

Policy on Pastoral Counseling



The Right Reverend Scott B. Hayashi, Eleventh Bishop of Utah
Policy Number: C011
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PURPOSE

The Episcopal Church expects its clergy to provide spiritual guidance and pastoral counseling to persons requesting such services, within reasonable limits. This expectation is informal and not based on any canonical requirement that any given clergy provide such services. This policy is intended to provide guidance about such limits, and to address the further issue of referring persons in need to outside professional providers. This policy does not apply to spiritual direction relationships.

POLICY

The Canons of the Church require priests to conduct worship services; to provide instruction in faith, ministry, and stewardship; to prepare persons for baptism, confirmation, reception and reaffirmation; to work with the Bishop regarding visitations and diocesan service; and to read official communications, such as Pastoral Letters, when issued. Traditionally, pastoral responsibilities to the congregation and other persons have expanded the educational function to include individual spiritual guidance and pastoral counseling without fee, especially during times of personal crisis or loss. This does not include long-term mental health counseling. Persons requiring mental health services are to be referred to appropriate professionals.

While clergy are free to counsel with church members and others, it is expected that they will be diligent in maintaining the scope of such counseling within their level of experience and competency. In the course of such counseling, the priest should refrain from using the term psychology or any of its derivatives unless the priest is a licensed mental health professional. Counseling should not exceed six sessions without consultation with a more experienced cleric. Persons requiring further assistance should be referred for further counseling services to another priest or to a mental health professional.

When referring a person to an outside professional or other health care provider, the referring priest should exercise caution about offering any representations of the specific expertise or skill of the provider, and should caution the person being referred to do their own checking of the professional credentials of the provider.

The policies and practices described in the Church Worker Conduct Manual of this Diocese apply to all counseling services.