

Suggested Diocesan Pastoral Care Policies and Procedures Guidelines



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Foundational Principle. When we assist or visit a parishioner as a representative of the pastoral care network at our church, we represent the church by bringing a *spiritual presence* to someone in need. We are not social workers or counselors, but rather lay ministers acting within the framework of Christian principles. This foundational tenet of our responsibility requires that we *not* dispense advice, but rather serve as listeners, referring more difficult situations on to the clergy and/or outside resources.

Spiritual Trust. Assisting parishioners in the name of the church means that care givers enjoy privileged access to personal lives. Honoring this sacred trust is a spiritual and moral obligation. Keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Before a pastoral care visit with your care receiver, pray for God's grace in all that you do for your care receivers.
- Maintain strict confidentiality. Do not speak about your care receiver's problems to others, except to the clergy and other pastoral care team members on a need to know basis, and in the case of sensitive issues, only with the care receiver's permission.
- Maintain a faith-based, hopeful and encouraging attitude, while showing sensitivity to how your care receiver's faith is being tested.
- Place a greater focus on Christian companionship for your care receiver, than on his or her medical situation or personal problems.
- Accept the confidences of your care receiver carefully and honestly. If the conversation moves toward topics of extreme sensitivity or danger to self or others, let your care receiver know that such serious issues would best be handled by the clergy, one of our counselors, or an outside professional resource.
- Be aware that your body language speaks as clearly as your words. A relaxed, listening posture often creates a sense of receptivity.
- Report to the clergy any suspicions of abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual or financial
- Do not accept money or any gift of value. Suggest a donation to the church, if the person or family wishes to show support and appreciation..
- Leave cashing of checks or management of documents to family members or guardians. If necessary, help your care receiver make the required arrangements.

Coming in the Name of the Parish. Our concern is that we make our visit and conversations most beneficial to the care receiver. The following suggestions will offer some guidance.

- Keep the agreed upon purpose of the visit as the priority, gentling declining additional activity at that time.
- For all forms of practical assistance offered to or requested by the care receiver, keep in mind the boundaries represented by the various pastoral care ministries at the church. For example, many churches do not have a ministry to do housework or lawn maintenance, but do provide meals and transportation.

- Refer the care receiver to other pastoral care ministry leaders, if the services of their ministries would be helpful. For example, a home visitor might contact the Eucharist Minister to bring communion or the Stephen Ministry to deal with a critical personal problem.
- Reassure the care receiver of the trustworthiness and confidentiality offered by each member of the network.
- Protect your care receiver from contagious situations. If you have a cold or other illness, do not visit personally but call by telephone. If a visitor is necessary, request the assistance from someone else in the network.
- Defer to medical caregivers any needed hands-on care activities, such as administering medications or giving massages. If requested, make contacts that can provide professional assistance.
- If you provide transportation, you must have liability insurance, and of course, a valid Washington State driver's license.
- When possible, have a list of your care receiver's contacts available, including the primary caregiver, family, friends, and doctors.
- Be prepared in the case of emergencies. A list of emergency contacts for the care receiver is desirable. In cases of concern, do not hesitate to dial 911. The following guidelines may be helpful to you in various emergency situations.
 - o If your care receiver is not there when you arrive for a visit, call on your cell phone. Contact a neighbor, friend, relative, or building manager if there is no response. If all else fails, it may be necessary to call 911.
 - o If your care receiver is unconscious, do not move him/her unless there is immediate danger (e.g. fire). Call 911 for an ambulance. Call contacts you know of (e.g. friends, relatives) and also inform the church administrator or the clergy.
 - o If the person is having an attack of some sort, do not move him/her unless there is an emergency. If he/she can speak, ask them to describe what is wrong or where it hurts. Call 911 and describe to them the situation. Notify the doctor, relatives, and/or appropriate church contacts of the situation.

Additional Guidelines. In the day-to-day activities of pastoral care, there are a number of additional procedures to keep in mind, as suggested below.

- Set up an appointment to meet with your care receiver. Don't show up unannounced.
- If you agree to a meeting or to provide some assistance, meet your commitment. Not meeting care receiver expectations reflects poorly on the church, as well as you.
- Communications are important. Keep in touch by telephone in between visits.
- Keeping a very brief log of visits is helpful. From a practical point of view, it provides documentation so that you can deduct mileage from your taxes. More importantly, a one sentence explanation of the visit can be used to provide feedback to others in the network.

- **Never hesitate to ask another lay minister in the pastoral care network for help. The pastoral care networks in most churches provide a variety of caring services that can be of help to care receivers.**
- **Avoid putting yourself in a potential sexual harassment situation. As an example, it is generally not advisable to offer to drive persons of the opposite sex, particularly younger people or even peers. Deal with inappropriate behavior directly and discuss it with the clergy.**

You are the church's representative to the community. Providing spiritual presence and creating a spiritual trust by following these guidelines, reflects well on both you and the church.



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