

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

GOAL:

To gain an awareness of the ethical responsibilities of youth ministry and how these relate to one's own relationships and life choices

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

After completing this module, participants will be able to:

- a)
 - (i) define the responsibilities of a youth minister to God, their community of faith, peers in youth ministry and the youth they work with
 - (ii) outline the relevant law relating to confidentiality, disclosure and human rights
 - (iii) identify and locate any existing code of ethics within their organisation

- b)
 - (i) demonstrate how the biblical writings, their personal experience and understanding of tradition shape their ethical understandings
 - (ii) explain the importance of confidentiality, setting boundaries in relationships, personal integrity and healthy attitudes to their own and other's authority

- c)
 - (i) write a code of ethics applying to their own youth ministry position.
 - (ii) identify a competent and experienced person to whom they can refer in ethical matters

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WHAT TO DO

Step One: Exploring Ethics – 3 hours

1. Develop your definition of ethics.
 - (a) How would you define ‘ethics’?
 - (b) Find a dictionary definition of ethics
 - (c) What kind of behaviour might be considered unethical?
 - (d) What choices would make you think about ethics?

Discuss these with your mentor

2. Read *Resource Material Section One: Ethics as Responsibility*

In less than a page (250 words) describe the ethical responsibilities you may have in one of the following situations:

- (a) the planning of a worship service
- (b) conversation with a young person about his/her concerns about violence at home
- (c) the leadership of a youth ministry team
- (d) running a camp for young people
- (e) the collection and management of money on behalf of others

Step Two: How Ethical Standards are Formed – 3 hours

3. Read *Resource Material Section Two: A Basis for Ethical Youth Ministry*
4. In a written, spoken (taped) or graphic presentation, show how the biblical writings, your personal experience, and your understanding of tradition shape *your* ethical understanding for one particular issue. Present your work as if you were sharing with a group of colleagues.

Step Three: Ethics and the Law – 3 hours

5. Read *Resource Material Section Three: Youth Ministry, Ethics and Law*
6. After discussion with your mentor, outline the changes you could put in place in your youth ministry context, taking into account the material of Section 3. Present, in less than 250 words, your plans.

Step Four: Personal Ethics for Youth Ministry – 3 Hours

7. Read *Resource Material Section Four: Personal Ethics for Youth Ministry*
8. Write half a page on each of the scenarios outlined in Section Four, those of Marty, Jenny, Ola, and Sarah's youth leader. What would be appropriate ethical choices for each of these people? refer to the following principles:
 - a. confidentiality
 - b. setting boundaries in relationships
 - c. healthy attitudes to your own and others' authority
 - d. personal integrity
 - e. handling conflicts of interest

Step Five: Code of Ethics – 3 hours

9. Read *Resource Material Section Five: Writing a Code of Ethics*
10. Does your organisation have a Code of Ethics? If so, include a copy
11. Discuss with your mentor those parts of the code which challenge or puzzle you
12. Write a code of ethics specifically applying to your own youth ministry position

Step Six: Where to Find Help When it is Needed – 30 minutes

13. Identify a competent and experienced person to whom you can refer in ethical matters. Write a paragraph explaining why you chose this person

SECTION ONE: ETHICS AS RESPONSIBILITY

Moral strength, character, and integrity: Are these found in youth ministry? What are the standards on which we base our behaviour? Are there rights and wrongs when it comes to youth ministry? Who decides what's OK and what's not? Good questions!

Taking on responsibility for youth ministry of any kind implies that we will be reliable, dependable, and answerable for our actions and attitudes.

Christian Youth Ministry has a unique environment in which ethical standards are needed. It is vital that we develop consistent standards of work and care in our relationships with young people, youth leaders, parents, Church leaders, our own family, and other colleagues in youth ministry. Above all, our allegiance is to Jesus Christ, who is our model of strong character.

TO GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE

Like it or not, we have a responsibility to reflect something of the true character of God. The following story illustrates how important this can be.

Paula could not be convinced. How could she trust God for anything? Why should she believe that God would forgive her, look after her, love her, just as she was. As a child at Sunday school, Paula had been a model of good behaviour and helpfulness. Now she was cynical, withdrawn and hard to motivate. 1

Brian and Jenny, Paula's youth leaders, had a challenge on their hands. They could see that Paula was angry with not only God, but also the important adults in her life. Her parents, who were going through their own private hell, had repeatedly disappointed her. One minute "up" and loving, caring and attentive. The next minute "down", hostile, inattentive and unkind.

Paula had developed her image of God from her impressions of the most important people in her life, her parents. And now, as a teenager, she was looking to a new community for a last-chance go at believing in God. Brian and Jenny decided to aim at modelling God's reliable and consistent parenthood for Paula.

Our ministry can help form positive or negative images of God in the minds of young people. Dale and Juanita Ryan, in their book, *Recovery from Distorted Images of God*, outline six choices common to people when imaging God:

1. The God of impossible expectations, or the merciful God who delights in all creation. 2. The emotionally distant God or the Christ who is God with us in our temptations, struggles, and feelings.
3. The disinterested God or the God who is intimately involved with us.
4. The angry abusive God or the God of compassion who heals our brokenness and acts on our behalf.
5. The unreliable God or the Faithful One, the Rock.
6. The God who abandons or the God who will seek us when we are lost.

As people in youth ministry, we have a responsibility to mirror God's character in our programming, our leadership of worship, Bible study, and most of all, in our relationships. Before we ever were called to Christian youth ministry, we were called to be in relationship with God. Being comes before doing. That means that ethically, you have a responsibility to follow Jesus Christ, even if it means dropping involvement in organised youth ministry.

Our responsibility to God, although that may be above all else, does not absolve us from responsibility to those we serve and serve with.

Youth ministry involves primary relationships with young people and team-members. Our responsibilities to these people include a commitment to dealing truthfully with others, encouraging open discussion, respect of privacy, and a maintenance of confidences. Healthy relationships will recognise the boundaries between carer and the person being cared for, and the limits of competency of people in leadership. Our ministry, if measured by the good news found in Jesus Christ, will recognise all people as equally special to God.

EMPLOYMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

For those employed in the field of youth ministry, there is a responsibility to seek excellence and diligence in all aspects undertaken by the employee. Time will be wisely spent. This does not mean that employees should allow themselves to be caught in workaholism.

For those being employed in other fields while working in youth ministry, the same standards can still apply. Youth ministry comes into ill repute when your employer is worse off because of your distraction.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR SELF CARE

Each of us has a responsibility to do what we can to stay healthy, fit and sane. To keep ourselves safe, we need to provide ourselves with accountability to someone else, and develop our support networks. At the end of the day, we ourselves are responsible for finding opportunities for spiritual growth, in-service training, recreation, refreshment and renewal.

YOUTH MINISTRY AS PROFESSION

Ethical standards are often associated with professional groups such as doctors, lawyers and accountants. Youth Ministry can be understood in terms of profession also. The word "profession" at its best refers to the undertaking of a group of people to deliver what they publicly have promised. A member of the medical profession is expected to put the welfare of the patient before all else. Medical ethics are developed to help those people who practice medicine to deliver on that promise.

Those in youth ministry may not belong to a tightly controlled group of practitioners with examinations and qualifications needed for entry. All the same, the actions of one person or group will inevitably affect the reputation of all in the same field. For this reason, it is important to develop a sense of accountability to one's peers, colleagues or team-members in youth ministry. This includes a commitment to being helpful and courteous to other church workers, praying for one another, dealing with conflict appropriately, and using proper channels to challenge those who are behaving unethically.

RESPONSIBILITIES TO FAMILIES

Effective youth ministry happens in the context of family, whether that is your own family, the families of young people, the families of those in the church, or the family setting of the church.

Consistent ethics include recognition of the relationships that count. If you have made commitments to other people, you need to honour those commitments above others. It's a lot easier for a church to find another leader than for a youth leader to find another spouse and family! The same goes for your demands on the time commitment of young people and others in youth ministry.

One of the potential conflicts of interest in youth ministry is that of the concerns of youth and the concerns of their parents. Parents and guardians who take their responsibilities seriously will be looking for information about your ministry with the young people in their charge. Are you known for your openness, reliability, and support of the role of parents? Where do you draw the line between confidentiality and involvement of parents in the resolution of difficulties faced by young people?

ETHICS AS SELF-DISCIPLINE

The working out of responsibility in youth ministry demands love, faith, hard thinking and self-discipline.

Ethical standards are not always as simple as they at first seem. Responsibilities to different people can come into conflict with each other, as in the above example. It is essential that we learn how to form ethical standards for new situations as they arise, based on standards that are recognised and sound.

SECTION TWO: A BASIS FOR ETHICAL YOUTH MINISTRY

For most Christians, the three most important sources of authority would be Scripture, Tradition and Experience. There are of course varying approaches to each of these sources of authority. We call them by different names, depending on the setting in which we stand.

ETHICS AND THE BIBLE

Are ethics based on principles, examples or rules?

The Bible is not short of lists of commandments and guidelines for holy living. At first glance, it might seem a simple task to take these rules and apply them to everyday living. However, under closer scrutiny, it becomes obvious that if youth ministry is to be characterised by an attitude of inner accountability to God, something deeper than external application of rules is needed.

The writers of the Old Testament have a lot to say to those in positions of responsibility. Attitudes such as hunger for justice for all, truth, kindness, faithfulness; these are all tied up with accountability to God. The Old Testament points to a God who demands that faith and practice measure up with each other; a God who refuses to let the world live for itself only; a God who demonstrates a faithful love that endures contempt and unfairness; a holy God who will not be compromised.

The New Testament brings us the revelation of God in Jesus Christ; Jesus, the holy one, who demonstrates God's power through humble service, rather than emotional blackmail or threats of violence. Here we see God's concern for *all* people, the just and the unjust; God's interest in the thoughts and intentions of people rather than mere outward show.

The early Church's development of ethics points to the community of faith as the sharers of power and authority, *together* entrusted with the good news of Christ.

ETHICS, TRADITION, AND THE CHURCH

The word, *tradition*, refers to that which is passed on. The good news of Christ is passed on from generation to generation. That "gospel" in some circles is Tradition with a big T. The smaller traditions are things that we have learnt from the experience of the wider faith community that preceded us.

Whether we are aware of it or not, the context in which we work will have certain standards or expectations based on what has gone on before. Those working in hierarchical leadership structures inherit ethical approaches, which may have developed during chaotic times. Those whose ministry is at every step reminded of sexual safety, no doubt are affected by the sexual scandals of another time, be it recent or long past. Some denominations and organisations have strict policies on alcohol and youth ministry, usually because of a shared experience of the world that has been handed on, a tradition. Some youth ministries are characterised by a demand for doctrinal purity, respect for Biblical standards, because of a shared "evangelical ethos" handed down by their predecessors.

EXPERIENCE AND ETHICS

Alongside Scripture and tradition, present experience and context have a strong influence on our approach to the standards we set ourselves.

One youth ministry organisation has developed a policy of not allowing its leaders to drink alcohol. This is in recognition that many of the young people in its programmes are from families in which alcohol is abused. A sign of acceptance of alcohol, no matter how moderate, is believed by this group to be sure to perpetuate the cycles of addiction the young people are seeking to leave behind.

Organisations and individuals are influenced by experiences of God and life, injustice and unethical leadership. Those who have had to put up with the abuse of authority may well attempt to avoid the same traps by developing alternative approaches to power sharing. Those who have seen examples of sexual molestation by people in positions of pastoral responsibility are likely to be careful to build firm guidelines to avoid the same mistakes.

ETHICS AND THE LAW

Expectations of those in positions of responsibility for youth can be shaped by the mood of the whole community. In New Zealand, there are four main areas in which the law reflects society's demands on those with such responsibilities.

- **The Privacy Act.** This law makes it clear that personal information belongs to the person to whom it refers. If personal information is to be gathered, it is to be used only for the stated purposes outlined by the collector. This has implications for both confidentiality in counselling and the collection of addresses, phone numbers and more personal details.
- **The Occupational Health and Safety Act.** This law makes it clear that in any situation in which someone is employed to be there, there is a responsibility for the health and safety for people in that environment. All steps possible must be taken to ensure that potential risks are avoided. Accidents and injuries must be reported.
- **The Children's and Young Persons Act.** This law outlines the rights of children and young persons to full justice in the context of family and community.
- **The Human Rights Act.** This law provides protection of the rights of people to live without discrimination on grounds of race, religion, age, sexual orientation.

WHERE DO WE STAND?

In real life situations, legalism is not usually helpful. Our responsibilities however are going to be more easily discerned when we examine the overall principles found in the Scriptures, the lessons of tradition, experience and the community's laws. The call of the gospel of Jesus Christ is for love to be our standard. We do well to remind ourselves of the example of Jesus himself in his concern for the welfare of others, his continual choice not to be self-serving.

SECTION THREE: YOUTH MINISTRY, LAW AND ETHICS

The following advice on the Privacy Act, Children's and Young Persons Act and Human Rights Act comes from the ethics guide for school chaplains working with the Churches Education Commission, compiled in 1996. Although written specifically for people working in an education environment, the principles contained here can be applied to most youth ministry contexts.

THE CHAPLAIN AND THE PRIVACY ACT

The purpose of the Privacy Act 1993 was "to promote and protect individual privacy... in particular to establish certain principles with respect to:

- (1) The collection, use and disclosure, by public and private sector agencies, of information relating to individuals; and
- (2) Access by each individual to information relating to that individual and held by public and private sector agencies."

Its primary intention is to ensure that where personal details about someone are held by any agency, (e.g. organisation, company, school, marketing body, Government Department) those details are not communicated to another agency for a different purpose.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN PROVISIONS OF THIS ACT.

- a) Personal information shall not be collected unless for a lawful purpose connected with the agency and the information is necessary for that purpose.
- b) Information shall be collected directly from the individual concerned, unless the agency believes on reasonable grounds that:
 - the information is publicly available.
 - the individual has authorised collection of information from someone else.
 - non compliance would not prejudice the interests of the individual.
 - no compliance is necessary:
 - (i) to avoid prejudice to the maintenance of law.
 - (ii) for the enforcement of the law.
 - (iii) for the protection of public revenue.
 - (iv) because of proceedings before or soon to be before the Court.
- c) Information collected will be used in a form in which the individual will not be identified. (statistics)

d) Persons must be made aware of the fact that information is being collected, why it is collected, and who will receive the information. The person concerned has the right of access to and correction of the information.

e) Storage of information must be such as to ensure safeguards of access, loss, misuse.

f) Information may be collected only by lawful means and be held only for such time as is needful for the purpose collected.

g) Information collected for one purpose may not be used for another without express permission.

g) It should be noted that in the Privacy Act "collect" does not include receipt of unsolicited information.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE PRIVACY ACT 1993 FOR A SCHOOL?

1. **Information** about school pupils (and teachers, other staff, Board of Trustee members, parents) that is **publicly available** is **not affected**. e.g. addresses and phone numbers which are publicly available through the electoral roll and phone book except where kept confidential and "unlisted".

2. **Information collected by the school** - for the purpose of education, communication, development and safety of its pupils - may be shared within the school and **known by all who need to know**. For example refer to the following three scenarios.

(a) School Secretary needs to have access to all phone numbers of parents for emergency contact. If the custodial parent does not want the non-custodial parent or anyone else to know their phone number, the School Secretary may **not** pass it on.

(b) Public Health Nurse may confide in class teacher that a particular child has a health problem. The class teacher may need to know because the problem affects the child's behaviour or learning ability. It may **not** be necessary, however, for any other staff to know, and certainly not members of the Board of Trustees, unless the "problem" affects them.

(c) If a chaplain is accepted as part of the School and asked to work with particular children the information the school has about those children may be important for the chaplain to know. e.g. a bright, happy, well adjusted child suddenly starts misbehaving or showing signs of stress or withdrawing from class mates or class activity. The teacher knows that the father has just left home or grandma died or mum is suddenly unemployed. Teacher feels that chaplain may be able to help child by being a listening ear, a friend. Teacher tells chaplain the situation - for background information - and asks chaplain to befriend child.

It might be disastrous if the chaplain said to the child "I hear your Dad has left home. Do you want to talk about it?" Child may then think confidence has been breached. If chaplain said "You don't seem as happy as usual today, would you like to talk about it?" - that leaves the

opening for the child to decide for themselves whether to tell, and it protects the source of the information, the teacher.

This situation may work in reverse: chaplain knows something that teacher doesn't and tells teacher - to help facilitate education, communication, development and safety of child.

THE CHAPLAIN AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Chaplains are reminded that New Zealand law prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex, marital status, religious belief, ethical belief, colour, race, ethnic or national origins, disability, age, political opinion, employment status, family status and sexual orientation.

In practice this means that C.E.C. (Churches Education Commission) expects chaplains to be available to all within a school community.

While chaplains may have strong personal feelings about some issues (e.g. "the sanctity of marriage", sexual orientation, abortion), chaplains are expected to listen to and accept all children and adults without showing prejudice or expressing disgust or criticism.

Chaplains may, of course, want to express their own personal views but should not expect all those to whom pastoral care is offered, to agree with them or to accept a "Christian viewpoint".

THE CHAPLAIN AND FAMILIES ACT 1989: THE CHILDREN'S, YOUNG PERSONS AND FAMILIES ACT 1989

Chaplains need to know that the principles underlying the care and protection provisions of this Act are to do with the **welfare of the child**.

The old legislation stressed the welfare of the child as an individual (which often meant removing the child from his/her family to State custody). The Children's, Young Persons and Families Act 1989 stresses the welfare of the *child in the family*.

It is possible that a chaplain might become involved in a Family Group Conference (as provided for in this Act) as an advocate for the child, as part of the invited whanau or as someone invited for a specific purpose by the Care and Protection Co-ordinator. The provision in the Children's, Young Persons and Families Act **for Family Group Conferences** is to try to get the best balance between the child's two rights: to protect from abuse and to the right to a family. Two types of Family Group Conferences: Care and Protection; Youth Justice. (The Children's, Young Persons and Families Act also relates to young people who offend against the law.)

Task of Family Group Conferences is to identify the risk, facilitate solutions, monitor resources and then let go. There are, of course, differences between the expectations of policy and the reality of practice - and regional variations as to effectiveness and methods used to set up Family Group Conferences.

THE CHAPLAIN AND THE COURTS:

If you are served with a **subpoena**, take legal advice on what you should say and to whom. One way of protecting your role as confidante and legal status is to use the facility called "Shield" found in section 35 of the Evidence Amendment Act: e.g. "Yes I saw [Jason Smith] on four occasions at the school - but I require you to rule, your Honour, on what is required in the public good."

The following advice is adapted from material distributed by the Ministry with Children Workgroup, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

HEALTH AND SAFETY IN EMPLOYMENT ACT 1992

Occupational Health and Safety regulations place responsibility on both employer and employee to ensure that process and procedures are in place to prevent people from suffering any harm. Obviously this applies to those employing youth workers, and youth workers themselves. The health and safety of all people, young and old, while on programmes or in premises linked with employees, is covered by the regulations. While this may not cover your situation, it would be wise to take steps to manage the risks associated with your ministry with youth.

HEALTH AND SAFETY INCLUDES PROTECTION FROM PHYSICAL INJURY, DISEASE, OR MENTAL DISORDER.

Occupational Safety and Health guidelines recommend that you follow these principles: a) Do not expose people to hazards unless absolutely necessary.

b) Develop procedures for dealing with emergencies before they occur.

c) Have a systematic system of identifying hazards whether they are new or existing hazards and once identified eliminate, isolate or minimise them.

d) Satisfy yourself that if an accident does occur you can honestly say that you took all reasonable practical steps to remove the risk of harm, but despite having taken those steps the injury was suffered.

SOME AREAS TO CONSIDER ARE:

ACCIDENT, INJURY, DISEASE

- Has your youth ministry programme been analysed in terms of risk management?
- Have you made all efforts possible to maintain high levels of hygiene?
- What are your plans for use in case of fire, flood or earthquake? Do leaders and young people know what to do in the case of such emergencies? (Camping near Mt Ruapehu would add the need for further contingency plans!)
- Do leaders have knowledge of first aid and emergency procedures? Have they completed a first aid course in the last year?
- Are leaders aware of the medical problems, medication, allergies and disabilities of young people under their responsibility?
- Do leaders know how to contact emergency services?
- Are parents or nearest of kin automatically informed of the injury and aid given, even in the event of minor injuries?

- In the event of an accident, injury or death, who is responsible for dealing with
 - other youth present
 - the Police
 - the parents
 - Coroners Court
 - the press
 - the local church or youth ministry agency
 - the wider church

INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR FROM ADULTS AND YOUTH

- Have you developed policies to protect young people from emotional abuse, physical abuse or sexual abuse by adults? Note that emotional abuse can include shouting, denigrating or belittling comments, favouritism, and culturally inappropriate behaviours, actions or attitudes.
- Have you ensured a safe ratio of leaders to young people? This will vary depending on the situation of risk.
- Who is responsible for recruitment of appropriate people for positions of responsibility? Do you have a means of "firing" leaders for inappropriate behaviour?
- Have you developed ways of dealing with inappropriate behaviour from young people such as bullying, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse?

WIDER ISSUES

- What support is given to those in youth ministry in your situation?
- What assistance is in place for helping to recognise risks, training to deal with accidents and emergencies?
- What resources are being given to minimise risks?
- What legal protections and counselling are provided for people involved in traumatic events? Have you provided for these before such events occur?

SECTION FOUR: PERSONAL ETHICS FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

PERSONAL INTEGRITY - A SEARCH FOR TRUTH

The use of the word "ethics" is often associated with lists of rules or guidelines, standards by which people in responsibility must measure themselves. However, a life based on outer rules only is fragile and brittle. Without the strength of inner integrity, codes of conduct can become sources of frustration or breeding grounds for hypocrisy.

Just what is integrity? Integrity is the quality found when the inner and the outer measure up, when what is said corresponds with what is thought and done. It's to do with honesty, standing true.

Could that be me? Who could honestly say that they're completely honest? Of course no one is perfect. Codes of ethics, professional or personal supervision, and self-inventories are what we use to keep ourselves working on personal integrity.

HOW DO WE WORK WITH THE EXPECTATIONS OF OUR COMMUNITY?

Expectations can be spoken, or unspoken, written or taken for granted. Some will conflict with others. Each person involved in our ministry, be it colleague, parent, young person or member of the wider faith community, will have his or her own set of expectations of us. Some demands will be unrealistic. Others will be fair and just.

One way of dealing with these expectations is to get them out in the open. Once we have recognised the varying hopes and dreams of people we are able to negotiate about what can be met and what cannot.

Some of the tensions that rise in youth ministry come from the gap between expectations and the reality. We need to have some people with whom we can be completely transparent -a supervisor or a support group, maybe. It doesn't help anyone when we use young people, or adults that we are serving, to be a dumping ground for our unresolved anger, doubts or failings.

At times we have to adapt our patterns of ministry into the context in which we are working. For example, some situations demand punctuality and consistency. Others require flexibility. Some church or agency environments will require those in youth ministry to check the direction of their work with people in authority on a regular basis, while others will be less formal in their reporting procedures.

POWER AND YOUTH MINISTRY

Power can be described as the ability to get results. It can be used for good, or for evil. God's creative power, as seen in the beginning of the book of Genesis, is seen as something that results in good. The rest of Genesis outlines the ways in which humans have abused their power, and been involved in the redemption of abused power.

Those in youth ministry, like it or not, are involved in relationships which involve the use of power with people who are vulnerable in some way. We have power in any situation in which we have information to share, an influence on the thinking or actions of others, a say in how things happen.

Power can come from a given role, from being an adult, being a male, belonging to a certain ethnic group, from having physical resources such as ability, size or strength, possessing economic resources such as wealth, job skills or credentials, intellectual resources, social resources. Power can be gained from gifts and lessons provided by life circumstances. (Marie Fortune covers these in her workshop resource, *Clergy Misconduct*.)

We have special responsibilities for the use of power when we are an adult working with young people, a leader in a group, a counsellor working with someone in need or crisis.

How we use our power can be the difference between coercion, manipulation or empowerment. We could force people to follow us by the threat of violence, banishment, or ridicule. We could induce a willingness to go our way by inducing feelings of shame, pity, fear, anger or greed. We could share our position of influence by freely and honestly giving information and options, and respecting the dignity of those making decisions.

Matthew and Luke show Jesus using an empowering model in the stories of the Temptation. Here Jesus refuses to manipulate crowds into following him through appealing to their sense of physical hunger or need for a hero. Likewise, he refuses to use the coercion to influence the decisions of those around him. His choice is for the emptying of himself in a life of service and sacrifice.

AUTHORITY AS POWER-SHARING

At times, those in youth ministry are given permission to make decisions and direct others. This could be called authority, legitimated and institutionalised power. Abuse of such authority can range from authoritarianism, in which control is seized, to permissiveness, in which the responsible use of power is neglected. The Soap Principle applies to authority. While our responsibility as a "maker of disciples" may include instruction and guidance, the soap principle should be kept in mind. "The more you use it (authority), the more you lose it."

A responsible use of power is linked to attitudes towards others in authority. Shared power is given by a community, often through the medium of people given authority to oversee or support. Systems of accountability, whether they be hierarchical or among peers, ensure that a person in ministry is using his or her power in the way intended by the faith community. When this happens, no one is threatened by someone else being able to influence events or people.

Here's a story illustrating the need to work within existing authority structures.

Marty was employed by Green Valley Church to work with young people. He was not familiar with the denomination that had called him to this job. His experience of ministry had been one in which leaders called the shots, took risks, and gathered a group of loyal followers who would do anything asked of them. He proceeded to do so. As time went by, it became obvious that the ethos of Green Valley Church was one of consultation, calculation and education.

When Marty started teaching his young people an approach to baptism that plainly contradicted the accepted teachings of the local church, other members of the church staff tackled him on his actions. He immediately responded by attacking the leadership, and resigning.

The impact of Marty's resignation was felt in the church and community for a long time. Many young people felt disappointed in Marty, and angry at the church leaders. Some dropped out altogether, having lost faith in Christian leadership and community.

An extreme example maybe. But an example of a person who was not able to share his power with either young people or other people in authority in his faith community. Power sharing assumes that by giving other people more power in their lives, you are not losing any power yourself This is not a competition.

ROLES, BOUNDARIES AND YOUTH MINISTRY

Responsibilities in youth ministry usually place a person in a role of some kind. This isn't the kind of role in which play-acting is required. Ministry roles are similar to many other relationship roles. Those in the role of parent will take into account the age of their child when deciding how to behave towards them. As the parent of a newborn baby, they will take full responsibility for feeding, bathing and changing of clothes. As the child grows in maturity, the parent's role evolves. In youth ministry, you are not usually merely a friend to those you are working with. You may be counsellor, confidant, discipler, fellow worker, organiser or coordinator.

Remember that at all times, there is more to your role in youth ministry than just friendship or leadership. An ethical approach to youth ministry requires that you define the boundaries that are appropriate to the roles that you have. If you are in a formal counselling situation, you need to be clear that you are not just a buddy. You are someone to whom the person is becoming vulnerable, at a particular time and place. In this situation it is your responsibility to keep the relationship from becoming sexual or inappropriately intense. If you are organising an event, especially one in which young people are away from parents or home, you do not have the freedom to drop out of role and become irresponsible in your actions.

CONFLICTING ROLES

Ethical dilemmas often develop when someone attempts fulfil two roles with the same person. Take for example the following two stories.

Jenny is the coordinator of a programme for young adults. She recently has started to see a lot more of one of the members of her group. He is the same age as her. They have a lot in common. Their relationship makes sense. But there is some tension in the group when

it is obvious that their relationship is starting to develop romantic overtones.

Ola is a 25 year old responsible for a group of young people. He has started going out with a fourteen year old girl from the group. The fourteen year old is infatuated with her leader, but is not on an equal footing with him. The parents of those in the youth group are beginning to lose trust in the leader. It is becoming increasingly obvious that not only is the group suffering from Ola's preoccupation with the things of 'love', but also from the sense that he has betrayed something here.

Consider the differences in the roles of Jenny and Ola. Jenny is working mainly as a peer to the others in her young adults group. All the same, she has to work out the power dynamics in her new relationship. Would it be developing if she were not the "leader of the group"? On the other hand Ola's relationship with the fourteen year old is one of inequality. As the leader he has a responsibility to draw the boundaries in his relationship with her.

Roles go together with boundaries. Once over the boundary, you are entering another role. The boundaries of a professional counsellor are clear. The counsellor and client meet in a recognised place, at a certain time, with recognition that the client is seeking professional help from the counsellor. The counsellor will not sexualise the relationship; will neither be a buddy nor a controller. Most youth ministry relationships are not so clear. The boundaries between provider of pastoral care and friendship are not easy to define.

It is up to adults to recognise that children and teenagers are vulnerable to the violation of boundaries. Because of their age, their size, lack of understanding and lack of experience, they are prone to victimisation. They are often dependent on adults because of a need for adult approval, an instinctive trust of adults, or a reliance on adults' interpretations of feelings, thoughts and experiences.

The same issues apply to relationships with other adults. There is an assumption that someone with responsibility for pastoral care will be safe, sensitive and caring.

Differentiation is the process by which people recognise that they are distinct from others. A baby will usually begin by seeing the world as an extension of itself. Gradually it becomes clear that these other people in the baby's world have separate wills that could possibly be controlled, or pleased, for one's own pleasure. A certain kind of maturity comes with the recognition that other people are not there for one's own pleasure. That kind of maturity is essential in youth ministry.

YOUTH MINISTRY IN CONFIDENCE

One of the most difficult ethical tensions faced by those in youth ministry is the question of confidentiality. Take for example, the case of Sarah.

Sarah confides in her youth leader that she is pregnant and considering an abortion. She doesn't want her parents to know about it as she is afraid of their reactions. What does the leader do? She knows that she has a responsibility to this girl to be a supporter as well as objective carer. She has a responsibility to the parents to be a co-carer of the girl. Does she tell anyone in the church about this? What does the youth leader encourage Sarah to do?

Karen Lebaqz provides an excellent analysis of the issues surrounding Sarah's situation in her book "Professional Ethics: Power and Paradox".

The following principles on confidentiality are adapted from the Churches Education Commission guidelines for school chaplains. Once again, any of these can be applied to a number of youth ministry contexts.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CONFIDENTIAL DISCUSSIONS:

1. Be aware of the school's policy on what information you must pass on to the principal. (e.g. disclosure of sexual abuse)
2. If a child, or adult, trusts you enough to share a secret with you they expect it to remain a secret.
3. **If**, however, what you are told is in the nature of **disclosure of abuse**:
 - (a) Remember that people only disclose when they want something to happen. (This person told *you* at *this* time).
 - (b) Listen. Do not over react, panic or criticise. Listen.
 - (c) Consider these possible responses:
 1. "I'm sorry that's happening to you."
 2. "I believe you."
 3. "I'm glad you came to me."
 4. "It's not your fault."
 5. "Together we can do something to stop this happening."
 6. "I'm not all powerful but I'll stay with you through all this - but you will have to trust me that I'll get other help to make sure that this [abuse] stops."
 - (d) Never paint yourself into a corner. (e.g. by promising, *before* you have heard that you won't say anything to anyone.)
 - (e) Tell only what is necessary and only to those who need to know. (Having a supervisor can help you work out the basis for such decisions).
4. Be mindful of what might happen next, and what you want to happen next.

SECTION FIVE: WRITING A CODE OF ETHICS

Codes of ethics usually appear when a group of colleagues become concerned about the reputation of their profession. Doctors protect themselves and the profession of medicine by agreeing that only those who pass certain tests of competency and who are prepared to stick to certain ethical standards will have the privilege of being recognised. This approach to professional ethics is being developed within the Church across the world, largely due to pressure after revelations of clergy misconduct.

Youth ministry in several denominations and organisations is being given a higher level of expectation, both for employees and volunteer workers. Codes of ethics are now being formulated for those in youth ministry.

The following is the Code of Ethics of one New Zealand Christian denomination, designed for all those providing pastoral care on behalf of the Church.

A. How we conduct ourselves towards those in our care

1. I will deal truthfully with others. I will encourage open discussion and respect others.
2. I will respect other people's privacy. Anything shared in confidence will remain confidential unless there is a clear danger to someone. I will let people know about these limits.
3. I will recognise that all people are made in God's image. Everyone is special to God and I will not discriminate between them for any reason.
4. I will not take advantage of people, either for my own benefit or the benefit of others.
5. I will not become emotionally dependant or intimately involved with anyone that is in my care. I will not abuse, harass or exploit anyone.
6. I see that I can't do everything. I won't try to do things such as formal counselling until I have proven competence in that area. I will refer people to those who do.

B. Accountability to our employer

1. I will take a professional approach to my job, always seeking to do the best I can do.
2. I will be responsible about the time I spend in ministry, spending neither too much nor too little.

C. Responsibilities to our colleagues

1. I will be helpful to other church workers. I will treat them with respect, courtesy and good faith.

2. I will appreciate what other people are doing in ministry by remembering them in prayer and encouraging them. I will respect the fact they are busy too and have commitments in other areas.

3. If conflicts do occur I will deal with them sensibly and do something about them. I will ask the appropriate people to help sort things out and seek reconciliation.

4. I will do something about colleagues who are not doing their jobs or who are behaving in an unethical way. I will use the appropriate channels to do this.

D. How we take care of ourselves

I will make sure I eat properly, get enough sleep and stay reasonably fit.

I will make sure I am always accountable to someone in ministry

I will make sure I have a support network in place.

I will make sure I participate in opportunities for spiritual growth.

I will make sure I participate in opportunities for in-service training.

I will make sure I have times of recreation, refreshment and renewal.

WHY HAVE A CODE?

Joe Trull and James Carter, in their book, *Ministerial Ethics*, spell out four good reasons for having a code of ethics:

1. Written codes of professional ethics spell out guidelines accepted collectively by peers.
2. They protect the profession from incompetent practitioners.
3. They support and protect individual members.
4. They define the nature of the profession.

"They are not simply rules for action. They identify the moral stress points within a profession and they present a model of a good professional."

Karen Lebaqz writes, "Rather than looking for specific guidelines for action in professional codes, they might be better understood as statements about the image of the profession and the character of the professionals".

A good youth ministry code of ethics will outline responsibilities to various people, and in so doing, present the aims of the youth minister to serve without compromising integrity. Such a statement will remind those in youth ministry of the network of relationships in which they work.

WRITING A CODE

When writing a Code of Ethics, the following pointers could be used:

1. Who is being called to account in the code? Is it just one person, or a number of people working alongside each other?
2. Who is being served? Whose welfare needs to be protected? (Not a simple question).
3. Who would be affected by a breach in ethical standards?
4. What are the points of tension for which expected moral standards need to be spelt out? Are there general issues faced by many people? Are there specific issues that need to be spelt out in local situations?
5. Who will ensure that accountability is provided for those covered by the code of ethics?