

Newsletter



THIS ISSUE

- Healthy Boundaries
- *Boundaries*, Sr. Kathleen Sowinski, SSSF

Dear Friends,

Establishing good and healthy boundaries is an important part of who we are and how we get along with others. When we are able to set and maintain healthy boundaries, we are able to communicate and sustain healthy relationships.

Boundaries are the limits we set in relationships that allow us to protect our selves. Boundaries that are intact are flexible and allow us to get close when appropriate and also maintain distances when we are in danger of being harmed.

It is good to remember the importance of maintaining a healthy balance within the structure of our boundaries. Rigid or fixed boundaries can have the effect of closing down or shutting off contact with others, whereas diffuse or diluted boundaries can have the effect of lacking identity and stability. It is when we have a balance between the two in both our personal and professional lives, that we are able to appreciate the value of the relationships around us.

It is the intention of this newsletter to help all observe, identify, and maintain healthy boundaries so that we, as a community, can continue to grow safe and secure in our knowledge, understanding, and respect of each other as faithful members of God's family.

I want to thank Sr. Kathleen Sowinski, SSSF who provided much of the information for this edition from her presentation on *Boundaries*. Sr. Kathleen is available for presentation or dialogue on the subject of *Boundaries* for parish staff, school faculties, or parish groups. She can be reached at sowinskik@archmil.org.

Blessings,
Patti Loehrer
Safe Environment Coordinator

PEOPLE WITH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES:

- Can protect themselves without shutting off from others;
- Know how to stand up for themselves at appropriate times;
- Are able to enter into relationships without losing their own identity;
- Are able to identify safe people;
- Don't let others intrude, mentally or physically;
- Are aware of their surroundings and are able to respond when others illustrate inappropriate boundaries;
- Know that their values, rights and responsibilities are more important than any sense of needing to be liked by others, needing to please others, or needing to make a "good impression;"
- Are able to continually assess their own personal behavior, learn from experiences, and are aware that unpredictable challenges can arise at any time.



Boundaries: The New “In” Word

Sr. Kathleen Sowinski, SSSF

Sr. Kathleen Sowinski, SSSF has developed a program for presentation and dialogue on the subject of Boundaries for parish staffs, schools faculties or parish groups. Sr. Kathleen can be contacted at sowinskie@archmil.org.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flows the springs of life.” Recently, people in parish and school positions have been acutely aware of “vigilance” policies governing professional behavior. These policies attempt to name personal boundaries. A common dictionary definition describes boundaries as “an extent beyond which an activity or function cannot or should not take place.” Within the past ten to twelve years, boundaries, once used in family interactions, now apply to all ministry.

Healthy boundaries have to do with being able to be a person of integrity to those with whom we are in contact. They allow for acting out of internal strength with comfort and ease.

Boundaries within our work or ministry will be the focus of this article. As Christians, we are co-workers in the Lord’s vineyard and as the 2005 Bishops’ statement indicates, we have the Gospel responsibility to transform the world in view of the final coming of Christ. That implies behavior flowing from inner, wise, and sensitive convictions.

How can we create and maintain ministerial boundaries that are at once welcoming and at the same time clear and professional? To provide contrast, boundaries are NOT:

- Set by another
- Primarily harmful or hurtful
- Controlling or manipulative
- A barrier, prohibiting negotiation or choice

On the other hand, the person in the position of real or perceived power *always* bears the responsibility for right moral action.

Ministerial boundaries involve use of time, location, person, confidentiality and touch. These boundaries can be *Rigid*, *Porous*, or *Flexible*.

If boundaries are *Rigid*, ministers cannot be their natural, warm selves. These people:

- Let no one “in”
- Think in absolute terms
- Communicate coolness
- Use harsh language
- Seem interpersonally distant
- Can be cynical, sarcastic, angry

If boundaries are *Porous*, a minister’s behavior can confuse others because it “tests the limits.” These people:

- Allow everyone into their inner life
- Tell all, everything
- Need to be needed
- Have a high “burnout” rate
- Avoid some responsibilities, including self care

Ministers with *Flexible*, healthy boundaries have:

- Varying degrees of intimacy
- Let some people “in” and others, not
- Live a balanced life
- Use their power in a fluid way; they can be leaders or followers
- Separate work and home issues
- Meet personal needs

These ministers know when a situation is appropriate. They set boundaries based on their beliefs, values, and feelings. They protect the well being of their spirit. They are clear about the boundaries between self and others. They can relax the boundaries without harming the other.

To grow ourselves, in order to increase the Kingdom, ministers need professional and theological competence. They need to be cognizant of the responsibility to serve others’ needs and be committed to their best interest. Ministers need to care for themselves. These actions will help ministers be their best, loving selves, people of integrity, living from their heart, encourages springs of life.



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