

Boundary Training
Committee on Ministry: Preparation
St. Louis Association of the Missouri Mid-South Conference
United Church of Christ

Members in Discernment (MID) are required to complete boundary training approved by the Committee on Ministry: Preparation (COM:P) during their discernment process in the St Louis Association (SLA). Each training is valid for three years.

As described in a UCC Mission Moments leaflet, *A Safe Church for All*:

"Boundary Training helps clergy be aware of the power dynamics in pastoral relationships, provides a safe place to raise questions about appropriateness, heightens awareness of boundary issues in congregations, and educates about safety practices.

"Boundary issues are much more complex and encompass much more of a pastor's life than sexual misconduct. They include, for example, the holding of power of attorney for an elderly parishioner or ethical issues for retired pastors. Boundary Training helps clergy understand those who cross boundaries, the victims of abuse, congregational trauma, interventions that help, and the importance of self-knowledge, self-care, and clarity about role."

The Boundary Training required in the SLA focuses on developing and maintaining healthy boundaries in ministry and is specific to the role of a clergy person. Of particular concern is the power difference between a person in a ministerial role and a member of their congregation or ministry setting. Boundary Training also includes conversation about personal and professional health -- finances, sexuality, and the use of social media.

Clergy are given the authority to represent the church and have power in relation to laity due to their role, education, and training. Power is the ability to influence another person's thoughts and actions. For many, clergy represent God - through both grace and judgment. The power of the ministerial role is a reality independent of the one who occupies the role. Clergy have the power to hear intimate spiritual concerns of others and to speak with authority on those concerns. The church's affirmation of a candidate's call to ministry authorizes that person to wield considerable power and influence. Whenever any Christian in a leadership position has the ability and authority to make decisions affecting others' lives, there may be the temptation to abuse that power. The ability to recognize, own, and use power wisely is essential to fulfilling the clergy's professional obligation. Minimally, clergy must be willing to put others' needs before their own, maintain appropriate interpersonal boundaries between themselves and church members, and responsibly use the power and authority of the ministerial office. These are primary ethical obligations.

It is vital that clergy exhibit a solid understanding of, and ability to live out, healthy interpersonal boundaries and sexual ethics for ministry as discussed in boundary training. Ministry is a sacred trust. The church seeks to discern how candidates and clergy can be strengthened in their practice of ministry. Where negatives exist, can they be sufficiently healed and transformed with the available resources to enable a candidate to incarnate love in ministry? Where positives exist,

can they be used to strengthen trust, enable safety, and express grace and love in relationships without giving in to temptations and distortions?

Typically, the SLA offers a few Boundary Training opportunities per year. Boundary Training is also available through our neighboring Conferences. Eden Seminary hosts Boundary Training the first Friday of each fall semester. *COM:P is also willing to look at the curriculum if an MID finds another potential provider of Boundary Training.*

To find out when the next Boundary Trainings are offered, contact the Missouri Mid-South Conference office (314-962-8740... mmsucc.org) and/or connect with Eden Seminary (314-961-3627... eden.edu).