Boundaries in Ministerial Life?! 
The Why, Where and How for Longevity in Ministry

Kathryn Kissell & Karin Moser
Ministry as the Ultimate Boundaryless Profession?
Professional Boundaries

Role
Spatial
Temporal
Financial
Mental
Relational
Clerical Boundaries?

Spatial  
Home is your workplace. Your home is owned by your “work”

Temporal  
No formal guidelines

Financial  
Stipend? Expenses, Tithing

Mental  
Switching off when the phone is always on

Relational  
Counsellor, Leader, Friend, Manager…

& diffuse intra-role boundaries

e.g. Graveling (2018)
Establishing Boundaries in Ministry
“Forget boundaries and go where God leads you”
Vaccarino & Gerritsen (2013)

Boundaries – The antithesis of wholehearted, committed ministry?
“Stay always within the boundaries where God’s love can reach and bless you.” Jude v21
Explore…

- Why boundaries are beneficial in ministry
- Where boundaries need to be set
- How boundaries can be set
The “Why” of Boundaries

- Boundary stress stemming from the intrusion of the work domain into non-work life is cited as one of the highest of ministerial pressures (Lee, 1999)
- Boundary stress is the factor most likely to precipitate a crisis in ministry (Fallon et al., 2013)
- The highly permeable border produces work-family conflict that can accelerate burnout (Innstrand et al., 2011)
- Boundary intrusions predict reduced marital satisfaction, parental satisfaction & prompt dissatisfaction with family functioning (Staley, 2012)
- Flourishing clergy are intentional about setting boundaries around work and personal lives (Duke Clergy Health Initiative, 2017)
Why you know what you should do but you don’t do it

good intentions
“Why you know what you should do but you don’t do it”
Negotiated Process of Creating Boundaries

Instead of focusing on the content of boundaries

Focus on the process of creating boundaries

• Within our self
• Between the self & our relational systems
The “Where” of Boundaries

• The impact of identity on boundaries

The force towards self-definition that represents the desire to live a productive and relatively autonomous life free from the dictates of the group

• Self Representation – In touch with one’s innermost wishes & values
• Self Esteem – Positive attitude towards oneself
• Agency – Sense that you can create self-directed purpose & influence one’s own actions
Solid ID

Ontologically acceptable

In contact with one’s inner values
Self-esteem based on who we are not what we do
Agency to act in accordance with one’s inner values

Contingent ID

Self esteem based on something or someone outside of ourselves

Either through outcomes within relationships or through work performance

e.g. Hallsten et al. (2005)
How Identity Impacts Boundaries

- Identity drives motivation
- Motivation creates diffuse boundaries

Diffuse boundaries can result in
  a) Diminished Non-Work life (Sonnentag et al., 2010)
  b) Spouse functioning as boundary “enforcer” (Cattich, 2012)
  c) Fusion with role & loss of sense of self (Beebe, 2009)
  d) Exhaustion and burnout (Grosch & Olsen, 2000)

Vocational Calling
Core sense of who you are fuses with the role you feel called to as well as the quality of relationships through which that calling is enacted
Systems Eat Boundaries for Breakfast

- Relational systems love fusion not differentiation of identity
- Boundaries raise anxiety producing predictable attempts at sabotage
- Understanding responses to anxiety, expecting the homeostatic kickback, developing the capacity to hold the line
- Ultimately raises everyone’s maturity

e.g. Olsen & Devor, 2015
The “How” of Boundaries

Where?
Boundaries are set within the self and co-created within the system

How?
Establishment of healthy inter-role and intra-role boundaries stems from developing mature intrapsychic boundaries of identity

Differentiation
One’s personal and behavioural functioning when under pressure
Differentiation

- **Identity** - Being positively connected with one’s non-contingent sense of identity

- **Connection** - Capacity to establish authentic, reciprocal relationships

- **Responsivity** - Ability to be emotionally responsive rather than reactive under pressure

- **System** – Understand natural behaviour of relational systems & formative impact of family of origin

  e.g. Titelman (2014)
3 Church of England dioceses hosted 3 coaching groups
- 6-8 self-selected participants in each group
- Full-time stipendiary parochial clergy

6 half-day sessions over 7 months

Coaching programme- Introduction to Bowen Systems Theory
- Understand key ideas
- Apply to own patterns of functioning and behaviours
- Practical coaching to mature personal and behavioural responses under pressure “Do something different”

Control group comparison
Assessing Impact of Coaching

**Intrapsychic boundary**  (Beebe, 2007)
- Identity contingent with Role
- Identity contingent with Relationship

**Inter-role boundary**  (Wayne, Musisca and Fleeson, 2004)
- Negative and positive spillover between home and work

**Intra-role boundary**  (Edwards, Webster, Van Laar & Easton, 2008)
- Manageable work demands
- Sense of control
- Clarity of role

**Intra-role boundary**  (Clinton, 2012)
- Burnout
- Work Engagement
Results

Overall Differentiation & Identity specifically strengthened
• Ability to take an I position in role significantly increased (large ES)
• Significant reduction in relational fusion (large ES)

Inter-role boundaries enhanced
• Level of negative spillover of work into home life significantly reduced (large ES)
• Amount of positive facilitation of work into home life increased (medium ES)

Intra-role boundaries strengthened
• Clarity of role increased (Small ES)
• Sense of control within the workplace increased (medium ES)
• Level of work demands remained consistent, but the experience of stress attributed to those demands decreased in contrast to control group

Work-related psychological health
• Burnout, particularly exhaustion decreased (medium ES)
• Work engagement increased (medium ES)
Areas of Impact

**Inter-role Boundary**

‘*Boundarying my time better*’

**Strengthened identity when under congregational relational pressure**

‘*Maintaining a clear sense of self in the middle of conflict*’

**Enhanced sense of self in colleague relationships**

‘*Feel a more confident resource, able to be more constructive*’
Value and Relevance of Coaching Groups

“It is a resource at many different levels. I would have benefitted from it earlier in ministry.”
Boundaries in Ministerial Life?! 
The Why, Where and How for Longevity in Ministry
Healthy boundaries are vital for the well-being of ministers and ministry well-being

Establishing boundaries is additionally challenging for clergy due to the lack of external institutional boundaries & nature of vocational calling

Healthy boundaries are internally created and externally co-created

Responsibility for maturing and growing our self identity
- Individual insight e.g. Spiritual direction, supervision, coaching
- Group insight e.g. Reflective practice groups

Responsibility for maturing and growing our systems
References


