

A decorative border made of watercolor brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, and blue, framing the central text.

# HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Presbytery of Eastern Virginia



# Welcome

Introductions

Open with prayer and scripture  
reading John 10:7-10.





# Topics Covered

Presbytery of Eastern Virginia is a community where...

We build bridges across divides to deepen connection to Christ and one another to serve the world.

01. Healthy boundaries

02. Abuse/Misconduct

03. Prevention

04. Responding





# Goals of Training



**01**

To increase awareness of the need for healthy and appropriate boundaries in church relationships

**02**


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

**03**

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

**04**

Even though mandatory... All are welcome here!

- Ministers
  - -Elders
  - Educators
  - Members
  - Volunteers
- 



# As we begin...

Respect for all

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







# Boundaries...what do you think?


---

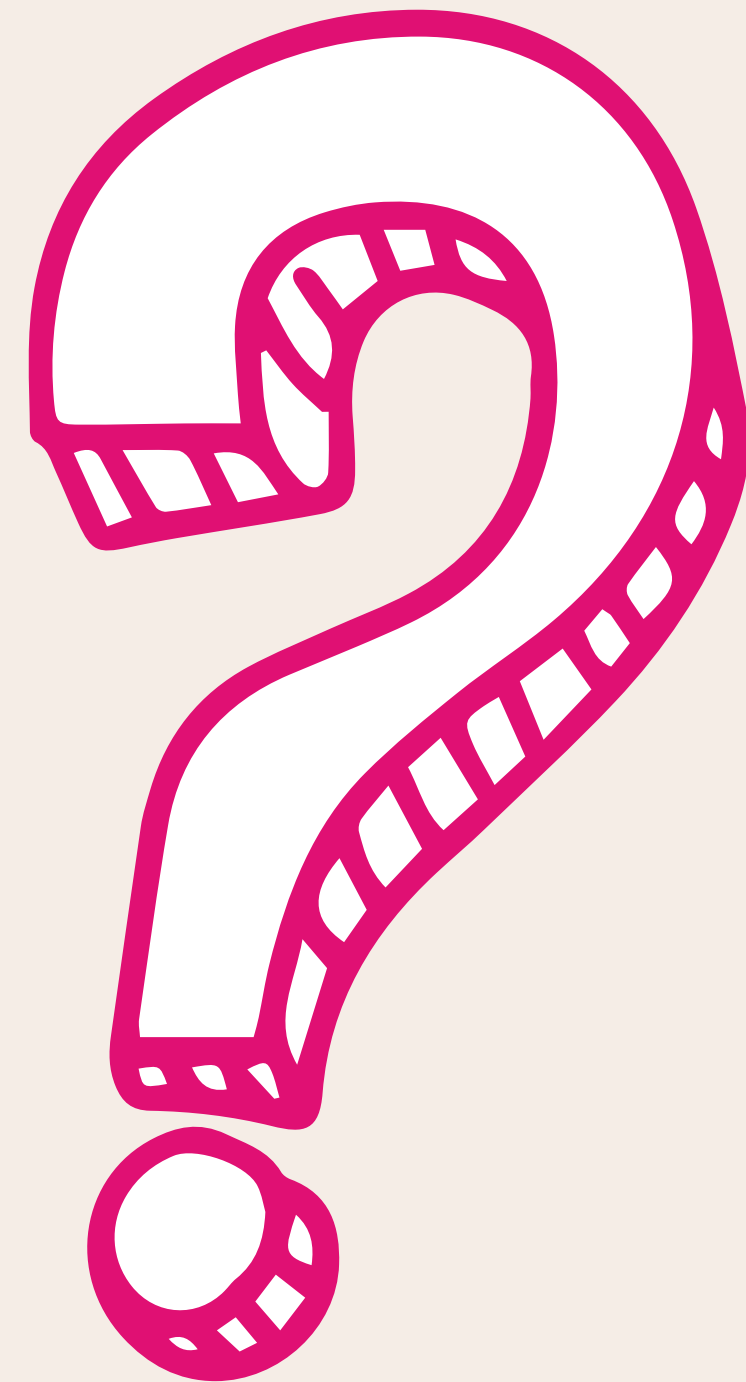


A gift?

- An act of grace?
- Create safety?
- As developmental milestone?

Rude?

- Withholding?
  - Barrier to relationships?
  - Culturally shaped?
- 





**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

**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**

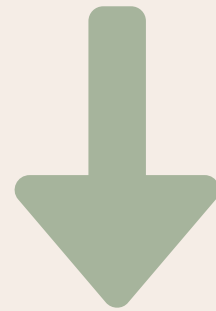
**MORE POWER**

**LESS POWER**



# Nature of Boundaries

**Power**



**Greater Resources**



**Potential for abusing  
those with less power**

**Power**



**Fewer Resources**



**Potential for being  
abused by those  
with more power**



# Nature of Boundaries

What boundaries are:

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





# Nature of Boundaries

## What boundaries are **NOT**:

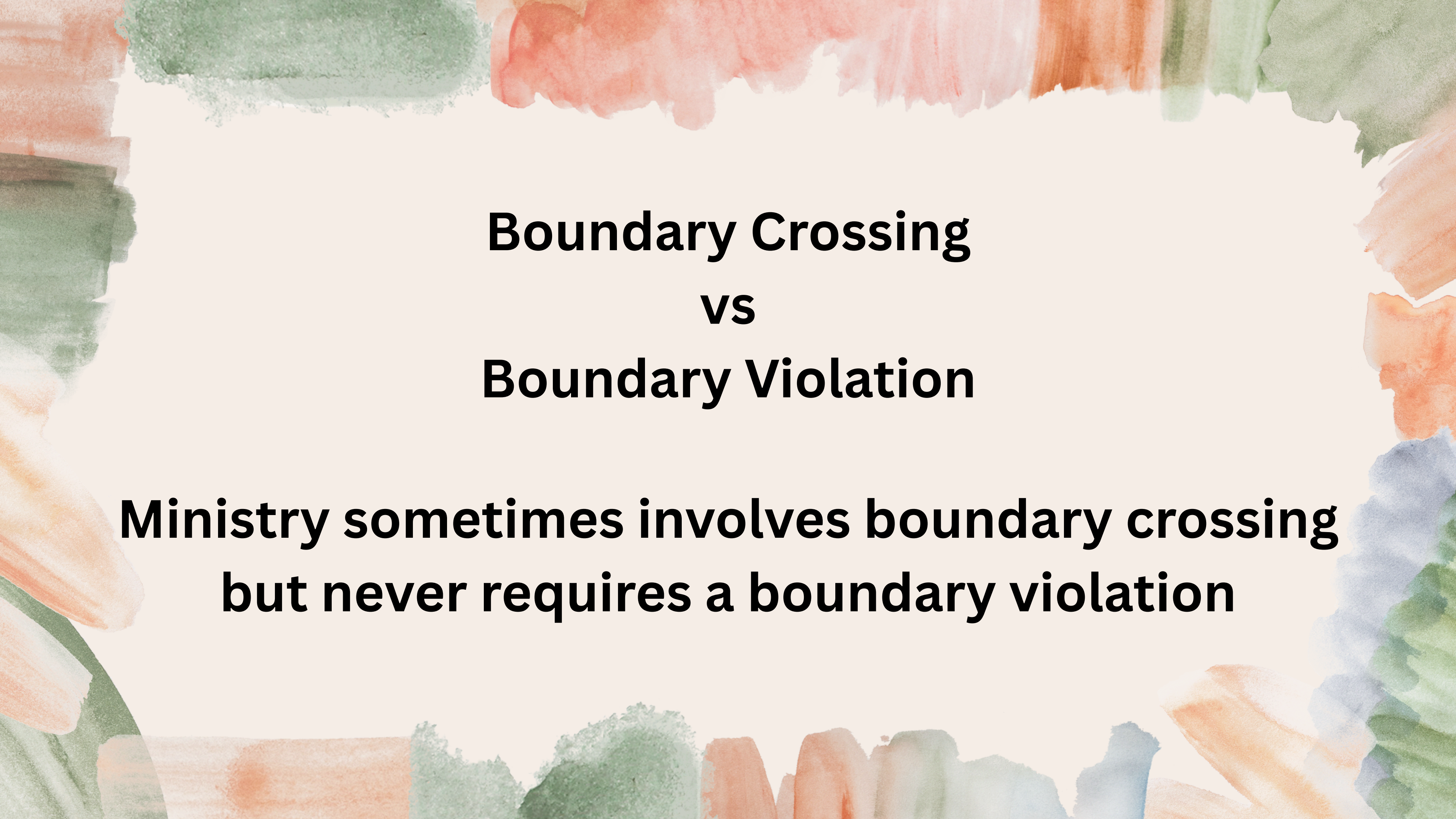
They are **NOT** clear rules about where and when we can be friendly

They are **NOT** blocks to authenticity and friendliness

***Boundaries are like a fence, not the Berlin Wall***





A decorative border made of watercolor brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, and blue, framing the central text.

# **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**

**High Intimacy Needs**

**Wanderers**

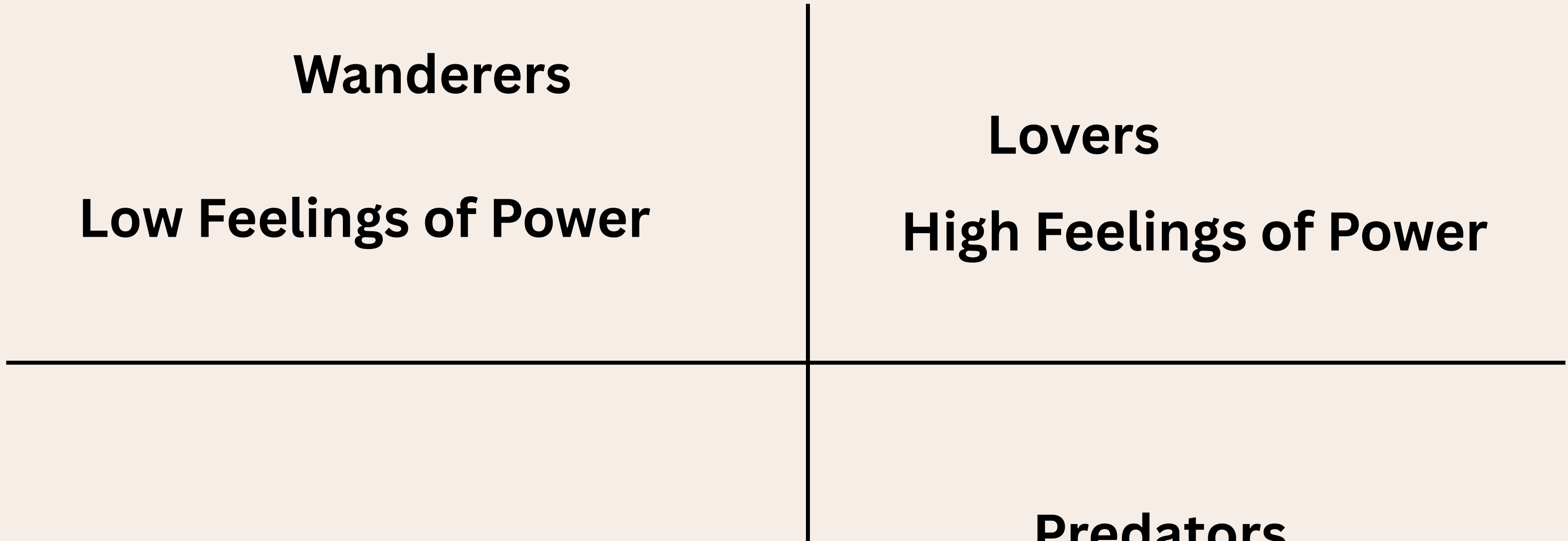
**Lovers**

**Low Feelings of Power**

**High Feelings of Power**

**Predators**

**Low Intimacy Needs**





# 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 2025-2027

G-3.0106 All councils shall adopt and implement the following policies: a sexual misconduct policy, a harassment policy, a child, youth, and adults with vulnerabilities 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:

01.

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.

02.

Tell the presbytery staff!

03.

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:

01.

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

02.

Beloved Former Pastors-  
“BFPs” when a pastor leaves, the pastoral relationship ends.

See Presbytery of Eastern Virginia'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 and more often as requested.



# 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.







# Financial Boundaries



01

- What does this look like in practice?
- Teams of counters (not related, if at all possible)


02

- Slips that record cash/coin/check-signed by each counter
- What happens to offering?

03

- Who makes deposit?
- Who has signatory for accounts?

04

- How many accounts do you have?
  - How handle McElwee?
- 



A decorative border made of watercolor brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, and blue, framing the central text.

# DISCUSSION:

Case Studies in Breakout Rooms



A decorative border made of watercolor brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, and blue, framing the central text.

# ABUSE AND MISCONDUCT PREVENTION

Policies and Procedures



# The Scope of the Problem

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

01.

1 out of four girls  
1 out of ten boys

02.

90% the perpetrator is known to the victim  
80% of abuse does not get reported

03.

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



## 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.

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

- [pcusa.org/resources](https://pcusa.org/resources)
- Faith Trust Institute
- [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)
- 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

G-4.0302

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



# Book of Order D-7.0201a

The disciplinary process begins when a written statement alleging that an active member of a congregation or a minister of the Word and Sacrament of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has committed an offense is submitted to the clerk of session or stated clerk of the presbytery having jurisdiction over the member. If, after investigation by an investigating committee and trial by a session or permanent judicial commission, the offense is proved true, the person found guilty is subject to censure by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

- 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.



A decorative border made of watercolor brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, and blue, framing the central text.

# GOOD SAMARITAN LAW

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



**Questions? Comments?**



# Policies and Procedures— Goals

- To prevent misconduct
- To addresss 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 For 12:26

- Protecting the Vulnerable-see “hospitality code”
- Accountability Luke 17:2 and 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:



**01**

Training and  
education




**02**

Prevention of  
misconduct  
and abuse



**03**

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 meeting, 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

- 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



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

BUT your policy may include, at this point:  
separation of allegee and alleged, 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.

# Your policy should involve care for:

01. The person making the  
allegation

02. The person whom the  
allegation is made  
against

03. The faith (and maybe  
larger) 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

Regardless of the employment status of the minister of the Word and Sacrament, the members designated in accordance with D-3.0102, shall determine as quickly as possible, after receiving the written allegations and providing the accused an opportunity to be heard, whether the risk to a congregation and/or to other potential victims of abuse requires **paid** administrative leave or other restrictions upon the minister's service when considered in light of the nature and probable truth of the allegations. Such **paid** 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 members of the commission. **The cost shall be borne by the employing entity whenever possible or be shared by the presbytery as necessary.**

# **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

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, 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, participate in hear say, parking lot conversations or email/text threads
- Presbytery can help in the process

What does Presbytery help look like?

- Meeting with the Session and congregation
- Offering space for lament, confession, prayers for wholeness and healing
- Utilizing tools through PCUSA and Book of Common Worship with liturgies to help guide prayer





# 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?
- How does it handle allegations that are found to be false? What is the process for exoneration?
- What is the process for sharing communication around these issues and/or 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 making the allegations
- 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 leader) 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 and/or Book of Order 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 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 and 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.



A decorative border made of watercolor brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, and blue, framing the central text.

# BOUNDARIES ARE NOT A BURDEN

Healthy boundaries=healthy church  
Healthy churches have healthy boundaries!



# Next Boundary Training...

- Every 36 months
- You will receive a certificate
- Put the date on it, and then put the date of when you are next due







AMEN!

BLESSING AND GLORY AND WISDOM  
AND THANKSGIVING AND HONOR  
AND POWER AND MIGHT

BE TO OUR GOD FOREVER AND EVER!

AMEN. (REV. 7:12)

*W 5.0401*

