

ESTABLISHING SAFE CONNECTIONS

Practical Steps for Pastors and Congregations

1. Begin with education.

Education is for everyone – laity, clergy, church leaders, and community. Present a positive picture of the purpose of the pastoral relationship, and then talk about why it must be dedicated to that purpose alone. Highlight the concern for safety and integrity in ministry relationships.

2. Clarify expectations: “zero tolerance policy” of sexual contact between pastors and parishioners.

Use the resources of the ELCA; look at the synod’s policy together with Church Council, Clergy and staff; discuss expectations with all church staff.

3. Prepare a policy and a plan for responding to complaints.

Work with the synod office to prepare a policy and plan for dealing with any complaints or concerns about sexual boundary violations. While congregations often become concerned about clergy sexual abuse because of liability concerns, and while these concerns may be quite reasonable, the primary concern of the congregation is to be about good ministry, and to be stewards of the gifts of ministry provided by them, by clergy, and laity alike.

4. Skip the “laundry list of don’ts” but establish a climate of openness, trust, awareness, carefulness, and respect.

5. Encourage your pastor to take care of personal needs away and apart from the congregation.

Encourage your pastors and other professional leaders to take good care of themselves. Encourage them to find the appropriate sources of personal care and counsel.

6. Make sure your pastor is taking appropriate time off.

Encourage the scheduling of meetings and appointments to provide for some free evenings every week. Encourage the pastor to set aside some other blocks of time besides a day off, for recreation. Honor the pastor’s commitments to these times apart.

7. Provide adequate vacation time for pastors.

Time at conferences and meetings out of town is not vacation time. Pastors are always “on” while they are in the community, even on a day off. Despite our best intentions, this boundary will be invaded.

8. Provide appropriate time and funds for continuing education for your pastor.

This investment in healthy and skilled ministry will be returned more than generously.

9. Provide fair and adequate compensation for pastors and staff.

Inadequate compensation can lead to feelings of burn-out. This can lead to resentments and other behaviors that can deteriorate the ministry.

10. Discourage your pastor from being a lone ranger. Encourage accountability, appropriate supervision and collegiality. Be alert to isolation.

Encourage your pastor to spend time with colleagues, to attend cluster and conference meetings, and participate in synodical activities. This is part of the work schedule, not time off. Your pastor needs the wisdom and advice of peers and mentors – your congregation will benefit.

11. Clarify expectations of single pastors and make them known widely.

If your pastor is single, take time at the beginning of the ministry to clarify expectations and talk about their ministry in the congregation and community.

12. Encourage your pastor to “get a life!”. Promote healthiness and wholeness.

Single minded devotion to duty is often rewarded in our culture. This is especially true for pastors. We know that this can be unhealthy, regardless of one’s profession. Developing other talents, friendships, and hobbies is critical to a healthy ministry.

13. Honor and respect the pastor’s family commitments and family life.

Honor your pastor’s commitment to family. This deserves a high place on the priority list!

14. Help establish and respect healthy boundaries throughout the congregation.

All of us need to set clear and consistent, safe boundaries with others. Respect the boundaries of everyone in the congregation. Honor confidentiality.

15. Be clear about job descriptions, policies, schedules, and other guidelines for pastors, lay leaders, pastoral relationships, and lay volunteers.

Set and be clear about good boundaries in all areas of ministry. Have clear job descriptions, predictable and publicized schedules, and agreed upon expectations throughout the congregation. Establish job descriptions for the pastor and other professional leaders, for lay leaders, e.g. council members, committee chairs, members of the alter guild, office volunteers, teachers, etc.

Taken From: “Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand And Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse”; A resource for members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by Rev. Jan Erickson-Pearson. Produced by the ELCA Church in America, Division for Ministry, 1996

Resources:

Southwestern Synod of the Minnesota ELCA: (available on Synod Website under Congregation Resources). Also contact Sarah Hausken, Youth Ministry Coordinator: sarah.hausken@swmnelca.org

- 1. Preventing and Responding to Abuse in Ministry*
- 2. Safe Haven Guidelines*
- 3. The SW MN Synod Policy Regarding Sexual Misconduct*

Brotherhood Mutual Insurance:

<http://www.brotherhoodmutual.com/index.cfm/resources/ministry-safety/article/a-tough-topic-for-church-leaders-dealing-with-sex-offenders/>

Faith Trust Institute:

<http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/training/events/70112000000jzGRAAY#sthash.zN3WG1s9.dpuf>