

Short Scenarios for Discussion: From Anywhere CRC:

Situation #1: Child Care Catastrophe

A 4-year-old has come to her parents with allegations of inappropriate sexual touching against a fellow church member, Stan. Stan and his wife co-own a home daycare center that the girl attends. Stan is also active in church, serving as deacon. The parents of the little girl reported the allegation to the appropriate child protection authorities, and an investigation is underway. They also called their pastor for spiritual support in the midst of the shock and confusion of the situation. Stan called the pastor as well, and explained that there had been a misunderstanding. He was sure that if he could just sit down and talk with the parents of the little girl, things could be worked out. The pastor, shocked by the allegation, called a safe church team member to get some perspective and hopefully some help.

Situation #2 Criminal Record Check

The congregation has (finally!) made a decision to begin requiring background checks for staff and volunteers who work with children and youth. It was discovered that one of the women leaders, Mary, who had been working in the children's program for many years, had a criminal record which included sharing sexually explicit images. She maintains that she was innocent, that she was with a friend who used her phone to download and share the images with her boyfriend, and that she knew nothing about it. She pled "no contest" in court to avoid an expensive trial and because her lawyer expressed concern that she may not win her case (the images were found on her phone). She points to all her years of good service at the church and believes that the church should make an exception to the policy that they have just put in place, which says anyone with a sexually related criminal offense is not able to serve in a capacity with children or youth. The pastor didn't want to lose this ministry worker and called a safe church team member to help him figure out what to do.

Situation #3 Sweet Martin

Martin was a sweet man - gentle, compassionate and well-loved by all. The congregation felt fortunate to have Martin, a retired pastor, who was always willing to help out by visiting those in the hospital, as well as shut-ins. Sandy, the safe church team member, was surprised to get a call one day from Mildred, a widow who had been visited several times by Martin. She seemed a little nervous and said she wasn't sure she should say anything or not, but then disclosed that she did not feel comfortable with Martin's hugging and kissing when he visited. Mildred said she wouldn't have called, except that she had spoken with two other widows who had experienced the same thing. So she thought she'd better call a safe church team member to find out what to do.

For each scenario:

- **Identify who holds the power in this situation**
- **Identify some of the important factors that must be considered.**
- **What might be a good response in this situation?**
- **How might this situation have been prevented?**

Situation #4 E-Harassment

A youth pastor contacted a safe church team member saying that he didn't know what to do. A relatively new member of the youth group, Karen, had approached him after their last youth group meeting, asking to talk. She said that she was getting sexually harassed at school by an older boy, Nathan, whose family was a part of the congregation, though Nathan did not attend youth group. She said that he would not stop texting her with sexually explicit messages and it was becoming unbearable. Karen's family did not attend church; she had come to youth group with friends. She was afraid to tell her parents about the texting, because if they found out that it was a boy from church they might not let her come. She begged the youth pastor not to tell anyone. The youth pastor had promised to call Karen back when he had more time to think about her situation. "I have no clue what to do," he said.

Situation #5 What's a Pastor to Do?

Pastor John addressed the council, informing them that Betty, a female member of the congregation has made several inappropriate advances towards him, despite his objections. Some have included sexually explicit language. He is requesting a more flexible office schedule, with more time to work at home rather than in his office at church. Betty often "drops by" his office unannounced, which is very distracting and upsets his work. He claims Betty has told him that the Lord has given her a vision that one day she and Pastor John will be married (despite the fact that Pastor John is already married with two young children). Pastor John complains, "She's driving me crazy; it makes me not want to come into work". One of the elders makes it clear that he considers the whole thing a joke, saying, "Pastor, I think you should be able to handle this woman. This doesn't merit the attention of council". Getting nowhere with his council, Pastor John contacted a safe church team member for advice.

Situation #6 Roger and Rachel

Pastor Paul got a call from Roger, who was in jail, hoping that the pastor would be able to help bail him out. He had recently moved to the area, had no other family nearby and didn't know where else to turn. He had been arrested for assaulting his wife. The pastor was shocked! Roger was an upstanding man, and Pastor Paul couldn't imagine that he would ever intentionally hurt his lovely wife. Rachel, his wife, also called the pastor, from the hospital where her minor injuries were being assessed. She was expected to be released soon. Rachel was so thankful for Martha, a woman from church, who was able to watch their little girl while she went to the hospital. Martha's daughter was 3 years old, almost the same age as Rachel's daughter. Rachel said that she also wanted the pastor to help bail her husband out of jail. "I never meant for him to go to jail," she said, "I just want him to stop getting so angry and hurting me the way he does." Pastor Paul was very hesitant to step into this situation and decided to contact a safe church team member for consultation.

For each scenario:

- **Identify who holds the power in this situation**
- **Identify some of the important factors that must be considered.**
- **What might be a good response in this situation?**
- **How might this situation have been prevented?**

Considerations for each Scenario:

#1 Child Care Catastrophe

- The situation has been reported – whenever there is suspicion of abuse of a minor, it's important to **immediately contact the proper authorities**, child protective services or children's aid.
- The situation is now in the hands of the authorities who have been specially trained to do the investigation. **Church members should never investigate**, an investigation can be severely compromised when untrained people ask too many questions or discuss specifics of the situation with those directly involved.
- **Be aware** of the possible dynamics of abuse: We all have a tendency to deny, it's hard to believe. Those who abuse often have tendencies to manipulate and deceive.
- The role of the church is to **provide supportive pastoral care to each party separately** as the situation unfolds. As much as you will want to "move on" these things take time.
- If the situation becomes public or a matter of media attention, all communication should be directed to one **designated media person**. It's best to have a short written statement to the effect that: church leaders are aware of the situation, are cooperating fully with authorities, that speculation and gossip are harmful and should be avoided, and that prayers are requested for those involved.

#2 Criminal Record Check

- **Policy must be followed** – if an exception is needed, a policy change is needed.
- The policy should **clearly state what offenses will disqualify someone** to work in a leadership role or in a role with children and youth

#3 Sweet Martin

- Is there **a policy for visitation**? It's helpful to have expectations and healthy boundaries clearly outlined so everyone knows what to expect.
- **Take the concern seriously** and let Mildred know that she did the right thing to bring it to someone's attention.
- What kind of **accountability** structures are in place? Should elder visits be in pairs rather than alone?
- This may provide a good **opportunity for mediation or a restorative practice**, which can bring about healing for all who have been wounded.

#4 E-Harassment

- **Take the concern seriously**. Sexual harassment can have very serious consequences and impacts for those who experience it. Find out more: <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-info/hot-topics/cyber-bullying.php>
- There are **limits to confidentiality**, when a minor is being hurt, action must be taken.
- Proper **authorities should be notified**, this can be a step in providing needed intervention, even though it will not be easy in the context of the church community.
- Both **parties may need specific professional help** to stop the harassing behavior, and to recover from the impacts of that behavior. Get help!

#5 What's a Pastor to Do?

- Take the concern seriously. Stalking is very serious and dangerous. Find out more: <http://stalkingawarenessmonth.org/splash.html>
- Gender does not make a difference, stalking has big impacts and must be stopped.

- Pastors need to set healthy boundaries, and may also need help and support from the council to protect those boundaries.
- Follow recommendations in the “Suggested Guidelines for Handling Objectionable Behavior Directed Toward a Pastor” provided by Safe Church Ministry. Find them on our policy page under documents: <http://www.crcna.org/SafeChurch/where-can-i-find-help-create-safe-church>

#6 Roger and Rachel

- **Consider the legitimate role of a pastor** in the request to bail a parishioner out of jail. Is that part of being a church family? (There may be a general answer, but also mitigating factors in answering this question).
- Each party needs **separate professional help – no couple’s counseling** in an abusive relationship.
- **Offer resources** – perhaps a consultation call with a local domestic violence shelter to find out what resources are available would be helpful. Learn more: <http://www.crcna.org/SafeChurch/resources-abuse-awareness/domestic-violence>
- **Contact child protective services or children’s aid** to determine the danger to the 3 year old child.
- Recognize that **abuse is not anger out of control**, anger management is not what’s needed; batterer intervention group work has been shown to be most effective.
- The congregation is most effective in a **listening, supporting, and walking-alongside** role.