

# Healthy Boundaries 201 – Beyond Basics

## COURSE WORKBOOK

A Course for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers



Working together to end  
sexual & domestic violence

## ***Healthy Boundaries 201 – Beyond Basics***

### **USING THIS COURSE WORKBOOK**

***Healthy Boundaries 201 – Beyond Basics*** is a workbook for an individual participant to be used in conjunction with a boundaries training course. It is intended to deepen faith leaders' understanding of the importance of healthy boundaries in ministry and teaching, and critically discern the complexities of boundaries in light of new challenges and emerging issues.

Understanding boundaries can help us manage the difficulties inherent in the role of clergy or spiritual teacher. Knowledge of what is appropriate, what is not, and whether an action is in the best interest of congregants or students can help us avoid possible boundary violations.

This training course workbook, ***Healthy Boundaries 201 – Beyond Basics*** is part two of a two-part FaithTrust Institute training program designed for clergy and spiritual teachers. The training program uses the DVD series, *A Sacred Trust: Boundary Issues for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers* and *Once You Cross the Line*, and is designed with three main objectives:

1. To increase awareness of the need for healthy and appropriate boundaries in the clergy/congregant or spiritual teacher/student relationship;
2. To illustrate the impact of appropriate vs. inappropriate boundaries in promoting effective ministry; and
3. To provide clergy and spiritual teachers with guidelines and suggestions for developing appropriate boundaries and necessary self-care strategies.

***Healthy Boundaries 101 – Fundamentals*** is part one of this two-part training program and is an introduction to the concepts of boundaries in pastoral and teaching relationships to help prevent boundary violations. It is intended for those who have not had boundary training.

FaithTrust Institute provides faith communities and advocates with the tools and knowledge they need to address the faith and cultural issues related to abuse. Founded in 1977, FaithTrust Institute is a national, multifaith, multicultural training and education organization with global reach serving African American, Jewish, Buddhist, Latina/o, Muslim, Anglo, Indigenous, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Asian, Pacific Islander, and many other communities.

FaithTrust Institute provides intervention and prevention training, consulting, educational materials and web resources in the following areas:

- Domestic and Sexual Violence
- Healthy Teen Relationships, Preventing Teen Dating Violence
- Child Abuse, Children and Youth Exposed to Domestic Violence
- Healthy Boundaries for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers, Responding to Clergy Misconduct
- Trafficking of Persons

People in crisis often look to their faith leaders for guidance and assistance. Religious values of justice and equality summon us to affirm the dignity and worth of every human being and the right of each person to live without fear or threat of violence. Our religious traditions obligate us to work towards an end to sexual and domestic violence in our communities and in society at large. FaithTrust Institute provides faith communities and advocates with the tools and knowledge they need to address the faith and cultural issues related to abuse.

Numerous victim advocate organizations and faith leaders have spoken to FaithTrust Institute about the great need to strengthen collaboration between faith communities and secular organizations in order to improve community-wide approaches to ending violence against women. FaithTrust Institute provides training and resource materials to strengthen this collaboration. Victims need and deserve the support of both secular and faith communities.



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sexual & domestic violence

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REV. DR. MARIE M. FORTUNE



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As we move forward in addressing the many challenges in maintaining healthy boundaries in ministry and teaching, many individuals are bringing new insight and leadership into our faith communities. Out of this collective multifaith effort, we support each other in our deepening awareness. We gratefully acknowledge the significant contributions to *Healthy Boundaries 201 – Beyond Basics* made by the following:

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Healthy Boundaries 201 – Beyond Basics  
Course Workbook

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### THE JOY OF BOUNDARIES

REVISITING THE BASICS .....	5
BOUNDARIES AND RELATIONSHIPS: “The Mending Wall” .....	7
THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR UNDERSTANDING OF BOUNDARIES:	
Hippocratic Oath .....	9
EXERCISE: BOUNDARY CROSSING VS. BOUNDARY VIOLATION .....	11
EXERCISE: SELF EVALUATION .....	13

### THEOLOGY AND BOUNDARIES

CREATION THEOLOGY AND THE NATURE OF BOUNDARIES:	
“God Marked a Line and Told the Sea” .....	15
THE FALSE SHEPHERDS .....	17
THE TRUE SHEPHERDS .....	19

### POWER AND VULNERABILITY

POWER AND AUTHORITY .....	23
EXERCISE: RESOURCES, POWER AND AUTHORITY .....	25
UNDERSTANDING POWER AND VULNERABILITY .....	27
EXERCISE: VULNERABLE OR AT RISK TO VIOLATE BOUNDARIES? .....	29
HOW WE USE POWER .....	31
THE CONCEPT OF POWER .....	32
HOSPITALITY AND ENTITLEMENT .....	33
USE OF POWER TO EXPLOIT OR TO PROTECT .....	35

### LIVING WITH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

#### Boundaries and Internet Technology

EXERCISE: SELF ASSESSMENT .....	37
INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY AND CLERGY MISCONDUCT .....	38

#### Boundaries and Social Media

DO YOU WANT TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA? .....	39
EXERCISE: SOCIAL MEDIA SCENARIOS .....	41
“FAITH COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS: SOCIAL NETWORKING” .....	43

#### Boundaries and Finance

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES .....	47
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#### Boundaries and Attraction

AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY .....	49
EXERCISE: SEXUAL ATTRACTION TO CONGREGANTS AND STUDENTS .....	51

#### Self-Care

THE TASK OF SELF-CARE .....	53
EXERCISE: SELF-CARE INVENTORY .....	55
EXERCISE: A SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST .....	57

**CLOSING**

PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY ..... 59

TRUSTING OUR LEADERS: “THE CONTRACT: A WORD FROM THE LED” ..... 60

READINGS FOR REFLECTION ..... 61

**ARTICLES**

“SOCIAL NETWORKING AND HEALTHY BOUNDARIES IN MINISTRY: ASKING  
CRITICAL QUESTIONS” *Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune and Rev. M.L. Daniel* ..... 65

“AN OPEN LETTER TO SPIRITUAL TEACHERS” *Scott Edelstein* ..... 69

“THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOU” *Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune* ..... 71

BOUNDARY BASICS FOR CLERGY AND SPIRITUAL TEACHERS ..... 77

DATING, FRIENDS, DUAL RELATIONSHIPS, GIFTS. .... 78

THE PULPIT, TRANSFERENCE, HUGGING AND TOUCH, INTIMACY. .... 79

PRESERVING BOUNDARIES: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL HEALTH ..... 81

**PARTICULAR BOUNDARY ISSUES FOR OUR COMMUNITIES**

“AFRICAN AMERICAN FAITH COMMUNITIES” *Kimberly Day-Lewis, J.D.* ..... 83

“ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITIES” *Rev. Thelma Burgonia-Watson* ..... 84

“JEWISH COMMUNITIES” *Rabbi Cindy G. Enger* ..... 85

“LATINA AND LATINO COMMUNITIES” *Rev. Luis Carriere* ..... 86

“LESBIAN/GAY/BISEXUAL/TRANSGENDERED CLERGY OR  
SPIRITUAL TEACHERS” *Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune* ..... 87

**SUGGESTED READINGS** ..... 89

## THE JOY OF BOUNDARIES

**Goal:** To recognize and affirm the value of boundaries particularly in our ministerial and teaching relationships.

*“I think boundaries are a gift. I think that boundaries are the thing that gives shape to our relationships, all of our relationships.”*

– Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune

(excerpt from *A Sacred Trust*, FaithTrust Institute DVD)

In a culture which celebrates the absence of boundaries as individual freedom, it is sometimes difficult to recall the value of boundaries in our lives and in particular, in our ministry or teaching. But without boundaries, we cannot really be in relationships. With boundaries, we develop trust in relationships and minimize the potential to cause harm.

## REVISITING THE BASICS

In order to pursue a deeper understanding of healthy boundaries in ministerial and teaching relationships, we assume that we begin with some fundamental principles.

Whenever we consider healthy boundaries in our pastoral and teaching relationships, we should begin by remembering **two basic goals** of healthy boundaries:

- To maintain the integrity of the ministerial or teaching relationship.
- To protect those who are vulnerable: congregants, clients, employees, students, staff, etc.

When I am considering crossing boundaries, I should ask myself, what is the likely impact on or potential harm *to*:

- The individual congregant/student?
- The congregation/sangha itself?
- Our shared mission?

These fundamental principles are always the starting points as we continue to expand our awareness of healthy boundaries and the complexity of living with healthy boundaries.



[illegible]

## BOUNDARIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

### “The Mending Wall” by Robert Frost

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunters is another thing:  
I have come after them and made repair  
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,  
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,  
No one has seen them made or heard them made,  
But at spring mending-time we find them there.  
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;  
And on a day we meet to walk the line  
And set the wall between us once again.  
We keep the wall between us as we go.  
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.  
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls  
We have to use a spell to make them balance:  
“Stay where you are until our backs are turned!”  
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.  
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,  
One on a side. It comes to little more:  
**There where it is we do not need the wall:**  
**He is all pine and I am apple orchard.**

My apple trees will never get across  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
He only says, “Good fences make good  
neighbours.”  
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
If I could put a notion in his head:  
“Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it  
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
**Before I built a wall I'd ask to know**  
**What I was walling in or walling out,**  
**And to whom I was like to give offence.**  
**Something there is that doesn't love a wall,**  
**That wants it down.”** I could say “Elves” to him,  
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather  
He said it for himself. I see him there  
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top  
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.  
**He will not go behind his father's saying,**  
**And he likes having thought of it so well**  
**He says again, “Good fences make good**  
**neighbours.”**

#### Discuss:

- What is Frost's resistance to the wall?
- How do his sentiments reflect your ambivalence about boundaries in ministry?

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## COMMENTARY ON BOUNDARIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

**Frost uses the low, hand-built rock wall** common in New England fields to discuss his resistance to boundaries. This wall he is walking and repairing with his neighbor is permeable, impermanent and in need of attention; it is more the notion of a boundary than a real wall. His neighbor refers to it as “a good fence.” It is voluntarily built and maintained by neighbors, not adversaries. It is not imposed from without.

**This is not the Berlin Wall**, built to be impermeable and permanent with the clear intention of walling in and walling out. That wall limited communication and relationships, divided families and countries all the while carrying the threat of war.

**This New England fence is meant, on occasion, to be crossed**, to bring news or flowers or shared produce. It is meant to enhance not limit interaction between neighbors. It is a recognition of a boundary that honors and respects the other and creates the possibility of relationship.

**Boundaries create space for relationship**, from the most intimate to the most casual. And occasionally they need to be tended, renewed, and clarified or renegotiated and changed. In this process of attending to boundaries, trust grows and also a particular kind of intimacy.

**Finally we do not know if Frost is convinced.** But his neighbor persists in his wisdom, “Good fences make good neighbors.”

(See page 77, “Boundary Basics for Clergy and Spiritual Teachers,” for further discussion.)

## Hippocratic Oath (400 BCE)

– Translation from the Greek by Ludwig Edelstein. From *The Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation, and Interpretation*, by Ludwig Edelstein. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943.

- Why is Hippocrates so specific about sexual boundaries? What does this tell us about his understanding of power and vulnerability?

[illegible]

## COMMENTARY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR UNDERSTANDING OF BOUNDARIES

The modern version of the Hippocratic Oath, written in 1964 by Louis Lasagna, Academic Dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University, is used in many medical schools today. It does not include any reference to sexual boundaries.

Contrast the 1964 version of the Hippocratic Oath with the current Code of Ethics for the American Association of Pastoral Counselors:

### **American Association of Pastoral Counselors Code of Ethics (excerpt) Amended April, 2012**

#### Principle III. Client Relations

E. We recognize the trust placed in and unique power of the therapeutic relationship. While acknowledging the complexity of some pastoral relationships; we avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of clients. We avoid those dual or multiple relationships with clients which could impair our professional judgment, compromise the integrity of the treatment, and/or use the relationship for our own gain. A multiple relationship occurs when a pastoral counselor is in a professional role with a person and 1) at the same time is in another role with the same person, 2) at the same time is in a relationship with a person closely associated with or related to the person with whom the pastoral counselor has the professional relationship, or 3) promises to enter into another relationship in the future with the person or a person closely associated with or related to the person. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, particularly within congregations or in family or couples counseling, we take reasonable steps to protect the clients and are responsible for setting clear and appropriate boundaries.

F. We do not engage in harassment, abusive words or actions, or exploitative coercion of clients or former clients.

G. All forms of sexual behavior or harassment with clients are unethical, even when a client invites or consents to such behavior or involvement. Sexual behavior is defined as, but not limited to, all forms of overt and covert seductive speech, gestures, written communication, and behavior as well as physical contact of a sexual nature; harassment is defined as but not limited to, repeated comments, gestures, written communication, or physical contacts of a sexual nature.

H. We recognize that the therapist/client relationship involves a power imbalance, the residual effects of which are operative following the termination of the therapy relationship. Therefore, all sexual behavior or harassment as defined in Principle III G, with former clients is unethical.

## BOUNDARY CROSSING VS. BOUNDARY VIOLATION

### Exercise

Make a list of activities in your ministry or teaching that you would consider to be boundary crossings and a list of activities that you would consider to be boundary violations.

BOUNDARY CROSSINGS	BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS

**What is the difference?**

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## COMMENTARY ON BOUNDARY CROSSING VS. BOUNDARY VIOLATION

**Boundary crossings** are a fact of life. All communication is a boundary crossing. Touch is a boundary crossing. Sexual activity is a boundary crossing. These activities are neutral in and of themselves. Boundary crossing is a necessity of ministry and teaching. We reach out to one another, we inform, we meet, we offer a healing touch, we preach, we write, etc.

The issue is **for what purpose** and **in whose interest**?

**Boundary violations** occur when the boundary crossing is not in the best interest of the other and results in harm.

The activity may be the same: for example, a phone call. A phone call can be used either to build up the other person or to cause them harm. The faith leader can either be calling to inform the congregant about an important meeting or to sexually harass them.

For Christians, Jesus' ministry provides a valuable paradigm for understanding the difference between boundary crossing and boundary violation. Jesus was all about boundary crossings: eating with sinners, talking with women, touching lepers, healing on the Sabbath, etc. But we never hear of him violating a boundary and causing harm to another person. He crossed boundaries that were oppressive and hurtful in order to bring forth justice, love, and healing.

## Exercise

- Do I ever worry that someone I serve as minister or teacher isn't able to do without me?
- Do I sometimes take over during a congregant/student's crisis?
- Do I experience inappropriate excitement from being a confidant?
- Have I confided in a congregant about my marriage or about a serious relationship?
- Have I ever placed a phone call to a congregant/student just because I wanted to hear their voice?
- Do I ever create situations in which I expect congregants/students to take care of me?

- What did you learn from this reflection?



## COMMENTARY ON SELF-EVALUATION

These preceding questions may seem provocative, but they push us to think critically about our interactions with congregants or students. We might identify situations which are more about us than about them, where our needs take precedence over theirs.

When our needs take priority and we forget the importance of acting in the best interests of the congregant or student, we are at increased risk of boundary violations.

Read and reflect on the article, “This Is Not About You.” (see page 71)

[illegible]

## THEOLOGY AND BOUNDARIES

**Goal:** To ground our understanding of healthy boundaries within the teachings of our faith traditions.

Our sacred texts and theology are rich sources of information and support as we deepen our awareness of the importance of healthy boundaries.

### CREATION THEOLOGY AND THE NATURE OF BOUNDARIES

#### God Marked a Line and Told the Sea

*“It was written as a polemical poem to counter spurious ideas of freedom and undisciplined license, and to affirm how the profoundest liberty involves a sense of boundaries and structure.”-Thomas Troeger*

##### Verse 1

God marked a line and told the sea  
Its surging tides and waves were free  
to travel up the sloping stand  
but not to overtake the land.

##### Verse 2

God set one limit in the glade  
Where tempting, fruited branches swayed.  
And that first limit stands behind  
the limits that the law defined.

##### Verse 3

The line, the limit, and the law  
Are patterns meant to help us draw  
a bound between what life requires  
and all the things our heart desires.

##### Verse 4

But, discontent with finite powers,  
We reach to take what is not ours  
and then defend our claim by force  
and swerve from life’s intended course.

##### Verse 5

We are not free when we’re confined  
To every wish that sweeps the mind.  
But free when freely we accept  
the sacred bounds that must be kept.

Thomas Troeger 1989 © Oxford University Press  
As appears in the *New Century Hymnal* of the United  
Church of Christ; Tune: KEDRON L.M.  
Used with permission by FaithTrust Institute  
Troeger was inspired by verses: Job 38:1-11;  
Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 104.

#### Discuss:

- How does creation theology help us understand the nature of boundaries?
- How do you relate to this paradox of freedom and bounds?

## COMMENTARY ON THEOLOGY AND THE NATURE OF BOUNDARIES

Troeger's powerful metaphor of the sea meeting the land helps us understand the nature of boundaries in the created order. It also offers us a nuanced picture of how boundaries work in our lives.

- The line between the sea and the land is always moving. When we walk the beach, we see (and perhaps feel) the surf reach its limit on the sand. One moment it is at our feet; the next it is several feet short of that.
- The tides are always changing. They are predictable under normal circumstances but never the same.
- If it is also true that boundaries in our relationships are fluid, how are we ever to know where the boundaries are? Hence the challenges we face every day in ministry and teaching. It means that we have to pay attention: no short cuts here. We always have to consider what is in the best interest of the congregant or student in discerning when boundaries should or should not be crossed.
- The hurricane or tsunami is a powerful reminder to us of what happens when the sea violates the boundaries of the land. People and property are always damaged or destroyed. These natural disasters cause great suffering but there is always the possibility of recovery, renewal and healing.
- The unnatural disasters of clergy or spiritual teachers violating boundaries can have equally devastating effects on an individual and a faith community. Recovery, renewal and healing are difficult but possible if the community acknowledges the betrayal of trust and holds the faith leader accountable.



## THE FALSE SHEPHERDS

### Introduction

The bible is filled with sheep. Everywhere we turn in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures, we find sheep. Throughout the Psalms and Prophets, metaphors of sheep and shepherds appear. In the Gospels, Jesus is identified as the Good Shepherd. In Matthew, Jesus the Shepherd says to the disciples: “See, I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

Sheep were important in biblical times and certainly very common. Many people were shepherds and many people knew about sheep. So it is no surprise that we see the frequent use of the metaphor of sheep and shepherds in scripture. In Ezekiel 34, we hear the prophet identifying the leaders of Israel as shepherds, i.e. those who had responsibility for the wellbeing of the people, the sheep.

### Ezekiel 34 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel: prophesy, and say to them—to the shepherds: Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? <sup>3</sup> You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. <sup>4</sup> You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them....

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>8</sup> As I live, says the Lord GOD, because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild animals, since there was no shepherd; and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep; <sup>9</sup> therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: <sup>10</sup> Thus says the Lord GOD, I am against the shepherds; and I will demand my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, so that they may not be food for them.

<sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD.

<sup>16</sup> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak. I will feed them with justice...<sup>23</sup> I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. <sup>24</sup> And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. <sup>25</sup> I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely...<sup>30</sup> They shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord GOD. <sup>31</sup> You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture and I am your God, says the Lord GOD.

- What are the characteristics of a false shepherd?
- What is the judgment that the prophet Ezekiel delivers on them?
- According to Ezekiel, who is speaking for God, what is the nature of the sin here?
- What is the outcome for the sheep? What is the outcome for the shepherds?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## THE TRUE SHEPHERDS

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who **enters by the gate** is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”

So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, **I am the gate for the sheep**. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:1-5, 7-10, NRSV)

### Discuss:

- What are the characteristics of a true shepherd?
- What is the meaning of trust in the relationship between sheep and shepherd?
- How do you relate to the metaphor of sheep and shepherd in your ministry?



## COMMENTARY ON WHAT THE SHEEP TEACH US

We seldom talk about sheep these days. And when we do, we often make fun of sheep or refer to them as a stereotype: stupid mindless sheep with a herd mentality. Actually sheep are not stupid at all. They definitely know what's going on around them all the time. They work as a community, closing ranks to protect the flock from danger and they are not easily led.

Sheep herders rely on dogs to manage a flock of sheep. There are two kinds of dogs with two different jobs. One dog is the protection dog. She lives with the flock. She is often a Grand Pyrenees or similar breed. Her job is to protect the sheep from predators like wolves. She hangs out with the flock; the sheep are very comfortable with her and accept her as a member of the flock. Her job is to stand guard, day and night. The other dog is the herder. This can be a border collie or a large dog like a German shepherd or Bouvier. A herding dog instinctively is a predator and wants to have a sheep. The sheep know this and are very wary of the herder.

So in order for this to work, the herder must be trained to control and use its instinct at the direction of the shepherd. A young untrained dog cannot be turned loose in a field of sheep. She will simply chase them in every direction and eventually will take one down. But a trained, disciplined dog is a marvel to watch. The shepherd directs the process to move the flock to a new area of green pasture. The protection dog stays back at the barn. The herding dog moves around the flock to guide and direct them. The flock is relaxed and not anxious.

The flock learns to trust a well trained dog and a familiar shepherd. Just as the Gospel says, the shepherd calls them by name and leads them out; the sheep follow because they know him. They trust the shepherd and the dog not to harm them. And the sheep will go out and come in and find pasture; they will find the nourishment they need for a full and abundant life.

But what happens when the shepherd and the dog betray their trust? This is the situation which Ezekiel addresses. Ezekiel calls out the shepherds because they have been feeding themselves off the sheep. Now, you may say, why is this a problem? Of course the shepherds are eating the sheep. These aren't vegetarian shepherds!

Actually the custom in that time was that a shepherd did not take from his flock for his needs. He bought his meat and wool from another flock. So Ezekiel uses this powerful metaphor to describe in great detail the ways that the shepherds have betrayed the sheep.

"You shepherds who have been feeding yourselves...I am against the shepherds...I will rescue my sheep. I will be their shepherd," Ezekiel says in delivering God's message. When Ezekiel calls out the shepherds, he isn't just talking about the clergy either. He is talking about the leaders of the people. He is holding up a mirror to all of us who provide leadership in our communities: the teacher, judge, coach, parent, police officer, senator, counselor, lay leader, or the President.

“You shepherds who have been feeding yourselves...I am against the shepherds...I will rescue my sheep. I will be their shepherd.”

Whenever we serve in a leadership role, we have a fiduciary responsibility. This is a fancy legal term which means that we have a responsibility to be trustworthy and to act in the best interest of the other person, even if it means not acting in our own interest. But we are all being called to account. And if we have betrayed the trust of the sheep, the text is clear: we may no longer be shepherds. We cannot be trusted. God is not pleased. “You shepherds who have been feeding yourselves...I am against the shepherds...I will rescue my sheep. I will be their shepherd. I will feed them with justice.”

For Christians, Jesus’ final instructions to the disciples after the Resurrection as recorded in John are: “Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep.” (John 21:15-17, NRSV) God has called us to be shepherds in many roles. Our job is twofold: to protect and to guide the sheep so that they may feed without fear. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10, NRSV)

May God give us strength and courage, patience and self-discipline to be worthy of the call to be shepherds among God’s people.



[illegible]

## POWER AND VULNERABILITY

**Goal:** To review our understanding of the realities of power and vulnerability that are fundamental to addressing healthy boundaries within our ministerial and teaching roles.

Most of us live with ambivalence about the power and authority of our roles as faith leaders. Some of us don't feel we really have power as a faith leader; others of us say that we don't want power as a faith leader. But we all experience power and vulnerability. So it is helpful to review our thinking on these issues.

## POWER AND AUTHORITY

Margaret Atwood in her novel, *Robber Bride*, describes an experience of a character who is a college professor:

She unlocks her office door, then locks it behind her to disguise the fact that she's in there. It's not her office hours but the students take advantage. They can smell her out, like sniffer dogs; they'll seize any opportunity to suck up to her or whine, or attempt to impress her, or foist upon her their versions of sulky defiance. *I'm just a human being*, Tony wants to say to them. But of course she isn't. She's a human being with power. There isn't much of it, but it's power all the same. (*Robber Bride*, page 24)

To paraphrase for those of us in ministry or teaching:

"I'm just a human being, you want to say to your congregants. But of course you aren't. You are a human being with power. There isn't much of it, but it's power all the same."

### Discuss:

- Do you agree or disagree with Atwood's idea of power? Why?

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## COMMENTARY ON POWER AND AUTHORITY

**The pastoral relationship is one of unequal power between minister and congregant.** The minister brings to a congregation resources (knowledge, expertise, experience, etc.) which carry power and authority. This power and authority can be used for good or ill.

**The fact of unequal power does not necessarily indicate the presence of abuse.** Power is not by definition abusive; it is a neutral reality in which we all share to a greater or lesser degree depending on socially constructed reality and circumstances. Parents have more power than children and can use that power to protect children in their vulnerability, nurture and support them in their development. Or they can use that power to neglect, abuse and exploit a child.

**The fact of unequal power does require a fiduciary responsibility on the part of the minister** (in its fullest sense, fiduciary meaning a responsibility to act in the best interests of the congregant even when such action does not coincide with the minister's personal interests). For example, a congregant may be considering a job offer in another state which would be an excellent move for the congregant. But the minister doesn't want to lose this chairperson of the religious education committee who is so effective. Our fiduciary responsibility requires that we support the congregant's choice to make the move even though it leaves us in the lurch with Sunday School.

**The fact of unequal power does require care of boundaries** in the relationship and protection of the congregant in her/his vulnerability (e.g. when dealing with a life crisis).

## RESOURCES, POWER AND AUTHORITY

### Exercise

When we are called, invited, hired, or appointed to a leadership role, it is because people believe that we have resources and they are asking us to bring our resources into their setting for their benefit.

**List the resources (sources of power and authority) that you have as a spiritual leader:**

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### Discuss:

- Did you discover resources you did not know you had? What does this tell you about your responsibilities as a minister or spiritual teacher?

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## UNDERSTANDING POWER AND VULNERABILITY

### Excerpts from *A Sacred Trust* (FaithTrust Institute DVD):

“The concept of power is not a negative word. It’s like fire. You can either use it to cook a meal or burn a house down. And so the same sense is power because power is simply influence and the ability to influence others. And very definitely ministers have power.”

– Evangelist Jimmy Hurd, Church of Christ

#### Discuss:

- Do you agree that “power” is a neutral concept? Why or why not?

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“I think that we don’t really understand the nature of the power that we have in the lives of people that are our congregants. I think we often feel powerless, in fact, as clergy persons. In fact, in some cases we may feel vulnerable in relationship to the people that come to us.”

– Pastor Jim Rismiller, Lutheran Church (ELCA)

“Being powerful or having power is not about feelings. It’s about resources; and either we have resources or we don’t have resources. But what they’re reflecting I think is very real and it has to do with not feeling in control. And that is a very real feeling in ministry, for better or for worse.”

– Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, FaithTrust Institute

#### Discuss:

- Think of a time when you “felt” powerless in ministry. In reviewing that situation, did you have resources whether you utilized them or not?

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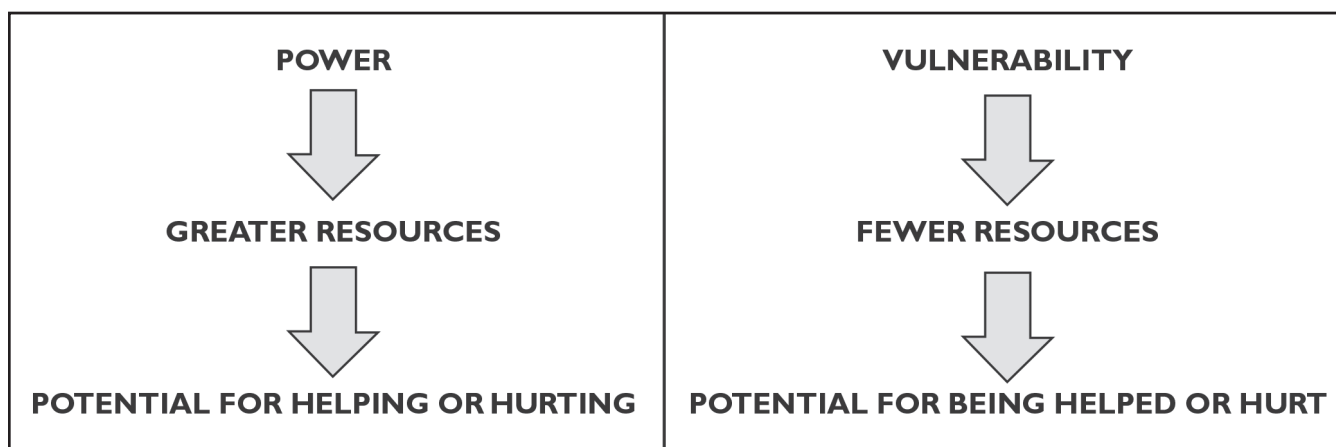
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## COMMENTARY ON UNDERSTANDING POWER AND VULNERABILITY



**Power and vulnerability are relative and contextual realities in our lives.** To speak of a person “having power” or “being vulnerable” in a vacuum is a misconception. A person has power *in relation to* another person in a given situation; a person is vulnerable *in relation to* another person in a given situation.

**Example:** A 14 year old Mexican male (son of undocumented parents) who has limited English skills is very vulnerable in relation to his 40 year old Anglo priest. The priest has greater resources. But the priest is vulnerable in relation to his Bishop who has structural power and greater resources to impact the priest’s life.

**The realities of power and vulnerability do not necessarily determine whether someone will be harmed.** But they do mean that harm is possible. Empowering someone who is vulnerable and giving them access to resources lessens their vulnerability.

**Example:** Educating children and youth about possible boundary violations and abuse and encouraging them to tell a trusted adult if someone does approach them inappropriately gives them resources to deal with such a situation.

## VULNERABLE OR AT RISK TO VIOLATE BOUNDARIES?

### Exercise

#### Introduction

Sometimes in a pastoral or teaching situation, we say that we “feel” vulnerable. In fact we may be feeling anxious because the situation is risky and we are facing the possibility of doing something unwise like violating boundaries. But in these situations, we are still in a position with resources to manage the outcome.

At other times we are in fact vulnerable in a pastoral or teaching situation, i.e. we literally do have fewer resources than the person we are with and if that person intends to take advantage of us, they may very well do so. These are frequently situations of sexual harassment in the congregation or sangha carried out by someone with much greater power than the faith leader.

**Directions:** Discuss these situations and consider whether you as the faith leader would be *vulnerable* or *at risk to violate boundaries*.

1. You respond to a request from a congregant to visit her at home. You arrive midday and knock on the door. She appears in her negligee, invites you in and offers you a glass of wine.

**Vulnerable or at risk to violate boundaries?**

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2. You respond to a request from a congregant to visit him at home. You arrive late afternoon and knock on the door. He lets you in. He immediately becomes physically aggressive towards you. Since he outweighs you by 100 lbs. and is very strong, you are unsuccessful in fending him off and he sexually assaults you. **Vulnerable or at risk to violate boundaries?**
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3. You are in your early 30's, recently ordained and new to this congregation. The chair of the Board of Trustees, a long time member of the congregation and generous donor, comes onto you sexually. When you rebuff him/her, he/she threatens to have you fired.

**Vulnerable or at risk to violate boundaries?**

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4. A member of your youth group whom you suspect was sexually abused as a child makes a sexual advance towards you. **Vulnerable or at risk to violate boundaries?**
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## COMMENTARY ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE OF A FAITH COMMUNITY

Frequently our congregations or organizations represent workplaces for faith leaders. As such, faith leaders face some of the same issues as any other employee. The possibility of sexual harassment is such an issue and our understanding of power and vulnerability are critical to addressing this situation. A senior faith leader may be sexually harassing a staff member; a particularly powerful lay leader may be sexually harassing the faith leader.

Beth Cooper (*Under the Stained Glass Ceiling*, 2011) estimates that at least half of all clergywomen experience sexual harassment by laity at some point in their ministries. Men may also experience sexual harassment from laity or senior clergy.

### **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations define sexual harassment as follows:

(a) *Harassment on the basis of sex is a violation of Sec. 703 of Title VII.* Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

According to this definition there are *at least two separate types of sexual harassment*:

(1) "*Quid pro quo*" harassment, which refers to conditioning employment opportunities on submission to a sexual or social relationship, and

(2) "*Hostile environment*" harassment, which refers to the creation of an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment through unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Source: [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)

Sexual harassment is not specific to gender or sexual orientation. Anyone of any gender or sexual orientation can harass or bully anyone of any gender or sexual orientation. It is important to remember that sexual harassment is not a function of who someone is. The faith community's concern should be for the health and safety of its staff and volunteers.

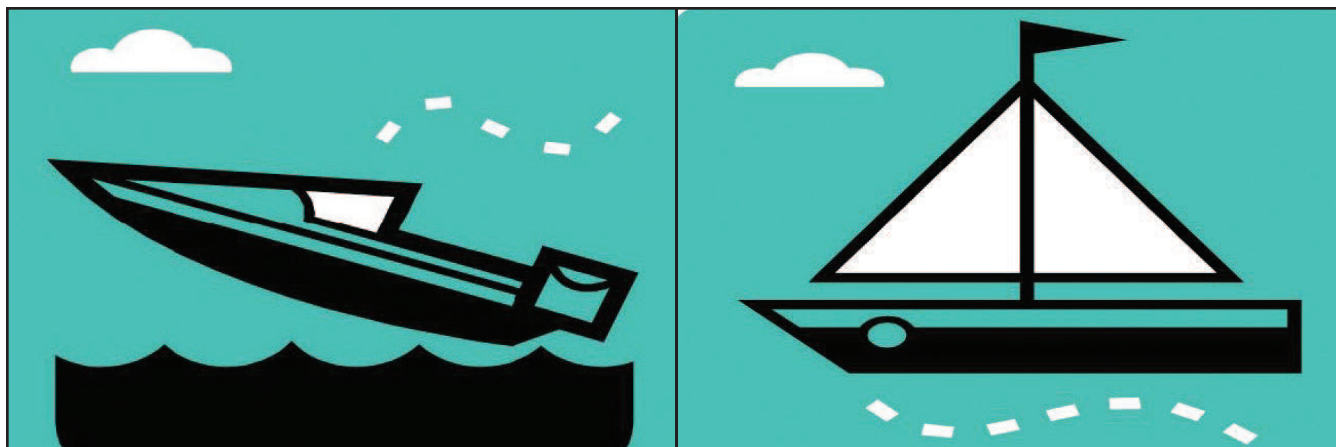
A composite image consisting of two panels. The left panel shows a woman with short dark hair, wearing a grey blazer, driving a car. She is looking forward with a slight smile. The right panel shows a diamond-shaped orange sign with a black silhouette of a person walking, indicating a pedestrian crossing. The sign is set against a background of trees.

Those of us who drive face a daily challenge of power and vulnerability and the very real possibility of violating boundaries that will result in harm to another person.

- Who has the right of way? Why?
- Who is vulnerable?
- Who is at risk to do harm?

[illegible]

## THE CONCEPT OF POWER



## RULES OF THE SEA

**SPEEDBOAT** is the “burdened” (obligated) party

- Has power and control of movement
- Is obligated to avoid boats under sail
- Has the “burden” (obligation) of responsibility

**SAILBOAT** is the “privileged” party

- At the mercy of the wind; less control of movement
- Is vulnerable to power boats
- Has the “privilege” of being protected

## COMMENTARY ON RULES OF THE SEA

The Rules of the Sea are literally the international standards for navigation on any body of water. The purpose of the Rules is to clarify that the vessel with greater resources has a responsibility to a vessel with fewer resources in terms of the power to maneuver.

The language used in the Rules is very interesting in this context. The vessel with greater power is the “burdened” party; the vessel with lesser power is the “privileged” party. These classifications by definition create a moral responsibility based on power and vulnerability. Although this runs counter to our standard social analysis which associates privilege with having power and resources and burden (of poverty, for example) with the absence of power and resources, it is language more fitting for our moral awareness as people of faith. This will become apparent in the next discussion on the Hospitality Code.

## HOSPITALITY AND ENTITLEMENT

### Hospitality Code

“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:17-19, NRSV)

“When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember, you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.” (Deuteronomy 24:21-22, NRSV)

“You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 23:9, NRSV)

### Discuss:

- Describe a time in your life that you were vulnerable (e.g. as a child, as a traveler, etc.).
- What do these teachings from Judaism teach us about power and vulnerability?

### On Entitlement

“For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves, . . .

‘Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth.

Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no flower of spring pass us by.

Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither.

Let none of us fail to share in our revelry; everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment, because this is our portion, and this is our lot.

Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow or regard the grey hairs of the aged.

But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless.”

(Wisdom of Solomon 2:6-11)

### Discuss:

- How does this passage from the Wisdom of Solomon contrast with the Hospitality Code?

## COMMENTARY ON HOSPITALITY AND ENTITLEMENT

The goal of our ministry or teaching should be the empowerment of our congregants or students, to lessen their vulnerabilities and equip them in following their spiritual paths.

### Power

- Power is a neutral fact of life for everyone. It is a measure of the resources one has in order to have agency.
- Having power, i.e. resources for agency, does not necessarily mean that one will misuse that power and exploit someone else. We have a choice how we use our power.

### Vulnerability

- Vulnerability is also a fact of life for everyone depending on multiple variables in one's life situation and experience.
- Being vulnerable, i.e. having fewer resources does not necessarily mean that one will be victimized or abused.

### Hospitality and Entitlement

- The Hospitality Code as it is presented in Hebrew scripture is not about altruism or charity. It is really about empathy. The people are taught to care for those who are most vulnerable because they themselves were also vulnerable as slaves/strangers in Egypt. We have been vulnerable before and we will be vulnerable again and so we need to remember this when we are in a position with resources to protect someone else in their vulnerability.
- The passage from the Wisdom of Solomon echoes the shepherds who are called out by Ezekiel in Chapter 34. It is the shameless assertion of entitlement and use of one's power at the expense of others.

## POWER AND VULNERABILITY

### Use of Power to Exploit or Protect

*(Optional Discussion)*

#### Excerpts from *Once You Cross the Line* (FaithTrust Institute DVD)

##### Part 1: Daniels and Roy

In this scene, we see Mr. Daniels, a married Roman Catholic youth minister, use his power to exploit Roy, a teenage member of the parish.

##### Discuss:

- What sources of power did Mr. Daniels possess?
- What made Roy particularly vulnerable?
- How did Daniels groom Roy?
- What was the impact on Roy as he reflected later in his life?

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##### Part 2: Daniels and Roy

In this scene, we see Mr. Daniels use his power to protect and support Roy.

##### Discuss:

- How did Daniels use his power to protect and support Roy?
- What was the impact on Roy?

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## LIVING WITH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

### BOUNDARIES AND INTERNET TECHNOLOGY

**Goal::** To address the challenges of the internet as it can enhance or undermine healthy boundaries in our ministries and teaching.

Internet technology is a remarkable tool that is increasingly accessible to more and more people. It gives us access to each other and to more information than we could ever have imagined. How am I at risk to violate someone's boundaries when I am using this particular tool in my ministry?

## SELF ASSESSMENT

### Exercise

How much time each week do you spend using the internet for:

- \_\_\_ Ministry?
- \_\_\_ Recreation and entertainment?
- \_\_\_ Study and research?
- \_\_\_ Socializing?
- \_\_\_ Managing personal affairs (e.g. banking)?

How does this affect my personal and professional life:

- Yes No Are you neglecting areas of ministry because of your time online?
- Yes No Are you neglecting personal and family relationships?
- Yes No Are you engaging in risky online behavior (sexting, "anonymous" chat rooms or sexual interaction)?

- Limit time on the computer for both work and play. Try an internet sabbath each week.
- Turn off the computer when not using it.
- Have the home computer in a high traffic area with the screen easily visible to others.
- Place family photographs on desktop.
- Develop and maintain embodied relationships with family, friends, parishoners.
- Practice other wellness activities such as exercise, spiritual nourishment, and other off-line creative pursuits.
- Regularly assess your usage of the internet.
- Find an accountability partner.
- Consult with a professional if you feel you cannot set limits on your internet usage or you are using it in ways that are unhealthy for you.



## BOUNDARIES AND INTERNET TECHNOLOGY

### INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY AND MINISTERIAL MISCONDUCT

The potential of the internet to undermine healthy boundaries in our ministries and teaching is apparent in the widespread availability of internet pornography. Here is an example of how one Protestant denomination is addressing this concern.

The United Methodist Church has raised the issue of internet pornography since 2004 and in 2008 made the use of pornography on church computers a form of sexual misconduct for clergy and laity. Here is a portion of their statement:

While definitions may vary, the 2004 *Book of Resolutions* offers the following:

**“Pornography is sexually explicit material that portrays violence, abuse, coercion, domination, humiliation, or degradation for the purpose of arousal. Any sexually explicit material that depicts children is pornographic.”**

— *Book of Resolutions 2004, “Pornography and Sexual Violence,”* p.166.

The global expansion of wireless internet and telecommunications provides limitless availability to pornography. Schools, businesses, and governments are struggling with the use of pornography by employees or students with the organization’s equipment.

#### **Pornography in the Church**

A disturbing trend in the Church is the use of pornography by clergy and lay employees and volunteers, even using computers and other equipment owned by or housed within churches and church-related organizations. We are aware of reports of adults sharing pornographic materials with children and youth during church activities, camps or programs. But beyond being saddened, shocked and dismayed by these reports, how do we raise awareness among congregational, conference, agency, school or cabinet leaders, and what do we do to identify, stop, heal and prevent recurrence in our communities of faith?

**The United Methodist Church declares that the use of pornography in church programs, on church premises or with church property by persons in ministerial roles (lay and clergy) is a form of sexual misconduct, a chargeable offense for laity and clergy in The United Methodist Church.**

United Methodist Church, 2008.

Prevention of the Use of Pornography in the Church (80279-MH-R9999)

## LIVING WITH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

### BOUNDARIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

**Goal:** To consider the benefits *and* risks of social media in order to make choices in its use that will enhance ministry and teaching and maintain the integrity of relationships.

Social media is an exciting and attractive tool for communication and social networking with great potential for ministry and teaching. It also represents numerous land mines that can lead to boundary violations and often unintended negative consequences if we are not intentional about how we use it. Our challenge is to think critically and bring our healthy boundary lens to our choices about how we use this tool.

### DO YOU WANT TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA?

**When you are considering using social media in ministry:**

- What is the purpose of your use of a specific technology?
- How does it enhance your ministry or teaching?
- How can you ensure transparency in your usage?
- How can you avoid boundary violations?

**Things to think about:**

- “I don’t post anything on my Facebook that my Bishop or my mother can’t see.”
- Facebook (Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) is forever.
- Nothing is confidential or private.

**If you decide to use social media, consider these guidelines:**

- Have a policy for your congregation or organization on social media and internet usage.
- Include transparency in your policy.
- Have someone in your organization supervising/monitoring the content of all social media sites.
- Direct clergy and teachers to not “friend” members but only respond to requests.
- Inform parents about the policy and practices affecting youth ministry.
- Separate personal and professional communications (e.g. Facebook, email, etc.).
- Do not post photos of someone without their permission.
- Do not post photos of children due to risk of photos being misused by predators.

[illegible]

## BOUNDARIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

### Social Media Scenarios

#### Exercise

**Directions:** In your small group, decide who will present a scenario. The rest of the group members will role play that person's peer support group, which meets monthly to discuss the boundary challenges that they face in ministry or teaching. The person presenting the scenario should present it to their peer support group in the first person (e.g. "I am the associate pastor at a small congregation..."). Address the question: *What do you see as the potential boundary issues, and how do you respond?*

1. You are the new associate pastor at a small congregation where you are beginning to build strong relationships with many congregants. One congregant whom you have known for a few months recently sent you an email to let you know she needs your support because she just found out her son is HIV positive. You share her email with the senior pastor because you need help in deciding how best to respond. Next week at church the senior pastor asks the woman how the church can support her and her son at this difficult time. The woman, assuming she sent her email to you in complete confidence, is upset and confronts you about the issue.
2. You are a spiritual teacher at a growing sangha where the students are accustomed to communicating using Facebook, Twitter, and texting. As a Buddhist teacher, you are reluctant to wade into the virtual world, however you feel pressured to establish a virtual presence in order to reach the 35 and younger demographic.
3. You are the senior minister and the youth minister is Facebook friends with a number of the youth and congregants. You do not have a Facebook page or any other virtual presence besides the church webpage. You have been overhearing congregants discussing personal information that has been shared by the youth minister on his Facebook page. A group of parents have been hearing the same information and have come to you to discuss their concerns.
4. You are a youth pastor at your church and in charge of monitoring the Facebook page for the entire church and youth group ministry. In an effort to separate your private life and your work life, you have two separate Facebook accounts. You are newly single and have recently created an account on an online dating website. Your profile includes personal interests and information, along with an unprofessional photo of you on vacation last summer. Looking to expand your online dating connections and possibilities, you share your dating profile on your Facebook page, not knowing that you accidentally shared it using your work account. It is a matter of seconds before members of your high school youth group are commenting on and sharing your information and photo with each other.

[illegible]

## FAITH COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS: SOCIAL NETWORKING

– M.L. Daniel and Marie M. Fortune

“I don’t post anything on my Facebook page that would not be acceptable to my mother and my Bishop.” – a local pastor

The explosion of the use of social networking technology creates many opportunities for ministry and also brings significant challenges. The lines between public and private have become blurred; the boundaries between faith leaders and congregants have become confused. In this environment, it is easy for naïve faith leaders to inadvertently cross boundaries in ways that may be harmful or certainly not helpful to congregants. It is also easy for predatory faith leaders to use this technology to exploit congregants.

How can we begin to think critically about our choices in the use of the social networking technology so that it builds up our faith communities as healthy and safe places rather than undercutting the integrity of our faith communities?

### Guiding Principles: Transparency, Screening, and Monitoring

- Does the faith community have an internet use policy or procedure that addresses employee and leadership engagement in social networks?
  - If so, does it speak to professional and private/individual communications, disclaimers and the faith community’s expectations?
- Are the community’s rules on public speech and private speech clear?
- Have relationship dynamics been considered in relationship to leadership “friending,” “unfriending” or seeking access to other members of the leadership team or members of the community within the social networks?
- Can the information gained by leadership via a social network be used to make employment decisions such as hiring, firing, promotions and demotions?
- What is the community’s liability exposure for the actions, statements, or oversight of its leadership that is engaged in social networks on the internet?
- Is there a checks and balances for how supervision will be conducted?
- How does the policy deal with supervision of the leadership that is responsible for vulnerable populations?
- Are there safeguards in place to identify predatory leaders who may have unfettered access to not only your population, but to their social networks by virtue of their position and the community’s virtual presence?

## **Practical Applications: Social Networks**

**Objective:** The fostering of accountable and responsible leadership and healthy communities.

1. Regularly monitored by senior leadership for:

- How is the site being utilized?
- What is being posted?
- How is assigned leadership
  - Responding to the post
  - Interacting with the community
  - Managing the site, and
  - Utilizing the internet
- Guidance opportunities
  - Training
  - Reflection
  - Corrective action

**Objective:** Management and Accountability

2. Friend request and Site Management:

- Does every requestor receive a copy of the code of conduct that expressly states the expectations for posting, a covenant of understanding, and a clear explanation of how violations, offensive and objectionable material will be addressed?
- Are requestor pages reviewed before being approved?
- Does the site moderator have sole discretion to determine what material is objectionable or offensive and when a violation has taken place?
- Does the site explicitly state that any and all posts are public information and that there are no expectations of privacy or confidentiality of any party utilizing this method of communication?
- Is it clear that no information posted on the site may be used without the written permission of the author?

**Objective:** When working with vulnerable populations in an arena that is changing daily, accountability, responsibility, and transparency are foundational.

3. Community's screening policy:

- What is the policy for screening anyone outside the target demographic that is unknown to the community before allowing them access to the site?
- Is it prudent to only accept friend requests and to prohibit solicitation of them?
- If parents or guardians of the target population are welcomed at actual meetings or gatherings, is the same true with regards to any virtual meeting place?
- What other measures are available to create a transparent atmosphere?

## Individual Assessment

- Does the establishment of a public page and a private page solve the dilemma of the line being blurred between the personal and the professional?
- What challenges arise from mixing public and private time, or public and private space?
- What are the implications of some members/students/followers/ spouses being friended or are granted access to your private page while others are excluded?
- Regardless of the character of the virtual identity, how do you manage content on your site, both your own content and the content that others post on your site and its dissemination?
- What are the parameters for political speech on your page?
- How might the increase of your knowledge of about your congregants' private lives through social networking be detrimental to your ability to serve effectively as a spiritual leader?
- Conversely, what happens to your ability to lead when the protective boundary between the leadership and followers has been effectively removed?
- What can you share and what pushes or violates appropriate boundaries, and how will you know when it happens?
- Is there anything about your engagement that could lead another to believe her/his communications to be confidential in nature?
- Are there legal implications for your community that can flow from what you do and say in the virtual world?
- Does your presence in the virtual world alter the realistic expectations of your community about your availability and or responsibility to the community?
- How do you handle former congregants when you are no longer their pastor but they are part of your virtual community?
- How much of your time is devoted to the utilization of technology demands and what is being sacrificed because of it?

(See page 65, "Social Networking and Healthy Boundaries in Ministry: Asking Critical Questions," for further discussion.)



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## LIVING WITH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

### BOUNDARIES AND FINANCES

**Goal:** To raise awareness about the potential for financial boundary violations and how to prevent them.

The handling of finances in a congregation or sangha is an area very susceptible to boundary violations. Whether it is the predator who sets out to embezzle funds or the wanderer who is sloppy and careless, the misuse of funds betrays the trust of the members. Financial boundary violations often correlate with sexual boundary violations. This is an area where careful precautions can prevent violations from occurring.

### PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

#### Principles to Help Insure Clear Boundaries in Management of Finances:

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Separation of personal and faith community finances

#### Guidelines for Congregations and Sanghas

- Discretionary funds should not be used
  - for personal needs
  - as a slush fund for personal banking
  - for routine budget items that the council has decided not to fund
- Bank statement should be sent to someone other than the faith leader
- Faith leader should tell board/council if he/she receives gifts of significant value
- Business expenses and reimbursable items should be reported in a timely way and include receipts
- An annual outside audit should be standard procedure
- At least two unrelated persons should count the monies from the collection
- Cash and checks should be safeguarded
- Keys to the buildings, business office, clergy offices should be accounted for
- **Beware of making exceptions to these guidelines!**

“I vow not to take what is not given to me, but to protect the belongings of others.”

– Buddhist Code of Discipline

[illegible]

## LIVING WITH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

### BOUNDARIES AND SEXUAL ATTRACTION

**Goal:** To consider ways to address sexual attraction to congregants and students.

Most pastors and spiritual teachers experience sexual attraction to congregants or students at some point. We may also experience sexual come-ons from those with whom we work. Sexual feelings can create challenges to healthy boundaries. How do we deal with these feelings and maintain the integrity of our relationships?

### AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

#### Excerpts from *A Sacred Trust* (FaithTrust Institute DVD):

“When sexual energy arises in a relationship, I think it’s saying, ‘Oh the boundaries are going down. Isn’t that interesting? I feel safe with this person.’”

– Jan Chozen Bays, Zen Buddhism

“It might be nice to think that all of us are so enticing and that people are just coming out of the woodwork for us. But I don’t really believe it’s about us at all.”

– Rabbi Julie Schwartz, Reform Judaism

“Some might argue that being aware of sexual attraction is good. So to have the thought is something to celebrate...If you recognize you are having the thought then you can get someone to be in conversation with you about it.”

– Ruby Takushi, Ph.D., Psychologist

“By the time you make it to the bedroom and you say that final ‘yes’, you’ve said ‘yes’ one hundred and one unspoken ways along the way.”

– Rev. Luis Carriere, Free Methodist Church

**Discuss your reactions to these quotes. Do you agree? Do you disagree? Why?**

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**Excerpts from *A Sacred Trust* (FaithTrust Institute DVD):**

“And then she started to leave... and then turned around and embraced me...what I had to attend to was my own attractions and my own feelings when this embrace occurred because I felt she was attractive and the embrace felt good.”

– Pastor Jim Rismiller, Lutheran Church (ELCA)

“The pastor always—that’s part of the power—has the responsibility to say ‘no,’ to set the boundary. It is not up to the parishioner. It is our job.”

– Rev. Gail Crouch, United Church of Christ

"What I said is, 'I don't want there to be a problem between us either because it's important to me that I be your pastor.' That framed it for her sake but also for my sake."

– Pastor Jim Rismiller, Lutheran Church (ELCA)

**Discuss your reactions to these quotes. Do you agree? Do you disagree? Why?**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## BOUNDARIES AND SEXUAL ATTRACTION

### SEXUAL ATTRACTION TO CONGREGANTS AND STUDENTS

#### Exercise

#### Excerpts from *Once You Cross the Line* (FaithTrust Institute DVD)

##### Part 1: Sam and Mary

In this scene, we see Mary, a visitor to the congregation, fall for Sam, the handsome, single pastor. Sam quickly realizes her attraction to him and his to her. He realizes he could easily wander and needs help.

##### Discuss:

- Sam comes to you as a trusted colleague, asking you to help him deal with his feelings for Mary and hers for him. What advice do you give him? How do you help him sort out this situation?

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##### Part 2: Sam and Mary

In this scene, we see Sam talking with a trusted colleague and then talking with Mary.

##### Discuss:

- What are the benefits of talking with a colleague when we are dealing with feelings of attraction for a congregant or student?
- What else might Sam have done to protect the integrity of the relationship?
- What if Sam and Mary decided to pursue a peer relationship outside of their pastoral relationship? What would this look like?

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## BOUNDARIES AND SEXUAL ATTRACTION

### COMMENTARY ON SEXUAL ATTRACTION TO CONGREGANTS AND STUDENTS

**Sexual attraction is a normal, everyday dimension of our human experience.**

**Consider the following:**

- We may have sexual feelings towards anyone. It may be an emotional and physical affection for another, a desire to connect, and/or sexual arousal. It may be an appreciation for the beauty of another from a distance. This is the fullness of our creation as sexual beings.
- The issues of transference and counter transference may also be at work. (see page 79)
- The challenge for us as moral agents is to correlate our desires with our values and commitments, our respect for others, and the responsibilities of our roles in ministry or teaching.
- “We are not free when we’re confined  
To every wish that sweeps the mind.  
But free when freely we accept  
The sacred bounds that must be kept.”

– Thomas Troeger, “God Marked a Line and Told the Sea” (see page 15)

#### **Read and Reflect:**

“He tried to block her out of his mind, but this was difficult. She kept watching him; the sound of her spoon in the container of yogurt was as regular as the drone of the fan. Her purposeful nakedness was oppressive, but not because he was actually tempted by her; it was more that the pure evil of having sex with her (the very *idea* of it) was suddenly his obsession. He didn’t *want* to have sex with her – he felt only the most passing desire for her – but the sheer obviousness of her availability was numbing to his other senses. It struck him that an evil this pure, something so clearly wrong, wasn’t often presented without consequence; the horror was that it seemed there could be no harmful result of sex between them. If he permitted her to seduce him, nothing would come of it – nothing beyond what he would remember and feel guilty for, forever.

– John Irving, *Son of the Circus*, 1994 (Ballantine Books)

(See page 78, “Dating, Friends, Dual Relationships, Gifts” and page 79 “The Pulpit, Transference, Hugging and Touch, Intimacy”, for further discussion.)

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## LIVING WITH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

### SELF-CARE

**Goal:** To affirm the importance of self-care in reducing our risk of boundary violations with congregants and students.

Clergy and spiritual teachers tend to be busy people juggling multiple tasks and multiple expectations from their congregants and students. We are also easily tempted to believe that we are indispensable. The consequence can often be ignoring our needs and our health which then puts us at greater risk to make unwise choices and engage in conduct which may bring harm to someone.

### THE TASK OF SELF-CARE

#### Moses' Leadership Style

"The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?'

Moses said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God.'

Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. **For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.**'"

(Exodus 18:13-18)

#### Discuss:

- How do you respond to Moses' father-in-law's comment in light of your own ministry and teaching?

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## COMMENTARY ON THE TASK OF SELF-CARE

Rev. Dr. Kirk Byron Jones in his book, *Rest in the Storm*, discusses delusion and denial (the things we tell ourselves about ourselves) as barriers to self-care:

- **Invincibility – Superman and Superwoman**

It is very easy for a pastor or spiritual teacher to see him/herself as invincible and different from others. Somehow, we can do it all. Somehow, the ordinary rules don't really apply to us. When we begin to see ourselves as "special," our risk to violate boundaries increases.

- **Indispensability – inflated importance**

It is also very easy for us to believe that without us, nothing will get done. We have to be at every meeting and every activity. We have to preach or teach every week. We can't possibly take time away or everything will fall apart. If this is the case, then we are not doing a very good job of equipping our congregants or students to function as whole, healthy people in the faith community.

- **Lack of Margin – between load and limit**

Finally it is easy to get into the habit of cutting it close. Whether it is time for a meeting or preparation for a sermon, we can begin to believe that there are more than 24 hours in a day. We lose sight of our own limits and try to carry more than we are literally capable of. We need some margins and some down time. We need to be able to say "no."

(See page 81, "Preserving Boundaries: Personal and Professional Health," for further discussion.)

## **SELF-CARE**

### **SELF-CARE INVENTORY**

#### **Exercise**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I take a real vacation each year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I walk every day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have an interest/hobby that has nothing to do with my job.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have a pet and I spend time with her/him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have regular prayer time each day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am active in an organization that has no connection to my job.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have one close friend with whom I can talk honestly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I spend time gardening.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I fast from electronic activity (email, facebook, etc.) at least one day a week.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I read at least one book a month for pleasure.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I play a musical instrument and practice regularly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I take off at least 1.5 days per week.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I meet regularly with a spiritual director or therapist.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I meet regularly with a colleague with whom I can honestly share.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I exercise regularly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I do not smoke.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I try to eat healthy, regular meals.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I listen to relaxing music regularly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I try to get sufficient sleep.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am careful how much alcohol I consume.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I get an annual physical.

**For those with a partner:**

\_\_\_\_\_ I eat most evening meals with my partner/family.

\_\_\_\_\_ My partner and I get away for an overnight at least once every 6 months.

**For those with children at home:**

\_\_\_\_\_ I attend most of my children's extra-curricular activities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Once a month I do something special with my children.

**What other self-care strategies do you use?**

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**Read and Reflect:**

"For the sake of others' welfare, do not neglect your own welfare. Understand your highest purpose and turn toward it."

*(Dhammapada, The Self:10)*

"The people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, making the Sabbath an enduring covenant for generations to come."

*(The Torah, Exodus 31:16)*

"The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves."

*(Mark 6:30-32, NRSV)*

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## SELF-CARE

### A SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

#### Exercise

As spiritual leaders, all of us are at risk of crossing boundaries inappropriately, thereby violating our role and abusing those who are vulnerable. But this risk of doing harm to those we serve or supervise can be considerably reduced through self-knowledge and self-care. If we understand our personal history and its effects on us, our behavior and perceptions are less likely to be shaped by that history. If we are aware of our personal needs and are taking care of those needs in appropriate ways, we are less likely to impose those needs inappropriately upon our ministerial relationships. Furthermore, if we are aware of the power implicit in our role and how that power affects those we serve and supervise, we are less likely to misuse that power.

Use this checklist to assess your risk of violating boundaries. If you answer “no” to the first question in “Personal History,” skip to the questions under “Psychosexual Integration.” An answer of “no” to any question, except the first, indicates an area in which self-awareness and self-monitoring are crucial.

#### Personal History

- |     |    |  |
|-----|----|--|
| Yes | No | Does my personal or family history include sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, or other family dysfunction?                                      |
| Yes | No | Am I coming to terms with the issues and feelings involved in my personal history? Am I able to identify areas in my history where I need healing? |
| Yes | No | Am I taking steps to address the areas where I need healing?   |

#### Psychosexual Integration

- |     |    |   |
|-----|----|---|
| Yes | No | Have I discussed my sexual history with someone (a professional or a friend)?   |
| Yes | No | Am I comfortable with my sexual orientation?  |
| Yes | No | Do I monitor my sexual fantasies for inappropriate persons, such as children, clients, congregants, employees, etc.?  |
| Yes | No | Are my personal friendships and intimate relationships appropriate—namely, age-appropriate and not involving anyone with whom I have a professional relationship? |
| Yes | No | Am I able to identify my emotional/sexual needs and meet them appropriately?  |

## Personal/Professional Self

Yes	No	Am I meeting my personal needs outside of my work setting?
Yes	No	Do I acknowledge the power inherent in my professional role?
Yes	No	Am I aware of the effects of that power on those with whom I interact, for example, the attraction that power holds for some people?
Yes	No	Am I aware of the consequences to me of my violating the boundaries that derive from my role as a spiritual leader?
Yes	No	Do I have a consultation or supervision setting in which I can discuss these questions?

Fran Ferder, FSPA, Ph.D., D.Min., and John Heagle, M.A., J.C.L., L.M.H.C., are the co-directors of Therapy & Renewal Associates (TARA); Used with permission.

## NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## CLOSING REFLECTIONS

**Goal:** To conclude the session by remembering and affirming our grounding within our faith traditions and the privilege and responsibility we have in being called into leadership.

## PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

### Excerpts from *A Sacred Trust* (FaithTrust Institute DVD):

“‘Anyone who goes out and comes in through me will find safe pasture.’ I never read or hear those words again, given the last twenty years in both the work that I do and in the situations in churches, congregations and synagogues. The first responsibility of a minister is to create a safe setting that people can come and be there, and know and expect – and have a right to expect – that they will be safe.”

– Fr. John Heagle, Roman Catholic

“To me, it’s a tremendous privilege to be a Buddhist priest.”

– Jan Chozen Bays, Zen Buddhism

“It’s what you do. What you do is a reflection of who you are.”

– Evangelist Jimmy Hurd, Church of Christ

“The call to ministry is a privilege. It’s not a right. It’s a privilege and a responsibility.”

– Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, FaithTrust Institute

“There’s not a formula to this – to how to do this – how to navigate our way through the maze of human emotions and human relationships. There is a word in Hebrew halavai – ‘it should only be so.’ If only there were that kind of a formula so that we knew that when we were making our way through: ‘We’re not supposed to do that; we’re not supposed to do that.’ What I think it requires is that we be awake. And aware.”

– Rabbi Zari M. Weiss, Reform Judaism

## TRUSTING OUR LEADERS

### “The Contract: A Word from the Led” by William Ayot

From *Leading From Within*, Intrator and Scribner, Eds., 2007, Jossey-Bass Publishers  
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“And in the end we follow them –  
not because we are paid,  
not because we might see some advantage,  
not because of the things they have accomplished,  
not even because of the dreams they dream  
but simply because of who they are:  
the man, the woman, the leader, the boss  
standing up there when the wave hits the rock,  
passing out faith and confidence like life jackets,  
knowing the currents, holding the doubts,  
imagining the delights and terrors of every landfall:  
captain, pirate, and parent by turns,  
the bearer of our countless hopes and expectations.  
We give them our trust. We give them our effort.  
What we ask in return is that they stay true.”

#### Discuss:

- From your perspective as one who follows the leadership of another person, how do you relate to the expectations expressed in this poem?
- From your perspective as a leader, how do you relate to these expectations placed on you?

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## READINGS FOR REFLECTION

“Being appointed spiritual leader . . . is an awesome commission from God. . . .To undertake such a vocation for light and transient reasons, to use it as a quick leap to prominence or as gratification for a boundless and pathological egocentricity is to profane it.”

– Samuel D. Proctor, *We Have This Ministry*, 1996

“First establish in yourself what is proper, then you can instruct others. As you instruct others is how you should act. It is easy to do that which is harmful and not good. It is hard to do what is beneficial and good. One’s self is difficult to control. Once controlled, then one can control others. When you are well trained you will find the best and rarest protection.”

– *Dhammapada*, The Self: 158-160

“At the time it is administered, any discipline seems a cause for grief, not joy, but later it bears fruit in peace and justice for those formed by it. So hold up your drooping hands and steady your trembling knees. Make straight the path you tread, that your halting limbs will not be dislocated, but healed.”

– Hebrews 12:11-13 (*The Inclusive Bible*, 2007)

“That’s why I want to remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God didn’t give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.”

– 2 Timothy 1:6-7 (*The Inclusive Bible*, 2007)

“YHWH, you are my shepherd –  
I want nothing more.  
You let me lie down in green meadows;  
You lead me beside restful waters:  
You refresh my soul.  
You guide me to lush pastures  
For the sake of your Name.  
Even if I’m surround by shadows of Death,  
I fear no danger, for you are with me.  
Your rod and your staff –

They give me courage.  
You spread a table for me  
In the presence of my enemies,  
And you anoint my head with oil –  
My cup overflows!  
Only goodness and love will follow me  
All the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in your house, YHWH,  
For days without end.”

– Psalm 23 (*The Inclusive Bible*, 2007)



## COMMENTARY ON TRUSTING OUR LEADERS

“I would be true, for there are those who trust me; . . .”

– hymn by Howard Arnold Walter, 1907, Congregational Pastor

In spite of the headlines of recent years, many people still take the risk of trusting their faith leaders. Fundamental to that trust is the assumption that we will do our best to act in their interest. This is perhaps the most humbling dimension of ministry and teaching. Those we serve come with the assumption that we have resources that may be helpful to them, that we will share these freely, and that we will be watchful for their interests. On some level, they expect us to be perfect, to have all the answers, to never violate boundaries. But even as they realize our imperfections and come to terms with our foibles and limitations, they still expect us to do our best.

Congregants and students should not trust us unconditionally because we cannot promise to be perfectly trustworthy. Even on our best days, we stumble. But when we stumble, do we have the capacity to own our mistakes and seek to rectify the impact those mistakes may have had on others? And if we don't have this capacity, does the faith community have the capacity to step in and insure that we do no further harm? Ultimately, it is reasonable to expect the faith community to provide a safe space where congregants' vulnerabilities can be expressed with the possibility of healing, not further harm.

Scott Edelstein, in his “An Open Letter to Spiritual Teachers” offers an important perspective as a layperson/student. His voice is invaluable for those of us who are clergy or spiritual teachers. He is frank and honest about the expectations and assumptions of those we serve and about the bottom line: we are responsible for maintaining healthy boundaries in our ministerial and teaching relationships. (See page 69 for further reflection.)

“God does not call us to be perfect; God calls us to be faithful.”

– Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune

## ARTICLES

The articles you find included here are intended to be additional resources for your learning and reflection.

Some of these articles appeared in *Healthy Boundaries 101 – Fundamentals*. We include them here because we feel they summarize important fundamental principles on boundaries inherent in the role of clergy or spiritual teacher. Other selected articles also address issues that continue to be critical to our particular communities.

In addition we offer two new articles. M.L. Daniel and Marie M. Fortune discuss social media issues in-depth in “Social Networking and Healthy Boundaries in Ministry: Asking Critical Questions.” Scott Edelstein brings a valuable lay person’s perspective that is important for ministers and spiritual teachers in his “An Open Letter to Spiritual Teachers” from *Sex and the Spiritual Teacher*.

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## **SOCIAL NETWORKING AND HEALTHY BOUNDARIES IN MINISTRY: ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS**

*– M.L. Daniel and Marie M. Fortune*

There is a sacred trust between spiritual leaders and those who have entrusted their spiritual well being to them. It is a trust that is governed by an appreciation for maintaining appropriate and healthy boundaries that clearly define each party's role. In traditional brick and mortar spiritual arenas, the challenges and benefits of boundaries, at best, can be described as complex. However, in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world where technology allows for connection 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the complexity of boundary considerations have multiplied exponentially. No matter where you are or turn, people are posting, texting, Tweeting, Facebooking, YouTubing, checking email, or consulting their calendar on their smart phones. In today's society, vast resources of information and social networks are virtually at our fingertips every moment of the day. What it means to be community, in communication or connected to one another is being redefined daily in the fast paced world of virtual reality, as more and more people are embracing the latest technology both in and out of faith communities. It is common for faith communities of all sizes and spiritual leaders of every background to establish a presence in the virtual world. As such, the challenges and benefits of establishing and maintaining healthy and appropriate boundaries in this new frontier pose some critical questions for spiritual leaders and communities venturing into this arena.

Social networking is not new. Not so long ago, social networking implied face to face encounters that created and sustained community. People of faith gathered in public settings, in homes, mosques, churches and synagogues to worship and study together. However, the internet has taken social networking to a whole new level. There are social networks that cater exclusively to faith communities such as Tangle.com, Mychurch.org, and Tuggle.it, and those that target a wider mainstream audience such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace. What all of them have in common are memberships that increase every day. On Facebook alone, there are 900 million users, half of which log in on any given day. Additionally, a majority of individuals using social networking are 35 years old and under – the same demographic that is disappearing in most mainstream denominations.

The extensive reach of these social networks is attractive and has enticed many faith communities and spiritual leaders to establish a virtual presence as a ministerial resource. For many, the social networks and the World Wide Web are exciting new tools for ministry. While these tools offer access to fertile grounds and present exciting opportunities for ministry, they are equally fertile grounds for ethical and boundary violations, both intentional and unintentional, by spiritual leaders and by those with whom they share the space. Like most tools, they are in and of themselves neutral and as such, have the potential for good or harm. As such, spiritual leaders ought to enter this new arena having asked critical questions in order to use these tools wisely and preserve their sacred trust.

Certainly, the greatest benefit represented by the internet and social networking is quick and easy communications. The mundane organizing and networking within faith communities can be much more easily accomplished through a congregation's website and email. The second greatest benefit is the potential for "marketing", i.e. letting people know who we are, what we are doing, and how it might interest them. But there are also landmines at every turn that we need to consider.

In the policies and procedures of some faith communities active in the virtual world, it is evident that they have given this issue some consideration, for which they are to be commended. Yet there still remains work to be done, and questions to be asked if ministry in cyberspace is to be done responsibly.

There are some basic questions and considerations for all faith communities and their leadership who are either considering establishing a virtual identity or presence or those who already have. Looking first to organizational considerations:

- Does the faith community have an internet use policy or procedure that addresses employee and leadership engagement in social networks?
  - If so, does it speak to professional and private/individual communications, disclaimers and the organization's expectations?
- Are the organization's rules on public speech and private speech clear?
- Have employment issues been considered in relationship to supervisor or leadership "friending," "unfriending" or seeking access to subordinates within social networks?
- Can the information gained by an organization or supervisor via a social network be used to make employment decisions such as hiring, firing, promotions and demotions?
- Are there employment factors to consider and what is the liability exposure for the organization for the actions, statements, or oversight of its leadership that is engaged in social networks on the internet?
- Does the organization's policy and procedure set up a checks and balances for how oversight will be conducted?
- How does the policy deal with supervision of the leadership that is responsible for vulnerable populations?
- Are there safeguards in place to identify predatory leaders who may have unfettered access to not only your population, but to their social networks by virtue of their position and the organization's virtual presence?

Considering just the issues surrounding leadership and vulnerable populations, the bottom line should be transparency. This operating principle rests in the reality that there is no privacy or confidentiality on the internet and that whatever is posted on social networking sites is there forever. With these things in mind, here are some practical applications that faith communities can consider that would be helpful.

1. Social networking pages should be regularly monitored by senior leadership. Senior leadership charged with supervising the site should be looking not only at how the site is being utilized and posted on, but at how the leadership assigned to minister to this population is responding to the posts, interacting with the community, managing the site, and utilizing the internet, and where appropriate, offering training or corrective action. The objective of such is the fostering of accountable and responsible leadership and healthy communities.
2. Every friend request accepted should be accompanied by an electronic copy of the organization's code of conduct that expressly states the expectations for posting, a covenant of understanding, and a clear explanation of how violations, offensive and objectionable material will be addressed. With respect to site participants, the site moderator should have sole discretion to determine what material is objectionable or

offensive and when a violation has taken place. Also, it should be explicitly stated that any and all posts are public information and that there are no expectations of privacy or confidentiality of any party utilizing this method of communication. Further, that no information posted on the site may be used without the written permission of the author.

3. The organization should adopt a policy of screening anyone outside the target demographic that is unknown to the organization before allowing them access to the site. Equally prudent is policy for persons in leadership to only accept friend requests and to prohibit solicitation of them. Additionally, if parents or guardians of the target population are welcomed at in-person meetings or gatherings, the same should be true with regards to any virtual meeting place; this assists in creating a transparent atmosphere. When working with vulnerable populations in an arena that is changing daily, accountability, responsibility, and transparency are foundational.

These limited considerations are in no way exhaustive, but they are the introduction to the more difficult conversation organizations should be having around social networks and establishing healthy boundaries.

Just as faith communities should be taking on the challenge of addressing boundary issues, so should each individual spiritual leader engage in her own self assessment. Here are some points to ponder:

- The very nature and design of social networks tend to contribute to the line being blurred between the personal and the professional. As such, it begs the question: Does the establishment of a public page and a private page solve this dilemma?
- What challenges arise from mixing public and private time, or public and private space?
- What are the implications of doing so when some members/students/followers are friended or granted access to your private page while others are excluded?
- How about when one spouse or partner is friended and not the other?
- Regardless of the character of the virtual identity, how do you manage content on your site, both your own content and the content that others post on your site, and its dissemination?
- Do you engage in political speech on your page and if so, are there guidelines?
- How might your awareness of congregants' private lives through social networking be detrimental to your ability to serve effectively as a spiritual leader? Conversely, what happens to your ability to lead when the protective boundary between the leadership and followers has been effectively removed?
- What can you share and what pushes or violates appropriate boundaries, and how will you know when it happens?
- Is there anything about your engagement that could lead another to believe her/his communications to be confidential in nature?
- Are there legal implications for your community that can flow from what you do and say in the virtual world?
- Does your presence in the virtual world alter the realistic expectations of your community about your availability and or responsibility to the community?
- How do you handle former congregants when you are no longer their minister but they are part of your friend community?
- How much of your time is spent using technology and what might be sacrificed because of it?

Spiritual leaders will benefit from exploring these questions and considerations, especially in the context of boundary training. Today's technology offers the temptation of virtual community and virtual intimacy. Critical questions remind us of the limitations of both.

Regardless of whether you choose to engage or not engage in social networking, an informed decision requires fully entertaining all of the critical issues. Social networks and the internet may very well be the tools for outreach and organizing today; however, faith communities and spiritual leaders have an obligation to engage this new frontier carefully and responsibly, so as to maintain the integrity of ministerial relationships and protect the sacred trust inherent in ministry.

Published by FaithTrust Institute, 2011.

## AN OPEN LETTER TO SPIRITUAL TEACHERS

– Scott Edelstein

To many of us students, your role as a spiritual teacher looks glamorous and exciting – not unlike being a movie star. Some of us, though, realize that your role can sometimes be difficult, painful, frustrating, confusing, tedious, thankless, and lonely.

But whether we're accurate or deluded about your life, all of us want and expect the best from you.

We also want you to encourage the best from us – though you won't always get it. Sometimes we'll project all kinds of things onto you – our hopes, dreams, fears, expectations, and fantasies. It's your job to not buy into any of our projections -and not to do any projecting of your own.

Your role requires you to always act in our best interests. Sometimes this means disappointing or upsetting some of us. Sometimes it means doing the opposite of what we may want, or expect, or ask for. Sometimes it means holding your emotions and actions in check. We need you to take a deep breath and do what's right.

Over and over, breath by breath, we need you to return to your commitment to serve. If what you're about to do isn't in a student's best interest, don't do it. If you're already doing it, remember your commitment, stop what you're doing and help keep everyone safe.

To help us not lost our own way, we need you to admit your limitations – publicly, straightforwardly, and often. You will help us the most if you frame each admission not as a confession, but as guidance for what we can and can't (or shouldn't) expect of you. Each admission will also serve as a model for us to follow.

When you don't know something and say "I don't know," this increases, rather than reduces, our trust in you and in your ability to have a positive effect on our lives.

You are an alpha figure – and perhaps the only alpha figure – in our spiritual community. We trust you and depend on you to be honest with us, to guide us, to provide safety (but not comfort), and to consistently put our interests before your own.

Yes, some of us want to have sex with you. A few of us may try to seduce you; others may offer themselves to you. Still others may flirt with you or try to envelop you in sexual energy. Some of us are very aware of our sexual power, and very skillful at using it. Some of us will be enormously aroused by your very ability to rebuff our attempted seductions. Some of us will be turned on by your clothes, your mannerisms, your resemblance to our parents, and other things that have nothing to do with you.

If you are single, some of us will find your availability a huge turn-on, even though we know you're not available to us. If you are celibate or have a partner, some of us will be turned on by your status as forbidden fruit.

A few of us may try to seduce you as a test. In these cases, we see you as a surrogate parent: we trust you deeply, but need to make sure that our trust is deserved. We may try hard to get you to violate that trust, yet what we actually want is for you to keep the sexual boundary in place.



A few of us seek high drama, and will go for the thrill of becoming (or declaring ourselves to be) your victims, no matter what you do or don't do.

When all of this starts to drive you half crazy, we still expect you to love and support us.

You can't stop some of us from doing these things – but you can help us (and yourself) stay safe. You can set clear boundaries, and you can anticipate and avoid potentially dodgy encounters. You may even need to avoid socializing with us outside of large community gatherings such as picnics, fundraising events, and potluck suppers.

As you get older and better known, these temptations and difficulties will probably grow. As a result, over time you will need to make your boundaries continually stronger and clearer.

You cannot do all this along. No one can. While some of us don't understand this, many of us do. We realize that you can best support us when you ask for the support of our tradition, the wisdom that underlies it, and the people you trust. We also understand that when you turn to your partner, to friends and relatives, to colleagues, to helping professionals, and to your own teacher for this support, you are not turning away from us.

If you have a partner, we need you to love and appreciate them, even though this may make some of us jealous – and even though some of us will project things onto them, just as we do with you.

We want and need you to be in top form. This means we need you to take good care of yourself. Regularly do things that feed and support you – spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Good self-care is far more noble than working yourself sick. It also provides a wholesome and inspiring example for us.

We are always eager to take all you can give, plus much more. So don't expect us to notice when you've reached your limit. You're the one and only person who can keep yourself from becoming depleted. When you pull back, set a boundary, or take a break, we may not like it, but it ultimately helps all of us. So, no matter what we say or ask for, the reality is that we want you to say "no" to us when your health and sanity require you to.

If you lost your way sexually, don't try to keep the truth from us. You will do the least damage if you go public about it immediately. The sooner you do this, the less pain and harm there will be for everyone, and the easier and more quickly you will find your way back to a centered life. And if you're currently in a secret sexual relationship, don't make us wonder and gossip and worry. Tell us what's going on and face the consequences. This helps everyone – especially us, your students and members of your spiritual community.

If, at some point, your role or situation or obligations genuinely become too much to handle, the best thing you can do for us is to say, "I can't do this any longer," and step down. There is nothing shameful – and much that is noble – in this. You will of course disappoint us. But you will disappoint us far more if you pretend to be someone you aren't – or if you try to do the impossible and fail.

We need you to love us. Not sexually, and not in some idealized, storybook way, but as someone whom we can trust to act in our best interests, over and over. Without this love, you cannot serve wisely.

We also need you to love yourself, for the same reason.

## “THIS IS NOT ABOUT YOU”

– Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune

**ABSTRACT.** Often these days, reflections on the nature of ministry begin with a critique of the dysfunction or failure of an individual ministry or of an institution which has all too often resulted in abuse or harm to someone else. This article was originally delivered as a Commencement Address on May 29, 1998, at Bangor Theological Seminary in Bangor, Maine. In it, the author addresses those persons going into ministry and suggests a framework for healthy ministry with a clear sense of self and boundaries which serve to enhance a ministerial vocation. As such, it provides a positive opportunity to reflect on the doing of ministry with an emphasis on preventing the violation of boundaries and avoiding doing harm.

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Graduating from seminary is sort of like being called up from the minor leagues to the majors. You spend a lot of time and energy preparing and suddenly you find yourself standing at home plate in Yankee Stadium with a bat in your hand and somebody is throwing a 98 mph fast ball at you. It can be exhilarating, but it is also terrifying.

A seminary education usually involves spending at least three years preparing to enter or to extend the vocation of ministry. This formal education is necessary but insufficient to prepare you for your vocation. Its purpose finally is to teach you how to think critically and how to integrate your head and your heart in making yourself available to others through ministry. Your exegesis of Romans Chapter 2, your brilliant paper on Niebhuur, Harrison and Post-modernism, your grade A sermon on the Transfiguration are only means to an end; that end being preaching the Good News and empowering your people on their spiritual journeys in their real lives.

So when you are called upon to explain to an 8-year-old child why her mother is dying of cancer; when you are asked to accompany a battered woman to court to finalize her divorce and escape her batterer; or when you are blessed to be present with the 80-year-old man who is passing into death with dignity and at peace, I doubt that the brilliant lecture you heard in New Testament will leap to your consciousness. Yet these years of study and living will have helped prepare you for your ministry.

Over a hundred years ago, Frances Willard wrote a book titled *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle*.<sup>1</sup> Frances Willard was a 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist and vegetarian reformer who lived with her companion, Anna Gordon, for twenty years, and who founded the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Now before you dismiss the importance of her organizing and reform work out of hand, I would remind you that the WCTU was originally founded by women out of their concern that their husbands would get drunk on Saturday night, come home and beat them and their children. Their reasoning was that the alcohol was the problem and if they could limit its availability, their husbands would not beat them. Their analysis, it turns out, was off the mark. But their efforts to organize a social movement to deal with a social problem like domestic violence were right on. The WCTU became

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1 Frances E. Willard, *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle* (Sunnyvale, California: Fair Oaks Publishing, 1991).

the largest national women's organization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Willard came to her political and social reform efforts from a Christian family life. Her agenda was broad; it included economic reform, prison reform, kindergarten for children, day care, and support of abused children.

In 1893, at the age of 53 and not in good health, her doctor recommended exercise out-of-doors, and a friend gave her a bicycle. Although women didn't ride bicycles in those days owing to the fact that they had to wear long skirts and that doctors recommended against it, Willard would not be denied. She was determined to learn to ride. It was a daunting adventure. I commend her book to you, especially those of you who are looking at a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> career.

Willard wrote: *"That which caused the many failures I had in learning the bicycle had caused me failures in life; namely, a certain fearful looking for of judgment; a too vivid realization of the uncertainty of everything about me; an underlying doubt-at once, however . . . matched and overcome by the determination not to give in to it."*<sup>2</sup> That about sums it up for me. Especially in the beginning of my ministry, I was certainly afraid of judgment because I was trying to do work that had not yet been tried; and there was plenty of judgment to go around. Still is. And plenty of uncertainty because no one really wanted what I was selling. So the doubt of myself and my mission were very real. But as Willard says, "matched and overcome by the determination not to give in to it." I hope that you bring this determination to your ministry.

I rarely have the opportunity to reflect on what healthy ministry looks like. I spend most of my time cleaning up messes that unhealthy ministry has created. So I want to reflect with you today on the nature of ministry—in its many forms and locations—in the parish, in the hospital or military, in a domestic violence shelter, on the street, or in the academy. And so I have titled my reflections: "This Is Not About You."

Of course it *is* about you. Ministry is about who you are and what you bring in service to others. It is about your gifts, skills, and experiences—the unique contribution that you can make. But hear my word of caution: "This Is Not About You."

- If you are going into ministry assuming that you have the answers, you don't.
- If you are going into ministry to work out your issues or your salvation, don't.
- If you are going into ministry to satisfy your ego, to find people who will adore you and follow you wherever you lead, don't.
- If you are going into ministry expecting to do your own thing, don't.
- If you are going into ministry looking for a romantic partner, look elsewhere.

Here is the paradox:

- You do have some answers. Don't hesitate to share them. One of my clergy mentors in her 80s, when I asked how she would describe ministry replied: "I just tell them what I know." Don't hesitate to tell them what you *know*; use your authority to bring release to the captives and sight to the blind. When I visited a battered woman in a shelter, she needed someone who represented the church to say, "This is not what the Bible means. This is not God's will for you to be in an abusive relationship. You don't have to stay there."

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 28.

- You will learn about yourself and, God willing, you will work on your salvation. These are the perks of the job, however, not its purpose.
- You will find people who adore you and will follow you anywhere. Don't let them. It's not good for them or for you.
- You may have a sense of your call that takes you outside the lines of traditional ministry. I certainly did. But you need to be in relationships of accountability with your church and your colleagues. We don't need lone rangers. Find the team players who can support and challenge you in your particular ministry.
- And you certainly deserve to find a loving partner with whom you can share your life. Just don't expect your congregants, students, etc., to fill that role.

This is the paradox: Your ministry is not about you—and it is all about you.

People trust us. They think we know what we are talking about! This is probably the scariest part of ministry. This is why we should always speak with some degree of fear and trembling. Somebody might just be listening!

We are invited into the intimacy of others' lives: birth, death, and everything in between. We are there with them, yet it is not our experience. We have the opportunity to play a role in their lives that makes all the difference. An old retired priest once said to me, "I do what I can and then I hurry along." And this is an enormously satisfying experience for us. To be able to bring a word, a gesture, an idea that is healing, empowering, transforming, compassionate. But it is not our experience still. "I do what I can and then I hurry along." It seems that this was Jesus' ministry also. Ministry is by definition itinerant—and not just for the United Methodists. Now this doesn't mean that we don't plant ourselves somewhere, make a commitment to a group of people, hang in there through the good times and bad. And it doesn't mean that we don't benefit enormously from these relationships—even though they are transient. I simply mean that we must stay clear: this is not about us.

If we forget who we are and why we are there, we can cause enormous harm. If we seek to meet our own personal needs in ministry, we can cause enormous harm. This is not about you.

Here's the other side of this caution. When your folks start to act crazy with you, don't take it personally. This also is not about you! Remember that you represent a lot of things to people—some of them flattering, some not so flattering. Their past experiences with clergy, with men/women. Whatever. Their interactions with you are not necessarily about you!

Now all of this may get confusing and you may begin to feel frustrated and powerless at times. In her novel, *Robber Bride*, Margaret Atwood describes the experience of a character who is a college professor:

She unlocks her office door, then locks it behind her to disguise the fact that she's in there. It's not her office hours but the students take advantage. They can smell her out, like sniffer dogs; they'll seize any opportunity to suck up to her or whine, or attempt to impress her, or foist upon her their versions of sulky defiance. *I'm just a human being*, [she] wants to say to them. But of course she isn't. She's a human being with power. There isn't much of it, but it's power all the same.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993) 24.

I find in listening to women and men in ministry talk about power, both seek to deny the power they have. Men say they don't "feel" powerful, which means they don't feel in control. Women say they don't want power because power is a bad thing. Both are being unrealistic. We all have power primarily by virtue of our roles. Most of you will complete your degrees in seminary in order to complete your credentials for ministry, ordained or otherwise. These credentials give you access to institutions, communities, and people's lives. Whether you like it or not, believe in it or not. You have power and authority because of these credentials. What you do with this resource is your choice.

When I was in seminary, I studied with Henry Nouwen. This was about the time that Henry was teaching about the "wounded healer." He helped us understand that it is not our perfection that we bring to ministry but our brokenness. It was an important contribution to our understanding of ministry. But today we must go further. We must realize that woundedness doth not a healer make. Woundedness (and there is plenty to go around) does not in and of itself make an effective minister. An effective ministry requires some healing of our wounds.

In other words, VICTIM  $\neq$  HEALER. Rather, SURIVOR = HEALER. Judith Herman describes this point in the healing process in her excellent book, *Trauma and Recovery*.

It means belonging to a society, having a public role, being part of that which is universal. It means having a feeling of familiarity, of being known, of communion. It means taking part in the customary, the commonplace, the ordinary, and the everyday. It also carries with it a feeling of smallness, of insignificance, a sense that one's own troubles are 'as a drop of rain in the sea.' The survivor who has achieved commonality with others can rest from her labors. Her recovery is accomplished; all that remains before her is her life.<sup>4</sup>

She is describing the process of integration—bringing experience and learning gained through healing to our efforts to be a healer for others.

So what does it take to have a healthy ministry? I hesitate to try to prescribe, and I do not pretend to be definitive here. But I will offer some of the things I have learned as I have navigated ministry over the years.

1. *Get a life.* If you have one already, protect it. If you don't, get one. In other words, have a life in addition to your ministry: physically, emotionally, intellectually; family and friends who are not part of your ministry setting; a hobby; exercise; days off; a vacation. I walk my dog twice a day. I get a massage every week. I go to baseball games and women's basketball games. Most of my friends are unrelated to the church. I work in my yard and spend real time with my family. Have a life in addition to ministry.
2. *Find colleagues for study and support.* And meet with them regularly. It is very easy to get isolated in ministry. Don't wait for someone else to do this for you. Find those people with whom you can consult and take your questions and struggles there. Make sure that you include some people you can count on to challenge you as well as support you.
3. When I went away to college, my mother said to me: "*Remember who you are and what you represent.*" In order to *remember* who we are, we must *know* who we are. Take the time to reflect on who you are: what is your social location and what does it mean? I hope your time in seminary is helping you do this. If because of your accident of birth you have privilege and

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) 236.



access to resources, how do you use these resources to empower others and challenge injustice? What is your personal and familial history? If you recall being abused as a child or growing up in a dysfunctional family, how have you worked on those wounds to find healing for yourself? What are the stresses in your life now, and how do you manage them so that they don't put you at risk to do harm to someone else?

"Remember who you are and what you represent." At this time in history, some of us do represent particular realities and communities. Whether as people of color or women, as gays and lesbians or persons with disabilities, whether we like it or not, we do represent our particular communities. And we have the potential to bring leadership where it is sorely needed.

"Remember who you are and what you represent." And remember who your people are. Who are those who have gone before you, who have carried you, taught you, guided you, cried with you, laughed with you. These are the people that Paul is lifting up in 2 Timothy: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, lives in you."<sup>5</sup> They are the cloud of witnesses who go before us. Name them for yourself. "Remember who you are and what you represent."

4. *Discover the joy of boundaries.* When we have "the boundary discussion," I always worry about the heavy negative connotation that some people feel towards boundaries in relationships. I find that boundaries are a great gift, both personally and professionally. I am not talking about building walls. Rather about boundaries that give shape to relationships and help to build trust; they are built on respect for the other person. So when you consider pushing the boundaries in relation to a congregant or client, I encourage you to consider three things:
  1. What is the likely impact on or potential harm to the individual congregant? How will he/she be affected by relaxing these boundaries, by increasing the mutual intimacy of our relationship? Are you attempting to meet your needs at his/her expense? What about her/his family? And what about yours?
  2. What is the likely impact on or potential harm to the congregation itself? How will others react? Will this appear to be some kind of favoritism? Will it stimulate jealousy or dissension? Will others expect the same degree of mutual intimacy with you?
  3. What is the likely impact on or potential harm to the mission of the church? Will your actions undermine the common mission you share? Will others be distracted from their ministries by your actions?

We must consider each of these questions because our choices and actions regarding ministerial boundaries affect much more than just ourselves and the other person involved. If our mission as a faith community is to sustain ourselves so that we might be able to carry our efforts forth to make justice and bring healing, if we believe that our faith communities should embody the values of justice, protection of the vulnerable and shared power, and if we affirm the need for persons called forth from among us to sustain, teach and lead, then we need leaders committed to clear boundaries and a willingness to be accountable for their actions. Good boundaries make effective ministry possible; effective ministry sustains the faith community and carries forth its message and witness.

5. *'Let go, but stand by.'* More wisdom from Frances Willard, reflecting in middle age on her experience of learning to ride a bicycle. " 'Let go, but stand by'—this is the golden rule for parent and pastor, teacher and friend; the only rule that at once respects the individuality of another and yet adds one's

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Tim. 1:5 NRSV.

*own, so far as may be, to another's momentum in the struggle of life.*"<sup>6</sup> Picture this 53-year-old woman in a long skirt sitting on a bicycle, and picture her teacher/supporter with a soft hand at the back of her bicycle seat, giving balance and a little push. "Let go, but stand by."

6. *Lighten up. Don't take yourself so seriously.* After all, this is not about you. This is about God's work. We may plant the seeds, water the garden, and even harvest on occasion. We may bring the yeast and the salt; we may pass along the light; we may even taste the bread and the cup on occasion. But we are contributing to a foundation for a future which we will not see. God is at work in ways we may never comprehend.
7. *Take yourselves very seriously.* Ministry is a privilege and a public trust. What we do matters a great deal because people should be able to trust us. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, "One does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron [and Miriam were]."<sup>7</sup> If you are called by God and by the community of faith, you are fortunate to bear the yoke that Jesus promises is easy to bear.
8. *Finally, pray always and do not lose heart.* This is Jesus' teaching in chapter 18 of Luke's Gospel, which he illustrates with the parable about the persistent widow who goes back time and again to the unjust judge to seek vindication. To pray always and not lose heart doesn't mean that we should spend all our time on our knees with our hands neatly folded. Rather that we should persist in our communication with God—asking for what we need and being thankful for what we have.

I hope these suggestions can help bring balance, self-discipline, and satisfaction in your ministry. I offer all of this in a context of challenge and possibility. As you pursue your vocation at this moment in history, you will encounter:

- The fruits of postmodernism and cynicism eating away at our collective soul;
- Political apathy in the midst of economic good times for some, despair for others;
- A resurgence of hate crimes and the isms which fuel the hatred;
- Violence still targeting those most vulnerable among us;
- Turmoil and confusion in our churches still struggling with sexuality and missing opportunities for ministry;
- A leadership vacuum desperate for strong, grounded, faithful leaders;
- And a longing among our people for spiritual and ethical guidance.

So be sustained by Paul's words to Timothy: "For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline."<sup>8</sup> And be assured by the Prophet Jeremiah: "Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work . . . there is hope for your future . . . your children shall come back to their own country."<sup>9</sup> We need your leadership. We need your energy. We need your courage. We need your creativity. We need you in the big leagues.

My prayer for you is that the spirit of God living within and among us will instruct you, will inspire you, will carry you, and will richly bless your ministry among us.

<sup>6</sup> Willard, *How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle*, 61.

<sup>7</sup> Heb. 5:4 NRSV.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Tim. 1:7 NRSV.

<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah 31:16-17 NRSV.

## BOUNDARY BASICS FOR CLERGY AND SPIRITUAL TEACHERS

To serve in the role of spiritual leader is a sacred trust. Sometimes, without intending to, we exploit and hurt those we want to teach and nurture by inappropriately crossing boundaries.

### **What every spiritual leader needs to know about relational boundaries<sup>1</sup>**

- They help us maintain clear professional relationships.
- They are guidelines (usually unwritten) that help us know when and when not to participate in a given activity, especially if we have more power.
- They are not intended to shackle us but to free us in our work as spiritual leaders.
- They help us keep perspective when people's problems seem overwhelming.
- They signal to others that it is safe to trust us.
- They protect congregants/students from our abuse of power. Our power is derived from our education, our position as a spiritual leader, and our resources. The very act of ordination sets us apart as having more power and designates us for leadership.

### **What boundaries are NOT**

- They are NOT clear rules about where and when we can be friendly.
- They are NOT blocks to authenticity and friendliness.

### **How can we keep from violating boundaries inappropriately?**

- Be aware of our needs and find healthful ways of having them met other than by the people we are supposed to be serving.
- Ask ourselves these questions: "Is this in the best interests of the other person or does it only satisfy my needs?" "Would I be comfortable if all my acquaintances knew I was doing this?"
- Establish a system of accountability. That is, we should arrange to meet regularly with a spiritual director, teacher, or colleague with whom we can speak honestly.
- Understand that boundaries are not always easy to discern and that there are often no clear guidelines for the best action to take when confronted with an issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Those not mentioned in the DVD are adapted from Rev. John Heagle's "Priestly Ministry and Healthy Boundaries," *Priestly Relationships: Freedom Through Boundaries*. (Chicago: The National Organization for Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy, Inc., 1997). Used with permission.



## DATING, FRIENDS, DUAL RELATIONSHIPS, GIFTS

### Dating

Pastors/Rabbis/Teachers who are single must often decide whether to date someone in their congregation/sangha. It is, after all, a place to meet someone with similar values and commitments. To date a congregant, however, introduces myriad complications and opportunities for misunderstandings.

If you find yourself attracted to a member of your congregation/sangha, consider doing the following:

- Inform him/her that you cannot be his/her spiritual leader and have a romantic involvement. Therefore, if the person wants to pursue a dating relationship, he/she should find someone else to serve as spiritual leader.
- Tell your governing body and supervisor about the relationship.

### Friends

Choosing friends from among those one serves and leads also has complications. There is a difference between being friendly and being a close friend who shares confidences. It is better to find friends among colleagues and through organizations that promote your values and interests. However, if you develop a close friendship with a congregant, consider the following:

- Discuss the difficulties of being both spiritual leader and friend;
- Avoid discussing the business of the congregation/sangha with him/her;
- Avoid spending time together at congregational/sangha events.

### Dual Relationships

*Dual relationships* are those in which the spiritual leader has more than one role, for example, if the rabbi is also a client or patient of a congregant. However, if the best person for a specific responsibility is in your congregation/sangha and you choose a dual relationship, consider the following:

- Minimize the number of dual relationships;
- Have a clear understanding with the person involved about what is expected, a contract perhaps;
- If problems develop, seek a solution with the help of your bishop/supervisor.

### Gifts

Where is the line between what is appropriate to accept and what is not appropriate? When presented with gifts, consider the following:

- Let your common sense guide you;
- Be certain you are not expected to do something in return;
- Accept appropriate gifts with a heart-felt thank you;
- Set a dollar limit; (for Buddhist teachers in traditions where *dana* from students is an accepted form of ongoing financial support, be careful not to develop preferences for students offering larger gifts);
- Find a way to graciously decline gifts that are inappropriate.

## THE PULPIT, TRANSFERENCE, HUGGING AND TOUCH, INTIMACY

A respect for boundaries protects relationships in which one individual has more power than the other. Four areas in which an understanding of boundaries is essential are 1) the pulpit, 2) transference, 3) touching and hugging, and 4) intimacy.

### The Pulpit

*The pulpit* is a tool that can be used for positive or negative ends. Negative ends include:

- Furthering our own agenda, as when there's conflict within the congregation/sangha;
- Promoting ourselves, as in drawing attention to our keen minds or smooth delivery.

*When we give in to those temptations, we are inappropriately crossing boundaries.*

### Transference

*Transference* is confusing feelings one has about one person with feelings for another, for example, confusing the spiritual leader with an old girlfriend or with the warm, generous father. In this confusion, the congregant may bring the baggage from that earlier relationship to the pastoral or teaching relationship.

We need to be aware that:

- A congregant's/student's interaction with us is often not about us;
- We aren't as wonderful or as terrible as the congregant thinks we are;
- Praise for our leadership, preaching, or teaching is not a sexual come-on;
- Dynamics of transference make congregants/students more vulnerable.

*When we use a transference attachment for our own gratification, we are inappropriately stepping over a boundary.*

### Hugging and Touch Boundaries

Sometimes we think congregants need our touch. They may even ask for it.

We need to consider:

- Is this a transference situation?
- Would touch be in their best interests or is it about our needs?
- Is there a better way to convey warmth and caring?

*While touch is an important part of pastoral care, hugging or touching a congregant/student can be inappropriate boundary crossing.*

## Understanding Intimacy

*Spirituality* can be described as the “intimate connection between ourselves and God,” and *sexual activity* as the “intimate connection between ourselves and another person.” Sometimes these intimacies become confused for both the congregant and spiritual leader.

*Sexual sharing is one of the gifts of God's creation. However, sexual contact with a congregant/student is clearly inappropriate boundary crossing and has the potential of doing great harm.*

## NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## **PRESERVING BOUNDARIES: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL HEALTH**

### **Guidelines**

#### **1. To Counsel or Not to Counsel**

- Do not attempt counseling unless you are trained as a counselor.
- Do not attempt to counsel victims, survivors, or abusers without special training in this area. REFER, REFER, REFER.

#### **2. If You Do Decide to Counsel, Set Limits**

- Avoid counseling in any setting that might suggest dating or other social interaction.
- Limit the length and number of sessions—in advance.

#### **3. Sexual Feelings**

- Be aware of any sexual feelings vis-à-vis congregants, clients, employees, students, staff, etc. (Expect to have these feelings.)
- Acknowledge these feelings to yourself, to a supervisor, and/or in consultation session—not to the individual who is the object of those feelings, nor to any other congregant/staff member.

#### **4. Sexualized Behavior**

- Do not attempt to sexualize any professional relationship.
- If a congregant/staff member engages in sexualized behavior towards you, do not respond in kind. Rather maintain your role as spiritual leader and consult with a colleague, consultant, or supervisor.

#### **5. Stress Management and Self-care**

- Provide for your own physical, psychological, and spiritual self-care with recreational times, time off to care for self or family, retreats, educational leave, etc.
- As a check to see whether you are doing this, list activities you engage in outside your congregation. (Institutions have an obligation to support individuals' self-care efforts through financial support and generous leave policies.)

#### **6. Dual Relationships**

- Do not enter into a dual relationship in which you are both spiritual leader and lover/partner to a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, etc. If, nonetheless, you and one of those persons agree to pursue an intimate relationship, end your role as spiritual leader.
- Try to avoid dual relationships with congregants, clients, employees, students, staff, etc., in which you relate to an individual in two capacities.
- Try to avoid dual relationships in which you are both spiritual leader and friend.
- If a dual relationship is unavoidable (for example, if you work in a small community, if you supervise employees and serve as their spiritual leader, if you are a priest in a seminary where you also teach), discuss the inherent problems and possible consequences with the individual(s) involved, establish whatever boundaries you can to limit the duality, mutually decide upon strategies for protecting the relationship you have as the other's spiritual leader, and be open about the duality.

7. **Personal Relationships and Intimacy Needs**
  - Attend to your personal and familial relationships. Maintain and nurture them.
  - As a check, list the relationships you have with people who are not members of your congregation/sangha.
8. **Avoiding Workaholism and Burnout**
  - Be clear about your job description and the accompanying expectations. Institutions must take the first step by providing position descriptions and specifying expectations of staff.
  - When you encounter situations beyond your expertise, consult and refer. If your workload seems unreasonable or unmanageable, discuss this with a supervisor or consultant and see what can be done.
9. **Supervision and Evaluation**
  - Ask a supervisor to meet with you periodically to review your position and work, if your supervisor does not do this on his/her own initiative.
10. **Avoiding Isolation**
  - Maintain contacts with colleagues.
  - Consult regularly.
11. **Spiritual Practice**
  - Engage in regular prayer and meditation.

## **PARTICULAR BOUNDARY ISSUES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN FAITH COMMUNITIES**

*– Kimberly Day-Lewis, J.D.*

Historically, faith and spirituality have been critical elements of black culture and consciousness. As centerpieces within the fabric of African American communities, churches and other religious institutions have served not only as houses of worship, but also as centers for social interaction and collective action in support of their members and the wider community. Clergy are often called upon to fill the leadership vacuum, and leadership has its privileges. In the African American community, people look up to clergy and give them deferential respect. The power of position and the community's tendency to place the pastor on a pedestal present to clergy particular challenges in exercising restraint in their use of power. The rise in the number of independent churches means that systems of accountability may be non-existent.

The predominance of females and the dearth of males within congregations add to the challenge. This dynamic may contribute to a sensitivity regarding the emasculation of African American males and the need to give them leadership opportunities that society denies because of discriminatory practices. Therefore, ministerial leadership may be predominately male and surrounded by female subordinates. If the leadership style is hierarchical and the congregation is fed a theology that emphasizes obedience to authority, male leadership, and female submission, the congregational system is ripe for boundary violations.

Ministerial leadership may fall into dual relationships without awareness of the complexity of such relationships and the need to give attention to boundary issues. Independent churches founded by a charismatic leader or a family may request professionals among their members to provide pro bono services or may have congregants functioning as volunteer servants to the pastor and his/her family.

There is wide diversity in the amount of formal theological education and training among African American ministers and a broad range of openness to seeking continuing education and training. Making training programs contextually relevant and accessible will be vital in delivering this resource to African American faith communities.

## **PARTICULAR BOUNDARY ISSUES FOR ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER COMMUNITIES**

– *Rev. Thelma A. Burgonio-Watson*

Boundary issues among Asian and Pacific Islander communities are not unlike those of any other community. However, boundaries must be understood within the context of the culture and traditions of a community. There are several cultural traditions and ways of relating in Asian and Pacific Islander communities that create particular challenges when dealing with boundary issues.

Relational complexities are as much a given as they are in other racial ethnic communities. For Asians and Pacific Islanders, maintaining smooth interpersonal relationships is an especially important value and may be perceived as even more important than keeping appropriate boundaries. Sensitivity to this value is critical. At the same time, we need to understand that maintaining appropriate boundaries and fostering healthy clergy-congregant relationships are complementary, not counter to interpersonal relationships.

Asian and Pacific Islander communities tend to be extremely close-knit. In general, it is natural for these groups to embrace their spiritual leaders as part of their extended family and to relate to their clergy as part of the family. It is, therefore, especially important that there be a clear understanding of boundary issues and of the challenges inherent in dual relationships, so that the best interests of the congregants remain primary in clergy-congregant interactions.

In close-knit communities, hospitality and gift-giving are timeless values, deeply honored and practiced. While these values should not be abandoned, they should be studied in light of their inappropriate potential.

Touching and personal space boundaries vary from one community to another. Clergy and spiritual leaders need to be sensitive to individual differences and preferences within their congregations.

In Asian and Pacific Islander communities, congregants may look up to their clergy and may have a tendency to place them on a pedestal. They generally address clergy in a formal way, with respect and sometimes reverence. This may be a reflection of how much honor and respect congregants give to their religious leaders, or it may be a reflection of the hierarchical nature of the community.

Culturally competent training can be an invaluable resource in clarifying how values in Asian and Pacific Islander communities may help or hinder the observance of clear boundaries that ultimately facilitate healthy and effective ministry.

## **PARTICULAR BOUNDARY ISSUES FOR JEWISH COMMUNITIES**

– Rabbi Cindy G. Enger

For Jewish communities, boundary issues are not unlike those faced by any other community. Yet there are some particularities. Jews are a minority population in the United States and throughout the world. While Jewish communities are clustered in metropolitan areas, and often concentrated in particular neighborhoods, Jewish communities also exist in small towns.

Community plays a central role in Judaism. So does the family. For Jewish men and women, dating and marrying a person who is also Jewish is an important value. For rabbis and those seeking to enter the rabbinate, intermarriage (that is, marriage to someone who is not Jewish) is essentially prohibited. Thus, especially for single rabbis living in areas with very small Jewish populations, which are likely to have only one congregation, the question of whether to date a member of the congregation may be a very real issue. On the one hand, the rabbi finds it important and desirable to date a person who is Jewish and involved in the Jewish community. On the other hand, if the person is Jewish and involved in the community, he/she is, in all likelihood, also a congregant. Thus, for a single rabbi who is interested in finding an intimate partner, choosing to live in a community with a small Jewish population raises important boundary concerns, such as those raised in the DVD series, *A Sacred Trust*.

These training and study materials refer to hugging and touch boundaries. For Orthodox Jewish communities, such boundaries are guided by religious principles and practices of modesty, which frequently include the prohibition of any touching or private meetings between men and women (other than that which involves married partners). Therefore, the discussion of touch boundaries needs to be understood within this context for Orthodox communities.



## **PARTICULAR BOUNDARY ISSUES FOR LATINA AND LATINO COMMUNITIES**

– *Rev. Luis A. Carriere*

Historically, Latina and Latino clergy have been conferred a great deal of authority, responsibility, and freedom over their congregants by their respective denominations, cultures, and nations. Traditionally, this has been conducive to long-term religious and cultural stability, health, and growth as clergy strive to provide in-depth care for the needs of their charges. The role of the Latina and Latino clergy is inadvertently magnified when the worshiping community experiences fluid patterns of migration, or when the community exists as a “culture within a culture,” that is, a minority group coexisting within a dominant culture.

As a consequence, many Latina and Latino clergy find themselves overwhelmed, overworked, and isolated as they attempt to carry out their ever-growing responsibilities. Many feel that their education and training experiences have not adequately prepared them for the complexities of professional multicultural ministry. In addition, it is not uncommon for many Latino and Latina clergy to have limited and infrequent contact with their clergy peers or denominational leaders.

Frequently, professional roles and boundaries are blurred by socio-cultural dynamics. Hierarchically, the clergy person is an ordained leader with power “above” the parishioner. Conversely, both the clergy person and congregant are “ethnic peers” who share the common struggles, experiences, and needs of many Latinas and Latinos who are trying to negotiate their way through the American landscape.

These factors create a high-risk environment, which is conducive to the abuse of clergy power in general, and clergy sexual misconduct in particular. Specifically, male pastors who are prone to acting out sexually quickly learn the ease with which victimization may take place.

The victimization of the Latina congregant is frequently compounded by the inordinate amount of authority the pastor has, the lack of support from denominational leadership, the lack of knowledge of how the adjudication process works, high risk of stigmatization within her family, church, and culture, and limited supportive resources (for example, counseling, financial, translation services, legal) within and without the Latino community. For some victims, fears around migration status may exacerbate their suffering by the real or perceived threat of deportation, thus, silencing and isolating them further.

Latina and Latino pastors are encouraged to pursue culturally relevant continuing clergy education and support: specifically, in areas that address professional relationships, adequate boundary setting, a clergy code of conduct, and awareness and prevention of clergy sexual misconduct. Clergy persons need to find a culturally relevant supportive system that honors their Latino heritage, native tongue and culture, or nation of origin. Finally, pastors need to become informed as to the devastation victims experience. For the Latina victim, clergy sexual misconduct not only threatens to destroy her sense of self as a woman, person, and child of God, but her very culture and heritage as well.

## **PARTICULAR BOUNDARY ISSUES FOR LESBIAN/GAY/BISEXUAL/TRANSGENDERED CLERGY OR SPIRITUAL TEACHERS**

– *Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune*

On the one hand, the boundary issues are the same across the board for all of us as spiritual leaders, regardless of our sexual orientation. On the other hand, it's never quite that simple. In other words, the ethical norms and expectations are no different. And yet, the context in which a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) spiritual leader functions is different. This increases the degree of complexity in addressing boundary issues.

Some may argue that the socio-sexual cultures for LGBT folks (which are certainly diverse within and among these groups) mean that boundary issues or professional ethical issues are different than for heterosexuals. Not so. Sexual attitudes or practices within one's peer group may or may not differ significantly from attitudes or practices of heterosexuals. But in order to insure the well-being of clients, congregants, students, or staff, it is critical that emotional, physical, sexual, and financial boundaries be respected in pastoral or teaching relationships. Any person, regardless of sexual orientation, can be harmed by the betrayal of trust by a pastor, rabbi, priest, or teacher.

For LGBT clergy serving predominantly LGBT congregations, the issues are not unlike those for any other "minority" community or a rural community. It's the problem of the "small town." Dual relationships are common, particularly if one tries to patronize community businesses. Social or dating relationships can also be complicated. There may not be other congregations in the community that are open and affirming, but dating within one's congregation carries all the usual risks and thus is not recommended.

In addition, LGBT congregants may expect a degree of emotional intimacy with their spiritual leader and the congregation because of the need to create an alternative experience of "family," especially if an individual is estranged from her/his family and/or dealing with issues related to those losses. Again the possibilities of the impact of dual relationships, favoritism, petty jealousies, etc., present a challenge to the LGBT spiritual leader.

All spiritual leaders face the complex challenges of building community, participating in that community, and still maintaining a clear sense of role and leadership responsibility. Remembering to consider the following three questions when faced with the possibility of increased intimacy or boundary-crossing can help us stay grounded: 1) How would my behavior impact the other person (and his/her family)? 2) How would my behavior impact the congregation as a whole? 3) How would my behavior impact the viability of our mission as a congregation? In other words, in our public leadership role, we must always consider the effects of our actions on the larger project. Our behavior is never just about us as individuals. This is why we need friends, family, and relationships outside of that public setting (where we are playing a public role) to ground us and meet our personal needs.

For the LGBT spiritual leader who is “closeted,” that is, not public about his/her sexual orientation or gender identity, issues of self-care and health are exacerbated. If one’s professional standing as clergy or spiritual teacher is possibly jeopardized by being out of the closet, how does one sustain healthy social relationships and sense of self? It is possible but not easy. Whether able to be “out” or not, the oppression of homophobia and heterosexism impacts anyone who is LGBT every day. This fact does not suggest that LGBT spiritual leaders be afforded special ethics. Rather it simply heightens the need for having solid support systems in place to help manage the complexities. For the LGBT spiritual leader who is comfortably “out” and supported by her/his religious community, issues of self-disclosure and good boundaries still apply. This is a problem for every clergy or spiritual leader. It’s just a variation on the theme for LGBT folks. For example, it may be important for a religious leader to share his/her coming-out story with congregants in order to build trust. Sexuality issues brought by a congregant in pastoral care need to be addressed openly and honestly without sexualizing the conversation to meet our own needs. This is particularly challenging with young people. They need a safe place to explore their sexual feelings, questions, and confusion, trusting that the adult clergy or spiritual leader will not take advantage of their vulnerability and cross sexual boundaries. In other words, we need to create non-sexualized settings in which sexual issues can be discussed.

We also must consider the context of social meanings and the overlay of cultural particularity, especially in regard to touch boundaries. Do we deal with affection differently based on the sexual orientation of the congregant or student? What about an individual whose cultural background is more affectionate or less affectionate than our own? How can we be aware of avoiding misunderstanding at the same time that we don’t let homophobia set the agenda? These are the challenges all clergy and spiritual teachers face in our work. Generally speaking, it is wise to be more reserved than not—regardless of orientation or gender—yet, as much as possible, accommodating to the congregant’s or student’s comfort zone. At the same time we need to stay within our own comfort zone. The clergy or spiritual teacher has his/her own boundaries to deal with in terms of the affection or come-ons of congregants or students. A single person should not be regarded as “available” to the congregation or as in need of “match making” by well-meaning congregants. Privacy in one’s social life is a legitimate expectation.

The keys to healthy boundaries are awareness and intention. We should never rationalize that “this time is different” or that “we are different” and the rules don’t apply. Being aware of the risks involved in any dual relationship means that we can successfully manage boundaries in ways that meet the needs of the person who asks for our help without taking advantage of his/her vulnerabilities. Our awareness and our intentions to respect boundaries can both be supported by consultation with trusted colleagues who can help us see our blind spots and potential for self-deceit. Such individuals and groups can help us remain accountable as we navigate the often confusing waters of ministry and teaching.

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