

# Oakwood Staff & Elder Standards

For Safeguarding Sexual Purity Among Married Staff & Elders

Established by Paul B. Phair (1994, revised 2005)

- I will heed my spouse's concerns about what makes him/her uncomfortable.
- I will monitor my heart. If I find myself especially enjoying a person of the opposite sex I will take special precautions not to develop an emotional affair. I will not rationalize the breaking of these standards.
- I will not develop an emotionally bonding relationship with a person of the opposite sex apart from my spouse.
- I will not be in a home alone with a person of the opposite sex even if there are grade school children present.
- I will not ride alone in a car with a person of the opposite sex at night, and I will do so in the day time only on rare occasions for specific, non-social purposes when another mature person (preferably my spouse) knows about it in advance.
- I will not eat in a restaurant alone with a person of the opposite sex. As an elder (not staff), if I must for business purposes, I will first notify my wife. I will not do this on a regular basis.
- I will not show affection to any person of the opposite sex that could be questioned.
- I will not counsel with a person of the opposite sex in an office or private location without someone else being present or just outside the door.
- I will not counsel a person of the opposite sex for more than three sessions without his/her spouse being present. I will refer.
- I will not discuss detailed sexual issues with a person of the opposite sex in counseling apart from that person's spouse. I will refer.
- I will not discuss my marriage problems with a person of the opposite sex alone.
- I will lovingly and privately express any of my concerns about the conduct of another staff member or elder directly to him or her; I will not wait until the problem becomes serious.

*"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." Eph. 5:3 NIV*

## Ministry workers: one in five confess to inappropriate sexual behavior

by Sandra Glahn (Pastors.com 2/05)

I picked up the phone and heard the strain in my friend's voice.

"I messed up with a married fellow-worker, so the church fired us both."

My heart sank. She obviously recognized her wrongdoing and it took guts to admit what she'd done, yet picturing the devastation to a church and two marriages brought a wave of nausea.

"You don't have to say anything," she said before I found any words. "And you should know -- it's not that I don't love my husband. It's less about my marriage than it is about my failure to fear God. Can you recommend a good counselor?"

Sadly, her story is common.

While news headlines lately have focused on predators in ministry, most leaders who fail morally are decent, ordinary people with normal sexual desires. In a survey of ministry workers, more than one in five confessed to inappropriate sexual behavior. Often the "partner" in such behavior was a member of the congregation, and nearly one in five was a counselee. Ninety percent of the time, no one found out.

Simply having a position in ministry leadership can make one appealing to the opposite sex -- not because of personal attributes but because of one's office. In congregations where the pastor has excessive power, that authority makes him even more appealing. It's the old hazard known as transference: The counselee, finding a compassionate, responsible, educated listener, transfers desires to the leader that belong elsewhere.

Christian psychologist Archibald Hart has conducted research on how such transference affects ministry workers. His conclusion: Those who know this pattern are less vulnerable. The healthiest leader quickly recognizes the distinction between role and person. The greatest danger happens when he or she, faced with the job-related demands and loneliness, enjoys the affection and reciprocates.

In the last decade, the church has begun talking more about accountability and community -- and rightfully so. Almost one in seven calls received on the Focus on the Family Pastoral Care Line is about Internet pornography. That lonely leader may dabble in porn until it fails to bring enough of a thrill; then he or she ends up in an illicit relationship. We must carefully consider the biblical imperative to "*Confess your sins to one another*" (*James 5:16, NAS*), as those with accountability partners are less likely to fail.

While we can never "affair proof" our marriages, we can set up safeguards:

- The first is to fear God and draw on his strength, recognizing that he sees all and - - having given all for us -- requires holiness in our thoughts.
- Next is recognizing that if it happened to King David, a man after God's own heart, no one is immune.
- Third is committing never to reveal reciprocal feelings. Setting photos of one's family in plain view also helps both counselor and counselee to keep reality in focus.

- Fourth is the aforementioned accountability. Telling someone helps prevent leaders from toying with immoral thoughts.

As Hart notes, “You can’t trust yourself. That’s biblical. You’re at risk under two conditions: Too much failure and too much success. We lack a theology of failure -- bigness does not equal God’s blessing. God is in the refining business, not the success business. We’re into bigness. Success teaches you nothing; failure can teach you all. There’s no such thing as a failure to God -- only forced growth.”

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