



Helping pastoring people set “Healthy Boundaries”

Central District Conference is requiring all credentialed leaders who are active in ministry to participate in Healthy Boundaries training, focusing on the health of the leader's relationships in her or his ministry. For current leaders, this training should happen this year; for leaders new to the conference, the training should happen within their first year with CDC. Lay leaders are also encouraged to participate with their pastors in this training.

The CDC Ministerial Committee and Doug Luginbill, conference minister, are very pleased with participation in the training sessions. Doug reports that after the training on June 20, which is just prior to the CDC Annual Meeting, nearly 90% of CDC credentialed individuals serving in active ministry will have received the training.

Mennonite Church USA selected the curriculum and encourages area conferences to set requirements and conduct training for their credentialed leaders. When a “train the trainer” event was held in May 2017, Terry Shue, then director of Leadership Development for MC USA, wrote: “We desire to raise the bar of trust by all of our conferences —large and small—to take concrete steps to require boundary training as a part of retaining an active status of any and all credentials [pastors] hold. This training is not only to protect potential victims; it is also in the best interest of our pastors and our congregations, keeping them safe and healthy.”

<http://mennoniteusa.org/news/event-equips-healthy-boundaries-trainers/>

The curriculum, developed by FaithTrust Institute, describes the purpose as:

- To increase awareness of the need for healthy and appropriate boundaries in the clergy/congregant or spiritual teacher/

student relationship;

- To illustrate the impact of appropriate versus inappropriate boundaries in promoting effective ministry;
- To provide clergy and spiritual teachers with guidelines and suggestions for developing appropriate boundaries and necessary self-care strategies.

Laurel Neufeld Weaver of Bluffton, Ohio, has co-led four trainings this year, two with Jon Bohley from Ohio Conference and two with Doug Luginbill. Marc Roth, Elkhart, Ind., will lead the session on June 20. Laurel and Marc, who are both private practice therapists, are also trained

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Marc Roth is one of the CDC Healthy Boundaries trainers.

as “investigators” if there is an accusation of abuse of a credentialed person in CDC. Together they will lead the June 20 training in Goshen.

What boundaries are addressed

In a recent interview, Marc, a member of Hively Avenue Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Ind., summarized the scope of the training as “essentially any boundaries in relationships.” Then he named some of the areas the curriculum addresses:

- power dynamics
- differences in belief systems
- structures around maleness and femaleness
- economic dynamics
- racial dynamics
- personality differences, such as being an introvert or extrovert
- sexual identity and sexual preferences
- how the ministering person views his or her call to ministry.

Healthy Boundaries curriculum

“It’s a very, very large spectrum,” Marc acknowledged. “I am impressed with the curriculum and how the church has found groups that have done this work well. It comes from a diverse group that has worked very hard at putting together a curriculum that reflects different cultural and theological foundations in the church.”

“The curriculum walks people through a set of circumstances and helps them be aware of things they might not have thought about before. It presents a series of vignettes to work through,” Marc explained. A diversity of voices comes into the discussion and participants see the situations from different points of view.

“The goal is raising awareness and helping participants see themselves and ask questions about their own interaction with others,” Marc said.

Personal health and accountability

The training emphasizes the importance of the ministering person paying attention to her or his own health. Marc said, “Being a fulfilled person helps you be a better servant.” Helping ministering people pay attention to how they are meeting their personal needs is a key issue, so they do not become dependent on the people they are serving to fill a lack in their own lives.

Doing this well involves accountability—to the

congregation, to the ministering person’s family and to colleagues. Resources for accountability are included in the discussion.

The perspective of a trainer

“MC USA is making a solid effort at addressing the realities of abuse, abuse of power and crossing boundaries in the church. They are primarily focusing on the victims, and that’s where we need to start,” Marc acknowledged.

Then Marc, as a therapist who works with youth who have done sexual crimes, added, “My personal hope is that we can get to a place where we can address the needs of the person who crossed the boundaries, too. They have reasons for what they did, whether they are aware of them or not, and I hope we can address those needs, too.”

Marc is a private practice therapist, who, he says, “tries to teach boundaries every day. This curriculum has given me ideas for how to do this more effectively in my work.”

Marc has a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary. He has been working in the area of boundaries and sexuality since 1981, as a youth pastor in another denomination and as a counselor at a residential facility. He spent some of his growing up years in Africa as the child of missionary parents so he also brings cross-cultural experience to this work.

For information and to report a problem

For more information on Healthy Boundaries training and steps to take if a person or congregation has a concern, visit the CDC website:

<https://www.mcusacdc.org/misconduct/>

<https://www.mcusacdc.org/resources/annual-clergy-report-form/>

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Central District Conference
www.mcusacdc.org office@mcusacdc.org
800.662.2264