

PREVENTION
Ways to prevent pastoral sexual misconduct

1. Have in place clear policies/ethical guidelines, and make sure these guidelines are available and publicized.
2. Find ways to promote and support health of individual clergy persons (personal and professional health).
 - A. Give clergy sufficient time off and continuing education opportunities to reduce risk of burnout or isolation.
 - B. Be reasonable in expectations for pastor's workload, giving consideration to personal/familial relationships.
 - C. Give funding and support for collegial consultation and supervision from outside the congregation.
 - This may include consultation with professional caregivers when needed.
 - Encourage clergy to belong to peer support groups.
 - Encourage clergy person to relate regularly to a spiritual friend or spiritual director.
3. Encourage clergy to make appropriate counseling referrals. Some church policies limit the number of sessions clergy will counsel a person before referring to another professional.
4. Attend to the health of the congregation.
 - A. Ensure an open system; one which has a clear, accessible complaint process. Make entire congregation aware of complaint process.
 - B. Establish clear expectations between pastor and congregation, during the ordination and call processes.
 - C. Establish an active pastoral relations committee to provide accountability for the pastor.
 - D. Share leadership among laity and pastor.
 - E. Openly state reasonable expectations of clergy's workload and skill.
5. Provide ongoing congregational education on sexual abuse.

Provide more extensive education on what pastoral sexual abuse is and the dynamics involved. Help church board and entire congregation understand dangers involved in pastors holding dual roles. Talk about the importance of identifying/reporting abusive situations.

 - A. Plan a sermon or series of sermons on the topic.
 - Name the sin of abuse.
 - Acknowledge the pain it causes.
 - Be explicit that the church is available to walk with those who have suffered abuse.

(more)

- B. Offer a Sunday school/Christian education elective.
 - C. Include topic in children's time.
 - D. Design a seminar or workshop on abuse, utilizing expertise of an outside professional.
 - E. Include a variety of resources on abuse in your church library.
 - F. Publicize community resources such as women's shelters, rape crisis centers, counseling services.
 - G. Educate clergy and lay leaders to take note of warning signs of professional and pastoral abuse, and to follow their concerns with caring, open interest.
 - H. Hold seminars on human sexuality and relationships in general.
6. Examine teachings/assumptions that may contribute to abuse.
- A. Thoughtfully examine church teachings that may contribute to abuse--for example, that children must always obey; that wives must submit to husbands; that it is good to accept suffering, etc.
 - B. Work to dispel the assumption that sexual issues are "private" and no one else's business. Remind members that sexual ethics, spiritual and emotional health, and issues of personal healing *are* the church's business.
7. Be prepared to walk with those affected by abuse.
- A. Identify those in the congregation with experience and gifts in ministering to those facing abusive situations.
 - B. Know what community and conference resources are available to help individuals and congregations dealing with abuse.
 - C. Consider setting up an ongoing abuse support group.
 - D. In educational settings, talk with children, youth and adults about "how you would respond if..." (...if you witnesses abusive behavior; if someone confided in you about an abusive situation, etc.). Develop, share and learn from informal case studies.

Revised by Tina Mast Burnett from an outline earlier compiled by Ellen Hollinger. This outline draws from material by Rev. Marie Fortune, Melissa Miller, Rev. Chilton Knudsen and Carolyn Holderread Heggen.

June 1996