Week 1: Pastoral Care and the pastoral relationship – gifts and boundaries

The relationship between a pastoral carer and a person in need carries a number of responsibilities alongside the gifts it also offers.

Excerpts from the Code of Ethics in Ministry Practice of the UCA

1.2 [Pastoral carers] have a particular place within the Christian community. They touch people’s lives at many points of joy, pain, celebration, grief and vulnerability. They are responsible for providing leadership in the community's task of worshipping, proclaiming the good news of Jesus, providing pastoral care, standing with those who suffer, and working for justice and peace. They minister within a pastoral relationship in which they seek to enable other people to focus on God as the source of healing, restoration and wholeness. As part of their responsibility to promote and maintain the Church as a missional community Ministers may occupy ministry positions in any of the Councils of the Church. This may mean that they will give more emphasis to some parts of their ministry than they would in a congregational placement. This form of ministry carries particular responsibilities in regard to other staff in the organization.

1.3 The pastoral relationship occurs within a faith community whose life and relationships are established by Jesus Christ. The pastoral relationship has its meaning, and is established and maintained, as the church enables others to meet Jesus who nourishes our lives. The pastoral relationship is part of the way the church is nourished and built up as the Body of Christ, and nurtures life in the world. As a result of this context, ministers also have relationships and responsibilities within the broader community which are based on their responsibilities within the faith community.

1.4 It is the seriousness of the pastoral relationship, and the vulnerability of people in that relationship, which make it necessary for Ministers to appreciate their unique position and the way they touch people’s lives. They exercise considerable influence and power. It is essential that each individual Minister recognises the power they have and understands the boundaries that the church requires to be observed within their ministry.

1.5 Because the pastoral relationship occurs in a deeply intimate community, friendships will develop. These will, at times, challenge the capacity of Ministers to provide the pastoral care that belongs to their role as Minister. Ministers have responsibility to distinguish times when objective pastoral care is required. They have the responsibility to discern the boundaries of the pastoral relationship, to offer professional pastoral care when it is required, and to discern when their relationships overstep the appropriate level of friendship and intimacy, or when they are exercising power inappropriately in relation to others in the pastoral relationship.

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1.6 The Uniting Church understands that as Ministers live out God’s call to ministry, all relationships shall be characterised by the love, care and compassion that was embodied in Jesus Christ. The requirement is that Ministers will exhibit a mature Christian faith in all their relationships and in particular embody integrity, trust and compassion.

1.7 People enter ministry as a response to a call from God and the Church. It is this call that requires that all Ministers carry out their ministry in a professional and accountable manner.

1.8 The Uniting Church is a multi-cultural church and as such is made up of faith communities from across many different cultural backgrounds. Each culture has its own unique expression of community and relationships which need to be borne in mind when overseeing the behaviour of ministers. In ministry with people from diverse cultural backgrounds these unique expressions form an important part of the intimate community which is formed and inform how Ministers express their ministry.


Gifts of the pastoral care relationship:

- Genuine interest in the person in need
- Focussing on the unique needs of each person
- Willingness of give of time, self and practical help
- Listening
- Follow through with requests where possible

Responsibilities of the pastoral carer

- Respect Boundaries: To be mindful and respectful of each person’s personal boundaries;
- To never engage in inappropriate intimate contact with the person in need;
- To say ‘no’ to any substantial gifts;
- Deal with dependency: To be alert to the potential development of unhealthy dependency;
- Care for your own needs: To know your personal needs and care for them outside of your caring ministry;

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- **Receive support**: To attend a pastoral carers’ support group where thoughts and emotions around difficult encounters/conversations can be offloaded and discussed;

- **Relinquishment**: To regularly pray for those you care for and allow others to pray for you.

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