

Jim's Tool Box Pastors Behaving Badly, Part 2

In the January edition of *The Capitol Area South Connection*, I wrote an article concerning "Pastors Behaving Badly." This article was a follow-up to my article on parishioners behaving badly in the November and December issues of the newsletters. An archive of those articles can be found at <http://www.capareasouthumc.org/pbb>. In this Tool Box article, I will conclude this series with a second article on pastors behaving badly.

In addition to the issues that I described in the last issue (control and confidentiality issues), another area of concern for pastors behaving badly is boundary issues. There are two significant areas to mention when it comes to boundaries. Pastors are expected to maintain healthy relationships with parishioners and with colleagues. The "power" position of the pastor puts that pastor in an important role when it comes to maintaining those roles with others. Unfortunately, pastors some times violate those boundaries of sexual relationships with serious consequences for all persons involved and to the congregation and the church as a whole.

When a pastor is involved in sexual misconduct, it is one of the most egregious ways in which pastors behave badly. Whether the issue is sexual misconduct with a parishioner or with a colleague or staff member, such behavior is inappropriate for clergy. In 1994, the West Ohio Annual Conference adopted a policy concerning clergy sexual misconduct. All pastors serving in the annual conference are required to take a sexual ethics class that helps pastors to understand the expectations of the annual conference when it comes to maintaining healthy relationships and boundaries in relationships in the church.

Another boundary issue concerns the relationships that pastors maintain in places where they have previously served. When a pastor moves from an appointment, she/he is expected to discontinue any pastoral/administrative/spiritual role in the life of that parish and with the members and friends of the congregation. While pastors often develop deep and abiding relationships and friendships with persons in congregations, it is inappropriate for pastors to continue involvement in the life and ministry of a parish when the pastor has left that appointment. After leaving a church, many pastors maintain some personal and social relationships with persons in a previous parish. However, it is important in those relationships that pastors maintain healthy boundaries around those friendships.

In no way will the former pastor continue to offer spiritual and pastoral guidance in those relationships or in the work of the former parish. It is helpful for a pastor when leaving a parish to share with the congregation in writing and/or from the pulpit that she/he will no longer be available to provide pastoral services or leadership in the parish. When these boundaries are crossed, it is more difficult for the newly appointed pastor to work with and to meet the spiritual needs of the members and friends of the congregation.

Another area in which I have witnessed pastors behaving badly is in the use of their time. In John Wesley's historic questions that are asked of all pastors being admitted into full membership of the annual conference, Wesley directed his preachers, "Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed." The word "triflingly" means "the deliberate act of delaying and playing instead of working."

While I suspect that most of us waste more time than we like to admit, the fact is that pastors have a lot of flexibility in setting their schedules. Some pastors overwork and over schedule themselves. Other pastors do not use their time well in carrying out their pastoral and leadership duties in the place where they are appointed. It is important for clergy to find the appropriate balance in their lives: work, play, family, hobbies, time for spiritual formation, time for physical exercise – to name a few.

In May at the clergy session of the West Ohio Conference, the clergy members will be asked to consider a “Covenant for Ministerial Conduct.” A task group of the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry has been drafting a document that outlines expectations of behavior for pastors. The document details what is appropriate behavior toward colleagues and parishioners in the covenantal community of the clergy in the West Ohio Conference. To the extent that pastors live into those expectations, we will have fewer pastors “behaving badly” and more pastors living in ways that demonstrates God’s love for all persons.

Again this month I would invite you to share your thoughts on clergy acting inappropriately. If you would like to comment on this article, you may do so by e-mailing me at jwaugh@wocumc.org. I would also invite you to post a comment on the Pastor Behaving Badly Discussion Board at <http://www.capareasouthumc.org/PBB2>. You will have to log on to offer a post. This will be a moderated discussion, so you will not see your post immediately until I have had an opportunity to review it.