

## INFORMED CONSENT – COUNSELEE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The purpose of pastoral or biblical counseling is to help you meet the challenges of life in a manner that is pleasing and honoring to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In an effort to make informed decisions about your counseling experience, the following information is provided. Below you will find pertinent information regarding your counselor's perspective and aim as well as your rights and responsibilities as you counsel with him. If you have any questions or concerns as it relates to the following, please feel free to ask.

### **Counsel Distinctives.**

#### 1. Counsel is pastoral.

In most cases, you will be counseled by a pastor of this church. There may be times when prudence will dictate the inclusion of other members of the church (elders or “shepherdesses”<sup>1</sup>). However, the nature of the counsel throughout will be pastoral. That is, the content of discussions will revolve around the issues of living with God in His church and world. As a result, you will not receive instruction on financial decision-making or medical issues, per se. Likewise, you will not receive “diagnoses” according to any category found in any psychiatric or psychology resource (e.g., *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV* or the *Physician's Desk Reference*).

#### 2. Counsel is voluntary.

In most cases, the pastor-counselor did not solicit the initiation of the counseling relationship. In other words, in the course of life, you determined that you needed assistance. As a member of this church, you rightly turned to your pastoral staff for that help. It might also be that in the course of discussions with pastors or other members the suggestion of counsel was provided. Nonetheless, whether you continue to counsel according to the pre-arranged meetings with your pastor-counselor is up to you. It is voluntary.

#### 3. Counsel is biblical.

Pastoral counsel is counsel consistent with the historic, revealed biblical faith passed down through the ages of God's people. In other words, “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Counsel you will receive is consistent with the excellent doctrinal summary found in the Westminster Standards (part of the accepted constitution of this church). It is the conviction of your pastor-counselor that the Scripture is sufficient for living (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and that through its study and application we have all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

As a part of this, counsel is confidential. Please see the Confidentiality Policy in this Intake packet.

#### 4. Counsel is often spiritually painful.

In the main, the seasons of life are marked with difficulty and struggle. Pastoral counseling steps into a situation with the Word of God. God's Word acts both in diagnostic and prescriptive roles. That is, with your pastor-counselor, you will identify areas of life that are

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<sup>1</sup> These are women chosen by the elders and trained by the pastors as crisis disciplers.

both consistent *and* inconsistent with God’s law. In the event corrections need to happen (i.e., repentance for sin, adoption of new motives or behaviors) you will likely find this difficult or painful. This is consistent with what Paul revealed to us in the Bible when he prayed that he may “know Him [Christ] and the power of His resurrection and *may share in His sufferings* becoming like Him in His death” and “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I am filling up what is *lacking in Christ’s afflictions*” (emphasis added; Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24, respectively).

If necessary, your pastor-counselor will ask you to live according to God’s Word and you may find that difficult and daunting. The reality of any helping relationship is the truth delivered in love must be a centerpiece of that relationship. You expect nothing less from your pastor-counselor. We have hope in Jesus Christ through it all: Philippians 1:6.

5. Counsel is covenantal.

Your pastor-counselor will be serving you according to the three-fold covenantal framework. That is, first, you actively partner with him in this season of life neither isolating yourself from his biblical instruction nor distancing yourself from the vibrant life of the church. Secondly, that you will treat him (and others) with Christian love and charity, personally and appropriately (see Matthew 22:39). This means that you will set your heart to the task of prayerfully living under the authority of God mediated through the legitimate spiritual authority of the church (see Matthew 16:19). Lastly, work purposefully with your pastor-counselor in homework and session-discussion.

**Counselor Distinctives.**

1. Typically, your pastor-counselors are ordained teaching elders in the Presbyterian Church in America ([www.pcanet.org](http://www.pcanet.org)). This is an official and professional clergy vocation. The Presbyterian Church in America is rightly recognized worldwide for its commitment to the historic Christian faith.
2. In the capacity as ordained teaching elder, your pastor-counselor is responsible to the church session (or board of elders) or congregation as well as the regional governing body, the Presbytery, for his conduct.
3. Your pastor-counselor may or may not be a member of other professional organizations.
4. Your pastor-counselor is not licensed by the state to conduct pastoral counseling.

By your signature, you indicate that you have read and understood this statement and any questions about this statement were answered to your satisfaction. By your counselor’s signature, he verifies the accuracy of this statement and acknowledges his commitment to conform to its specifications.

Counselee name: \_\_\_\_\_

Counselee signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Pastor-counselor name: \_\_\_\_\_

Pastor-counselor signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_