

Strategies to ensure a lifetime of effective, ethical practice involve*

Awareness: refers to self knowledge – means knowing our preferences and tendencies, prejudices, values and weaknesses.

Alliances: means forging ongoing, trusting, honest relationships as a means for ethical action.

Attention: refers to a host of efforts to keep ethics on one's personal radar.

Action: Acting on our convictions and decisions is not easy. Ethics is more than what we say – it is how we practice what we do on a daily basis.

*Dr. Kim Strom-Gottfried, University of North Carolina, "The Ethics of Practice with Minors – High Stakes, Hard Choices"; Chicago, IL, Lyceum Books (2008).

Questions for self-reflection when sorting through a boundary question:

- Is this in my 'parishioners' best interest?
- Whose needs are being served?
- Will this have an impact on the service I am delivering?
- Should I make a note of my concerns or consult with a co-worker/colleague?
- How would this be viewed by a 'parishioners' family or significant other?
- How would I feel telling a colleague about this?
- Am I treating this 'parishioner' differently? (appointment length/time, amt. of personal disclosure)
- Does this 'parishioner' mean something 'special' to me?
- Am I taking advantage of the 'parishioner' in some way? Emotionally? Physically? Financially?
- Am I comfortable in telling someone or writing down my actions and choices on paper?
- Does this contradict with what is written in *Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers*?
- Have I given careful consideration to how cultural and ethnic norms might be relevant to the boundary issues?

A sound management protocol to deal with boundary issues should contain six major elements:

1. Be alert to potential or actual conflicts of interest.
2. Inform 'parishioners' and colleagues about potential or actual conflicts of interest; explore reasonable remedies.
3. Consult colleagues and supervisors, and relevant professional literature, regulations, policies and ethical standards (codes of ethics) to identify pertinent boundary issues and constructive options.
4. Design a plan of action that addresses the boundary issues and protects the parties involved to the greatest extent possible.
5. Document all discussions, consultation, supervision, and other steps taken to address boundary issues.
6. Develop a strategy to monitor implementation of the action plan.

*Social Work/Volume 48, Number 1/January 2003; Frederic G. Reamer; Boundary Issues in Social Work: Managing Dual Relationships

*The Bulletin, The College of Psychologists of Ontario, Volume 25, No. 1, July 1998

ESTABLISHING SAFE CONNECTIONS

Practical Steps for Pastors and Congregations

1. Begin with education.

Education is for everyone – laity, clergy, church leaders, and community. Present a positive picture of the purpose of the pastoral relationship, and then talk about why it must be dedicated to that purpose alone. Highlight the concern for safety and integrity in ministry relationships.

2. Clarify expectations: “zero tolerance policy” of sexual contact between pastors and parishioners.

Use the resources of the ELCA; look at the synod’s policy together with Church Council, Clergy and staff; discuss expectations with all church staff.

3. Prepare a policy and a plan for responding to complaints.

Work with the synod office to prepare a policy and plan for dealing with any complaints or concerns about sexual boundary violations. While congregations often become concerned about clergy sexual abuse because of liability concerns, and while these concerns may be quite reasonable, the primary concern of the congregation is to be about good ministry, and to be stewards of the gifts of ministry provided by them, by clergy, and laity alike.

4. Skip the “laundry list of don’ts” but establish a climate of openness, trust, awareness, carefulness, and respect.

5. Encourage your pastor to take care of personal needs away and apart from the congregation.

Encourage your pastors and other professional leaders to take good care of themselves. Encourage them to find the appropriate sources of personal care and counsel.

6. Make sure your pastor is taking appropriate time off.

Encourage the scheduling of meetings and appointments to provide for some free evenings every week. Encourage the pastor to set aside some other blocks of time besides a day off, for recreation. Honor the pastor’s commitments to these times apart.

7. Provide adequate vacation time for pastors.

Time at conferences and meetings out of town is not vacation time. Pastors are always “on” while they are in the community, even on a day off. Despite our best intentions, this boundary will be invaded.

8. Provide appropriate time and funds for continuing education for your pastor.

This investment in healthy and skilled ministry will be returned more than generously.

9. Provide fair and adequate compensation for pastors.

Inadequate compensation can lead to feelings of burn-out. This can lead to resentments and other behaviors that can deteriorate the ministry.

10. Discourage your pastor from being a lone ranger. Encourage accountability, appropriate supervision and collegiality. Be alert to isolation.

Encourage your pastor to spend time with colleagues, to attend cluster and conference meetings, and participate in synodical activities. This is part of the work schedule, not time off. Your pastor needs the wisdom and advice of peers and mentors – your congregation will benefit.

11. Clarify expectations of single pastors and make them known widely.

If your pastor is single, take time at the beginning of the ministry to clarify expectations and talk about their ministry in the congregation and community.

12. Encourage your pastor to “get a life!”. Promote healthiness and wholeness.

Single minded devotion to duty is often rewarded in our culture. This is especially true for pastors. We know that this can be unhealthy, regardless of one’s profession. Developing other talents, friendships, and hobbies is critical to a healthy ministry.

13. Honor and respect the pastor’s family commitments and family life.

Honor your pastor’s commitment to family. This deserves a high place on the priority list!

14. Help establish and respect healthy boundaries throughout the congregation.

All of us need to set clear and consistent, safe boundaries with others. Respect the boundaries of everyone in the congregation. Honor confidentiality.

15. Be clear about job descriptions, policies, schedules, and other guidelines for pastors, lay leaders, pastoral relationships, and lay volunteers.

Set and be clear about good boundaries in all areas of ministry. Have clear job descriptions, predictable and publicized schedules, and agreed upon expectations throughout the congregation. Establish job descriptions for the pastor and other professional leaders, for lay leaders, e.g. council members, committee chairs, members of the alter guild, office volunteers, teachers, etc.

Taken From: “Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand And Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse”; A resource for members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by Rev. Jan Erickson-Pearson. Produced by the ELCA Church in America, Division for Ministry, 1996

PREVENTION OF BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS

Guiding Principles to Establish and Maintain Appropriate Professional Boundaries

- 1) Anything you say or do may result in a boundary violation.**
 - We need to be continually aware of our actions and our words on the clients we work with.
 - We need to recognize the unequal power in our professional relationships.

- 2) Avoid behaviors that could appear “Risky”.**
 - Excessive touch, excessive self-disclosure, special favors or special arrangements can all lead to problems.
 - Understand the potential conflicts that exist with dual relationships. Take time to clarify relationships where you have interaction with the client in different roles.

- 3) Be “client” centered.**
 - Keep your role and job expectations clear and well defined.
 - Keeping the focus on the client prevents role confusion and role reversal.

- 4) When in doubt --- ASK!!**
 - Consult with co-workers or Supervisor when you have a question or concern.
 - Establish appropriate ways to consult with co-workers or supervisor regularly.
 - If you are receiving “mixed messages” from a client, talk to them about it.

- 5) Maintain a healthy balance between your personal needs and professional responsibilities.**
 - Intimacy needs (emotional or physical) cannot be met through your client.
 - Care for yourself, your family, and your social relationships.

- 6) You, the professional, are responsible for establishing and maintaining appropriate professional boundaries**
 - Remember, a boundary violation is not just an “event”. It is the result of a process that has occurred over a period of time.