

## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Gal. 6:10

### I. The Advantages of having a Biblical Counseling Ministry

- A. This is a great mission work right in your area. You will be able to reach the lost for Christ and to build your church with converts rather than church hoppers.
- B. Couple counselors will be available for ministry to couples. This helps the woman counselee believe that she will be treated fairly.
- C. Trained women will be available to counsel women so the pastors or male leaders do not have to be tempted by the opposite sex.
- D. Your church members will want you to counsel their family and friends. This will bless them and build the church.
- E. Lay people will be handling the more common situations as your flock grows.
- F. Your trained church members may not even know that they are counseling because they are simply doing what Christians are supposed to do.
- G. As you counsel more, you will learn the types of struggles that the sheep are experiencing.
- H. You will become a better shepherd, a better counselor, and a better preacher.

### II. Working *WITH* the Local Church

Individuals who receive training in Biblical counseling are often highly motivated to use what they have learned to help hurting people. Most would prefer to work with a church-based counseling ministry. However, many churches do not have an established counseling ministry, and that leads to the frequently asked question, “How does a church start a counseling ministry?”

This class will attempt to answer that question by identifying key actions which will set the stage for an effective launch of a formal counseling ministry. It is impossible to cover all the factors that would need consideration, but these will get the process rolling.

- A. **WHY:** God has established the church as His instrument of ministry. It is important that you not establish yourself as a separate identity, or as a para-church ministry. God will honor your service under the authority of your local church. This good reputation will also allow other churches to trust that you will respectfully cooperate with their local church.



## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

B. **HOW:** Be sure to request permission to contact the counselee's Elders/Pastor. It is inappropriate to make a commitment that important information will be withheld from the local church under-shepherd. (Heb. 13:17)

If at all possible, keep his/her Pastor or Elders generally updated as to their progress. Our goal is to encourage the counselee's active participation in their local church. If a counselee refuses to grant permission to contact his/her church leadership, you will need to discover his/her reasons.

If you meet with him/her initially to gain an understanding of their problem with the church, be careful not to entertain unfounded accusations against a God ordained Elder. 1 Tim. 5:19 - If in doubt, check it out. (Pr. 18:7) If his/her unwillingness to cooperate with the local church appears to be slanderous or outright rebellion against authority, you may need to terminate the counseling. Gain enough data to determine where this spirit of rebellion is coming from.

Upon rare situations, it may be necessary to overlook the initial responsibility to contact the local church because of an even larger responsibility. Such situations should be serious ones (ie. authority abuse, sexual abuse by leadership, etc).

C. **Getting Started:** Establish a solid foundation for a long term ministry.

1. Let all potential counselors know up front that most Biblical Counselors will not head towards a paid career in counseling.
2. A pastor, some church leaders and their wives need to be trained to counsel. Their support is vital for your church counseling ministry to succeed.
3. Acknowledge that counseling is already happening at your church.
  - a) People receive counsel in general discipleship formats.
  - b) Members of your church are regularly giving and receiving counsel/advice on personal issues, but it is not organized, scheduled or evaluated.
4. Review your theological motivations.  
Matthew 28:18-20  
Ephesians 4:11-12  
2 Timothy 2:2  
The Doctrine of progressive sanctification (Ephesians 4:22-24)
5. Establish philosophical guidelines/procedures.
  - a) All counselors must be Biblical Counselors, not integrationists.
  - b) All lead and associate counselors are expected to pursue ACBC certification.
  - c) All lead or associate counselors must be church members in good standing.



## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

- d) We do not charge for counseling, but counsees are expected to pay for materials used to assist them. All donations to the counseling ministry should be handled by the appropriate church channels.
6. Identify the primary day or days of the week that counseling will be offered to the community from the church building.
  - a) Pastoral staff commitment is crucial.
  - b) Availability of trained counselors in the afternoon and evening is important.
  - c) Schedule appointments 1½ or 2 hours apart.
7. Determine titles & qualifications of counseling team members and then recruit them.
  - a) Lead Counselor (either certified or pursuing ACBC certification)
  - b) Associate Counselor or Accountability Partner (from your church or their church)
  - c) Observers – future counselors (only individuals who have completed the training classes)
8. Secure the necessary funding.
  - a) Resources for counsees (pamphlets, books, CDs, etc.)
  - b) Resource library for counselors
  - c) Meals and refreshments for staff
  - d) Staff training, development, continuing education opportunities
  - e) ACBC applications, supervision fees, yearly membership fees
9. Collect and approve appropriate paperwork for the counselor's use.
  - a) Personal Data Inventory & Basic Information Sheets
  - b) Medical Information Release
  - c) Counseling Record Sheets
  - d) Consent to Counsel Sheet
  - e) Growth Assignment Sheets
10. Purchase resources that will be frequently recommended by counselors.
  - a) Counseling Pamphlets
  - b) Books on particular areas of progressive sanctification
  - c) Discipleship materials to aid your counselors
11. Counseling appointments are scheduled after the counselee returns their Personal Data Inventory and Basic Information Sheets. (You can download a copy of our application for counseling from the BCTC web site. Please change the contact info, if you plan on using this as a model for your church counseling ministry.)
12. All counsees, who are not members of the church which houses the counseling center, should sign a “consent to counsel” sheet before counseling begins. Church members, of the church which houses the counseling center, should not sign a “consent to counsel” form. They and you have greater security through your church membership.
13. All counsees are expected to attend at least one worship service per week at a Bible-believing church while they are receiving counseling. If they do



## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

not have a church, suggest that they attend your church.

14. It is difficult to counsel when children are present. If you are unable to provide child care, suggest that the parents seek suitable care for the scheduled counseling time.

### III. Let Scripture set your Boundaries.

#### A. Foundational Verses for the Counseling Ministry

1. Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.
2. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
3. JN 16:7-11 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.
4. Ro. 12:6-8 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.
5. 2 Tim. 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

#### B. Important Counseling Verses

1. PR 10:8 The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.
2. PR 12:15 The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.
3. PR 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.



## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

4. PR 18:17 The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.
5. PR 14:23 All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.
6. PR 17:28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.
7. PR 20:5 The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.
8. Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"
9. Romans 8:28-29 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
10. 1Cor 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.
11. 1CO 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
12. Eph. 4:22-24 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
13. 2 TH 3:10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."
14. James 1:19-20 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.



The following information may prove helpful in training your counseling ministry staff and in establishing clear guidelines to aid you in the counseling ministry.

### IV. Setting up the Files

It is important to keep one master file containing file folders on all counselees. This information will be kept at the office. The individual case files should contain the following:

- A. A signed consent to counsel sheet, containing the signature of all adult counselees and the parental consent for any youth receiving counsel, must be included in each file. If your ministry is established under the church's authority, you will NOT need signed consent from your *Members* before counseling. (This is for their legal protection.)
- B. A Personal Data Inventory form should be filled out as completely as possible and placed in each counselee's file. If a counselee is a church member and the counseling is informal, it may not be necessary to have a PDI for the counselee but do keep weekly records.
- C. A dated record sheet of each meeting with a counselee should be filled out and placed in the files. These records will provide guidance for future counseling, reference for any necessary church discipline, reference for any legal request, and help in vindicating the counselor if he/she is falsely accused by the counselee or others.
- D. In addition, each counselor may wish to keep his or her personal counseling records. These records should be left in the office except for brief periods when the counselor may wish to take the files for further review at home. Please know that these files may also be needed if any legal issues arise. Please do not maintain a separate set of records at home.
- E. A central file of potential counseling aids and growth assignments should be maintained at the office for use of all counselors. Keep your master copies separate to avoid someone accidentally using the master sheet.

### V. Understanding Forms

**“a man of understanding and knowledge maintains order.” (PR 28:2b)**

The principle shown here, in this instruction about leading a government, also applies to Christian ministry. Sloppy workmanship will not reflect well upon the God of order. On the other hand, the keeping of accurate, orderly, records will produce a peaceful and productive harvest in due season. When you have orderly records, you will not have to depend upon your memory and you may avoid duplicating your previous efforts.



## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

A central method of record keeping will prove beneficial. If you wish to add personal touches to your records, please make them clear enough for another counselor to decipher the information.

Note: You may become unable to minister for a variety of reasons and another counselor may need to fill in for you.

Because you are establishing a church sponsored ministry, not a personal endeavor, all counselee records must be kept at the office. Your church holds a legal and moral responsibility for the oversight of this ministry. In order to assist the church officers in this responsibility, you will need to keep accurate and up-to-date records.

### A. Your record keeping could include the following types of forms/records:

#### 1. Individual counselee files

PDI, signed consent to counsel; counseling record sheets; possibly an exit interview; a 6 week check-up record sheet; and follow up notes – info from their pastor, or additional contact information such as e-mails they send you

##### a) Setting up the counselee's file

(1) Place the counselee's name and record number on the outside of the file.

(2) Please write the date, your name, and the counselee's name on each record sheet.

(3) Please record all growth assignments, general teaching/counseling instruction, and any pertinent data gained during the counseling session.

#### 2. Ministry Records

- phone records of who calls — their name, phone number, contact address, and e-mail or text info
- a central list of counselees (You may wish to do an excel sheet listing the cases by their numbers or alphabetically. This will save you a lot of time later.)
- a file on previous ministry events and a file of planned future events
- a copy of all yearly ministry reports to your church leaders and/or a copy of the congregational yearly reports from your ministry
- records of all expenditures and donations



## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

- a list of ministry resources such as homeless shelters or on-line accountability ministries, a list of written or audio/visual resources and contact info for ordering additional ministry books and pamphlets

### 3. Ministry Tools

- a) Establish a file drawer containing files of pertinent teaching/counseling and homework information which can be maintained for the use of all ministry volunteers. Please clearly mark your originals or store them elsewhere. This helps to avoid irritation when someone uses your originals.
- b) Ministry mini books and pamphlets will prove very helpful. You can seek reimbursement from your counselee to cover the cost of handouts or you can use the material as a part of your counseling session.
- c) Don't neglect the materials already available through your church. Recorded copies of sermons make great homework, when they deal with the issues that the counselee is struggling with. Write out several questions about the sermon to use as a homework assignment with the DVD.

**Sloppy workmanship will not reflect well upon the God of order. (See 2 Tim. 2:15)**

## VI. Handling Phone Calls

### A. Before They Call

Remember that there is no problem too large for Jesus Christ. Prepare yourself or the ministry secretary with a brief outline of all the ministry goals and procedures. Check to see who will be available to take appointments. If needed, check with the other counselors before setting up an appointment. Be sure to ask God to bless your ministry of greeting and encouragement. People will make their first evaluation of the ministry based upon your interaction with them. Don't forget to keep clear records, your skills in receiving and recording information will greatly affect the ministry.

### B. Handling Phone Calls

Take a deep breath, pray a quick silent prayer. Speak clearly and graciously. Smile as you speak, a smile really does travel across the phone line. Don't let them get ahead of you. If you don't understand what they are saying, graciously ask them to repeat or clarify. (Sometimes troubled people speak rapidly, quietly, or with slurred speech.)

1. Be prepared to briefly explain the ministry. You may wish to use the following information (if it applies).





## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

- a) This counseling ministry is established to benefit the community.
- b) We are entirely donation based. The counseling services are free to the community and no one will be turned away because of a lack of funds.
- c) Our counselors are trained to address a wide variety of life issues.
- d) We will be applying Biblical principles to find real answers and hope.
- e) All counseling is confidential. (Note: There are two exceptions to this. There is no confidentiality in a child endangerment situation. The law requires all citizens to report child endangerment or crimes against children. Explain that the counselors will comply with this law. Another exception to the need for confidentiality is church leadership. Let them know that you would like to keep their pastor or elders informed of their general progress and any need for prayer support and pastoral guidance.)
- f) Be sure to clearly write down their whole name, phone number(s), e-mail and mailing address.
- g) Some counselees may not wish to give their number and address for safety reasons. You may ask if there is a good time for them to receive calls (usually when their husband is not at home) or you may ask them to call the ministry at a later time, when you know a counselor will be available.
- h) If asked for help in paying bills, please refer them to your established church ministries. You will need to say, "We keep no funds on hand and are currently unable to provide financial assistance."
- i) Above all, REMAIN CALM. Your calm demeanor will speak volumes of hope. It is okay to briefly express sympathy, but never sound shocked by their trials. Remember that there is no problem too large for Jesus Christ. Your quiet and gentle response will provide assurance and hope to a broken-hearted person.
- j) Please keep the office manager informed of all appointments so that he or she can keep the ministry calendar organized.

## II. Handling Emergencies

### A. When the Emergency Occurs

1. Take a deep breath and pray a quick, silent prayer. Remember that the battle is not yours. It is the Lord's battle.



## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

2. If you are on the phone, be sure to get their full name and address. You may need this information later to ask the police to go to their residence. (Do not tell them the reason for your question.)
3. Remain calm. Your quiet confidence in God's care will lend them strength. If you seem overwhelmed, they will believe that their life struggles are too difficult for anyone to help. (1 Cor. 10:13)
4. Gently ask the pertinent questions. Are you alone today? (Check to see if minors are in the home.) Do you have any weapons in your home? Have you taken any drugs or other harmful substances?
5. If they have taken harmful drugs, ask them to call 911. To make sure this happens, have someone else call 911. Report their name, phone number, address, and their claim of taking a harmful substance.
6. If they have weapons, ask them to have an adult remove the weapons from their presence. If you can-not accomplish this, you will have to determine if they or others may be in danger. If you think there is a potential danger, call the police. (Do not offer to go to their home yourself!)
7. Ask if they want help. Let them know that they won't have to be alone in this struggle. Tell them God's Word has the answers for all of life's struggles and that you will be glad to help them. (This simple human contact may be the first means of offering hope.)
8. This is not the time to try to counsel. They won't be thinking clearly.
9. Ask them to make arrangements not to be left alone. If possible, arrange for them to come see you within 24 hours. Do not let them off of the phone if they are going to be left alone with no hope.
10. Get them to make a personal promise to you. Get them to promise that they won't do anything to harm their self or others without first giving you an opportunity to talk to them face to face. Call them by their name and let them know that you care about what happens to them.  
"Susan, I really am concerned about what you're telling me. I would like an opportunity to meet you in person. Will you show me the respect of promising that you won't do anything to hurt yourself without first giving me the chance to meet with you? Thank you."
11. If you have made arrangements for them to have someone spend time with them, ask them to call you back after they make those arrangements. Let them



## Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church

know that you will be calling them back if you don't hear from them in 20 or 30 minutes.

12. Once you hear from them again, double check that they won't be left alone. Remind them of your upcoming appointment and tell them that you are really looking forward to meeting them.

13. It may also be necessary to offer some practical, temporary encouragement. If they are out of food, make arrangements for them to get some food. (Do not offer money. Get food from the deacon's pantry or have someone meet them at the store to buy a few groceries.)

### **B. At the First Meeting**

1. At the first meeting, greet them warmly. Make sure that you shake their hand. Appropriate physical contact is helpful. Get some of their data and help him make out a temporary emergency plan. If the counselee is distraught, get him to look you in the eye and make a personal promise that he will not do anything foolish without first giving you a chance to talk with him. This personal interaction is very important. It lets them know that you care about their life choices and that you intend to be there for them in a crisis.

2. When a counselee comes in cold, not having any previous contact with your church, it is valuable to spend a few minutes covering the information in a ministry brochure. It is important to express that your primary goals are God's glory and their good.

a) When you minister to the public, you are dealing with those of a different mindset. Frequently, they will want you to do the work for them. Many men and women will be used to ministries which treat them as either incapable or ignorant. If you assign a growth assignment, make sure that it is doable. Always check homework. Your goal, for the use of homework, is to help the counselee recognize the benefits of diligently seeking God. (Heb. 11:6)

b) Your job is to train the counselee to become dependent upon God and independent from you. (Eph. 6:19-20) To accomplish this, it is vital that they become involved with the local church. You will want them to have contact with other Christians in their church. You can use accountability forms, or you can meet with both the counselee and his/her accountability partner for one or two sessions.

3. Be sure to explain that all counseling is confidential, with the exception of matters pertaining to church discipline, any information about on-going child endangerment or illegal activities. You are legally responsible to report any child



Establishing and Maintaining a Counseling/Discipleship Ministry in the Local Church  
endangerment. The illegal activities are dealt with on a case-to-case basis.

4. Make sure that you use gracious and gentle words. The first appointment will primarily involve gaining their trust and offering hope.
5. Frequently, the counselee will offer minor difficulties for the first session or two. They are testing your response to evaluate if you are worthy of hearing their real heartaches.
6. Never let them leave without offering the hope that our God “heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds”. The nature of a just and holy God is the encouragement that they need. Assure them that you will be glad to meet with them through this difficult time, but God can be there with them every day.

### III. Prayer – Where, When and Who?

**A.** All counselors are highly encouraged to begin and end all sessions with prayer. It doesn't need to be a lengthy or eloquent prayer, just a humble prayer of dependence. Your example of humble dependence will be an encouragement to the counselee as he/she recognizes your confidence in God's ability to hear and answer prayers. Please remember that prayer isn't another opportunity to instruct the counselee. Prayer is aimed at God, not the counselee.

**B.** Prayer Support - When and Who???

As with all ministries, your ministry depends entirely upon God's good grace. To that end, you can seek prayer support from ministry volunteers, the church officers, and the church prayer meeting. It may not be appropriate to request church wide prayer for individuals unless you receive the approval of the counseling ministry director and an elder of your church.

(Too much information in a prayer request may offend either the individual being prayed for, their spouse and family, or those hearing the request at church. Pr. 25:9-10)

If you are going to seek prayer support for a counselee, either get their specific approval or make your request vague enough not to divulge their identity. Even with these precautions, you may still offend someone. Be careful, but seek prayer when wise to do so.

#### **THE BOTTOM LINE!**

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 2 Cor. 1:3-6

