

IFTCC Pastoral Care Protocol

Revised 2026

Purpose

This Protocol provides guidance for Christian pastoral care workers who support individuals experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction, gender incongruence, or related questions concerning identity, relationships, discipleship and Christian living. It establishes the theological, pastoral and ethical framework within which pastoral care associated with the International Foundation for Therapeutic and Counselling Choice (IFTCC) should be offered.

The IFTCC recognises clinical practice and pastoral care as distinct but complementary ministries. Pastoral care workers are not clinical practitioners unless separately qualified to practise as such, and clinical practitioners are not acting as pastors simply by virtue of their professional qualifications. Each role has its own responsibilities, competencies, boundaries and accountability structures. Where appropriate, practitioners in either role should recognise the limits of their competence and work collaboratively through appropriate referral in the best interests of the individual seeking support.

Pastoral care is an ecclesial ministry rather than a therapeutic discipline. Its primary purpose is to nurture Christian discipleship through prayer, biblical teaching, spiritual direction, encouragement, accountability and participation in the life of the Church. While pastoral care may complement professional counselling or psychotherapy, it neither replaces nor seeks to replicate clinical practice. Pastoral care workers must recognise the limits of their competence and, where appropriate, encourage or facilitate referral to suitably qualified mental health or healthcare professionals.

The IFTCC prioritises the dignity of every individual seeking support and honours their conscience, personal agency and freedom to pursue goals consistent with their sincerely held beliefs and values. Pastoral care must always be voluntary, respectful, non-coercive and characterised by compassion, humility and truth.

The IFTCC unequivocally rejects all practices involving physical violence, force, manipulation, intimidation, shame or humiliation intended to coerce an individual to renounce an LGBTQ identity or to alter their sexual or gender experiences against their will. Pastoral care should instead encourage personal responsibility, spiritual maturity, informed choice and faithful Christian discipleship.

Biblical Foundations

The pastoral ministry of the Church is rooted in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, who consistently combined truth with grace, conviction with compassion, and holiness with mercy. He called all people to repentance and faith while treating those burdened by shame, brokenness and sexual sin with dignity and compassion. His response to the woman caught in adultery demonstrated both His refusal to condemn and His invitation to new life through

obedient discipleship.

Scripture teaches that every person is created in the image of God and therefore possesses inherent dignity and worth. Human relationships have been disrupted by sin, yet through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God has provided the means of reconciliation, restoration and renewal. Pastoral care therefore seeks not merely behavioural change but the restoration of relationship with God, growth in Christlikeness and participation in the life of His Church.

Pastoral care workers represent Christ by helping those under their care encounter God's mercy, truth and transforming grace through prayer, Scripture, spiritual direction, discipleship and loving Christian fellowship. They seek to cultivate hope, belonging and faithful perseverance while recognising that spiritual growth is often gradual and lifelong.

Accordingly, the IFTCC recognises the following foundational principles, essential priorities and professional responsibilities as the basis of pastoral care within the organisation.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

1. God desires all people to be reconciled to Himself through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is our Creator and the source of human identity. Although sin, unbelief and human brokenness separate us from God, His purpose to restore humanity through Christ remains unchanged.
2. Every person bears the image of God and therefore possesses inherent dignity and worth. Scripture presents humanity as created male and female, equal in value and complementary in God's purposes. Through faith in Christ believers are progressively renewed into His likeness and invited to participate in God's work of restoration.
3. Jesus Christ affirmed the Genesis pattern of covenant marriage between one man and one woman as God's design for sexual intimacy and family life. Pastoral care therefore encourages Christian sexual ethics while treating every individual with compassion, respect and dignity.
4. The love of God calls people to repentance, forgiveness and renewal. Pastoral care workers seek to communicate God's grace and truth, encouraging confidence that His purposes always lead towards wholeness, peace and spiritual flourishing.
5. Christian discipleship is characterised by loving obedience to God through a relationship of trust, self-giving love and faithful surrender. Pastoral care seeks to nurture this lifelong process of spiritual formation.
6. Pastoral care workers are called to model mature Christian discipleship (1 Corinthians 11:1). Through prayer, Scripture, wise counsel and personal example they encourage those under their care to grow in holiness, maturity and Christlike character.
7. The Holy Spirit brings conviction, healing and renewal. Through prayer and dependence upon God's presence, pastoral care workers seek to help individuals process their experiences, beliefs and emotions in ways that promote peace, relational health and faithful participation within the Christian community. The IFTCC recognises that there are

many appropriate pastoral approaches which honour both biblical truth and the dignity of those seeking support.

ESSENTIAL PRIORITIES

1. Healing and spiritual growth are often gradual rather than immediate. Pastoral care workers should prepare those they support for a journey of repentance, healing, perseverance and renewed hope, recognising that restoration rarely follows a simple or linear path.
2. Those receiving pastoral care should be accompanied with patience, compassion and realism. Pastoral care workers should anticipate seasons of struggle, disappointment and temptation while continually encouraging trust in God's goodness, faithfulness and transforming grace.
3. Pastoral care workers must recognise the limits of their role and competence. Where significant trauma, mental illness, safeguarding concerns or other clinical needs are evident, referral to an appropriately qualified professional should be encouraged. Pastoral care may appropriately complement professional therapy through prayer, encouragement, discipleship and Christian community.

PROFESSIONAL AND SAFEGUARDING RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Unlike clinical practitioners, pastoral care workers exercise ministry primarily within the context of Christian community and discipleship. Appropriate relational boundaries must always be maintained, and particular care should be exercised in relationships involving vulnerability, dependency or significant differences in age, authority or gender.
2. Pastoral care workers must be accountable to appropriate church or organisational oversight. Individuals receiving care should know how to raise concerns or seek additional support. Expectations concerning confidentiality, transparency and accountability should be clearly explained from the outset. Where appropriate and with informed consent, confidential records of meetings may be maintained.
3. Pastoral care workers must familiarise themselves with the safeguarding and legal requirements applicable within their jurisdiction. Confidentiality is important but is not absolute. Where there is a serious risk of harm to the individual or to others, or where reporting is required by law, appropriate action must be taken.
4. Regular supervision, accountability and review should form part of responsible pastoral practice. Appropriate informed consent procedures, safeguarding arrangements and opportunities for feedback should be established to protect both those receiving care and those providing it.
5. The IFTCC rejects as unethical and harmful any pastoral practice involving physical violence, coercion, manipulation, intimidation, shame or humiliation. Pastoral care associated with the IFTCC must always respect the dignity, conscience and freely chosen goals of the individual, encouraging spiritual growth through voluntary participation, biblical discipleship, compassionate support and informed personal choice.
6. The IFTCC encourages appropriate collaboration between clinical practitioners and pastoral care workers where this is desired by the individual, ethically appropriate, and

undertaken with informed consent. Such collaboration must respect the distinct responsibilities, competencies and accountability of each role and should never confuse pastoral ministry with clinical practice or clinical practice with pastoral ministry.