



## Gospel Care Expectations and Consent (Informed Consent Form)

### Welcome to Sojourn Care

At Sojourn, we humbly thank you for giving us the privilege to journey with you during your time of need. We recognize our responsibility to God, to you, and to the church as we come alongside you to learn and grow together in God's grace. We want to offer you hope and healing through the gospel.

Please take the time to read this short but important document that explains what you should know and expect from us as you receive gospel care from Sojourn. Please initial at the bottom of each page and then sign and date at the end of the form.

### What is Gospel Care?

Gospel care seeks to encourage one another to abide in the love of Christ to restore our souls so that we can love God and others in a broken world. We see how Christ and his gospel truths apply in deeply personal and specific ways to the realities of your life so that you can live out the gospel by faith in community, made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. At Sojourn we believe the gospel powerfully transforms our individual lives, our relationships, and the world.

Many of us have negative, preconceived notions of care done by the church. Please read what gospel care is NOT:

1. Gospel care is not just quoting or prescribing Bible verses and asking you for more faith and effort.
2. Gospel care is not simply exposing outward sins or "idols" of the heart.
3. Gospel care is not following a fixed paradigm of method and sequence, expecting the same "results" for each person.
4. Gospel care is not merely teaching biblical principles in general while ignoring the specific details of each person's story.
5. Gospel care is not just for those requesting care, but is needed by all of us because none of us have arrived and all of us need help.

### What to Expect from Gospel Care versus Traditional Counseling

In modern culture the term "counseling" has come to imply a one-on-one 'professional relationship' between a psychotherapist and a 'patient' or 'client.' Traditional "therapists" or "counselors" are typically licensed by a local or national accrediting body and are subject to the restrictions set by their licensing boards. Therapists usually meet with a 'client' on a weekly or bi-weekly basis in an office setting, provide some form of psychological assessment using secular tools and DSM-IV criteria, set restrictions on personal interactions outside the office, keep a written record, and charge a fee.

We here at Sojourn have a different vision of how we care for one another with the gospel. In fact, we seek to redeem the concept of "counseling." It is our belief that meeting once a week with a therapist for one hour does not provide enough support for those who are suffering. Gospel care can and should take place in community. We are called to care for one another on a daily basis - encouraging, challenging and building one another up in the gospel (Heb. 3:12-14; 10:24-25; Eph. 4:16). Nonetheless, we recognize that there are times when we may need someone to journey with us in a more intentional and in-depth way.

God has raised up men and women at Sojourn who provide such care as ministry servants. These individuals and couples have been selected because we believe they have been blessed with the gifts of listening, compassion, wisdom, and insight. Our ministry servants come from a broad variety of backgrounds - some have received training in the mental health disciplines, many come from other professional backgrounds, but every person giving care has been trained to utilize a gospel framework for understanding and responding to life struggles.

Our Sojourn ministry servants who serve in this area, even those who have previously received formal secular mental health training, utilize the gospel care approach and do not adhere to the typical theories and models of traditional "psychotherapy" and are not constrained by the ethical guidelines associated with their respective state or national license.



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Some things to anticipate include:

1. We do not always meet in a formal care setting on one of Sojourn's campuses, since much care occurs in the community. In most situations, notes are taken so that we can better love you through the details of your lives.
2. We do not set limits on personal relationships outside of the sessions because care is done in community given the holistic nature of the church.
3. We do not conduct psychological assessments based on secular theory.
4. We do not provide medical care or prescribe medications.
5. We do not function as a crisis center. On occasions when suicidal or homicidal risk emerge, the ministry leader will take necessary measures to ensure the person's safety, to include calling 911 and/or ensuring the person is admitted to a local mental health facility.
6. And finally, we do not charge a fee for care.

### **Gospel Care and Psychotropic Medication**

God designed our body and soul to function in an integrated manner. As a result, soul disorders can contribute to bodily disorders and vice versa. Moreover, given the pervasive effects of living in a fallen world, we recognize there are times in which the body/brain does not function as God designed—in such cases, medical treatment and/or psychotropic medication may be necessary. On the other hand, we DO believe that medications are sometimes overprescribed as a means of providing a “quick fix” for life problems—this results in part from our fast-paced, economically driven medical and therapeutic systems that do not operate from a gospel framework. However, we also recognize that care approaches that discourage the use of psychotropic medications may prevent people from seeking treatments that are at times appropriate and necessary. Therefore, we are careful not to advise against the use of medications to those receiving care since ministers of the gospel are not trained medical personnel. Additionally, we see the use of medications as an issue of Christian liberty that in some cases may be necessary. Nonetheless, we assert that psychotropic medications alone rarely function as a ‘cure all’ for life's complex issues.

A helpful way of thinking through the struggles of the body and soul is to consider a spectrum. On one end, the issues are primarily heart and relational in nature (issues such as anger, fear, and escapism). On the other end, the issues are primarily physiological in nature (issues such as dementia and brain injury). There are some issues that can fall in the middle of the spectrum (such as ADHD, depression, etc.). But given the reality we are all made in the image of God, even struggles that are primarily physiological in origin co-exist with heart and relational issues.

No matter where you are on this spectrum, God knows you and His gospel message relates to your situation. Our sovereign God knows our hearts, our bodies, our capabilities, and ultimately our responsibilities before Him and others. Though disordered bodily function sometimes blurs matters of responsibility and capability, we still live in God's world and are called to live in accordance to His ways. Despite whatever weaknesses we may experience, we remain responsible to our call to love God and love others so that God is glorified through our lives.

### **Sojourn's Relationships with the Mental Health System and Other Providers**

We recognize our members can exercise gospel freedom by choosing to seek care outside of Sojourn. Therefore, we do not discourage or keep those requesting care from seeking help elsewhere but it is important for them to know the care they may receive may not be consistent with care that flows from and focuses on the gospel. Moreover, those seeking care are welcome to work with outside agencies even while receiving care from us; however, we believe the elders and/or ministry leaders can play a vital role in the redemptive process by working with the outside agencies, given that the person receiving care provides written consent for such collaboration.

### **Gospel Ministry Limits of Confidentiality**

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt. 7:12). It also encourages people to seek needed care. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of Sojourn Community Church, all staff and ministry servants are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. Those involved in care cases will carefully protect all information that they receive through the care sessions and case management, subject to the following guidelines.



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Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate and necessary to reveal certain information to others, based on the purpose and function of the church, as described in Sojourn's By-Laws and Covenant available on the Sojourn website.<sup>1</sup> In particular, when a Sojourn ministry servant believes it is necessary, they may disclose confidential information<sup>2</sup> to appropriate people in the following circumstances:

### Traditional Circumstances:

1. When Sojourn ministry leaders believe the ones receiving care could be in danger of harming themselves or others (Prov. 24:11-12).
2. When Sojourn ministry leaders believe that there is ongoing abuse taking place—i.e. sexual, physical, domestic, child abuse, etc. (Rom. 13:1), or a past abuse against a minor is disclosed.
3. When a minor (defined by as anyone under 18 years old) shares information that Sojourn ministry leaders believe is in the best interest of the child to disclose information to the parents and/or authorities (e.g., neglect, abuse, drug usage, sex, physical harm).
4. When Sojourn ministry leaders are ordered by a court of law to release the counselee's information.
5. When Sojourn ministry leaders seek guidance and receive regular supervision to better care for those they are helping, they can discuss relevant information with ministry supervisors and/or elders (Prov. 11:14; 15:22).

### Gospel Ministry Circumstances:

6. When Sojourn ministry leaders offer care in community, those involved in the care process agree that all information shared outside of the gospel care sessions amongst the involved community can be shared with one another and be discussed in the care sessions.
7. When a case escalates to church discipline where those receiving care have consistently demonstrated an unrepentant heart. Those Sojourn ministry leaders and relevant members will wisely and lovingly coordinate redemptive efforts to pursue restoration (see Matt. 18:15-20), sharing only the necessary information, not a full release from confidentiality.
8. When Sojourn ministry leaders are of the opinion that confidential material should be disclosed.

Please be assured that we strongly prefer to keep personal information confidential and will make every effort to resolve issues as privately as possible. Based on the stated limits of confidentiality, you will not have to sign a "release of information form" when any of the above situations arise.

### **Cancelling Appointments**

Please contact the ministry servant and others that may be journeying with you when canceling appointments. We ask that you give a 24-hour notice but we also know that there are times when this is not possible.

### **Materials Needed for Care Sessions**

1. Bible, notebook, pen/pencil
2. Any assigned homework

### **Legal Release**

Your signature below serves as acknowledgement that you have read and understand the information contained in this document.

As one receiving care, I understand the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Sojourn's By-Laws and Covenant found at <http://sojournchurch.com/category/resource/policies/>

<sup>2</sup> A communication is "confidential" if not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those present to further the interest of the counselee in the care session, or persons reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication, or persons who are present during the communication at the direction of the counselor (including members of the counselee's family).



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1. I agree to receive gospel care knowing what it is and is not.
2. I understand the assigned ministry leader does not adhere to the typical theories and models of traditional "psychotherapy" and are not constrained by the ethical guidelines associated with their respective state or national license.
3. I understand I have the ability to choose other forms of care offered outside of Sojourn.
4. I understand and consent to Sojourn's ministerial limits of confidentiality described above.
5. Subject to the provisions of this Informed Consent form (including confidentiality), I am free to end my care sessions at any time.
6. The assigned ministry servant is free to end the care sessions at any time.
7. To ensure my health and wellness, the assigned ministry leaders may refer me to another ministry servant, psychologist or psychiatrist.
8. If I have any concerns about the gospel care, I am free to contact one of the Sojourn elders.
9. Out of courtesy, I will give at least 24 hours prior notice before canceling an appointment.
10. I hereby acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to seek the advice of independent legal counsel and that I have read and understood all of the terms and provisions of this Agreement

I further agree that any disputes that arise in connection with Sojourn's gospel care ministry shall be resolved as follows:

- (1) If I believe I have been personally wronged by my assigned Sojourn ministry servant, I will follow the church discipline article in Sojourn's By-Laws available on the Sojourn website<sup>3</sup>
- (2) For all other complaints, the parties to this agreement are Christians and believe that the Bible commands them to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian church (see Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8). Therefore, the parties agree that any claim or dispute arising from or related to this agreement shall be settled by biblically-based mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, a division of Peacemaker® Ministries. Judgment upon an arbitration decision may be entered in any court otherwise having jurisdiction in Louisville, KY. The parties understand that these methods shall be the sole remedy for any controversy or claim arising out of this agreement and expressly waive their right to file a lawsuit in any civil court against one another for such disputes, except to enforce an arbitration decision.

In doing so, I expressly waive the right to sue my assigned ministry leader, Sojourn Community Church, its elders, or anyone else connected with the gospel care ministry in a court of law—this waiver will be binding on all family members, heirs, legal guardians, attorneys, etc. who might take action in connection with or on behalf of the person being care for.

(One requesting care) printed name	Signature	Date
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(One requesting care) printed name	Signature	Date
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Parent/Guardian printed name	Parent/Guardian Signature	Date
(required for those requesting care under 18 years old)		

<sup>3</sup> Sojourn's By-Laws and Covenant found at <http://sojournchurch.com/category/resource/policies/>