

Clergy Boundaries and Ethics for SPRCs

Adapted from presentation to the BWC by Becky Posey Williams, from the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, January 2019

Begin with a Vision for Clergypersons:

- What is your vision for yourself in terms of being the best minister you can be?
- What is blocking your implementation of that vision?
- What steps do you need to take to set boundaries in order to live out your vision?

In ministry, how do clergy:

- Maintain the integrity of the ministerial relationship?
- Always recognize the reality of power and vulnerability present?
- Make choices that sustain healthy boundaries AND honor our deep, human need to be in intimate friendship relationships?

Without healthy boundaries and self-care, clergy and other ministerial leaders (including laity) run the risk of violating that trust. One potential avenue for violating that trust is through sexual misconduct.

“Sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships is a betrayal of sacred trust. It is a continuum of sexual or gender-directed behaviors by either a lay or clergy person within a ministerial relationship (paid or unpaid). It can include child abuse, adult sexual abuse, harassment, rape or sexual assault, sexualized verbal comments or visuals, unwelcome touching and advances, use of sexualized materials including pornography, stalking, sexual abuse of youth or those without capacity to consent, or misuse of the pastoral or ministerial position using sexualized conduct to take advantage of the vulnerability of another.” (*Book of Resolutions* 2016, #2044 p. 776)

ETHICS IS NOT JUST FOLLOWING THE RULES

It's thinking about the potential impact of one's decisions and actions on oneself and others, and modifying your behavior based on your consideration of those consequences.

The Judicial Council asserts that dating, romantic or sexual relationships between clergy and their parishioners “are never appropriate because of imbalance of power” (Decision 1228, 2012).

Questions clergy are asked to consider:

- What is your plan for handling a sexual advance by a supervisor or by a member of your congregation?
- When are you most aware of your power in ministry?
- When do you feel powerless in your position of ministry? How do you feel powerless in your place of ministry?
- Social media: How does your online presence through social networking, blogs, etc. reflect your professional role as minister?

Pastor's Plan for Self-Care:

Identify the pressures ministry can place upon you.

Recognize places where self-care can be improved.

Identify barriers to self-care

Outline a self-care plan

SELF-CARE INVENTORY

- _____ 1. I stand up for myself, saying “no” when I need to.
- _____ 2. I take good vacations.
- _____ 3. I am able to let go and learn from mistakes I have made.
- _____ 4. I am careful about what I eat and almost always have a balanced diet.
- _____ 5. I can identify what I enjoy doing just for fun.
- _____ 6. I do something for fun at least once a week.
- _____ 7. I drink at least 8 glasses of water a day.
- _____ 8. I exercise at least 30 minutes a day, four days a week.
- _____ 9. I take at least one full day off work each week.
- _____ 10. I can name at least 2 people I trust and whom I can talk to about anything.
- _____ 11. I sleep well and get 7-8 hours of sleep most nights.
- _____ 12. I feel I have the training and skills to do my job well.
- _____ 13. During my work day, I take a couple of brief breaks, including standing up and moving around.
- _____ 14. I am an active member of a covenant group of colleagues.
- _____ 15. I have a Spiritual Director and make at least monthly appointments with him/her.
- _____ 16. I am aware of my personal history and can identify areas where I need healing.
- _____ 17. I am taking steps through individual therapy/counseling to address my personal history.
- _____ 18. I am aware of my grudges and able to let go of them.
- _____ 19. I believe I have more positive emotional experiences than negative.
- _____ 20. For my optimum healthy self-care, I could definitely spend more time, attention, and focus on: