**CARE & NURTURE TEAMS**

**HEALTHY MINISTRY PRACTICES**

Healthy pastoral care relationships begin with you, the caregiver. Attention to healthy practices and boundaries protects everyone in the congregation, especially those who are or may be feeling vulnerable. You are providing an essential spiritual ministry; your pastoral team greatly appreciates your efforts to emotionally and spiritually support your fellow congregants. Your prayerful and compassionate caregiving makes the church community stronger and safer. God bless your care & nurture ministry.

These guidelines are meant to enhance your caregiving skills with adults. At the same time, they protect those who are not always able to protect themselves. **Please note:** The lead pastor of the church is the person ultimately responsible for assigning emotional and spiritual care or suspending such care for a congregant. If you become overwhelmed or think you are not helping them or qualified to help them, ***let the lead pastor know***. The church pastor will handle the needs of families regarding their children.

Think of your caregiving role as a person who has a shoebox. This shoebox is dedicated to a single congregant with whom you are in confidential conversation. Imagine the information provided to you and the substance of your caregiving conversations as sacred stories that you will store in the “shoebox” in your closet away from the rest of your things. You know they are there, but you are keeping them safe and separate from your own story and the stories of other persons. They are there if you need to have them in your work with your fellow congregant, but they are not laying around for others to see or for you to edit. The stories are a sacred trust given to you by the person to whom you are providing spiritual care.

1.  Who has been or is on the caregiving list and the nature of their request for emotional or spiritual support is privileged information. It should not be shared without the express permission of the congregant.

2. The information you receive during your contact(s) with the congregant is privileged and confidential. Please do not, without the congregant’s *express prior permission or request,* share this information with anyone on the church care & nurture team, the church pastor(s), other church congregants (including leadership), the individual’s friends and/or family, or anyone else. **Exceptions: You may be a mandatory reporter in the case of child abuse or elderly persons/at-risk persons abuse.** **Also, if someone reports to you that they are at risk for self-harm or physical harm to others, this information must be reported to the lead pastor.**
3.  Unless the person requesting emotional or spiritual support volunteers more information, it is not your role to inquire further either directly or indirectly. When emotional or spiritual care is requested, accept it as stated without probing for more information than is offered. Simply listen without giving the person advice or your personal opinion about the situation or other people involved in the situation.

4.  If there is a sense that further and direct care by one of the church pastors would be helpful or even essential for the congregant, encourage them to contact the pastor directly.

5.  Hold the information given to you as a sacred trust. Refrain from asking the spouse/companion, family, or friends of a person about how the person is doing with a situation about which you have been told in confidence.  They may not already know, or if they know, they may not appreciate that *you* know and are talking about it.

6.  Anything you hear from a congregant is exclusively that person’s story to share as they wish. Information you have received from them or from others concerning them should never be spoken of by you to the congregation at large, in small groups (including care & nurture teams), to a church pastor (subject to the above exceptions), or to your own family and friends. Any disclosure in any setting of the church, formal or informal, without the *express request* of the congregant is a violation of the sacred trust. Maintain confidentiality in social media, church weekly newsletters, “joys & concerns postings,” or any other form of communication.

7. Communicate directly with the person seeking pastoral support. Leaving voicemails or messages with another person, even a family member or co-worker, compromises confidentiality and the integrity of the pastoral care relationship. Instead of voice mail or messages given through others, use email communications directly to the congregant and simply write, “A note from [your name]” in the subject line.

8. Remember your role as a support person and caregiver. It is not your place to provide professional mental health services, legal advice, or any other services other than one-on-one emotional and spiritual support. You should not accept gifts or payments of any kind from the congregant or their family. Sexual contact between caregivers and congregants receiving spiritual or emotional care is always a violation of the sacred trust. If you feel yourself to be vulnerable in this regard, please immediately report your feelings to the church pastor(s) and cease your caregiving role.

 *Prayer for caregivers:*

*Holy One of all, we know that you have created humans in your image as caring and communal creatures. Thank you for the stories that connect us as church families and for those who give of their emotional and spiritual support in the care of others. Bless our efforts to be Christ to those around us. Help us to show unconditional, non-judgmental community love to those you put in our path. In the name of the Spirit of God-Alive, we pray: Amen.*

Rev. Dr. Tracey Dawson

 Rev. Wendy Kidd

 RMC Healthy Ministry Relationships Team

