(POL-COUNSELING) Pastoral Counseling and One-on-One Ministry Policy

General Board Approved: May 31, 2026

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear expectations for pastoral counseling, discipleship, mentoring, prayer, and other one-on-one ministry settings.

The church desires to provide compassionate pastoral care while maintaining wisdom, visibility, accountability, and safety for all involved.

2. Scope

This policy applies to pastors, employees, officers, ministry leaders, volunteers, teachers, mentors, and others providing counseling, pastoral care, discipleship, prayer, or personal ministry under the authority or approval of the church.

3. Nature of Church Counseling

Counseling provided by the church is pastoral and spiritual in nature unless otherwise stated. Church leaders are not necessarily licensed professional counselors, therapists, psychologists, physicians, attorneys, or financial advisors.

When a matter requires professional, medical, legal, or emergency assistance, the person should be referred to appropriate outside help.

4. General Accountability Standard

Counseling and one-on-one ministry should be conducted in a way that is observable, accountable, and appropriate.

Ministry workers shall avoid isolated, secretive, or unnecessarily private settings, especially with minors, vulnerable adults, or members of the opposite sex.

5. Counseling with Minors

Counseling or mentoring with minors should occur only with the knowledge of a parent or guardian, except in urgent situations where immediate care is needed.

When meeting with a minor:

- Another approved adult should be present, nearby, or aware of the meeting;
- The meeting should occur in a visible or observable location;
- Doors should remain open or windows unobstructed when possible;
- Meetings should not be hidden from parents or guardians;
- Ongoing counseling should involve parental awareness and leadership oversight.

Adult ministry workers should not meet alone with one unrelated minor in an isolated or unobservable setting.

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6. Counseling with Adults

Counseling with adults should be conducted with wisdom and appropriate boundaries.

When counseling an adult of the opposite sex, ministry workers should use heightened care, such as:

- Meeting during normal church or office hours when others are present;
- Meeting in a visible or observable location;
- Keeping doors open or windows unobstructed when possible;
- Informing another appropriate church leader when ongoing counseling is taking place;
- Referring to another counselor or ministry worker when appropriate.

7. Location and Timing

Counseling and one-on-one ministry should normally occur:

- On church property;
- In a public or semi-public location;
- During reasonable hours;
- In spaces where others are nearby or can observe general activity.

Meetings in private homes, isolated places, vehicles, hotel rooms, or other highly private settings should be avoided unless there is a clear pastoral reason, appropriate safeguards, and leadership awareness.

8. Transportation Connected to Counseling

A ministry worker should not transport one unrelated minor alone in connection with counseling or one-on-one ministry except in an emergency or with specific parent/guardian and leadership awareness.

Transportation shall also follow the Church Driver Approval Policy and Church Transportation and Vehicle Use Policy.

9. Digital Counseling and Communication

Texting, messaging, email, phone calls, or video calls used for counseling or pastoral care should remain appropriate, accountable, and limited to ministry purposes.

Digital communication with minors shall follow the Electronic Communication and Social Media Policy.

Secretive, romantic, sexual, manipulative, or overly personal communication is prohibited.

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10. Confidentiality

Pastoral care often involves sensitive information. The church will seek to handle such information with care.

However, confidentiality is not absolute. Information may need to be shared when:

- Abuse, neglect, or exploitation is known or suspected;
- A person is a danger to self or others;
- A minor or vulnerable adult may be at risk;
- Required by law;
- Necessary for appropriate church leadership, safety, accountability, or discipline;
- Legal counsel, insurance, or civil authorities must be involved.

Ministry workers should not promise absolute secrecy.

11. Documentation

In appropriate cases, ministry workers may document counseling or one-on-one ministry interactions.

Documentation should be brief, factual, secure, and limited to necessary information, such as date, persons present, general concern, referral made, or safety action taken.

12. Referrals

The church may refer individuals to qualified professional counselors, physicians, emergency services, legal counsel, addiction recovery services, crisis resources, or other outside support when appropriate.

The church should not attempt to handle matters beyond its ability or authority.

13. Boundary Concerns

Any concern about inappropriate counseling conduct, boundary violations, secrecy, favoritism, emotional dependency, sexual misconduct, or unsafe one-on-one ministry should be reported according to the Abuse, Misconduct, and Incident Reporting Policy.

14. Review

This policy shall be reviewed periodically by the General Board and may be revised as needed.

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