

RS-204 - AMENDMENTS – POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

IX. D. - CLERGY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT POLICY

(Submitted by the Response/Intervention Team and the Steering Committee, pursuant to the request of the Conference Committee on Rules, in re “sunset” policy VII.D.5)

(Adopted after amendments, New England Annual Conference - Friday Afternoon, June 18, 2010)

INTRODUCTION

Since 1997 (1992 for the Southern New England and Maine Conferences), the New England Annual Conference has had a Clergy Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure. In 2003, the Annual Conference instructed the Steering Committee and the Response and Intervention Team to draft a policy concerning sexual misconduct by laypersons, thus recognizing that clergy are not the only leaders in the church that may be accused of, or subjected to, sexual misconduct. The Lay Sexual Misconduct Policy was passed by the 2009 Annual Conference.

The following policy updates and revises the 1997 process for handling complaints of clergy sexual misconduct. It also is intended as a teaching tool for our churches and our Annual Conference as we strive to maintain our congregations as safe environments for all. We offer this policy with the hope that open discussion and sharing will take place in our churches and Annual Conference about respecting the personal boundaries of others so that our churches may truly be safe and open places for all God’s people.

THEOLOGICAL PROLOGUE

We acknowledge that all persons are created in the image and likeness of God and are called, through Jesus Christ, to be in life-giving relationship with God and other persons. As we live in these life-giving relationships, we come to recognize and affirm that all life is contingent upon the grace of God.

Grace is life-giving and it is life-changing. It is freely given by God and invites a faithful response. Included in this faithful response is a life of devotion, discipleship, and acceptance of the mandate to use our gifts and skills in service to God and to further God’s realm.

We believe that the Church of Jesus Christ is created to be one community with each member holding a significant presence and purpose. When any part of the community is injured physically, emotionally, spiritually, or relationally, the well-being of the whole community is violated and all suffer, including the institutions. Therefore, those who are under episcopal appointment must hold the role and its responsibilities in sacred trust. We understand sacred trust to mean to do no harm and to be faithful to the love of God.

When sexual exploitation and other power abuses including but not limited to racism, classicism, sexism, breaks that sacred trust, the entire community suffers. The task and purpose of the sexual abuse policy and procedure is to restore what has been stolen and/ or broken by that sexual exploitation.

For survivors, it means resources and support, just actions from the church and its judicatory systems, and healing for their rightful place in the family of Christ.

For the abuser, it means accountability, discipline, and appropriate treatment, which may or may not lead to restoration to ministerial role and function.

For the church, it means support and resources to assist with the healing process, which ultimately leads to revitalized ministry and restoration to everyone’s rightful place in the body of Christ.

For congregations and community, it means truth-telling and healing resources and support.

Finally, we acknowledge that we are people working in partnership with God in covenant to bring new life out of the destruction and devastation wrought by clergy sexual abuse in all its forms and expressions.

DEFINITIONS

Sexual Misconduct includes all expressions of sexual and gender harassment, exploitation and abuse as well as sexual abuse within the relationships of our covenant communities. It includes sexual harassment, which is defined in the current Book of Discipline and appropriate paragraph as:

Any unwanted sexual comment, advance or demand, either verbal or physical, which is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive. Sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than an exclusively sexual issue. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender.

Descriptive examples of sexual misconduct include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 1 Improper verbal, written, and visual behavior: the inappropriate use of sexually explicit words, gestures or images including pornography.
- 2 Pornography: the possession, distribution, creation or use of pornography.
- 3 Seductive and/or stalking behavior: inappropriate and/or offensive behavior, but without seeming threat of repercussion.
- 4 Sexual bribery: solicitation of sexual activity and/or other sex-related behavior by promise of rewards.
- 5 Sexual coercion: coercion of sexual activity by threat of punishment.
- 6 Sexual imposition: gross sexual imposition like prolonged gazing, fondling, grabbing, assault or rape.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Justice requires providing a setting in which the complainant may share her or his story and be heard with openness and compassion; providing a means by which judgment can be made as to the validity of the complaint; and providing clear, consistent steps, known to all participants, leading to just resolution.
Such steps may include: protecting the vulnerable, calling the abuser into account by confrontation and the imposition of consequences, providing pastoral care and vindicating the victim-survivor or the accused person if the complaint is deemed not valid.
2. If there is suspicion of child sexual molestation or harassment one should be familiar with relevant state law and abide by it.
3. In this policy a "complainant" is understood to be the alleged victim-survivor who submits to the bishop a written and signed formal complaint of sexual misconduct.
4. In rare circumstances, the formal complaint may be written by someone other than the alleged victim-survivor. This person writes with and on behalf of the victim-survivor, but not in place of the alleged victim-survivor.
A third party complaint, that is one written without the consent of nor with the actual alleged victim-survivor, is considered "hearsay" and will not be received.
The term "victim-survivor" will be used for the person against whom the offense was committed if the accused person (the respondent) makes a confession of misconduct or is proven to be guilty.
5. When sexual misconduct occurs, there are many victims: the person(s) who has been abused, the spouse(s) and families of the abused person(s), the

spouse and family of the accused person, and the congregation(s) and the larger community surrounding them.

While all these victims are not addressed by current disciplinary procedures of the United Methodist Church, all are hurt when sexual misconduct occurs. The Conference Response/Intervention Team will be available to provide care for the respondent (accused person) and family, the complainant(s) (victim-survivor[s]) and families, as well as appropriate intervention for and on behalf of the congregation(s) and/or the larger community.

When allegations of sexual misconduct are made, the complainant(s) (victim-survivor[s]), the respondent (accused person), and the congregation(s) will receive sensitive and respectful care from the Conference Response/Intervention Team, the district superintendent, and the bishop. Justice for the respondent (accused person) will also be sought if the allegations are proven to be valid. Reasonable care will be taken to protect the privacy of the respondent (accused person), complainant(s) (victim-survivor[s]), and the congregations(s).

6. When the clergy person who is accused is the pastor of a church, and if that person is placed on suspension, due care will be provided by the district superintendent and bishop to provide an interim pastor to assure adequate coverage while the suspension is in place.

POLICY FOR HANDLING CLERGY MISCONDUCT COMPLAINTS

1. Initial Steps

Anyone who feels that he/she has experienced sexual misconduct by a clergy person may first contact any of the following:

- their SPRC (Staff Parish Relations Committee) or PPRC (Pastor Parish Relations Committee) chair,
- their district superintendent, bishop or the coordinator of the Conference Response/Intervention Team.

Allegations may come in a number of ways including verbally, written and hand delivered or mailed through the US postal service, or through a phone call. This ensures confidentiality which electronic communication does not guarantee. The person(s) receiving the allegations must always listen carefully and seriously. If the allegation/complaint comes from someone other than the alleged victim-survivor, an attempt must be made to clearly determine who has direct knowledge of the alleged misconduct or incident and clarify that a formal complaint must come directly from the alleged victim-survivor.

If the Conference Response/Intervention Team coordinator receives the call first from the alleged complainant(s) (victim-survivor[s]), that coordinator notifies the bishop who directs the next steps. If the alleged complainant(s) (victim-survivor[s]) wishes for his / her concern to remain in confidence, this can happen until a formal complaint is filed. At the point of a formal complaint, the disciplinary process begins – as outlined in the current Book of Discipline and appropriate paragraph.

When a written complaint is filed with the bishop, the bishop begins the process as outlined in the current Book of Discipline and appropriate paragraph. The bishop and the district superintendent shall meet with the respondent (accused clergy) who has the right to bring with him or her, a person of their choice for support. The purpose of this initial meeting is to inform the clergy of the complaint, allow the clergy to see the complaint, and provide the clergy an opportunity to respond.

The bishop then may call upon the Conference Response/Intervention Team coordinator to discuss the case, and may ask for the deployment of Conference Response/Intervention Team members

who, together with the bishop or the district superintendent, will be in contact and be on call to support the complainant(s) (alleged victim-survivor(s), the respondent (accused), and the local congregation.

(Members of the SPRC or PPRC, Lay Leaders, and other key lay persons and staff of the local church as well as district superintendent and other conference personnel should have the contact information for the Conference Response/Intervention Team coordinator and the Conference First Contact brochure translated into Spanish and Korean.)

The clergy against whom the allegation is made may be removed from leadership, service or ministry until a process of fact-finding and or investigation is completed. This suspension is with pay and without prejudice pending investigation.

As allegations are made and heard, all parties are encouraged to take one or more of the following actions:

- a. Keep a diary listing contacts, conversations, as well as the details of any alleged offenses.
- b. Understand the procedures available within this policy and the Book of Discipline for dealing with the problem.
- c. When appropriate, consider a referral to a professional counselor. The Conference Response/Intervention Team will compile a list of these persons as a resource for the particular geographical area.

2. Fact-Finding

All those involved in such a difficult circumstance – the complainant (alleged victim-survivor), the congregation(s), the respondent (the accused), the Conference Response/Intervention Team members, the district superintendent, and the bishop are encouraged to give daily attention to their spiritual nurture during this difficult process. The connection with God especially needs to be fostered in such a time. Active support from a Spiritual Director or prayer group or supportive spiritual friend may be crucial.

In the initial meeting with the complainant (alleged victim) and the bishop, the focus needs to be on clarifying the facts of the allegation. Additional parties, the coordinator or other assigned member of the Response/Intervention Team, along with the PPRC or SPRC member and/or lay leader or other person of the complainant's choice may be present as listeners in this initial meeting. Trauma, fear, anger, loss of trust and powerful memories will likely be present with the person making the allegation. With gentleness, the facts need to be clarified: who, what, when, where, how. Knowing what did not happen can be as important as what did happen.

The Bishop and/or the district superintendent may need to engage in some initial fact finding to make a determination if the allegation requires legal action, intervention from the police or child protective services. There may be circumstances where there is a legal obligation to act, even if the complainant (alleged victim-survivor) asks that this not be done.

Note: If the party involved is a minor, the bishop or others as he / she directs, is mandated to report the alleged misconduct to the police or the child protective authorities pursuant to state law. In these cases, it is not the responsibility of the reporting person to investigate the charges. That is the responsibility of the authorities.

But in the case of clergy misconduct involving a child, the bishop has the ability and responsibility to assure appropriate accountability action toward the accused.

3. Coordination:

When a written complaint is filed with the bishop, as the bishop deems appropriate:

- a. the district superintendent and the coordinator of the Conference Response/Intervention team are informed of the allegation.
- b. the district superintendent and the coordinator of the Conference Response/Intervention Team are kept apprised of any developments.
- c. It is the New England Conference policy to have the Conference Communications Director available as a resource to work with the PPRC or SPRC chair, another spokesperson for the congregation, and/or the district superintendent to respond to all media contacts and requests for information.
- d. The bishop or district superintendent may call upon the Communications Director to consult with the designated congregant in preparing a response for the media even if there is no media coverage or current inquiry. A press statement will be available for distribution in the event of any media inquiries. This press release also will be given to the congregation with clear instructions about where and to whom media inquiries are to be directed.

4. Ongoing Follow-up

For the sake of accuracy and protection of the facts, detailed notes will be kept of key conversations, statements, meetings, phone calls, and electronic communication and data. Such records will be filed by the bishop or designee, retained, and kept in a confidential and secure manner.

5. Congregational Disclosure

If the pastor is suspended, the bishop shall designate the district superintendent or another person to fill the pulpit the first Sunday after suspension. For the health and protection of the local church and to assure justice, the bishop may recommend that the district superintendent and the coordinator of the Conference Response/Intervention Team or another R/I Team designee share pertinent information with the PPRC or SPRC. A disclosure with the local congregation will take place following worship on that first Sunday. The detailed process for this congregational disclosure is on as Addendum A follows this policy.

The Congregational Disclosure will discuss the process, though not the details, from complaint to Just Resolution. The congregation will be assured that they will be resourced by the Conference Response/Intervention Team and / or other appropriate parties of the Conference which will keep records of key conversations, statements, meetings, and phone calls.

6. Toward a Just Resolution

The bishop, superintendent, Conference Response/Intervention Team members assigned to the complainant (victim-survivor) and respondent (accused) along with their (complainant and respondent's) persons of choice meet together to work out a Just Resolution. A Just Resolution is defined in the current Book of Discipline and appropriate paragraphs as:

A Just Resolution is one that focuses on repairing any harm to people and communities, achieving real accountability by making things right in so far as possible and bringing healing to all the parties.

The process with the above group is as follows in compliance with the Book of Discipline:

- Meet first with complainant / (victim-survivor) to hear what he / she feels is a Just Resolution.
- Meet next with respondent (the accused) to hear what he / she feels is a Just Resolution, the respondent (the accused) hearing also the terms expressed by the complainant (victim-survivor).
- After both meetings, bishop or his/her designee writes the Letter of Just Resolution. This is given first to victim-survivor for signature or revision suggestions, then to the

offender for signature or revision suggestions. Copies of the letter are given to offender and victim-survivor, as well as the coordinator of the Conference Response/Intervention Team and the district superintendent.

- Closing the loop with all parties is important both for the closure and certainty of everything being compiled appropriately. It is also important for assuring that the information shared is complete for any appropriate follow-up.

The coordinator of the Conference Response/Intervention Team will ensure that all relevant documentation gathered and/or created by the Conference Response/Intervention Team members working with the case, including written and electronic notes and all written and electronic correspondence is properly assembled into a case file and provided to the appropriate conference office for further use and retention.

The coordinator of the Conference Response/Intervention Team will also direct all members of the Conference Response/Intervention Team to securely destroy all physical and electronic notes or working documents created during the Conference Response/Intervention Team's involvement in the case.

7. When a Just Resolution Cannot Be Reached

The bishop can (the current Book of Discipline and appropriate paragraph):

- Refer the matter to a third party mediator(s) if this has not been attempted.
- Dismiss the complaint with the consent of the Cabinet giving the reasons in writing, a copy of which shall be placed in the clergyperson's file.
- Refer the matter as an Administrative Complaint (to the Board of Ordained Ministry,) or ¶1362.1a (2008)
- Refer the matter as a Judicial Complaint ¶12704. (2008)

8. Clergy Sexual Misconduct Charges

Language dealing with chargeable offenses and judicial complaints can be found in the current Book of Discipline and appropriate paragraphs. Nothing in this policy should be construed as contradicting the processes and/or requirements of the Book of Discipline. Rather, this policy seeks to provide a more detailed process for clergy – ordained, commissioned, and local pastors -- and others who would assist in dealing with a possible case of misconduct.

9. Policy Visibility

It is important that this policy be published and placed in a prominent part of the church where it can be read and easily accessed on the New England United Methodist Conference website – www.neumc.org.

STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATION

1. Introduction

To enable the implementation of this policy, the Steering Committee and the Response/Intervention Team will be responsible for explaining the procedures in this policy and for providing education for clergy and laypersons on issues relating to sexual ethics for clergy. Quadrennial training will be conducted for active clergy, the Cabinet, and local church PPRC or SPRC members. The Steering Committee will review the policy and discuss further training each quadrennium.

2. Evaluation of Policy and its Implementation

Each person who has been involved with the procedures of this policy is invited to reflect on the process and give feedback to the Steering Committee and the Response/Intervention Team. Persons who have feedback, concerns or questions are encouraged to contact the chair of the Steering

Committee or Response/Intervention Team because evaluation can be a helpful tool for continuous improvement in the policy and its implementation. [Names and/or churches involved will not be disclosed by the committee chair or the coordinator of the Response/Intervention Team.]

3. Education about the Policy

The Conference will provide this policy to every church, every pastor, and every PPRC/SPRC Chair via electronic or postal mail. The policy will be placed on the Conference web site and annual notifications of the policy's existence and location will be sent via conference communications. This policy is to be posted in a plain and visible place in each local church and easily accessed on the Conference website – www.neumc.org.

In order to educate clergy and laity about this policy, the Steering Committee will offer workshops to review the policy and provide education on prevention of sexual misconduct. Local church PPRCs (or SPRCs) will be expected to attend these workshops in order to teach the congregation about the function of this policy. District education will include methods for presenting the issues to the congregation. Education will be ongoing.

4. Prevention Education

To be effective in preventing sexual misconduct, education must be a priority for the Church. Such education includes in-service training, growth in self-awareness, a disciplined spiritual life and the clarification of one's relationship with community.

a. Local Church Training

The PPRC or SPRC is charged with teaching the congregation (for example, through youth and adult education, worship, and conversation) about ethical sexual conduct in the congregation. Therefore, the PPRC or SPRC is responsible for seeking out resources, identified in Section III and utilizing resources provided by the New England Conference, General Board of Discipleship, Safe Sanctuaries, General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, and the Board of Laity, through which it can inform itself about the dynamics of issues surrounding appropriate sexual boundaries, and clergy and lay sexual ethics and misconduct.

The Conference program agencies and personnel (for example, the District Committees On Ministry, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, the Conference Lay Leader and the Commission On the Status and Role Of Women) are responsible for providing continuing education for the laity about sexuality and ethics. Traditional laity gatherings such as Annual Conference, District Trainings, Cluster events, and the Board of the Laity are opportunities for such training and refectation.

b. Clergy Training

All clergy in the New England Conference are required to have Sexual Ethics training each quadrennium. Lay and clergy misconduct information and discussion shall be included in this training. Local Pastors' Licensing School has a Sexual Ethics training each year.

RESOURCES

1. Safe Sanctuaries: www.gbod.org/safesanctuaries. Resources include sample policies, evaluation forms, DVD trainings and guidelines, "healthy congregations" studies and study materials, staff contacts and other resources.
2. National/State Sex Offender Registry: <http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/registry.htm>
3. Child Protective Services:
 - Connecticut - <http://www.ct.gov/dss/site/default.asp>
 - Maine - Child Protective Services -- <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cw/abuse.shtml>

Maine - Adult Protective Services -- <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/oes/resource/aps.htm>

Massachusetts -- <http://www.mass.gov/dss>

New Hampshire -- <http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/DHHS/DCYF/default.htm>

Rhode Island -- <http://www.preventchildabuse-ri.org/>

Vermont -- http://dcf.vermont.gov/child_protection

4. Other Resources:

Sexual Ethics Task Force – Rev. Dr. Darryl Stephens , Director

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women - United Methodist Church

Garlinda Burton, General Secretary

77 West Washington St., Suite 1009 Chicago, IL 60602

312-346-4900 - office

www.umsexualethics.org

Faith Trust Institute – Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune – founder and Executive Director

2400 N 45th Street Suite 101 , Seattle, WA 98103 206-634-0115 fax

Faith Trust Institute: <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/>

Addendum A

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 OF THE CONGREGATIONAL DISCLOSURE

The primary purpose of the Congregational Disclosure Process is four- fold:

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

Resources: Bishop.

District superintendent

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 to provide 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.
 Conference Director of Communications

- d. To remind the congregation that 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, district superintendent, and R/I Team coordinator.

The district superintendent and the Response/Intervention Team coordinator meet with the SPRC before the disclosure – preferably sometime earlier than Sunday morning – the chair of the SPRC calling an emergency meeting as soon as possible after the chair receives the call about the formal complaint. If no other time is possible, it is better before worship on Sunday a.m. than not at all. The district superintendent leads the meeting after the chair opens the meeting with prayer.

The superintendent introduces the coordinator of the R / I Team and explains the function of the team in this situation – that a formal complaint has been filed with the bishop against their pastor. The R/I Team members are assigned not as advocates but as a presence with each party involved in the proceedings. The SPRC hears that the pastor will not be in worship that morning. The superintendent says that he / she will preach and will read the following letter to the congregation. This schedule has been worked out in advance with the chair of the SPRC. The superintendent then reads the letter to the SPRC and welcomes any questions.

The SPRC is told that the nature of the complaint is held in confidence but the goals of the disclosure are laid out for the SPRC. They are told that it 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 is true. If it does involve a child, then another step in the process is followed because police will have been immediately notified and the pastor dealt with in keeping with the law. The spirit of the disclosure can be followed however.

The SPRC is reminded of their pastoral care role in the congregation. They are told that they will be asked to stand in the midst of the disclosure to help the congregation remember that fact and to see once more just who serves in this capacity. The SPRC meeting discussion ensues with all parties participating – superintendent, R /I Team coordinator, and all SPRC members.

Safe Room

The SPRC is asked if they might provide a person outside the congregation to staff a “safe room”. If they cannot, then the district superintendent or Team coordinator will identify someone from another congregation to fill that role. The safe room is a place where a person in the congregation might go if the 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. This room and purpose will be identified by the R/I Team coordinator at the beginning of the meeting while at the same time identifying the location of the rest room. This detail is important so that one who is leaving the discussion can feel safe that no one knows if they are leaving to go to the safe room or to go to the rest room.

SPRC confidentiality critical

When the 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

On Sunday morning, the superintendent preaches with at least the R / I Team coordinator present, if not all the team members who will work with the parties involved. The Conference Director of Communications may be present and if expecting any media, shall stand at the back of the sanctuary to be the sole voice in communication with the media.

Just prior to the benediction and after the last hymn, the superintendent explains briefly why he/she is there and the letter is read. This letter is written over the signature of the bishop and the superintendent. The R / I Team coordinator is introduced who then leads the disclosure from the front of the sanctuary but not in the pulpit. The superintendent comes down from the pulpit and stands with the R / I Team coordinator.

The coordinator begins with prayer, thanking God for God's care and presence with the congregation, with the one who filed the complaint, with the one accused, and asks God's blessing on this time. It is important that the people remain together in the sanctuary, that no one is invited to leave. It is also important that a first item after the prayer is the information about the Safe Room and the rest room as mentioned earlier.

The Congregation Is Not Alone

The R / I Team coordinator explains the functioning of the team of bishop, superintendent, and R / I Team and reassures the congregation that they are not alone in this process. The SPRC is asked to stand so they too are addressed as those of the congregation who are there for the people. It is also important to emphasize that all parties involved have a Team person with them, that no one is left alone and that a Just Resolution will be sought. The congregation is reminded of respect for all parties that the pastor will not be in contact with the congregation nor the congregation with him/her. This is to make certain that the process is allowed to move forward with the least hurt to all parties.

Not "Shunning"

Sometimes this "no contact" creates a point of anger in the congregation and they respond that the pastor is being "shunned". The R/I coordinator and the superintendent remind the people that discussions, choosing sides, "he said-she said" does no one any good. If they see the pastor in the grocery store or on the street, of course they will 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..

The congregation is invited to express their feelings, ask any questions, but there will be no disclosure of the details of the allegation. The pastor is suspended, yes, but "with pay and without prejudice pending investigation." This is repeated many different times in many different ways despite the congregation's desire to know the details. Details they think will help them make sense of what has happened. It will not and this is important to say. They also sometimes say "We should have taken better care of our pastor." This too is 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 the congregation has exhausted itself, when the questions and comments seem to be going in circles, the R/I Team coordinator begins to close the discussion (usually between an hour and an hour and a half). A few directions remain. The letter read by the superintendent will be sent out to the congregation the next day – the SPRC deciding who should receive it. The goal is that no one hear of the alleged misconduct charge first “via the grapevine” but from the actual words of the bishop and district superintendent.

There will be a “press release” issued by the Communications Director with all inquiries from the media directed to the Communications Director. If the media does not want to do that, then one voice from the congregation shall be Director or if the media insists, to that one person.

The congregation is reminded that their Team member is there for them as is the R/I Team coordinator. The R / I Team will also be with them for as long as it takes for their healing. If other meetings are required, they may be called. The congregation must be assured that they will be informed all along the way of what is happening and they will be informed when a Just Resolution is reached. Meanwhile they will receive an interim pastor – sometimes two and sometimes an R/I Team member who is not serving a church.

The congregation is then invited to sing a hymn - often “Sanctuary” from Faith We Sing, p. 2164. If the leaders feel the need of the congregation to gain back some control, they might ask for a favorite of people for this time in the life of the congregation. After the hymn, the superintendent or the R/I Team coordinator offers a benediction and invites all to the coffee hour if that is available. It is good to have something for the people to gather rather than everyone just leaving alone from this difficult hour.

The hymn and benediction at the end of the disclosure reminds the people that they have been in worship all the time – that God does not walk with them only in those High Holy Moments of celebration, but in this kind of Holy Moment as well.