



Organising pastoral care

... in an all-member culture

A56 Articles series: Structures

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This article is divided into five parts.

- 1 **Overview**, an introduction to structuring pastoral care.
- 2 **Taking care in practice**, covering its scope, different types of care, those who need care and those who provide it.
- 3 **Small groups in pastoral care**, the basic structure for all-member care.
- 4 **Other means of offering care**, including caring beyond church boundaries.
- 5 **Possible team structures**, with ideas of models that can be applied and the establishment of a Pastoral Care Team with issues that may arise.

This is not a guide to pastoral care as such, as I am certainly not qualified to write on that, but an investigation into how pastoral care might be structured to be effective within a local church or team of churches. It presents a challenge to rethink pastoral care into every area of church life and to change an expectation of the Minister being the one 'pastor' for everyone.

There is of course a danger of over-organising pastoral care. Examples would include making responsibility for it a topic for professional staff alone or insisting that people fall into neat categories of care need. Human beings are complex entities and putting some operations specialists in charge of care structures could be dangerous. Those who manage the structure need to have a deep appreciation for humanity's struggles and people's differences.

But there is an equal danger of under-organising the topic. A laid-back approach might fail to notice particular people in need or put amateur carers into complex human settings where they might cause more harm than good. It might fail to take seriously the role of church leaders to shepherd the flock under their care.

1: Overview

This first part sets the context by looking at the culture shift to all-member care, defining pastoral care, summarising some Scriptural foundations and noting the importance of safeguarding.

A change in culture

What this article assumes is the need for a culture shift from an expectation that the church's Minister is the one who takes pastoral care of the congregation, which is clearly impossible in anything other than the smallest church, to one where the Minister enables the whole congregation to be carers, seeking wholeness for each other. The need is to mobilise the whole Church to care for others, or to put it biblically, to love neighbours and to shepherd the flock. This means everyone being observant, listening well and taking action themselves if they can, or passing information on to others if necessary.

Here there is a danger of the Minister still believing he or she is there to pastor everyone, a burden that then prevents them from leading and teaching adequately. There is just as great a danger in the congregation seeing the Minister as the only valid person to visit them at home. For an older generation it is a not uncommon view to take, but it can hold a church back from growth. Some people expect weekly visits or attention well above what might be reasonable.

But once you see the whole congregation as your team, the issue of organisation comes into play. How do you organise such a body of people to use their gifts and time effectively to offer a caring environment? This is what this article explores, both for care teams and for everyone. It assumes there has been a culture shift from one Pastor to everyone a carer. On the other hand, thinking structure can itself help change the culture.

What is pastoral care?

First, a common but false assumption. It is thought by some to be about offering the church's form of social services to the sick and the elderly. These are both groups of people that need care, but to restrict our thinking to such people omits huge areas of suffering and struggle as people seek to live out their lives in a stressful world. And to see pastoral care in line with social services misses out on the breadth of riches of this shepherding service that the Church can offer.

It is, literally, taking good care of people of all

ages so that they flourish in the faith. It is all about meeting needs of the whole person: body, mind, emotions, spirit. Jesus came to offer life in all its fulness (John 10:10). Pastoral care opens up that possibility to all. It seeks to help people in the church, and those outside it too, through the chaos of life today. It brings Christ's message of salvation into the ordinary, everyday, messy world that we live within. It brings wholeness, it brings assurance. It surely includes Bible teaching but much more than just that.

Scriptural models

Here are four scriptural ideas behind this.

First Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments included the one to love your neighbour as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). See, for example, Matthew 19:19, 22:39, Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27. But see also Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, and James 2:8. We can see how wide the definition of 'neighbour' is from the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Pastoral care is love for others in action. But while Jesus presented a wide scope of application he also (Matthew 10:42) saw a special need for caring for fellow-believers.

A second idea is to note the times Jesus is described as having 'compassion' on the crowds or individuals. In Matthew's Gospel see 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34. This was partly for the lack of teaching they had, but it especially applied to his healing ministry. Compassion is an emotional response to need.

A third theme might be the care of the poor by the Early Church. We see this in the choosing of the seven in Acts 6 to ensure the widows of the Hellenistic Jews were not short-changed and the collection for the Jerusalem Church in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. See also Galatians 2:10.

A fourth, and probably the most often selected idea, is that of a shepherd with his sheep. So Matthew 9:36 and Mark 6:34 talk about sheep without a shepherd, Ezekiel chapter 34 rebukes the political leaders for misleading and exploiting the sheep, John chapter 10 has the great illustration of the Good Shepherd and Jesus is seen as the Shepherd in Matthew 2:6, Hebrews 13:20, 1 Peter 2:25, 5:4. Shepherds seek the lost sheep and care for the flock.

One of the best foundations for this subject of taking care comes in Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28 (see also 1 Peter 5:2-3). *'Keep watch over yourselves* (a vital element of a caring ministry it might be said) *and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood'. (NIV)*

He goes on to warn against savage wolves attacking the flock, and against those who will distort the truth and so to be on their guard. Shepherding is far more than social services.

In the leadership gifts of Ephesians 4 the gifts of pastor and teacher are often viewed as one gift, but the idea of a pastor must be wider than just Bible teaching as can be seen in Jesus' ministry. However the Acts 20 passage shows that shepherding includes teaching and we should view the whole topic of pastoring in that context. It is as wide as that.

Having made that point, however, this article will now focus on bringing wholeness by taking care, but as part of a wider ministry that includes teaching.

Safeguarding

The whole area of safeguarding, the creation of churches as safe spaces, is a crucial part of pastoral care but deserves significant treatment beyond the scope of this article. It needs to impact each area of what follows and although mentioned only occasionally should be seen as an integral area of caring for each other. There will be a number of implications such as:

- The role of the church's Safeguarding Officer within any Pastoral Care Team.
- The lines of accountability for safeguarding through to the Minister and beyond.
- Correct practice for details of safeguarding to be accessed from the church's website home page.
- Correct procedures for online training to be undertaken by all those of whom this is required.
- Enhanced DBS checking requirements followed in specific detail.

2: Taking care in practice

This second part shows how wide the topic of pastoral care really is by looking at examples, listing four different forms of church care, and asking who needs care and who can provide it. These, together, form a foundation for an effective pastoral structure.

The scope of pastoral care

Here are contemporary examples of such practical care in three overlapping categories but in no particular order. This is not a 'To Do' list for any church but simply a set of examples of what constitutes care.

Visiting

- Visiting the sick to offer companionship.
- Taking Communion to care homes and to the housebound.
- Offering to go shopping with those who struggle to walk.
- Giving lifts to those who need transport.
- Reading to those who can no longer see well.
- Watching a recording of a service with a housebound member.
- Sitting with someone who cannot bear to be alone.

- Visiting to prepare for marriage or baptism.
- Visiting those recently bereaved.
- Visiting those in hospital.

Listening

- Encouraging the concerned so they can share their worries.
- Helping the stressed to reduce the tension.
- Calming those who are hurting in any way to offer compassion.
- Listening to those who need to share stories of their lives.
- Praying with those who are facing difficulties at work or school.
- Giving time to those who need to be understood.
- Counselling someone with significant disorders

- Having proper processes for any safeguarding complaint.
- Offering professional counselling help to the abused.
- Making eye contact with and smiling at a loner

Practical support

- Writing letters or emails for those who cannot read.
- Noticing who is missing in church and phoning them up.
- Having a thorough safeguarding policy that is adhered to.
- Giving practical know-how to those who can claim benefits.
- Offering lifts to church services and events
- Cooking a family meal for those who have just moved house or given birth.
- Providing food for those who cannot afford the cost.
- Pointing to professional help for those with addictions.
- Writing a note of thanks to someone who led or took part in a meeting.
- Offering financial support to someone who cannot pay for heating.

In many of these cases there can be the opening of a Bible to read a relevant passage as part of the wider shepherding concept already discussed.

All these are examples of pastoral care and they may be given to a young child or teenager (with due caution), a young couple, a family, a bereaved woman or an elderly man.

Four forms of care

It can be helpful to see four overlapping types of care a church can offer.

Authorised care

In a church setting there is what we might term 'authorised care': the hospital visit from the Minister, a member of the Ministry Team taking services in a local care home, the help offered by a member of the church bereavement team, a proper safeguarding policy with clear procedures. They are offering care in the name of the church or an official body and are part of an official care service.

Group care

Then there is 'group care'. This lies somewhere between the authorised care structure and what will follow below in a natural friendship way. This is care that relies on an element of the church's structure to enable people to care for each other. So a home group structure that enables applications of a Bible passage to be shared sets up an environment where people can pray and care for each other.

Natural care

Thirdly, there is also what we might term 'natural care': the person who offers to get the shopping for someone who cannot go out, the teenager who deliberately befriends a new and lonely member of the youth group, the friend who spots you are missing on a Sunday and drops round to check you are OK, the handyman neighbour who comes round at midnight when you have a plumbing emergency.

Suspect care

It needs to be said that there is another and fourth form of so-called care which we might term 'suspect care'. There are examples, some of which reach the national news, of people joining churches and then offering to care in some way for young people or vulnerable adults but with evil intent. Not all offers of pastoral care can be taken to be with good intentions.

People who need care

Everyone needs care at different times and in different ways. Here are a few examples of groups of people to care for. This is a list to show how wide the examples can be, not an agenda for any one church to tackle.

- **The elderly.** Some will be fit and healthy, others will struggle with various needs. Some may be supported by family, others will live in warden-controlled flats, but still others will be alone, perhaps with mobility issues.
- **The housebound** and those in care homes. Some may be confused, others frustrated: the housebound may struggle with limited access to professional carers. Those in homes may feel cut off from the church.
- **Singles** of all ages. Many will live fulfilled lives, but some may struggle with loneliness or recent bereavement, or a range of common problems regarding finance.

- **Families** of all ages, especially in school holidays. Some marriages may well be under masked strain, some young parents may find it difficult to cope with the cost of childcare while needing to be double earners, some may struggle with the costs of a mortgage or the inability to get away from renting, some may be hiding abuse, others may be exhausted and not being fed by Bible teaching because of the demands of young children.
- **Parents of young adults.** There may be pressures for young people to live at home, parents may have adult children in various kinds of personal difficulty.
- **Minister and staff.** The church through its Trustees/PCC has a duty of care for its employed staff and a pastoral responsibility to look after those who serve them as Ministers. This is often overlooked.
- **Young people and children.** Some may live in broken families, or be left to be out on the streets late at night, or be in danger of drug dealers and other social problems. Others may struggle with bullying at school, pressure from social media, abuse at home, sexuality in various forms, body image, or the pressure of the exam system.
- **The sick in body.** This group includes those going through short-term illnesses sometimes with hospital treatment, to those with long-term problems or cancer treatments.
- **The sick in mind.** Mental health is a massive issue today for the elderly with dementia through to parents who cannot cope to the young with pressures of false expectations or bullying.
- Those with **physical or emotional disabilities.** This may be obvious if they are in a wheelchair for example, but many issues are hidden. The hard of hearing, the dyslexic and the visually impaired may all struggle with church services.
- The church's **mission partners** and their families. Those who the church support in mission work in the UK or globally have special needs including living costs, children's education, language and cultural differences, security and expectations to 'succeed'.
- Those **out of work or retiring** from work. Some will struggle with long-term

unemployment, while others find it hard to leave the world of work behind and to find new purpose.

You will be able to add other groups relevant to your church.

People responsible for care

Again, this is a list to show breadth of possibility, not a tick list for each church to have.

- **Minister** – the default carer but if seen as the chief carer in anything other than a small church (under 100. say) this can prevent him or her from their priority ministries. He or she may however take on hospital and care homes visits and those in special need. There will be some cases where the Minister should handle the issue, even in a large church. At the very least that should imply that church leaders cannot be remote CEO figures who do not know their people and are not easily approached.
- **Associate/Assistant Minister** – larger churches that appoint an Associate or Assistant may give them responsibility for home groups or pastoral care in general.
- **Ministry or staff team** – there may be some understanding that the staff team in a larger church or the Ministry Team in any church has some oversight of care which would include visits and home Communion.
- **Elders** – in a Presbyterian model the church District Elders usually have a number of church members arranged in geographical districts which they are responsible for visiting regularly so that the whole membership is covered.
- **Pastoral Care Group** – this may be a special team of visitors or a Trustee working group to ensure that effective pastoral care takes place. More later.
- **Home group leaders**, or appointed carers – where home groups have a well documented responsibility for pastoral care, there needs to be one person in the group tasked with ensuring this works out well.
- **Care Co-ordinator** or Lead or Counsellor as a member of staff. Official recognition whether paid or not to someone on the staff holding overall responsibility for care within the church.

- **Care Co-ordinator** / Bereavement Team Leader or equivalent, this time not as a member of staff but an official office-holder.
- Those appointed as **Pastoral Assistants** and those licensed for pastoral ministry in any form.
- **Parish Nurse or Anna Chaplain** – an official member of a national movement offering specialist information or care.
- **Everyone!** This is the culture assumed. But it has to be structured in some way to work effectively. So we now move on to specific structures in parts 3-5.

3: Small groups in a care structure

Most congregations are simply too large to be an effective channel of pastoral care without some agreed structure. One exception might be the checking of who is missing on each Sunday from a list, although in an age where many people attend once or twice a month rather than every Sunday, this is no longer as straightforward as it was. Some quite large churches however manage this every week.

But what do most churches have in their natural structure in the way of smaller groups? Here is a listing of possible groups in approximately increasing order of size. These are the possibilities of what has been described as 'group care' above.

- One-to-one mentoring
- Prayer triplets/groups
- Young people's groups
- Children's groups
- Special care groups
- Home/cell groups
- Seniors events
- Mothers Union
- Groups or events for men or women
- Midweek church services

Here are some further thoughts on some of these.

One-to-one and prayer triplets/groups

Churches that have small groups that pray for each other and meet regularly have a natural setting for pastoral care. The level of sharing in such groups will usually be deep so that there is little chance of hiding behind masks. People will be directly honest with each other, expecting strict confidentiality.

What such groups then need is some idea of what to do when someone shares an issue that needs help beyond the group. What if one member claims to have been abused by a church leader? Do the other members appreciate their safeguarding responsibility within the confidentiality cover?

Young people's and children's groups

It is important not to omit children and teens from this list. A considerable amount of practical care can be undertaken in such groups and leaders might see and encourage this. This would include care from the leaders (aware of all safeguarding issues) as well as children and teens caring for each other.

Home/cell groups

The traditional structure of home groups consisting of perhaps six to a dozen people each, designed for studying and applying the Scriptures together, sharing needs and praying for each other, is an ideal part of a church's structure for pastoral care. The group size falls somewhere between the prayer triplet and the congregation. It is (or at least it should be) small enough for sharing with a high level of honesty and vulnerability which means that members will know and understand when any one of their number is struggling with life in any way.

Home groups can of course run into problems and become staid or lose their level of honesty. But when the groups are well organised and led with a clear role to include sharing and praying for each other, they can be the mainstay structure for church members to look after each other's needs.

Seniors' events

Many older members of a congregation find that home groups do not fit with their needs. They may take place on a mid-week evening and seniors may not wish to come out at night when

it is dark in winter. Some groups may well be run during daylight hours and some home groups may be run especially for seniors, but many churches will also organise events for seniors, often with a speaker on a general interest topic and a membership that goes wider than just those who are members of the church.

Such events may or may not include a time of worship and prayer but whatever will still be times when people care for each other and build friendships to carry that care on into every day. The main restriction will be frequency of meeting. If such events only take place every other month, the level of care may be limited.

Midweek church services

These might be seen as one form of seniors event in that although they may be open to everyone, most of those who are able to come will be retired. But they play an important role in the care structure of any church. Many of these will be held weekly so there is a more obvious care element than in a monthly seniors event. And much of the care will be taking place over refreshments after the liturgical service which then becomes a key element of the whole.

Unofficial friendship groups

All the above examples rely on an existing element of the church's own structure. But there is an equally strong feature in most churches of what has already been described as 'natural care': friendship groups.

Here there may be no official part of the church structure that is being utilised but there may be strong links formed over many years from those who have formed friendships with each other for reasons of shared interests, living in the same road, membership of community groups that are not linked to the church or other reasons. Such people watch out for each other.

There is also a sense in which such groups form for a few minutes and reform for a few more in a time of coffee 'after' a church service (or, more correctly, as part of the church service). A significant amount of care can take place at such times.

However, the time for refreshments can be painful for some when they see others in tight friendship groups that fail to be open to others. Everyone needs to be looking out for those on their own, both visitors and regulars.

Those not connected to others

So there is a wide range of church structures that enable pastoral care to take place both in an authorised sense and in a natural one. What churches need to do is to recognise that such elements exist and make use of them. This might mean home group leaders knowing that they are to report any needs that the group cannot take care of itself back to authorised carers in the church's structure. It might mean church staff knowing that the mid-week service is an opportunity to catch up with people there that they know are going through difficult times.

But that then leaves a number of people who do not belong to any of these groups and it is they who need to be given special attention.

It may be helpful to have a listing of the unconnected in your church. If someone is in a prayer triplet, home group, seniors group or comes to a midweek service, they are linked in to the structure, provided each of these elements is working well. But if someone comes to Sunday services each week but is not part of anything smaller, they need to be considered. If they come only occasionally on Sundays, say once a month or so, this is particularly important.

There are ways of giving such people 'carers'. A few churches have an extended home group structure whereby each home group has an inner core of members who commit to meeting regularly, but are then given a few unconnected people to keep a caring eye on too. In this way all those who have no obvious link to a group come under the home group umbrella.

Similarly a seniors group can have an associate membership of those who do not want to come to meetings but who are in the seniors age group.

But some of these people who are not connected may not want to be connected anywhere into any form of structure and would regard any plan of this kind to be an interference in their life. You need to take care in more ways than one.

Churches who visually and without making it known take a census of everyone at Sunday services can enable a special group of carers or church staff to spot when people start drifting away or seem to be out of circulation.

Newcomers Teams can unobtrusively be on the lookout for visitors and seeking to look after them and introduce them to others. Welcome needs to be an integrated part of care structures.

4: Other means of offering care

But there are other ways of caring for each other. Here are a few followed by further ideas for caring for those who are not church members as part of outreach.

Prayer ministry

The idea of offering prayer at the conclusion of a church service is now quite normal. A specialist group of those trained for such ministry is available at the end of a service to pray with anyone who wants prayer for any need or for healing. This may be undertaken in a side room or chapel although safeguarding issues need to be taken into account. There are normally guidelines for those undertaking this ministry to prevent any misunderstanding.

Prayer chain

Many churches operate some form of prayer chain which members can opt into. There will be a central phone number or email address for anyone to ask for prayer for a particular issue. A co-ordinator checks what is being requested to ensure no confidences are breached and then puts the message out.

This may be done by email or, for those not on email, phone calls which may be passed on through a root system (eg. one person phones three, who each have three others to ring).

Mapping church members

It can be visually helpful to have a large-scale map of the area where members live and place on it pins by different colour for those in home groups, those covered by a seniors' group, etc. and then those not formally connected to others in the church. The same can be done digitally.

Such visual mapping can help if putting the unconnected into home groups or linking people up who live near each other.

Home Communion

For the housebound and those in care homes, home Communion can bring comfort. It can be provided by a Minister or an authorised Ministry Team member and available for anyone who requests it.

But it is probably best to make clear that this is only available for those who cannot come to a church Communion service and is not an alternative to this that anyone can opt for.

Care home services

Some churches have permission to run a weekly or monthly service in a local care home. This can be combined with Communion.

Healing ministry

This article does not cover healing ministry as this deserves more detailed treatment than is possible here. But it is certainly part of pastoral care, usually as a monthly or quarterly special healing services, usually held on a Sunday evening, or seen as part of prayer ministry.

Welcome ministry

The welcome to Sunday services for newcomers and everyone can also be seen as part of a pastoral care ministry. This is dealt with in other resources on this website (see box at the end of this article).

Lifts to church

It would be wonderful for a church to arrange for those who need such a service to have drivers to bring them to church on a Sunday. But this is fraught with legal danger in both issues of safeguarding and car insurance. So this usually needs to be left as a 'natural care' type of service where lifts are arranged privately rather than through an official church scheme.

Care in a vision-led church

It is important that a church whose Minister is a visionary has someone in leadership who is a gifted and recognised pastor. Being a member of a strongly vision-driven church can be uncomfortable for everyone and a visible pastor encouraging the church out of its comfort zone can help everyone own the vision and pay the price for its discomfort.

Safeguarding provisions

As already noted, proper policies and procedures for safeguarding are a key element of caring for people by seeking to ensure churches are safe spaces.

Outreach ministries

But pastoral care is not restricted to within the church membership. It can and perhaps should be an important aspect of outreach. If we are to love our neighbours, they are all around us.

Much will depend on the needs that exist in the community around the location of the church. Here are some examples.

- **Food banks** – many churches are involved in such projects, such as run by the Trussell Trust.
- **Debt agency / CAP** – a number of churches employ staff to manage a Church Action on Poverty – giving advice to those who need financial support to recover from debt.
- Work with **disabilities** – a wide range of possibilities here, often initiated through church members with the particular disability themselves.
- Work with **needy groups** – there may be local people-groups that need support.
- **Church projects** – many churches undertaking a capital building project set aside a percentage of the total sum to fund a project in a Global South country or a church in a deprived area of the UK.
- **Schools work** – either through specialist staff or a local charity working with primary or secondary schools.
- **Toddler groups and playgroups** – probably the most common activity in this list, but with opportunities for building relationships with parents and carers.
- **Chaplaincies** – hospital, police, etc. – some churches may have staff who also have a chaplaincy ministry in local hospitals or with the local retail or business community.
- **Pioneer ministers** – appointed to work in the local community as their priority.
- **Video courses** – for marriage preparation, marriage enrichment, parenting different ages for children, divorce support, etc. – churches can put on specialist courses using external materials.
- **Local political issues** – churches can play a leading role in a local campaign to bring justice to an issue within the local area or deal with local problems.

- **Bereavement support** – for all whose funeral was held at the church, perhaps with the church remembering the early anniversaries of the death with a card and/or visit.
- **Marriage and baptism anniversaries** – similarly.

Writing a pastoral care policy

Here is an outline structure you might use to write your own policy. Much will depend on local needs and your church's practices but this framework will enable you to structure an appropriate policy.

Most of this involves a shortened version of this article, as this is already structured ready to become a policy.

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|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | A biblical explanation of pastoral care and definitions (see pages 2,3) |
| 2 | The shift in culture to all-member care (page 2) |
| 3 | The scope of pastoral care and contemporary examples (pages 3,4) |
| 4 | Types of care (page 4) |
| 5 | Those who need care and those who give it (pages 4-6) |
| 6 | Small groups and pastoral care (pages 6,7) |
| 7 | Other forms of care and external care (page 8,9) |
| 8 | The structural model you are using (adapted from pages 10,11) |
| 9 | Staffing and Pastoral Care Team (or whatever you have, adapted from pages 10-13) |
| 10 | The values with which you seek to give pastoral care (this has not been dealt with in this article which has focused on structural issues, but this needs to be a major section of a policy.) |
| 11 | Issues such as training, confidentiality, safeguarding, administration, links to Safeguarding Policy. |
| 12 | Summary and future development planned. |

5: Possible team structures

In this final part we look at care models any church can choose from, the setting up of a Pastoral Care Team, appointing a specialist member of staff (whether paid or not), and some structural issues that arise.

Note that in these examples the first concern is to appoint appropriate teams with a team leader, rather than appoint a Care Lead and then build a team around them. In other words to share responsibility in an effective structure rather than look for one specialist.

Extended small groups

Note that throughout these structures the idea of small groups includes children and teens groups, seniors' activities, and perhaps some ministry groups such as Music Group.

- Give official responsibility to all small groups for the pastoral care of their members. Appoint one person in each group (not necessarily the leader) to co-ordinate this. It is important that one person feels the responsibility.
- Allot those with no small group links to one of the groups as associates and give the group leader responsibility for ensuring the group between them takes appropriate care of them. (This works particularly well when small groups are arranged geographically.)
- Use the church's Ministry Team (clergy and authorised lay ministers) for special needs and in particular bereavement but also those who are in hospital, care homes, hospices and those living in the area or parish who are not church members.

Small groups plus Pastoral Care Team

The Pastoral Care Team leader may be an office holder or a specialist member of the church staff.

- Give responsibility to all small groups for the pastoral care of their members as above.
- Appoint a Pastoral Care Team under a team leader to keep links with all church members who are not part of a small group. The care team leader should work closely with the Home Group Co-ordinator. This requires effective administration to keep the list up-to-date.

- Appoint a specialist team for the care of those who are ill or bereaved or in special need of any kind. Some members might have specialist training in types of care and be available to support small groups and the Pastoral Care Team as necessary.
- Have a small team who run occasional services in local care homes. This may be led by a member of the church's Ministry Team.

Pastoral Care Team

This centres care on the team rather than other church structures.

- Appoint a Pastoral Care Team and set up a structure with enough members to enable the whole congregation to be covered by links to one member of the team. This might be arranged by geographical districts and will need a detailed structure for larger churches.
- If necessary, appoint a specialist team for the care of those who are ill or bereaved or in special need of any kind.
- Appoint a back-up team including the Minister and any trained listeners/counsellors for special needs beyond the competence of the Pastoral Care Team to deal with. This may need knowledge of external resources available.

Staff team

A number of larger churches run something like this, but it has the danger of professionalising care to employed members of the staff. It can however work well when combined with a scheme involving small groups.

- Church staff at their weekly meeting check those missing on a Sunday or known to be in need and decide on appropriate action.
- Specialist member of staff, a Care Lead, keeps a watching brief on all church members but especially those not linked to a small group, and visits or asks someone else to visit as necessary.

Newcomers Team

This may be part of the responsibility for the Pastoral Care Team or a separate, specialist team. This concept is in addition to those structures suggested above.

- A Newcomers' Team under a leader who visit newcomers to discuss membership of the church, promote small groups, and take responsibility for pastoral care until the newcomers are settled in a normal part of the structure.
- This team may well have Sunday responsibilities to look out for newcomers.

Bereavement Team

This may be part of the responsibility for the Pastoral Care Team or a separate, specialist team. This concept is in addition to those structures suggested above.

- A Bereavement Team under a leader who visit the family of those who have died as church members or whose funerals were held at the church.
- They might also organise an annual service to commemorate those who have died in previous years.
- They may also deliver personal cards on the anniversary of the death.

These are only ideas and can be combined in various ways. Note that it is vital that whatever structure is chosen there is proper administrative support for it and effective communication so that no one who needs visiting is omitted, but neither is there muddle with different people visiting them. It is essential that someone is responsible for ensuring that correct information is shared between Ministry Team, Pastoral Care Team, staff and small group leaders.

Records need to be kept on the church database of who has been visited by whom and when, but under GDPR principles this information must not be held once no longer current, and the church should not keep formal pastoral records of what is discussed in a visit or any kind of views held by the visitor. The person being visited may of course ask to see their record at any time.

Setting up a Pastoral Care Team

Note; this article focuses on structures more than the practice of how to go about caring for someone. For this, see for example the paper *Guidelines for good practice in pastoral care*

available from the website of the Association of Christians in Counselling and Linked Professions (see resources listed on page 14).

What follows is some possible definitions of teams and individuals, but these will need to be adapted to apply to your church. It is assumed that the church's Safeguarding Officer will be a member of the PCT. You are advised to simplify what is written here which has to cover a wide list of applications.

Suggested text for role documents is in italics. Do not copy this but adapt from it.

Guidance notes

You are a member of the Pastoral Care Team under the Team Leader to whom you are accountable. Like other teams in our church you aim to meet together regularly to share issues (being careful not to give away confidences), receive training and help each other by giving advice and praying together.

This is a significant team to be part of. You visit people on behalf of the church, demonstrating that those in the group you visit are part of the Christian community of our church, taking a genuine interest in their lives, bringing encouragement and practical support, and helping people to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ thereby.

Your role is to encourage people to make their own decisions with some help from you, but not to act in any way so that they become dependent upon you.

Take note of and follow the guidance in our church's Lone Working Policy. Take precautions so someone knows who you are visiting and what time you expect to return.

We shall normally ensure that if a single person is visiting someone the visitor is the same gender as the one being visited. (Couples may visit anyone). Be aware of the dangers of misunderstanding on the use of physical touch but treat each visit as you feel to be appropriate.

Keep your conversations confidential to you and the one you visit, except when a safeguarding issue is at stake.

You will be required to be DBS checked and to gain safeguarding online training certificates as advised by your team leader.

Under GDPR you may keep records of those you visit with details already shown on the church database plus dates and length of time of visits or contacts. Some visits will be recorded centrally. Such details are to be deleted if you no longer visit this person.

Person profile

To be a member of our Pastoral Care Team your life should be rooted in prayer and study of the Scriptures. You will seek God's wisdom in when to visit or meet with those in your care group, in what to say, and in when to challenge and when to support.

You need to know which Scripture passage might help someone in their present need, bearing in mind that some in your group may be particularly vulnerable. Those appointed to a pastoral care ministry in Acts 6: 1-7 were to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

We expect members of the Pastoral Care Team to have a high level of emotional intelligence and be able to show real discernment and empathy when meeting people at home or in church. You will be able to keep confidences.

You will be a committed member of our church and held in respect by church members for your wisdom and care.

Role definition**1: Purpose**

The purpose of this team is

- *to offer effective and accessible pastoral care based on Christian values to members of the church and those living locally who approach us for support;*
- *to encourage a culture of all-member responsibility for and involvement in pastoral care throughout our church;*
- *to be alert for pastoral needs.*

2: People links

The team is accountable to the Trustees/PCC through the Pastoral Worker, and each team member is to work under the Team Leader.

You are part of a team who care for each other and pray for each other. You will see the work of pastoral care within this team context.

3: Responsibilities

Your role involves:

- *Watching out for members you are responsible for and following up non-attendance on Sundays by means of a phone call and, when necessary, a personal visit.*
- *Visiting those who cannot come to church with ease and offering to watch the latest service recording with them.*

- *Passing on weekly service sheets and monthly newsletters for those who have not been able to pick these up in church or who do not have email contact.*
- *Offering special help to those you visit in times of need and to inform your team leader of such changes in circumstance.*
- *Praying for other members of the team and giving priority to the team meetings and training sessions.*
- *Assessing practical needs of those you meet with and discussing these with your team leader before making any promises of action.*

Appointing a specialist member of staff

The role of Team Leader for a Pastoral Care Team may be further formalised into a member of staff holding the brief for pastoral care for the church.

For larger churches this might be a member of the paid staff but for most it will be Care Lead or Pastoral Team Leader. A few churches appoint a Parish Nurse who might or might not take on this role. But for most churches this will be a member of the congregation who leads the carers team.

Person profile

As for a member of the Pastoral Care Team (above) plus:

You will be an effective team leader, enabling and inspiring team members to fulfil their responsibilities, to make wise decisions and to work together as an effective team.

You will be easily available and capable of handling crises that may arise.

You will be well organised, able to handle the administration and communication required for our pastoral care scheme to function well.

Role Definition**1: Purpose**

The purpose of this appointment is:

- *to lead the Pastoral Care Team who offer effective and accessible pastoral care based on Christian values to members of the church and those living locally who approach us for support;*
- *with other team members to encourage a culture of all-member responsibility for*

and involvement in pastoral care throughout our church;

- *with other team members to be alert for pastoral needs.*

2: People links

You are accountable to the Trustees/PCC through the Minister for the effective work of pastoral care throughout the church.

You report directly to the Minister and attend weekly staff meetings as frequently as you are able.

You are the leader of a team of dedicated Christian workers.

You liaise with small group leaders, Church Administrator, members of the Ministry Team.

3: Responsibilities

(As for a member of the Pastoral Care Team (above) but with additions such as those that follow here for the responsibility to be the leader of the team)

- *Organising the team for visiting and follow up so that suitable people are chosen for each person that needs care. Caring for each team member by encouraging the team to care for each other.*
- *Leading team meetings and arranging appropriate training for everyone. Selecting new team members and inviting them to join.*
- *Overseeing communication and administration of our care scheme in consultation with the Church Administrator.*
- *Liaising with small group leaders (including young people's group leaders) and offering them suitable resources for the care of their members.*
- *Passing on care responsibilities to the Ministry Team or specialists when such action is necessary.*
- *Seeking wherever possible to encourage all church members to see themselves as members of the Pastoral Care Team so that everyone gets involved in some way!*

Appointing a committee

Many Trustee groups (including PCCs in Church of England churches) will have a Care Committee of some kind as a subgroup. Their responsibility

is to ensure that the Trustees fulfil their responsibilities to ensure the church cares for the flock.

It may well be appropriate to have a small working group of specialists, if there are such people in the congregation, who are able to advise the Pastoral Care Team and offer training.

But it may be better to ensure that this working group is actually a group of carers rather than a committee to discuss care. In other words to give this role to the Pastoral Care Team so there is no committee as such. This simplifies the structure and gives responsibility to those who carry out the work.

Structural issues that arise

Boundaries

Most pastoral care involves friendship, listening and encouragement. But there are people who need more specialist assistance. The danger is of a member of the Pastoral Care Team trying to help someone whose needs go beyond the team member's ability to deal with.

Consider also the Prayer Ministry Team member who finds themselves with someone saying they have been abused in the past. It is vital at this point to recognise that these cases require a specialist.

You do not become a counsellor after attending a few training sessions. Professional counsellors have had years of training and practical experience.

There are two stages where action may be needed. First anyone needs to know when to hand over to someone with more experience of the type of case they are up against. This may involve marital relationships or someone who is clinically depressed. There may well be someone in the church capable of handling this, including the Minister, but if the responsibility is not transferred to them damage may be done.

The second stage is of a more serious nature to recognise when you need a trained counsellor because of more serious issues such as trauma. The level of necessary expertise may fall outside the competence of anyone in the church to deal with and external help needs to be requested.

Confidentiality

This is an important issue but is not covered in this article on structures. It should however have a major place in advice on how to undertake care.

Caring for the carers

Members of the Pastoral Care Team may find themselves sharing in cases that can be emotionally draining. It is important that they, along with their fellow team members, are offered regular training and a chance to offload with others, within the needs of confidentiality.

The church Trustees/PCC should ensure that both team members and any member of staff or volunteer are properly supported.

Such oversight may also need to extend to small group leaders, especially if their group includes people who take up much of their time and emotional energy.

Changing the culture (recap)

The reason for a need to organise pastoral care assumes a shift of culture from Minister-care to congregational-care as was explained at the start of this article.

But this will not happen through structure alone, and, as already explained, when you appoint a Pastoral Care Team there is the risk that the model will change from Minister-care to Team-care and not to congregational care.

Without a very definite action plan to re-educate the congregation this will never happen and any Pastoral Care Team will be seen as the specialists whose role this is.

Organisations offering resources

Acorn Christian Healing Foundation <https://www.acornchristian.org>
A national network of Christian healing hubs

Anna Chaplaincy (part of Bible Reading Fellowship) <https://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk>
Supporting older people emotionally and spiritually

Association of Christians in Counselling and Linked Professions <https://www.acc-uk.org>
See in particular their paper 'Guidelines for good practice in pastoral care'

Grove Books Pastoral series <https://www.grovebooks.co.uk>
A wide range of booklets on pastoral themes

Mind and soul foundation <https://www.mindandsoulfoundation.org>
Helping leaders explore Christianity and mental health

Parish Nursing Ministries UK <https://www.parishnursing.org.uk>
Whole person healthcare through the local church

Thirtyone:eight <https://www.thirtyoneeight.org>
Safeguarding advice and guidance

Plus a range of healing agencies, Age UK, social services, local charities offering resources in aspects of pastoral care and a wide range of books available.

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles> then A56. See also Articles A12/13, *The leader as a shepherd*, A43, *Every member on active service*, and A48, *Organising your small groups*. Also Training Notes TN85, *Preparing a Lone Worker Policy*, TN109, *A test for your church's welcome*, TN134, *Integrate your newcomers* and TN135, *How to conduct a disability audit*.

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of advice on church structures of any kind.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A56 under Structures (with a link to Planning).

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