

### COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Permission is hereby granted without charge for the reproduction and distribution of this work, or any of its parts, for educational purposes by the faculty or administration of member institutions of The Association of Theological Schools, provided that no fee or compensation is charged for copies, use of, or access to such information beyond the actual cost of reproduction or access, and that the copyright notice is included intact. **Requests for permission for all other uses of any part of this work should be addressed to the author(s).**

# A Comprehensive, Holistic, and Integrated Approach to Professional Sexual Ethics in Theological Education

*Darryl W. Stephens  
Lancaster Theological Seminary*

*Patricia Beattie Jung  
Saint Paul School of Theology*

*ABSTRACT: With the rise in awareness of ministerial sexual abuse, seminaries and schools of theology must be more intentional in teaching professional sexual ethics across the curriculum. Professors in every theological discipline are increasingly expected to take responsibility for teaching issues of embodiment, healthy boundaries, basic sexuality education, and ministerial ethics. This article promotes a comprehensive, holistic, and integrated approach to professional sexual ethics training in order to achieve specific student learning outcomes in theological education.*

## Introduction

For decades, seminaries and judicatories have taken a narrow approach to sexual ethics for ministry, focusing almost exclusively on sexual misconduct prevention through boundaries training workshops. Yet, most pastoral misconduct begins long before there is inappropriate sexual involvement. The slide toward misconduct begins when ministerial leaders fail to distinguish their pastoral role from their personal life, fail to take care of themselves, and/or turn to inappropriate ways of fulfilling their sexual needs, fantasies, and desires. Ministers—lay and ordained, paid and volunteer, part-time and full-time—are in leadership roles, with varying degrees of power and authority. Placed on a moral pedestal and living in a “fishbowl” within a faith community, ministers must learn early on how to live and model healthy, responsible, perhaps even ideal, moral lives. Now, there is increasing pressure to go beyond earlier emphases on church-sponsored continuing education events that were motivated primarily by concerns about liability.

It is fair to say that the teaching of professional sexual ethics is not yet a widespread, intentional area of focus in theological education. ATS Executive Director Daniel O. Aleshire, in an assessment of theological education in North America, observes the positive influence of a professional model on theological education, focusing on accreditation standards and the education of skilled practitioners.<sup>1</sup> Yet, neither his nor any of the

“Placed on a moral pedestal and living in a “fishbowl” within a faith community, ministers must learn early on how to live and model healthy, responsible, perhaps even ideal, moral lives.

other contributions to the *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity* addresses in any detail the teaching of professional sexual ethics.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Charles R. Foster and his colleagues, in a study of clergy education sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (“[t]he most important study of North American theological education in this century,” according to Aleshire<sup>3</sup>), make no mention at all of sexuality and barely touch on any other aspect of professional sexual ethics instruction.<sup>4</sup> The researchers of this first volume of the Preparation for the Professions series evidence no notice of the near-absence of professional sexual ethics

sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (“[t]he most important study of North American theological education in this century,” according to Aleshire<sup>3</sup>), make no mention at all of sexuality and barely touch on any other aspect of professional sexual ethics instruction.<sup>4</sup> The researchers of this first volume of the Preparation for the Professions series evidence no notice of the near-absence of professional sexual ethics

---

1. Daniel O. Aleshire, “Theological Education in North America,” in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Regional Surveys, Ecumenical Trends*, ed. Dietrich Werner et al., Regnum Studies in Global Christianity, ed. Ruth Padilla DeBorst et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2010), 507.

2. The absence of sustained attention to professional sexual ethics in this hefty volume addressing the global theological context indicates that this neglect is not limited to North America. Though they did not explicitly identify professional sexual ethics as a subject that should be constitutive of theological education in itself across the globe, the editors may have been noting this limitation of their otherwise fine handbook when they note that sexuality is a contested area *impacting* education everywhere. “We particularly regret that the *Handbook* does not contain articles on . . . the whole range of issues related to the debate on human sexuality and different sexual orientations in Christianity and their impact on theological education.” Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, and Joshva Raja, “Introduction” in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, xxvi–xxvii.

3. Aleshire, “Theological Education in North America,” 512.

4. Charles R. Foster et al., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, Preparation for the Professions series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

as an explicit curriculum in their quest to discover the “signature pedagogical framework” for the education of clergy. Interpretative skills, spiritual and vocational formation, contextual awareness, and performance skills are indeed integral to the education of clergy,<sup>5</sup> but focusing on these four pedagogical intentions to the neglect of essential professional competencies assumes too much. Theological educators should not assume that students are learning professional sexual ethics simply as a result of attending seminary.

This article promotes a comprehensive, holistic, and integrated approach to professional sexual ethics training in order to achieve specific student learning outcomes. Professional sexual ethics training should be comprehensive—that is, attend to what the Carnegie Foundation series on the professions calls the three fundamental “apprenticeships” of professional training: normative, cognitive, and practical,<sup>6</sup> or, more colloquially, the *being*, *knowing*, and *doing* of professional formation. Professional sexual ethics training should also be holistic (i.e., encompass a range of conceptual frameworks) and integrated (i.e., span the entire curriculum) rather than be isolated to one or two academic classes. These efforts are needed to meet rising expectations for professional sexual ethics instruction in theological education.

## Rising expectations

---

Several denominations are beginning to push for more rigorous training in professional sexual ethics as an integral part of academic formation for ministerial leaders. Combined with changes in the 2012 ATS Commission Standards of Accreditation specifying attention to professional ethics and personal and professional standards of conduct, there are rising expectations across faith communities that ministers-in-training be much better prepared than they have been in the past.<sup>7</sup>

In June 2012 at its Biennial Meeting, the ATS Commission added the following to its *Degree Program Standards*: “The [MDiv] program shall

---

5. Ibid., 33–34.

6. William Sullivan, “Introduction,” in *Educating Clergy*, 5.

7. Kate M. Ott also makes this argument in “The Case for Sexuality Education in Professional Ethics Training,” *Colloquy*, (Fall 2012): 12–13, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy/colloquy-2012-fall.pdf>.

specifically provide for training in professional and ministerial ethics.”<sup>8</sup> As before, the Standards require schools to offer programs that “provide opportunities through which students may grow in personal faith, emotional maturity, moral integrity, and public witness,” but now “moral integrity” is specified to include attention to professional ethics and personal and professional standards of conduct.<sup>9</sup> The content of these terms is undefined in the Commission Standards, yet the amplification of these topics in the Standards is significant. Theological schools and their faculties are expected to make professional ethics a more visible part of the explicit curriculum in theological education.

Denominational bodies, which have always had some degree of expectation that their ministers-in-training would learn ethics and standards of conduct consistent with leadership roles in ministry, are voicing specific expectations for professional sexual ethics instruction more clearly than they have in the past. The *Standards of Ethical Conduct* for members, for employees and volunteers, and for ordained officers of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), commends the following for inclusion in seminary curricula: (1) being faithful, keeping covenants and honoring marriage vows; (2) maintaining a healthy balance among the responsibilities of the office of ministry and commitments to family and other primary relationships; (3) recognizing the need for spiritual, physical, emotional, and intellectual renewal; and (4) refraining from abusive, addictive, or exploitative

---

8. ATS Commission on Accrediting, *Degree Program Standards* (approved 6/2012, posted 01/21/15), sec. [A].2.5.2., <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/degree-program-standards.pdf>.

9. This emphasis on professional and ministerial ethics in the 2012 ATS Commission Standards is echoed in nearly every degree program: “personal, professional, and ethical standards” (specialized masters in ministry; B.2.4.); “personal and professional standards of conduct” (music degrees; C.2.1.3); “and development and appropriation of a personal and professional ethic with focused study on ethical standards and mature conduct in the profession” (DMin; E.1.2.1); “development and appropriation of a personal and professional ethic with focused study on ethical standards and mature conduct in the profession” (Doctor of [area of specialization] including the DEdMin and DMiss; G.1.2.1(4)); “the fostering of spiritual, professional, ethical, and vocational competencies that witness to personal and spiritual maturity” (Doctor of [area of specialization] including the DEdMin and DMiss; G.2.1.4).

behavior as well as seeking help to overcome such behavior if it occurs.<sup>10</sup> The document offers this definition:

Sexual misconduct is a misuse of authority and power that breaches Christian ethical principles by misusing a trust relation to gain advantage over another for personal pleasure in an abusive, exploitative, and unjust manner. If the parishioner, student, client, or employee initiates or invites sexual content in the relationship, it is the pastor's, counselor's, officer's, or supervisor's responsibility to maintain the appropriate role and prohibit a sexual relationship.<sup>11</sup>

Adopted in 1998, the PC(USA) *Standards* precede more recent and more detailed expectations of denominational bodies regarding seminary education.

In 2010, the Unitarian Universalist Association, according to its own press release, became “the first major religious denomination in the country to require that its candidates for ordination demonstrate the capability to address sexuality issues in ministry” by requiring that they be able to “demonstrate competency in critical areas relating to human sexuality.”<sup>12</sup> In 2012, The United Methodist Church (UMC) adopted curricular guidelines for professional ethics, sexual ethics, healthy boundaries, and self-care, applicable to ministerial candidates in seminary and alternative routes of theological education, recommending that professional sexual ethics education span across all disciplines of theological education rather than reside in a single, stand-alone course. The UMC resolution is presented as a covenant of expectation, allowing seminaries flexibility in the way they teach and implement these guidelines, which are nonetheless quite specific in terms of goals, competencies, and content areas to be covered during formal theological education.<sup>13</sup>

---

10. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “Professional Code of Ethics,” *Standards of Ethical Conduct* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2004), 1. Approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998), [https://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/oga/publications/ethical-conduct.pdf](https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/publications/ethical-conduct.pdf).

11. *Ibid.*, 16.

12. Unitarian Universalist Association, “Unitarian Universalist Seminarians to be Trained in Sexuality Issues and Ethics” (February 9, 2010), <http://www.uua.org/news/pressroom/pressreleases/158197.shtml>.

13. United Methodist Church, “Sexual Ethics as Integral Part of Formation for Ministerial Leadership,” in *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2012* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 146–152.

It is clear that judicatories, students, and parishes are demanding better preparation and training in professional sexual ethics from seminaries and schools of theology. The format of a one-day healthy boundaries workshop commonly offered by seminaries or judicatories is insufficient professional formation. A three- to four-year professional degree program affords the opportunity to do more, much more, if teaching faculties are thoughtful and intentional about achieving comprehensive student learning outcomes.

## **Comprehensive learning outcomes**

---

A comprehensive professional formation must address the normative, cognitive, and practical dimensions of ministry. These three apprenticeships—being, knowing, and doing—require a wide range of desired student learning outcomes. Professional sexual ethics education should foster certain virtuous characteristics, provide basic knowledge in human sexuality, and afford opportunities to develop skills for addressing sexual issues as they arise in the practice of ministry.<sup>14</sup>

Ministers—whether single, vowed celibates, or married—are sexual persons, with sexual needs, shames, desires, and passions of their own. To become a sexually healthy, religious professional, one must become sexually self-aware and be able to live with personal sexual integrity. Such clarity must be accompanied by at least the acceptance of, if not comfort with, oneself as a sexual person. Such honesty with oneself about one’s own sexual and gender orientation and gender identity is requisite, even if it is not always prudent or safe to share this honesty with all others. Self-awareness includes the integration of one’s sexual history into one’s narrative self-understanding along with any ways biography and culture might bias one’s current attitudes (e.g., inclination toward sexism or homophobia). To become a sexually healthy, religious professional, one must also grow

---

14. What follows is a very brief summary and synthesis of desirable pastoral attributes based on a range of sources, including Marie M. Fortune, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook* (Seattle: FaithTrust Institute, 2009); Nils C. Friberg and Mark R. Laaser, *Before the Fall: Preventing Pastoral Sexual Abuse* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 125–128; Richard M. Gula, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 156–188; Debra W. Haffner, *A Time to Build: Creating Sexually Healthy Faith Communities*, 2nd ed. (Norwalk, CT: Religious Institute, 2012), 15–16; UMC, “Sexual Ethics,” (see n. 13).

increasingly attuned to the sexual dynamics of various ministerial relationships and pastoral situations. Such alertness to the risks that accompany the often emotionally charged, private exchanges that compose ministry, and especially to any warning signs that a pastoral relationship is becoming sexualized, is a crucial virtue for pastoral leaders.<sup>15</sup>

“Professional sexual ethics education should foster certain virtuous characteristics, provide basic knowledge in human sexuality, and afford opportunities to develop skills for addressing sexual issues as they arise in the practice of ministry.”

Ministerial leaders must also know the basics about and be comfortable discussing human sexuality, including specific sexual behaviors and relationships, sexual and gender orientations, and diverse gender identities, as well as one's faith community's sacred texts, traditions, and contemporary teachings about sexual morality. Religious professionals must understand key concepts, such as sexual boundaries and “safe church” policies, and truly grasp the profound and pluriform consequences of ministerial sexual misconduct.

Effective professional sexual ethics training requires not only normative and cognitive formation but also the development of extracurricular skills, such as fostering in pastors the ability to meet their emotional needs for intimacy and love in ways congruent with their station in life (e.g., if married, practice fidelity; if a vowed religious, practice celibacy, etc.). Given the fiduciary duty to give priority to the pastoral relationship, pastors need to learn how to avoid unnecessary dual relationships with parishioners and instead establish personal intimacies that are not also pastoral, insofar as this is possible. The ability to read and resist the cultural wars that foster disrespect of sexuality is also a vital ministerial skill. A sexually healthy minister encourages sexual justice for all and is skilled at preaching and teaching about sexuality in ways that foster respectful

---

15. Cristina L. H. Traina names this virtue “erotic attunement.” *Erotic Attunement: Parenthood and the Ethics of Sensuality between Unequals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).



interactions among sexually diverse persons and diverse points of view. A single conceptual framework will not be enough to achieve such a range of learning outcomes in the being, knowing, and doing of ministerial formation. A holistic approach is needed.

## **A holistic approach**

---

A holistic approach to professional sexual ethics for ministry demands the combination of several conceptual frameworks in order to reach the learning outcomes described above. Though each is insufficient in itself, the frameworks of professional ethics, healthy boundaries, sexual ethics, and sexuality education offer the opportunity to address current debates.<sup>16</sup> These conceptual frameworks have often been isolated and unevenly pursued, if addressed at all, in theological education.

A professional ethics perspective focuses on the office of ministry and the role of the ministerial leader vis-à-vis the role of those persons served in ministry. In this view, ethical expectations for the pastor are distinct from those of parishioners precisely because of the difference in roles, responsibilities, and power—differences that create vulnerability on the part of the parishioner and for which the pastor must exercise great care. Many features of ministry suggest that it is like other professions. Ministry requires advanced training, credentialing, a public role as an officer of the church, a fiduciary duty to serve faithfully God’s mission and the trust of God’s people, and a voluntary covenantal commitment to serve the other’s best interest. All this points toward positive comparisons with other helping professions.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the contrasts of ministry with other professions are also pronounced. Pastors function most often like generalists, and their congregational or community context for ministry often blurs boundaries. Ministers are never really “off duty,” even if they have removed their collars. Dual relationships cannot be avoided entirely, conflicts of interest occur regularly, and there are often ambiguous perceptions of power

---

16. Patricia Beattie Jung and Darryl W. Stephens, eds., *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 2.

17. Richard M. Gula names four “marks of being professional: (1) specialized knowledge and skills; (2) service of fundamental human needs; (3) commitment to the other’s best interest; and (4) structures of accountability.” *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 51. Gula presents an excellent synthesis of ministry as both a vocation and a profession in *Just Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 1–43.

among those in ministry.<sup>18</sup> Whether ministry overall is best understood as a profession continues to be a matter of fruitful debate.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, there is considerable consensus about the import of professional boundaries in ministry. So, this is at the core of the typical professional ethics framework. For this reason, judicatories in mainline churches tend to focus on the healthy boundaries aspect of professional ethics.

The healthy boundaries framework, as developed and taught by the FaithTrust Institute, which has set the standard for this kind of training, is premised on the ideas of fiduciary duty and the responsible use of power. The pastor must act in the best interests of the congregant,

“Pastors function most often like generalists, and their congregational or community context for ministry often blurs boundaries. Ministers are never really “off duty,” even if they have removed their collars. Dual relationships cannot be avoided entirely, conflicts of interest occur regularly, and there are often ambiguous perceptions of power among those in ministry.

upholding the sacred trust that he or she will not abuse the power of the ministerial office for his or her own gratification or desire. Sexual misconduct occurs “when any person in a ministerial role of leadership or pastoral counseling (clergy, religious, or lay) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, or staff member (adult, teenager, or child) in a professional [ministerial] relationship.”<sup>20</sup> Because of the inherent asymmetry of power in a pastoral relationship, sexual relations are ruled out of bounds between pastor and

---

18. For reasons such as these, Mark Miller-McLemore argues against a professional ethics approach to ministry, finding fault with the conceptual language of healthy boundaries and self-care. Mark Miller-McLemore, “Revaluing ‘Self-Care’ as a Practice of Ministry,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 109–134.

19. For discussion, see Karen Lebacqz and Joseph D. Driskill, *Ethics and Spiritual Care: A Guide for Pastors, Chaplains, and Spiritual Directors* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 37–55.

20. Fortune, *Responding to Clergy Misconduct*, 30 (see n. 14).

parishioner. Not only is sexual activity not a legitimate service of ministry, but also the ability of the parishioner to offer authentic consent to such activity is compromised due to his or her vulnerability vis-à-vis the pastor. The excellent training materials developed by the FaithTrust Institute have done much to mainstream this important perspective, no doubt protecting many vulnerable persons from unintended harm, even as the policy implications of this approach remain contested.

There is considerable disagreement within the profession of ministry about naming the boundaries: what is and is not allowed, tolerated, or condoned. Just as institutions of higher education are not consistent across the board in their policies as to whether faculty may have sexual or romantic relationships with students,<sup>21</sup> judicatories and clergy are not of one mind about the admissibility of pastors having such relationships with parishioners.<sup>22</sup> In a survey of United Methodist clergy, fully one-third asserted the belief that “it is morally OK for a single pastor to date one of his or her parishioners.”<sup>23</sup> Nor is there consensus about what safeguards should be put in place to protect the vulnerable party, if indeed there is sufficient recognition of the power differential within and potential for abuse inherent to a ministerial relationship. Absent a sense of professional boundaries, the appropriateness of a clergyperson dating a parishioner is rendered a personal, private matter. Within a professional ethics paradigm, these “private” sexual relationships of clergy generally fall into the null curriculum. Indeed, reflection on personal sexual ethics in general is not often found in seminary curricula.

---

21. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) describes three types of “Consensual Relationship Policy” in effect among its members’ institutional settings: “absolute prohibitions, limited bans on faculty-student supervisory relationships, and strong discouragement.” While acknowledging that “[s]exual relations between students and faculty members with whom they also have an academic or evaluative relationship are fraught with the potential for exploitation,” the AAUP stops short of advising an absolute prohibition, suggesting instead, “When a sexual relationship exists, effective steps should be taken to ensure unbiased evaluation or supervision of the student.” <http://www.aaup.org/issues/sexual-harassment/policies-2002>.

22. For example, in the United Methodist Church, there exist a range of policies on clergy dating parishioners. Darryl W. Stephens, “Moral Exemplar or Ethical Professional? Clergy and Sexual Sin in Methodist Church Law,” *Methodist Review* 3 (2011): 80–81, [www.methodistreview.org](http://www.methodistreview.org).

23. Darryl W. Stephens, “Dating in the Parish—Attitudes, Ethics, and Church Law,” *The Flyer*, General Commission on the Status and Role of Women in The United Methodist Church (December 2012): 7.

Alongside this stress on healthy boundaries and professional sexual ethics is an emphasis on the pastor as set apart to embody the community's sexual ideals. Rigid disciplinary enforcement of prohibitions against adultery and other extramarital sexual relations among clergy is presumed to be a way of modeling for the church as a whole the ideals of sexual morality expected of all members. Writing for Protestant clergy, Nolan B. Harmon argues that a more

stringent adherence to accepted moral standards is required of clergy. Different expectations apply to ministers, he concedes, but not because the standards are different for pastors. "Whether we like it or not, the people demand a higher [moral] standard from the min-

“*The pastor's behavior must be beyond reproach, above even the appearance of impropriety, due to the public nature of the role and the deleterious effect of moral lapses by the pastor on the edification of the laity.*

ister than from the ordinary person.”<sup>24</sup> The pastor's behavior must be beyond reproach, above even the appearance of impropriety, due to the public nature of the role and the deleterious effect of moral lapses by the pastor on the edification of the laity. For this reason, church discipline is often more strictly enforced for clergy than for laity.

Writing for ministers in the Roman Catholic Church—many of whom are vowed celibates but an increasing number of whom are married or simply single—Richard M. Gula notes that the church teaches that chastity takes different forms depending upon the minister's commitments: celibacy for those who have vowed it, sexual exclusivity and steadfastness for those who are married, and continence for all others. He notes as well that the virtues of justice and fidelity should both play a role in assessing ministerial sexual ethics. It is justice that calls for the subordination of sexual self-interest to professional responsibilities and the common good. Pastoral trustworthiness translates into the maintenance of firm boundaries and says a clear NO to invitations to blur those lines.<sup>25</sup>

---

24. Nolan B. Harmon, *Ministerial Ethics and Etiquette* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 22.

25. Gula, *Just Ministry*, 85–88 (see n. 14).

Sexual ethics for ministry as a model of sexual morality for all persons offers a consistent, clear, and unambiguous message about sexual morality, reinforced by the pastor's embodiment of this message in his or her

“*[R]eligious leaders need continued sexuality education to understand themselves and their parishioners within rapidly changing culture contexts.*

personal life. The pastor is expected to display the moral ideals preached. An expectation of personal moral maturity, that pastors “be persons of integrity, persons whose professional lives uphold the highest ethical ideals,”<sup>26</sup> works well when sexual mores within a religious community remain stable. But when rules, if not basic norms,

are contested, the modeling approach to ministerial sexual formation provides few resources for navigating the currents of profound social change, such as ministry with LGBTQI persons.<sup>27</sup>

One way to provide tools for navigating such dramatic social change is to emphasize a sexuality education framework, centered on an information-based, contextualized approach to human sexuality. Sexuality education provides data and information in order to demystify sexuality and to equip pastors with practical tools for addressing emerging sexual concerns within their faith community and culture. This framework emphasizes being “knowledgeable about human sexuality” and being able “to integrate sexuality and spirituality.”<sup>28</sup> From a sexual health perspective, religious leaders need continued sexuality education to understand themselves and their parishioners within rapidly changing culture contexts.

Sexuality education is a much-needed corrective to both the negative and the romanticized church rhetoric about sexuality. Aside from discussions of sexual orientation, churches have been reluctant to recognize ministers as sexual persons. Even then, faith communities rarely do more than delineate what is prohibited, leaving the question of how to

---

26. Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 17.

27. See discussion in Stephens, “Moral Exemplar or Ethical Professional?” 72–74 (see n. 22).

28. Haffner, *A Time to Build*, 13 (see n. 14).

nurture a healthy sexuality unanswered. If discussed at all, the sexuality of a ministerial leader is often identified only as a risk or danger against which the church must take preventive measures.<sup>29</sup> While providing a very much-needed, positive approach to the discussion of sexuality, and clergy sexuality in particular, the sexuality education format, which tends to “bracket” value questions, runs the risk of confining its ethical discourse to issues of personal integrity, consent, and the avoidance of harm, if not balanced with other perspectives.

Professional sexual ethics formation in theological education should be multifaceted. A holistic approach that fosters respect for sexual boundaries along with healthy habits of sexual self-awareness, integrity, and concerns for meeting personal needs for intimacy is important. Continuing sexuality education should recognize that clergy are often expected to embody the highest moral ideals of their communities and, at the same time, foster within them respectful interactions about hotly contested sexual norms. Combining frameworks that foster healthy sexual habits, respect for professional fiduciary duties, and deeper understanding of a faith community’s traditional ideals for sexual morality is an effective approach to pedagogy. But additionally, it must be recognized that the initiatives of accrediting and ecclesial bodies (noted earlier) will most effectively be accomplished only by decompartmentalizing professional sexual ethics. This instruction must be integrated throughout the curriculum.

## **Integral, integrated, and integrative**

Ministerial sexual ethics should be an integral part of student formation for ministry. It should be integrated across the curriculum. Professional sexual ethics must become part of the overall educational formation of church leaders, rather than be relegated to a stand-alone workshop or targeted ethics course, elective or not. Do not misunderstand: workshops and courses devoted to the professional sexual formation of clergy are very

---

29. For example, Marilyn Naidoo, writing about the importance of spiritual formation to thwart the deleterious influence of culture, mentions sexuality, along with drugs and alcohol, as an area in which students may have experimented, evidence of “the marks of current culture” that a new generation of students brings with them to seminary. “Spiritual Formation in Protestant Theological Institutions,” in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, eds. Dietrich Werner et al., Regnum Studies in Global Christianity, ed. Ruth Padilla DeBorst et al. (Oxford, Regnum, 2010), 190.

valuable. But what is introduced therein requires steady reinforcement. Professors in every discipline must take responsibility for addressing issues of embodiment, healthy boundaries, basic sexuality education, and clergy ethics as they arise, even when these topics fall outside of their research or teaching expertise. Professional sexual ethics is now an expected part of the explicit curriculum in theological education. It is part of the core of, not just an add-on to, ministerial formation. What is needed now is an integrated approach to curricular development.<sup>30</sup>

An integrated approach is cross-curricular, interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary, encompassing both classroom and extracurricular aspects of seminary formation. In 2008, the FaithTrust Institute conducted an assessment of its 10-year effort to impact theological education with the goal of “prepar[ing] people for ministry who have ownership and understanding of the importance of healthy boundaries that goes beyond the perfunctory and becomes integral to their ministry.”<sup>31</sup> Having trained more than 100 theological school faculty and administrators, the FaithTrust Institute found that an integrated approach is necessary:

The strong consensus of participants was that the most effective teaching of ministerial ethics involves multiple opportunities for students to engage with the material, which has the potential to (a) reinforce learning and (b) create an institutional ethos of healthy boundaries and accountability.<sup>32</sup>

The UMC’s 2012 resolution, “Sexual Ethics as Integral Part of Formation for Ministerial Leadership,” echoes this consensus by encouraging faculty in every discipline of theological education to incorporate professional sexual ethics into their core courses.<sup>33</sup> An integrated approach includes not only addressing these issues as they arise in multiple courses in the cur-

---

30. Limatula Longkumer advocates along similar lines for developing gender justice in theological education: “Women in Theological Education from an Asian Perspective,” in *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, 72–74.

31. Marie M. Fortune and Aleese Moore-Orbih, *Assessment of the Impact of Specialized Theological Education on Pastoral Ministry* (2008), 3, <http://www.umsexualethics.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Zs%2FX2hSP398%3D&tabid=7537>.

32. *Ibid.*

33. United Methodist Church, “Sexual Ethics,” 151 (see n. 13).

riculum but also fostering an institutional ethos in which extracurricular aspects of formation are consistent with what is explicitly taught in the classroom. Sexual harassment policies, policies prohibiting romantic or dating relationships between faculty and students, community worship, and other aspects of seminary life should reinforce professional sexual ethics education.<sup>34</sup>

Schools and administrators will need to provide support for this effort. Currently, there are significant institutional pressures on faculty *not* to teach about sexuality in the seminary classroom, and doing so is rightly perceived as a professional risk. It appears that only contingent or

“Professors in every discipline must take responsibility for addressing issues of embodiment, healthy boundaries, basic sexuality education, and clergy ethics as they arise, even when these topics fall outside of their research or teaching expertise.”

already tenured faculty dare teach courses in sexuality. According to a comprehensive survey of 36 diverse US seminaries, junior-level faculty seeking tenure teach only 6 percent of the full-semester sexuality-related courses offered.<sup>35</sup> For professional sexual ethics education to become integrated into theological education, this must change. Faculty must be actively supported and encouraged to teach professional sexual ethics and promote its consideration among colleagues.

Only when the concepts and ideas central to ministerial sexual ethics are reinforced throughout one's theological studies can they become truly formative, rising to the “integrative challenge” of professional education: “the integration of knowledge, skills, moral integrity, and religious

---

34. For a discussion of the implicit curriculum and professional sexual ethics, see Darryl W. Stephens, “Teaching Professional Sexual Ethics Across the Seminary Curriculum,” *Religious Education* 108, no. 2 (2013): 206–207.

35. Kate M. Ott, *Sex and the Seminary: Preparing Ministers for Sexual Health and Justice* (New York: Religious Institute and Union Theological Seminary, 2009), 5, [http://www.religioustheologicalinstitute.org/sites/default/files/research\\_reports/sexandtheseminaryreligioustheologicalinstitute207.pdf](http://www.religioustheologicalinstitute.org/sites/default/files/research_reports/sexandtheseminaryreligioustheologicalinstitute207.pdf).



commitment in the cultivation of student pastoral . . . imaginations.”<sup>36</sup> An integrative pedagogy requires leaders in theological education who have the moral will and the pedagogical imagination to adopt a comprehensive, holistic, and integrated approach to professional sexual ethics instruction.

*Darryl W. Stephens is Director of United Methodist Studies at Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Patricia Beattie Jung is a Visiting Professor of Christian Ethics at Saint Paul School of Theology in Overland Park, Kansas.*

---

36. See discussion of the “integrative challenge” in Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 330.