



# Healthy Boundaries

Peaks Presbytery



# Introductions

Opening prayer

# 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



# Goals of Training

2. To know the impact of appropriate vs. inappropriate boundaries in promoting effective ministry and teaching



# Goals of Training

3. To learn guidelines, suggestions, and policy ideas for developing appropriate boundaries



# Goals of Training

Even though mandatory...

All are welcome here!

- Cynics
- Tourists
- Explorers
- Survivors
  
- Ministers
  
- Elders
  
- Members/Volunteers



# As we begin...

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



# Boundaries...what do you think?

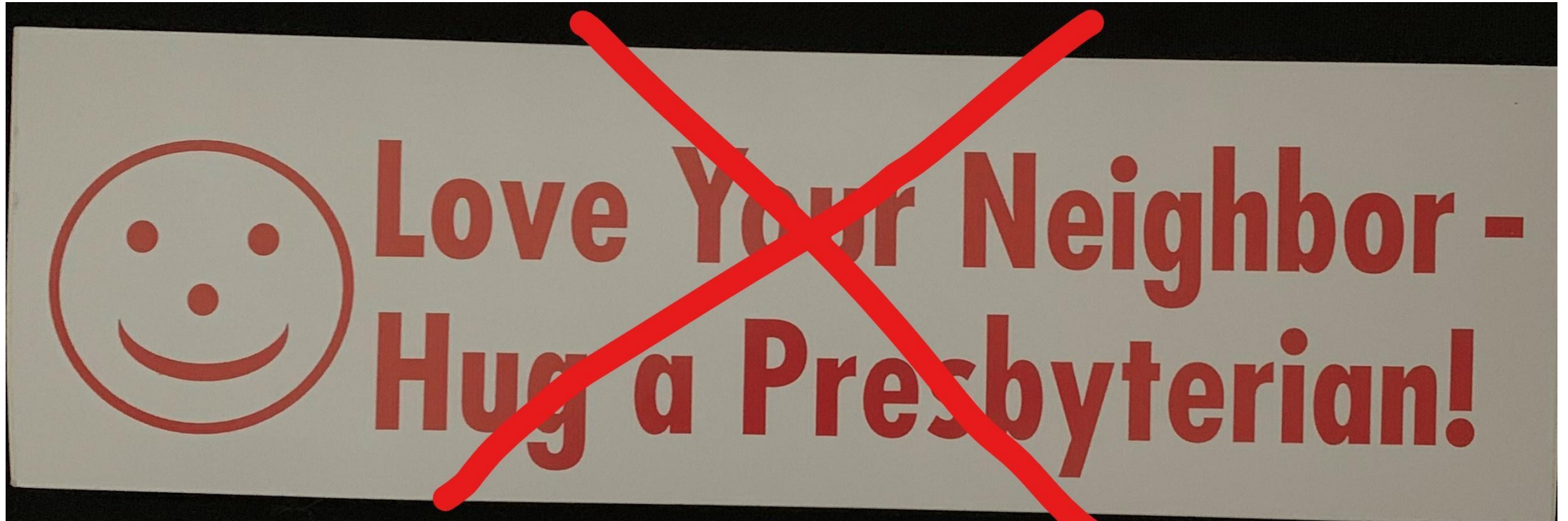
- A gift?
- An act of grace?
- Create safety?
- As developmental milestone?
- Rude?
- Withholding?
- Barrier to relationships?
- Culturally shaped?

???



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

Boundaries? Consent? Cultural Practice?



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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

A fence defines the boundary where one area of land ends and another begins

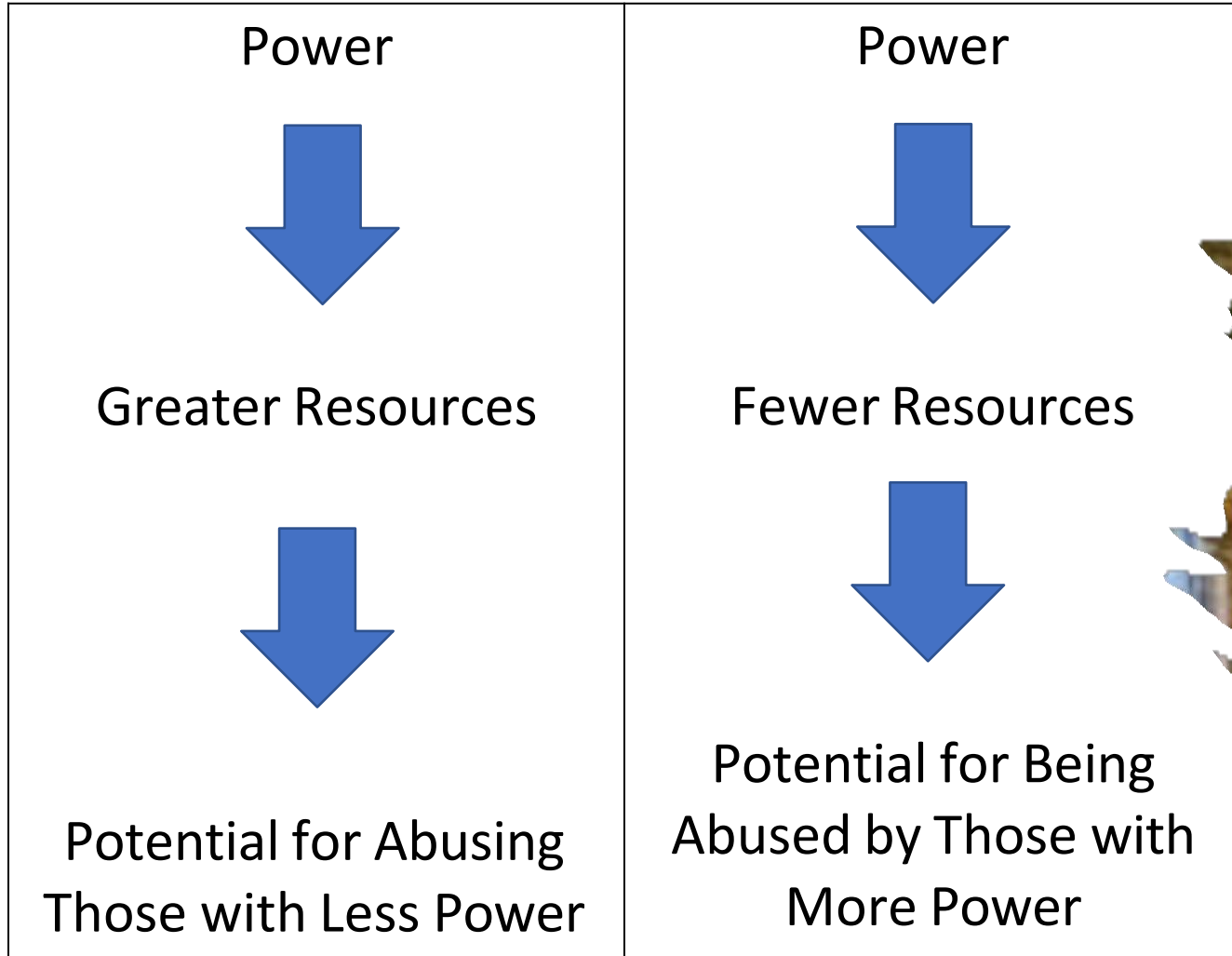
Boundaries in ministry relationships define the separateness between the pastoral leader and the congregant

more power

less power



# Nature of Boundaries



# Nature of Boundaries

What boundaries are:

1. They help us maintain clear professional 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

Boundaries are like a fence, not the Berlin Wall



# Boundary Crossing VS Boundary Violation

Ministry sometimes involves boundary crossing but never requires a boundary violation



# 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



# 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 imbalance of power



# 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.

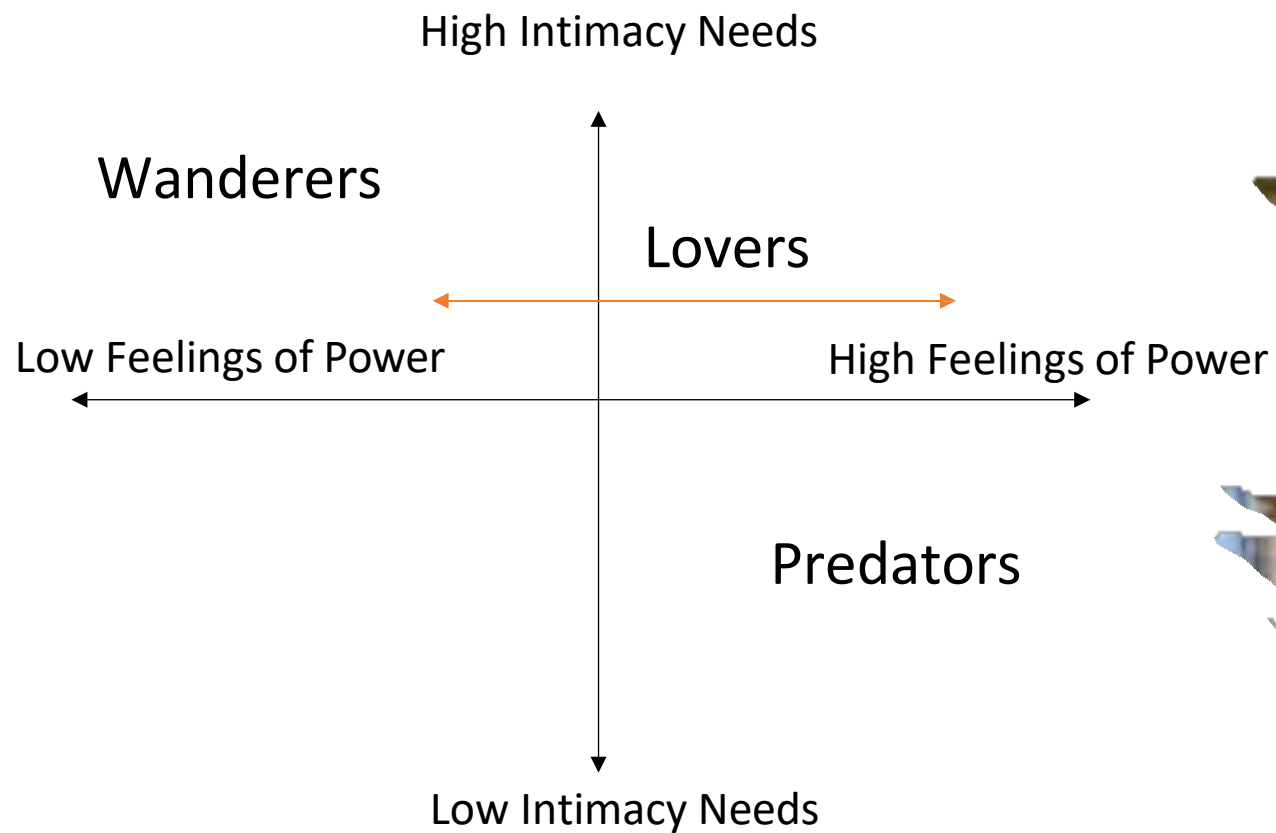


# Sexual Harassment

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

When prevention fails, intervention  
is necessary. This is why we have  
policies and procedures.



# 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 and youth 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.
- NOTE: as of 7/25 "vulnerable adult" added to protection policy



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 relationships  
with a congregant:

2. Tell the presbytery staff!
3. NOTE: IF YOUR PASTOR COMES WITH SPOUSE/FAMILY, THEN THINK ABOUT POSSIBLE CONFLICT OF INTEREST AREAS/i.e., is it appropriate for them to serve on Session, be employed by the church, 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. Develop close friendships elsewhere to avoid issues...



# Friends and BFPs

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

1. Discuss the difficulties of being both a spiritual leader and a friend/family.
2. Beloved Former Pastors- **“BFPs”**  
when a pastor leaves, the pastoral relationship ends.

See Peaks Presbytery’s Departing Minister Covenant



# 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. Minimize the number of them
2. Have a clear understanding about what you expect from each other
3. 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.)
4. If problems develop, reach out to presbytery



# 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!
6. Proper practices/boundaries for handling offerings/deposits/counting, etc.



# Financial Healthy Boundaries

## G-3.0205 Finances

the session shall prepare and adopt a budget and determine the distribution of the congregation's benevolences. It shall authorize offerings for Christian purposes and shall account for the proceeds of such offerings and their disbursement. It shall provide full information to the congregation concerning its decisions in such matters.

The session shall elect a treasurer for such term as the session shall decide and shall supervise his or her work or delegate that supervision to a board of deacons or trustees. Those in charge of various congregational funds shall report at least annually to the session



# Financial Healthy

## Boundaries

G-3.0205 Finances

Sessions may provide by rule for standard financial practices of the congregation, but shall in no case fail to observe the following procedures:

- a. All offerings shall be counted and recorded by at least two duly appointed persons, or by one fidelity bonded person;
- b. Financial books and records adequate to reflect all financial transactions shall be kept and shall be open to inspection by authorized church officers at reasonable times;
- c. Periodic, and in no case less than annual, reports of all financial activities shall be made to the session or entity vested with financial oversight.

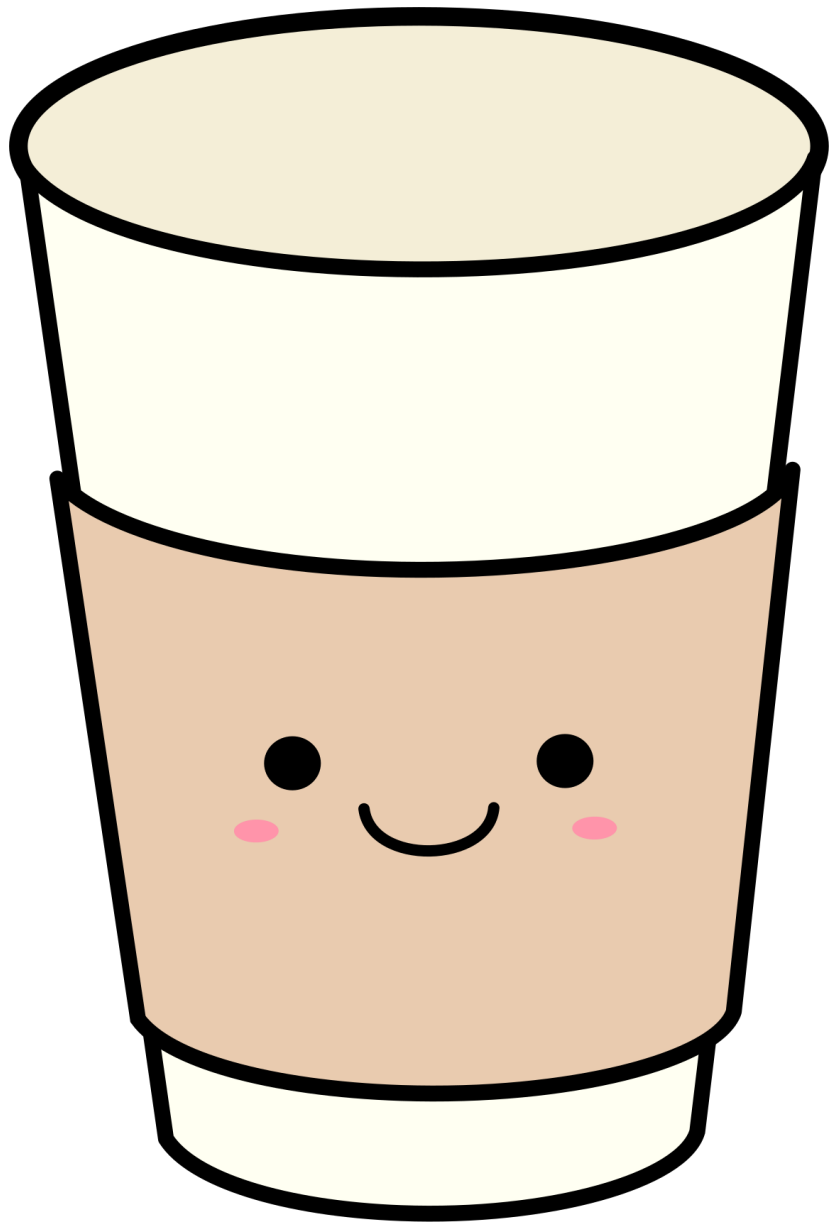


- What does this look like in practice?
- Teams of counters (not related, if at all possible)
- Slips that record cash/coin/check-signed by each counter
- What happens to offering?
- Who makes deposit?
- Who has signatory for accounts?
- How many accounts do you have?



Discussion:  
Case Studies  
Breakout Rooms





# Questions?

**Break Time**

Take a  
stretch 😊



# Abuse and Misconduct Prevention

Policies and Procedures

## The Scope of the Problem

1 in 4 Girls



1 in 13 Boys



Experience sexual  
abuse before the  
age of 18  
(as estimated by the CDC)



Youth-to-Youth sexual  
misconduct occurs at a  
**higher** prevalence rate  
than adult-to-youth



**90%**

of the time, the  
perpetrator is  
known to the  
victim

**80%**

of abuse does not  
get reported  
In some industries,  
reporting is even less  
frequent



Sexual abuse remains a  
serious issue that affects  
millions of vulnerable  
individuals each year,  
sparing no generation  
or demographic.

# Data regarding Abuse and Misconduct at Church

- 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.<sup>1</sup>
- 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.<sup>2</sup>
  - 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>
- Faith Trust Institute
- <https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/>
- Faith Trust videos on youtube:
- <https://www.youtube.com/user/FaithTrustInstitute>
- YOUR insurance carrier may have resources

# 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-



# Mandated Reporting

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- 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

# 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.

# Good Samaritan Law

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

This does NOT apply if you intentionally make a false report of abuse.

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- 2:1 (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 OR reference checked- what does your policy say?
- Signed affidavits of all volunteers and staff agreeing to abide by your church's policies
- Sharing of practices and policies with congregation
- PHOTO release- write as an "opt out"-

# Social Media Policy

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- 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





- If you do NOT yet have these policies, The Presbytery is available to help.
- While it is helpful to see policies other churches and Sessions have developed/adopted,
- 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

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 allegee,
- \* administrative leave,
- \* stepping down from Session, youth group, Sunday School, etc.

# If an Allegation is received

- D-7.0501 REFERRAL TO AN INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE
- When a **clerk of session** or the **stated clerk of a presbytery** receives an allegation,
- without undertaking further inquiry, that clerk shall then report to the council only that an offense has been alleged without naming the accused or the nature of the alleged offense and refer the statement of allegation promptly to an investigating committee, which shall conduct an inquiry as defined below. The clerk of session or stated clerk shall also inform the accuser of the disciplinary process and their rights and responsibilities in the process.
- Goes into effect 7/4/25

Your policy should involve care for ALL:

person making the allegation

person against whom the allegation is made

the entire faith (and maybe the community)

# Clarity in your policy

- Who receives allegations?
  - Does the congregation know who to contact/how to report this?
  - Does the Session?
  - How do they know who to contact? How is this information shared?
- What happens next?
- Contact Presbytery

# When you receive a verbal report of an allegation

- Care for the person making the allegation
- The allegation is received with trust and confidentiality
- 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 the allegation is against the pastoral leader:

- **D- 7. 0902B ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE**
- b. Regardless of the employment status of the minister of the Word and Sacrament,
- the members designated in accordance with D-3.0102,[PJC special committee] shall determine as quickly as possible, after reviewing the written allegations and providing the accused the opportunity to be heard, whether the risk to a congregation and/or to other potential victims of abuse requires administrative leave or other restrictions upon the minister's service, when considered in light of the nature and probable truth of the allegations. Such administrative leave or restrictions will continue until either the matter is resolved in one of the ways prescribed in the disciplinary process or until the leave or restrictions are altered or removed by the members of the commission.
- Goes into effect 7/4/25

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

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


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- 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.”
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After...

- Denial/guilt/anger/grief/loss/betrayal
  - Your congregation might experience all of these feelings and reactions
  - It is important to stress what is known and can be 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:
  - The Presbytery meeting with the Session and the congregation
  - 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?

- Or is it about justice making and healing 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?
-

# Book of Order D-1.0101

Church discipline is the church's exercise of authority give 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.

# Boundaries and Policies are NOT a burden

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





## Next Boundary Training...?

- EVERY 36 MONTHS
- You will receive a certificate for today
- It is dated and identifies the date when you are next due for training