

# **AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF PENNSYLVANIA AND DELAWARE**

## **CLERGY ETHICS COURSE**

### **CASE STUDIES**



## Case Study #1

### **TIME FOR THE FAMILY**

(adapted from *Case Studies in Ministry*, Gerry Heard, Cummings & Hathaway, 1996)

Rev. Art Lewis has been pastor of a church of about 200 members in a town of about twenty thousand people for almost eight years. His wife is named Pam, and she works as an elementary school teacher. They have two sons, ages twelve and ten, and a six-year-old daughter. In recent months, Pam has been emphasizing to her husband that he must spend more time with the children. She points out that the boys are getting older and that they especially need the companionship and guidance of their father. In particular, she would like for him to make an effort to attend their school functions and take them to their ball games. She says that this would allow him to develop closer relationships with the boys and would give her more time for activities with their daughter and for household chores.

Because of the demands of his work, Rev. Lewis has always found it difficult to spend time with his children. He would like to be able to take them places more often and to attend more of their activities, but he only seems to be able to do these things occasionally. However, he begins to consider how he might do this. One possibility is for him to spend less time studying and preparing his sermons. Another option is to reduce the amount of time that he spends in community service organizations and perhaps resign from some of them completely. He would prefer not to have to do any of these things because he thinks that all of his responsibilities are important and need to be taken seriously. But he realizes he must do something. He begins to pray and try to decide what he should do.

Discussion Questions: Case Study #1 – *Time For The Family*

1. What would you consider to be the primary ethical issue(s) in this case study?
2. Is it true that some church ministers find it extremely difficult to spend an adequate amount of time with their families? If so, why is it so difficult for them?
3. Did Reverend Lewis wait too long to confront this problem of spending time with his family? Should he have sought to deal with it when the children were younger?
4. How is Pam affected by the fact that her husband is not spending enough time with his children? Is she being treated unfairly?
5. Which of the options mentioned in the case do you think Pastor Lewis should choose in order to allow more time for his family? Are there some other options that he should consider which are not mentioned?
6. What do you think Reverend Lewis should do?
7. How does the issue of "call" relate to this case? How could dealing with that issue help Pastor Lewis resolve some of the "symptoms" of the problem?

Case Study #2  
**PASTOR LEAVING**

*(Written by Dr. Ken Swetland, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, adapted for our use)*

Reverend John Smith has been the pastor of a successful ABC church for over ten years. The church has grown significantly and has added staff under Rev. Smith's leadership. The pastor's wife is a paid member of the staff, as is his brother-in-law.

Rev. Smith is nearing the age of 65 and is making plans to retire. He will pursue writing and other professional interests in retirement. In preparation for this transition Rev. Smith contacted the ABC Region and *his* Area Minister to inform the denomination of his plans. He requested a meeting with the Executive and Area Minister to discuss his retirement plans and transition strategy.

When the Executive and Area Minister met with the pastor, Rev. Smith presented a transition strategy that he had discussed with no one except *his* family and the church moderator. Rev. Smith had then presented the staff with his plan in writing. He stated that he would give the church a six-month resignation notice. During that time he would assist the deacons in scheduling pulpit supply and finding an interim. He said that he had already contacted a couple of potential clergy to talk about the position, but that he had decided to recommend one of the current staff associates to become the next pastor. He said that he had discussed this with that associate staff member and the church moderator.

He also said that he would keep *his* membership at the church because his wife doesn't really want him to retire at this time. He said that his wife would continue teaching Sunday school and participating in the various women's ministries the church offers. The region staff pointed out to the pastor that his strategy violates the ABC Clergy Code of Ethics and is not in the best interest of the church. They stated that when a pastor leaves a ministry that he/she normally removes his/her membership and participation in the church. They also stated that there are many ABC churches in the area to choose from and that any of them would benefit from his and his wife's presence.

Additionally they clarified that this strategy violates traditional Baptist polity and even the accepted By-Laws of the church he serves. Rev. Smith responded by saying that he has a different interpretation of the ABC Clergy Code of Ethics and that there is historic precedent for his decisions. He said that when he retires that he would not be the church's pastor, but simply a friend to the church. As a church member he should be free to pursue friendships and ministry opportunities. He also said that other pastors do this. He said that his situation is unique. He appreciated the counsel of the region staff, but that the church is autonomous and will proceed as they choose.

Discussion Questions: Case Study #2 – *Pastor Leaving*

1. What would you consider to be the primary ethical issue(s) in this case study?
2. What is the biggest ethical issue for Rev. Smith?
3. What is the biggest ethical issue for the church?
4. What could the church do to help Rev. Smith in this transition?
5. What could the Region staff do to help Rev. Smith?
6. What could Rev. Smith do to help himself?

Case Study #3  
**NOMINATING CHURCH OFFICERS**

(adapted from *Ethical Dilemmas in Church Leadership*, Michael R. Milco, Kregel Publications, 1997)

At the most recent meeting of the church's nominating committee, potential names were considered for open positions. Prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit had been offered, and the Scriptures were read concerning qualities essential for church leadership.

Several names had been suggested for the position of elder, including Harold Montgomery.

Pastor Williams, who sat on the committee, thought that Harold would make an excellent candidate. Harold had once pastored a church and his walk with the Lord seemed to be consistent.

In a few days the phone rang in Pastor Williams' office. "Hello, Pastor Williams, this is Grace Knowles. Pastor, I understand that Harold Montgomery's name came up as a potential candidate for the office of elder at church." "Yes," answered Pastor Williams. "Pastor, has anyone ever told you why Harold left the ministry ten years ago?" "Why no," answered Pastor Williams. "You see, Pastor, I have never told anyone else this before but," silence hung for several moments, "Harold has wrestled with homosexuality on and off for most of his life and has tested HIV positive. I know his life appears to be in order on the outside, and deep down Harold would love to be an elder here, but for the wrong reasons. You see, Pastor Williams, if you keep him on the slate I know you will have more difficult problems to deal with in a few years. Pastor, please do not tell anyone else. I hope I have made myself clear."

Pastor Williams hung up the phone, stunned by the conversation. Who could she talk about this with? What would she say to the nominating committee about the reasons why Harold's name should be taken off? People would begin to wonder. Why had she never heard any of this before? Did Grace Knowles have some sort of personal agenda? Pastor Williams prayed and tried as hard as she could to be discerning.

Two days later at a staff meeting, Pastor Williams questioned her staff about their knowledge of Harold Montgomery. She shared her conversation with Grace Knowles and asked them not to repeat any of their discussion. In the back of her mind she wondered if she had broken her confidence with Grace. These were her colleagues in ministry; they needed to know, she thought. Without picking up the phone and talking to Harold, Pastor Williams took Grace Knowles' conversation to heart. For her it was a closed file. Harold had a problem, Pastor Williams reasoned to herself. If he becomes an elder, his problem will become our problem, and my problem. With that thought, there was no more discussion.

At the following nominating committee meeting, Pastor Williams suggested Harold Montgomery's name be taken from the slate. Several questioned her as to the decision. Pastor Williams guarded Grace's and Harold's confidentiality, protecting not only them, but in her mind, the church body as well.

Discussion Questions: Case Study 3 – *Nominating Church Officers*

1. What would you consider to be the primary ethical issue(s) in this case study?
2. Pastor Williams said, "If he becomes an elder, his problem will become my problem." What did she mean by that?
3. What would you have done differently if you were the pastor in this situation?
4. What about someone who had a history of alcoholism or homosexuality in the past? Should he or she be prohibited from serving in a specific capacity in the church?
5. What prudent steps are often missing when nominations are made to fill open church positions?

#### Case Study #4

### **A ROMANTIC INTEREST**

(adapted from *Case Studies in Ministry*, Gerry Heard, Cummings & Hathaway, 1996)

Kelly Wilson, a college sophomore, serves as a part-time youth director at a church in the same town where she goes to school. Since she first accepted the position about six months ago, she has been able to develop some new programs and increase the number of young people involved in church activities. The pastor of the church has already complimented her several times for her contributions.

Kelly finds her work rewarding and feels that she is gaining valuable knowledge about the ministry and how to work in a church. However, a personal issue is now bothering her, and she is not sure how to deal with it.

She is romantically attracted to Jonathan Hill, one of the young men in the youth group. Jonathan is a *senior* in high school and a leader in the group. He is a very positive witness for Christ in the church and in his school, where he is a leader of the Christian Club and a starting player on the basketball team.

He also seems to be interested in her, but she has never talked with him about the feelings that she has for him.

They will often talk privately before or after youth meetings, apart from the other youth, but always about church things.

One time, she and a friend ran into Jonathan and a friend at the movie theater, and the four of them decided to see the same movie together and then get ice cream at the shop next to the theater.

The young people in the church have seen them together. Some of the youth have asked questions and made comments about their relationship.

She finds this embarrassing and wonders what to say. She also wonders if maybe she should go ahead and talk to Jonathan about going out on a real date since everyone already seems to know about their interest in each other.

Discussion Questions: Case Study #4 – *A Romantic Interest*

1. What would you consider to be the primary ethical issue(s) in this case study?
2. What do you think about Kelly Wilson having numerous private conversations with Jonathan at the church?
3. What is your view of her visiting with him at public places such as the movie theater?
4. How should Kelly respond to the questions and comments of the youth regarding her relationship with Jonathan? Should she deny any sort of romantic interest in him?
5. Is it ever permissible for single church ministers to date members of their church?
6. What suggestions would you offer Kelly concerning how she should deal with this problem?

Case Study #5  
**THE FAMILY INCOME**

*(adapted from Case Studies in Ministry, Gerry Heard, Cummings & Hathaway, 1996)*

The church in which Rev. Isaiah Riley serves has about 80 members. Although Pastor Riley is forty-nine years old, this is his first full-time position on a church staff. He worked for many years as a self-employed carpenter before he accepted a call to ministry. During seminary he served as a supply pastor in his present church, three years ago, after he was finished with seminary, he accepted a call to be its pastor. The church has grown from 50 to 80 members, but is still small.

Rev. Riley is married and has two daughters who are sixteen and thirteen years of age. His wife Vera works as a teller at a local bank. Because of a prolonged illness, she is only able to work part-time.

Over the past several months Vera has been expressing to him her dissatisfaction with the financial situation of the family. She insists that their two incomes are not adequate for their family. They currently are not able to afford certain things that are needed, such as new clothes for the children or repairs on the cars. They have not been able to save money to replace older kitchen appliances that have needed repairs recently. She also points out that it will soon be time for the girls to begin college, and no money has as yet been set aside for that purpose. Loans from seminary put a big strain on their budget.

Pastor Riley realizes that they do have some financial problems, but he is not as concerned about these as his wife is. He thinks that she tends to exaggerate the severity of these problems. However, since this has become a source of increasing unhappiness for her, he has decided that he must do something to try to improve their financial situation.

He first goes to the head of the Pastoral Relations Committee and explains to her his circumstances and his need for more income. She is sympathetic and tells him that in a few months the church is planning to increase his pay by about 3.5 per cent at the annual business meeting.

Rev. Riley tells her that he will be grateful for the raise in salary, but that he is doubtful that it will be enough. He knows that his wife will not consider it to be sufficient to solve their problems.

After talking to her, he considers the possibility of getting part-time employment in the evening or at night. He prefers not to do this because he would not have as much time to spend with his family, and it would make it more difficult for him to do an effective job at the church. Finally, he thinks about the fact that he could get back into the home remodeling business and make more money than he is making now. He wonders if maybe he should resign from the church and go back into business for himself. He doesn't really want to do this because he sees himself as having a calling to church ministry, and he has found the work to be rewarding. Pastor Riley plans to pray about the matter and then talk with his wife again. Afterwards, he will make a decision.

Discussion Questions:

1. What would you consider to be the primary ethical issue(s) in this case study?
2. From the information provided in the case, do you think the financial crisis of the Riley's is a reality and a serious matter, or would you say that it is a creation by Mrs. Riley?
3. What do you think about the possibility of Rev. Riley's getting some outside work to increase his income? If he decides to do this, is it necessary for him first to get the approval of the church?
4. Does Pastor Riley have any other options for improving his situation besides the ones mentioned?
5. Are financial reasons ever an adequate justification for leaving church related work?
6. What do you think Rev. Riley should do?

Case Study #6  
**Should Pete Be Reinstated**

*Kenneth L. Swetland. The Hidden World of the Pastor  
(Grand Rapids:VH: Baker Books, A Division of Baker Book House Co.), pp. 19-31*

Pete sat in the outer office of the presbytery building, apprehensive about what the committee in the next room would decide. It had been two years since his divorce and three years since he had left his wife after having had an affair. The church he had served as pastor had dismissed him.

During the past three years he had lived on the street, held menial jobs, been depressed to the point of suicide, and married the woman with whom he had had the affair. Still, he felt a call from God to be a minister of the gospel, and he wanted to continue in the Presbyterian Church USA.

Having completed the three year probationary period, he was now waiting the final decision of the committee formed by the presbytery to monitor his probation. He did not know what he would do if the committee decided not to reinstate him. "I have experienced the heights and depths of sin and forgiveness," he had told the committee. "I ask you now to forgive me and restore me to the ordained ministry."

As he waited for their decision, his mind flitted over the past the events of the last three years, his first marriage, his conversion experience, and his original call to ministry. Pete had grown up in the Presbyterian church. He was baptized when he was four months old, attended services with his parents throughout his childhood, and was active in the youth group as a teenager. "I did all the things church kids were expected to do," he said. When he went to college a few hours away from his home, he found a Presbyterian church where he enjoyed the people and the worship service, and he attended regularly.

Toward the end of his college days, Pete had started to date Barbara, the sister of one of his best friends. Although they had known each other in high school, they had never liked each other. Now that they were dating, friends teased them about what an unlikely couple they were. But the relationship deepened, and three months after Pete graduated from college, he and Barbara were married.

Pete landed a job working for a newspaper, and three months later received his draft notice from the army. The Vietnam War was at its height, and Pete entered the infantry, sure that he would soon be in Vietnam. Out of two hundred people in his unit, only he and one other man were college graduates, so Pete was quickly thrust into a leadership position.

The officers in charge of his outfit urged him to go to officer candidate school, but Pete declined. Wanting to end his stint in the army and return to his newspaper job as quickly as possible, he volunteered instead to go to Vietnam. He assumed he would go there anyway, and he thought volunteering might shorten his tour of duty, as had happened with some of his friends. The army, however, sent him to Germany.

Barbara had been able to visit Pete several times while he was in training in the States, and she became pregnant during one of those visits. She joined him in Germany after a few months, and their first child, a girl, was born there. While stationed in Germany, Pete and Barbara attended chapel services on the army base. Pete observed that the chaplain's duties appeared easier than what he was doing in the Infantry, and since he enjoyed religious activities anyway, he applied for a change of status. He received permission to become a chaplain's assistant. In this job he did clerical work and helped with administrative duties but performed no pastoral functions. Still, it was a job he enjoyed, and he felt he was supporting a good thing.

Barbara had gone home after the birth of their daughter to be near her family. Pete missed being with her and their little girl, but he was also a little relieved since there was often tension between him and Barbara.

In Germany Pete encountered a man carrying a cross across Europe, preaching that people should repent and believe in Jesus Christ in a personal way. This hit Pete strongly. His faith had been largely intellectual. He occasionally had wondered about the adequacy of his faith. So he responded to the man's message and believed in Christ. He wrote to his family about his newfound faith, saying, "I have accepted Christ as my Savior in a personal way, and I'm very excited about it." They called to express concern that he would become "a religious fanatic." He responded that his experience was real and they needed to embrace the Christian faith in a personal way, too.

Barbara returned to Germany, and before long she accepted his challenge and also committed her life to Christ. Together they began a new journey of faith. Pete read everything he could get his hands on about Christianity, and he and Barbara were involved in Bible studies that excited them.

When Pete was discharged from the army, he and Barbara returned to their home in the States. Pete got his job back as a newspaper reporter and writer, and was also involved in a restaurant he had invested in earlier, a business which was going well. He and Barbara quickly got involved in a local Presbyterian church, a different one from the one he had attended as a child. Soon he was teaching a Sunday school class, leading a Weeknight Bible study for adults, and participating in the church's Evangelism Explosion program. He was also involved in a weekly prayer breakfast for men through the local Christian Businessmen's Committee. Within a year after joining the church, Pete was made a deacon and later the moderator of the board of thirty-three people.

By this time Pete and Barbara had a second child, a son. Pete was busy with church involvement, his newspaper work, and the restaurant business. They bought a house with over an acre of land, which demanded a great deal of upkeep. "To say I was busy was putting it mildly," said Pete. But he enjoyed it all and felt immensely happy with his life- except for his marriage.

When Pete married Barbara, he knew that the two of them had very different outlooks on life and approached tasks with very different styles. But he also knew that was part of what he found attractive in Barbara. He approached life head-on and tackled tasks with enthusiasm, seeing things through from beginning to ending. Barbara, on the other hand, was artistic and creative and would seldom finish a task she started. Even though she did not work outside the home,

Pete did much of the house work and cooking, since he liked the house to be neat and the meals to be well-prepared. The tension that had been present almost from the beginning between Pete and Barbara now broke out in frequent fights. They did not know how to communicate or fight fairly.

During one particularly intense exchange, Pete feared they were about to hit each other or throw something at each other. He requested they get professional counseling, but she refused. Later when they had both calmed down, he again requested - begged might be a better word - that they get counseling, but she again declined. The more he asked her to go to a counselor with him, the more adamantly she refused, saying that going to a counselor was an admission of failure and she did not think they had failed.

Despite the tension in his marriage, things were going well for Pete in his church work, and he began to sense a call to pastoral ministry. In a way this surprised him since he enjoyed his lay ministry and his businesses. He tried to forget what he felt, finding the whole thing a bit frightening, but the sense of call persisted. So he made an appointment to discuss it with his pastor. "I think the Lord may be calling me to be a pastor and to go to seminary to prepare for this ministry," he told the pastor.

"If that's true," the pastor replied, "you'll never be happy doing anything else."

When Pete told Barbara, to his surprise she said, "Let's do it!" That was the confirmation he needed. Pete visited a nearby seminary, thinking he could commute to classes and continue with his restaurant business. But his visit was disappointing. Pete was turned off by the profane language of an admissions counselor and angered by graffiti on the walls of several buildings at the school. When Pete asked the admissions counselor what he would learn about the Christian faith at the school and the counselor replied, "We don't deal with faith here," that was the final straw.

When Pete told his pastor about the seminary visit, his pastor urged him to look elsewhere. He recommended another school, and Pete made arrangements to visit, even though it was more than a day's drive from home and was not affiliated with his denomination. Then he talked with the admissions counselor at this seminary, he found him to be a man filled with sweetness, faith, and love," and he fell in love with the school.

Barbara rejoiced with him, and together they prepared to go away to school. By this time a third child, another girl, was born to Pete and Barbara, so going to seminary was no minor undertaking. But their house sold quickly and for a good profit. Pete was also able to sell his interest in the restaurant, so they had enough money to finance seminary studies without either of them having to work.

Pete and Barbara had been Christians three years when they went to seminary. Both were twenty-nine years old, and they looked forward to what they thought would be like a three-year Bible study. Pete felt quickly intimidated, however, by the rigorous academic program and the high caliber of the other students. For the first six weeks he was miserable and thought he had made the biggest mistake of his life. He was scared and felt stupid as he compared himself to

other students. But Pete and Barbara made friends and began to see that he could handle the course work. They felt more comfortable, and life settled into a good routine.

While at seminary Pete developed close friendships with five other married male students. Together they laughed and studied and prayed their way through seminary. It was a good time, and Pete felt confirmed in his call to ministry.

His field education brought him face-to-face with a wide range of pastoral tasks, all of which he enjoyed, and he received affirming comments wherever he ministered. Pete finished seminary in three years and went on to complete a Th.M. at a Presbyterian seminary.

In seminary the tensions that had existed all along between Pete and Barbara continued, but his enjoyment of the studies, the good camaraderie with his friends, and the exciting church ministry he was in took his mind off his marriage troubles.

After Pete finished the Th.M. he was called by a PCUSA church to be the pastor. The congregation numbered 110 and was composed mostly of blue-collar workers. The real world of ministry hit Pete immediately. In his first week at the church, he dealt with the rape of a parishioner and a suicide, and he conducted a funeral. In the months that followed, his counseling load was heavy, but he enjoyed the ministry and was grateful to God for the growth that was occurring in the church.

Pete worked long hours and was exhausted much of the time. But he came home from the office each day and did the laundry, cooked supper, cleaned the house, and put the three children to bed. Barbara still did not work outside the home, but she seldom did anything to make the house livable.

She began projects such as washing or ironing but would leave them undone, and Pete would have to finish them when he got home. It seemed to Pete that Barbara was becoming more disorganized all the time. Even though he would tidy up the manse one day, the next day things would again be in disarray.

He frequently asked Barbara to try harder, and he requested that she talk with someone who could help her develop organizational skills, but she refused. She loved her artistic outlets and spent most of each day on her projects or reading. Pete wanted the manse to look good since they had frequent visitors who came to the house for counsel or assistance, but it was up to him alone to keep things organized and neat—a reality he was increasingly resenting.

Pete often wondered why Barbara never finished anything. She had never received her college degree even though she had plenty of credits, but had switched majors so many times that she was never able to form a concentration in any one subject to allow her to graduate. Even many of her artistic projects or crafts were never completed, but sat around the house in various stages of development. But Pete felt helpless to do anything about it. When he tried to talk with Barbara about it, she would become upset and a loud argument usually followed.

After four years at this church, during which time the congregation had grown to 170 people, Pete was called to his second church.

This church was composed mostly of professional people. They loved to deal with ideas, and Pete felt there was a good match between his interests and the people's. Even though Pete had seen good growth in his first church- both in numbers and in his ability to pastor the people - he had always referred to himself when with other ministers as the "unintentional interim pastor." This was partly because Pete had followed a minister who had been at the church for twenty seven years, but was also because Pete felt he was not the right person for the needs of the people.

Pete was very happy in his second church, and the ministry was going well, but he continued to be unhappy with his marriage. He knew Barbara was unhappy, too. He now saw her as a chronic complainer who was never satisfied with anything and never thought anything he did was worthwhile. He had tried through the years to give her emotional support, but he never felt she supported him the same way. Now he stopped giving her any kind of support.

The church had a creative ministry to the community and was growing in numbers. Pete was well liked by the congregation and popular in the community." A few people sensed that all was not well between Pete and Barbara, but no one knew the tension was so great that Pete was avoiding going home. Were it not for the children and his desire to be with them, Pete knew he would seldom be at home. When he was in the house, he sometimes had to leave for a few minutes to calm his own emotions and lower the tension.

Soon after they had arrived at the church, Pete and Barbara made good friends with another couple, Don and Janie. Their oldest daughter had become a friend with one of Don and Janie's daughters, and the families frequently got together for cookouts, restaurant dinners, and social activities. Both Don and Janie were active in church, Don as an elder and Janie as a Sunday school teacher. Pete had observed occasionally some tension between Don and Janie, but on the whole their relationship seemed stable, and Pete greatly enjoyed the time the two families spent together. Don was, in fact, his best friend.

One day Janie came to see Pete at the church office to talk about stress in her marriage. She revealed Don was occasionally abusive with her, and she had reason to believe he was unfaithful. She said the problems were long-standing, that she had been to several counselors, but that there had been no change in her relationship with Don. For his part, Don had refused to go to a counselor with her.

Pete told Janie that because of the friendship between their two families, he did not think he was the best one to offer her counsel. He also knew he found her very attractive and did not want to be tempted by being alone with her. So he referred her to another pastor.

A few weeks later Pete went to Don and Janie's house to help them move to a new place. While carrying a box out of a room, he noticed Janie look at him in a romantic way. *Oh no!* he thought. *This is scary.* He knew he felt something for her, but he did not want to pursue it. That

night he called his executive presbyter and revealed he might be falling in love with one of his parishioners and he felt vulnerable since his own marriage was shaky.

"Well, work it through," the man responded. "You know what to do." Pete did not tell the presbyter that, in fact, he did not know what to do.

Don and Janie invited Pete and Barbara over for dinner a few days after settling into their new home. Pete sensed that he shouldn't go because the thought of seeing Janie was too exciting. Pete often hugged his parishioners and would kiss women on the cheek (many parishioners had commented on how warm and affectionate he was), but as he and Janie embraced at the door of their home he felt more was being communicated than socially accepted affection. Again he was frightened by his feelings, but he felt helpless to control them.

When the evening came to a close, Pete followed Janie into the bedroom to get their coats, and suddenly he and Janie fell into a passionate embrace and kiss. It lasted only a few seconds, but Pete found it intensely exciting. At the same time he knew he was nearing the point of no return. As he and Barbara drove home in silence (their all-too-familiar silence) he vowed never to do such a thing again.

Pete had often preached against what he saw as the "three worst sins: abortion, homosexuality, and divorce." On more than one occasion he adamantly vowed in public that he would never get divorced. Even as he said the words, he wondered deep down if his words were not just bravado that he hoped would prevent what he feared. Now contradicting in his behavior the very things he had preached so strongly about, Pete felt waves of guilt sweep over him, and he began to wonder if he could continue in the ministry.

Still, Pete called Janie frequently from the office. They talked freely about their bad marriages and their growing feelings of love for each other. Then Pete often arranged for them to meet to talk about church matters. For several weeks they took long drives in the country where he would park the car in a remote spot, and they would passionately kiss and embrace. Pete fell into a vicious cycle: First he would excitedly plan his next rendezvous with Janie; then he suffered overwhelming feelings of remorse and guilt.

Several times Pete called his executive presbyter and asked for help. Once he told the presbyter he was thinking of leaving the church to deal with his problem. The presbyter encouraged him to stay in the church and work it through since the church was growing and was a good model of ministry to other churches in the presbytery. But he offered no suggestions for help.

Pete felt increasingly ashamed and alone. He knew he was spinning out of control, but he could not stop himself. In one particularly low moment he called the men he had been close to in seminary to get their advice, but to his dismay each one indicated he was having his own problems and was in no position to help. "You know what you have to do," was the typical response. *Yes*, Pete thought, *I do know what to do, but I'm helpless to do it.*

Finally the inevitable happened. Pete's parents lived in a nearby town, and while they were away on vacation Pete took Janie with him to check on his parents' home as they had asked. There Pete

and Janie had sexual intercourse. Pete told Janie how delighted he was to be with her, how fantastic sex with her was, and how much love he felt for her. She responded similarly. It was an intense experience for both.

That night back home, Pete felt overwhelmed with guilt to the point of being physically sick. He called one of the elders and said he would be unable to preach on Sunday. Then he called his executive presbyter and begged for help. This time the man dropped everything and came to see Pete. In their conversation, in which Pete told all, he recommended Pete get professional counseling.

Pete accepted this recommendation and contacted a Christian psychologist in a nearby town. During one session Pete talked about how his affair with Janie was affecting him spiritually. He felt he could not preach or pray anymore. "I'm too embarrassed to go to the Lord about this," he said. "How can I ask for his help when I already know what I'm doing is against his will?" Feeling he was in a no win situation, he seriously contemplated suicide. But his love for his children stopped him.

Pete and Janie would resist seeing each other for days, but then one would call the other, and they would soon be back together again. As often as they could they arranged a time and place to have sex, which would be followed by a cycle of guilt and despair for Pete.

He called the friend he felt closest to from his seminary days and asked if he could come to stay for a few days and talk about his problem. The man agreed, and Pete drove several hours to his house. When Pete told him the full story, the man said, "I simply can't comprehend what you're doing! You of all people know how wrong this is! What do you want me to do about it?"

Pete snapped, "I want help, not a lecture!"

Pete soon learned the man and his wife were having their own troubles. That night after everyone had gone to bed, Pete heard them arguing strongly, so he left quietly in the middle of the night and drove home. He realized he was going to have to handle his problem himself. On the way home he hoped he would fall asleep at the wheel and have an accident. Before he reached home, he decided his only option was to tell the elders what he had done and resign as pastor.

The next morning Pete called the elders and requested an emergency meeting for that evening. He also invited the executive presbyter. In the meeting Pete confessed to the affair without saying who it was with, and offered his resignation. The elders were shocked and did not know what to do. They turned to the executive presbyter, who advised them to tell the congregation everything and accept Pete's resignation. He also encouraged them to support Pete's continuing with counseling.

A meeting of the church was held the next Sunday, and the congregation was told what had happened. The congregation gasped at the news. Many people expressed hurt, disillusionment, and betrayal. A few refused to believe it. Some expressed intense anger at Pete for the shame he had brought to the church. Several people requested that the church refuse to accept the resignation and instead send Pete to a rehabilitation program. But the overwhelming majority

accepted his resignation, effective immediately. They also voted to give Pete's salary to Barbara for six months and to allow her to stay in the manse for that period of time, but no support was to be given to Pete. The next day church officials removed all of Pete's personal belongings from the office and changed the locks on the door.

Discussion Questions:

1. What would you consider to be the primary ethical issue(s) in this case study?
2. Who carries the responsibility for what happened between Pete and Janie?
3. Other than the affair, did Pete do everything he could have to prevent this from happening? Is there something more he could have done?
4. What could the church (local and regional) have done to support Pete's marriage?
5. After the church leadership discovers the misconduct what is their responsibility to all parties:

Congregation:

Janie and Don:

Pastor:

Pastor's Family:

Regional Authority:

6. What would you have the Presbyter do differently?