Pastoral Care Policy

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1. Introduction

New Testament believers were encouraged to share one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), intercede for one another (Romans 8:26) and demonstrate care in actions, not just words (1 John 3:18). At United Church Ferndown (UCF) we have adopted a whole-church approach to pastoral care.

We understand pastoral care as the loving, prayerful and practical support offered by Christians to one another as we follow Jesus. It includes listening, encouragement, prayer, practical help, companionship, appropriate challenge and referral to specialist support when needed. It is both a ministry of the whole church and a responsibility exercised by people who have been entrusted with particular roles.

One important way to provide pastoral care is to encourage believers to participate in house groups and other forms of Christian fellowship. At UCF, initial pastoral support will often be accessed through these relationships (see section 4). Where support is beyond the scope of a house group, a referral can be made to a Minister or Pastoral Deacon, who will involve others discreetly where appropriate.

Drawing on our individual gifts, our aim is to enable and support one another through the challenges and joys of life. Our principle, 'We Love All People' (James 2:8), expresses our desire to be a church that loves people, motivated by the experience of God's love in our own lives. We seek to show this through our actions and relationships with people within the church family, those on its fringes and the wider community. We offer hospitality with open arms, ears and hearts, and seek to respect each person.

This policy covers pastoral care in house groups; prayer support and prayer ministry; the Pastoral Care Team; pastoral oversight and the RAG system; and the roles of Ministers and Pastoral Deacons. It is a guide to good practice and is not an exhaustive manual. It must be read alongside the church's other policies and procedures.

Our Baptist understanding of church life informs this approach: the gathered church shares responsibility for its life and witness; every believer is called to serve; and leaders equip, encourage and oversee the ministry of the congregation. The church's constitution determines the formal responsibilities and decision-making authority of the Church Meeting, trustees and leadership bodies.

2. Policy Statement

United Church Ferndown is committed in all areas of its work to providing a safe, welcoming environment where all people are treated with dignity and respect. This policy applies to all pastoral care undertaken on behalf of UCF, whether by Ministers, Pastoral Deacons, members of the Pastoral Care Team, house group leaders, prayer ministry volunteers or other authorised volunteers.

- Every adult has a responsibility to help prevent physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse, exploitation and neglect of people connected with the church, and to report actual or suspected abuse in accordance with UCF's Safeguarding Policy.

- All staff members and volunteers undertaking pastoral care will be made aware of, and given access to, this policy and the relevant safeguarding, data protection, health and safety and other procedures. They are expected to understand and follow them.
- UCF will support, resource and train those undertaking designated pastoral care roles. The names and appropriate contact details of the Ministers, Pastoral Deacons and Safeguarding Lead(s) will be made available to the congregation, including information about how to raise an urgent concern.
- Ministers and Pastoral Deacons will provide advice, guidance and support to those undertaking pastoral care, within the responsibilities assigned to them.
- The Leadership Team will ensure that appropriate policies, procedures, resources and oversight arrangements are in place. Formal responsibilities remain subject to the UCF Constitution and the church's trustee arrangements.
- This policy will be available to people connected with UCF on request and will be reviewed at least annually.

3. Care for One Another at UCF

Every Christian has a responsibility to care for others (John 13:34). Such care often happens naturally through friendship and fellowship. Sometimes additional, organised support is needed (see section 13).

At UCF we recognise that life includes both challenges and joys. We seek to journey together through highs and lows, fostering belonging whether we meet as a whole church or in house groups. Our care includes praying, listening, encouraging, comforting, sharing and learning together.

To help ensure that people are not overlooked, we use a Pastoral List, a RAG rating system and a light-touch Pastoral Oversight Scheme (see section 12). Approved volunteers offer prayer after the Sunday morning service (section 11), and an urgent prayer WhatsApp group is available (section 10).

We hope that everyone at UCF will give and receive the love Jesus showed and taught (John 11:5; John 13:34; Romans 5:8); that our care will provide support and encourage spiritual growth; and that the whole fellowship will take an active, appropriate share in caring for one another.

Pastoral care should support Christian discipleship and participation in the life of the church where this is welcomed by the person. It must never be used to pressure someone into worship, prayer, disclosure, reconciliation or any particular decision.

4. House Groups

4.1 Commitment to House Groups

UCF encourages participation in house groups as one valuable expression of Christian fellowship and mutual care. We recognise that groups may have different formats and settings, and that not everyone will be able or wish to participate in one.

4.2 Role of House Groups

Pastoral support will be offered through the friendships and relationships that already exist within house groups. Members are encouraged to care for one another, while respecting privacy, boundaries and each person's wishes.

Within each house group, a designated person will oversee pastoral awareness. They will ensure that members who have not attended recently are followed up sensitively and that concerns beyond the group's competence are referred to a Minister or Pastoral Deacon. House group leaders should not investigate safeguarding concerns or attempt to provide counselling.

A person's absence should not automatically be treated as evidence of a problem. Contact should be kind, proportionate and respectful, and the person's preference about further contact should be recorded where appropriate.

5. Confidentiality

5.1 Confidentiality Statement

Information of a personal nature shared in pastoral care will be treated respectfully and kept confidential, with access limited to those who need the information to provide appropriate support or fulfil a legal, safeguarding or organisational responsibility. Permission should normally be sought before information is shared with another person or team.

Confidentiality is not absolute. Information may need to be shared without consent where there is a serious risk of harm, suspected abuse, neglect, exploitation, a safeguarding concern, or another legal obligation. In such circumstances, only relevant information should be shared with the appropriate person or agency. Volunteers must not promise absolute secrecy.

Those providing pastoral care should not feel they must manage concerns alone. They should seek advice from a Minister, Pastoral Deacon or Safeguarding Lead as appropriate. Wherever safe and appropriate, the person receiving care should be told why information needs to be shared and with whom. Do not alert an alleged perpetrator or take steps that could increase risk.

5.2 Breach of Confidentiality

A person's decision to share personal information may involve considerable trust. Any suspected or actual inappropriate disclosure must be reported promptly to a Minister and the person responsible for data protection, or to the Leadership Team where appropriate. Safeguarding-related disclosures must also be reported under the Safeguarding Policy. The church will consider what action is needed, including support for those affected, containment of the disclosure and any required reporting.

5.3 Disclosure Requiring Additional Professional Support

Specialist or professional help may be needed in some circumstances. Referrals should normally be made with the informed consent of the person concerned. Where consent is not given, the volunteer should seek advice from a Minister or appropriate lead. Where there is a safeguarding concern, serious risk or legal obligation, information may need to be shared without consent in accordance with the relevant procedure.

Pastoral volunteers must not diagnose, provide clinical treatment or represent themselves as counsellors unless separately qualified and formally authorised to provide that service. Spiritual and practical support can complement professional help but must not replace it.

5.4 Disclosure of Abuse and Further Action

Where abuse, neglect, exploitation or serious harm is suspected or disclosed, UCF's Safeguarding Policy and procedures must be followed immediately. The person receiving the disclosure should listen, take the concern seriously, avoid leading questions, not investigate, make a factual record as soon as possible and report it to the Safeguarding Lead or deputy without delay. If someone is in immediate danger, contact emergency services.

5.5 Confidentiality and Data Protection

Pastoral information may include special-category personal data, such as information about health or religious beliefs. UCF will handle such information in accordance with its Data Protection/Privacy Policy and applicable data protection law. The church will identify an appropriate lawful basis and, where required, an Article 9 condition for processing special-category data; provide appropriate privacy information; restrict access; keep information accurate and proportionate; establish retention and secure deletion arrangements; and respond appropriately to data rights requests and breaches.

Pastoral workers should record only information that is necessary for the pastoral purpose. Records should be factual, respectful and objective. Personal pastoral notes must be kept only in church-approved, access-controlled arrangements, not in personal notebooks, unapproved apps or informal message threads.

6. Consent

6.1 Issues of Mental Capacity and Consent in Adults

Pastoral care should be offered with the person's agreement. Adults should be presumed to have capacity unless there is a reason to doubt it. A person's capacity is decision-specific and may fluctuate. If there is concern about capacity, do not make assumptions or attempt to undertake a formal assessment unless appropriately qualified. Seek advice from a Minister and, where relevant, the Safeguarding Lead or appropriate professional. Follow the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and UCF's safeguarding procedures where applicable.

A person's unwise decision does not, by itself, mean that they lack capacity. Where an adult lacks capacity for a particular decision, any action must be lawful, necessary, proportionate and in their best interests, with appropriate professional advice.

6.2 Children and Young People

Pastoral support for anyone under 18 must be provided in accordance with UCF's Safeguarding Policy and procedures. Appropriate parental/carer involvement and consent should normally be obtained, taking account of the child's age, understanding, wishes and welfare. Consent from a parent or carer does not remove the need to listen to the child and act in their best interests.

Only people authorised and appropriately trained under the Safeguarding Policy may provide designated pastoral support to children and young people. Volunteers must follow the church's rules for one-to-one conversations, communication, transport and visits. They must never place themselves in an unauthorised or unsupervised situation with a child or young person.

6.3 Assumed Consent

For ordinary, low-level expressions of care within normal church relationships, consent may be indicated by the person's participation or response. However, consent must not be assumed for formal pastoral visits, ongoing support, recording or sharing personal information, prayer ministry involving touch, or circulation of prayer requests. The person may decline or end support at any time without adverse consequences. Support may resume if invited.

If a person does not respond to an initial contact, this should not be treated as permission for repeated contact. Use judgement, respect known preferences and seek advice if there is a genuine welfare concern.

7. Safe Practice

7.1 Duty of Care

Pastoral work is a serious and important ministry. When undertaking it on behalf of UCF, volunteers and leaders must act with reasonable care, follow this policy and relevant procedures, and work within their competence. A failure to take reasonable care may cause harm and may expose individuals or the church to legal or other consequences.

The safety and welfare of the person receiving care, the volunteer and others must be considered. Follow UCF's Safeguarding Policy, health and safety arrangements and incident reporting procedure. If a situation feels unsafe or beyond your competence, pause and seek help.

7.2 Prayer Ministry

Believers are encouraged to pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18). Prayer support is an important part of pastoral care and should be offered sensitively, but never imposed. Approved volunteers offer prayer after the Sunday morning service. Urgent prayer requests may be made to the Deacon responsible for Prayer, a Pastoral Deacon, a Minister or through the UCF Prayer WhatsApp group (section 10).

- Prayer should demonstrate sensitivity, humility and respect. Ask what the person would find helpful and do not press for personal details.
- Prayer is an invitation to seek God's help; it must not be presented as a substitute for medical, psychological, social care or other professional support.
- Physical contact, including holding a hand, must only take place with the clear permission of the person being prayed for. If permission is uncertain, do not touch.
- Be mindful of where you are praying and who might overhear. Do not disclose personal details in a public setting.
- Where prayer is offered one-to-one, choose a place where others can see the interaction while still respecting reasonable privacy. Avoid isolated or inappropriate settings. Where possible, have another trained prayer minister nearby.

- Prayer ministry alone with a person of a different sex is discouraged; where it is appropriate and safe, use an open, observable setting and follow any additional church guidance.
- Prayer with children and young people must follow the Safeguarding Policy and the relevant procedures.
- The Ministers will arrange or approve suitable prayer ministry training, in consultation with the Deacon responsible for Prayer.

7.3 Lifts

Informal lifts arranged between friends are preferred. Where lifts are formally arranged on behalf of UCF, they will be coordinated by a Pastoral Deacon or another authorised person. A rota of approved volunteers may be established where the person is able to travel safely without assistance.

If someone needs physical assistance to get in or out of a vehicle, or has other needs beyond the volunteer's ability, an appropriate alternative should be considered, such as a taxi or community transport scheme. Any cost should be discussed with the person in advance; no one should be excluded from church activities solely because they cannot afford transport without the church first considering whether help is available.

Anyone providing lifts on behalf of UCF must ensure that their vehicle is roadworthy, appropriately insured for the journey and suitable for the passenger. They must hold a valid driving licence and follow the church's safeguarding and transport procedures. DBS checks must be obtained only where the role is eligible and required under the safeguarding assessment. Transport involving children or adults at risk must follow the Safeguarding Policy.

7.4 Visiting Friends at Home

Home visits may take place informally between friends or through the formal Pastoral Care Team. Informal visitors should:

- Visit only where they feel comfortable and safe. If in doubt, seek advice from a Minister or Pastoral Deacon so that an appropriate formal visit can be arranged.
- Consider whether a second visitor or a different venue is appropriate. Do not visit alone where there is a foreseeable risk or where boundaries may be difficult to maintain.
- Carry a charged mobile phone and ensure someone appropriate knows the expected arrangements where this is sensible.
- Not undertake informal visits to children or young people on behalf of UCF. Any authorised contact must follow the Safeguarding Policy.

8. Code of Conduct

8.1 Abuse of Trust

Abuse of trust occurs when someone uses a position of authority, influence or pastoral trust to the detriment of a person receiving care. The person receiving care may feel unable to complain or take action because of loyalty, dependence, fear or the perceived authority of the pastoral worker. All those working pastorally must understand their boundaries and responsibilities.

Pastoral workers must not exploit emotional, spiritual, financial, sexual or other vulnerabilities. They must not use prayer, Scripture, spiritual authority or access to church support to manipulate, intimidate, shame or control another person. Concerns must be reported in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy and complaints procedure.

8.2 Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks

People undertaking roles involving children or adults at risk will be subject to the safeguarding role assessment and DBS arrangements set out in UCF's Safeguarding Policy. DBS eligibility depends on the activities and responsibilities of the role; an enhanced check must not be requested unless the role is legally eligible. The Safeguarding Lead or authorised DBS verifier will determine the appropriate level of check.

Any relevant change in circumstances or information that may affect a person's suitability for a role must be disclosed through the confidential process specified by UCF. A criminal record does not automatically exclude someone from every role; decisions must be lawful, fair, risk-based and consistent with safeguarding requirements.

8.3 Boundaries to Practise

Those receiving pastoral care should be able to understand what they can expect from UCF and its pastoral workers. In addition to the requirements in sections 5, 6 and 7:

- Pastoral care is not counselling, psychotherapy, medical treatment, legal advice or financial advice.
- Pastoral workers must recognise their limits and seek advice or referral when a need is beyond their competence.
- No volunteer should handle personal finances on behalf of UCF or a person receiving care except under the specific safeguards in section 13.5 and with prior authorisation.
- Be alert to over-dependency in either direction. If dependency develops, discuss it with a Minister or Pastoral Deacon and agree a safe, sensitive plan. Support may be shared with other suitable team members with the person's knowledge wherever possible.
- Do not create secrecy, exclusive relationships or private arrangements that bypass church oversight.
- Do not use personal social media or private messaging to develop inappropriate or unaccountable pastoral relationships. Follow church guidance for digital contact.
- Respect the person's right to make their own decisions, including decisions with which the pastoral worker may disagree, unless a safeguarding or legal duty requires action.

9. Actions and Considerations

9.1 Ethical Considerations

The first priority is the safety and protection of those receiving pastoral care. People will be treated with dignity and respect in our actions, attitudes and language. Privacy and personal decisions, including a decision not to pursue an issue, should be respected wherever possible. In some circumstances, safeguarding or legal responsibilities may require action even where the person

does not agree. Any such action should be necessary, proportionate and explained wherever safe and appropriate.

9.2 Equal Opportunities

UCF is committed to social justice and is opposed to discrimination. We seek to serve and respect people fairly and equitably, recognising differences in age, disability, sex, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, and other relevant circumstances. Reasonable adjustments should be considered so that people can access pastoral support.

UCF will comply with the applicable DBS Code of Practice and will treat applicants for positions of trust fairly. Decisions about suitability will be based on the role, relevant information and a proportionate risk assessment, not unfair assumptions.

9.3 Misconduct, Mistreatment and Abuse

UCF will not tolerate abusive, exploitative, coercive or inappropriate behaviour. Safeguarding concerns must be reported immediately to the Safeguarding Lead or deputy in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy. Complaints about conduct should be taken seriously and reported through the church's complaints procedure or to the appropriate person identified in the Constitution. Where necessary, external agencies, including the Police or local authority safeguarding services, will be contacted.

Where a concern relates to the Safeguarding Lead, Minister, trustee or another person who would ordinarily receive the report, the concern should be raised with the alternative contact identified in the Safeguarding Policy. No one should investigate an allegation themselves.

9.4 Incident and Accident Reporting

Significant incidents or injuries must be dealt with immediately. Call 999 where emergency assistance is required. Once immediate safety has been addressed, complete the church's Incident/Accident Report form as soon as possible and send it to the designated person. Safeguarding incidents must also be reported through the Safeguarding Policy; an ordinary incident form is not a substitute for a safeguarding report.

10. UCF Prayer WhatsApp Group

10.1 Function of the UCF Prayer WhatsApp Group

The prayer WhatsApp group is a group of people from UCF who have committed to pray for the world, our nation, the life of UCF and the needs of individuals connected with the church and community.

Prayer requests about an identifiable person may only be shared where that person has agreed to the specific sharing. The request should contain the minimum detail necessary. Permission to pray privately does not automatically mean permission to share a request with the group or publish it in the NewsSheet.

No further enquiries should be made simply to satisfy curiosity or place pressure on the person. Feedback is welcome where appropriate and with the person's agreement. Safeguarding concerns must not be managed through the prayer group; they must be reported directly under the Safeguarding Policy.

10.2 Persons Invited to Join the UCF Prayer WhatsApp Group

- Have a desire to pray for God's people.
- Have time available to receive and share appropriate messages and to pray for the needs shared.
- Are willing to seek support for themselves if they are troubled by difficult issues.
- Agree to follow this policy, respect confidentiality and not forward, screenshot or otherwise redistribute prayer requests.

10.3 Responsibilities of the UCF Prayer WhatsApp Group

- Ensure that permission has been obtained before sharing a prayer request about an identifiable person.
- Share only the minimum information needed for prayer.
- Maintain confidentiality within the group, except where a safeguarding or serious-risk concern must be reported through the proper channels.
- Do not use the group to discuss, investigate or speculate about a person's circumstances.
- Report accidental disclosure, loss of a device or suspected unauthorised access promptly to the appropriate church contact.

11. Prayer Ministry Team

11.1 Persons Invited to Join the Prayer Ministry Team

- Have a willingness to pray with people and listen sensitively.
- Understand confidentiality and its limits.
- Have read and agreed to work within this policy, particularly section 7.2, and the relevant safeguarding procedures.
- Have time available at the end of the morning service.
- Complete any role-specific induction or training required by UCF.

11.2 Responsibilities of the Prayer Ministry Team

- Be available to listen, care and offer prayer to people who request it.
- Refer people who need more support than prayer ministry can provide to a Minister or Pastoral Deacon.
- Arrange a rota swap if unavailable.
- Join others praying before the morning service at 10.00am, where possible.
- Go to the designated quiet room after the service and remain available for at least 15 minutes, even if no one initially comes for prayer.
- Maintain confidentiality, subject to the limits set out in section 5.
- Access training and support when available, and raise any concern about a prayer ministry interaction.

12. Pastoral Care Management

12.1 Pastoral List

UCF maintains a Pastoral List to help ensure that people connected with the church are not overlooked. The list may include adult members, regular attenders (normally attending at least monthly), house group members and, where appropriate, immediate family members connected with the church, unless they have declined pastoral contact.

The list is an administrative aid to organising care; inclusion does not create a legal duty of care in every circumstance and does not imply that a person has a particular need or status. People should be told, through appropriate privacy information, what information is held, why it is held, who can access it and how to raise a question or request correction. Only necessary information should be recorded.

12.2 RAG Rating

UCF uses a Red, Amber and Green (RAG) system as a practical internal prompt for organising pastoral contact. It is not a clinical assessment, diagnosis, risk assessment or judgement of a person's faith or wellbeing. Ratings should be based on relevant, proportionate information, reviewed regularly and handled sensitively.

Green: People who are attending and appear to be connected into the informal life of UCF, with no known need for additional organised pastoral care. They may be included in the light-touch Pastoral Oversight Scheme.

Amber: People who may need additional pastoral support for a limited period. Examples include someone grieving, recovering after hospital treatment or facing a significant life event. Appropriate contact or visits may be arranged for as long as needed.

Red: People who are housebound or can attend UCF only infrequently because of circumstances beyond their control, and who would welcome regular pastoral contact. The Pastoral Care Team aims to visit those classified as Red at least once a month, subject to the person's wishes and availability. At least three times a year, a Minister will seek to visit with the Pastoral Visitor and offer Communion, by arrangement.

A person's preference takes precedence over a routine target. If someone does not want a visit, this must be respected and an alternative form or frequency of contact may be agreed. A rating may be changed when circumstances change. The reason for a rating should be recorded only where necessary and in factual, respectful language.

12.3 Pastoral Oversight

The Pastoral Oversight Scheme is a light-touch ministry intended to help notice when someone may have become disconnected or need support. Ministers, Deacons, house group leaders and others authorised by the Leadership Team may be allocated people to contact. House group leaders will normally oversee those who attend their groups.

Those undertaking oversight should:

- Check in informally and appropriately with people allocated to them.
- Encourage and include people without creating pressure or an expectation of constant availability.

- Inform a Minister or Pastoral Deacon of concerns that require additional support.
- Promptly alert a Minister or Pastoral Deacon where a change in circumstances may warrant a review of the RAG rating.
- Notice patterns of non-attendance, including where someone has not attended for around three weeks, and report this sensitively to a Minister. This is a prompt for appropriate contact, not an automatic assumption that something is wrong.
- Information about the Pastoral List and RAG ratings must be shared only with authorised people who need it for their role. It must not be circulated in general WhatsApp groups or discussed casually.

13. Pastoral Care Team

13.1 Criteria for Joining the Pastoral Care Team

- Have pastoral skills and gifts affirmed by a Minister or Pastoral Deacon.
- Be available to offer confidential prayer and/or practical support to people referred to the team.
- Be able to make a realistic commitment to the role. The previous expectation of a minimum of eight hours per month should be agreed individually and reviewed against the church's actual needs and the volunteer's capacity.
- Be prayerful and a sensitive listener.
- Have read and agreed to work within this policy and relevant church policies.
- Recognise when support is no longer needed or when a referral is appropriate.
- Seek help and supervision when they themselves need support.
- Complete appropriate induction, safeguarding checks where eligible, and training required for the role.

13.2 Referral to the Pastoral Care Team

Referrals to the Pastoral Care Team will normally come from a Minister or Pastoral Deacon. A person may also express a wish for support directly. The person's agreement should normally be obtained before a referral is made, subject to safeguarding and legal exceptions.

If a concern is sensitive, complex, urgent or requires significant planning, a Minister or Pastoral Deacon will retain oversight and decide whether the Pastoral Care Team is appropriate. Safeguarding concerns must be referred immediately through the Safeguarding Policy, not simply placed on a pastoral rota.

13.3 Responsibilities of the Pastoral Care Team

The Pastoral Care Team will:

- Undertake induction and attend pastoral training when available.
- Offer prayer and/or practical support to people referred to the team.
- Attend quarterly team meetings for support, encouragement, training and appropriate updates.
- Follow this policy, the Safeguarding Policy, Data Protection/Privacy Policy and other relevant procedures.

- Seek pastoral advice or supervision when necessary.
- Pray for those they support and for wisdom and care in their ministry.
- Avoid taking on more than they can manage and be alert to their own wellbeing.
- Be accountable to the Pastoral Deacon(s) and one another, while respecting confidentiality.
- Use the visit-log arrangements in Appendix B to confirm that visits have taken place and to help ensure that people are not missed.
- Record substantive pastoral information only in the approved, secure pastoral record system, not in the visit-log WhatsApp group.
- Share prayer requests through the prayer group or NewsSheet only where the person has given specific permission.

13.4 Home Visits

In addition to the rest of this policy, the following arrangements apply:

- Make it clear that you are visiting on behalf of UCF and are accountable to the Pastoral Deacon(s) and Minister(s).
- Explain that you are offering pastoral support, not professional help or counselling.
- Visits should normally be arranged in advance and logged using the visitor-safety process in Appendix B.
- If you are unsure about your safety or the safety of the person you are visiting, do not visit alone. Arrange an appropriate second visitor or meet in a suitable place where others are present.
- Do not plan routine home visits late at night. Unless there is an emergency, do not visit, phone or message before 9.00am or after 9.00pm.
- If the person is not at home, follow the agreed contact arrangements. A simple visiting card may be left only where doing so is safe and does not disclose sensitive information to others.
- Be aware of attraction, dependency and other boundary issues. Do not visit alone where this may make it difficult to maintain appropriate boundaries.
- Visits involving a child or young person must only take place where authorised under the Safeguarding Policy. The required parent/carer involvement, visibility, supervision and any second-adult arrangements must be followed. No volunteer should rely on this policy as permission to undertake a visit that is not authorised by safeguarding procedures.
- Carry a charged mobile phone and follow the agreed check-in/check-out arrangements.

13.5 Handling Personal Finance

Pastoral Care Team members may occasionally be asked to help with shopping or an online purchase. Such assistance must be limited, transparent and authorised. It may only be undertaken by a volunteer whose role has been approved, who has completed the required safeguarding training and checks where legally eligible, and who has received guidance on the specific task.

- Always provide receipts and a clear account of any money spent.
- Do not move, borrow, retain or handle cash or valuables that are not directly required for the agreed task.
- Where money must be handled, two people should be involved wherever reasonably practicable.

- Do not ask for or retain bank cards, PINs, passwords or online banking credentials, and do not access another person's bank account.
- Do not make financial decisions, sign documents, act as attorney or become involved in wills, inheritance or beneficiary arrangements through a pastoral relationship.
- Gifts, including monetary gifts, should normally be declined. Any gift that cannot reasonably be declined must be reported to a Minister or Pastoral Deacon and recorded in accordance with church guidance.
- Any exceptional financial assistance or handling arrangement must be approved in advance by the appropriate authorised person and documented.

13.6 Record Keeping and Visit Logging

UCF will keep pastoral records only where necessary to provide, coordinate or oversee care, meet safeguarding responsibilities or fulfil legal and organisational obligations. Substantive pastoral records must be held in the church-approved secure system, with access limited to authorised people.

Pastoral records should be factual, relevant, proportionate and respectful. They should distinguish what a person has said from a volunteer's observation or opinion. Do not record speculation, unnecessary intimate detail or diagnoses. Safeguarding records must be handled separately in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy.

The Pastoral Care Team also uses a restricted WhatsApp group for a limited operational purpose: visitor safety and visit tracking. The group is not a pastoral case-record system and must not be used to share personal circumstances, prayer requests, health information, addresses, family details, safeguarding information or accounts of conversations. The permitted use is explained in Appendix B.

UCF will provide appropriate privacy information and determine the lawful basis and any required special-category condition for pastoral record processing. The church will set retention periods, secure deletion arrangements, access controls and a process for handling data breaches and data rights requests. Personal devices used for approved church communications must be protected by a strong passcode or equivalent security, kept up to date and not shared with others.

13.7 Training and Support for Those Providing Pastoral Care

The Ministers, in consultation with the Pastoral Deacon(s), will arrange or signpost appropriate pastoral training. Training should cover listening, boundaries, confidentiality, consent, safeguarding, data protection, recognising when professional help is needed, visit safety and the church's referral procedures.

Pastoral workers should have access to regular support and supervision. Quarterly team meetings provide an opportunity for training and encouragement, but urgent concerns must be raised immediately rather than held over until the next meeting. Volunteers may step back from the role when necessary and should be supported in doing so.

14. Pastoral Deacon(s)

In addition to participating in pastoral care as appropriate, the Pastoral Deacon(s), supported by the Ministers, will:

- Pray for and coordinate the work of the Pastoral Care Team.
- Act as a link between the Pastoral Care Team and the Leadership Team.
- Help ensure that this policy is implemented and reviewed.
- Maintain an understanding of the roles, skills, availability and training needs of team members.
- Provide confidential supervision, advice and guidance to those providing pastoral care.
- Receive and assess pastoral referrals, retaining oversight of complex, sensitive or planned support.
- Liaise with specialist or professional agencies and make referrals where appropriate, with consent unless a safeguarding or legal exception applies.
- Ensure that visits and follow-up arrangements are coordinated and that people are not overlooked.
- Help ensure that visit logging is used only for its defined operational purpose.
- Arrange or recommend additional training in response to needs identified by the team.

Pastoral Deacons do not replace the Safeguarding Lead, trustees or other people with formal responsibilities under the Constitution and church policies. Where a concern falls within another person's remit, it must be passed to them promptly.

15. The Ministry Team

Ministers have a particular commitment to prayer, spiritual leadership and pastoral oversight of the church. Healthy pastoral care is nevertheless a ministry shared by the whole fellowship. This policy seeks to ensure that Ministers, Deacons, house group leaders and the Pastoral Care Team provide care that increases appropriately when people are in need.

The Minister(s) will offer:

- Spiritual and pastoral oversight of the church's pastoral care ministry, working with the Pastoral Deacon(s) and within the church's governance arrangements.
- Support to those engaged in pastoral care roles.
- Regular informal pastoral care of people with whom they come into contact.
- Emergency pastoral care, while ensuring that emergency services and safeguarding agencies are contacted where needed.
- Visits to people in hospital for a significant stay, where appropriate and permitted by the hospital and the person.
- Pastoral support for people whose needs require knowledge, experience or training beyond that of other pastoral volunteers.
- Home Communion, by arrangement, for people no longer able to attend church, aiming to visit at least three times a year where this is welcomed and practicable.

The Children's, Youth and Families' Pastor is responsible for coordinating pastoral care for children and young people within the scope of that role and the Safeguarding Policy, and shares responsibility with the Ministers for pastoral care to families.

The Leadership Team and trustees retain their responsibilities under the UCF Constitution and applicable charity and safeguarding requirements. They should ensure that this policy is resourced, implemented, monitored and reviewed, and that any significant concerns about its operation are addressed.

Appendix A. Responding to a Concern or Emergency

This quick guide does not replace UCF's Safeguarding Policy or emergency procedures.

- If someone is in immediate danger or needs urgent medical assistance, call 999.
- If a person discloses abuse or you suspect abuse, listen calmly, take the concern seriously, do not investigate or ask leading questions, and do not promise secrecy.
- Report the concern immediately to the Safeguarding Lead or deputy using the procedure in the Safeguarding Policy. If the concern relates to that person, use the alternative reporting route in that policy.
- Make a factual record as soon as possible, using the approved safeguarding reporting process. Record the person's words as accurately as you can, the date and time, and what action you took.
- Do not share the concern in a prayer or visit-log WhatsApp group. Do not discuss it with people who do not need to know.
- For non-safeguarding needs beyond your competence, seek advice from a Minister or Pastoral Deacon and consider an appropriate professional referral.
- If you are uncertain, seek advice promptly. Do not delay reporting a safeguarding concern while trying to decide whether it is serious enough.

Appendix B. Pastoral Visit Logging and WhatsApp Arrangements

B1. Purpose

The Pastoral Care Team WhatsApp group is used for a narrow operational purpose: to help protect visitors and to keep track of which planned pastoral visits have taken place and when, so that people do not inadvertently get missed. It is not used to discuss the person visited or to record pastoral information.

B2. What may be posted

Messages must be limited to the minimum information needed to confirm the visit and the visitor's safety.

Example of an appropriate operational message

"Visiting (Initials) - arrived at 2.00pm."
"Visit completed - left 2.45pm."

B3. What must not be posted

Do not post the person's full name, address, telephone number, health information, diagnosis, family circumstances, reason for the visit, details of the conversation, prayer requests, photographs, safeguarding information or any other personal or sensitive detail about the person visited. Do not use the group to discuss how a person is coping or what they have disclosed.

If the visitor needs to report a pastoral update, concern or safeguarding issue, this must be communicated directly to the appropriate Minister, Pastoral Deacon or Safeguarding Lead through the approved confidential route, not in the visit-log group.

B4. Pastoral Team and device security

Members of the pastoral WhatsApp group should be restricted to current authorised Pastoral Care Team members and those Ministry Team members who need access to coordinate or oversee visits. The group members should be reviewed regularly and removed promptly when someone leaves the relevant role. Group participants must not forward messages, add unauthorised members, take screenshots for other purposes or use the group for unrelated conversation.

Members must use a suitably protected device, keep its operating system and WhatsApp updated, use available account security such as two-step verification, and ensure message previews or notifications do not expose information to others. A lost device, suspected account compromise or accidental disclosure must be reported promptly to the appropriate church contact.

B5. Retention and review

The group is an operational check-in tool, not the permanent record of visits. The Pastoral Deacon(s) should ensure that visit completion is transferred, where necessary, to the approved visit-tracking record and that WhatsApp messages are deleted in accordance with the church's agreed retention arrangements. The church should document and review those arrangements as part of its data protection procedures.

The church should confirm that this limited use of WhatsApp is covered by its privacy information and data protection assessment. Although the group is not intended to contain personal information about people visited, volunteer codes, visit references, dates and times may still relate to identifiable individuals in some circumstances. The church should therefore treat the log carefully.