



## **Prayer and Privacy - HIPAA**

HIPAA is the acronym for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996. This law was initially enacted as a provision to protect the sharing of personal health information. Since then, it has crossed over into protection in the disclosure of all personal information by financial institutions, credit agencies, etc. This broader application of the law has now reached into the most personal relationships within the church – specifically public sharing of prayer requests.

However distasteful that our even prayers would fall under government law, it is a good reminder to be careful about what is shared publicly about others in prayer – especially on the internet or via other printed materials.

Suffice it to say that if you would not want to have the entire world know about the details of your own prayer requests– then be discreet in what and how you share requests for others, too.

Keep praying boldly and be wise about it.

### **Here are some examples of what the information means:**

- 1) If Suzy Jo shares that she is having surgery (or marital problems, or any other personal information) and gives permission to share the information to a broad audience (like during church service prayers, or in the bulletin, or newsletter) then that is OK.
- 2) If Aunt Hillary shares the information about Suzy Jo then it is not OK to publish it or talk about it in detail to the broader audience (unless you go to Suzy Jo and get her permission).

### **Here is an example of why we share this information:**

- 1) A church in the district called us to ask if we had any information on the HIPAA laws concerning prayer – the situation that cause the question was as follows: A prayer group within the church would write down the weekly prayer requests, pray about them, and then deliver them to the church

office. The office was putting the requests, including the details, in the bulletin. One of the people in the group was not aware that what was shared in the group would end up in the bulletin! Here are some suggestions about how to share the request without causing problems:

- A) ask permission from the person to put the details in the bulletin;
- B) put the information in but only with a first name and without specifics – i.e. Suzy Jo requests prayer for healing; for challenges in her life; for peace; etc
- C) Keep the prayer requests in the group and with the Pastor, church staff, and prayer warriors only – and leave them out of the bulletin and other public items.

Again – all of that being said – be smart, be wise, be kind, be trusted with confidential information and remember if, as the original email said, Suffice it to say that if you would not want to have the entire world know about the details of your own prayer requests– then be discreet in what and how you share requests for others, too.

