

BEST PRACTICE



Y1 Guidance for those in positions of trust or exercising pastoral ministry with vulnerable people

The Convocations of York and Canterbury have produced *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*. All those involved in pastoral ministry in the Diocese, whether paid or unpaid, clergy or lay, should be working within this set of guidelines. Following such guidelines should not only protect vulnerable people but also ensure that workers are not wrongly accused of abuse or misconduct.

Y2. Pastoral relationships

Workers in pastoral ministry need to develop an understanding of themselves and how they relate to others. They need to ensure their own safety whilst increasing the well-being and safety of others. People in positions of trust necessarily have power, although this may not be apparent to them, therefore respecting professional boundaries is particularly important. Many pastoral relationships can become intertwined with friendships and social contacts, making this guidance even more necessary.

- Church workers should exercise particular care when ministering to persons with whom they have a close personal friendship or family relationship.
- Church workers should be aware of the dangers of dependency in pastoral and professional relationships and seek advice or supervision when these concerns arise.
- Church workers who exercise a healing ministry should be trained in the theology and non-intrusive practice of that work.
- Church workers should recognize their limits and not undertake any ministry that is beyond their competence or role (e.g. therapeutic counselling, deliverance ministry, counselling victims of abuse and domestic violence, or their perpetrators, or giving legal advice). In such instances the person should be referred to another person or agency with appropriate expertise.
- Church workers should avoid behaviour that could give the impression of inappropriate favouritism or the encouragement of inappropriate special relationships.
- Church workers should treat those with whom they minister or visit with respect, encouraging self-determination, independence and choice.
- Care should be taken when helping with physical needs, washing and toileting, always respecting the choices of the individual concerned.
- Pastoral relationships may develop into romantic attachments and such situations should be handled sensitively. Workers need to recognize such a development and make it clear to both the person concerned and a supervisor or colleague.



Alternative arrangements should be made for the ongoing pastoral care of the person concerned.

- Church workers should not undertake any pastoral ministry while they are under the influence of drink or non-prescribed drugs.
- Workers should be aware of the power imbalance inherent in pastoral relationships. It is never appropriate for workers to take advantage of their role and engage in sexual activity with anyone with whom they have a pastoral relationship.
- Church workers must take responsibility for their words and actions if wishing to make physical contact with another adult (e.g. a hug may be misunderstood) or talk to them about sexual matters. This will include seeking permission, respecting the person's wishes, noticing and responding to non-verbal communication, refraining from such conduct if in doubt about the person's wishes.
- Church workers should refrain from viewing, possessing or distributing sexually exploitative images of adults.
- Church workers should avoid situations where they feel vulnerable to temptation or where their conduct may be misinterpreted.

Y3. Financial integrity

Financial dealings can have an impact on the church and the community and must always be handled with integrity. Those with authority for such matters should maintain proper systems and not delegate that responsibility to anyone else.

- Church workers should not seek personal financial gain from their position beyond their salary or recognized allowances.
- Church workers should not be influenced by offers of money.
- Church workers should ensure that church and personal finances are kept apart and should avoid any conflict of interest.
- Money received by the church should be handled by two unrelated lay people.
- Any gifts received should be disclosed to a supervisor or colleague where it should be decided whether they could be accepted.
- Care should be taken not to canvass for church donations from those who may be vulnerable, e.g. the recently bereaved.



Y4. Conversations and interviews in a ministry context

Formal interviews and informal conversations in a ministry context are pastoral encounters. Church workers should be aware of their language and behaviour. For example, innuendoes or compliments of a sexual nature are always inappropriate. When a person asks questions or seeks advice around topics of a sexual nature, the worker should be discerning about the motives and needs of the person and question their own ability to assist.

The church worker should consider in advance:

- The place of the meeting, arrangement of the furniture and lighting, the worker's dress;
- The balance of privacy for conversation with the opportunity for supervision (open doors or windows in doors, another person nearby);
- The physical distance between people determined by hospitality and respect, being aware that someone may have suffered abuse or harassment in the past;
- Whether the circumstances suggest a professional or social interaction;
- The propriety or danger of visiting or being visited alone, especially in the evening;
- The personal safety and comfort of all participants;
- Establishing at the outset the nature of the interview in respect to subject matter, confidentiality and duration;
- The appropriateness of initiating or receiving any physical contact, for example gestures of comfort, which may be unwanted or misinterpreted.

Y5. Guidelines for use of photographic or other imaging equipment.

The taking of photographs, film or other images of vulnerable adults is not appropriate without consent. Workers must ensure that such consent is in place before making any such image of a vulnerable adult.¹

When such images are properly obtained then they must be used only for the purpose consented to. Special care must be taken, when using any image in general publicity or in publications such as annual reports or press promotions. All images must maintain the dignity of the individual.

¹ A standard form is included in the appendices

