

Guiding: Counseling in the Local Church

We live today in a fallen world. Although the blood of Christ was shed to forgive us of all sins, our sin nature continues to be something each Christian will deal with this side of eternity. For many, the keys of abundant life have been understood and embraced resulting in a victorious Christian life free from the need of crisis counseling.

For others, their struggle to embrace their full life in Christ becomes a daily challenge producing the need for biblical guidance and direction.

However, whether you are living in a place of consistent victory, daily struggle, or somewhere in between, the need for biblical advice and input is a part of our every day life. True biblical counseling stretches far beyond the narrow view that counseling is only for those in desperate need of guidance. It embraces the principle that there is wisdom in a multitude of counsel for every person and every situation you might face.

It is important that all leadership of any local church embrace the same counseling philosophy. Following is a statement that describe the biblical view toward counseling in the local church.

Counseling is an expression of our pastoral ministry to assist people to become better Christians. Our goal is to aid individuals in understanding and applying the atonement of Christ to their entire lives: past, present and future. We aspire to see Christ's compassion, wisdom, and healing power demonstrated. Our frame of reference for counseling is the Bible, which is relevant to all of life's issues. We believe in the sufficiency of the application of Scripture, the dynamics of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the church in seeing people's deepest needs met. Our counseling ministry will be most effective to those who take personal responsibility and allow the working of both the Word and Spirit in their lives.²

I. Foundation Principles to Counseling in the Local Church

The following principles are critical in developing a proper counseling philosophy.

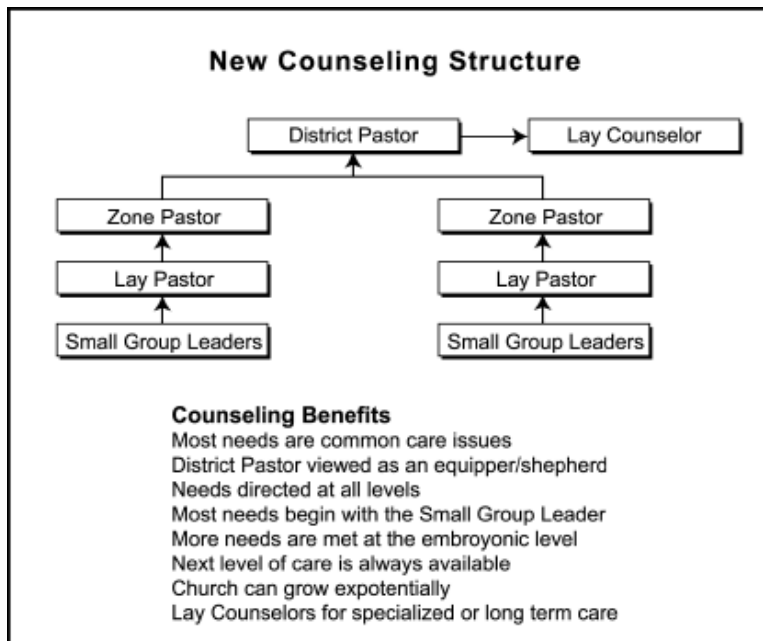
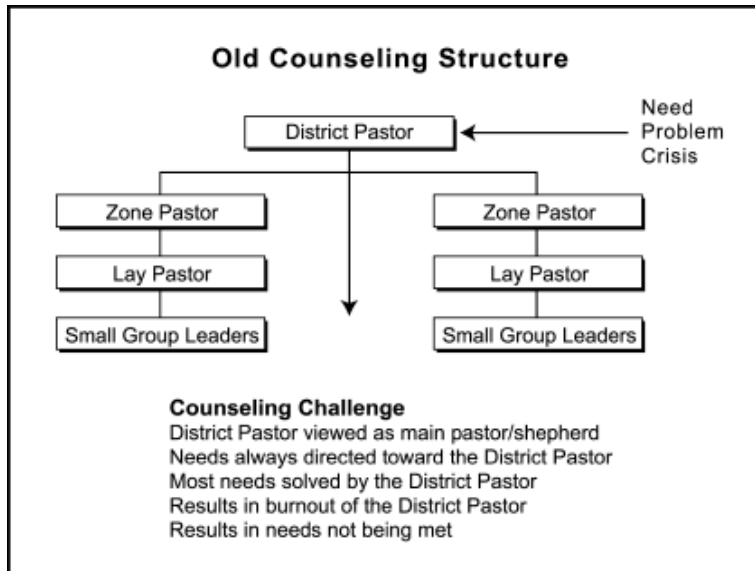
- A. Biblical Counseling stretches into the lives of every Christian**
(Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 24:6)
- B. Biblical Counseling is based upon the Word of God**
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- C. Biblical Counseling is based on the finish work of Christ**
(Colossians 1:27-2:10)
- D. Biblical Counseling relies on the ministry of the Holy Spirit**
(John 16:7-15; 14:17)
- E. Biblical Counseling is limited by the faith and response of the person being counseled.**
(Galatians 3:1-5)
- F. Biblical Counseling engages all the benefits and resources of the local church.**
(Acts 2:38-47; Hebrews 10:17-25)

II. Creating a Healthy Culture of Counseling/Guiding in the Local Church

- A. Establishing a Biblical Counseling Philosophy**
- B. Unifying Leadership on Biblical Counseling**
- C. Establishing Guidelines for Counseling and Guiding**
- D. Developing a Pastoral Counseling Strategy**
- E. Training people to Counsel**

III. The Counseling Flow in the Local Church

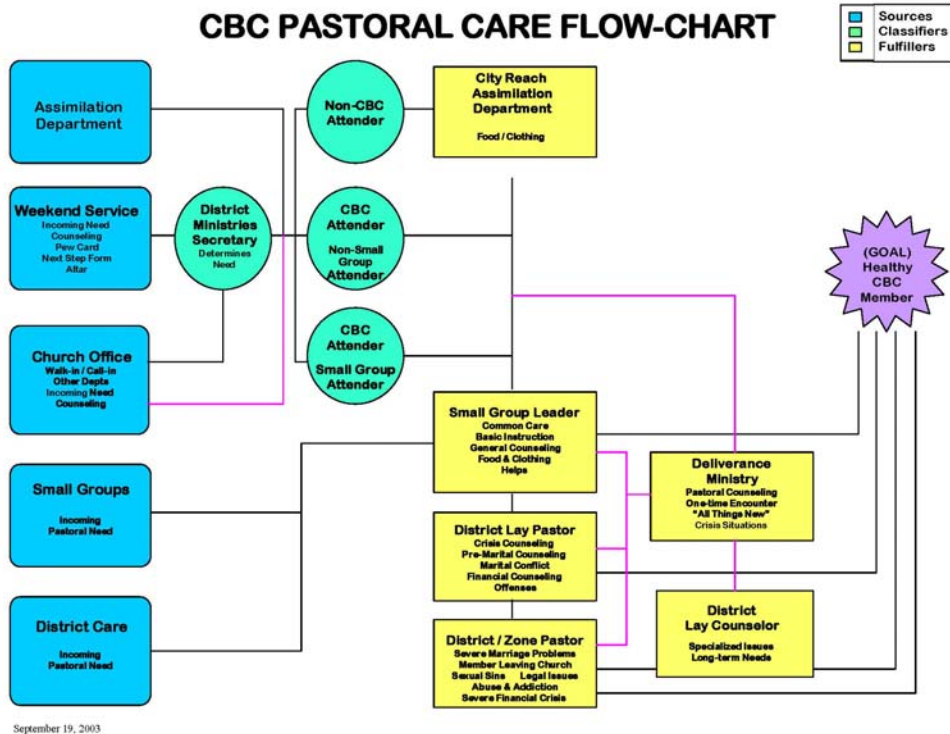
As each leader works to provide pastoral care and bring health and restoration to each individual that needs any form of counseling, an understanding of the pastoral flow will assist in meeting a person's needs in a prompt and efficient manner. The following diagrams show the shift in the counseling structure, which allows most people to be ministered to by their small group leaders. The challenges of the old counseling structure and the benefits of the new process are listed for your review. This is a generic diagram of a local church with a small-group pastoring structure.



IV. The Counseling Process in the Local Church

In order to meet the variety of needs and bring resolution to each challenge presented, there must be very clear goals, guidelines, and processes established.

The diagram below gives an example of how a local church might define their counseling process to insure that each leader understands the process, and each person is not lost in cracks.



V. General Counseling Recommendations

1. Each leader should abide by all guidelines set forth by the leadership of the local church.
2. Never make claims of providing "secular counseling."
3. Never make claims that you are a psychotherapist, professional, medical, or psychiatric counselor.
4. Do not use state-regulated professional titles such as, "Licensed Professional Counselor," "Clinical Social Worker," "or "Pastoral Counselor" unless licensed to do so.
5. Avoid strictly psychiatric diagnosis and interventions.

VI. Counseling Session Guidelines

1. Begin every session by explaining that you are not a professional counselor, but are offering spiritual advice, which is biblically based.
2. Always have a Bible present and prominently displayed during every counseling session.
3. Always include biblical principles, scriptures, and spiritual considerations in every counseling situation.
4. Begin and/or end every session with prayer, asking God to meet their needs, and to direct you with godly wisdom.
5. Never give any advice that is contrary to the Bible, regardless of the circumstances involved.
6. Keep records and general notes of each counseling session. For purposes of confidentiality, these records should be kept separate and secure.
7. All counseling discussions are to remain confidential. Any discussion about the counselee's situation must first have the counselee's approval before sharing their situation with any other leader. In some cases, mandatory reporting of a severe situation may apply.
8. Counseling should never be done with members of the opposite sex unless there is a third party present in the session.
9. Two adults must be present when counseling anyone under the age of 18.
10. Never enter a room, private place, or home with a child when the parents are absent.
11. Do not counsel a person for longer than six consecutive months.

VII. Guidance for the Leader in Counseling

1. Be sure that your personal walk with the Lord is consistent and that you are blameless in the area you are counseling.
2. Be personally submitted to other pastoral leadership.
3. Be personally accountable, having a "transparent" relationship with another person.
4. Be a person of prayer and faith. Pray before, during, and after the session.
5. Always counsel from a base of inner peace. Don't counsel when you are physically or emotionally exhausted.

VIII. The Do's and Don'ts of Good Listening

1. First and foremost, don't interrupt.
2. Be empathetic; don't condemn, argue or patronize.
3. Stay close and involved, but don't be a space invader.
4. Talk about yourself, but don't get too familiar too fast.
5. Consider the context of the statement being made.
6. Listen with all your senses.
7. Avoid an audience or distractions of any kind.
8. Remove physical obstacles between you and a good conversation.
9. Ask open-ended questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" response.

¹ This is the City Bible Church Counseling Mission Statement developed by the All Church Leadership Team in 2001.

² For further information regarding the "Basic Counseling 101" and other City Bible Church Counseling Training materials, contact City Bible Publishing