



Policy on Personal Work

Adopted by the PCC. Last revised 3 October 2022

Two guiding principles:

(1) Personal Work is good

God has made every one of us unique. And he cares for each of us as individuals. Read Luke 15:1-10. Because God does this, we believe it is right that we as a church try to, also.

- Negatively, we want to avoid anyone saying the tragic thing that David says in Psalm 142:4, 'No one cares for my life' [literally, soul].
- Positively, we want everyone in church to have at least one godly friend in church.

What makes for a godly friend?

1. We can trust them. This is a person who we feel ...
 - has things in common with us
 - truly loves us
 - understands us
 - will treat our personal things with respect and great discretion
 - will be honest
 - will not seek to control us
 - is ready to receive help from us too
2. They listen well. Specifically, as we talk about our lives, they are listening out for ...
 - the good things, where God has been at work already – we're not all bad!
 - the hard things, which if they were easy to fix, we would have fixed already – we don't just need more advice!
 - the bad things – we know there is sin in our lives that a true friend will address, but we want them to do so with patience, care and humility
3. They seek to point us to the gospel. A good friend is invaluable in helping us apply the gospel wisely to our lives:
 - Where our perception of things is distorted, they can reframe our situations
 - Where we are being proud or self-sufficient, they can encourage us to take refuge in Jesus instead
 - Where we are weak and needy, they can help to bear our burdens and walk with us

We want church to be full of such godly friends. And we want everyone to have one. That means that we like the idea of people in church proactively seeking to foster friendships with others in order to be such a godly friend.

Godly friendship-forming will often include some of the following:

- seeking to meet up with them 'one-on-one'
- reading the Bible and praying with them
- over time intentionally seeking to get to know them more intimately
- forming a cautious view of what we think might most help them forwards in faith, love and hope

We see all these things (sometimes summarized as 'Personal Work') as healthy activities.

(2) Personal Work is dangerous

We know something of our hearts. Even though Christian believers are born again, forgiven, and have God's Spirit living in us, we remain sinful:

- Sin continues to affect every part of our thinking, feeling and wanting
- We continue to be naturally self-absorbed, self-serving and self-deceiving
- Left unchecked, we will all find ways of using others, even abusing them, instead of serving them
- In short, none of us is fully safe to be let into someone else's heart!

The nature of Personal Work means that there is often a power imbalance between the two people who are meeting up. We do not naturally use this power well.

Whenever we do not love someone as the Bible commands us to, it is shameful because it is so different from the way Jesus treats us. It is also destructive, because it will hurt that person, it will make it harder for them to trust Jesus, and it will make it harder for others to trust Jesus too.

Specific traps that believers have fallen into, as they have sought to do Personal Work, include:

- taking advantage of the other person, eg money or sex
- fostering a relationship of dependence, where the other person becomes a disciple of them, rather than of Jesus eg becoming inappropriately directive or developing an exclusive and asymmetrical relationship
- allowing the other person to be motivated by a desire to please them, eg being overly warm when listened to and overly cool when ignored
- allowing a self-reinforcing group or subculture to develop in church that is overly deferential to them

As individuals, we want to repent of all these things. As a church, we want to do what we can to prevent and/or expose them.

No policy or set of guidelines can fully safeguard a church from abuse, or be a substitute for the lively operation of the Spirit in our hearts. However, we want a culture of best practice that means that when one of us starts to do things that are unhealthy, those things look/sound/feel unhealthy to the rest of us.

We hope that the policies in this document help to foster such a culture.

Policies for any leader routinely meeting up with someone else in order to nurture them spiritually

Anyone recruited by the church to serve on a ministry team enjoys a degree of credibility, authority and influence simply by holding that role. In recognition of that fact, we call them 'leaders'. We leaders need to be aware that our role may amplify the power imbalance often associated with Personal Work. It is right that the church collectively checks that we use this power in a godly way. So...

1. Transparency

It is our duty to inform another relevant person (either their Small Group Leader or, failing that, one of the clergy) the following:

- that we are meeting up
- what, in broad terms, our meetings consist of
- if the person has revealed something to us that might make them particularly vulnerable to abuse (eg absent parent), seeking their permission first (if a safeguarding issue arises, you **MUST** consult the Safeguarding Officer)
- if we have either given or received money or other significant favours from them that might create a sense of obligation

2. Non-exclusivity

It is our duty to strengthen relationships between them and others in church (eg Small Group Leaders, Clergy, other friends), such that they are learning to talk with others about the things they are telling us.

- We will consider whether 1-on-1 is better than eg a Bible & Prayer triplet
- Where we sense that their relationship with us is significantly stronger than with others, we will take steps to avoid over-dependence and to encourage healthy relationships beyond that with ourselves.
- No-one may act as a Small Group Leader over the same person for >3 years (most Small Group Leaders will have a break after 3 years anyway)

3. Purity

- Neither of us will ever be undressed in the other's presence
- We will not encourage prolonged/intimate physical contact
- We will never engage in physical chastisement
- We will not engage in regular opposite-sex, 1-on-1 personal work, except in the context of ministry line-managers
- Opposite-sex line-management meetings should not happen privately

4. Accountability

- All staff and full-time volunteers are to complete termly feedback forms, in which they are encouraged to raise concerns and share preferences
 - These forms will be read by at least two of the Clergy & Wardens Group
 - Their line manager will agree priorities for the term ahead with at least one (other) member of the CWG and talk those through with the staff member
- The Clergy are to engage in annual 360° reviews of their ministry and share whatever priorities they set with the CWG
- Where there is cross-gender line management, the Clergy must provide someone of the managee's sex to talk with each term about their relationship with their line manager