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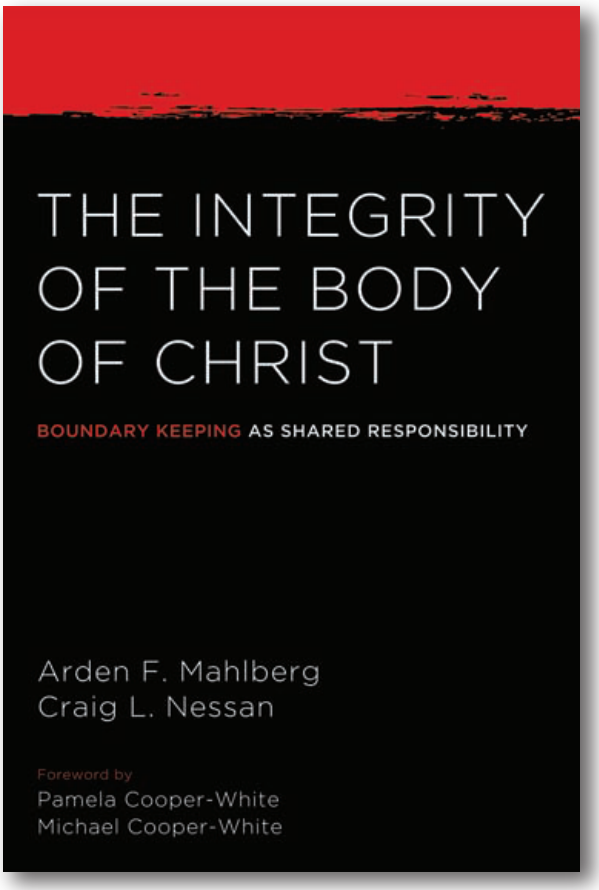
THE INTEGRITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST



BOUNDARY KEEPING AS SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Arden F. Mahlberg
Craig L. Nessan

Foreword by
Pamela Cooper-White
Michael Cooper-White

For religious communities to have integrity and credibility they must flourish as places of love and respect. Every aspect of church life is defined and protected by essential boundaries: boundaries around space, time, thought, speech, will, emotion, and behavior—both for clergy and church members. Lack of awareness and attention to boundary keeping diminishes the integrity of the church and harms its mission, whereas insight and vigilance about best practices lens freedom and energy to the calling of the church to care for others and to reach out to the world. In a flourishing Christian community, a wide array of boundaries must be recognized, celebrated, and navigated-from the boundaries that define and protect us as individual persons to role boundaries and the boundaries that define essential communal functions, such as worship.

This book is no conventional account of boundaries. It takes a comprehensive approach to the challenge of understanding and creating healthy boundaries. It applies the lessons from the emerging field of behavioral ethics to the rich and rewarding complexity of boundaries in church life, helping us to be more loving and responsible in how we think, speak, and act, so that the church can be true to its identity and mission.

"A meticulously crafted volume that addresses the complexities and subtleties of 'boundaries' experienced as the people of God engage in ministry. The theological perspective of the authors informs their analysis and proposed solutions to ensure that the Integrity of the Body of Christ remains intact as experienced in the daily interactions of the people of God."

—**ROBERT H. ALBERS,** Distinguished Visiting Professor of Pastoral Theology (retired), United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

"Nessan and Mahlberg go after an unglamorous topic—boundary keeping—and refashion it to attract the attention of any serious Christian. Dispelling the notion that boundaries are mostly about constraint, these two scholars take down the yellow police tape that often encircles our imagination. They open up whole new worlds for our understanding of what it means to live moral lives grounded in integrity."

—**PETER W. MARTY,** Pastor, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Davenport, IA

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The Integrity of the Body of Christ

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ARDEN F. MAHLBERG &
CRAIG L. NESSAN

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Contents

Foreword

In our current callings, we serve at historic institutions of theological education. On July 1, 1863, the bloodiest battle ever fought on U.S. soil took place on and around the campus of Gettysburg Seminary. In the previous days, Robert E. Lee and the Confederate army had crossed the Mason-Dixon line, the border between Maryland and Pennsylvania. Lee believed that his advance into northern territory would overwhelm Union forces, cower the civilian population, and lead to a swift victory and permanent division of the nation. The Civil War was all about borders and boundaries; it was about who would govern which territory, whether a *United* States would prevail or the young country would be divided into two or more loose federations of autonomous and largely independent states. Above all, it was about whether or not boundaries would forever be established between races—an elite and superior (white) class ruling it over an enslaved, rights-denied underclass of African Americans and presumably other people of color as well. Would whites be allowed at will to cross personal boundaries, lay hands and legal claims of "property" upon persons of color?

A few decades later, near the end of the nineteenth century, a different kind of boundary battle took place at the still young Union Seminary in the City of New York. Though it was founded by Presbyterians in 1836, some six decades later Union's leaders had to make a determination of where doctrinal lines would be drawn and who would ultimately govern the school. Upset with teachings by one of the school's faculty members, who embraced the radical notion that not everything in the Bible might be literally true and verbally inspired by God, church officials deemed his teachings heretical and demanded his release from the school. Standing on the principles of academic freedom, scholarly self-determination, and a commitment to embrace and honor a wide spectrum of beliefs, Union's leaders decided to declare their independence from the Presbyterian

Church and become a freestanding, independent, and broadly ecumenical school for the preparation and formation of ministers and other leaders in church and society.

Throughout their illustrious histories, these two great institutions have had to engage in continuing discernment (and often hotly contested, prolonged debates) about boundaries. How rigidly would theological and confessional borders be drawn? Who would be allowed to teach? Could women as well as men, persons of color as well as whites, be allowed to become students and even faculty and senior administrators? Who would determine the style of worship at chapel services, and who might be allowed to preside at such services? What would be the nature of the relationship with other schools? Would it serve seminaries well to join with colleges and universities as the movement for accreditation gained steam? Could our schools accept the constraints and careful governmental monitoring that ensues in becoming eligible to administer U.S. federal student loans? What policies would guide governing boards as they steward endowment funds? Are some promising investments "off limits" by virtue of company products or labor practices?

Over the course of human history, persons, families, tribes, organizations, and nations have recognized the necessity of setting and stewarding borders or boundaries—those places where one individual, group, community, or public entity ends and another begins. Establishing and tending boundaries requires careful attention and constant vigilance. Many boundaries are good; they protect persons, other creatures, and property from being overrun, abused, and denied their rightful place in the universe. Some boundaries, like those within which and for which the Confederacy was established, cannot be allowed to stand and must be torn down, if they are allowed to be set up in the first place. Since its inception, humankind has had to engage in discernment regarding boundaries: Which are good and which are bad? Where should they be drawn, and with what degree of clarity? How rigidly should they be enforced? How do those in power enforce boundaries of their own making, and how are just boundaries reestablished when tyranny and abuse reign? Currently, our nation and others with the greatest resources are engaged in heated debates about how national borders should be monitored and patrolled, opened or closed. In sharp contrast to the spirit of the Statue of Liberty in New York's harbor, whose torch beckons and invites in the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," some current politicians' campaign slogans shout, "Build a wall; keep them out!"

This is a book about stewarding borders, establishing, tending, and sometimes changing boundaries. Its authors—Prof. Craig Nessan and Dr. Arden Mahlberg—bring to bear their collective wisdom on a vast array of topics related to personal and professional boundaries. Each author in his own way has assumed a *calling* in which boundary tending lies at the very heart of the profession. A pastor, professor, and longtime seminary academic dean (Nessan) and a practicing clinical psychologist (Mahlberg) lead readers gently but insistently down a path into some of the most complex and vexing dimensions faced on a daily basis by their peers in many professions. Heeding their own counsel that boundary keeping is a communal endeavor, they reach beyond their own experience and insights to draw heavily upon the wisdom of others; readers will do well to follow the many tributaries that lead to other resources cited in the extensive footnotes.

The book is deeply *theological*; it makes the claim that God cares about how we relate to one another as individuals and communities. The Hebrew Bible portrays creation as a divine boundary-establishing activity. At creation, God "separated" things and beings. Where there was only an amorphous glob of borderless nothingness (*tohu va bohu* in Hebrew), God drew boundary lines between day and night, darkness and light, earth and sky, plants and animals, male and female. When boundaries were crossed, pain, enmity, and alienation occurred through the eating of fruit from a tree "across the border." But when some boundaries became oppressive and no longer served God's beloved, they had to be crossed. Jesus and his followers got in trouble when they transgressed some of the overly rigid religious laws that had become death-dealing rather than life-giving. St. Paul declared that in the overarching unity in Jesus Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." (Gal 3:28) Explicitly Christian at its core, the book's insights and practical implications will nevertheless be relevant to readers of any faith tradition, and to those who ascribe to no spiritual creeds or religious beliefs.

As educators engaged in the formation of future "ministers" (we use the term broadly to embrace a wide range of vocations in which today's seminary graduates live out their callings), we are well aware that our institutions' and ecclesial bodies' requirements for "boundary training" courses or workshops are often met by sighs, groans, and eyerolls from our students. Such reactions frequently reveal resistance to engaging with difficult and challenging topics, some of which touch sensitive nerves within fledgling religious professionals. A significant percentage of

students (especially women) have themselves been victims of boundary violations at the hands of family members, neighbors, strangers, teachers, clergy, or others least suspected of such crimes. Some who find their way to our schools have been on the offender side of a boundary violation and must come to terms with their culpability, which can provoke profound guilt and should result in serious self-examination regarding fitness for a calling in which temptations and opportunities to repeat such behavior will appear at every turn. Mahlberg and Nessan walk the fine line between a legalistic approach and an overly tolerant stance that has all too often marked the church's way of treating boundaries and boundary violations. Later chapters offer quite specific guidance on a vast array of issues that every person will encounter with some regularity, with particular focus on those unique to religious and therapeutic professionals involved in what prior generations of pastoral theologians commonly referred to as "the cure of souls."

The authors recognize that boundary tending is *contextual*. In our work with seminarians, clergy, and congregations over the decades, we have often witnessed colleagues get into trouble as they move from one ministry to another. Such troubles arise from a failure to recognize that boundaries are drawn differently in different places. Whereas unannounced drop-in pastoral calls may be appreciated and even expected in some contexts (we have tagged along with a "community promoter" on her round of spontaneous visits in Central American *campesino* villages), in other settings such a practice will be met with horrified looks and a chilly reception at the door. Just as preachers must exegete a text of Scripture (that is, must draw out of a passage its original meaning and what it might mean for us today), so pastoral counselors and other helping professionals must exegete their context to determine what words and actions are appropriate in that particular setting. Being a careful student of "where the boundaries lie" becomes particularly acute as one engages in cross-cultural ministry. As one example, direct eye contact in some cultures is the norm for conveying respect and authenticity; in other contexts such eyeball-to-eyeball exchange is regarded as presumptuous, offensive, or even flirtatious, particularly with a person of the opposite gender.

While every context undergoes change over time, the landscape for professionals has undergone seismic shifts in recent years with the advent of smartphones, with the dizzying array of social media, and with other developments made possible by the electronic revolution. Should one

"friend" students, parishioners, or members of a youth group on Facebook? Do I widely disseminate my mobile phone number? How does one "keep sabbath" and "turn off and tune out" from time to time when serving among folks, who may launch search and rescue operations if a text message does not receive response within minutes? If Robert Frost's legendary poetic assertion is true, that "good fences make good neighbors," how does one even begin to conceive of building fences in the cyberspace neighborhood? No book can anticipate every boundary-tending matter that will be encountered in daily life and the exercise of a profession, but this one offers enough of a road map to help readers avoid many danger zones.

Boundary tending, as we have suggested, is deeply theological and highly contextual. While, as the authors delineate so compellingly, it is communal, it is also profoundly *personal*. Each of us brings our own history and unique set of life experiences to bear in our relationships and professional responsibilities. While there are no inherently gender-specific ways of responding to events and occurrences, socialization tends to shape women and men in different ways; this too varies by cultural context. Among the many gifts offered in the chapters that follow is a heavy dosage of attention to the whole matter of self-care. Often ignored if not outright derided by ecclesiastical officials frustrated at hearing anecdotal stories of the rare clergy who refuse to respond to a true emergency on a day off, this area should receive the kind of careful and compassionate attention the authors signal. While the "wounded healer" is an apt description of all who engage in spiritual and therapeutic callings, there are limits to just how much hurt and pain one can endure and manage in a redemptive fashion that may serve others.

Among the boundaries most difficult to reinforce among those of us in the helping professions are those that pertain to respecting our own human limitations and temptations, as well as the power conferred by our professional role. We hold a *fiduciary* trust—from the Latin word *fides*, which means both trust and faith! If airline crews and long-distance truck drivers must abide by strict limitations of time spent in the cockpit and cabin or behind the wheel, should enforced periods of rest and renewal not be even more rigidly monitored for those whose sharp retort or careless comments may cause someone in our care physical, psychological, and *spiritual* harm? No less than is the case for other professionals entrusted with high-level responsibilities, personal well-being and stewarding of the self is a life-and-death matter for those of us who

engage in spiritual and mental caretaking. Some boundary crossings may appear mutual, but it is always the responsibility of the professional to maintain the appropriate line of familiarity—to cross sexual boundaries with a member of one's congregation, or to exploit a parishioner financially, is not only boundary crossing but violation.

Nessan and Mahlberg herein offer a solid foundation on which to build personal and communal codes of ethics. Good communicators that they are, the authors set forth a broad range of issues in an accessible manner devoid of "insider language." Even as the book will serve well in the classroom and professional gatherings of the clergy or counselors, so it can provoke lively conversations by parish councils as they set policies and fulfill their responsibilities to ensure that congregations are safe places for all. Doctors Mahlberg and Nessan invite us into honest and open conversations about matters that, despite receiving heightened focus in recent years, merit more frequent and in-depth examination. May such conversations flourish and help us all develop and sustain integrity and wholeness in our callings!

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Introduction

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt 22:37–40).

We wrote this book after years of hearing people—clergy, seminarians, and their spouses—ask for a comprehensive resource on boundaries in congregational life. We wrote this book both for people who have violated the boundaries of others and for people whose boundaries have been violated. Readers have wanted to know how to create common language and how to establish common understanding about boundaries. They want to develop a shared recognition of what boundaries are and of how to think through boundary issues. Clergy and seminarians want to know how to speak up to insensitive colleagues within the seminary or church context.

While this is a book about boundaries and boundary keeping, it is, more fundamentally, a book about love. Perhaps there is something paradoxical about that. While boundaries sound like constraints and boundary keeping sounds constricting, boundaries do far more than constrain. Boundaries serve as doorways opening to wonderful experiences of love that are not otherwise possible. Only within the safety, mutual accountability, and permission of love is free expression of our most creative selves possible. When we monitor the health of our relationships with persons, things, and functions (including with our own roles), we find that some actions build relationships, some actions harm relationships (or have potential to do so), and some (neutral) actions have little effect, one way or the other, on our relationships.

We can group our actions into good, bad, or neutral in terms of their effects on our relationships. We might also color code our actions, just as traffic lights are color coded. A red light means, stop! A red action is one that if we do not stop it will do damage, or at least damage is possible. A green traffic light means, go! Do these things! They are good for relationships. Think of things that are good for a marriage, for example. Successful couples are willing to follow green-light practices and avoid red-light practices.

A yellow light means proceed with caution and be ready to stop. Professional drivers who see a yellow light want to know if it is fresh or stale. How long has the light been yellow? In relationships, yellow-light issues are those that require caution because you are being motivated by feelings, urges, and desires that may or may not be appropriate, may be helpful or may be harmful. Relationships succeed because people let green trump yellow most of the time—not necessarily all the time but much of the time. That is, we do not let our feelings dictate whether we will go to work in the morning, or whether we are willing to do what the job calls for. But relationships also succeed when folks are willing to slow down and prepare to stop at a stale yellow.

Boundary keeping is surprisingly difficult. You would think that good intentions would lead to constructive behavior. Most of us believe that because our motives are good, what we do is therefore justified. Or we think that when we do "the wrong thing" but nothing bad happens, it was not a bad decision. There is plenty of evidence that most of us want to do the right thing, but it has long been recognized that doing the right thing is not always that easy. Fortunately, today we have the benefit of some helpful research that we can apply to our own boundary keeping and that of our congregations and colleagues in ministry, whether ordained or laity.

Paul decried the fact that he did not understand why he acted contrary to what he wished he would do (Rom 7:15). Since World War II, social scientists have made laudable attempts at understanding how it is that people commit atrocities on the one hand, as well as how some people are able to do the right thing under adverse and threatening circumstances. In our approach to boundary keeping in this book, we hope to apply some of the things that have been learned so we can all do better, at least with boundary keeping in congregational life. Of course, we hope that the benefit will spread beyond our congregational lives, but we

are confining our scope in this book to congregational relationships and functions.

Within congregational life, we set out to address with the broadest possible all relationships with persons, things, and roles. We do this because it is the health of the entire system that best shapes the health of the individual parts. For example, while the discussion of boundaries in the church rightfully gives prominent attention to sexual boundaries, especially the responsibility of clergy to safeguard from harm all those with whom they relate, the context that supports and enforces this involves focusing on the well-being of the other rather than how the other person can help you have pleasurable experiences. This means never objectifying others, not seeing them as a means to an end, and never misusing power at all, not just in the area of sexual gratification.

In our discussion we start with the fact that our judgment and decision making can only be as good as our awareness. We cannot respect a boundary that we do not recognize, nor will we effectively counteract an unhealthy personal motive that we do not recognize. Our awareness also shapes our sense of what is important and what is not important. We quickly make the point that once we start looking for them, we find boundaries everywhere, important boundaries, in all aspects of congregational life. We will examine the factors, such as time pressure, stress, and social and cultural dynamics, that routinely limit our awareness. We will look at ways to expand and clarify our awareness so we can act more lovingly, even in stressful circumstances.

We want it understood at the outset that boundary-keeping decisions in congregational life, which protect the well-being of others, can jeopardize one's own self-interest. To take a common example, we all want to be liked; in fact, it feels like we "need" to be liked. This is fine until that need overpowers boundary reasoning, which it easily can do.[1] Keeping and promoting good boundary practices may risk the loss of social support, the loss of friends, the loss of support from coworkers or colleagues, and even the loss of one's employment. In more minor circumstances, our setting boundaries may diminish our freedom and pleasure. Healthy interpersonal boundary keeping can bring loneliness instead of social resources that are precious to many people, especially clergy. Thus, to be a good boundary keeper one must be ready to sustain loss of resources and be comfortable with vulnerability. Virtually

1. Kerns, "Why Good Leaders Do Bad Things."

all boundary keeping involves loss, and virtually all boundary violations involve the acquisition of resources of one form or another, including the resource of power. Jesus was right: we must become willing to lose things for the sake of love, even love of self. In the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:18–13) Jesus notes that "the cares of the world" choke the word of God to the point that it does not yield the fruits of love. These concerns can dim our awareness of the well-being of others. However, we will discover that when we are willing to take a loss on one level, other very important things become possible—for others and sometimes even for ourselves. We will invite you at various points in this process to reflect on your own motives, which can conflict with your own awareness of and prioritizing the needs of others.

How can we possibly counteract these strong forces? We bring to this discussion insights from the relatively new field of behavioral ethics, which is the scientific study of why we act ethically and why and how we act unethically. Most of this research has been done in the field of business. The task for the individual is the same regardless of the setting. We must live more consciously and intentionally, not letting the perverse forces of the psyche or the external organizational culture control us. We must recognize and understand what we are dealing with when we try to love consistently, one moment to the next, in all circumstances and with all people.

As we will discuss at various points throughout the book, living ethically requires that we learn when not to trust our own judgment and what to do instead. Our judgment, according to the research, is often shaped by forces beyond our conscious awareness, in the deep, primitive parts of the mind, where urges and desires activate our outward behaviors, sometimes before conscious decision making can even begin to occur. Ethical decision making is a much slower process than what it takes to generate feelings and urges. Often by the time the conscious mind gets involved, the train has left the station, and the conscious mind is left to construct a rationale for what we are already doing. The result is often self-deception rather than self-revelation.[2] The ego wants to preserve a positive image of the self. So researchers have come to characterize our ethics as being egocentric in nature.[3] Much of what we hear in boundary and ethics discussions is actually ego-based ethical reasoning, even when

2. Tenbrunsel and Messick, "Ethical Fading."
3. Epley and Caruso, "Egocentric Ethics."

it is couched as being based on compassion. For example, a pastor who is uncomfortable with conflict or distress in others will try to justify not insulting a person by requiring a background check. While it sounds caring to do so, it avoids the self-interest that it serves for the pastor.

When we do engage the conscious, rational process of ethical thinking with awareness of our own urges and desires, the result can be what Bazerman, Tenbrunsel, and Wade-Benzoi brilliantly characterize in the title of their article as "negotiating with yourself and losing: making decisions with competing internal preferences."[4] Bazerman and Tenbrunsel note: "Behavioral ethics research supports the argument that most people want to act ethically. Yet we still find ourselves engaging in unethical behavior because of biases that influence our decisions—biases of which we may not be fully aware. These biases affect not only our own behavior, but also our ability to see the unethical behavior of others."[5] So in many cases of decision making about ethical issues, there is very little internal negotiating going on. The self-interest of the ego takes off and musters the support of the rest of the self before our ethical, rational self even knows what is happening. As the phenomenon of ethical fading reveals, the ethical dimension of the self often is defined out of the situation entirely. Sometimes it is stress, especially time pressure, which limits our awareness and excludes ethical considerations. In order to get real negotiating to occur among the various parts of the self, we have to change our relationship to what occurs inside ourselves. In this book we will make this point both early and often.

We can become more consciously aware of what is going on inside ourselves, in order that these events have less control over us. One powerful approach we recommend is some form of meditation or prayer designed to increase awareness. This is different from what many people do for meditation when the motivation is relaxation. Relaxation can help with some things that seriously restrict awareness and thereby also ethical decision making, such as stress and time pressure. On the other hand, relaxation and stress release without increased awareness can simply assist a person in persisting with a life that is not well considered, in the same way that various forms of "numbing out" relaxation do. The purpose of increased awareness is greater self-control and freedom of choice, no longer being controlled by unhealthy habits, urges, or desires.

4. Bazerman et al., "Negotiating with Yourself and Losing."
5. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots*, 99.

With comprehensive awareness, we notice our urges and desires and how they contrast with our deeply held values. We have awareness of the present, past, and future. We have awareness of self, others, and God simultaneously.

Behavioral ethics researchers have some recommendations that have guided us in writing this book. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, for example, conclude from their research that organizations will benefit from standards of practice that identify separately what is unethical from what is ethically desirable.[6] We will highlight how our biblical heritage is a resource for the church to do just that. We will pair "thou shalt not" with a positively stated alternative. In our final chapter we will summarize recommended practices. Bazerman and Tenbrunsel recommend a zero-tolerance policy for unethical behavior in order to reduce uncertainty. Furthermore, they also recommend continuing to move the standards to higher levels, which challenges us to grow ethically. Without that, as their research suggests, there is a tendency for standards of conduct to degrade—something we can identify also in the church. We note how Jesus raised the standards of the Ten Commandments. While there can be value in seeing the gospel as relief from the law, in fact Jesus raised the bar considerably in characterizing the alternative kingdom of God—particularly in the Sermon on the Mount.[7]

Bazerman and Tenbrunsel also note the following risk factors for unethical behavior within organizations: uncertainty in the system, isolation, and time pressure. Many of our churches and church leaders rate high on these risk factors. We recommend, as does the research, deliberately referring to the ethical standards in routine ways, in order to keep them in our conscious awareness. We also recommend particular practices that can help accomplish this same goal. Mary C. Gentile adds another useful approach from the business realm.[8] She teaches people to practice speaking up when they encounter ethically questionable practices, in order to increase the likelihood that theirs will become more

6. Ibid.

7. The authors choose to employ the term "kingdom" as the primary translation of the New Testament word *basilea.* Readers should note that in many places we employ the term "shalom" as a synonym for "kingdom." While "kingdom" may seem antiquated to some, it preserves the comprehensive claim and political character of what Jesus meant by God's kingdom activity in the world. In the New Testament, the kingdom is not a place but a mode of God's transforming presence and rule over all creation.

8. Gentile, *Giving Voice to Values.*

ethical communities. As Gentile notes, confidence that we can address unethical behavior in others and in our organizations will help us be more consciously aware of the ethical violations happening around us. This makes good sense psychologically. Her approach is elegant and brilliant. Gentile and others make the observation that the people who stand up to unethical behavior are people who were taught to expect that they would have to at some point in their lives. For Christians charged with living the alterative kingdom of God, how could it be otherwise?

James L. Bailey speaks of the alternative kingdom of God as a "contrast community."[9] The findings of behavioral ethics support the value of making explicit the contrasts between self-interest and best practices in our decision making. We recommend that readers begin to practice examining their ethical lives according to best practices while reading this book. When making decisions that affect others, ask yourself these questions: (1) What do I want, based on my feelings and desires? (2) Why do I want that? (3) What would it do for me? (4) How strongly do I desire that? (5) How important does it feel to me? (6) Why do I feel so strongly? (7) What best practices are called for and why they are they needed? and (8)Why are these best practices so important? By asking these questions before engaging in potentially unethical behavior, we let the rational, ethical part of the brain have a better chance of influencing our behavior. Throughout the book, and especially in our final chapter, we offer best practices as a resource to help guide us in good decision making.

It is hard to live in contrast with our environment, especially the contemporary social environment. We are strongly influenced by the social norms around us. For this reason behavioral ethicists recognize the need to create an informal culture of high ethical standards in our organizations (congregations, in the case of this book) in all aspects of their functioning. Formal codes of ethics and conduct, while essential, have less sway on us than the informal culture. You, our reader, are co-architect of the informal culture of your congregation and in the larger church—you, your coworkers, friends, colleagues and peers. We welcome your interest and participation in helping make our congregations more healthy and vibrant centers of love.

We express our heartfelt appreciation to those who reviewed our manuscript and offered constructive suggestions that have enhanced our work: Robert Albers, Wayne Menking, and Gary Schoener. We also

9. Bailey, *Contrast Community*.

are deeply grateful to Michael Cooper-White, President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, and Pamela Cooper-White, Christiane Brooks Johnson Professor of Psychology and Religion at Union Theological Seminary, for sharing their insights in the foreword and offering constructive advice for improving the book. We also offer thanks to the many people whose work we have built upon (as represented in references and bibliography) as well as to countless unnamed others from whom we have learned. The authors express our special gratitude to Halcyon Bjornstad for her assistance in proofreading and indexing. The editors and staff of Cascade Books have been excellent to work with in the editing and publication process, and we are grateful to each of them. The authors especially desire to express thanks to their wives: Arden to his wife, Linda Mahlberg, for her patience and support through the process of devoting many hours to this book; Craig to his wife, Cathy Nessan, for her steadfastness and support. We dedicate this book to those who have requested a resource like this, in the hope that it will contribute to forward movement for an ethical church. We especially dedicate this book to our children, whose generation calls us to accountability for bequeathing to them a church that more adequately demonstrates the integrity necessary to serve as a life-giving community for them, their peers, and future generations: Nathaniel and Nora Mahlberg; Benjamin, Nathaniel, Sarah, Andrew, Jessica, and Mary Nessan.

PART 1

Defining and Protecting Integrity through Boundaries

1

The Necessity of Boundaries for Creating and Sustaining Identity and Effective Mission

SCENARIO ONE: PASTOR A AND PASTOR B

Early in her ministry at Grace Church, Pastor B. began to visit members who were unable to attend church. She was the new Associate Pastor and was eager to meet everyone. The pastor rang the doorbell at one of her first calls. A frail yet spirited elderly woman came to the door. "Are you Dottie?" Pastor B asked politely. She introduced herself and asked to come in. When they sat down, she said: "Everyone has told me, 'You will enjoy getting to know Dottie.'"

"Actually, Pastor, my name is Dorothy. I've always loved that name. It was my grandmother's name, but everyone calls me Dottie."

"Well," replied Pastor B, "Dorothy is a beautiful name. And, actually, I prefer to be called 'Pastor Blanchard, if you don't mind."

Pastor B. realized that she was in the same boat as Dorothy. Her name was Susan Blanchard. When the call committee decided to extend her the call to be Grace Church's first Associate Pastor to work with Pastor Alvez, a member of the committee declared excitedly, "Now we have a 'Pastor A' and a 'Pastor B!'" Everyone laughed. But the names stuck! When Pastor Blanchard raised her disquiet in private with Pastor Alvez, he brushed it off. He thought it was cute. She, however, felt uneasy, like she was not in control of her own identity. Should she assert herself over this issue with her new colleague and congregation? "Pastor B," in

contrast to "Pastor A," was by definition second-best. It was not that she needed to be first, but according to her understanding this was supposed to be a nonhierarchical copastorate.

Pastor Blanchard came to discover that many of the members of Grace and also many members of the local community had been given nicknames by others, like "Stub," "Baldy," "Skinny," and "Nutsy." When she began to inquire in private, many of them did not like their nicknames but nonetheless had resigned themselves to them.

"She'll always be Dottie to me," the church secretary said when Pastor Blanchard told her about Dorothy's preference. Names convey messages and communicate images. "Dorothy" does not evoke the same meanings and images as "Dottie." Pastor Blanchard did not like the implications of being labeled "Pastor B."

Who has the right to decide what one is called? This is a boundary issue of great significance. The question about who has the right to define one's core identity in life leads us into the central theme of this book: the myriad boundaries questions we encounter in Christian community. Naming others can be a form of domination. Conquering cultures routinely rename those they have come to dominate, instead of using the native people's own names for themselves. Cult leaders often rename their members as part of asserting their control. Bullies engage in name-calling to intimidate their victims. One of the first steps leading to dehumanization and violence is stealing the name of another person or group and substituting a degrading epithet (for example, "cockroach" or "vermin") for their valued name.

As Pastor Blanchard considered the issue of naming more fully, she became disturbed by the realization that she, Pastor Alvez, and their clergy colleagues had been educated, trained, and socialized to label parishioners. As Pastor Alvez was orienting Pastor Blanchard, he said: "We do have three alligators in the congregation and one clergy wannabe." He proceeded to identify the people he felt had a history of criticizing their pastors in ways that did not seem could ever be satisfied except by their removal; he also talked about those members who sometimes could be satisfied with specific things but who were preoccupied with figuring out how they could always get what they wanted. This type of labeling (alligators, clergy killers, and clergy wannabes) reduces ambiguity and complexity. It makes us feel like we have got the person figured out. But once we have categorized another, we see and relate to the label and lose

site of the person in all of their rich complexity. Therefore, labeling is a violation of a person's identity boundary.

BOUNDARIES, BOUNDARIES EVERYWHERE!

Boundaries are fundamental structures that establish and preserve identity. Boundaries protect the essential nature of things, while also contributing to their definition.[1] *A guiding question for respecting boundaries is, who does this belong to?* The Ten Commandments begin with an identity boundary. We are commanded to know and acknowledge who God is, as well as to remain clear about who God is not. It is God alone who defines God's nature, not us. We are neither to construct our own image of God nor to behave as if anything other than God is God. We are not to use the name of God in ways that diminish God's being or identity. We are to use God's name to preserve God's being and identity for us and for others. God's identity belongs to God, not us.

Similarly, we are also commanded to respect the identity of others. Bearing false witness is one form of creating a false image of the other. This includes saying a person's name with a negative inflection. We are also enjoined to respect our own identity as a person created in God's image.[2] Jesus encouraged each one of us, "Let your light shine!" In the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids, when the women who let their lamps go out came to join the party, they were told, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you" (Matt 25:12). Attitudes and practices that protect and nurture our core identities are essential to living as Christ calls us to live.

One of our deepest longings is to express who we are: to be known, understood, and accepted just as we are. When other people project their own images upon us and have agendas for who they want us to be, we feel unsafe and withhold who we really are. By adolescence, most children who are still creating stories or artwork as a form of self-expression have stopped showing them to anyone else. It is so easy to form our own images of others and to justify them to fulfill our own agendas. For example, a pastor might peg a young person as a future pastor and become overinvested in that outcome. The young person would not want to disappoint such an influential person in his or her life. When others act like they are authorities about who we are, on some level we feel we are unsafe, even if

1. Cf. Olsen and Devor, *Saying No to Say Yes*, 4–7.
2. Harbaugh et al., *Covenants and Care*, 119–21.

their image of us is flattering: "I can tell that you are the kind of girl who will make a man very happy." On the other hand, when others criticize us, they attack our very being. One's identity is unsafe in either case. Who does one's identity belong to?

While we are quick to form impressions and to set agendas for others, a part of us longs to know others deeply for who they are. Allowing the self to be "self" and the other to be "other" establishes the delightful conditions for the meeting of an I and a Thou. How we treat a stranger respectfully becomes the model for how we treat each and every person, since here we approach the other without presuming already to know who they are. We ask their name and invite them to tell us about themselves. We err in such encounters, however, if we too quickly form an impression, thereby creating a false image, one based upon our own construction. Exploring who others are in deliberate conversation by listening to them gives us the benefit of an entirely different way of seeing things, something wholly "other" from our own hasty perceptions. While the impulse of the anxious mind is to reject what is foreign and different, the secure and open mind responds to differences with respect, fascination, and curiosity.

Respecting boundaries is so essential to the spiritual life that it is a key part of the prayer Jesus taught his followers: "and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who have trespassed against us." This is territorial language, the language of boundaries and borders. While the translation can be "sins," "debts," or "trespasses," we note that the major thrust of the Ten Commandments has to do with disturbing or violating established boundaries, which the word "trespass" reflects.

Various types of boundaries are associated with different parts of our being, as we will explore in the chapters ahead. We have a physical boundary that protects our health, which, if violated, will result in death. We are commanded not to kill. Life does not belong to us—it belongs to God. It is not ours to take. We are not to take from others their possessions or their loved ones. We are even commanded not to steal with our imaginations—not to covet or desire what others have. Does it not feel like a kind of theft when we have something precious and sense that someone else wants to possess it instead of being happy for us? "Do not commit adultery!" Again hear the warning about a boundary violation. With marital infidelity, you are not just going where you do not belong (even if invited); you are stealing from your own marriage what rightly belongs to it—vital energy whose absence damages the marriage, even if

the partner is not consciously aware.[3] We are also commanded to protect the boundary around sacred time—to keep the Sabbath holy, uncontaminated by thoughts about work, outside responsibilities, or the secular values of the dominant culture that distract us from the sacred values of the culture of God.[4]

The commandments have to do with respecting boundaries. So they tell us what not to do instead of telling us what to do. Thereby, they delineate boundaries in ways that would not be as clear, if the same content were merely put in positive terms. For example, "Do not covet what belongs to your neighbor," clarifies a boundary. Taking the same content and putting it positively could translate as: "Be grateful for what you have." This may communicate somewhat the same idea but misses the lesson about boundaries: To whom does this belong? Put even more positively, God could have commanded us to be happy for our neighbor for the good things they have to enjoy. Again this surely is a part of what it means to fully love our neighbor, but it misses the truth about boundaries.

Beyond the discipline of boundary keeping, translating the commandments positively as did Jesus *builds bridges across boundaries* that would not be possible without first respecting the boundaries for what they are. The commandment to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30) builds a bridge to God; God is accessible and can be totally engaged. To "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) reveals the bridge not only between people, but between us and Christ. To recognize that how we treat the least important person (Matt 25:40) is the same as how we treat Christ requires both a boundary and a bridge. Boundaries beget bridges. Respecting the boundaries defined in the Ten Commandments, while adding love, strengthens each person's uniqueness, their capacity to love, serve, celebrate, and create, giving us the conditions ripe for spiritual community.

Spiritual community depends on bridges between and among us. Paul taught the followers of Jesus to understand themselves as a mystical body, the very body of Christ. Each one has a unique and important function that when linked to others is like the complex organism of the

3. Harbaugh et al., *Covenants and Care*, 123–24.

4. Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, chap. 1.

human body.[5] To live as members of Christ's body requires both the ability to be a unique person, on the one hand, and the capacity to unite with others without damaging them, on the other. The standards are high and the challenge significant.

We all know what it feels like to be violated. If you have ever had a purse stolen or your car broken into, you have felt violated. If you have ever had people say hurtful things about you to others or misrepresent you, as happens in gossip, you have felt a boundary violation. Gossip is by nature problematic when it comes to boundaries. Barbara J. Blodgett defines *gossip* as "informal, evaluative discourse about someone not present who is a member of the speaker's social group. These features—the informality, the absence of the person being talked about, the evaluative or judgmental nature of the discourse, and the relational context—are ones I take to be necessary and sufficient features of gossip."[6] Perhaps you have experienced even worse violations. It is now widely recognized that abusive violations of a person's integrity can wound that person in profound ways for a very long time.[7] As a consequence of abuse, parts of the self can be cut off and the individual can turn against themselves or others. Among the many consequences, the abuse can so negatively impact a person's relationship with God that it impairs their capacity to trust the gospel.[8]

A car that has a few things wrong with it can run safely at forty-five miles an hour. When you try to drive it ninety miles per hour, however, it will perform badly and may even be dangerous. The demands of the godly life are at least that challenging. Every part of the vehicle needs to be in top condition. Therefore we can cultivate awareness of and care even for subtle boundaries, not just the obvious ones. As scientists learn more about the impact of boundary violations on our lives, they coin new terms: "microviolations," "micro-insults," and "micro-incursions."[9] These are the kinds of behaviors that are not easily detected but do have significant impact on our sense of safety, our willingness to disclose ourselves freely, and our ability to do our best work. These relatively small, apparently minor, violations damage our spirit, especially when they are

5. Nessan, *Shalom Church*, 34–36.
6. Blodgett, *Lives Entrusted*, 88.
7. See Fortune, *Love Does No Harm*, 35, for reflections on the meaning of "harm."
8. Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?*, 110–11.
9. Cf. Sue, *Microaggressions and Marginality*.

persistent. What we would call toxic environments at work, home, or church result from accumulating subtle violations. Such events seem so small that people can disagree about whether one person is being overly sensitive or the other person is being overly insensitive. Is it something, or is it nothing?

Before mechanical sensors of air quality were invented, coal miners would bring a caged canary with them into the mine, because canaries are more sensitive to dangerous gasses than humans. As long as the canary was singing, the miners were fine. But as soon as the canary stopped singing, the miners knew to get out fast. Like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, some people are more sensitive than the rest of us when it comes to toxicity in the psychological and spiritual environment. These persons are more strongly affected by attitudes, language, and behaviors that are actual boundary violations, though these violations may not be so obvious to others. Others might regard these people as being thin-skinned or overly sensitive, especially with regard to behavior that seems to have become the norm. People who grew up in family systems where boundaries were not respected can become numb to violations of their own boundaries and to their violating the boundaries of others.[10] The sensors inside us need to be cleaned, repaired, and activated to their full capacity.

How many rabbis and priests in Jesus's time had some minor, nagging qualms about money changing in the temple? Undoubtedly there were some, but most would have been shocked by Jesus's bold assertion that the integrity of the temple was being violated by commercial activity that had become routinized. Habituation dulls our capacity to sense harmful elements. As rust weakens iron, so microviolations weaken the spirit and impair our capacity to do God's work, especially when they are allowed to continue unchecked. Attending to micro-issues proactively allows us to get better and better at Christ-like community. We will not "let our light shine," as Jesus urged us, if we fear someone around us will disrespect or invalidate us.[11]

Respecting others involves a sense of the sacred. The apostle Paul tells us that the human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). My body is not wholly mine. We are advised to approach the body as sacred space. Thomas Merton also spoke about the sanctity of human

10. Halstead, *From Stuck to Unstuck*, chap. 3.

11. Bailey, *Contrast Community*, chap. 3.

subjectivity.[12] Our subjectivity is central to who we are. It is the experience of interior dwelling that we have been given, and which we create and occupy. It includes our attitudes, values, impressions, perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and thoughts. It also includes our sacred experiences, entrusted to us by the Holy One. We treat our own subjectivity as being sacred, when we do not contaminate our state of consciousness through negativity toward self or others.

Dorothy accurately detected that her identity boundary had been violated when people renamed her instead of granting her the simple courtesy of asking her how she wished to be called. She respected her boundary by telling Pastor Blanchard how she wished to be called but failed to protect her identity boundary with others, perhaps sensing that her preference would not be respected. The result: Dorothy was not as fully at home in Christian community as she might have been. Nor was Pastor Blanchard, who also chose not to make an issue of her moniker after she failed to get the support of Pastor Alvez. Because of his expressed attitude, Pastor Blanchard faced the risk of alienating him and others in the congregation simply by exercising the right to choose her own name. The result? She also became tentative in other areas of self-expression. She treated those people differently, whom Pastor Alvez labeled as alligators and clergy wannabes, interpreting their behavior otherwise than the behavior of those not so labeled. Even microviolations have real consequences for the body of Christ.

PROTECTING AND PRESERVING THE IDENTITY AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Boundary issues are pervasive in the life of the church. Often when we hear the word, "boundary," we think chiefly, if not exclusively, about sexual boundaries in ministry. God knows that maintaining clear and proactive sexual boundaries is an imperative of the first order for healthy ministry.[13] The extent and magnitude of sexual boundary violations throughout the Christian churches has permanently harmed countless victims and their families—women, men, and children—each one precious to God. The failure of the churches to hold leaders accountable for sexual abuse and to remove offenders from public service has further

12. Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, chap. 2.
13. Cf. Hopkins and Laaser, eds., *Restoring the Soul of a Church.*

complicated the church's integrity. Moreover, these abuses have brought scandal and suspicion to everything the church does. This book certainly advocates for vigilance and accountability in maintaining and respecting sexual boundaries at every level of the church's life—beginning with the ethical responsibilities of the clergy.[14]

At the same time that we insist on clarity about sexual boundaries, in this book we extend the argument for wise boundaries to encompass a broad array of church practices by *including all church members* (laity, lay staff, and clergy) and *every dimension of human life* (thought, word, and deed). For church professionals not to exploit church members for their own ends is only the beginning. In virtually every human encounter and human activity in the life of the church, we either express the identity of the church by living according to the values of God's kingdom or not. Are we being the church, or are we being something else? There are necessary boundaries that are rightly observed, if we are to relate to one another with the respect due to those made in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. What is more, it is crucial that we recognize and tend these interpersonal boundaries for the sake of preserving and safeguarding the integrity of the church's core mission of bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world in word and deed.

Boundaries can be detected at every human interface. As we have already seen, there are boundaries that involve "naming" and "labeling" persons. Furthermore, there are many boundaries involving the use of language in appropriate and edifying ways. There are boundaries involving inflection of voice and innuendo of speech. There are boundaries entailed in written communication, both private and public: handwritten notes, newsletter announcements, professional correspondence, e-mails, messages social networks, blogs, text messages, and a host of other electronic means. There are boundaries involving propriety and respect in the assembly for Christian worship and at other church gatherings for congregational, council, and committee meetings. There are boundaries involved in childcare and youth ministry. How we do these things with integrity as church will be different than how others might do them in secular society.

Pastors must follow accepted professional practices in visitation, counseling, and all other private meetings with people. There are boundaries involving a wide range of public behaviors: for example, what one

14. Cf. Jung and Stephans, eds., *Professional Sexual Ethics.*

buys and where one purchases it, what movies one attends and which DVDs one rents, or whether one drinks alcohol in public. Pastoral ministry is public in a way that requires careful attention to boundary crossings that might compromise the effectiveness of the pastoral role and the church's ministry.[15] Maintaining clear boundaries can assist all members of the church to preserve clarity about roles, avoiding dual relationships and role confusion. We will go so far in this book as to suggest that we maintain proper boundaries by reflecting not only on our words and actions but even on how we 'think about' others in a salutary way. This is only a beginning list of how defining boundaries affects our life together with others in the church.

Because the range of issues involving boundaries is so broad, it is important to offer a working definition of the term 'boundaries'. *Boundaries protect the essential nature of persons and things, while at the same time contributing to their definition. Boundaries are therefore necessary for the faithful expression of identity. In the life of the church, boundaries are intentional limits placed on thoughts, words, and deeds to safeguard the protection of persons and to guard and protect the integrity of the church's identity and mission. Furthermore, boundaries set limits on behavior in order to protect things of value.* What is at stake in tending boundaries is preserving the integrity of each person as made in God's image, the value of holy things set aside for God's purposes, the identity of the church as the body of Christ, and the mission of the church in extending God's reign. Conversely, boundary violations put at risk the integrity of persons, the proper use of holy things, the core identity of the church, and the church's mission.

Boundaries protect persons and thus allow for the faithful expression of their true identities as members of the body of Christ! Each person has been created in the image of God and is precious to Jesus Christ. For this reason, it is essential that we relate to other persons in thought, word, and deed with the respect owed to those with such status. It is now widely recognized that traumatizing a person by violating their boundaries through abuse can wound that person in profound ways for a very long time. Furthermore, research has shown that abusing children negatively impacts their relationship with God as adults.[16] Again, as rust weakens iron, microviolations weaken the spirit, especially when the microviola-

15. Everist and Nessan, *Transforming Leadership*, 116–17.

16. Salter et al., "Development of Sexually Abusive Behavior in Sexually Victimized Males," 471–76.

tions are allowed to continue. Even micro-incursions demoralize people's vitality. It is wise to assume that when someone objects to something, even where we see no problem at all, at least a microviolation may have taken place. Listening to those who complain or express hurt feelings is one way to increase our own sensitivity, asking questions in order to see things from another's point of view. If someone objects, it is wise to assume they have a valid point, even if you do not readily understand it. If we are the offending person, this means checking our defensiveness to consider what the other is expressing.

Moving from micro- to extreme violations, such as when a person has been assaulted, the impact is likely to include dissociation to reduce the pain.[17] Dissociation is a disengagement from what is happening. The victim of an extreme violation becomes somewhat, if not totally, unconscious and may not even remember what happened. If conscious, the victim becomes numb. As they experience the violation, they may feel like they have become an outside observer of what is happening to them, as if they are watching someone else. They may literally experience being outside their body. While this is extreme, micro-incursions have the same effect on a smaller scale. If we undergo a microviolation, to some degree we become less present and engaged. We may freeze up at a church meeting and be unable to fully participate because of the alarm that is sounding inside us in response to critical language or harsh tones.

A member might hesitate to participate fully in a fellowship after witnessing a pastor exploiting relationships with members—for example, pursuing members for private business interests. Agents at church-based insurance companies may seek privileged access to members or membership lists. Or a pastor might seek a clergy discount from a church member who works at a car dealership. Here the relationship between pastor and parishioner is exploited in the interest of financial benefit. This boundary also is obscured when church members in business voluntarily offer clergy discounts or other favors to their pastor.

Boundaries protect holy things! While not as damaging as infractions involving persons, boundary violations can also involve the misuse of property. For example, the church council president decides, without asking permission, to use the fellowship hall for a private Christmas party for her family and friends. Or a member who lives in the neighborhood borrows the church's lawn mower, and so it is missing when a member

17. Cf. Karjala, *Understanding Trauma and Dissociation.*

of the property committee comes to use it to mow the church's lawn. Or the chair of the property committee enters the parsonage when no one is home, in order to borrow coffee creamer for a church meeting. Or the pastor borrows folding tables and chairs for a family graduation party and returns the tables dirty, and one of the chairs with a broken chair leg. In each of these cases, self-interest leads to disrespect for things set aside for the church's 'holy' use.

Boundaries preserve the church's identity! What is the church? The church is the people of God, the communion of saints, the fellowship of the baptized, and the body of Christ. Each of these images points to the intrinsic identity of the church in relationship to the triune God. The church discovers its true identity exclusively grounded in God's grace revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.[18] The church lives in obedience to the Great Commandment: to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love the neighbor as oneself. One constant temptation in the life of the church is to substitute some other identity to replace core Christian identity. Thereby the church serves as a social outlet for the enjoyment of the members, or as an organization to provide services for those who pay their dues. Or the church gets construed as a business venture that only has value when it makes a profit. Or the church exists primarily to perpetuate the building and provide a cemetery. So many false identities threaten to overtake the church's identity as the people of God in Christ Jesus! Good boundaries clarify, protect, and preserve the true nature of church so that it can fulfill its mission of living the Great Commandment.

Boundaries preserve the church's mission! The mission of the Christian church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, to serve a world full of neighbors as disciples of Jesus Christ, and to care for God's creation as faithful stewards. The church exists not for its own self-interest but to mediate God's life-giving presence to the world through the message of the gospel and ministry of service for the well-being of others. Primary venues for the church to embody this mission are evangelism, ecumenism, global service, and social ministry. Wherever church leaders or members distort Christ's mission to serve self-interest, a boundary has been crossed and the intended purpose of the church becomes compromised. One of the great challenges that undermines the integrity of the church and its mission is the misrepresentation of the gospel by those

18. Nessan, *Beyond Maintenance to Mission*, 6–10.

who represent it publicly. Hypocrisy by church members and misconduct by clergy obscure the intention of the gospel as Christ's message of unconditional forgiveness, mercy, and grace. "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt 18:6).

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTRY

Boundaries are essential to the life of the church and its ministry, in order to preserve the church's core identity and mission. There are a variety of ways to describe the basic purpose of the church. Consider the following affirmations: The church exists to follow the Great Commandment of loving God and loving the neighbor as oneself; the church serves as an instrument for the arrival of God's kingdom in this world; the church lives for the sake of proclaiming to others the good news about Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of the world; the church seeks to follow the way of Jesus Christ through faithful discipleship; the church is the body of Christ in the world and makes Christ present to others. Each of these descriptions reveals aspects of the church's true identity and mission. In concise formulations, each of these statements expresses the spiritual purpose of the church: how the church serves God's intention to bring life, wholeness, fulfillment, and salvation to the world.

There are several paradigmatic ways the church incarnates this fundamental purpose, enacting its identity and mission—through worship, prayer, education, community life, stewardship, evangelizing, ecumenism, global connections, and social ministry.[19] The center of the church's life is in the communal gathering of God's people for worship.[20] At worship we reclaim our identity in Christ and become the people God intends us to be—through confession and absolution, praise, hearing the Word, voicing our convictions in the creed, praying, sharing the peace, presenting an offering, breaking bread, and receiving blessing. The pattern of the Christian life is rehearsed in the things of worship: trusting God's promises for our lives, learning to praise God, attending to God's Word, becoming those who care for the things for which we pray, shar-

19. Ibid., 8–10.

20. Ibid., chap. 4.

ing God's peace with one another and the world, generously stewarding the gifts God has bestowed, and partaking of the Lord's Table where all are welcome and there is enough for all. We are sent from worship to be agents of God's shalom in our daily lives.

The church also exists to pray for the needs of all people and the creation itself. We pray for God's mercy and healing in a broken world, where suffering threatens to overwhelm us. The church teaches members the way of discipleship as a primary educational task. At church we learn what it means to follow Jesus in our daily lives. By living with one another in community, the church learns what it means to live under the cross, where the weak and lonely, the sick and marginal ones have privileged place.[21] In this community we recall that it is the Crucified One who binds us together in love. We learn to experience Jesus Christ himself as we relate to one another in the church and as we go out into the local community to encounter Jesus Christ in the least of these. Moreover, the church knows the true meaning of stewardship, where everything we receive is a gift given to us from God's generosity. As stewards the very posture of our lives is that of thanksgiving for all the kindness God has showered upon us.

In its life of service, the church responds to God's goodness by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ in words and deeds. Evangelizing involves the church in speaking boldly, genuinely, and authentically about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Christian people are to testify to others about what God has done in their lives in order that others might believe (Rom 10:10–13). The work of evangelizing encompasses both personal conversations with others and testimonies given in public worship services. Glory is also given to God wherever Christians of different traditions and denominations are reconciled to one another as brothers and sisters. Beyond the scandal of denominational divisions, Jesus prays that the church be one (John 17:20–21). Therefore ecumenical relations belong centrally to the church's mission. Christians also build connections with one another across the globe in partnerships and cooperation that mutually enhances our life together. The catholicity of the church is manifest wherever Christians throughout the world pray for one another, join in worship together, participate in Christ-centered community, and live in mutual service to one another. Lastly, the church partakes in social ministry—both acts of charity to relieve human suffering and the work

21. For a pastoral approach to the theology of the cross, see Menking, *When All Else Fails,* 74–81.

of advocacy to transform the structures and policies that hold people in subjugation. Through these manifold expressions the church fulfills its God-given purpose.

Those who serve as ministers of the church—meaning both the clergy and laity—have as their Christian vocation the fulfillment of the church's purpose in the various ways described in the previous paragraphs. Biblically and theologically, these are the reasons why the church exists: to reveal the presence and the way of God to others in this world. For the laity, this means trusting the good news of Jesus Christ at the center of life, and following the way of Jesus Christ in discipleship by thought, word, and deed. The Christian vocation encompasses all arenas of life: one's family, the workplace, at church, and as member of local and global communities.[22] As a Christian, one's very identity is centered in Jesus Christ and one's whole existence is offered as spiritual worship of God (Rom 12:1–2).

Pastors have a particular calling among the baptized: to serve as ministers of God's Word and sacraments among God's people. This vocation involves faithful teaching and preaching of the Christian faith, stewardship of worship among the Christian community, and sharing the presence of Christ with others in pastoral care. Because of the nature of professional ministry and how these leaders represent God before the world, pastors and other ministers who work for the church are held to a high ethical standard. The failure to reflect the highest Christian values on the part of pastors and other ministers brings special scandal upon the church and its mission. Without expecting Christian perfectionism, there is an expectation that both Christian laity and especially Christian pastors and lay professionals represent with integrity the reality of God's own ministry in the world.

Boundaries are designed to safeguard the church's identity and mission. Worship takes place for the praise of God, not to sell products. Prayer is for entreaty to God, not gossip. Christian education is for learning the meaning of discipleship, not bragging about one's accomplishments. Christian community is for the mutual strengthening of the members in the faith, not cruising for a date. Stewardship is about gratitude to God, not for tax benefits, gaining influence with the pastor and congregation, or pride about one's generosity. Evangelizing is for sharing the good news, not manipulating people with guilt. Ecumenism is for

22. Fortin, *Centered Life*, 83–84.

building up the whole body of Christ, not demonstrating the superiority of one's own tradition. Global partnerships are for mutual accompaniment in the Christian faith, not creating dependency relationships. Social ministry is for sharing with those in need, not obtaining a sense of one's own righteousness or the promotion of political agendas.

The church's central purpose—to worship God and minister to the world in the name of Jesus Christ—is undercut by thoughts, words, and actions that compromise or contradict the stated purpose of the church as articulated in this chapter. When Christians, whether ministers or laity, engage in domestic abuse, cheat on taxes, operate according to unfair business practices, discriminate in hiring, tell lies, fail to maintain the safety of an automobile, or litter in public places—each of these behaviors violates a boundary by misrepresenting the will of God for human life in the spirit of Jesus. Another cause for consternation is valuing secondary identities over the primary one. This especially includes the privileging of certain ethnic and cultural heritages over baptismal identity, whereas it is baptism that properly provides the fundamental basis of Christian community. Eric H. F. Law comments:

> To be interculturally sensitive, we need to examine the internal instinctual part of our own culture. This means revealing unconscious values and thought patterns so that we will not simply react from our cultural instinct. The more we learn about our internal culture, the more we are aware of how our cultural values and thought patterns differ from others. Knowing this difference will help us make self-adjustments in order to live peacefully with people from other cultures.[23]

Engaging in intentional processes to increase diversity in congregational life must become an urgent priority.[24] Other secondary matters also are often sources of conflict in congregations, such as conflict over music and styles of worship. Often when people feel loss about their secondary identities, they do not know who they are anymore and fall out of touch with their primary identity, similar to how a person may feel lost after retirement. Such behaviors contradict Christian identity and obscure God's purposes for the world.

Likewise when Christian pastors or ministers neglect their families, fail to pay their bills, manipulate their relationships with others out of

23. Law, *Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, 9.

24. Cf. Law, *Sacred Acts, Holy Change.*

self-interest, misrepresent their competence, break confidences, exhibit professional jealousy, complain about parishioners to their colleagues, or display rage in public, such behaviors contradict their public vocation as representatives of God and bring scandal upon the church in its professed identity and mission.[25] These examples illustrate the variety of ways that Christian pastors and ministers can overstep boundaries to the detriment of the church's identity and mission. The Christian life—for laity, pastors, and other ministers—is abounding with ethical boundaries to preserve the church in fulfilling its central purpose of bearing witness to the reality of God in this world.

Becoming "canaries in the church" requires us to keep our eye on the church's core identity and mission so that we can better know how to fulfill it, detect what is harmful, and keep ourselves from violating it. At the close of this chapter we have mentioned examples of how personal interests that can conflict with the church's core identity and mission. Many of these will be explored in the remainder of this book. Having introduced in this chapter particular facets of the boundaries needful for preserving the identity and purpose of the church, we next discuss boundaries in relation to the matter of entrustment: the imperative that the church be a safe place for us to be in Christian community together.

25. Bush, *Gentle Shepherding*, chap. 2.