

St Mary's personal work and mentoring policy

Introduction

As a church, we see the value of people meeting personally to encourage others to grow in their knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. While whole church gatherings and small groups have a significant place in the life of the church, there is an important role for teaching and supporting people on a one-to-one basis, because:

- It is a way of building others up (see Eph 4:15, 29).
- It can encourage people to persevere and grow in their faith (see Heb 10:24).
- The personal work format allows for a more tailored application of teaching and support.
- It allows others to respond to issues in a person's life that might be difficult or embarrassing to share with a group.

Despite the benefits, personal work can present dangers—as evidenced, sadly, by abuse cases in recent years. These dangers include:

- Coercion and controlling others by strength of personality or a power imbalance.
- Extending into people's lives in a way that's inappropriate or "heavy shepherding."
- Taking advantage of another person for sexual gratification or financial gain.
- Developing a relationship of dependence on another person rather than becoming an independent disciple of Jesus Christ.
- Creating a relationship where the person is motivated by a desire to please another, and fears being ostracised (or "ghosted").

All such behaviours are unhealthy and do not reflect godly or Christlike leadership. We want to be a church that fosters healthy friendships that "build each other up" over personal gratification (Rom 15:2, 1 Cor 14:12). The policy aims to ensure personal work is conducted in a way that promotes good practice and minimises the risk of abuse.

Definitions

The policy covers ministry that takes place between two individuals. These might be called “one-to-ones,” “personal work,” or “mentoring.” The policy uses these terms interchangeably.

The policy covers personal work undertaken by:

- (1) **Staff**; and
- (2) **Volunteers** in connection with their area of volunteering (for example, a Housegroup leader mentoring a person in their Housegroup).

The policy does not cover friendships or where people in the church meet up to encourage one another. While this policy doesn’t speak into these situations, we expect all relationships in the church to be healthy and Christlike. Where there are concerns that relationships are not, people should talk to a Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) or member of the clergy.

Staff and volunteers will meet with people in the course of pastoral ministry, and these are not necessarily considered formal mentoring relationships. Where meetings occur in the regular practice of pastoral ministry, they are covered by our Lone Working and Safeguarding policies. This policy applies (in addition to, and in conjunction with others) where a relationship becomes what might be considered “personal work.” This will be determined by:

- Frequency: a staff member or volunteer meeting individually once or twice would not be personal work but asking to meet regularly, say, once a week for six months would be.
- Setup: staff or volunteers chatting after a Sunday service or visiting someone who is sick would not be considered a one-to-one but having someone senior teach another more junior on an individual basis would be considered personal work.
- Language: staff or volunteers inviting others to “meet up to read the Bible” or “get together regularly to read and pray” would suggest more formal personal work.
- People: staff or volunteers meeting regularly with a group of people is not mentoring but with only one person it would be.

Where there are questions about whether a relationship falls into the definition of personal work, please talk to a PSO or member of the clergy.

Children, young people and vulnerable adults

Mentoring with anyone under 18 or a youth group member is not permitted. As a church, we want to encourage ministry with under 18s, but this should always take place in a group setting where at least one other authorised leader and one other young

person are present. If a young person wishes to speak to a youth leader individually, we encourage them to do so as part of the regular youth activities in a supervised space—such as at the Friday or Sunday groups. We also encourage college-age children to join a small group Bible study (GBGs or 4Bs), where teaching can be more tailored to their circumstances but where there are always at least two leaders, and two young people present. Please refer to the risk assessments for these activities for further details.

Mentoring with vulnerable adults. Pastoral support is provided on an individual basis to those who would be considered vulnerable because of old age and/or living with support through our Senior Pastoral Care Team. Please refer to the Volunteer Role Descriptions and Risk Assessment for this activity. There may be occasions where someone meets with another considered a vulnerable adult because of a learning or physical disability. Any such meetings should be discussed with a member of the clergy or a PSO before commencing, and appropriate risk mitigations should be put in place.

Approach (with over 18s)

We should consider whether it might be possible and appropriate to meet with two or three people at the same time and whether anything would be lost by doing so. Sometimes meeting in a group can be just as, if not more, effective in encouraging individuals in the Christian life as it builds relationships between them too.

Requirements

If one-to-one meetings are considered appropriate, we ask that the following requirements be adhered to.

1. One-to-ones should be between people of the same gender. We recognise there are occasions where members of the opposite sex will meet one-to-one, such as in the staff team or in the course of pastoral ministry. However, mentoring relationships should not take place with someone of the opposite sex. Even where meetings take place with the same sex, people should not mentor the sort of person they might find sexually attractive or have a pattern of becoming emotionally attached to.
2. One-to-ones should be transparent. A staff member should let their line manager know who they are mentoring. A volunteer arranging a one-to-one with someone in their ministry area should discuss this with the person responsible for the ministry. In many cases, this will be a member of the clergy. Where not, the person responsible for the ministry should discuss with a member of the clergy or a PSO, who will record the start and end dates on ChurchSuite. They should share on a regular basis and in general terms how the meetings are going. Where possible, meetings should take place where others are present such as a coffee shop or the church building.

3. One-to-ones should promote healthy relationships with others. Our ultimate aim in personal work is not to build dependency on us but to foster healthy interdependence with the whole church. As such, we would expect the person being mentored to be encouraged to join a small group and attend church on Sundays. We also limit the period someone might be mentored to 18 months. Where a mentor might suspect an over-dependence on them, they should take steps to avoid this and encourage relationships beyond themselves. They should take advice from a member of the clergy or PSO in this scenario.
4. One-to-ones should focus on God's word rather than the personal opinion of the person mentoring. While pastoral issues arise and there might be questions about how to deal with life decisions, it would be easy for the person mentoring to tell the other what they should do. We would always expect meetings to be framed around a passage of scripture or a portion of a Christian book. The person mentoring should always recognise there is freedom in the Christian life and many "disputable matters." Rather than telling someone what they think the Bible says about something, it is normally better to give them a list of relevant passages and to suggest that they reflect on their own, recognising their freedom to decide (even if they ultimately decide to go against the clear teaching of Scripture).
5. There should be an audit trail of meetings. Those people mentoring should keep basic records (which could be shared if there is a genuine and legitimate need) of who they met with and when such as a diary or calendar.
6. Those mentoring should seek wider support as necessary. While we would not expect people mentoring to share confidential details from the person they meet with (except where there are safeguarding concerns), we would encourage them to seek the advice of the clergy where necessary. Some people will need or would benefit from specialist help that a one-to-one cannot provide (for example, medical or mental health concerns). The person mentoring should always work within the requirements of the Safeguarding policies and nothing in this policy takes away from the requirement to adhere to safeguarding practices such as responding, reporting and recording.

Abuse

We are aware that there have been high-profile incidents of abuse in a one-to-one setting. For the sake of clarity and completeness, the following should never happen:

1. Being undressed with the other person, or attending an activity together that involves this.
2. Prolonged physical or intimate contact.
3. Physical chastisement.
4. Ostracising or "ghosting" the other person.
5. Talking inappropriately about intimate subjects.
6. Receiving or controlling any money of the other person.

If there are any concerns that the above may have taken place, the mentoring relationship must end immediately and be reported to a PSO, who will take the appropriate action.

This policy will be reviewed and updated at least annually.

Signed

Date

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Perkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

21.01.2025

Date of next review: January 2026