

## DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: WEIGHING THE RISKS OF ACTING AND NOT ACTING

### STEP 1: Choose a specific action:

Telling the congregation that the rector is on leave because he engaged in a sexual relationship with an adult member of the parish

### STEP 2: List risks of taking action

1. Rector's wife will be embarrassed.
2. Youth will know what happened.
3. We will get sued for defamation, libel, and slander.
4. This will put a damper on the retirement party.
5. Members will be angry at the woman who told the judicatory.
6. Pledging will go down because people love the rector.
7. Members will be angry at the woman engaged in the relationship with the rector. She is recently widowed and needs her community of support.

### STEP 3: List ways to reduce or eliminate risks

1. She already knows her husband is unfaithful; judicatory staff will offer support, and meet with her before any disclosure to the congregation to share what will be disclosed.
2. Youth already know more than many adult members. Provide a separate meeting for youth so they can process misconduct as a community of youth.
3. Carefully craft the disclosure statement to ensure clarity of allegations versus facts.<sup>1</sup>
4. True. Education about dynamics of misconduct and the value of Christian fellowship in a community of truth-tellers can ease this disappointment.
5. Her name will not be disclosed, yet it is possible that members will figure out who reported this matter. The bishop can indicate the church "became aware of the rector's behavior" without indicating anyone who reported to the judicatory. She will receive care and support at each step of the process, members will be educated on why it is important to report such matters, judicatory will express gratitude for her courage, if necessary.
6. It might, and such a decrease in pledges can be minimized by focusing on the health of the congregation and the importance of this community to members, rather than the importance of the ordained leader.
7. Her name will not be disclosed. Members may know or figure out her identity. Education on power dynamics in ministerial relationships will help members understand that the rector is responsible to maintain professional boundaries.

*Continued*

---

1. Speaking the truth about a situation does not create liability for harming another's reputation. In this case, if the rector's reputation is harmed, it is because he engaged in misconduct at the end of a long career.

## DECISION-MAKING PROCESS *Continued*

**STEP 4: List risks of not taking action:** (This is the list from chapter 2.)

1. Displaced residual anger, sadness, and distrust can continue for years.
2. Unacceptable behavior is condoned by silence.
3. Trust is not restored and continues to erode.
4. Energy is spent on ignoring and hiding the truth rather than engaging mission and ministry.
5. Formation of disciples is curtailed. Members become reluctant to bring their own brokenness to the community, as the community does not have the capacity to speak of the brokenness within itself.
6. Primary victims are blamed because of the lack of understanding of the power dynamics at play.
7. Primary victims may feel unheard.
8. Others are not encouraged to recognize their victimization (in the church or in other settings) and heal from such misconduct.
9. The congregation is denied an opportunity to be educated and establish healthy boundaries and systems of checks and accountability.
10. Some members know what is going on; some know something is going on, but do not have accurate information. This creates a power differential between those with knowledge and those without.

**STEP 5: List ways to reduce or eliminate risks**

1. There is virtually no way to reduce or eliminate these risks without telling members about the misconduct.

**STEP 6: Decide:** Will disclose to congregation that the rector is on leave because he engaged in a sexual relationship with an adult member of the parish