Boundaries

“Boundaries are norms, rules or codes that characterize an individual’s personal space or environment and his or her sense of security and safety. Healthy boundaries provide a nurturing and safe physical, emotional, sexual and spiritual environment for individuals.”

Len Sperry, MD, PhD, *Sex, Priestly Ministry, and the Church*, 2003
A boundary is your personal “property line.” It defines who you are, where you end, and where others begin.

**Boundaries**

- are a physical or emotional or verbal limit that a person defines as safe or appropriate
- take time and effort and care and ongoing attention to maintain
- need clarity, definition, articulation, repetition, re-definition, transparency, and monitoring...
Boundaries

Boundaries in relationships are essential, at home/family/community and at work/ministry.

Why?
- Create mutual respect (for each other’s personal space, comfort level, limits)...
- Ensure safety...build trust
- Clarify expectations...
- Communicate your needs and limits...
- Show the value of each person’s well-being...incl. yours
- Allow for personal freedom, free from undue pressure

Boundaries

Boundaries are essential in all realms of life, in all realms of intimacy:

- Cognitive/Intellectual, Emotional
- Spiritual, Physical
- Cultural, Financial, Sexual ...
Boundaries

Cognitive/intellectual boundaries

- recognizing and respecting each person’s beliefs, ideas, values, viewpoints, perspectives
- assuring that each person’s perspective and each person’s voice is heard and valued, includes your voice
- making room for divergent views and experiences, without elevating one to a perfect standard
- letting go of resentments, past wounds

→ Communication specific boundaries:

- safe, clear, and written practices when disrespect or aggression is present (know what your expectation is, what you will tolerate and what crosses your boundary)

- safe, clear, and written process of what to do when a boundary is crossed (aggression, bullying etc..)
  - time out
  - end meeting
  - bring in third party
  - initiate a mediated process
Boundaries

Cognitive/intellectual boundaries

➔ Communication specific boundaries:

- remember you have a team, a council => not alone
- review principles of Non-Violent Communication (NVC)

NVC begins with the assumption that all human beings are compassionate by nature. However, there are specific forms of life-alienating communication that contribute to the violence in ourselves and society. When we use labels to define the other, these words can blind us to the point of being unable to see with compassion the uniqueness of each person. When I engage in moralizing judgments, or when I think in terms of “it’s good, or it’s bad,” that “I’m right,” or that “I hold the truth,” I have to ask myself the question: “What place do I leave to the other, who thinks differently from me?” To practice NVC is to recognize that I am not alone. NVC helps us to connect with each other in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish.

Nonviolent Communication and Spirituality: Nurturing Empathic Communication
Southdown-Covenant-Summer2022_WEB.pdf

Emotional boundaries

- identifying what are your emotions, what are the other’s emotions
- identifying what is your responsibility and what isn’t (cannot take responsibility over the other person’s emotions and feelings)
- what and how much and how deep you want to share
- what feels safe to share; trust; vulnerability level
- don’t make your mood contingent on the other person’s mood (previous concept of codependency)
Boundaries

Physical boundaries
- what feels safe and comfortable in terms of touch
- what feels safe and appropriate in terms of meeting space (code of conduct – your level of comfort)
- what type of personal space does a person require
- what feels culturally safe and appropriate
- what feels safe and appropriate from a positional or personal power imbalance perspective (vulnerable person...)
- respect for a safe practice of distancing / removing self from conflict

Financial boundaries
- clarity and equity regarding the use of accounts and potential limits on spending etc...
- is there an unspoken expectation about what is and isn’t okay?
- are financial goals clearly expressed (limits clearly communicated)?
- clarity and equity with expected practices (reimbursements)
**Boundaries**

**Sexual boundaries**
- clarity around the use of language
- clarity around the culture of a community, the expectations, the way sexual matters are being discussed
- is there safety, trusted space provided for judgment-free discussion/conversation?
- is there a sense of affective maturity or is there immature nervousness/deflective humour?
- is there an established process to deal fairly with all?

**Boundaries**

**Recognize, know, and embrace your power**

- Often carries negative associations from the past
  - E.g., abuse, exploitation, mistrust, self-interests
- Not typically associated with positive experiences
- Religious and clergy may avoid acknowledging and recognizing their power
Boundaries and Power

Recognize, know, and embrace your power

- To share our wisdom and experience
- To educate
- To guide
- To support
- To influence
- To provide understanding
- To provide leadership

Boundaries and Power Imbalance

VULNERABILITY

1. Positional power
   - A person in a positional power imbalance (e.g., a parishioner, staff member, person receiving spiritual direction or pastoral counselling, seminarian, supervisee) is unable to give free, informed consent
   - Also includes a person who has received professional help/support from the priest or religious—even without knowing their role, status, function, etc.
Boundaries and Power Imbalance

2. Personal power
• This refers to a person in a context of personal power imbalance—for example, financial dependence, anxiety, depression, history of abuse or trauma, age/maturity

3. Spiritual power
• A person in a spiritual power imbalance is one who has sought spiritual advice from the person representing faith/spirituality/God
• This also includes a person who has sought safely in the ministerial role of the priest or religious (even someone who may not be a parishioner or a Catholic)
Boundaries

Well-Being/Self-Care Boundaries

• is there an unspoken, implicit culture of workaholism?

• has the concept of self-care just become an empty slogan?

• do you know the difference between self-soothing behaviors and self-care behaviors (self-care inventory)?

Make 2022 a Self-Care Journey

Self-Soothing?

Self-Care?

Prayer
Meditation

A LONG WALK with GOD

Social Media
Well-Being/Self-Care Boundaries

• do you have regular check-ins with leadership team about self-care?
• do you support and foster a process of seeking professional support/accompaniment?
• do we subtly and perhaps in unspoken ways perpetuate the mental health stigma?

Boundaries

• Be proactive about your boundaries.
• Be honest with your boundaries.
• Be realistic with your boundaries.
• Be clear about your boundaries.
• Be transparent about your boundaries.
• Be repetitive with your boundaries.
• Be boring with your boundaries (if you are a risk taker, this is not the area!!!)
Boundaries

• Be **reliable** with your boundaries.
• Be **consistent** with your boundaries (monitor when and why you make exceptions!).
• Think your **expectations** through ahead of time.
• Do not be caught off guard and have thought your own standards and boundaries through ahead of time.
• Rely on consultation.
• Document, document, document...

**Boundaries**

• **Articulate** and **share** your boundaries clearly, and **make the implicit explicit** (eliminate the guess work).

• DON’T ASSUME to know the other person’s boundaries ➔ **ask permission**.

• DON’T ASSUME the other person knows your boundaries ➔ **repeat and articulate**.