

Boundaries in Professional Relationships

Handouts

SAMARITAN COUNSELING CENTER

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Clergy and Congregational Care

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Those Who Flourish in Ministry are Intentional about Their Well-being

By: [Kate Rugani](#)

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2017

Challenges are part of any ministry, yet some clergy thrive despite the inevitable setbacks. New research shows that their keys to success can be boiled down to a few simple strategies available to anyone.

- Focus on working in alignment with God.

Strategy 1: Remember who it is that you serve.

Rather than looking for praise from the pews, aim to derive your sense of success from knowing you're doing your all to enact the work God has called you to. Also, keep in mind that you are participating in a process -- you are working with God, and God alone sees the full picture.

Strategy 2: Discern, discern, discern.

Create time for spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study to understand the work God is calling you to do.

- Be proactive and flexible in taking care of your physical and mental health.

Strategy 3: Prioritize healthy behaviors.

There is tremendous pressure to eat what is offered to you at church gatherings. Remind yourself that your congregants don't want to make you unhealthy. Take smaller portions, and don't feel awkward about it. Go to the doctor regularly; get annual checkups. Get outside. Ride bikes, play golf, or go for a walk every day and set a goal for the number of steps you want to log. Make healthy activities a priority, but also be flexible about how you incorporate those health behaviors into your daily routine. Pastors' lives are too unpredictable to keep to the same habits all the time, but that doesn't mean you have to dismiss your health goals.

Strategy 4: Invest in spiritual care.

Start each day by reading the Bible. If you're traveling and can't read along the way, listen to a devotion on an MP3 player or mobile device. Set aside time for prayer and one-on-one communion with God. Keep a regular Sabbath.

Strategy 5: Make time for personal interests.

In addition to pursuing the activities you care about, look for opportunities to incorporate them into your ministry.

- Be intentional about setting boundaries around your work and personal life.

Strategy 6: Pick the time that works for you.

Schedule activities in functional blocks. Pick one night of the week when you will attend nighttime church meetings, and urge others to use this as a basis for scheduling. Set “office hours” for when you will be available at the church each week.

Strategy 7: Use space creatively.

One pastor described taking regular “office hours” in a local McDonald’s. This allows him to have space outside the church to connect with church members, as well as the broader community. To create distance from their work on an afternoon off, some pastors recommend going out of town -- even if it’s only as far as the next town.

Strategy 8: Communicate clearly and regularly.

If you keep a Sabbath, include that information in the signature of your emails. If you have to say no to a request on your day off, offer an alternate time to help. Ask your congregants, staff and other key people about their top priorities for you, and share your own. Then discuss where your expectations diverge. Being honest about your gifts and limitations as a leader is important.

Strategy 9: Manage your technology.

Some pastors set a stop time every evening, after which they do not pick up incoming calls. These clergy say they check their voicemail and will respond if there’s an emergency, but by waiting for a message, they can determine whether a request needs to be addressed during off hours. Work with another pastor or spiritual leader who can be “on call” when you are off or away. Include that person’s contact information in your automatic email reply and your outgoing voicemail message.

- Nourish friendships and mutual relationships.

Strategy 10: Find support from other clergy.

Identify another pastor who can serve as a mentor. Form or join a peer or covenant group. Find at least one person in whom you can confide and from whom you can draw support in the face of ministerial and personal challenges.

Strategy 11: Seek out emotional support from family and friends.

Meet a friend for lunch, especially if you feel yourself getting down or low on energy. Create an annual ritual, such as a retreat with friends, to maintain important connections. Make yourself accountable to a close friend or spouse who knows the day-to-day stresses you’re facing; help each other maintain boundaries and healthy practices.

Those who set priorities and adjust their plans to attend to those priorities on a near-daily basis aren't undone when difficult circumstances arise; they find their way through. They embrace challenges. They avoid symptoms of depression, anxiety and burnout. They flourish.

"If you're wondering whether these basic strategies make a difference, they do," Proeschold-Bell said. "Even though they sound like good common sense, they are hard to enact -- but worth it. They are what differentiated flourishing pastors."

Questions to consider

- What activities and values are meaningful to you? How do you make time for them? Are there ways to incorporate them naturally into your other responsibilities?
- None of the flourishing clergy who participated in the study named all of these strategies as critical parts of their ministry, but they all said they employ a number of them. You likely already do, too. Which new ones will you try?
- Positive emotions have been shown to promote broad-minded coping and openness to new ideas -- important traits for effective leadership. How might you foster positive emotions in yourself and others?

--<https://www.faithandleadership.com/those-who-flourish-ministry-are-intentional-about-their-well-being>

Differentiated Leadership

“The basic concept of leadership through self-differentiation is this: If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her own position as “head” and work to define his or her own goals and self, while staying in touch with the rest of the organism, there is more than a reasonable chance that the body will follow. This emphasis on a leader’s self-differentiation is not to be confused with independence or some kind of selfish individuality. On the contrary, we are talking here about the ability of a leader to be a self while remaining a part of the system.”—Friedman, Failure of Nerve

Some have suggested that the key to well-differentiated leadership is self-awareness and self-regulation. The following chart provides specific examples of the differences between poorly differentiated and well differentiated leadership. And, if one understands leadership as an organizational function, not the purview of designated individuals, then one can see the value of applying Friedman’s concepts to all who exercise influence (Maxwell’s definition of leadership), and, indeed, to all of us.

POORLY DIFFERENTIATED LEADERSHIP

WELL-DIFFERENTIATED LEADERSHIP

Focuses on pathology -----	Focuses on strength
Is obsessed with technique is -----	Concerned for one’s own growth
Works with symptomatic people -----	Works with motivated people
Betters the condition -----	Matures the system
Seeks symptomatic relief -----	Seeks enduring change
Is concerned to give insight -----	Is concerned to define self (take stands)
Is stuck on treadmill of trying harder -----	Is fed up with the treadmill
Diagnoses others -----	Looks at one’s own stuckness
Is quick to quit difficult situations -----	Is challenged by difficult situations
Is made anxious by reactivity -----	Recognizes that reactivity and sabotage are evidence of one’s effectiveness
Has a reductionist perspective -----	Has a universal perspective
Sees problems as the cause of anxiety -----	Sees problems as the focus of preexisting anxiety
Adapts toward the weak -----	Adapts toward strength
Focuses empathically on helpless victims -----	Has a challenging attitude that encourages responsibility
Is more likely to create dependent relationships -----	Is more likely to create intimate relationships

A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix by Edwin Friedman; Church Publishing, New York, NY 1999, 2007; p. 231



Behavioral Covenant for Group Conversation¹ Sample

I will give my full attention when listening to another without interrupting.

I will suspend judgment and respect the other's point of view.

I will offer thanks to others for their courage in sharing.

I will honor each person's faith in Christ and listen for truth in another's point of view.

I will speak honestly and clearly.

I will speak briefly, using an economy of words to share my thoughts and feelings.

I will speak from my own experience and understanding rather than speaking for others.

I will willingly open myself to the greater discernment of the whole community rather than demanding the outcome I prefer.

I will be attentive to the emergence of shared wisdom in our dialogue.

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Principles for Establishing & Maintaining Boundaries

1. **MANAGE YOUR EMOTIONS:** One of the more difficult and the most beneficial aspects of relating to others, especially in a professional-to-congregant relationship, is being aware of and appropriately responding to your own emotions. It is essential for avoiding boundary violations that you are aware of your own needs and address them appropriately, *outside the professional-congregant relationship*. Your responsibility is to:
 - Allow your feelings into your awareness
 - Acknowledge (at least to yourself) what they are
 - Choose actions appropriate to the situation
2. **EVERYTHING YOU SAY OR DO (AND EVERYTHING YOU DO NOT SAY OR DO)** is relevant to your relationships with congregants. As a professional/leader in a group or organization, all your behavior is subject to responses based on perceptions. Since no one is perfect in behavior and speech, it is important to maintain a sense of humility and a willingness to own one's behavior, as it seems appropriate. One must be aware, constantly and conscientiously, of your strengths and weaknesses, your privileges and responsibilities, and of the affect of your actions on others.
3. **AVOID RISKY BEHAVIOR:** There are enough pitfalls without going looking for them. Excessive and intimate touching or hugging may spell T-R-O-U-B-L-E. So does excessive self-disclosure of an intimate nature.
4. **WHEN IN DOUBT, CHECK IT OUT.** In many instances it is helpful and sometimes necessary to ask before acting, particularly in matters that may be seen as intruding into someone's space.
5. **BE CONGREGANT CENTERED.** Keeping the focus on the congregant's (subordinate's) wants and needs prevents role confusion and worse-role reversal. Similarly, on a staff-to-staff level, the supervisor needs to remain focused on the needs of the supervisee.
6. **YOU, THE PROFESSIONAL, ARE RESPONSIBLE** for establishing and maintaining boundaries. The fact that your congregants may display poor boundaries in approaching you is recognized and needs to be addressed and it is a separate matter. It does not detract from your responsibility, not solely, but principally, in the first place, and in the final analysis.
7. **TEACH OTHERS:** In order to avoid boundary violations and the accompanying pain that goes with them, train staff and congregants in navigating interpersonal relationships. Help your congregants understand the different boundary issues that arise in the mix of relationships and responsibilities that congregants have. Train by your example and be intentional about addressing boundary issues in the life of the congregation. It is important for congregants to understand boundary matters at all levels. Some of this training is required (especially in regarding children) some just makes sense to do.

Differences Between Personal and Professional Relationships

The following factors (not a complete list) highlight important differences between personal and professional relationships.

1. **FEES & PAYMENT:** Professional relationships may involve fees or some form of payment
2. **TIME--LONGEVITY OF THE RELATIONSHIP:** Personal relationships can last forever. Professional ones are always time-limited. They end if you change jobs, move away, or if the congregant moves away or joins a new church.
3. **TIME--THE TIME INVOLVED IN AN INTERACTION.** Interactions in personal relationships can be any length of time. A professional relationship may involve "sessions" and need to be viewed in relation to time shared with other congregants and other role demands.
4. **SITE OR LOCATION:** You can get together with family or friends anywhere you choose. A professional encounter may have implications for those who see it and is affected by professional role boundaries. Even when going to a congregant's home, boundary issues are at play.
5. **GOALS:** The professional relationship has intent behind it or formal goals. Such intent or goals are generally not true of personal relationships.
6. **NOTES/RECORDS:** The keeping of notes or records of interactions may be helpful or sometimes necessary in professional relationships, especially for the sake of the organization. Record keeping in personal relationships (diaries, calendars, etc.) is strictly for the sake of the individual.
7. **LICENSES AND REGULATION:** In most denominations, those considered professionals in and for the organization are licensed or approved by the denominational body. Personal relationships have no such regulation.
8. **SELF-DISCLOSURE:** A professional relationship is primarily one in which the congregant self-discloses. Although it may be appropriate at times for professionals to self-disclose, such self-disclosure is for the sake of the congregant not to satisfy the needs of the professional.
9. **POWER DIFFERENTIAL:** The impact of the power differential between the professional and the congregant cannot be over stated. The professional *always* has the responsibility of monitoring the dynamics of her or his relationships with congregants and intervening when necessary to prevent boundary violations.
10. **PHYSICAL CONTACT:** In a personal relationship physical contact is based on what adults agree to and is generally limited only by a desire to avoid harm or pain. In a professional relationship physical contact is limited to appropriate contact *always* based on the best interests of the congregant.
11. **SEXUAL INVOLVEMENT:** Exclusively limited to a personal relationship.
12. **PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY:** In personal relationships these are guided by mutual understandings between the parties, personal discretion, and other informal arrangements. In a professional relationship the professional bears the responsibility to maintain privacy and confidentiality. *No expectation of privacy should accompany a professional's self-disclosure in the context of the professional relationship.*

Clergy & Staff to Congregant Relationships: Word and Action Dimensions to Consider

The following dimensions related to boundaries in relationships with congregants are critical. You may be aware of other dimensions, as well.

1. **TOUCH** What kind of touch is always OK? Never OK? Hand on shoulder? Hugs? How frequently? Should you ask the congregant first? Could asking be coercive? What if a congregant requests a hug or requests to be held? Do you/does your profession have a “license to touch”? Can you help people without touching them? How will you know how the congregant interprets your touch? Laws prohibit certain kinds of touch and physical contact.
2. **SELF-DISCLOSURE** What is appropriate to reveal about yourself, about your personal life and circumstances? What is always OK to share about yourself? Is it possible to have a professional relationship without any self-disclosure? How about unintended or nonverbal self-disclosure? Could it be that your congregants may not be interested in finding out about your personal life? *Congregants who have previously experienced boundary violations may be very sensitive about this matter.*
3. **USE OF LANGUAGE** Is it always OK/never OK/sometimes OK to say to a congregant: “I like you”? “I love you”? “I’ll always be there for you”? “You are special”? Is it OK to use the kind of language your congregants use? What if this includes swearing?
4. **MEETING PLACE AND TIME** What are appropriate places to meet with a congregant? The congregant’s home, kitchen, bedroom? The local restaurant? What are the risks or limits? Should you meet alone with a congregant? Never? Sometimes? Under what circumstances? How about the duration and frequency of the contacts? What could be the congregant’s interpretation and the implications?
5. **GIFTS** Is it OK to give congregants gifts or to receive gifts from your congregants? What occasions would be appropriate/inappropriate? Does the dollar value make a difference? Consider the difference between giving a gift to one congregant vs. all congregants; the difference between receiving a gift for oneself vs. for the organization or program.
6. **LENDING AND BORROWING** Is it OK to lend money or things to congregants? To borrow from a congregant? What are the criteria? Are there organization policies?
7. **BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS** Is it desirable/permisible to get into transactions such as: renting an apartment to a congregant, having congregants wash your car, etc?
8. **SOCIALIZING** What type of socializing with congregants is appropriate? What is off limits? How does one avoid creating cliques or groups of persons who are “in” and persons who are “out”?

Other Considerations:

9. **WHEN DOES A CONGREGANT CEASE TO BE A CONGREGANT?** When someone separates from the congregation do the boundary issues change? If so, in what way or ways? It is generally considered unethical for a professional to terminate contact with a congregant *in order to* have an intimate relationship.
10. **HOW ABOUT SUPPORT STAFF/NON-PROFESSIONAL STAFF?** What boundary considerations apply? Are these roles and their limitations clear to everyone in the organization?

Staff-to-Staff Relationships: Word and Action Dimensions to Consider

Staff-to-staff relationships are qualitatively different from staff-to-congregant relationships. However, the same dimensions are helpful to examine.

1. **TOUCH** What kind of touch among staff is appropriate? What is inappropriate?
2. **SELF-DISCLOSURE** How far should staff go in disclosing personal matters to other staff? How does one make sure that being supportive of other staff does not turn into “therapizing”?
3. **USE OF LANGUAGE** How about staff calling other staff “honey”?
4. **MEETING PLACE AND TIME** What do staff communicate to congregants by the way they conduct themselves in public?
5. **GIFTS** What could be the implication of staff giving each other gifts? Could the expectation become a burden or a competition?
6. **BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS** Would it be OK to have one staff person babysit for another staff person? Or to purchase a car from the other?
7. **SOCIALIZING** Would it be OK for staff to go out to dinner together? Or to the movies? What if some go and others are not invited? There is clearly a difference between socializing with the whole staff (e.g. holiday party) versus two people or a small tightly-knit group repeatedly socializing while excluding others.

Other Considerations:

8. **HOW DOES THE STAFF PERSON’S POSITION IN THE HIERARCHY PLAY A ROLE?** Consider the differences between: a staff person and a coworker (same level) going on a trip together, vs. the staff person taking the same trip with the senior clergy person or members of the governing group.
9. **DO THE STAFF AND THE CONGREGATION RESEMBLE AN OPEN OR A CLOSED ORGANIZATIONAL FAMILY SYSTEM?** Pay attention to how the web of relationships affects the organization. Is the congregation/organization open to new ideas, people and ways of doing things?

Issues Related to Retiring Clergy

Persons retiring from clergy responsibilities face, to varying degrees, issues that easily connect to boundary considerations. Below are noted several areas to consider for the congregation in which a retired clergy person participates, for the retiring/retired clergy person and for regional associations.

Clarifying Roles: While the actual circumstances as related to the physical presence (or not) of a retired clergy person in a congregation may vary greatly, in all circumstances, it is recommended that active clergy connect with any retired clergy who will be in or continue to be in fellowship with the congregation to ensure an understanding of the role retired clergy persons will play in the congregation. Both the retiring (or retired) clergy person and the active clergy have a responsibility to the congregation and themselves to maintain clarity and transparency around their roles in the congregation.

Letting Go: It is vital that the congregants and the retiring clergy person let go of their clergy-congregant relationship. Congregational leaders, especially the retiring person, must make clear to the congregation that the relationship as clergy is ending. One danger is, as the following metaphor shared by one retiring clergy person notes, “leading the congregation from the grave”. It is important for the retiring person to make clear to the congregation that as of a specific date, she or he is no longer their pastor.

Sense of identity: Some clergy persons gain their sense of identity from the role they play or function they perform. Sensitivity to this possibility may be helpful when working with a retiring clergy person, especially if that person seems to be having difficulty with the transition. Be aware that allowing a retiring person to continue in any aspects of a clergy role may be an enabling behavior that ultimately may not be helpful. At the same time, retired clergy who have a good sense of themselves can be contributing members of a congregation. Clarity around relationships is vital for individual and congregational health.

As with many persons retiring from a role (CEO, clerk, postal worker, etc.) the retiring clergy person faces the challenge of recreating one’s self. Such a re-creation may be more challenging for some clergy persons, perhaps due to the often all-encompassing role of clergy and how that person related to that role.

Loss of “Protection” of Identity: Another dynamic that affects some retiring clergy is a sense of vulnerability due to a loss of “hiding place”. That is, a clergy person may hide her or his true self through the assumption of the role of the clergy person. Once the role is no longer available, the person loses the “hiding place”.

Loss of Spiritual Disciplines: A retiring clergy person may lose touch with self-sustaining spiritual disciplines that were developed in the context of the weekly rhythm of worship preparation.

Note for Regional Associations: Regional Associations would do well to consider ways that persons retiring from active congregational ministry may be able to use their gifts and experience in ongoing service either throughout the association or within a congregation. A “one-size-fits-all” approach, while potentially administratively simple, may fail to recognize the value, in a particular situation, of finding ways to accommodate a departure from standard practice when there seems to be significant reason to consider such an accommodation. The challenge to such an approach is providing a discernment process that is open to Spiritual guidance and keeps in mind the good of the congregation and the good of each person involved.

Five Characteristics of Self-Differentiation

(Definition of Self Within Relationships)

1. A Sense of My Own Limits, And The Limits of Others
 - A clear understanding of where I end and someone else begins;
 - Respect for the right of others to be the way they are, but refusing to allow others to intrude upon one's own rights;
 - Defined from within, rather than adapting to please others.
2. CLARITY About What I Believe
 - What would I die for...and what's not worth it?
 - Of what am I certain, and of what am I not so certain?
3. COURAGE to Take Stands
 - Defining where I stand, what I believe, in the face of disapproval;
 - Refusing to give in to another when it is a matter of principle;
 - Capacity to stand firm in the face of strong reactions! ("You can't think, act, feel that way and be a part of this family!")
4. The Ability to STAY ON COURSE
 - Resolve to follow through toward a vision in spite of sabotage; ·
 - Emotional and spiritual stamina to stick with a lofty goal and not let others' reactions change your course
5. STAYING CONNECTED In Spite Of It All
 - Maintaining a relatively non-reactive give-and-take with those who are reacting to you...
 - (Easier said than done!)
 - Resisting the impulse to attack or cut off from those who are most reactive to you.

(The first three have to do with SELF-DEFINITION...the last two have to do with SELF-REGULATION. BOTH are necessary for healthy relationship!)

Differentiation of Self is a life-long process, in which we can only take small steps at any one time. The essential capacity one must develop is that of self-regulation (taking responsibility for the management of one's own anxiety and reactivity).

From the Timothy Project at Eastern Mennonite University

Boundaries and Social Media

CARDINAL RULE OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS CONFIDENTIALITY ON THE INTERNET. TREAT ANYTHING POSTED ON ANY SITE AS PUBLIC DOMAIN.

Brock Dubbels, a longtime educator from Minneapolis, Minnesota who regularly uses technology in the classroom, advises setting clear boundaries when it comes to social media.

“Kids don’t need to see my backyard, or know what I say to my wife over dinner. When I have fun with friends and family, that’s a different me, and it’s important that I make that distinction,” he explains. “Being a professional means that I project the values of my profession and my employer when communicating with students.”... If he gets friend requests from students, he deletes them. “I approach the student personally and thank them, but tell them that it is not appropriate for me to be a “friend” when I am their teacher and advocate,” he says.

— (<http://neatoday.org/2011/04/28/why-cant-we-be-friends-social-media-boundaries-between-teachers-and-students/>)

The main boundary that we have established is to make sure that all communication between adults and students is traceable--this means that social media like Facebook and Twitter are great, while Snapchat and Ask.FM are not so. Another advisement that we have is that when texting, be cautious about autocorrect (which I fail miserably at), abbreviations (like LOL, JK, LMAO, etc.), and emoticons. We also advise that you should always proof-read before you post, and if you think it has some way of being misconstrued, don't post it! Best example: One time I accidentally texted a student back, "Sorry, I'm really busy today"

1. **Am I ethically ok with the basis of this social media platform?** Facebook? Yes. Instagram? Yes. Snap Chat? No. The liability of not being able to control exactly what comes on my phone’s screen is also a huge problem. What a 13 year old boy thinks is funny can often be illegal. Seriously.
2. **Would I be happy if a student’s parent saw what I posted or commented?** If there is even a hesitation, do not do it. It is not worth it and once it is on the internet you cannot take it back.
3. **Lastly, what purpose is this serving and can I do this more effectively in a more personal way?** Social media has been a great tool for student ministry but it has also, in many ways, taken away much of our personal connections. We can communicate so efficiently through it and get so many details about each other’s lives that we often mistake that for a deeper more intimate interaction.

Often the concerns boil down to whether a priest can be friends with his or her parishioners. And, friend or not, most dioceses have policies about whether and how a departing rector can continue to be in relationship with parishioners. A cleric's spouse or partner is often expected to abide by those policies – a tough requirement if they have chosen to be digitally connected to congregants even if the cleric has not.

Dell said that while there is "wisdom" in those policies, "I don't know that anyone at this time would be ready or is comfortable saying that upon leaving a ministry you must terminate your Facebook account and un-friend all your parishioners."

Yet, Drescher said, she knows ministers who have done just that. A Presbyterian pastor who was leaving his congregation announced to all his Facebook friends that because of the denomination's policy against maintaining contact, he would close his Facebook page when he left and open one to which he invited only personal friends. His former congregants, he said, would be able to re-friend him in one year, if they still wanted to be connected.

--(<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/article/clergy-must-navigate-traditional-boundaries-new-social-media-world>)

Pastoral Boundaries in Social Media, Keith Anderson, Lutheran pastor

“At the time, Professor Wengert’s first wife was dying and he opened the class by explaining to us that, though he very much appreciated our concerns and prayers, he did not need or want all us pastor wannabes to try to comfort, console or minister to him. He already had a pastor. Those 10 minutes were as good an explanation of pastoral boundaries as I have ever heard.”

“I like what Nadia Bolz-Weber wrote in her comment on Adam Copeland’s article Facebook Rules for Pastors: “My main thing is that I try to never put up any status updates that seem emotionally fishing....my parishioners should not feel like they have to take care of me emotionally. I have real live friends for that.”

- <http://pastorkeithanderson.net/item/you-re-not-my-pastor#sthash.F7ntkyI2.dpuf>

“Chester County District Attorney Tom Hogan said in a statement that county detectives traced Father Haynes’ Instagram account as the source of sexually explicit photographs of children posted on the social media website.”

<http://catholicphilly.com/2014/10/news/local-news/west-chester-priest-arrested-on-child-pornography-charges/>

Additional Resources:

FaithTrust Institute: M.L. Daniel - What You Need to Know: Healthy Boundaries and Social Networking in Ministry (recorded podcast \$10 fee)

- Identify and explore the unique boundary issues social media raises for individuals engaged in ministry.
- Define what every faith community’s internet policy should address.
- Address the warning signs of unhealthy internet usage.

<http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org>

New Media Project, Christian Theological Seminary--<http://www.cpx.cts.edu/newmedia/blog/new-media-project/2013/07/23/youth-ministry-and-social-media-healthy-boundaries>

Guidelines for Clergy Use of Online Social Networking; Orthodox Church of America --
<https://oca.org/PDF/official/2011-guidelines-for-clergy-use-of-online-social-networking.pdf>

A Church Leader's Reflections on Boundary Training

“The headlines are relentless. I wince every time I hear of a minister violating sexual or moral boundaries. I listen sadly as clergy describe unrealistic demands placed upon them by their congregation. Over the years I have seen the great harm inflicted on congregants and clergy alike by boundary violations.

As preparation for our offering something similar, I recently attended my first-ever Boundaries Workshop. Wow.

I knew that boundary violations have become a pressing issue in ministry settings.
I knew that clergy over-functioning and laity under-functioning (and vice versa) are a lethal mix.
I knew that a minister with a Messiah complex can be deadly.
I knew from personal experience how sick clergy can be.
I knew about laity who think they own the minister and his/her family.
I knew from experience what it feels like to be a victim of boundary violations.
I knew this topic is one that most of us would rather not address.

But I didn't know.

I had not realized how pervasive this issue is for the 21st century church.

I had not realized how reluctant we (I) have been to confront the congregational systems we have built that have enabled and even encouraged fuzzy boundaries.

I had grown insensitive to how vulnerable every minister is to a multitude of temptations.

I had not stopped to take in how many men and women, boys and girls have had their lives harmed by boundary violators.

I needed to be reminded that for all the good that clergy can do for the sake of the kingdom, an unhealthy minister has the capacity to inflict pain and harm that will carry its poison far into the future.

Now I know, and I can't un-know what I know.

I've tried to capture my thoughts as I mull over the implications of clear and healthy boundaries for clergy and congregations alike.

1. Boundaries are our friends. Just as clear rules make a game more enjoyable for all the participants, clear boundaries make congregational life richer and more Christ-like for all.
2. The personal and internal issues that every minister deals with have significant impacts on the way he or she lives out his or her calling in the church.
3. The personal and internal issues that every member of a church deals with will have significant impact on the way each of us lives out our calling in our church.
4. Every minister needs someone to hold him or her accountable. This person or persons should have a name and a regular appointment on the calendar of the minister.
5. Every congregation should have a relationship with a licensed pastoral counselor to whom they refer congregants with personal issues.
6. Every congregation needs to establish a professional code of conduct for their clergy.

7. Clarity about a wide array of expectations between clergy and congregation is sadly lacking in most congregations. Such clarity is indispensable for healthy ministry.
8. Personnel committees have two essential roles: advocacy and accountability. Their job is a sacred trust that requires great maturity, spiritual insight, and emotional intelligence. They should meet regularly. Setting salaries is a minor task in their job description.
9. Every church needs clear guidelines for how they are going to do the ministry they have been called to. These must be composed in broad enough terms to remain flexible as our contexts continue to shift and change.
10. Regarding conviction #9, when rules rule, the Kingdom of God is stifled.
11. Every minister and every volunteer who works with children and youth should undergo a thorough criminal background check and be required to attend an annual boundary awareness workshop/ review.
12. All churches need clear policies regarding online and social media communications for clergy and laity.
13. Sexual and moral violations are the most obvious, but boundary issues run much deeper and are more pervasive than we are prone to imagine.
14. If you think you are above and beyond the need for clear boundaries, you probably have a problem.

Since having my consciousness raised regarding the urgency of this issue, I've come to a greater appreciation for how very difficult it is to be effective in ministry and maintain proper boundaries.

Some of us were raised with better clarity in this regard than others. No one, however, can afford to take this issue lightly or ignore his or her own vulnerabilities. We must pay close attention to boundaries if we are going to be taken seriously in our community.

Every congregation and its clergy should covenant with one another to make healthy boundaries a high priority. What that will look like will vary from place to place, but it must be addressed and it must become a high priority. Anything less dishonors the One we serve.”

---Bill Wilson, September 2012 (<https://billwilsoncch.wordpress.com/?s=Boundaries>)

Dr. William “Bill” Wilson founded The Center for Healthy Churches in January of 2014. This followed his service as President of the Center for Congregational Health at Wake Forest Baptist Health since 2009. Previously he was Pastor of First Baptist Church of Dalton, Georgia, where he served since 2003. He brings over 33 years of local church ministry experience to the Center, having served as pastor in two churches in Virginia (Farmville BC and FBC Waynesboro) and on a church staff in South Carolina. Bill has led each of the churches he has served into a time of significant growth and expansion of ministry.

Resources

Olsen, D.C. and Devor, Nancy G., “Saying no To Say Yes”; **ISBN-10:** 1566997283
ISBN-13: 978-1566997287

Saying No to Say Yes: Everyday Boundaries and Pastoral Excellence is an essential guide for pastors seeking to avoid the dual pitfalls of entanglement in congregational drama and burnout. It provides pastors concrete guidance on how to draw boundaries that facilitate community engagement while still maintaining the crucial distance that fosters enduring leadership.

Jung, Patricia Beattie and Stephens, Darryl W., “Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach”; **ISBN-10:** 0800699432, **ISBN-13:** 978-0800699437

Sexual health is an essential part of maintaining professional relationships in ministry. Focusing on implications for the practice of ministry, this book engages all dimensions of theological education and academic disciplines. Each chapter includes an analysis of common ministry situations, discussion questions, practical guidelines, and resources for further study. The volume is ideal for use in courses on professional ethics for ministry, advanced leadership training, and continuing education for clergy.

Brushwyler, Ronald L., “Staying in Bounds: Professional Boundaries for Clergy”; The Midwest Ministry Development Service, 1840 Westchester Blvd., Westchester, IL 60154-4334; <https://midwestministrydevelopment.org/pdf/Staying-In-Bounds.pdf>

Safe Churches Program--Samaritan Counseling Center; <http://scclanc.org/safechurch/>