

One-to-One ('Personal Work') Policy

Definition

This policy addresses the way in which staff and volunteers from Arborfield and Barkham Churches (ABCh – including St Bartholomew's Arborfield, St James' Barkham, Christ Church Wokingham and Church at the Green) seek to meet with others on a one-to-one basis, including regularly over a longer period of time, in order to evangelise and/or encourage and disciple them in following the Lord Jesus.

Reading the Bible, encouraging, and praying one-to-one is one way in which we fulfil the Lord Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). It is also a key way of fulfilling the Bible's many 'one another' commands (eg John 13:34; Romans 15:14; 1 Corinthians 12:25; Ephesians 4:15, 29; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24; James 5:16; 1 Peter 3:7-10). Indeed, how we speak to one another is an identifying mark of God's people.

We will meet with people in the course of our encouragement and training of leaders as well as in our pastoral care. One-to-one meetings are not the only way of doing this (sometimes it may be appropriate to meet with several people at once), but they will be a feature of this ministry. One-to-one meetings with non-Christians will also be a normal part of our personal evangelism. We expect ABCh staff to be meeting with people like this regularly. We would also hope that other volunteers in our church families will do this too. Where this is at the request of or with the explicit blessing of their church, volunteers should follow this policy too.

Dangers

It is important that we are above reproach in all of our ministry. Spending time with individuals can become over-intense and is potentially open to being misunderstood. 'Spiritual abuse' is a form of psychological and emotional abuse which can occur within churches and is characterised by coercive and controlling behaviour. One-to-one meetings can easily be a feature of this form of abuse and a setting in which such abuse can easily happen.

There are often several key elements to such abuse:

- Manipulation
- Exploitation
- Control through misuse and abuse of scripture
- Censorship of decision making
- Pressure to conform
- Enforced accountability
- Requirement of obedience
- Isolation

All such behaviours are contrary to the way of Christ and should be resisted and exposed.

In addition, it is worth remembering that some onlookers may be suspicious of one-to-one ministry. It is therefore a good idea to pause and consider how others might perceive what we are doing, so we can ensure we are not doing anything that might be open to misunderstanding.

Guidelines

It is important to consider first whether it might be possible and appropriate to meet with two or three people at the same time, and whether anything would be lost by doing so. Sometimes meeting in a group can be just as, if not more, effective in encouraging individuals on in the Christian life – not least because it builds relationships between them too.

If one-to-one meetings are considered appropriate then, knowing our own weaknesses and out of love for others, especially the most vulnerable, we are committed to the following basic principles in our churches' ministry with individuals. If in exceptional circumstances one of the following principles is set aside, a written record should be kept and the relevant church minister and, if relevant, Church Safeguarding Officer should also be informed.

- It will not normally be wise to meet regularly one-to-one with someone of the opposite sex. One exception to this is when someone line manages a staff member of the opposite sex. In that case, it will be appropriate to meet one-to-one, though you should work to be above reproach, eg considering carefully where you meet and what you discuss. This care should be balanced by a willingness, in particular, to train and support female members of staff or the church family. Maintaining reasonable, godly standards is not to become an excuse for neglecting to properly manage female colleagues (eg a male line manager refusing to meet with a woman regularly when he would happily meet with a man doing the same job).
- Aim to meet for no more than about an hour each time. (There will be obvious exceptions to this: eg occasionally meeting with someone socially, or in a pastoral emergency.)
- One-to-one meetings should not be secret. Church staff should normally let at least one colleague know who they are meeting with (and why) and volunteers should share with their minister on a regular basis who they are meeting with and how things are going. This is important not least so we can be praying for one another.
- We recognize that one-to-one ministry can lead to the development of an unhealthy dependence or a controlling relationship, especially where one person has an obvious position of spiritual authority. You should consider carefully how our actions may be understood by others (eg as controlling or favouritism) and take all reasonable steps to avoid misunderstanding. You should be aware that others may perceive you as having authority (putting you on a pedestal), even if you don't necessarily feel authoritative.
- You should carefully consider both the topics you address (eg avoiding an unhealthy focus on sexuality or a pushy attitude to financial giving) and the character of any advice you give (carefully distinguishing God's commands from your opinions by ensuring that the Bible is visibly and always the authority, rather than you). You should always show people that what you are teaching comes from the Bible – this will help to

avoid a misuse of power. You should seek to handle the Bible correctly and not misinterpret it or selectively quote from it to get your own way.

- Some pastoral situations that arise, and some passages of the Bible, involve subjects that are more 'private' than others (particularly in matters of morality). Whilst God sees and knows all and all areas come under his rule, you must be careful not to push or probe. Let the Bible do the work as issues are raised. Rather than telling someone what you think the Bible says about something, it may often be appropriate to give them a list of relevant passages and to suggest that they go away and read them on their own, encouraging them to think carefully about what these passages say. Beware of anything said in private that could not be repeated with integrity in public. In such situations you should offer love and support, leave space for individuals to make decisions for themselves, and recognise that (sadly) sometimes people may decide to go against the Bible's clear teaching.
- Often someone will ask for input when making big decisions about life or faith. It would be easy to overstep your role at this point and pressurise them to do what we want them to do (eg what church to go to, who to go out with, what job to do, where to live etc). At those points remember that your comments are only advice and so make clear that they are free to do as they wish.
- If you feel the need to have a potentially difficult pastoral conversation with an individual, ask the advice of a staff member first and perhaps discuss inviting someone else to join you (assuming the person you are meeting with agrees to this too). Take notes of the meeting.
- Individuals often respond to personality, including in Christian circles. Yet our aim should be to point people to Christ by word and deed in such a way that their response is to him rather than us. While we should seek to set an example (1 Timothy 4:12), we can only be 'imitated' as much as we imitate Christ. This should not lead to a cloning of type, but to a growing Christlikeness of character. One way of avoiding unhealthy dependence or unintended coercion, which can lead to an unhealthy relationship, is to ask to what extent the relationship is two-way. Can the individual we pastor ask us exactly the same type of question as we might ask them?
- Basic records (which we could produce on request) should be kept of who you meet, when and where (eg a diary entry or a formal list of these meetings) and why you met (eg 'counselling' or 'to read 2 Timothy'). (It is important to note that these records should be kept by the churches when you move on, so need to be kept in a format which means that they can be left with the churches as and when this happens.) It is good practice to check regularly that these records are being kept (eg in annual staff appraisals).
- Where you have a concern about a particular pastoral relationship, whether that is someone else's relationship with us or a relationship between two other people, or where we fear that you might have spoken or acted unwisely, you should report that immediately to the relevant church minister and/or Church Safeguarding Officer.
- In ordinary circumstances, you should only have regular (eg weekly or fortnightly) one-to-one meetings with someone else for a limited period (if possible, defined in advance). This should rarely, if ever, be for more than a year because the longer we

meet with someone, the more likely the relationship is to become over-intense spiritually and/or emotionally. If someone needs ongoing one-to-one support, it may be appropriate for someone else or even a Christian counsellor to take over from you. Ultimately, no-one is indispensable to anyone. Clarity about expectations when we start meeting with someone greatly helps, not least because we do not want people to feel dropped by us. At the same time, continuing to meet more occasionally may well be a good idea, since people are not just short-term projects. In some cases, of course (eg with members of a small group you lead, or when someone is struggling with ongoing pastoral issues) you may well plan to meet with people occasionally over a much longer period, but it would always be wise to discuss this with another member of the staff team or with the Church Safeguarding Officer.

- You should be aware that some people need or would benefit from specialist help that you cannot provide (eg with addictions, mental illness or an eating disorder), perhaps alongside continued pastoral care by you. In these cases, it is appropriate to recommend that someone see a GP or counsellor. But you should be aware that adults have a right to confidentiality and to make their own decisions and so not discuss them with others without their permission unless there is an overriding reason to do so.
- Remember not to promise to keep all information confidential. Some information may need to be shared with others (eg if a crime has been committed or someone is at risk of significant harm). You can (and should) promise appropriate confidentiality, but never absolute confidentiality.
- If someone expresses suicidal thoughts and you have an immediate concern for their safety (eg if they have stated definite plans or sound particularly set on this course of action), you should dial 999. In all cases, you should endeavour to get anyone expressing suicidal thoughts the help they need, putting them in touch with their GP or the Samaritans (116 123). If you have any concerns or are uncertain how to respond, the Church Safeguarding Officers and/or the Diocesan Safeguarding Team can offer advice. Confidentiality is not a bar on seeking advice when someone is at risk of significant harm and so it is good practice to speak to someone (eg the relevant minister and/or Church Safeguarding Officer), whenever someone expresses suicidal thinking to you.
- You should take steps to maintain your own safety. If you are concerned that someone's behaviour is or may become aggressive, it is not appropriate to meet them one-to-one. If you feel threatened, leave the situation sooner rather than later and make sure you tell your minister and/or Church Safeguarding Officer what happened. It is always good practice for someone to know where you are and who you are meeting with. You should also consider carefully where and at what time you meet with others.
- You must abide by our churches' safeguarding policies. If you are concerned that someone may harm themselves or someone else in any way or be harmed by someone else, you may have a duty to disclose this to the relevant authorities (eg if someone discloses or we suspect domestic violence or controlling behaviour). If the danger is immediate, dial 999; otherwise, your Church Safeguarding Officer can advise on the next steps.

Under-18s

- It is not appropriate to meet one-to-one with someone under-16 except in exceptional circumstances. This must not happen without prior agreement of your minister and/or Church Safeguarding Officer and also must not happen without written parental consent.
- With regard to young people aged 16-18, inform another colleague on the church staff team or your minister, and your Church Safeguarding Officer, before meeting.
- Any one-to-one meeting with a child should take place in a public place (eg a café) or in a very visible place (eg a room with the door open, where other adults are around), and with written parental consent. Keep a written record of who you met with, when, where and why.
- Whilst any sexual activity between staff and volunteers and those under 18 is obviously contrary to the expected biblical standard of sexual activity being restricted to marriage, staff and volunteers also need to be aware that sexual activity with a 16 or 17 year-old by a person in a position of trust could be subject to a criminal investigation, even though the legal age of consent is 16. Legislation under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022) England and Wales has extended 'Positions of Trust' to include faith leaders and sports coaches as well as those employed in education, social work, health care or the police.

Training

We will train leaders who conduct one-to-one meetings as part of their ministry to be aware of these principles and the danger of manipulative or coercive patterns forming. We will provide oversight and accountability to leaders and work hard to prevent unhealthy relationships from forming (and will respond to that and report it if they do).