

Introduction

Lay and ordained, paid and volunteer, part-time and full-time—ministerial leaders are called apart and authorized by communities of faith to proclaim and embody the scandalous good news of an incarnational God. We who are ministers represent this Christ-embodied church and, thereby, represent God. Yet sometimes we need to be reminded that ministers are people, too.

Parishioners tend to put us on a pedestal, expecting no sins or faults. At the same time, members of the faith community sometimes walk all over leaders as if we are doormats-for-Jesus, offering ourselves to the world 24/7. That we might have needs of our own and be bound by human finitude often goes unrecognized. To complicate matters, Christians have a long history of denying sexuality—in ourselves and our leaders. This does not contribute to healthy ministers or healthy ministry. Indeed, media reports of the unhealthy and abusive behavior of ministerial leaders have become all-too-frequent. In the years since 2002, when the Boston Globe first reported on a cover-up of child sexual abuse by priests, the Roman Catholic Church and many Protestant denominations have begun to grapple more openly with the problem of sexual abuse in church settings. Not just children but adults, too, have survived sexual exploitation by those entrusted to care for their spiritual needs. Ministers are all-too-human.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MINISTRY

Many people who enter ministry are unprepared to handle issues of professional power, intimacy, and interpersonal boundaries, leading to preventable cases of sexual misconduct within the church. While better training can make the church a healthier, more credible witness to the gospel, no amount of education will eliminate sin from the church or its ministry. Sexual predators undoubtedly belong to our communities. Safe church protocols for the prevention of abuse, effective judicatory procedures in response to abuse, and the care and healing for all involved are critical in such circumstances. Nevertheless, this book is primarily written for those of us who are living in the murkier waters of daily life—ministerial leaders striving to be true to ourselves, our communities, and God. We are merely people—albeit called to sacred roles—who struggle, fail, learn, and grow in discipleship, even as we lead others to do the same. In order to flourish as ministerial leaders and followers of Christ, we need nurture and

guidance. We need practical guidelines and realistic expectations. We need a holistic approach to ministry and the place of sexuality in it.

PROFESSIONAL SEXUAL ETHICS

Bringing our whole, human selves into ministry allows us to be genuine and fully present as we fulfill our respective callings within the body of Christ. This includes our sexuality and its appropriately expressed and cared for needs and desires. Whether a teacher, chaplain, musician, prayer leader, preacher, or treasurer—each person in a ministerial role of leadership communicates profound messages about God’s love. Authentically embodying God’s unbounded, indiscriminate, infinite love, however, demands that we recognize and acknowledge our own limitations and boundaries. Upholding the sacred trust of ministry requires leaders who are attuned to the complicated dynamics of power, interpersonal boundaries, and consent within ministerial relationships. “Professional sexual ethics” refers to all of this—the integration of professional ethics, sexual ethics, and sexuality education for ministerial leaders.

Professional ethics in ministry pertains to the role of ministerial leader. When one’s call to leadership is publicly affirmed, one is given authority within the community of faith. This authority (whatever the specific role) conveys certain responsibilities. Professional ethics is the intentional practice of reflecting on, deliberating about, and acting on the right use of this power and authority. Simply put, these special obligations stem from the role of ministerial leader. These are “professional” duties, even if the person in ministry is lay, part-time, or unpaid. When a ministerial leader abuses the power of her role by sexually exploiting a person in her care, this is a violation of *professional* sexual ethics. Marie Fortune, Founder and Senior Analyst of the FaithTrust Institute, offers this definition of sexual misconduct in ministry:

When any person in a ministerial role of leadership or pastoral counseling (clergy, religious, or lay) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student or staff member (adult, teenager, or child) in a professional [ministerial] relationship.¹

Fortune’s pioneering work in healthy boundaries for ministry and the prevention of sexual abuse by ministerial leaders has had a profound impact on

1. Marie M. Fortune, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook* (Seattle: FaithTrust Institute, 2009), 30.

the work of many contributors to this volume. Awareness of professional sexual ethics for ministry has increased significantly in the past twenty-five years, coincident with greater awareness and enforcement of U.S. federal guidelines regarding sexual harassment in the workplace.

Holistic sexual ethics and sexuality education pertains to the ministerial leader as a sexual person—a rare topic in churches and in theological literature. Aside from discussions about vowed celibacy for priests and debates about ordaining partnered gay and lesbian persons, faith communities are reticent to acknowledge the minister as a sexual person. Much more has been written about clergy health generally (for example, healthy work/life balance) and about sexuality education for all Christians than about the sexual lives of clergy. When sexuality and ministry are discussed together, it is usually framed in terms of risk, danger, and prevention. Much more has been written about the abuses of sexuality by those in ministry than has been written about healthy sexuality for ministerial leaders.² Yet, awareness of professional sexual ethics and the need for resources is on the increase within denominational structures with the power to influence theological education.

In 2010, the Unitarian Universalist Association, according to its own press release, became “the first major religious denomination in the country to require that its candidates for ordination demonstrate the capability to address sexuality issues in ministry.”³ This action was heavily influenced by the Religious Institute, which offers the following characteristics of a sexually healthy religious professional:

- Knowledgeable about human sexuality.
- Familiar with their tradition’s sacred text(s) on sexuality.
- Able to engage in theological reflection about how best to integrate sexuality and spirituality.
- Able to examine the impact of racism, sexism, heterosexism and homophobia on ministry.
- Trained in pastoral counseling approaches that facilitate resolution of interpersonal conflict, specifically when dealing with sexual matters, for individuals, families and groups.

2. Notable exceptions include Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton, *Sex in the Parish* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); G. Lloyd Rediger, *Beyond the Scandals: A Guide to Healthy Sexuality for Clergy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); and Scott Edelstein, *Sex and the Spiritual Teacher: Why It Happens, When It’s a Problem, and What We All Can Do* (Boston: Wisdom, 2011).

3. Unitarian Universalist Association, “Unitarian Universalist Seminarians to be Trained in Sexuality Issues and Ethics,” news release, February 9, 2010, <http://www.uua.org/news/pressroom/pressreleases/158197.shtml>.

- Able to serve as role models, discussing sexual issues with ease and comfort.
- Knowledgeable about their denomination's policies on sexuality.
- Able to speak out for sexual justice within their denomination and in the larger community.
- Skillful in preaching about sexuality-related issues.
- Able to recognize their own personal limitations and boundaries when it comes to handling sexuality issues.
- Able to deal appropriately with sexual feelings that may arise for congregants, and vice-versa.⁴

This view recognizes that sexual health is an essential part of maintaining professional relationships in ministry.

In 2012, The United Methodist Church (UMC) approved a comprehensive set of guidelines for teaching professional sexual ethics in educational programs of ministerial preparation. United Methodist candidates for licensed and ordained ministry are now expected to reach the following goals and competencies in seminary (or alternate track of theological education).⁵

GOALS

FUTURE MINISTERIAL LEADERS ARE EXPECTED TO:

- Understand healthy interpersonal boundaries as integral to enabling the trust necessary for ministry.
- Recognize sexual ethics in ministry as an issue of appropriate use of power and avoidance of abuse rather than exclusively an issue of "sexual morality."
- Understand the importance of professional ethics, including one's own denominational policies and expectations.
- Learn the role of judicatories in prevention and response to clergy sexual misconduct.

4. Debra W. Haffner, *A Time to Build: Creating Sexually Healthy Faith Communities*, 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Religious Institute, 2012), 13. Over the past decade the Religious Institute, a non-profit organization, has sought to develop models of sexual health for ministerial formation and congregational practice. For additional resources see <http://www.religioustheology.org/resources>.

5. United Methodist Church, "Sexual Ethics as Integral Part of Formation for Ministerial Leadership," in *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2012* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 146–52. For an earlier example of an articulation of desired outcomes for theological education to address and prevent clergy sexual misconduct, see Nils C. Friberg and Mark R. Laaser, *Before the Fall: Preventing Pastoral Sexual Abuse* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998), 125–28.

- Become knowledgeable about human sexuality, one's own sexual self, and how to deal with sexual feelings that may arise for congregants, and vice versa.
- Appreciate how sexual integrity contributes to spiritual wholeness and how it is vital to ministerial formation and personal health.
- Become conversant with scriptural and theological resources for all of the above.

COMPETENCIES

MINISTERIAL CANDIDATES ARE FURTHER EXPECTED TO:

- Practice healthy life choices and work-life balance.
- Be sexually self-aware.
- Become comfortable talking about issues of sexuality.
- Develop skills to provide pastoral care and worship leadership on sexuality issues.
- Be committed to sexual justice in the congregation and in society at large.

Expressing its hope that implementation of these goals and competencies become integral to formation, the UMC asserts, “At its best, professional formation for ministerial leadership should not be confined to one subject, class, or academic discipline but should rather pervade the entire core curriculum, ethos and co-curricular experience of ministerial education.”⁶ This book embraces this hope, discussing concerns related to professional sexual ethics in relation to both traditional theological core disciplines and in connection with some of the common practices of ministry.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is for you, the ministerial leader. It is appropriate for advanced leadership training for laity, seminary and other courses of study for ministerial formation, and continuing education for clergy. Furthermore, this book is about you, the ministerial leader. These chapters consistently focus on the person, role, and behavior of the ministerial leader. Read this book early in your leadership journey and review it often. Discuss it with others. Wrestle with and debate its conclusions.

6. United Methodist Church, “Sexual Ethics as Integral,” 149. For a constructive approach to implementing these curricular guidelines, see Darryl W. Stephens, “Teaching Professional Sexual Ethics Across the Seminary Curriculum,” *Religious Education* 108, no. 2 (March–April 2013), 193–209.

Contributors to this book represent the breadth of theological disciplines and bring a wide range of expertise in sexuality and professional ethics for ministry. In these chapters, established scholars (lay and clergy) and pastoral leaders offer a cross-curricular, inter-disciplinary, and ecumenical conversation about sexuality in the context of ethical ministerial leadership. Focusing on implications for the practice of ministry, chapters feature analyses of common ministry situations and practical guidelines. Each chapter includes discussion questions, designed for classroom or group study, and a trove of resources for further study.⁷

Part 1, “Ethical Landscape of Ministry,” presents foundational issues in professional sexual ethics. These chapters could be assigned in preparation for a leadership training event, for a student orientation, in an introduction to ministry course, or as a common text for a first-year ministerial formation group. In chapter 1, Kate M. Ott makes a case for sexual health and wholeness as essential to faithful and effective ministry, focusing on integrity in one’s sexual identity, personal attitudes, values, and history. In chapter 2, Darryl W. Stephens discusses safeguards and warning signs as guidelines for a professional ethics approach through vignettes depicting sexual exploitation, blurred boundaries, and dating. Stanley Hauerwas, in chapter 3, reframes the issue of professional sexual ethics by encouraging faith leaders to resist societal confusions and to speak truthfully and frankly about sex. Concluding Part 1, Cristina L. H. Traina, in chapter 4, establishes the virtue of attunement as essential to forming strong, trusting bonds in ministry, arguing for an embrace and appropriate restraint of the erotic in ministerial relationships.

Part 2, “Sources of Wisdom,” draws upon four deep wells: inherited traditions of church teachings, interpretation of scripture, traditions of theological reasoning, and an ethic arising from experiences of the disenfranchised. In chapter 5, Rosemary Radford Ruether surveys the church’s inheritance of Augustine’s teachings on sexuality, suggesting ways in which that heritage needs to be reconstructed for sexual ethics today. In chapter 6, John C. Holbert interprets the story of David and Bathsheba as a warning regarding his own potential to abuse the power of the pastoral office—a risk that all ministerial leaders share. Susan A. Ross, in chapter 7, explores feminist developments of Protestant and Catholic theological traditions about love of self, suggesting appropriate practices of self-care for ministerial leaders. Concluding Part 2, Miguel A. De La Torre, in chapter 8, develops a constructive ethic of sexual pleasure, based on experiences of “those who reside

7. See also James S. Evinger, “Clergy Sexual Abuse Bibliography,” 22nd ed.,

<http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/bibliographies/clergy-sexual-abuse/?searchterm=evinger>.

on the margins of power and privilege”—an ethic with the potential to overturn unjust social structures.

Part 3, “Practices of Ministry,” explores professional sexual ethics from the perspective of a wide range of theological disciplines, focusing on the practicalities of ministry. In chapter 9, Joretta Marshall discusses pseudo-intimacy, vulnerability, clergy dating, collegiality, and intersections of oppressions as central issues facing ministers in the practice of pastoral care. In chapter 10, Robert C. Dykstra, through an engaging discussion of a character in a young adult novel, explores the risks and benefits youth ministers face when talking to teens about their sexual lives. In chapter 11, Boyung Lee examines sexuality education in congregations, increasing the pedagogical awareness of faith leaders and empowering us for more effective teaching throughout all ministries of the church. In chapter 12, F. Douglas Powe argues for prophetic resistance to individualistic distortions of the David narrative by pastors in African American churches, encouraging accountability and healing so that congregations may become more effective evangelistically. In chapter 13, Steven Charleston offers guidance for maintaining appropriate interpersonal boundaries and respecting cultural differences during missional encounters. John S. McClure, in chapter 14, interrogates the embodied sexuality of the preacher and the power of the pulpit, attending especially to differences in the ways women and men experience these aspects of ministerial leadership. Concluding Part 3, Don E. Saliers, in chapter 15, examines perceptions and intentions of liturgical leaders during the embodied, ritual acts of the gathered congregation, discussing embedded, contemporary cultural images and drawing upon ancient practices and virtues for truth-telling and resistance.

Part 4, “Pastoral Leadership,” provides holistic guidance to the ministerial leader, applying themes of earlier chapters to common challenges in the church. In chapter 16, Jeanne Hoeft offers practical guidelines for monitoring power within the relational dynamics of ministry, with special attention to friendship and intimacy. In chapter 17, Joyce Ann Mercer discusses significant areas of concern regarding the use of technology in ministry, including virtual selves, digital privacy (or lack thereof), disinhibition in social networking, pornography use, and appropriate self-care for ministerial leaders. In chapter 18, Adam Hamilton offers leadership advice based on the experience of his congregation’s response to sexual misconduct among two of its ministry staff. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell, in chapter 19, offers a frank discussion of an array of sexual topics in the lives of young people and in the Bible, urging openness to life-long learning by ministerial leaders and communal deliberation and discernment in congregations as new issues and insights emerge. The

book concludes with chapter 20, by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, who writes elegantly about the need for ministerial leaders to attend to their own sex lives—outside of their professional context.

The end is the beginning of continued conversations and insights that go well beyond this book. You, the reader, will likely find much to disagree with—and agree with—in these pages. We hope that this book inspires you to examine your own ministry, your own sexuality, and your own professional ethics, with the aim of creating a healthier, more responsible, more effective, and more passionate witness for Christ.

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