

Counselling Policy - OCMBC

October 22, 2010

Policy Statement:

While counselling is not one of the main functions of the conference, conference personnel will provide a limited amount of that service. While doing so, personnel will adhere to practices and procedures that protect both the counsellors and those being counselled.

Giving pastoral counsel is an ongoing activity in any ministry. Often this focuses on incidental issues revolving around specific situations or events, including more significant issues such as planned marriages. But, periodically individuals need more than a word of advice, instruction, insight or encouragement. They may require more intentional and ongoing counsel designed to bring about life change. This often means meeting on a regular basis over an extended period of time. In this case, counselling is understood to be different than mentoring, discipleship, or spiritual direction since it begins with someone in a “deficit” emotional and/or psychological situation.

The paid staff of the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (Conference Minister and Extension Director) will adhere to the following policies and procedures to protect both the “counsellor”¹ and the individual being formally² counselled:

1. Limit the scope of formal counselling activities to no more than two to four visits so as to recognize the professional limits of the counsellor’s expertise and training, as well as the limits of religious therapy. If further counselling is deemed necessary after three visits, the one being counselled will be referred to a licensed professional counsellor and any further counsel by the initial counsellor will cease. This does not require the cessation of ministry relationship through which the referred individual can be encouraged as he or she works with a professional counsellor. It also does not place an obligation on said individual to receive professional counselling.
2. Decline and/or refer counselling cases requiring specialized psychological or medical requirements to qualified health care professionals.
3. Adopt an “open door” and/or “team counselling” approach in order to reduce the risk of allegations of abuse or harassment. The meeting room where counselling is taking place, should provide a balance of privacy and accountability. For example, there should be visibility into the room via window in the door or beside the door (or the door should be open). When counselling someone of the opposite gender, another individual will be present either in the room during the counselling, or will be immediately accessible to the

¹ Counsellor refers to any staff or agent of the Ontario Conference who is not registered as a professional counselor but has an initial encounter with an individual who is discovered to be in a deficit position.

² Formal counsel is planned. It has a set time, an identifiable “issue of deficit” that is being addressed, and requires regular, frequent (weekly or biweekly) therapeutic focus. It is not about mentoring/discipleship which focuses on going to the next level in ministry development, nor is it about spiritual direction which focuses on facilitating the desire of a mature and emotionally healthy individual to continue his/her faith journey through a deepening inner life through the disciplines of spiritual formation.

meeting room with full awareness of the meeting.

4. When providing formal counsel to an individual, the one providing the counsel will complete a report detailing the date, time, length of time, location, general nature of the counsel, and the recommendations made. The report will be reviewed by the counsellors overseeing board (i.e. Board of Faith and Life for Conference Minister, Board of Church Extension for Extension Director). Irrespective of any other provision set out in this Policy, information of a private and confidential nature which the counsellor has a legal duty to maintain as confidential, including the person's name, will not be included in the report that is forwarded to the boards.
5. Counsellors will avail themselves to continuing education in communication skills and conflict management, and also keep current on legal issues, legislation and acceptable practices affecting a counselling ministry.
6. Individuals seeking counsel or guidance will be made aware in advance the scope and limitations of the pastoral services offered.

Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches
Suggested Assessment Tool
for Referring Individuals for Professional Counsel

If, after meeting with an individual, in your evaluation, he or she indicates three or more of the following, a recommendation to refer the individual to a professional counselor is likely appropriate. That recommendation can be affirmed by:

1. a second meeting which, when evaluated, leads to the same conclusions as the initial meeting.
2. the individual when he or she is questioned along the lines of this assessment tool.
3. a third-party who knows the individual and has opportunity to observe the individual's interactions with people and his/her performance of ministry responsibilities.

Place a check in the box for each statement that you believe is true concerning your meeting with the individual.

- Individual is seeking or evidencing a need for intervention to fix a problem or deficiency that is beyond a specific skill set or competency related to ministry/work performance
- Individual is evidencing an emotional or behavioural crisis that is interfering with ongoing life performance (i.e. seems to affect a number of spheres over a period of time as opposed to just ministry/work for a short period of time).
- Individual seems to increasingly lack his/her customary initiative to take proactive steps towards improvement or appropriate goals.
- Individual is struggling with issues that are beyond the immediate relevance of the ministry sphere, i.e. mainly personal, interpersonal and relating to other and/or all aspects of life.

- Individual is dealing with or focused upon the impact of his/her “past”.
- Individual is repeatedly focussed on “what’s wrong” as opposed to “what’s right”.
- Continued meetings to resolve the individual’s concerns would need to be frequent and for an indefinite period of time. Such meetings do not evidence definitive progress toward resolution.

Immediate referral is strongly recommended in response to the following:

- The individual is depressed which, aside from verbal confirmation, may manifest itself in a prolonged unproductive and apathetic period, absenteeism, and withdrawal from people and responsibilities.
- The individual is struggling with substance abuse evidenced by a chronic reliance on drugs (over the counter, prescription or illicit) or alcohol or, is the victim of domestic or “stranger” abuse/assault.

Name of individual _____ Date: _____

Name of “evaluator” _____ Referred: YES NO