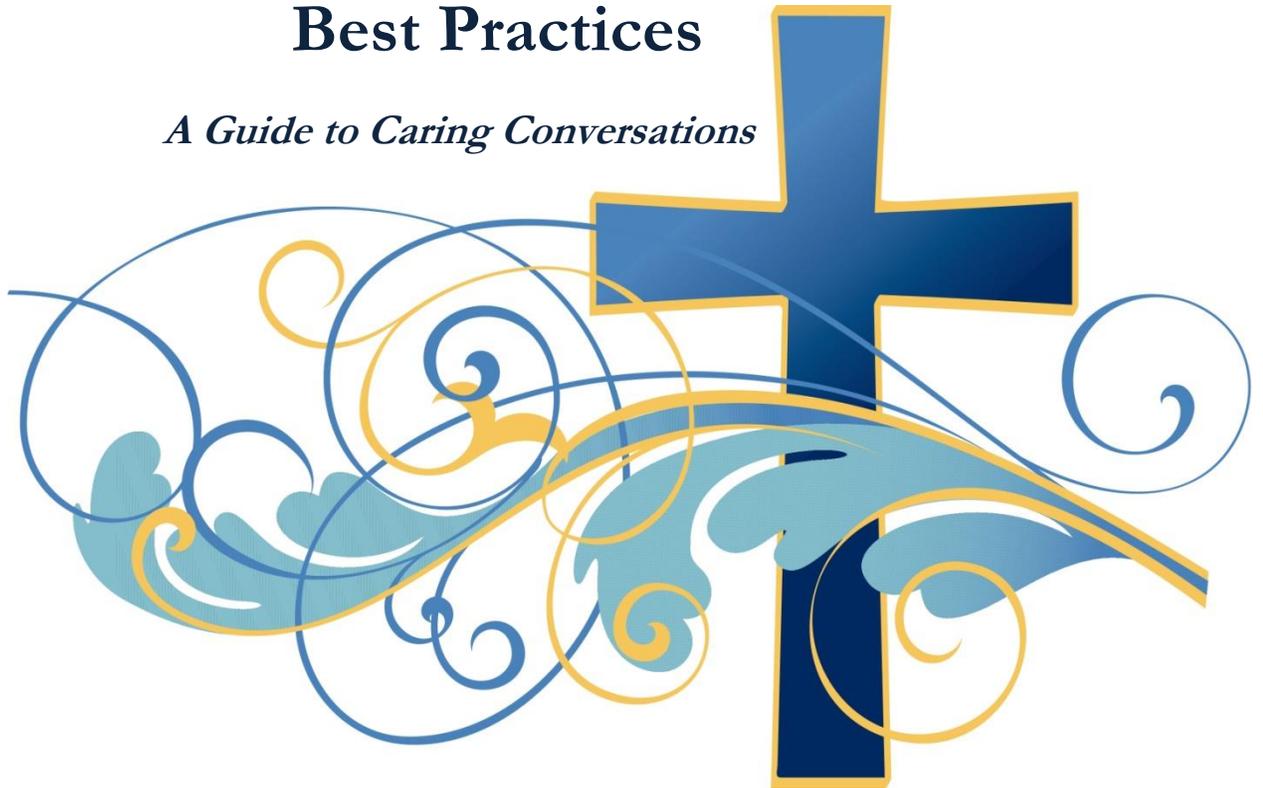


Pastoral Ethics

And

Best Practices

A Guide to Caring Conversations



**Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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Introduction

As the church of Jesus Christ, we are concerned for the relationships we have for one another. We are also acutely aware that conflict and misunderstanding can arise that harm not only our relationships but affect the ministry to which we have been called.

It is helpful, then, to take opportunities to grow in our understanding of when and how things can go wrong and build up our resources for making faithful choices.

This resource presents scenarios that prompt conversation and learning about situations that can arise in our church. Examples, concepts and scenarios are intended to be translated to all aspects of our church life. So a scenario set in a Conference meeting or Bible study still teaches us important lessons about our life together even if that is not your specific situation. In the same way, where a scenario may raise the question of gender, any form of stereotyping or discrimination could be applied.

The scenarios regularly use the language or example of pastors but the intention is to apply learnings to any ministry setting which may include other forms of leadership and staffing such as other rostered leaders (e.g. Associates in Ministry, Diaconal Ministers, and Deaconesses), or staff (e.g. organist, youth director, volunteer director), or other volunteer leaders.

This resource builds off of an earlier edition from 2007, written by the Ministry Committee of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod. This new edition has tried to keep pace with our ever-changing culture and the contemporary issues that we face in ministry.

Each scenario could stand alone as a conversation starter for a council meeting, mutual ministry committee, call committee, adult class, or any leadership event. It may be helpful to consider having some of these conversations before conflict arises rather than in the midst of a conflict. The hope is that certain situations could be avoided if together we work at building appropriate relationships with one another, understand proper protocol, and seek to focus our life together in the call to ministry.

How we deal with each other as people of God shapes the culture and atmosphere of the synod and the congregation. We are called to model healthy and faithful relationships in our life together. In a world where the church and its leaders are in the public eye, it makes a difference to treat one another with respect at all times.

You are invited to begin a conversation about Godly Relationships with this verse from Philippians 4:8.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

- How would you define Godly Relationships? Read Luke 8:1-3 for one example
- How does this verse lead us to see one another and guide our words and actions toward them?

Consider what Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism regarding our relationships with our neighbors:

The Eighth Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

What does this mean? – Answer: We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell

lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead

we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light. (translation, Timothy J. Wengert)

How could this commandment and its explanation change the way you relate to:

- people of the opposite gender?
- people of a different skin color?
- people of whose primary language is not English?
- people of different sexual orientations or identities?
- people who don't seem to have the same economic resources or educational background?
- people of a different generation – older? Or younger?

Since we live in a sinful world, even in the church we will feel the effects of sin. Often that sinfulness is experienced when we suffer from broken relationships between one another within the life of the congregation. Scripture places before us a style of living that is contradictory to what we might experience in the world. It is a life that strives for forgiveness and reconciliation. It is a life in which we admit our own shortcomings in order to make room for others and to repair relationships. The ethics that guide pastors and participants in the church are not rules that protect turf, but guidelines that help us live in relationship to one another in such a way that we mirror the gracious presence of God.

Consider these Scripture texts as you think about ethical decisions in the church:

¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
Galatians 5:14 (NIV)

²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
2 Corinthians 5:20-21(NIV)

Pray for God’s mercy and guidance in your relationships with one another:

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that your patient love for others will be shown in the relationships that we have in our congregation. Bless our pastor, our lay leaders, and all those who call this congregation home. Give us your Spirit and enable us to treat one another with respect, seeing in one another your gracious presence. When we have differences, open our hearts and minds to one another so that we may grow in mutual understanding. Use us to demonstrate your ongoing love to the world. In your most holy name we pray. Amen

Follow the teachings of Jesus about reconciliation, restoration and renewal found in Matthew 18.

See Appendix F for Biblical, preaching, and liturgy resources on Matthew 18.

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LOVING OUR STAFF

Pastor... Can't You Help?

Situation

One Sunday morning, Sarai, an active church member of Grace Lutheran Church approached her pastor saying, "My Uncle John has been in the hospital for the last two weeks. He would really like to receive Holy Communion. Would you mind visiting him this week?" The pastor responded, "Isn't your uncle a member of St. John's Lutheran Church?" "Yes," she answered, "My aunt called their pastor the day he went into the hospital, but the pastor still hasn't responded. Uncle John is so upset. I think a visit from you would really help."

Two weeks later, Sarai approached her pastor again. "Pastor, I know that you said you talked with Uncle John's pastor and that he was going to visit him. But he still hasn't been there. Uncle John was moved to a personal care home. I don't think he'll ever be able to go to church again. Can't someone do something?"

Questions

What might be some reasons why Uncle John's pastor has not responded to the family's request for pastoral care?

What appropriate actions might the woman and/or her aunt take to obtain pastoral care for Uncle John?

List the options that a pastor would have when asked to visit a member of a neighboring congregation. What are the positives and negatives of these options?

Commentary

When people do not receive timely pastoral care, the situation can become quite frustrating. Emotions can surface quickly on all sides. Repeated contacts with the local pastor may be necessary, especially if the original message was not received directly or was received at a time when there were other distractions. While it is true that some pastors may not respond as quickly as they should, it is also true that sometimes communication does not reach a pastor when it should.

The pastor of a family member helps best by attempting to build a bridge between the person or family in need and their pastor so that the long-term pastoral relationship will flourish. This kind of situation can become very difficult when the pastor who should be providing pastoral care is not doing so. An important step in the process is communication between the two pastors. In the end, obtaining pastoral care for Uncle John and his family is the most important goal.

LOVING OUR STAFF

Friends Forever

Situation

Pastor Miriam has faithfully served St. Paul's Church for ten years. She has recently accepted a new call to a congregation in the same synod. Pastor Miriam and her family have made several close friendships in the congregation during her service at St. Paul's. Following a lovely going-away reception in Pr. Miriam's honor, their friends, Abraham and Sarah, express sadness that their friendship would be ending because of the move. Pastor Miriam's husband is caught off-guard and not certain how to reply.

Questions

When a rostered leader's call comes to an end, must friendships end as well?

Why, or why not?

What situations might call for a friendship to be terminated or continued?

Commentary

The Reverend Trish Towle Greeves writes, "So how do we respond to the friends-with-former-members quandary? It depends. It depends on the health and maturity of the pastor and those with whom she or he is engaged, and how well the necessary boundaries are understood and followed by all concerned. It depends on the nature, history, conduct, and focus of the friendship, and the member/friend's relationship and commitment to the congregation and its new leader. Such friendships can probably never be without risk and misunderstanding. Attempting to follow a blanket "no contacts" policy, however, also involves losses, costs, and pain for all concerned."*

*From *"Is This the Only Way?: How Former Pastors Relate to Congregations They Previously Served"* by Trish Towle Greeves, Alban Weekly; Number 492, December 30, 2013

LOVING OUR STAFF

Retired... But Not Gone

Situation

Pastor Gabriel retired. Pastor Michael was called to the congregation six months later. Pastor Gabriel remained in the community and stayed as a member of the congregation. He told Pastor Michael that other than attending worship he would be scarce in the life of the congregation.

As time went on, though, it became clear to Pastor Michael that every decision he made was being reviewed by Pastor Gabriel. Parishioners, who were friends with Pastor Gabriel, would regularly visit the retired pastor and discuss what was happening in the church. At first this was not known to Pastor Michael. He became suspicious when issues that needed a decision at council meetings were regularly delayed until the next council meeting. When the next council meeting was held, 'old' ideas were approved while most 'new' ideas were turned down.

Finally, Pastor Michael asked Pastor Gabriel about this. Pastor Gabriel's response was that as a member of the congregation he had a right to express his opinion, too. He couldn't help it if people agreed with his opinion.

Questions

What responsibilities do each of the pastors have in this situation?

What was the responsibility of the congregation's leadership in this situation?

How can the integrity of the ministry of the new pastor be maintained without completely cutting off contact with the former pastor?

In preparation for the new call, what might a congregation do to avoid the development of a conflict between former and newly called pastor?

How would this situation apply to other employees of the congregation – organist, secretary, youth worker...?

Commentary

* See Appendix B for Constitution Provision †S14.14, page 19

The Constitutions of the ELCA, synod*, and congregation are very clear that once a call is ended, so is the pastoral relationship with the congregation. In theory, this is a good thing; but in practice it is not always so easy to do. It is hard to end long-term relationships between pastors and members, and between spouses and family members and their friends from the congregation.

The primary responsibility lies with the person leaving not to interfere with the ministry of the congregation or the leadership of the new pastor. This is for the well-being of everyone involved and allows for God to work in new ways through the new relationships that are being established.

If approached, it is expected that the former pastor will speak well of the new pastor and encourage the member asking to be in conversation with the new pastor over questions and concerns they may have.

LOVING OUR STAFF

“But I Don’t Know the New Pastor...”

Situation

Pastor Timothy had been at his new call for only three weeks when the call came from the hospice unit that a member had died. Pastor Timothy visited this person five times in the three weeks since his arrival, but when the funeral home contacted him they informed him that the family would like the old pastor, Pastor Paul, to do the funeral. Pastor Paul retired from this congregation just before Pastor Timothy started. Pastor Paul served this congregation for 25 years and having bought a home in town, still lives in the area.

When Pastor Timothy calls the family, they tell him that Pastor Paul had been with this family for years, had done baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals. Pastor Paul knew their dad so well, and the whole family so well, that they were sure he should be the one to do the funeral. They hoped he would understand.

Questions

What are the benefits of Pastor Paul doing the funeral? What are the drawbacks?

How can important occasions in a family’s life, like a wedding or funeral, help members get to know a new pastor?

How can congregational leadership and pastors help members make the transition to the new pastor?

Commentary

When a pastor’s call ends it ends, whether it is a regular or interim call. Further pastoral work should not be done by the departing pastor, even though it may be difficult for both the members of the congregation and the pastor especially in times of crisis or need.

If contacted with a request, it is helpful for the former pastor to contact the current pastor and talk about the situation before responding to the invitation.

MANAGING CHANGE

Shopping for a New Church

Situation

Priscilla and Aquila, a couple in their 30's, have belonged to a Lutheran congregation for about seven years. They were married in the congregation. Their two young children were also baptized in the congregation. As their children approach school age, the couple has also been feeling "growing pains." Lately, they've been bored with this congregation. Most of the members are elderly. Very few young children attend worship, and Sunday school classes are very small. The worship services are very traditional with little contemporary emphasis. The pastor doesn't seem receptive to changes in worship or in doing much with evangelism and seems put-off by any suggestions to do so. Priscilla and Aquila do not feel connected to the pastor and no longer feel comfortable in the congregation.

Priscilla and Aquila have friends attending another Lutheran congregation that seems to be exciting and thriving. Their friends rave about the fun activities for all age groups, a strong youth program, enlightening and uplifting sermons, and Spirit-filled worship services. Priscilla and Aquila have decided to "check out" this other congregation in hopes of finding a flourishing, healthy church in which to raise their children. They believe it is time to move on.

Questions

Is it okay for parishioners to leave their congregation if they no longer feel happy there?

What, if any, obligations do Priscilla and Aquila have to their current congregation and pastor?

What kind of communication should happen between the two pastors?

Is "church shopping" a practice that should be avoided?

Commentary

All members should take an active role to improve the quality of congregational life and should work with the pastor and other parishioners to do this. Members unhappy with life in their congregation or with their pastor should first approach the pastor with their concerns, hoping to resolve the issues. It is important to converse with the pastor first. If after conversation, the members still choose to search elsewhere for a more "suitable" congregation, they should notify their pastor about their intentions.

Likewise, a receiving pastor should encourage these people to be reconciled to their former pastor in an effort to make amends before considering a transfer. The receiving pastor should also encourage them to contact their previous congregations. The receiving pastor should be sensitive to the concerns of these new members but should also consider and respect the former pastor.

By being in communication, congregations and pastors can continue to minister appropriately during times of transition.

MANAGING CHANGE

The Biggest Giver

Situation

At the annual meeting of the congregation, the council proposed balancing the budget for the coming year by reducing support for the church-related college. They then proposed that special gifts from individual members could still meet this need outside of the regular budget.

Thomas was not happy about this. Thomas prided himself on being the biggest giver at church and has threatened to withhold his offering if the vote doesn't go the way he wants.

Questions

What should the congregation do?

If the congregation follows Thomas' lead, what are the risks and benefits?

If the congregation passes the proposed budget, what are the risks and benefits?

What role could the pastor play before, during and after the vote?

What roles could congregational leaders play before, during and after the vote?

What are the implications for the congregation's relationships and ministry possibilities?

Commentary

Congregations, councils, and pastors must always take into account what is best and right for the whole community and for the ministry. Sometimes we lose sight of this. While everyone may not agree, it is possible for everyone to remain in the community of the church and part of the conversation about ministry.

Matthew 18:15-20 could provide insight into reconciliation when situations like this lead to broken relationships. Jesus instructs his followers on a process of reconciliation and forgiveness. Consider how this biblical teaching might be helpful in approaching any situation that could lead to conflict.

MANAGING CHANGE

Too Many Changes

SITUATION

John and Lois have been members of Redeemer Lutheran Church for over 30 years. Their children and grandchildren were raised in this congregation. The family has always been active in the congregation and well respected by its members. About a year ago, a new pastor was called to serve Redeemer Lutheran Church. Since then, John and Lois have noticed 'radical' changes taking place.

The most pressing issue is the change to a contemporary worship service at 11 AM Sunday morning while relegating the traditional service they preferred to 8 AM.

John and Lois and a small group of parish friends are deeply concerned and disappointed by these and other changes that have been made unilaterally by the new pastor. They feel obligated to contact the bishop to complain about this. They believe this has become a matter that would best be addressed by an outside authority that could provide spiritual guidance and advice.

QUESTIONS

What should parishioners do if they have concerns about changes their pastor is making in their congregation?

What might the pastor and congregational leadership do in order to implement changes in a positive way?

Is it appropriate for a member to contact the synod office or a church authority outside of the congregation to intercede? What should be their first step?

In a situation like this, how can the pastor and the congregational leaders best interact with the concerned members?

COMMENTARY

***See Constitutional Provision *C15.11 in Appendix B, page 19**

Mutual respect and dialogue is always important in the church, but especially when changes occur. Including others in the process gives opportunity for many voices and perceptions to be heard. Consider including people of different experience, age, longevity in the congregation, and perspectives to be part of the conversations. This also broadens the leadership who will share the vision with others. The decision-making process should seek to bring people along with the changes and that helps them to see the wider vision that leads to change.

If members are unhappy with a pastor's decisions or practices, they should contact that pastor to discuss their concerns. If, after conversation, the members are still bothered by the pastor's decisions and practices, they should seek the advice of a Mutual Ministry Committee. This committee can facilitate discussion between members and the pastor. If a Mutual Ministry Committee does not exist or is unable to help, the members should then appeal to the congregation's council.

If after review, the council still seeks further advice, the council and the pastor together should request synodical help. No steps should be taken in secret or behind the backs of either the pastor or the council. Reconciliation and conversation is always the preferred solution. Synodical contact should be made only after appropriate steps have been taken first and should come from the congregation's council, not individual church members.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

My Colleague, My Friend

Situation

Pastor Esther is attending her Conference Meeting. When she walks in the room the first person she meets is Pastor Jeremiah who says, “Hi, don’t you look pretty today, I wish my pastor growing up was as pretty as you. I’d have been a lot more excited about church.” (Ha Ha Ha).

Pastor Jeremiah then greets the next pastor, Pastor Obadiah, saying “Hi, how are you? I heard about that new Bible Study you’re doing, I’d love to hear more about that...”

During the meeting Pastor Esther sits at a table of colleagues who talk through the presentation by the leader, making wise cracks and jokes throughout. When someone from their group stands to speak, the table quietly listens.

As the meeting proceeds, she notices that when rostered women speak, this group ignores or downplays or jokes about those comments, but when a rostered man speaks, he has their attention and respect.

Questions

What issues are highlighted by this scenario?

Do you think others notice the same things Pastor Esther does? Why or why not?

What could Pastor Esther do to change her experiences of going to meetings with her colleagues?

What do leaders need to pay attention to when they are with one another?

Why are these things important?

Commentary

Read and discuss Paul in Galatians 3:28.

Everyone wants to be valued for who they are and the gifts they bring to ministry, not just their looks or their gender. It can be a gift to one another to recognize those things we bring to ministry.

Christians should always show respect for one another in every setting and speak well of them. Jokes can be demeaning even if they are intended to be funny. Offering care and concern is different from gossiping in that we seek to offer support, prayer and consolation. We are called to model deep, caring relationships with one another.

When we hear disrespectful comments we need to speak up. Comments of this nature should not be dismissed because the commenter is of a certain generation when it was thought to be Okay. It should not be dismissed because we think “Oh, that’s just so and so, we expect that from him or her.”

When you reflect on your own words, behaviors and thoughts toward others, can you see ways you are not living into Godly relationships? What steps could you take toward change? There are resources available through therapists, pastors, spiritual directors, and the bishop should you seek guidance and support.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Just Joking

Situation

The weekly Bible Study group is studying Genesis. In the midst of talking about Adam and Eve, creation, sin, and the fall, Bildad says, "That's why women should never be in charge."

A bunch of people chuckle at his joke. But Mary is hurt and offended. She has been struggling with feeling included and accepted at this congregation and suddenly feels like she will never be fully accepted due to the number of these kind of sexist comments that get thrown around too often.

She suddenly slams down her coffee cup, lets out a sigh of exasperation and starts to get up to leave. Others in the room are confused by her reaction. Bildad shrugs and says, "Don't be so sensitive, I was just joking."

Questions

What could cause Mary and others in the room to be upset?

Why would the language of "sexist" be used to refer to his comment?

What other kinds of things do we say that unintentionally diminish other people?

How does this behavior contradict the Gospel?

What could Mary say to explain the impact of what Bildad thinks is just a little joke?

Imagine that the pastor responded by stopping the Bible Study and asking the group to talk about what happened. Do you think others in the room would agree with Bildad, that this was no big deal? Or with Mary, that comments like that hurt?

How do you think talking about our attitudes and behaviors and comments affects the life and ministry of the congregation?

Even if most of the group agrees with Bildad, how can a leader help the group understand that Jesus calls us to a different way of being in relationship that honors one another at all times and in all circumstances?

Commentary:

***Read 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.**

What we say out loud, the jokes we tell, the comments we make, are an expression of our faith and are to be used in building up the Body of Christ*. When someone says something that is sexist, racist, demeaning, hurtful, or disrespectful, to or about an individual or particular group of people, it tears down not just individuals but the whole body. Our response to hearing those comments is part of our public witness to the gospel.

KEEPING BOUNDARIES

Tempted In the Wilderness

Situation

Pastor Hosea is a single man, serving as a congregation's only pastor. He wishes that he had found someone to spend his life with, but that hadn't happened yet. However, being single allows him to pour his time and energy into his vocation as a pastor in a way that he couldn't if he were married, with or without children.

Hosea is warm, kind, and genuine, and is ready with a hug when someone needs one. He is an especially supportive pastor for people who are in need – he often goes above and beyond, for which people are really grateful. He considers his life an open book, which helps him express empathy and guide others through their struggles. Sometimes he wonders if he shares too much.

Rumors begin spreading about Pastor Hosea having an inappropriate relationship with Lydia, one of the key lay leaders of his congregation. He has been seen frequently visiting her at her home at times when her husband is not present, and is with her frequently in public. They talk often, and at times seem to have a particularly tender tone in their interactions.

Questions

What do healthy relationships between a pastor and a parishioner look like?

It could be that Pastor Hosea is being especially supportive for Lydia's spiritual or personal struggles, which might be confidential in nature. If so, what choices could he make so that their relationship appears to others to be clearly "just" a pastoral one?

It could be that a non-pastoral friendship has developed between Pastor Hosea and Lydia in the course of their work together. If so, what choices could he make so that the nature of their relationship is transparent to her husband and the community? How could Hosea guard against any temptation he might feel to become emotionally or sexually involved with his married parishioner?

What habits or practices might have been helpful for Pastor Hosea to use as a part of his personal and pastoral life, in order to avoid the temptation of this inappropriate relationship? When he began noticing his desire for or attraction to his parishioner, or hers for him, what could he have chosen to do in order to encourage and live an appropriate relationship?

How should Pastor Hosea's congregation respond to the rumors? Who has the responsibility to mention concerns to him? How might the congregation minister to Pastor Hosea in this particular situation, as well as help him to develop healthy long-term relationships in a profession that can lead to a very lonely life?

For additional resources, see Appendix B

KEEPING BOUNDARIES

You Are Not Alone

Situation

Pastor Bartholomew was teaching the confirmation class. After class was over, all of the youth were picked up except for Ruth. Pastor Bartholomew had Ruth try to reach her parents on the phone, but she was unable to contact them to find out where they were. As Ruth was making these phone calls, the students and teachers from other classes were also leaving the building. Soon the only ones left in the building would be Pastor Bartholomew and Ruth.

Questions

What safe guards are needed to maintain appropriate care for youth who participate in congregational activities?

How do you assure the safety of youth?

How do you assure the safety of adults in leadership positions?

How can this subject best be discussed with adults who may feel that they are being unfairly targeted for their support of the congregation's children?

What other safety issues does this raise?

Where do we begin the conversation to be sure that in our congregation children and youth as well as adults are safe?

Commentary

This is a classic scenario that can happen to a pastor or another responsible adult. Many times, parents will drop their children at the church for Confirmation, Sunday School, Youth Group, or some other event. Parents may lose track of time, leaving their child alone at the church at the end of the event.

It is important to have policies and plans in place that protect both the children and the adults involved in children and youth ministries.

Putting yourself in a situation where you are the only one left waiting with a child is not wise. Make sure that there is at least one other person, preferably an adult, who is still present. If the next to the last child's family comes to pick them up, ask them to stay with you until the last child's family arrives. By assuring there is another person around, you assure no false accusations can be made.

In recent years, safety issues have become a hot topic in churches. Your insurance company can assist you with practical advice, and the necessary actions that are needed to keep youth *and* adults safe while participating in church activities.

Background checks are strongly encouraged for all adults involved in the children and youth ministries of the congregation. These are easily done on-line these days and should be regularly updated according to your insurance company's regulations.

GOING ON-LINE

“I Can’t Believe She Posted That!”

Situation 1

Pastor Rachel is really glad for the ways that social media connects her to colleagues. For a variety of reasons, she doesn’t find her local cluster to be very supportive. She was really struggling with her congregation’s council president and his manipulative and controlling ways of relating to her and others at the congregation. One day she was so frustrated that she was ready to quit. Instead of doing so, she vented about her council president in an ELCA Clergy Post (an on-line group for clergy members only). Some of the responses were helpful in sharing another way for her to think about and approach the relationship. Others were unhelpful or off-topic.

One week later, she overheard her council president making comments about her. She tried to confront him using some of the advice that had been shared with her by colleagues online. After she asked to hear more about what was going on, the president said, “I hear you’re complaining about me to everyone you know on Facebook.” Pastor Rachel is surprised that what she thought was confidential among clergy had somehow been shared.

Questions

What are some of the benefits and challenges of social media relationships?

In what other ways could Rachel have sought support or advice regarding her council president?

How do you make decisions about what you share and what you don’t in public electronic forums?

“Honest...It Just Popped Up!”

Situation 2

Pastor Amos goes on Facebook, as is typical over his morning coffee. He sees several posts by members that have friended him. One of the posts is linked to some photos of one of the teenage girls from church. Pastor Amos sees that they are provocative poses in skimpy clothes. The photos make him personally uncomfortable. He closes the site but continues to think about a myriad of problems with what he has seen. He feels like he needs to say something either to the girl or to her parents out of concern for her and the trouble she is inviting with such posts. At the same time he worries that someone may think of him as having done something inappropriate just for looking and expressing concern about the provocative nature of the photos.

Questions

Did Pastor Amos do anything wrong?

How can Pastor Amos provide care and guidance for this family without incriminating himself in some way?

What kind of policies should a pastor set that avoid inappropriate internet contact with members and the community?

How can the church promote the healthy use of social media and technology with its staff and members?

What do you do if you see something disturbing on-line (pictures, comments, etc.) about a church member or colleague?

Commentary on Social Media

Are you and your congregation seen in the best light by what is said or represented here? What impression of you and your congregation will this post give a stranger?

What you post matters. What you look at matters. You are responsible for your use of social media. Social media can be a great tool for being in touch with members, especially our younger members. At the same time it can also open us up to potentially problematic situations that affect our ministry relationships.

What you post is public. Once it is out there it doesn't go away. Re-posting happens. Your intended audience won't be the only ones to see this – count on it! Public expressions impact how you are seen as a church leader and have the potential for building up or tearing your relationships. They also affect how your congregation is seen by the public. Consider these points especially when posting pictures, or when stating your political positions.

Every pastor needs to have a real live support person (mutual ministry, mentor, spiritual director) to air things with. Your anger, frustration, hurt feelings and righteous indignation should not be aired publicly. Questions about specific incidents of conflict should not be posted, especially if it names or alludes to certain congregational members. Disrespectful comments should not be posted about other church bodies. Be gracious and intentional about the way you communicate.

Make sure you have full and accurate information before you respond.

Consider how your on-line activity will follow you through the years. It doesn't go away. If you are a pastor, consider what call committee will 'Google' you and find this? What will they think? What new resident will do a search and decide they don't want to go to a church where the pastor posts negative or angry words? What congregational leader or member will be hurt by what you say publicly when you should have gone to them directly?

There are safe ways to use social media to communicate with members that do not put you at risk or vulnerable to inappropriate use. Apps like Remind 101 are designed for school teachers but can be helpful for church leaders. Apps like this can be helpful for adults who need to contact youth about events and activities. No one will question why that adult has access to a child's phone number. Since it goes as a group, you don't see individual numbers, and participants have to sign up for it to be included.

BEING SAFE

Are You OK?

Situation

Pastor Susanna has an appointment with Eunice, a 30 year old woman from her congregation. Eunice used to be in worship every Sunday, but recently has only been coming once in a while. She has also dropped off of the Christian Education Committee and stopped teaching Sunday School. These are things that she seemed to be gifted for and seemed to enjoy very much. Eunice has told people that she needs to be home and doesn't have time.

Several of Eunice's friends from church have expressed concerns to Pastor Susanna about Eunice, including how she seems to be more and more withdrawn, seems to be very cautious in her interactions with her husband, always needing to please him and afraid to upset him. The friends have shared that they get "weird vibes" around her husband in that he makes them feel uncomfortable, almost threatened by him.

One friend told Pastor Susanna in confidence about recently seeing Eunice in the store, and she had a lump on her head and a bruise on her cheek. When asked, Eunice tried to brush it off saying, "Oh, I'm just so stupid sometimes."

Eunice has two young children. They don't seem as out-going and as happy as they used to be.

Pastor Susanna suspects there may be abuse occurring in the home and hopes that this is what Eunice is coming to talk with her about.

Questions

What clues do we have that might indicate abuse? What kinds of abuse might be happening?

What opportunities does Pastor Susanna have to help in this situation?

What could Pastor Susanna say to help Eunice feel safe talking?

What does Eunice need to know before she starts talking to Pastor Susanna about what she might share?

Based on what she suspects is going on, what resources could Pastor Susanna have ready to give to Eunice to help her and the kids be safe and get help?

What if Pastor Susanna is wrong about what she thinks is going on?

APPENDIX A

A Primer for Pastoral Ethics*

A few basic principles should guide our contact even when faced with difficult circumstances:

1. The pastor who is currently under call in a congregation is responsible for providing pastoral care and for presiding over pastoral acts for the members of the congregation.
2. When a pastor not under call to a particular congregation is asked by a member of that congregation to perform a pastoral act or to provide pastoral care, it is that pastor's responsibility to say "no."
3. Congregational members place the former pastor or a neighboring pastor in a very difficult position when they ask for pastoral acts to be performed by that pastor.
4. Since pastors under call bear the responsibility of pastoral acts for congregational members, it is imperative that the pastor provide nurture and care for all members in a timely fashion.
5. If a pastor is unable to provide care for a member of the congregation, that pastor should ask for the assistance of another pastor so that no one is without pastoral care.
6. When congregational members feel that they need to remove themselves from a situation of conflict, neighboring congregations may provide an "oasis" for worship and spiritual nurture. However, in pastoral care situations, the home pastor still bears the responsibility of reaching out to the person.
7. Building partnerships in ministry can help to address ethical concerns before they happen. Examples are: assuring that no adult (pastor or layperson) is alone with children or teens; assuring that communication and response happens quickly when the need for pastoral care arises; assisting in understanding and addressing situations of interpersonal conflict.
8. Following the Christian life described in the New Testament, pastors and laity alike should work for relationships that witness to the self-sacrificing love of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, our communication with one another should be honest, direct, and timely. Each person needs to view the situation through the other person's eyes.

***From "Pastoral Ethics: A Guide for Discussion," Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, 2007**

APPENDIX B

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & INFORMATION

Through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America documents and constitutional provisions can give direction and guidance to pastors and congregations in making ethical decisions and in managing conflict:

- **Vision and Expectations**, a document produced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to provide guidelines for the behavior of Rostered Leaders in the ELCA, can be found at www.elca.org
- **ELCA Synod Constitution †S14.14 refers to the expected limits on pastoral leadership for congregations they do not or no longer serve.**

Ordained ministers shall respect the integrity of the ministry of congregations which they do not serve and shall not exercise ministerial functions therein unless invited to do so by the pastor, or if there is no duly called pastor, then by the interim pastor in consultation with the Congregation Council .

- **ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations *C15.11 refers to the synod and bishop's role when congregations and pastors are unable to resolve a substantial matter within the congregation's life and ministry.**

When there is a disagreement among factions within this congregation on a substantive issue that cannot be resolved by the parties, members of this congregation shall have access to the synodical bishop for consultation after informing the chair of the Congregation Council of their intent. If the consultation fails to resolve the issue(s), the Consultation Committee of the synod shall consider the matter. If the Consultation Committee of the synod shall fail to resolve the issue(s), the matter shall be referred to the Synod Council, whose decision shall be final.

Bible Study, Preaching & Liturgy Resources on Matthew 18

Each of these resources is available @ SWPA Synod Resource Center or you may choose to research them on-line.

- *Matthew 18 Community: The Nature of Conflict* <http://www.free-bible-study-lessons.net/>
- *Proclaiming the Story: Encourage; Exploring Life in Community, Session 2: So Many Friends* (Matthew 18). Download available in ELCA website in Archives; Search Education and Evangelism Team, then enter title.
- *Signs of the Kingdom: Studies in Matthew:* Seven sessions with Leader and Learner Guides;
Also available: *Liturgy Supports* and *Preaching Supports*.

- Curriculum materials available from Augsburg Fortress, Signs of the Kingdom-Liturgy and Preaching Supports available as downloads from the Book of Faith website located on ELCA website.

Additional Topical Resources

Preventing Abuse and Ministering with the Abused

Ministry with the Abused, Originally written for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada & adapted for use in the ELCA in 2010. Download or request copies @ www.elca.org

Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse
Download or request copies @ www.elca.org

The Youth Worker's Guide to Helping Teenagers in Crisis, Rich Van Pelt and Jim Hancock, Youth Specialties

Pennsylvania Child Abuse History and Clearance Forms and Information
<http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/findaform/childabusehistoryclearanceforms/>

Understanding Domestic Violence

Pennsylvania Domestic Violence Resources: <http://www.aardvarc.org/dv/states/padv.shtml>

East Texas Crisis Center website: www.etcc.org

Understanding Child Abuse

Safe Horizon: www.safehorizon.org

Allegheny County Child Protective Services
<http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/childprotection.aspx>

Understanding Elder Abuse

The National Elder Care Locator: Help to find appropriate resources.
<http://www.eldercare.gov/Eldercare.NET/Public/Index.aspx> Call 800-677-1116.

Pennsylvania Department of Aging
http://www.aging.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/department_of_aging_home/18206

Mandated Reporting and Crisis Care

RE:SOLVE Crisis Network Hot-line at: 1-888-7-YOU CAN (1-888-796-8226) Speak with a trained counselor or get a referral for other counties.

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape PCAR works in concert with a statewide network of 50 rape crisis center serving all 67 counties in PA. For a list of centers and for additional information: www.pcar.org

Mandated Reporting with Children and Youth

For current information (legislative changes do occur) on mandated reporting see: <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/mandated-reporter.aspx>

Allegheny County Child Protective Services call 412-473-2000 or 1-800-932-0313

ChildLine by calling 1-800-932-0313. ChildLine is a 24-hour toll-free telephone reporting system operated by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare to receive reports of suspected child abuse.

Gender Understanding

The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy, Allan G. Johnson, Temple University Press. Reading guide available @ www.elca.org

Speaking of Sexism: Called to Risk and Trust. Three-session Bible study available @ www.elca.org

Race and Class

One Body, Many Members (DVD) Assist congregations to welcome individuals whose race, culture, or ethnicity is different than their own. Available @ resources.elca.org

Even the Stones Cry Out for Justice, Assist congregations who wish to reach out and embrace people of all races, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds. Three or five session Bible study or one-day retreat available @ www.elca.org

Lazarus at the Gate, Information, Bible studies, bibliographies, network referrals for doing work among people living in poverty. Available at www.elca.org

Disability, Mental Illness, and the Body of Christ

The Body of Christ and Mental Illness Social Message, ELCA, Available @ www.elca.org

ELCA Disabilities Social Message, ELCA, Available @ www.elca.org

Social Media

Pastoral Transitions in the Age of Social Media, Adam Walker Cleaveland, Copies of the complete article may also be found by searching the Alban Institute website at www.alban.org. (February 5, 2014)

Other helpful websites on these and other topics:

www.churchmutual.com

www.buildingchurchleaders.com

Several print resources are recommended for those who wish to learn more about specific topics:

- *Ethics and Psychological Type, Pathways to Intensity* by Blake Burleson, Center for Psychological Type, Inc.
- *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times* by Peter Steinke offers information on Family Systems Theory and Triangulation.
- Stephen Ministry Training Modules on *Confidentiality*

Many of these and other helpful resources are available through the Synod Resource Center 9625 Perry Highway, Pittsburgh, PA 15237 412.367.8222 or beth.caywood@swpasynod.org

