

AFFINITY™

Pastoral Care Code of Ethics Manual

Ethical standards for leaders, ministry teams, staff, and volunteers operating within the
AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Program

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Purpose

The AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Code of Ethics establishes the ethical standards that guide pastoral-care leaders, ministry teams, staff, and volunteers operating within the AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Program.

These standards are grounded in AFFINITY™ pastoral-care principles and Dr. Vanessa R. Brooks's Human-Centered Leadership Model, including psychological safety, trauma-informed leadership, compassionate accountability, resilience and burnout prevention, and values-based decision-making.

The purpose of this Code is to ensure that pastoral care protects human dignity, strengthens trust, respects appropriate boundaries, and supports the well-being and agency of the people receiving care.

1. Honor Human Dignity

Every person receiving pastoral care should be treated with respect, compassion, fairness, and cultural responsiveness.

Pastoral-care leaders should recognize the whole person and avoid reducing individuals to a problem, diagnosis, crisis, behavior, or circumstance.

2. Create Psychological Safety

Pastoral care should create an environment where people can speak honestly, ask questions, express doubt, disclose concerns, and seek help without unnecessary fear of shame, retaliation, rejection, or spiritual judgment.

Care should support trust rather than require compliance as a condition of belonging.

3. Practice Trauma-Informed Care

Pastoral-care leaders should recognize that trauma may influence how people experience relationships, authority, faith, safety, and care.

Care should avoid unnecessary coercion, intimidation, spiritual pressure, shaming, or practices that may intensify distress.

Leaders should approach difficult behaviors and responses with curiosity, care, and appropriate boundaries.

4. Respect Scope and Competence

Pastoral-care leaders should provide care only within the limits of their role, training, experience, and authority.

Pastoral care should not be presented as a substitute for licensed mental-health treatment, medical care, legal services, emergency intervention, or other specialized professional services when those services are needed.

Recognizing the limits of one's role is an ethical responsibility.

5. Protect Confidentiality and Privacy

Information shared during pastoral care should be treated as private and handled responsibly.

Information should only be shared when:

- the person has provided appropriate consent;
- sharing is necessary to coordinate authorized care;
- safety concerns require action;
- reporting is required by applicable law or church policy.

Pastoral-care information should not be used for gossip, public discussion, unnecessary leadership conversations, or unrelated ministry purposes.

6. Maintain Appropriate Boundaries

Pastoral-care relationships should maintain appropriate emotional, relational, spiritual, financial, and professional boundaries.

Leaders should not use a person's vulnerability, dependence, spiritual trust, or need for assistance for personal, relational, financial, or organizational advantage.

7. Support Human Agency

People receiving pastoral care should be supported in making informed decisions about their own lives whenever possible.

Pastoral-care leaders may offer guidance, education, prayer, resources, and recommendations without unnecessarily controlling decisions that appropriately belong to the individual.

Care should strengthen a person's capacity to participate in decisions affecting their life and well-being.

8. Use Compassionate Accountability

Compassion does not eliminate accountability.

Pastoral-care leaders should communicate expectations, limitations, boundaries, and decisions clearly while preserving dignity and respect.

Accountability should not become punishment, humiliation, public exposure, or misuse of spiritual authority.

9. Make Values-Based Care Decisions

Pastoral-care decisions should be guided by established AFFINITY™ policy, ethical standards, identified need, available resources, appropriate scope, and the well-being of the person receiving care.

Decisions should not be based on favoritism, personal relationships, status, financial giving, influence, or inconsistent treatment.

10. Refer and Collaborate Responsibly

When a person's needs exceed the church's pastoral-care scope, available resources, or level of competence, leaders should appropriately connect, collaborate, or refer.

Referral should not be treated as abandonment.

When appropriate, pastoral care may continue alongside professional or community-based services.

11. Protect Safety

Immediate concerns involving danger, abuse, serious crisis, or threats to safety should be addressed according to established crisis, reporting, and emergency procedures.

Routine pastoral-care processes should not delay necessary action when immediate safety is involved.

12. Protect the Well-Being of Caregivers

Pastoral-care leaders should not be expected to carry unlimited responsibility for the needs of others.

Churches should support reasonable workloads, shared responsibility, boundaries, supervision, rest, and access to support when leaders are experiencing burnout, compassion fatigue, or secondary stress.

Healthy pastoral care requires healthy caregivers.

13. Provide Fair and Consistent Care

Pastoral-care policies, eligibility requirements, resources, and procedures should be applied as consistently and fairly as possible.

Differences in care should be based on legitimate differences in need, scope, available resources, safety, or established policy—not favoritism or arbitrary decision-making.

14. Continue Care With Responsibility

Pastoral care should not automatically end when a resource is provided or a referral is made.

When appropriate, the church should determine what continued pastoral support, follow-up, connection, or communication is needed.

The goal is not simply to complete a transaction, but to help people remain supported, connected, and cared for.

AFFINITY™ Ethical Standard

AFFINITY™ pastoral care should reflect:

**Dignity • Safety • Compassion • Accountability • Boundaries • Agency • Competence •
Consistency • Collaboration • Continuity**

Every person operating within the AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Program is expected to provide care in a manner that protects people, respects their humanity, and strengthens trust in the pastoral-care experience.