



Healthy Boundaries

Shenandoah Presbytery



Introductions

Open with prayer

Scripture John 10: 7-10

Topics Covered:

Healthy Boundaries
Abuse/Misconduct
Prevention
Responding to an
Allegation



Goals of Training

1. To increase awareness of the need for healthy and appropriate boundaries in church relationships
2. To create and maintain appropriate policies and procedures to protect all



Goals of Training

3. To enable participants to help others in their congregations to know, understand, and live out healthy boundaries
4. To respond appropriately and effectively if there is an allegation of abuse or misconduct



Health Churches = Healthy
Boundaries

The more people who have Healthy
Boundaries, the healthier the
church is!



Goals of Training

Even though mandatory...

All are welcome here!

This training is required for pastoral leaders, elders, and certified Christian educators. Your church may also choose to include others: SS teachers, youth leaders, volunteers in your mission and ministry, etc.

When you do this training, please record in your Session minutes the date the training was completed, and who took the training.

Notify assocgp@shenpres.org when your pastor completes the training



As we begin...

- Respect for all
- Respect confidentiality
- Use wisdom (and good boundaries!) when choosing to share



Boundaries...what do you think?

- A gift?
- An act of grace?
- Create safety?
- As developmental milestone?
- Rude?
- Withholding?
- Barrier to relationships?
- Culturally shaped?



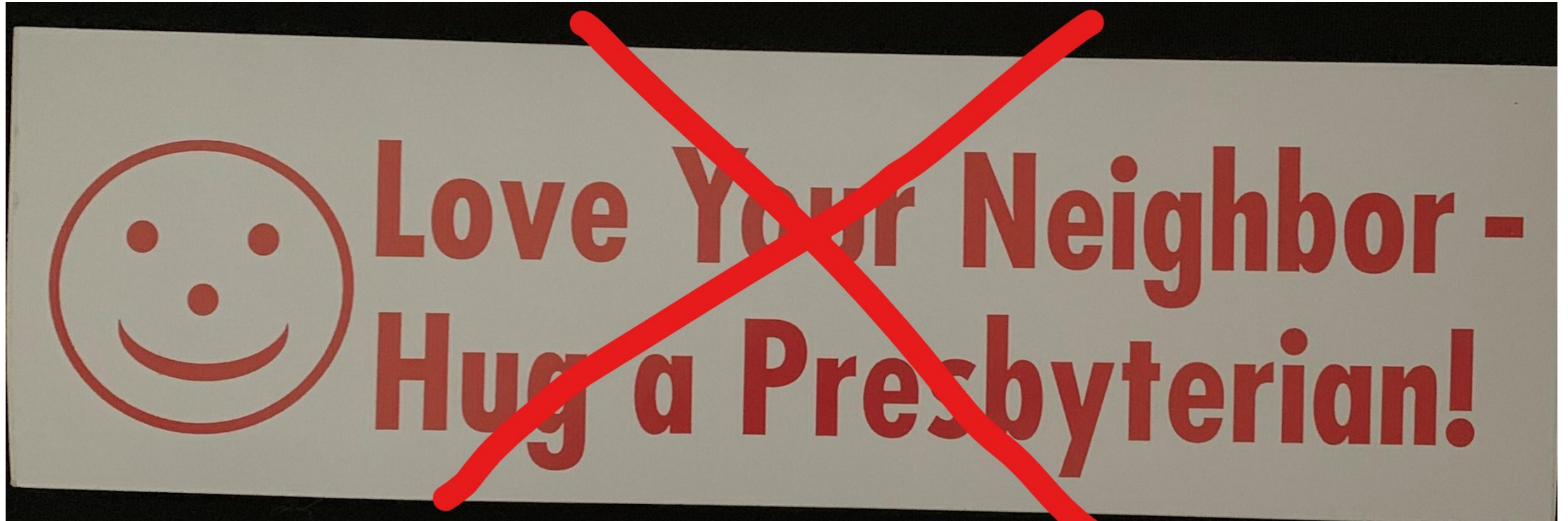
Rev. Luis A. Carriere
Everitt Free Methodist Church

???



**Love Your Neighbor -
Hug a Presbyterian!**

Boundaries? Consent? Cultural Practice?



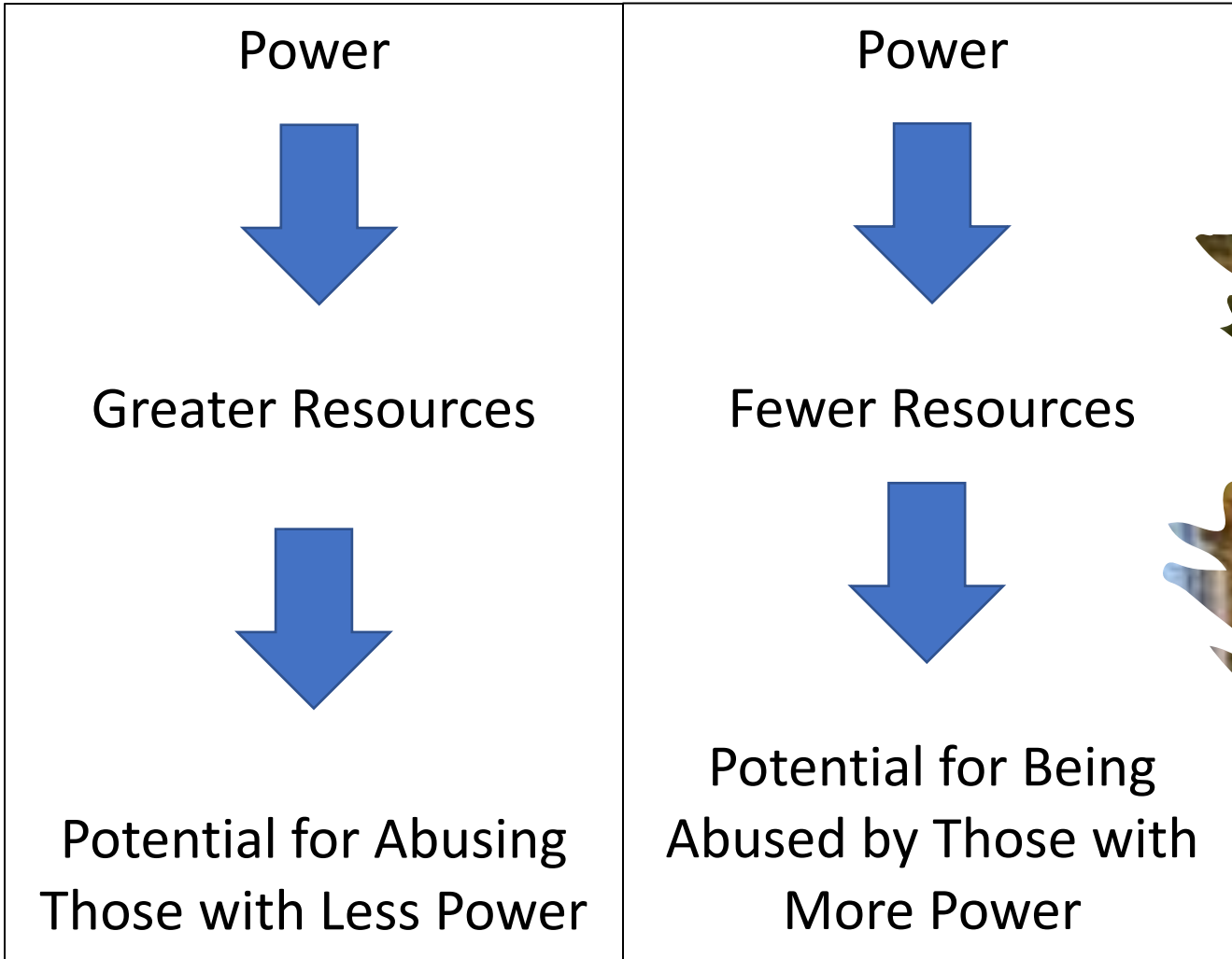
Boundaries
are the distance
at which I can
love you and me
simultaneously.

Book of Order G- 2.0104a

- “To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and Ministers of Word and Sacrament...Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world.”
- Healthy boundaries helps us in this manner of life.



Nature of Boundaries



Nature of Boundaries

What boundaries are:

1. They help us maintain clear relationships
2. 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
3. They are not intended to shackle us but to free us in our work as spiritual leaders
4. They help us keep perspective when people's problems seem overwhelming
5. They signal to others that it is safe to trust us
6. They protect from abuses of power



Nature of Boundaries

What boundaries are NOT:

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



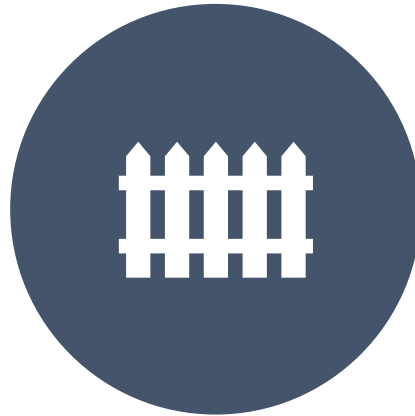
What do
Healthy
Boundaries
look like?



Boundaries:



WALL?



FENCE?



GATE?

Boundary Crossing

VS

Boundary Violation

Ministry sometimes involves
boundary crossing but never
requires a boundary violation



Crossing? Or Violation?

01

Bringing
communion to
shut-ins

02

Making Hospital
visits

Boundary Crossing
vs
Boundary Violation

Bottom Line:

Is this in the best interests of
the congregant
and the congregation?



Sexual Misconduct

It is misconduct when any person in a ministerial role of leadership or pastoral counseling engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, etc. of any age in a professional, pastoral relationship.



Ethical Analysis

When a pastoral leader engages in sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, or staff member:

1. It is a violation of role
2. It is a misuse of authority and power
3. It is taking advantage of vulnerability
4. It is an absence of meaningful consent
5. It is damaging to the church
6. It is a scandal to the Gospel



Meaningful Consent

Is two adults who are able to consent to the relationship.

NOT applicable in employer/employee, pastoral leader/congregation members, etc., due to built in imbalance of power



CONSENT

From facebook: (8/5/25)

“Tonight at Walmart I saw a little boy ask a little girl if he could hug her because he liked her sweater. The girl (these kids looked to be about 5 MAYBE 6) said no, so the boy said “okay. I like your sweater. Bye.” And then he ran back to his parents.

He said to his Dad “I didn’t hug her because she said no, but I told her I liked her sweater!” and his dad said: “Cool buddy!” and they went on with their shopping trip.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent. Most victims and perpetrators know each other. Immediate reactions to sexual abuse include shock, fear or disbelief.

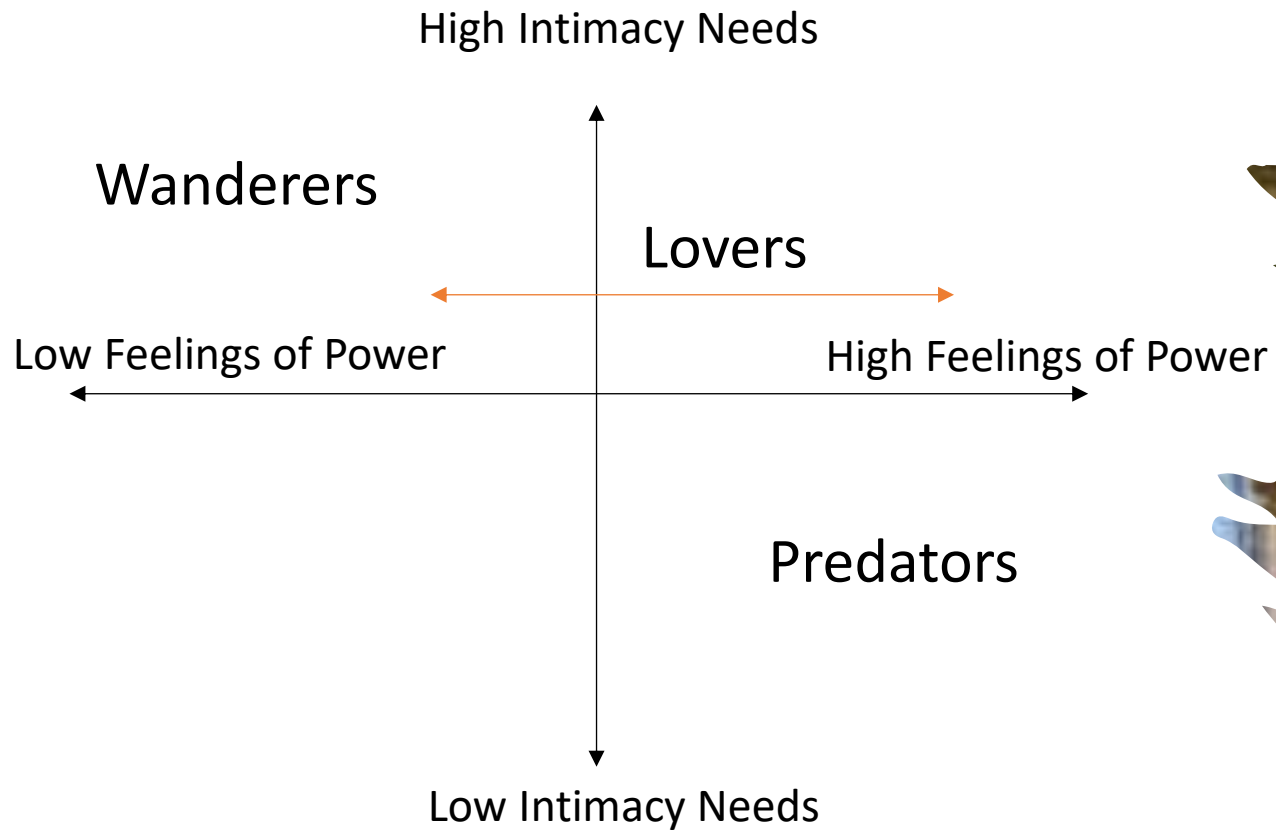


Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is behavior characterized by the making of unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks or physical advances in a workplace or other professional or social situation



Predators, Wanderers, and Lovers



Predators, Wanderers, and Lovers

Prevention and healthy boundaries can stop many wanderers and lovers, but not predators.

We have policies and procedures in order to protect and prevent, but we must also have policies when there is a violation.



Book of Order 2023-2025

- G-3.0106 All councils shall adopt and implement the following policies: a sexual misconduct policy, a harassment policy, a child, youth and vulnerable adult protection policy, and an antiracism policy.
- Each Council's policy shall include requirements for boundary training which includes the topic of sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse prevention training for its members at least every thirty-six months.



Dating,
Friendships,
Dual
Relationships,
and Gifts



Dating

Pastoral leaders who are single must often decide whether to date someone in their congregation – it is where they spend a lot of time with people with shared values and commitments. Dating a congregant creates many issues...



Dating

If you find yourself near or in a dating relationship with a congregant:

1. You cannot be their spiritual leader and have romantic involvement. If you pursue a dating relationship, one of you will need to find another church.




Dating

If you find yourself near or in a dating relationship with a congregant:

2. Tell the presbytery staff!



A photograph of a dirt path leading through a field of tall grass. The path is bordered by a rustic wooden fence made of vertical posts and horizontal rails. The sky is clear and blue.

If your pastor comes with a spouse/family

- THINK ABOUT POSSIBLE CONFLICT OF INTEREST AREAS:
- is it appropriate for them to serve on Session,
- be employed by the church,
- Volunteer as youth director/secretary, etc.?

Friends

Having friends among the people you lead and serve with is natural but also has complications. There is a difference between being friendly and being a close friend who shares confidences, especially when it comes to pastoral matters. You will need to set healthy boundaries



Friends

If you find yourself the close friend or family of a congregant, consider the following:

Discuss the difficulties of being both a spiritual leader and a friend/family.

Continue to prompt them to communicate with the appropriate person(s) in a situation: i.e., to attend Session meetings with a concern, etc.



Dual Relationships

A dual relationship is one in which you might have more than one role such as being the patient of a congregant.
Sometimes, this is unavoidable...



Dual Relationships

Tips for dual relationships:

1. Have a clear understanding about what you expect from each other
2. Learn to set boundaries (i.e., don't talk "church talk" while in the barber's chair, if the barber is also a member). Think about any policies Session might have about engaging in business with members (plumbing, contractors, etc.)
3. If problems develop, reach out to presbytery



“BFPs”

Beloved Former Pastors = **“BFPs”**

when a pastor leaves, the pastoral relationship ends.

Any pastoral issues should be handled by the interim/new pastor, such as requests for funerals, baptisms, weddings, etc.

See Shenandoah Presbytery’s Departing Minister Covenant





Gifts/Finances are Boundary Issues, Too

- Best Practices for Financial Issues
 - Book of Order:
 - G-3.0113 – “full financial review” every year by public accountant or committee of members versed in accounting procedures...not related to treasurer(s).
 - G-3.0205- “All offerings shall be counted and recorded by at least 2 duly appointed persons, or by one fidelity bonded person;
 - Financial books and records...shall be kept and shall be open to inspection by authorized church officers...
 - Periodic, and in no case less than annual reports of all financial activities shall be made to the session

Gifts/Finances

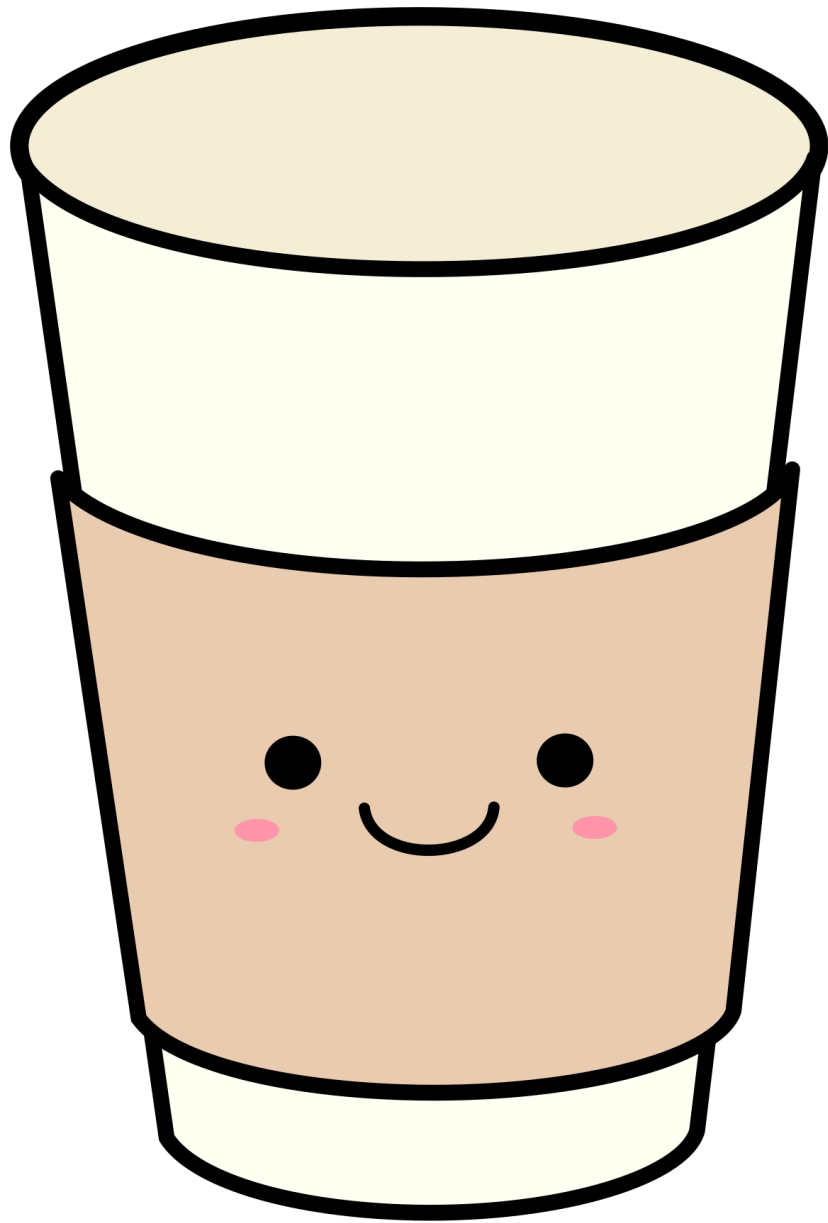
Where is the line between what is appropriate to accept and what is not appropriate?

1. Let common sense guide you
2. Be certain you are not expected to do anything in return
3. Say thank you!
4. Consider setting a dollar limit
5. Think beforehand about a gracious way to decline inappropriate gifts- this applies to Sessions, too!



Discussion:
Case Studies
Breakout Rooms





If someone from your congregation asked you what “healthy boundaries are,” what would you tell them? Why are they important?

Break Time

Abuse and Misconduct Prevention



Policies and Procedures

SEXUAL ABUSE STATISTICS

- 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18.
- 90% of offenders are known by their victim or their victim's family.
- 1 in 10 public school children, accounting for 4.5 million students, have experienced sexual misconduct by an educator.
- Each year, 1 in 7 nursing home residents and thousands of adults with disabilities are abused.
- There are more than 60 million survivors of child sexual abuse in America; 80% never reported their abuse.
- Child abuse costs the United States approximately \$103 billion per year.

Data regarding Abuse and Misconduct at Church and its effect

- OGA PC(USA) reports 50 allegations of clergy misconduct annually.
- Mark Tammen, PC(USA)'s polity guidance trainer, reports that of 90 cases over a 5 year period, 2 were false allegations.¹
- Abuse/Misconduct may be perpetrated by pastoral leaders/REs/Deacons/Youth leaders/Sunday School teachers/youth to youth
- In 2015 the first national survey of adult survivors of clergy perpetrated sexual abuse was conducted (March-May 2015). 280 survivors participated in the study.²
- • 50% Agree or Strongly Agree that their experience with the church after the abuse negatively affected their relationship with God
- • 80% Agree or Strongly Agree that their experience with the church after the abuse negatively affected their spiritual life

PCUSA RESOURCES

- <https://pcusa.org/resources/legal/creating-safe-ministries>

Given what we know,

- How do we PREVENT abuse and misconduct?
- Scripture
- Policies-
 - Include practical applications-
 - Ratios/windows/clear line of sight
 - Background checks/reference checks/training
 - Annual review of policies
- Culture of health/no tolerance for harm
- Shared by all-
 - Predators will not stay if they know you have prevention steps

Policy needs to be created and known

- BEFORE something happens-
- You cannot scramble to make things up in the heat of the moment-
- And everyone needs to know/have access to this information
- Think fire drills: we need to know what to do in an emergency, EVEN when we pray we never have to use that knowledge



Mandated Reporting

- G-4.0302 Mandatory Reporting
- Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, **shall** report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in G-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse.

Every State has Reporting #s

- Virginia:
 - <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/abuse/>
 - Child Protective Services Hotline (800) 552-7096
 - Adult Protective Services Hotline (888) 832-3858
- West Virginia:
 - <https://dhhr.wv.gov/bss/services/Pages/Centralized-Intake-for-Abuse-and-Neglect.aspx>
 - For child and elder abuse:
 - 1-800-352-6513

Good Samaritan Law

- Every state has a Good Samaritan clause- if you make a report of abuse in good faith, you cannot be charge civilly or criminally

Story of Rev. Kris Schondelmeyer, PC(USA) pastor

- Rev. Schondelmeyer, who served as pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Deep Run in Perkasio, Pennsylvania, was sexually assaulted when he was 17 by a commissioned lay pastor (what is now referred to as a commissioned ruling elder) who was serving as a chaperone for youth attending a Presbyterian conference. After the assault, Schondelmeyer told no one and put the episode out of his mind. A decade later, shortly before his wedding, Schondelmeyer began having vivid nightmares about the assault. Instead of going on his honeymoon, Schondelmeyer found himself in a psychologist's office.
- Shortly after the nightmares began, Schondelmeyer went online to find out what had happened to the man who assaulted him and learned his attacker had served prison time on child pornography charges prior to becoming a lay pastor. More devastating to Schondelmeyer was learning that church officials knew about the man's criminal history when they decided, as Schondelmeyer says, "to give him a second chance" and allow him to chaperone the youth conference.

BOO D-7.0201a

- No written allegation shall be filed later than five years from the time the alleged offense was discovered
- Except in cases of sexual abuse of another person as defined in D-7.0901, in which case the five year time limit **shall not** apply.
- There is also **no time limit** to file an allegation that a person who knew or reasonably should have known of the reasonable risk of sexual abuse of another as defined in D-7.0901 failed to take reasonable steps to minimize the risk.

Questions? Comments? Break time



Policies and Procedures- Goals

- To prevent misconduct
- To address allegation of misconduct with a fair process
- If allegations are founded, to repair the breach of trust that the misconduct created and to make justice

- To offer resources for healing to the victim(s)
- To hold the abuser accountable
- To offer resources for healing to the congregation

Theological and Biblical Convictions

- Truth-telling John 8:32
- Acknowledging the victim with compassion- to “suffer with”
 - 1 Cor 12:26
- Protecting the Vulnerable- see “hospitality code”
- Accountability Luke 17: 2
 - 2 Samuel 12: 1-7
- Restitution Luke 19: 1-12
- Vindication Luke 18: 1-
 - Not revenge, but to be set free

All Policies Should Have These Components:

Training and
Education

Prevention of
Misconduct
and Abuse

Response to
an Allegation

#1 Training and Education

Who will you train?

Who will do the training?

How often will you train?

How will you communicate this to the congregation?



#2 Prevention of Misconduct and Abuse

Not only behavior, but also speech, social media, etc.

Physical factors- doors/windows/records of meetings, etc.

The fact of having these policies, and making them known to the congregation reduces risk of abuse and misconduct

Best Practices for Prevention

- Ratios- 2 adults per 1 (at least 2 adults, preferably not related/married) to youth/others
- If that is not possible: 1:2 (1 adult with MORE than 1 youth/other)
- Clear sight lines
- Open doors/windows in doors
- Volunteers? At least 6 months, preferably background checked/reference checked
- Signed affidavits of all volunteers and staff agreeing to abide by your church's policies
- Sharing of practices and policies with congregation

Social Media Policy

- Need to have a social media component in your policies
- Biblical basis of respect for all
 - Includes who will be copied on texts/emails, etc.
 - Some congregations set up group text options-
 - Applies to adults as well as youth
 - Youth misconduct a growing phenomenon in social media



AI and Boundary Training

- Help your people understand AI and its abuses
- Especially re: Images and Child Pornography
- And safe sharing of minor's images in church videos/photos/online newsletters, etc.
- In the United States, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children said it had received 485,000 reports of A.I.-related CSAM, including stills and videos, in the first half of the year, compared with 67,000 for all of 2024. (nytimes, 7/10/25, accessed 2/8/26)



- If you do NOT yet have these policies, The Presbytery is available to help.
- PLEASE take the time to write your own- don't just rubber stamp somebody else's boiler plate, as it should fit your unique situation
- Talk with your insurance carrier.
- If you already have policies, review/update annually

Question #2

- Name 3 things your congregation can do/is already doing to prevent abuse/misconduct
- What other things would help?

If there is an
allegation



#3 Response to an Allegation

What to do?

- Have a clear process- and follow it
- Acting for justice
- Need to have policy in place BEFORE an allegation/event happens
- Notify Presbytery (through Stated Clerk) AND your insurance agency



Steps to take immediately:

An allegation is an allegation-

and is taken seriously
but it is, at this point, an allegation

But your policy may include, at this
point:

separation of alleged and allegedee,
administrative leave,
stepping down from Session/youth
group, Sunday School, etc.



—

Your policy should
involve care for:

person making the
allegation

person against whom the
allegation is made

the entire faith (and
maybe larger community)

Clarity in your policy

- Who receives allegations?
 - Does the congregation know who to contact/report this?
 - Does the Session?
 - How do they know who to contact? How is this information shared?
- What happens next?
 - ALWAYS contact Presbytery through Stated Clerk, and insurance company

When you receive a verbal report of an allegation

- Care for the person making the allegation
- The allegation is received with trust and confidentiality
- BUT, In order to take ecclesial (church) disciplinary action, there must be a **written complaint-**
- D-7.0102
- “The disciplinary process begins when a written statement alleging that an active member of a congregation or a minister of Word and Sacrament of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has committed an offense to the clerk of Session or the stated clerk of the presbytery having jurisdiction over the member.”
- NOTE: if allegation is regarding abuse of a minor, still need to notify civil authorities/child abuse hotline (and also Presbytery)

If there is no written report

- You may ask the person making the verbal allegation if they would feel comfortable with your (2 people) going to that person and talking with them, naming the person making the allegation
- If they do not wish to be named, we cannot go and say “someone has said...” At that point it remains hearsay.
- We continue to provide pastoral care, but also continue to watch and monitor- adjustments in monitoring/supervision/staffing might be in order
- and also call the Presbytery Stated Clerk.

If the allegation is against the pastoral leader:

- Call the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery
- Notify your insurance carrier
- NOTE: Presbytery will help you through this process
- Have in your policy information about administrative leave for the pastoral leader:
- And how that will end, if the matter is:
 - Substantiated
 - unsubstantiated

Administrative Leave – allegations against a Minister of Word and Sacrament

- When an allegation of sexual abuse as defined in D-7.0901 has been received against a Minister of Word and Sacrament, the stated clerk receiving the allegation shall immediately communicate the allegation to the three members designated in accordance with D-3.0102
- Regardless of the employment status of that minister of the Word and Sacrament, the 3 members...shall determine as quickly as possible, after receiving the written allegation and providing the accused an opportunity to be heard, whether the risk to the congregation and/or to other victims of abuse requires paid administrative leave...
- See Book of Order D-7.0902 a and b

If the allegation is against a staff/volunteer/member:

- Notify the Session that an allegation has been made (no names or description of offense yet)
 - Follow the procedures in your policy
 - Contact the Presbytery for help
 - Notify your insurance carrier
- Have in your policy information about separation of that person until investigation is concluded:
I.e., if Sunday School teacher, no longer can teach
If youth leader, no longer allowed with you- including social media, etc.
until the allegation is substantiated or resolved

If there is an allegation:

- You will need to inform the congregation:
- “The Session has received a written allegation regarding an offense. The Session is following the procedure outlined in our policies. Because this is an allegation, and because we want to preserve the confidentiality of all involved, we will not be naming names. We pray for, and ask for your prayers for, all involved.”
- Contact the Presbytery and your insurance carrier.
- Always have copies of your policies available and known.
- Healthy congregations can keep confidentiality, but do NOT have secrets.



Book of Order

- F-1.0301 “The Church is to be a community of faith, entrusting itself to God alone, even at the risk of losing its life.”
-

After...

- Denial/guilt/anger/Grief/loss
- Your congregation might experience all of these feelings and reactions
- It is important to stress what is known and shared, and not gossip/hear say/parking lot or email conversations
- Presbytery can help in this process-
- Which might include some or all of these steps-
- Lament, confession, prayers for wholeness and healing
- The Book of Common Worship Pastoral Edition has liturgies and services for individual and congregational use



Questions to ask about your policy

- Is it clear, fair and consistent with your mission and theology?
 - Is it fair to all: those who make allegations, those against whom allegations have been made, survivors of misconduct?
 - Does it have the capacity to hold perpetrators accountable?
 - How do you deal with allegations that are found to be sustained?
 - Those that are found to be false? What is the process for exoneration?
 - What is the process for sharing communication
 - around these issues?
 - When an allegation arises?
-

What is the real objective
of your policy?

- Is it to protect the institution? Cover your assets and reputation?

- Or is it about justice making for all involved-
- Person who makes the allegation
- Person against whom the allegation is made
- The faith community


Policy should clearly state the range of behavior you are attempting to prevent

This

- Sample: “It is clergy misconduct when any person in a ministerial role of leadership (TE, RE, Deacon, or lay) engages in sexual conduct or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employees, staff member, etc., (child, youth or adult) in a professional relationship.”

Instead of this

- “conduct unbecoming the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament”



Policy review

- How old is the policy?
 - Do you have a regular, set time for review- and who does this work?
 - Session? Sub-group? Outside group?
 - What language/BOO citations need to be updated?
 - How are people being trained? Where are records kept/for how long/by whom?
-

Question #3:

- Who, in your congregation, do you tell about an allegation?
- When the allegation is against a member?
- When the allegation is against a pastoral leader?
- When the allegation involves a minor or vulnerable adult?

Book of Order D-1.0101

Church discipline is the church's exercise of authority given by Christ, both in the direction of guidance, control, and nurture of its members and in the direction of constructive criticism of offenders.

The church's disciplinary process exists not as a substitute for the secular judicial system, but to do what the secular judicial system cannot do.

The purpose of discipline is to honor God by making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ;

to preserve the purity of the church by nourishing the individual within the life of the believing community;

to achieve justice and compassion for all participants involved;

to correct or restrain wrongdoing in order to bring members to repentance and restoration;

to uphold the dignity of those who have been harmed by disciplinary offenses;

to restore the unity of the church by removing the causes of discord and division;

and to secure the just, speedy, and economical determination of proceedings.

In all respects, all participants are to be accorded procedural safeguards and due process, and it is the intention of these rules so to provide.

Communication

Name 1 thing you will share with your congregation

Name 1 action your church will take in the next year to become a church with Healthy-er Boundaries

Name 1 thing you learned today/relearned today that will help you serve God and God's people with "energy, intelligence, imagination and love"?

Boundaries and Policies are NOT a burden

- Healthy Boundaries = Healthy Church
- Healthy Churches have Healthy Boundaries!



Next Boundary Training...?

- EVERY 36 MONTHS-
- You have received a certificate
- Put the date on it, and then put the date of when you are next due-

