

Inside: Trust: The Boundaries
of Community

A Focus on
Leading with Care

Managers or Leaders?

Trust: The Boundaries of Community

Canadian Ministries



Trust is an essential aspect of all relationships. Establishing and maintaining appropriate boundaries related to discretion and confidentiality are ways healthy pastoral relationships are forged and nurtured. How can we speak the deep and important truths of our lives if we cannot trust that the information won't be shared with others? Of course, there are exceptional, and sometimes urgent, circumstances that require leaders to disclose information to the appropriate authorities to ensure the safety of those in their community and circle of care. However, even in situations that warrant the appropriate sharing of information, great care, wisdom and discretion are required. Church leaders (elders, church school teachers, camp staff, youth leaders, ministers, parish nurses, and all others who are in positions of leadership and trust) may wish to consider the following:

- Leaders understand that inappropriately sharing confidential information trespasses pastoral boundaries and harms relationships.
- Leaders learn about and seek to understand, as much as possible, the policies and expectations of federal, provincial, denominational and third party agencies regarding confidentiality.
- The obligation to keep information confidential does not apply when the disclosure of information is required as provincial or federal law order. Special care should be taken to know what leaders are obliged to do in their jurisdiction related to information shared about abuse.



- Leaders consult with others in related professions or the appropriate authorities when they have questions regarding their ethical obligations and confidentiality.
- Leaders include those who make disclosures in the decision-making process when circumstances require that confidential information be disclosed.
- Some people decide to take notes in a pastoral situation. Great care ought to be taken to protect the identities and the details of circumstance in your notes. Notes are useful to aid memory and guide care; however, it may be beneficial to be sufficiently vague in case notes are lost, found, etc.
- Leaders are responsible for ensuring that students, clerical staff, volunteers, family members, etc. do not have access to confidential material and will maintain confidentiality should they have access to any information.
- Confidential information ought to be discussed only where privacy can be reasonably ensured. Conversations overheard in halls, coffee shops, restaurants, at street corners, etc. easily lead to breaches of confidentiality.
- On the rare occasion that it is required, leaders disclose information to insurance companies, spouses, parents, authorities, etc. only when necessary and with the permission of or after informing the people who made the disclosures.
- Leaders take great care not to coerce or force people to share confidential information unless the law requires action. In these cases, leaders may volunteer to accompany people to the proper authority.
- Leaders protect the confidentiality of the dead as well as the living.
- When dealing with minors or adults who lack the capacity to give informed consent, in compliance with laws and policies, etc., all care should be taken to protect confidentiality.
- Leaders ensure that records are kept in a secure location and format.
- Leaders are diligent to ensure the security of information transmitted through and stored on computers, email, telephones, voicemail, answering machines, texts, etc.
- Leaders take precautions to protect confidentiality in the event of their own incapacity or death. Our diaries, computers and files will someday be in the hands of others and we will have no capacity to protect those people and situations named in them.
- Leaders take great care to preserve the identity of any person when using an example or employing a sermon illustration. (Those who preach and teach also take time to consider how they use the events of their own lives, marriages and children's lives when speaking in public or posting information on Facebook, Twitter, church web pages, in texts, etc.)
- When consulting with colleagues, leaders do not disclose confidential information that reasonably could lead to the identification of a person unless the individual has given consent.
- We all have weaknesses. Good leaders reflect honestly upon their capacity to keep confidences and are alert to the signs of their lapses in judgment and the effects of physical, mental and emotional fatigue on their actions as well as how alcohol, stress or pride may impact their judgment. All precaution should be taken to ensure against any lapses.

Prayer:

God of all grace, foster care in our relationships and give us the restraint to act with integrity, the strength to act with courage, the prudence to act with wisdom, and the faith to see your redeeming work in all of life.