

## NDCC Counseling Procedures

By Caleb Horn

Counseling at NDCC may be different than many other churches. This ministry is not separate from the other ministries of the church, but goes hand-in-hand with the purpose and goals of the church. Counseling is a more focused form of ministering Biblical truth to the life of an individual than teaching or preaching, but the essence is still the same.

### *What does counseling look like?*

Our counseling is very a very intense form of discipleship. We are ministering and applying Biblical truth to individual lives, in a direct, situation-specific way. The people who come to use are not “clients,” but “counselees.” They are not paying experts to “fix” a problem in their lives. We are fellow-strugglers helping them to find wise counsel in their situation. They can also be viewed as a disciple or novice, since counseling is training to live a godly life. The person guiding the counseling process is not an expert, but is another sinner who is helping the struggling through a difficult situation. Because of this, we refer to them as “counselors.” Counselors do not have all of the answers, nor are they perfect, but they are simply striving to help another out of the mud (Galatians 6:1-6). In a sense, the counselor is also a counselee in that they are learning and growing to be more like Christ (if they are not something is wrong).

Typically, counseling will run from 8-15 sessions, around 12 being the most common. The first session is spent largely on information gathering, assessing the situation, teaching basic concepts that apply to the situation, and giving a few simple assignments. Typical sessions begin with going over any “projects” or “homework” that has been completed and building on that for teaching. Once this has been accomplished, any new teaching will take place, and then new homework is assigned for the next session. As counseling progresses, there is more of a focus on learning through homework than during the counseling session. The sessions with the counselor become more of a point during the week where their efforts are focused, rather than the high point of their spiritual walk. Hopefully, toward the end of counseling, the counselee is able to help with assigning their own homework. Counseling is focused on producing spiritual growth and one of the goals of counseling is to help them pursue this growth on their own. Counseling is completed when enough growth has occurred that the counselee has handled the situation/can handle it when it comes up again; ideally to the point that they can handle other situations that come up biblically. To help facilitate this process, counseling is done at a desk or table, as it makes the homework and study process easier, as well as promoting a “let’s get down to business” attitude for both counselor and counselee. Ideally this is done at the church offices.

What we do is a ministry. It is done without charge or expectation of reward. Like any other ministry in the church, we are honoring God through loving, helping, and serving others. If a counselee

wants to show their appreciation for the counseling they received, they are welcome to donate to the ministry of the church, but we do not solicit financial or other gifts. Counselees are responsible for paying for any resources needs (books, videos, audio recordings, etc).

Records are kept for several reasons. One of the biggest is help track progress and growth throughout the counseling process. They can also be used for training and counselor development (name and specifics removed; only record (audio or video) sessions with written permission of the counselee) and are kept for legal reasons.

Counseling may be discontinued if the counselee does not complete assignments, misses appointments without prior arrangement with the counselor, or refuses to change life-dominating sins. This is up to the discretion of the counselor and director of counseling ministries.

### *Who can counsel?*

All believers are responsible to help out other believers (Gal 6:1-6; Eph 4:11-14). One form of this is in sharing Godly advice in a "one-another ministry," which we call counseling. Each believer is to help out his fellow believers when and where they struggle, although care must be taken to be diligent in guarding oneself against falling into the same sin while trying to help another. Wisdom then states that one should not counsel another if they are struggling with an area where they both struggle.

In NDCC, counseling takes place in many different levels. Sermons are a form of counsel; although they are typically very broad and do not always tackle specific situations in detail. Small groups and Bible studies are an informal form of counsel which is more focused, but will not always deal as in-depth as formal counseling will. Ideally, group leaders will be equipped to counsel at least a basic level, although depending upon their level of training; they may want to receive help from someone who is further along in their training or a staff member.

For formal counseling, anyone who is a member, who is committed to our counseling position, who has received an appropriate amount of training, and is currently living a life that strives to honor God is eligible to be a counselor. Depending on their training and experience, there may be either a supervisor or trainee observing, though this is more detailed in "training." All pastors should be involved in counseling, although some will counsel more than others. The more complicated situations should be given to the most experienced counselors.

### *What are the requirements to be counseled?*

In order to be truly counseled from the Bible, a person must be a Christian and they must have a desire to change. Ideally, they would have a desire to honor God, but it is more often a desire to "fix" a

problem. They must also be committed to working at the situation. If they will not complete assignments, counseling will be put on hold until it is completed.

We will meet with people who are not Christians, but it is not properly “counseling” but “pre-counseling.” This is a great way for outreach. Depending on the situation and the counselee, the gospel may not be presented until a few sessions into pre-counseling. It should be presented within the first few sessions, once they become receptive and are more familiar with biblical concepts. If we do not present Christ to them, then we are not really helping them, but causing more problems in that we are helping them to become more proficient sinners. (NOTE: we do not refer to it as pre-counseling to the counselee until after they have placed their faith in Christ)

Counselees must also complete a “Counseling Packet,” which includes a “Personal Data Inventory,” along with some other forms. These tools are used to help gather information about the counselee and situation in the early parts of the counseling process.

If the counselee does not currently attend church anywhere, they must become involved with NDCC (services, groups, etc). If they attend another church, they may be required to attend one service a week or have a pastor/group leader from their church attend counseling with them. This is up to the discretion of the counselor and the director of the counseling ministry (we do not want to tear them away from a church where they are actively involved, however we do not want to encourage them to be involved somewhere that is not biblically focused nor do we want to become a dumping ground for another pastor’s problems).

#### *Who oversees counseling?*

Although all pastors can, should, and hopefully will be involved with counseling, there will be one staff elder who oversees the counseling ministry of the church. This person must be certified by the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (or actively pursuing certification) and preferably received some form of advanced training in Biblical Counseling (ie – MA, MDiv, or DMin, although anything earned through a NANC Training Center would suffice). Depending on the current church structure, it would probably work best if the director of counseling ministries was Pastor of Family Life or Pastoral Care, since these are the two areas counseling fits with the best.

This person is in charge of facilitating training for all staff and any lay members who desire to be involved in the counseling ministry. He is to help guide other counselors as needed, as well as make decisions regarding the counseling ministry, in accordance with counseling procedures and the wisdom of the elders.

#### *What training/resources are available for counselors?*

It is our desire that our counselors are as prepared as possible for any situations they may face. To this end, we have several different forms and levels of training available.

The most important area of knowledge is biblical truth, so sermons, groups, bible studies, reading, and general Bible training is very important. For specific methods and ideas for counseling, there are several avenues, which will largely depend upon the current size and scope of the counseling ministry. Small groups/Bible studies pertaining to counseling will be offered occasionally as a “basic training” for soon-to-be counselors, as well as more in-depth groups as needed/possible.

Most of the practical training will be done through a mentoring process. It is our desire that counseling never be done with just the counselor and counselee present, but with someone else observing (especially crucial when counseling youth/children or someone of the opposite gender (which is to be avoided, if possible)). The first stage of this process will be a “trainee” sitting in and observing a more experienced counselor. As the trainee grows in knowledge and ability, the roles are switched and the trainee becomes the counselor and the counselor a supervisor. Everyone, even the most experienced counselor in the church, needs to have someone else in the room observing and helping sharpen their abilities. Depending upon how busy the counseling ministry is, more experienced counselors will focus on working with people from within the church and less experienced with people from other churches coming to use for counseling. This mentoring process will be done in conjunction with classes, seminars, conferences, reading, study, etc.

Ideally, as we get more people becoming counselors, we will be able to attend and host conferences put on by groups such as NANC, Faith Baptist (Lafayette, ID), and CCEF. A growing option is working with other NANC counselors in the area to develop training. Ideally, we will have some members and staff who become dedicated to the counseling process and decide to pursue NANC certification, which is heavily encouraged.

As we are training our own members to counsel, pastors and leaders of other churches can also benefit from our training. Arrangements are made through the director of the counseling ministry.

There is a variety of resources available, some of which are available through the church website and bookstore. An in-depth list is available through the director of the counseling ministry.

### *Other guidelines*

Anything in the current Packet will need to be followed.

If NDCC has not set a specific policy, then defer to NANC guidelines.

The director of counseling ministries, along with other counselors and elders, will have a list of resources that should be used in counseling. This is not to say that all resources must come from the list, but all resources must be consistent with NDCC so there will also be a list of resources to be avoided.

Although each situation will be different to some degree, all situations will be similar, some more than others, including:

Marriage counseling – whenever possible, both spouses need to be involved. This may not always work, and may take some creativity, but the most progress can be made if both are there, even if both are not believers. We will not counsel a couple toward divorce/separation/etc.

Pre-marriage – see wedding guidelines.

Children – this is really family counseling, so both parents need to be present when possible. It may be necessary to counsel the child without the parents present, but this should be the exception not the rule and would probably only be a portion of a session, but make sure someone else is present. It may be good to do a few sessions with just the parents before bringing the child in.

Teens – is usually more individual than with children, but still can have the family dynamic. Probably best to start with just the teen, maybe meet with parents individually after a few sessions, then go from there. Many times teens and parents view things only from their viewpoint, so it can be helpful to bring them together. Try to rely on youth workers as much as possible. Make absolute certain to have another person present, preferably a youth worker.

Women – if possible, women should be counseled by qualified women. If this is not possible, then it should be done by a pastor with his wife.

In summary, the counseling ministry of NDCC is one way that we help people to become more like Christ. The way this process is set up is that not only does the counselee grow, but the counselor, trainees, and supervisors grow as well, sometimes even more than the counselee. This is definitely an intense aspect of ministry which strongly encourages spiritual growth in the lives of everyone involved.