

BASIC PASTORAL CARE

Baptist Times 4 December 2003

Although pastoral care is the responsibility of us all (see 1 Cor 12.25), any responsible church will appoint people with a specific responsibility for the care of its members.

It varies from church to church as to who exactly makes up this group. In my own church, in addition to a pastoral team, we have a larger group of care-group leaders responsible for the various care groups into which the church is divided. Their task is simple: it is to love those in their care. However, to make the task clearer, we devised the following guidelines:

- 1. In a church as large as ours it is very easy for people to feel lost and uncared for. Your primary task is to ensure that all those within your group feel loved, wanted and cared for - in a sense you represent the Lord and his love to all those in your care. To keep track of people in your care group, you may find it helpful to have an informal "register", in which you mark absences from church!*
- 2. A secondary role is to be the eyes and ears of the ministers and the pastoral team. Please inform us of concerns: e.g. sickness, loneliness, loss of faith, family problems, redundancy etc.*
- 3. Eight practical ways of fulfilling your caring role: (A) Share the caring with others in the group, and in this way practice "one-anotherness". (B) Pray for members of your group - and encourage them to pray for one another. Consider establishing a telephone 'prayer chain', where you alert each other to pray for special needs. (C) Visit all the housebound members of your group - and ensure that they are visited regularly (fortnightly?) by someone in the group. (D) Encourage those in your care on a regular basis. Aim to have a monthly "pastoral conversation" with every member of the group. Remember that pastoral care is helping people not just to cope with life's crises, but also to grow in the faith. Feel free to lend a good Christian book you have just read, or to suggest a series of Bible reading aids. (E) Recognise anniversaries. Make a list not just of birthdays and wedding anniversaries, but find out too when people were widowed. (F) Practise hospitality. Encourage members of the group to invite each other to their homes for a meal or for a cup of coffee. Maybe you might set a lead by having people in your home on a regular (monthly?) basis. (G) Organise social activities. Hold a party, e.g. with other care groups in your area. (H) Offer practical help: e.g. baby-sitting, transport, shopping, collecting library books; help with housework, repairs, decorating...*

These guidelines are very basic – but that is pastoral care!

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