

BOR ¶2046: Sexual Ethics as Integral Part of Formation for Ministerial Leadership

Background: A 2005 survey conducted by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (henceforth, GCSRW), “Sexual Harassment in The United Methodist Church,” found a high number of incidents of sexual harassment in local churches and seminary settings (Gail Murphy-Geiss, “Sexual Harassment in The United Methodist Church,” Chicago: General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, 2005). A 2009 study, “Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice” by the Religious Institute, found that few seminaries offer comprehensive courses in sexuality issues for religious professionals and most seminarians can graduate without taking a course in sexuality. Furthermore, tenure-track faculty are the least likely to teach sexuality-related courses. One of the report’s key recommendations is that seminaries require coursework on human sexuality and healthy professional boundaries (Kate M. Ott, “Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice,” New York: Religious Institute, 2009).

Since 1996, The United Methodist Church has called for “United Methodist-related schools of theology to provide training on the prevention and eradication of sexual harassment, abuse, and misconduct within the ministerial relationship” (Book of Resolutions 2008, p. 139; see also Book of Resolutions 1996, p. 131). The United Methodist Church has also urged seminaries to address issues of pornography and pornography addiction (Book of Resolutions 2008, pp. 155-56). Some schools have done well in teaching professional ethics and sexual ethics for ministry, and some faculty members work very hard to attend to the ethical aspects of the ministerial profession. These efforts, however, often depend on the passionate commitment of individual faculty members and administrators and are not yet integrated into the institutional structures of expectation in seminary education. (This dynamic goes beyond United Methodist theologi-

cal education. In a 400-page, landmark study of clergy education by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, issues of sexual ethics and interpersonal boundaries are mentioned only three times, briefly. Charles Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006, pp. 173, 315 and 338.) The United Methodist Church desires that professional ethics go beyond a special emphasis of lone faculty members and become an integral and intentional part of the fabric of ministerial formation. The United Methodist Church calls for seminaries and Course of Study schools to strengthen existing curricular coverage and training in professional ethics for United Methodists preparing for roles of ministerial leadership.

A multidisciplinary, multiethnic, racially diverse, ecumenical group of scholars, clergy, and consultants has unanimously agreed on the fundamental need to improve the structures of professional education for clergy. Many persons and groups have been included and consulted in developing a strategy to improve training in professional ethics for United Methodists preparing for roles of ministerial leadership. In April 2010, GCSRW convened a full-day seminar of seminary faculty, administrators, and consultants, with the participation of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, to examine the issue of ministerial preparedness and sexual misconduct and to develop recommendations for addressing this need. (Details of this seminar, along with resources and updates on this project have been made available online throughout the development and testing of these guidelines: <http://umsexualethics.org/Education/SeminaryCurriculumDevelopment.aspx>.) Two seminar participants from different United Methodist seminaries committed to offering a pilot course in sexual ethics for ministry in the fall semester of 2010. The success of these elective courses was reported back to GCSRW in January 2011. Meanwhile, GCSRW

conducted listening sessions and pedagogical workshops with two additional United Methodist seminaries during the academic year 2010-2011. Plans are also being made for meeting with each United Methodist Seminary faculty by 2014. GCSRW collaborated in January 2011 with the FaithTrust Institute and the Religious Institute to present a panel and pedagogy workshop for the Society of Christian Ethics on "Teaching Sexuality from a Professional Ethics Perspective." (This session was made possible, in part, by a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, which is funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. and located at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana.) GCSRW also presented its work in this area to participants of "Do No Harm 2011," a national sexual ethics summit of UM leaders from 56 annual conferences held in Houston, Texas in January 2011.

As a result of these consultations with faculty, administrators, general agency staff, and consultants, GCSRW proposes the following plan:

1. Develop pedagogical objectives relating to professional ethics for ministry to be covered during the course of the Masters of Divinity (henceforth, MDiv) curriculum;
2. Promote the development of a series of curricular modules with resources for each core MDiv course, tailored to each discipline of study: theology, ethics, evangelism, biblical studies, field education, etc. (including each of the basic graduate theological studies required for UM ordination, Book of Discipline 2008, ¶ 324.4a);
3. Encourage intentionally utilizing the implicit curriculum (e.g., plagiarism policies and student honor codes) to model professional ethics, policies, procedures, and adjudication of misconduct;
4. Develop strategies for greater ongoing collaboration among

UM seminaries, and between seminaries, GCSRW and other general agencies, and boards of ordained ministry.

Each stage represents ongoing collaboration with seminary faculty, administrators, and general agency staff. 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. The overarching goal is that every person preparing for any role of ministerial leadership in The UMC be conversant with and practice professional ethics, sexual ethics, healthy boundaries and self-care.

Therefore, be it resolved, that The United Methodist Church calls for a rigorous program of ministerial readiness regarding professional ethics, sexual ethics, healthy boundaries, and self-care to become a standard aspect of United Methodist seminary and Course of Study education. The following pedagogical goals, core competencies, and content areas are to apply to students in the MDiv program of each UM seminary and additional seminaries approved by the University Senate and to the Course of Study for licensed local pastors.

Goals—Future ministerial leaders are to:

1. understand healthy interpersonal boundaries as integral to enabling the trust necessary for ministry;
2. 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”;
3. understand the importance of professional ethics, including one’s own denominational policies and expectations;

4. learn the role of judicatories in prevention and response to clergy sexual misconduct;
5. 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;
6. appreciate how sexual integrity contributes to spiritual wholeness and that this is vital to ministerial formation and personal health;
7. become conversant with scriptural and theological resources for all of the above.

Competencies—Ministerial candidates are to:

1. practice healthy life-choices and work/life balance;
2. be sexually self-aware;
3. become comfortable talking about issues of sexuality;
4. develop skills to provide pastoral care and worship leadership on sexuality issues;
5. be committed to sexual justice in the congregation and in society at large.

Content Areas—Students will study:

1. theology of power, privilege, and abuse (including topics such as: fiduciary duty of ministry; professional ethics paradigm; conflicts of interest; healthy boundaries; predators vs. wanderers);
2. human sexuality (including topics such as: dating, intimacy, and work/life balance; pregnancy, birth control, and abortion; pornography and objectification of persons; shame and abuse; consent and vulnerability; genetic, cultural, and physiological aspects of gender and sexuality);
3. sexual misconduct in ministry (including topics such as:

boundary violations; judicatory processes of justice-making;

secrecy; inappropriate uses of social networking and communication technologies);

4. pastoral care (including topics such as: working with victims of sexual violence and abuse; transference; dual relationships; confidentiality and stewardship of information; referrals);

5. best practices of ministry (including topics such as: cyber-safety, Safe Sanctuaries [Joy T. Melton, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*, Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998]; healthy communications, clergy self-care; life-long sexuality education; ministering with sex offenders).

This common core of expectations will provide a baseline of preparation for ministerial leaders in The UMC. The regular, up-to-date sexual ethics training currently required of all clergy under appointment can build upon this shared foundation instead of having to start with the basics every time (Book of Resolutions 2008, p. 139). District committees on ordained ministry and conference boards of ordained ministry can expect clergy candidates to have a working knowledge and understanding of these facets of professional ethics and sexuality in ministry before they are appointed to serve a church. The continued training for clergy during residency can also build on this common core.

Be it further resolved, GCSRW will continue its work to improve training in professional ethics for United Methodists preparing for roles of ministerial leadership. Specifically, GCSRW will continue the four-stage plan described above.

Second Stage: GCSRW will continue to encourage and equip all faculty members to address these issues as they pertain specifically to their academic discipline. GCSRW will work with faculty groups to develop a series of curricular models and resources for each core MDiv course, tailored to each discipline of study:

theology, ethics, evangelism, biblical studies, field education, etc. (including each of the basic graduate theological studies required for UM ordination, Book of Discipline 2008, ¶ 324.4a).

Third Stage: concurrent with the second, GCSRW will work with seminaries to address co-curricular and extra-curricular formation of seminary students. Specifically, GCSRW will create guidelines for intentionally utilizing the implicit curriculum (e.g., plagiarism policies and student honor codes) to model professional ethics, policies, procedures, and adjudication of misconduct.

Fourth Stage: GCSRW will develop strategies for greater ongoing collaboration among UM seminaries, and between seminaries, GCSRW and other general agencies, and boards of ordained ministry. GCSRW has already begun this work by participating in a roundtable discussion, “Improving the Gatekeeping Function by Seminaries and Denominations,” convened by the FaithTrust Institute in March 2011.

Measuring Our Accountability: Seminaries have a great deal of flexibility to contextualize the ways in which these learning goals are reached. Each seminary has the freedom to shape its curricula and courses in ways that best suit the structures of the particular seminary. These guidelines do not specify an additional three-semester-hour course for ordination (although this is one possible way to meet the objectives listed above) but rather that the objectives be achieved throughout the entire professional degree (MDiv) or five-year Course of Study. It is intended that seminary administrators will coordinate how these topics will be covered across different academic courses and how each of these competencies and goals will be achieved throughout either track.

Be it further resolved, The United Methodist Church calls for:

1. District committees and conference Boards of Ordained Min-

istry to expect seminary and Course of Study graduates, beginning with the entering class of 2013, to have met the goals, achieved the competencies, and covered the content areas as outlined;

2. each seminary to report to GCSRW, by January 2014, its plan for meeting the above objectives;
3. Directors of Course of Study programs to report the same to GCSRW by September 2014;
4. GCSRW to assist the academic dean or other administrator at each seminary in interpreting these objectives, reporting the plan for compliance, and measuring the program's success; and
5. GCSRW to report the results of this effort to General Conference 2016.

ADOPTED 2012

RESOLUTION #2046, 2012 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS

See Social Principles, ¶ 161J.