

CONGREGATIONAL SEXUAL MISCONDUCT DISCLOSURE PROCESS

New England Conference Response/Intervention Team

The following is an ideal with the understanding that some things may change due to the bishop's discretion or particular circumstances. This outlines the process if the complaint has been filed against the pastor of the church and if the bishop decides to suspend the pastor. To suspend or not is at the discretion of the bishop.

The following takes place after the bishop has received the formal complaint per the current *Book of Discipline* and appropriate paragraph, and has spoken with the respondent (the accused) and sometimes with the alleged victim (the complainant). The accused has the right to see the complaint and the alleged victim is told that such will happen. The process prior to the congregational disclosure in the New England Conference is outlined in the General Principles... Process of the New England Conference – June 25, 2009 – sections I, II, & III.

This general format has been used in New England about 15 times with slight modifications depending on circumstances. Lay misconduct process is similar but with the pastor present and preaching. The district superintendent may or may not be present in the lay misconduct case – it has been handled in both ways. The Response/Intervention Team coordinator or another member of the Team is present and leads at the will of the pastor. Nothing happens without the knowledge of the district superintendent however.

I. THE GOAL/ PURPOSE OF THE CONGREGATIONAL DISCLOSURE

- a. To inform congregation their pastor has been suspended “with pay and without prejudice pending investigation” due to a formal sexual misconduct complaint submitted to the bishop
- b. To allow questions, comments about the forthcoming process (but not to disclose specifics about the complaint)
- c. To introduce conference team -- Response/Intervention Team, Cabinet, Bishop, Communications Director, et.al, that will work with the congregation for as long as it takes for Just Resolution and congregational healing

Response/Intervention Team members deployed by R/I Team coordinator - not to function as an advocate but to accompany each party thru the process for information and support

- one or more assigned to the congregation,
- one assigned to the one filing the complaint (complainant)
- one assigned to the accused (respondent)
- others as may be needed for family members etc.

- d. To remind the congregation - even in the midst of shock, denial, anger, and all other feelings, they are and will remain in the midst of God's care, they are not alone, and they will come through this as they remain together as the church / the people of God.

II. THE PROCESS

Prior to Worship – meeting with the SPRC before disclosure - district superintendent & R/I Team coordinator.

- chair calls emergency meeting preferably sometime earlier than Sunday morning
 - as soon as possible after the chair receives the call about the formal complaint
 - if no other time possible, better before worship on Sunday a.m. than not at all.

District superintendent leads the meeting after the chair opens the meeting with prayer.

- explains that a formal complaint has been filed with the bishop against their pastor.

Superintendent introduces the coordinator of the R / I Team & Sunday a.m. process

- R/I Team coordinator explains function of the team in this situation
- R/I Team members assigned not as advocates but as a presence with each party involved

- SPRC hears that the pastor will not be in worship that morning.
- superintendent says that he / she will preach & will read the following letter to the congregation. (this schedule for worship worked out in advance with SPRC chair.
- superintendent then reads the letter to the SPRC and welcomes any questions.
- SPRC told that the nature of the complaint is held in confidence but the goals of the disclosure are laid out for the SPRC.
- SPRC told that complaint is a sexual misconduct complaint and it “has not risen to the level of law enforcement – that it does not involve a child” – if that true.
- if complaint does involve a child, another step in process is followed because police will have been immediately notified and pastor dealt with in keeping with the law. Spirit of disclosure can be followed however.

SPRC reminded of their pastoral care role in the congregation.

they told that they will be asked to stand in the midst of the disclosure

- to help congregation to see once more just who serves in pastoral care capacity.

Any discussion from SPRC invited thus far – often helping SPRC members understand what misconduct is – power issue – “not just an affair” - a new paradigm now and it is misconduct.

Other Details for SPRC

Safe Room

- a place where a person in congregation during disclosure might go if issue of sexual misconduct surfaces a painful point for them – someone who has perhaps been abused or for some reason finds themselves unable to remain in the discussion.

SPRC asked to provide a person outside the congregation to staff safe room

- if they cannot, then district superintendent or Team coordinator will identify someone from elsewhere to fill that role.
- during disclosure R/I Team coordinator explain this room, purpose, & location
- at same time R/I Team coordinator identifying location of the rest room.
 - **** rest room detail important so that one who is leaving the discussion can feel safe that no one knows if they leaving to go to the safe room or to go to the rest room.

SPRC confidentiality critical

When SPRC feels ready to work with the conference resources, the meeting is adjourned with the SPRC told they MUST maintain confidentiality and say nothing to anyone.

Sunday morning – Worship and Disclosure – if complaint against pastor

superintendent preaches with at least the R / I Team coordinator present

- also present if possible - some or all team members who will work with the parties involved
- also present if possible - Conference Director of Communications may be present
 - if expecting any media, CDC stand at the back of sanctuary as sole voice in with media.

prior to benediction and after the last hymn, superintendent explains briefly why he/she is there

- the letter from bishop and superintendent read
- R / I Team coordinator introduced by superintendent
- R/I team leads the disclosure from front of the sanctuary but not in the pulpit.
- superintendent comes down from the pulpit and stands with R / I Team coordinator.

R/I Team coordinator begins with prayer, thanking God for God’s care, presence, and blessing

with congregation,
with the one who filed the complaint,
with the one accused

Important that people remain together in the sanctuary, that no one is invited to leave.

Also important that first item after prayer is information about the Safe Room and rest room

Reminder - The Congregation Is Not Alone- shown visibly

R / I Team coordinator explains functioning of the team of bishop, superintendent, and R /I Team

- congregation reassured that they not alone in this process
- SPRC asked to stand so they visible as those of congregation who there for the people
- congregation assured all parties involved have R/I Team person with them,
 - no one is left alone and that
 - a Just Resolution will be sought
- congregation reminded of respect for all parties
- congregation told that pastor will not be in contact with congregation nor congregation with him/her

*** this is to make certain that the process is allowed to move forward with the least hurt to all parties.

No contact - not “Shunning”

Sometimes “no contact” creates point of anger in congregation

Sometimes congregation responds with thoughts or comments - the pastor is being “shunned”!

- R/I coordinator and superintendent remind people:
 - discussions, choosing sides, “he said □ she said” does no one any good
 - if they see pastor in grocery store or on the street, of course they offer a greeting
 - but no discussion of the situation is helpful to anyone

Important For Congregation To Speak, Feel Heard, Try To Make Sense Of It...

Congregation invited to express feelings

ask questions

but there will be no disclosure of the details of the allegation

Congregation assured they will know now the process and will be kept informed throughout.

Congregation assured they will have pastoral coverage throughout the process until “the end”

Congregation told pastor is suspended, yes, assured “with pay and without prejudice pending investigation.”

This repeated many times in many ways despite the congregation’s desire to know more details.

Details they think will help them make sense of what has happened

It will not and this is important to say

Congregation also sometimes says “We should have taken better care of our pastor.”

This important to challenge.

“The pastor is sent to take care of you, not for you to take care of him /her.

That is the reason our United Methodist church is a connectional church in all ways.

Clergy are required to have covenant relationships with other clergy precisely for this reason – to make sure there is someone to take care of them other than the congregation they SERVE.”

Final Details – Letter, Media, ... They Will Not Be Left Alone Or Left Out

When congregation has exhausted itself

When questions and comments seem to be going in circles

Then R/I Team coordinator begins to close the discussion (usually between 1 hour and 1 1/2 hours)

A few directions remain.

1. Letter read by the superintendent sent out to congregation next day –
SPRC deciding who should receive it.
 - goal -- no one to hear first of the alleged misconduct charge “via the grapevine”
 - rather from the actual words of the bishop and district superintendent.
2. Press release issued by Communications Director with directions - all inquiries from the media directed to the Communications Director.
3. Congregation is reminded -- their Team member there for them as is the R/I Team coordinator. The R / I Team will be with them for as long as it takes for their healing.
4. If other meetings required, they may be called.
5. Congregation assured again that they will be informed all along the way of what is happening
6. Congregation assured will be informed when Just Resolution reached
7. Congregation assured they will receive pastoral coverage -
interim pastor
sometimes two interim pastors
sometimes R/I Team clergy member who is not serving a church
sometimes another alternative
8. Closing - Congregation invited to sing -- often “Sanctuary” from *Faith We Sing*, p. 2164.
If the leaders feel need of congregation to gain back some control, might ask for a favorite of people for this time in the life of the congregation.
9. After hymn, superintendent or the R/I Team coordinator offers benediction
10. After benediction - invitation to coffee hour if available
 - good to have something for people to gather rather than everyone just leaving alone from difficult hour.

Hymn and benediction at the end of disclosure reminds people:

they have been in worship all the time –

God does not walk with them only in those High Holy Moments of celebration,
but in this kind of Holy Moment as well!!

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