service it supports or provides, or the promotion of counselling in general as undertaken by ACC members or other counsellors on accredited registers.
- 4) For information on ACC Pastoral Care training, including a workshop on these Guidelines, please see ACC website www.acc-uk.org or email pastoral@acc-uk.org.