

Handling Sensitive and Confidential Information

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In the course of our ministry with God's people, pastors, elders, and staff leaders are often entrusted with sensitive and/or confidential information about individuals and families. The following guidelines are advised:

1. Our members' and friends' confidentiality must be loyally protected. In love, we seek to honor and guard the name and reputation of each person we serve. We do not share potentially harmful or embarrassing information about others with anybody, including our wives, unless it is necessary in carrying out our spiritual leadership duties.
2. There are times when sensitive information cannot be held confidentially, even if the member has requested it. In the church, for example, we are bound by a common order and discipline which requires us to follow the steps in Matthew 18:15-20 and in our Book of Discipline in the case of unrepentant immorality among our members. Even in these cases, however, we seek to effect repentance with the least embarrassment or damage to one's reputation by involving the least number of people possible to resolve the issue.
3. There are times when we are unsure how to handle confidential information we have received. In these cases, we seek advice from wise counselors, but we disguise the identity of the parties involved so that no damage is done.
4. When discussing ideas or problems or possible future actions, we are careful not to discuss these matters outside the circle of those involved in order to avoid unnecessary division in the congregation. We exercise discernment in allowing information to be communicated through the proper channels at the appropriate moments.