



Guide to Pastoral Boundaries



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This guide has been written as an accompaniment to the Pastoral Boundaries video (see www.baptist.org.uk/pastoralboundaries) that all active BUGB Accredited Ministers and Recognised Local Ministers must watch by the end of August 2026. It draws on a number of resources from both within and outside Baptists Together. We acknowledge that it may not reflect every minister or pastoral carer's context or experience. Please consider the guide as a 'live' document that will be updated as pastoral best practice evolves. If you have insights or experience that you feel should be considered, please email ministries@baptist.org.uk. We may not be able to respond personally to every contributor, but we would value your comments.

Ministries Team, February 2026

1. Introduction

This guide provides clear, practical standards for safe, accountable pastoral care. It is intended primarily for those who are BUGB Accredited Ministers and Recognised Local Ministers, but will be useful for anyone who undertakes pastoral work in Baptist contexts.

It is a significant privilege to be permitted to care for and journey with members of our churches and neighbourhoods. Jesus entrusts us to be shepherds of those in our care, just as we ourselves benefit from his shepherding through his Word, his Spirit, and those who pastor us.

In this pastoral task, we are wise to pay attention to pastoral boundaries. They are the limits or personal rules we set for our relationships with those we support. They are likely to be specific to the practice of ministry and may be different from those we have experienced or observed in other professions. So, careful thought, discussion and good communication are required as we set the limits on how we relate to those we serve.

2. A Biblical reflection

Jesus' pastoral practice gives us pause for thought.

On the one hand, we can reflect on Jesus's gracious interaction with those who came to him seeking his intervention in a passage such as Mark 5:21-43.

In the narrative, Jesus is literally crowded by others. People are pressing in on him from every side. A man of standing falls to his knees and asks Jesus him to drop everything and come and heal his dying daughter. A woman whose condition disadvantages her socially reaches out to touch him, uninvited, and Jesus is aware of the imposition.

As Jesus responds to the pastoral expectations placed upon him, we might observe the boundaries that he worked within:

- Jesus' initiates neither the encounter with Jairus, nor that with the unnamed woman, but respects their agency, responding to *their* invitation.
- He does not seek pastoral opportunities in order to justify or burnish his ministry.
- He manages competing needs by attending fully to both Jairus's urgent request and the woman's unexpected interruption. He does not rush or neglect either.
- He is aware of when ministry costs him – he feels power flow out of him when the woman touches his cloak. Significantly, at the start of the following chapter, Jesus returns home, presumably to rest – a feature of his self-care that we see in other gospel narratives.
- He demonstrates attentiveness to the individual person who comes to him, rather than to the expectations of the crowd.
- He does not adopt the crowd's panic or disappointment on the news that Jairus' daughter was dead, nor allow the crowd to determine his response to this news.
- He limits the number of people present when entering Jairus's home. And the miracle of Jairus' daughter's resurrection is without drama. His ministry is not for show.
- His touch is modest – taking the young girl by the hand.
- He protects the vulnerable. He reassures the woman in her fear and removes the cause of her shame. He limits the witnesses to the healing of a young child and shows concern for her physical well-being even after he has performed the miracle.

On the other hand, Jesus interacted with some people in ways that we might hesitate or even refuse to imitate in our day and age. In these cases, Jesus *breaches* the boundaries that others expected him to work within:

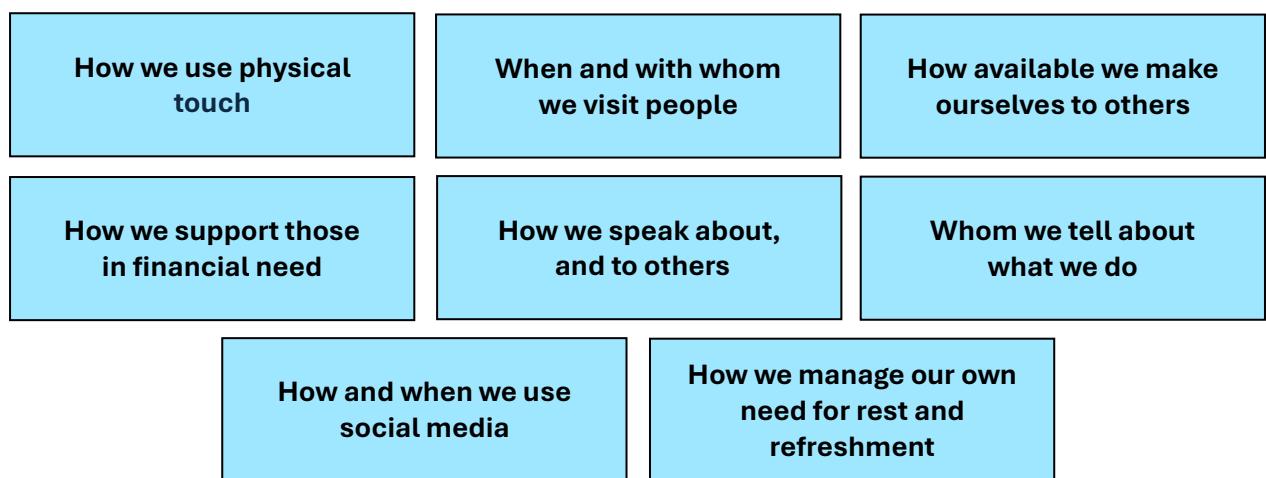
- In Matthew 8:1-4, Jesus does not distance himself from a man with leprosy, but reaches out to touch him, putting himself and his close companions at risk of the disease (according to the understanding of the time.)
- In Mark 2:15-16, he associates freely with the sinners and tax collectors that society labelled unworthy of familiarity.
- In Luke 7:36-38, he permits a woman to shed tears over his feet, wiping his feet with her hair and kissing them.
- In John 9:1-7, he makes mud with saliva and presses it onto the eyes of a blind man, whilst the text is silent on whether the man consented to this.

However, in all of the texts mentioned above, it is strongly implied that Jesus understands the nature and ramifications of his response to others. With both wisdom

and prophetic imagination, he chooses the boundaries he will work within. We note that in both his careful handling of Jairus, his daughter, and the woman who suffered from bleeding, *and* in his provocative interactions with the man with leprosy, the sinners and tax collectors, the woman who wept over him, and the blind man, Jesus prioritised the need of the people before him. Jesus is, of course, uniquely filled with both grace and truth (John 1:14). Our task is to seek similar wisdom through a deepening relationship with Jesus, personal reflection, and discussion of our practice with those who accompany us.

3. The limits of our ministry

In today's context, pastoral boundaries might be to do with:



Boundaries are not barriers to effective pastoral work. Rather, they clarify expectations, protecting both the carer and the cared for. They reduce the risk of abusing the power we hold in pastoral encounters. They help us to avoid compromising ourselves and others. And they guard the safety, dignity and spiritual growth of those we are called to support.

Understanding and working within pastoral boundaries helps us to strike a balance between our committed accompaniment of others and a necessary separateness that respects their independence, dignity and agency. We are rightly concerned to minister in ways that are incarnational and compassionate, yet our ministry should be subject to boundaries that are appropriate for each context.

Pastoral boundaries also enable us to gain trust and so witness to the goodness and faithfulness of Christ. For ministers, this is because the public views us as representatives of a ministerial profession (regardless of whether we are comfortable with the term 'professional'.) Those who observe us rightly expect that we behave

appropriately. When we do, trust is built – trust in us, our Baptist movement, and in the gospel we proclaim.

4. Important accompanying documents

All of us exercising pastoral care in a Baptist context should be familiar with our church or organisation's safeguarding policy, procedures and guidelines on best practice. If you have not read these for a while, please take some time now to re-acquaint yourself with them.

But for ministers, our pastoral care sits within a way of being that reflects the character of Jesus and to which we aspire. To this end, we should also be aware of the content of four related documents:

4.1 The Marks of Ministry. The Marks of Ministry name the characteristics and behaviours that all who are recognised or accredited as Baptist ministers should exhibit.

4.2 A Code of Ethics for Baptist Ministers. The Code encourages us to apply of four virtues – integrity, accountability, community, and spirituality – to six spheres of relationship: ourselves; our one-to-one relationships; our local Baptist congregation; the wider Baptist world; the wider Christian community; and the whole created world. The Code document contains a helpful matrix that identifies the outworking of each virtue within each sphere.

4.3 The CMD handbook outlines five habits of Continuing Ministerial Development that all ministers should foster in order to sustain our well-being and capability in ministry. Particularly important are the habits of attentiveness – to God, to others, to our own self – and accountability, where we talk about our ministerial practice with trusted colleagues or trained accompaniers. These habits help us to reflect on our own well-being and our interactions with others.

4.4 The Ministerial Recognition Rules for Accredited Ministers and **RLM Rules** for Recognised Local Ministers set out the expectation that ministers “live in conformity with the way of life [their] high calling demands... seeking to serve Christ through ministry in church and world in ways that faithfully embody the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Appendix 3 of the Rules gives examples of conduct that falls short of this expectation and the sanctions that might result.

5. Recognising boundary failures

The breach of a pastoral boundary rarely happens suddenly. There is more commonly a trajectory over time from reasonable to inappropriate behaviour, for example:

- initial care → over-involvement
- providing support → emotional dependence
- being asked for advice → controlling the decisions of others
- necessary visiting → over-frequent, unwisely timed, secret visiting
- physical warmth → misuse of physical touch;
- informality and banter → over-familiarity;
- helping with the shopping → financial entanglement;
- sharing prayer needs → breach of confidentiality.

As carers, we may not even be aware of the trajectory, because it is gradual. This can be exacerbated when we ourselves are struggling with personal stress, isolation, overwork, or unmet personal needs.

This is why it is so important to be accountable to others about whom we are supporting, when, and in what ways, and also for our own self-care.

Before we consider self-care, you may wish to look at the case studies in Appendix 1. They are loosely based on real examples and they help us imagine what a breach of pastoral boundaries looks like. They also offer some questions to help us reflect on how the situations might have been different.

6. Self-care that sustains pastoral care

An essential means of guarding against the trajectory that leads us to breach a pastoral boundary is to pay attention to our own self-care. The quality and sustainability of our care for others is founded on how much we care for ourselves and how much we allow ourselves to receive God's care. This is the practice of the CMD habit of attentiveness.

We can practise self-care by paying attention to five aspects of our being:

Aspect of our being	Practical outworking	Reflective questions
Spiritual	Establishing rhythms of personal prayer, praise and worship, encountering God's Word, Sabbath, retreat, etc.	Which rhythms sustain me? Where are the gaps? What refreshes me that is quite separate from my work?
Emotional	Naming, expressing and reflecting on our feelings.	Do I have a safe place to be honest and am I using it well?

Mental	Feeding our minds with Scripture and what will edify us.	Which thoughts dominate and impact my behaviour?
Physical	Taking seriously our body's need for sleep, exercise and a healthy diet, as an act of stewardship.	What one change would best help me sustain an appropriate energy level?
Relational	Guarding time for family, friendships and supportive peer relationships.	Who outside my ministry refreshes me? Who needs me to be present?

Be aware of the warning signs that spell danger to safe pastoral practice: irritability, poor sleep, neglect of prayer, disengagement, increasing secrecy, flirtation, feelings of being indispensable, neglect of time off.

Being accompanied by others is likely to be vital, even non-negotiable, in achieving this. A regular time with a pastoral supervisor, a spiritual director, a mentor, or a trusted 'critical friend' protects the time we need to stop, look and listen; to step back and observe ourselves; to listen to what the Word, others, and even our own bodies are telling us. Those that accompany us give us room to explore how we are experiencing and reacting to our environment, relationships and ministry tasks.

7. Reflective practice

Pastoral boundaries are not absolute. They vary according to both personal and ministry context. Expectations and risks differ in, for example, small fellowships, large churches, chaplaincy settings, or marginalised communities. Personal factors such as age, gender, and experience also shape how others perceive us and what boundaries may be appropriate.

Given this, it is essential that we reflect on our practice. It is not sufficient to simply follow our instinct, or even to assume our previous experience will help us determine the correct course in every case. Rather we should get in the habit of thinking about our pastoral care and the application of boundaries.

There are six questions we can use to reflect on all our pastoral encounters and which help us shape or refine our pastoral boundaries. These are shown overleaf.

7.1 Who benefits? Pastoral care should always prioritize the well-being of those we serve, not our personal needs. It is all too easy to act from motives such as wanting to feel useful, seeking company, or a deep-seated need to 'rescue' another. We should check our motivations and ensure the pastoral encounter serves the person we are caring for.

7.2 Who holds power? Pastoral roles inherently carry privilege. A pastoral relationship is asymmetric because the care, prayer, guidance and practical support we offer affords us power. This can be amplified by our relative social standing, health, agency and other factors. Our posture should be marked by humility and openness, ensuring dignity and autonomy for others.

7.3. Do I have permission? What people deem as acceptable unsolicited interventions varies over time and from culture to culture. Presuming what a person is comfortable with can lead to discomfort or harm. We should check that our prayer, visiting, laying on of hands, guidance, information sharing, etc, are never imposed, but invited by the person we are helping. If unsure, we should ask.

7.4 Who else knows? Accountability is essential for safe and effective pastoral care. While confidentiality about conversations remains important, others should know when, where and to whom we are offering care. Sharing the detail of our pastoral activities with a pastoral care team or a trusted individual maintains transparency. It reduces the risk of misunderstanding or misconduct, though those we share with must be deeply committed to confidentiality themselves. Alternatively, we can arrange to have somebody with us during our pastoral encounters. In short, we should *all* have *someone* to whom we are accountable for the care we offer.

7.5 How could this appear? Those who offer pastoral care have a responsibility not only to act appropriately but to consider how others view it. Ministers especially are subject to public scrutiny. So, it is worth asking not only whether our practice is appropriate, but how it might look to those who observe us. We should be aware of when we treat people differently, whether this is justified and how it appears to others.

7.6 Who manages the boundaries? Within the community we pastor, it is helpful to communicate what our boundaries are so that those we care for know what to expect. Nevertheless, the boundaries we choose can be tested and even broken by the actions of others, for example when a person rings us late at night. Likewise, an emergency may demand the crossing of a usual boundary, such as sitting alone with a person just bereaved until others arrive. It is for us to decide how to respond when this happens – whether we can be flexible or whether we need to be firm to re-establish practice that guards the well-being of both the person pastored, and ourselves.

Together, these six reflective questions help us to be self-aware, safe, accountable and respectful of those we serve. They help us to avoid favouritism. They help us to identify where a boundary may need to be defined more clearly – whether in all circumstances or just for a particular situation. All this builds trust and fosters personal integrity.

8. Pastoral best practice

Examples of best practice can help us to shape our own approach. These are listed below. However, we said earlier that pastoral boundaries are not absolute and depend to some extent on our context. So, our practice may vary from these recommendations, but if this is the case, we should know why. (There are a few that are part of the legal or denominational expectations we work under, and these are described as what we ‘must’ do.) The examples can also be used from time to time to review how we work and to make refinements or changes as necessary.

8.1 Safeguarding

- All pastoral care team members, including members of any prayer ministry team, must undergo an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check and complete regular safeguarding training.
- Always work within your church or ministry setting’s safeguarding policy and procedures.

8.2 Confidentiality and record keeping

- Be clear that though confidentiality may be assumed, it is qualified because you must report where is risk of harm to the person you are supporting or to others.
- State the limits of confidentiality in a pastoral care policy but also mention them sensitively at the outset of conversations where you think a disclosure might be made.
- If you feel that you must disclose the content of a pastoral conversation, first encourage self-disclosure or offer accompanied disclosure by the person you are caring for.
- Record significant encounters in some way.
- Records should focus on what was said and agreed actions. You can include your observations and reasoning, but should avoid speculation. A guiding principle is that you should be happy for any records to be read by the person to whom the record relates.
- Records should be kept securely – lockable storage for paper records and password protected for digital records – and disposed of in accordance with an appropriate data retention policy.
- If married, do not share the content of pastoral conversations with your spouse unless this is agreed and widely understood as acceptable within your community.

8.3 Pastoral visiting and meeting

- Be transparent with an accountability partner or pastoral team (not just a family member), about whom you visit and when.
- Forewarn a person that you intend to visit them and the expected visit duration.
- Avoid late-night visits to a person's home.
- Do not enter a home to visit anyone under 18 years of age without another adult present. Consider instead meeting them in a place where you are always visible to others and always seek parental concern first.
- Be attentive to the particular needs of any adult-at-risk that you visit and consider taking another person with you.
- Keep a record of whom you visited and when.
- Consider holding pastoral conversations in public or visible spaces where appropriate, or whether someone should accompany you.
- In a person's home, you can name anything about the environment that makes you uncomfortable and request that it be changed. For example, subdued lighting or overly close seating arrangements.
- If visiting people beyond your own church community, carry ID.
- Assess the risk of visiting people and consider whether you should be accompanied or whether there is someone better suited than you are.
- Aim to ensure that both you and the person visited have a clear exit route.
- Where relevant, apply the same rules to video calls. Recognise that inappropriate intimacy happens on screen as well as in person.

8.4 Physical touch

- Use touch when it is for the benefit and comfort of the person you serve rather than your own.
- Seek explicit consent for hugs and other touch beyond a handshake, especially with people we know less well or not at all.
- Avoid lingering contact.
- Avoid making a habit of hugging or kissing people as a normal means of greeting.
- Adjust behaviour if necessary according to your own attire or that of others.
- Never touch intimate areas.
- Name your discomfort if someone else is physically over-familiar.
- Learn what is acceptable to, or expected by, those in your community who are from a different culture to your own.

8.5 Deepening relationships

- Bring into the open any change in the nature of a pastoral relationship. For example, raise in conversation the occasions where pastoral support has turned into friendship, and vice versa.
- Have an accountability partner such as a trusted colleague or pastoral supervisor with whom you can be open about the nature of your pastoral relationships.

- Reflect frequently and honestly on your own feelings towards the people you pastor and how your care is shaped by your dislike, caution, attraction, etc, towards them.
- Be mindful of the temptation to self-justify inappropriate elements in our pastoral relationships.
- Aim to be above suspicion of any kind and avoid all types of flirtation in ministry.
- Pay particular attention to your relationships with those you work with in a staff or pastoral care team, especially when there is a significant difference in position, such as a minister working with an intern.

8.6 Dual relationships

- Be clear with those you see in more than one context about how you will relate to them in each one, for example when you are both pastor and friend to someone in your community.

8.7 Praying for others

- Always seek the consent of those you wish to pray for in-person.
- Aim to find out from the person what they wish you to pray for. In particular, be careful not to act solely on what a person's friend, family member or partner tells you is the issue.
- Be as clear as possible about the nature of your prayer. For example: whether you are simply committing to God the conversation you have just had with someone; or spending time in listening to God for prophetic insight into a person's situation; or engaging in prayer ministry in which you seek the healing and freedom of the person prayed for.
- Seek parental consent when praying for those under 18 unless it is within a known prayerful group setting such as a church service or youth meeting.

8.8 Prayer ministry

(By prayer ministry, we mean intentional praying with and for individuals in order to facilitate an encounter with God, often focusing on emotional, physical, or spiritual healing, or encouragement, or freedom.)

- Consider how a person's mental health may be affecting their view and, if necessary, signpost them to their GP or other form of mental health support. Mental health first aid training can help you discern where specialist help is required.
- Always work with another member of a pastoral or prayer team, rather than offering prayer ministry on your own.
- Invite the person prayed for to bring with them a trusted friend, to avoid any awkward power dynamics where two people pray for one person.
- Offer insights, scriptures and suggestions open-handedly and never coerce a person into a certain response.

- If laying on hands, explain what you are doing and why, and ask for consent. You may offer alternatives to the laying on of hands such as stretching out your hand but not touching the individual.
- Phrase consent questions in such a way that consent can easily be refused. E.g. “Are you comfortable if I put my hand on your shoulder as I pray, or would you prefer it if I did not?”
- Do not advise a person to change or stop medication (or affirm their own suggestion that they should), but point them to medical professionals.
- If any distress in the person receiving prayer escalates, pause and seek to reassure them.
- Avoid praying, speaking or acting in a theatrical fashion and adopt a calm approach.
- Pause from time to time to check with the person you are praying for how they are responding and whether they wish you to continue.
- Obtain parental consent if offering prayer ministry to a person under 18 years old.
- Have someone such as a pastoral supervisor with whom you can reflect on our practice of prayer ministry.

8.9 Deliverance ministry

(By deliverance ministry we mean invoking the authority of Jesus to liberate individuals from spiritual oppression or demonic influence.)

- Please note all the advice in the section above on prayer ministry. Note especially that you should consider mental health factors. Note especially that you should not work alone. But in addition:
- If you suspect a demonic aspect to a person's difficulties but are not trained or experienced in deliverance ministry, do not try to deal with it, but simply pray for peace and then later seek skilled help.
- You must not practise deliverance on a person under 16 years old. This is a criminal offence under The Exorcism of Children (Prohibition) Act 2001, regardless of whether or not parental consent is given.
- Additionally, exercise great caution if you are considering practising deliverance on a 16- or 17-year old because of their status as a child, and always obtain parental consent.
- Always prepare prayerfully.
- Ensure good follow up prayer and counselling is available before any deliverance ministry is attempted.

8.10 Professional skills

- Be aware of what you are *not* skilled or qualified to do and be ready to signpost people to other professional services, such as counselling, deliverance ministry or mental health services.

8.11 Money and gifts

- Do not solicit or accept gifts or money from those you care for.
- Do not accept a legacy from those you had cared for, but ask for it to be redirected.
- Do not accept money for pastoral services other than when you provide a formal service, such as a funeral.
- Do not make personal loans or gifts, but use church hardship funds with proper oversight. Make a record of all transactions and gifts.
- If handling small amounts of money for practical purposes, keep all receipts or pass them onto someone whose role is to keep tabs on financial transactions.

8.12 Language and speech

- Avoid cynicism, gossip and put downs.
- Beware banter as it can often be misunderstood by your conversation partner or those who overhear it.
- Do not use offensive or obscene language, even with those you know well.
- Avoid all forms of sexualised language or joking.
- Be conscious of power and status imbalances, for example, the power that comes when we chair or lead gatherings.
- Offer spiritual guidance and discernment in exploratory and not definitive language.

8.13 Appearance

- Wear clothing appropriate to the role you occupy in each context and do not wear what is provocative or likely to be unhelpful.
- Consider how your attire communicates that you value the person you pastor.

8.14 Digital relationships and social media

- Use church-arranged digital platforms for messaging where possible, rather than personal accounts.
- Have two phones or two SIMs so that you can separate work and personal communications.
- Avoid late-night messaging.
- Do not reply immediately to every message you receive – remember that you can set your own boundaries for digital interaction.
- Examine the frequency and tone of your messaging with each person from time to time.
- Assume written content may be forwarded, so maintain a professional tone.
- Beware messaging opinions about anyone that you are not willing to share with that person themselves.
- Allow people to opt out of groups.
- When offended by someone else online, do not immediately reply but pause and think how the matter may be resolved relationally.

- Maintain pastoral boundaries for online interactions as much as for those in-person

8.15 Rest

- Pay close attention to your need for rest and refreshment.
- Strongly prioritise a day off each week and take your annual leave entitlement.
- Agree with those you work with under what circumstances your time off may be interrupted.

8.16 Working environment

- Determine and communicate what, if any ministry work you will undertake in your own home or manse, and whether this is by invitation only or whether you are happy to respond to people dropping by.
- Agree with anyone with whom you share your home the balance between hospitality and their need for space and privacy.
- Whether you work from home or a church office, assess and mitigate any risks of using the space for the purpose of pastoral care of others.

8.17 Breaching pastoral boundaries

- Identify someone to whom you can talk when you become aware that either you or a person you are caring for has breached the pastoral boundaries you aim to work within.

9. Conclusion

Once again, we acknowledge the enormous privilege and responsibility of being invited to care for others. People trust us and often share with us what is of the deepest concern to them. We get to travel with people through grief, challenge, joy and success. What a wonderful task! – to be an expression of Jesus’ love to those we care for.

For such a task, we seek the Spirit’s guidance, compassion, insight and revelation. But we also set and maintain boundaries on our practice that keep safe both ourselves and those we care for. And wherever possible, we share both the setting of these boundaries and that nature of our pastoral work with trusted and trustworthy colleagues or accompaniers. Finally, we pray with humility that Jesus would use us, as those in receipt of his love and care, to extend his kingdom in the lives of those he calls us to pastor.



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Appendix 1: Examples of breaches in pastoral boundaries

The case studies below are all loosely based on actual cases explored by the BUGB Ministries Team and Safeguarding Team. They demonstrate how pastoral encounters can develop from a compassionate starting point towards actions that cause misunderstanding, conflict or harm.

Each brief description is followed by some questions. You may wish to discuss these with those with whom you share pastoral care in your context, or within a minister's meeting or other group setting.

Case 1

Whilst aiming to provide support to a church member in a difficult financial situation, their minister decides to give and to lend them money. The minister arranges this directly, without the knowledge of the leadership team. The church member's troubles continue and they tell the minister they cannot pay back the money loaned and need a further gift to help with immediate expenses.

Reflect: Why do you think the minister decided not to tell anyone about the support they offered? What pastoral support arrangements in the church might have helped the minister avoid their escalating involvement? What rules should be in place regarding transparency in financial support for church members?

Case 2

A minister and their spouse provide pastoral support to a person whose partner has left them. The person has young children, and the minister and spouse often provide childcare support. Over time, the visits are more often undertaken by the minister alone. Some of them take place in the evenings and the minister occasionally stays until it is late. Their spouse is not fully aware of the frequency or timing of the visits. But a church member who is a neighbour of the person visited, notices. The neighbour assumes an inappropriate relationship is forming and submits a complaint.

Reflect:

- What damage might have resulted from this situation and to whom?
- When might the care of a person be helpfully shared between a minister and their spouse and when might this be problematic?
- What might be the reasons the minister continued to visit the person when their spouse had stopped visiting?
- What limits should there be on the time of day for routine visiting, phoning or messaging those cared for?

Case 3

A minister offers pastoral support to a church attendee who is struggling with mental health challenges. Over time, the attendee leans more and more heavily on the minister for reassurance and advice. They begin to express suicidal thoughts and frequently call the minister late at night. The minister responds by calming the attendee but does not refer them to professional help or ask if they are seeing a GP. And at no time does the minister involve other members of the pastoral care team. One night, the attendee calls in the early hours, saying they intend to go to a remote location to end their life. The minister immediately drives there and finds the attendee attempting suicide. The minister contacts the police, who express anger that they tried to manage the situation alone.

Reflect:

- What are the signs of a dependency developing between the minister and the attendee?
- Who else should the minister have involved – inside or outside the church, and at what point?
- Why do you think the minister didn't involve others?
- What should they have done on receiving the phone call regarding the suicide attempt?

Case 4

A minister starts a new prayer ministry in the church and recruits a pastorally-gifted church member to support them. As time goes on, the two spend increasing amounts of time on this ministry, and the church member often gives the minister a lift home. It becomes common for them to stop for coffee together at the end of the evening or to spend time sitting and chatting in the car. One of these occasions, the church member suddenly suggests that they and the minister should leave their respective partners and start a new life together. This startles the minister, who has not picked up on any signs of growing intimacy between them.

Reflect:

- How is your perception of the situation different, if at all, according to the respective age, gender, and life circumstances of the minister and church member?
- At what points did the minister act unwisely or without reflection?
- With whom should the minister have discussed their working relationship with their prayer ministry partner and, had they done so, what might have been avoided?

Case 5

A minister newly arrived at a church soon starts to support an occasional attendee whose spouse has recently died. The attendee becomes increasingly demanding of the minister's time, and the minister does not make any attempt to move their care to another member of the pastoral care team. The minister visits the attendee far more often than they visit anyone else, feeling they are doing good work. But eventually the attendee's adult children intervene and complain that the minister is manipulating the attendee. This leads to a public confrontation that is embarrassing for the minister, who is accused of grooming an adult-at-risk.

Reflect:

- What damage might result from this situation?
- What could have been established from the beginning of the minister's time at the church that would have helped avoid this situation?
- And who would be responsible for ensuring good practice is in place?
- Was the minister right in thinking theirs was good work?
- How should a minister move from acute care, as in this case of bereavement, to a sustainable pattern?
- What responsibility does the minister have, if any, to the attendee's wider family and how should it be expressed?