

Church Confidentiality Guidelines

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Friends

In a warm and lively church like Hearsall, we hope we often see one another as friends. It's not a good idea to try to prescribe what friends may or may not share concerning each other. Instead, we trust that church friends will share information in a manner that is kind and truthful, and respects the general wishes of any person we may be talking about.

Meetings

In a formal meeting of the church, such as a Bible study, prayer meeting, deacons meeting or church meeting, if someone shares something personal that is not public knowledge, we should not share that outside the meeting without the permission of the person concerned.

Officers

If we are acting as an officer of the church, then more strict rules about confidentiality apply. If we share personal information with a person in their capacity as a deacon, pastoral visitor, youth leader, Sunday School teacher, minister or other named officer, then we should expect that nothing significant that we have shared will be passed on to anyone else without our express permission. Officers should note that this includes their own spouse. Church members should note that if they positively wish their information to be shared, they should mention this to the church officer concerned. If there is any doubt in the mind of either party about whether a person is acting in their capacity as an officer, then clarification should be sought.

Minister

A minister can only provide proper pastoral guidance if strict confidentiality is taken as read in any encounter. Any personal matter shared with the minister will not be shared with anyone else unless you ask him to do so, or unless he seeks and gains your permission to do so.

Supervision

Officers of the church may share any concerns they have with the Minister if they feel an issue that has been raised with them is beyond their capacity to process. The Minister may likewise confide in the Regional Minister (or other officially appointed supervisory figure) if the issue is beyond his capacity to process. In such supervisory conversations, the identity of the person originally sharing will not generally be disclosed and the conversation will focus on the wellbeing of the officer, though some reflection on possible strategies to assist the person originally sharing may take place.

Exceptions

Anyone in the church should make speedy and appropriate referrals if they feel someone's life is at risk, or there is risk of serious harm. The church's safeguarding policies should always be followed as appropriate. Also, if a person discloses that they are breaking the law to an officer of the church, the officer may disclose to appropriate authorities.

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Prayer Chain

If a matter is shared on the prayer chain, this is obviously to enable people to pray and is not a way of sharing information generally. So the information should be kept simple and possibly only say “..... needs prayer” and should be kept to the prayer chain only. If the person requesting the prayer wishes it to be in the prayer book, they should either do this themselves or specifically request someone to do it, if they are not able. Also they should state how much detail should be included.