

Pastoral Counsel at Christ Reformed Church

Approved in Consistory on October 13, 2014

The Definition of Counsel – Official church officers and staff at Christ Reformed Church engage in “counsel” whenever they use biblical principles to advise, comfort, or correct someone in both formal and informal settings and conversation. The terms “counsel” and “counseling” are understood broadly by our pastors and elders as advice and support given to people to help them deal with problems or make important decisions. These terms do not refer to professional guidance that utilizes professional psychological methods.

The Goal of our Pastoral Counsel – Our goal in providing pastoral counsel is to help Christians meet challenges in life in ways that will bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is designed to help Christians to find comfort in belonging to Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1), to provide encouragement and accountability as they seek to grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:18), and guide them in wise thinking and godly living unto God’s glory and their own well being.

The Basis of our Pastoral Counsel – We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for Christian belief and gratitude: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). Therefore, our pastoral counsel is based on scriptural principles, not secular psychology or psychiatry.

The Character of Pastoral Counsel – Pastoral counsel at Christ Reformed Church has the character of shepherding, discipleship, and pastoral care, not professional mental health advice. None of the pastors or elders are trained or licensed as psychologists, psychiatrists, therapists, or any other types of mental health professionals. If professional mental health advice or care is desired, one must seek that out elsewhere.

There are times when biblical principles can be brought to bear upon legal, financial, medical or other matters. If one is in need of professional advice concerning matters like these, however, they will need to seek such advice from independent professionals. Pastors and elders can help people to consider professional advice in the light of relevant scriptural principles should they so desire, but our counsel is not to be confused with professional or technical advice.

Pastoral counsel at Christ Reformed Church is provided free of cost as part of our shepherding ministry and is strictly voluntary for both the counselor and the counselee.

The Confidentiality of our Counsel – Confidentiality is an important aspect of pastoral counsel and we will carefully guard the information people entrust to us. There are five situations, however, when it is necessary for a pastor or elder to share certain information with others:

- 1.) When “mandated reporter” laws concerning abuse and/or neglect apply (see California Penal Code Section 11164-11165).
- 2.) When there is a clear indication that someone may be harmed unless others intervene.
- 3.) When another pastor or elder must be consulted to know how to best provide Christian counsel.
- 4.) When the person receiving counsel attends another church and it is necessary to include his or her pastor or elders in the process.
- 5.) When a person persistently refuses to renounce a particular sin and it becomes necessary to pursue church discipline (cf. Matt. 18:15-20; URCNA Church Order arts. 51-62).

Please be assured that those who counsel strongly prefer not to disclose personal information to others, and they will make every effort to help people find ways to resolve problems as privately as possible.