

Trinity Presbyterian Church

Counseling Policy and Procedures

June 2016

Trinity Presbyterian Church
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Counseling Policy:

The following policies are intended to promote a healthy and safe ministry environment at Trinity Presbyterian Church (TPC) in which ordained pastors, ministry staff employees, ordained church officers, and professional counselors with a formal relationship to TPC offer spiritual care, discipleship, and counseling with professionalism. These policies are not intended to limit or hinder the discipleship ministries of the church, nor must they be applied without exception. However, they do exist to provide protection and accountability to our pastors, staff, ordained church officers, and professional counselors, as well as those to whom they minister.

References to “counseling” have in view a relationship wherein an ordained pastor, elder, or deacon, a ministry staff employee, or a church-authorized counselor is seeking to help someone with a particular struggle or crisis in their life. For the purposes of this policy, a counseling session is (1) scheduled, (2) confidential, and (3) characterized by written records of the counseling session that are maintained by the counselor. We acknowledge that all relationships present opportunities to “counsel” at some level; however, herein we are referring to counseling opportunities that are afforded due to someone’s official role in the church, and that they represent the church in such a relationship.

As it is the responsibility of the TPC Session to ensure that we faithfully “preach the Word” through the public pulpit ministry, so it is the responsibility of the TPC Session to ensure that we faithfully “counsel the Word” through the counseling ministry. Thus, any counseling practice that is antithetical to biblical teaching, even if professionally licensed by the State, shall not be supported by any TPC funds, facilities, or personnel.

Counseling Guidelines:

1. The TPC Ruling Elders (RE) provide general oversight of counseling matters.
2. TPC REs oversee the counseling relationships of all TPC pastors, ministry staff, ordained church officers, and Heart Song counseling counselors.
3. Members seeking counseling are encouraged to discuss the matter with their RE.
4. Counseling sessions should be limited to 90 minutes in duration.
5. The number of subsidized counseling sessions that an individual counselee may receive through the TPC Counseling Ministry shall generally be limited to 5, after which, counseling sessions shall be paid in full by the counselee.

6. After the fifth subsidized counseling session, the TPC Session shall review the counseling goals, objectives, and progress. The number of subsidized counseling sessions can be extended with the Session's approval.
7. Counseling relationships by TPC pastors, ministry staff, or ordained church officers shall not normally exceed 3 sessions. The Session shall be advised of all such counseling cases that exceed 3 sessions. The advice and consent of the Session is necessary for those which exceed 3 sessions.
8. The default location for all counseling sessions is in the office of TPC in Crofton, MD. Counseling involving only two individuals of opposite genders is not permitted.
9. When counseling a member of the opposite sex, the counselor shall sit in a separate piece of furniture (e.g. not on the same couch) and shall maintain an appropriate physical distance from the counselee.
10. Physical displays of affection shall be carefully guarded. While tenderness and care are legitimate aspects of helping hurting people, attention shall be given to ensure that affectionate contact is brotherly or sisterly and parental, and not mistaken for personal advance.
11. Counseling shall not be done for the personal financial profit of TPC staff. If personal gifts of appreciation are received by any counselor, they shall be promptly reported to both the Teaching Elder and the Session who will make a determination if the appearance of a conflict of interest arises.
12. The content of counseling with any TPC pastors, ministry staff, or ordained church officers will be kept confidential, but TPC reserves the right to share content with the Session. For all Heart Song counseling, confidentiality will be maintained per policies detailed in Heart Song's "Informed Consent" form.
13. Heart Song Counseling sustains a unique relationship with the TPC Counseling Ministry. Heart Song Counselors shall maintain regular communication with the Session, via the Teaching Elder, regarding their ministry to TPC members.
14. Heart Song Counselors shall observe all provisions of this counseling policy. Heart Song Counselors shall receive payment from TPC for subsidized counseling services per paragraph 5.
15. TPC does not presently employ a dedicated female counselor. Female counselors will be provided through Heart Song Counseling services.
16. Recommended contributions for subsidized counseling: Those individuals who receive regular counseling services (defined as 3 or more sessions in a 12 month period) through TPC's counseling ministry are urged to make some financial contribution toward the TPC counseling assistance fund as they are able. General guidelines for counseling contributions are as follows:
 - a. Annual gross income under \$30,000 per year: As able.
 - b. Annual gross income under \$45,000 per year: \$15 per session.
 - c. Annual gross income between \$45,000-100,000 per year: \$30 per session.

- d. Annual gross income above \$100,000 per year: \$60 per session.
 - e. Contributions to the counseling assistance fund that are fee for service are not tax-deductible.
 - f. Counseling contributions are to be made payable to Trinity Presbyterian Church. The fees shall normally be handed to the counselor who performs the service. TPC will pay Heart Song Counselors at the agreed upon rate for all TPC members who have been referred to Heart Song.
 - g. Since individual circumstances may vary, the above fee structure may be tailored to meet individual needs with the approval of the Session, subject to the limits of the funding available in the TPC counseling assistance fund.
17. The Church Administrator will maintain a record of each Request for Counseling (RFC).

Requesting Subsidized Counseling:

1. Members seeking counseling are encouraged to begin the process with their RE.
2. The member's RE will communicate the need to the Session and, as appropriate, the member's Deacon.
3. The Session will consider the request, remaining mindful of the balance in the TPC Counseling Ministry Fund.
4. If the Session approves, the member's RE will complete a RFC form on behalf of the member, which will notify the Church Administrator for billing and invoice tracking.
5. The Church Administrator will inform Heart Song that a counseling subsidy has been approved.
6. Once Heart Song has been informed, the RE will direct the member to contact Heart Song to schedule the appointment. The primary Heart Song point of contact is Jeff Rickett at jeff@heartsongcounseling.org.