

Ethics in Preaching

Virginia Annual Conference
Board of Ordained Ministry
Quadrennial Clergy Ethics 2016-2021
Minister as Moral Theologian

The dramatic presentation of sermons containing numerous ethical issues were presented and critiqued during live sessions of the ethics training titled, “Minister as Moral Theologian”. Following are some of the issues represented in the videos. We are sure you were able to identify even more.

The Worst Sermon Ever – presented by Rev. Alex Joyner

- Criticism, embarrassment, and shaming others; in this case, his son Billy.
- Being the hero of your own story
- Sharing confidential or medical conditions of parishioners; oversharing
- Misquoting and plagiarizing others work
- Lying (“I’ve never done anything wrong”)
- Not sharing the Good News, the gospel, or having a theme to the message

An Even Worse Sermon – presented by Rev. Dave Rochford

- Bringing personal pain into the pulpit
- Arrogant, pompous, condescending, sanctimonious, offensive, over-educated
- Mispronouncing the Greek
- Inappropriate glance and body language, sexist
- Plagiarism:
 - “and go boldly into that good and gentle night” (*Dylan Thomas*)
 - “I recall anticipating a major pulmonary surgery...” (*Bishop Cho*)
 - “we regard no man according to his former state” (*John Wesley, Sermon 117*)
 - “Like the harlot named Agnes whom I met in a coffee shop...”
(*Tony Campolo, The Kingdom of God Is a Party*)
 - “I am not proud to recall the theft of a pear from my neighbor's orchard”
(*St. Augustine, Confessions II.9*)
 - “The time is now to stir things up!” (*Bishop Lewis*)
 - “Since conscience is the perfect interpreter of life...”
(*Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man*)
 - “so many people never quite get to the point of rising above self”
(*Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from the Birmingham Jail*)
- Not sharing the Good News, the gospel, or having a theme to the message

Plagiarism and Using Sources

The Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry uses the following definition of plagiarism:

“According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, to "plagiarize" means

- to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own
- to use (another's production) without crediting the source
- to commit literary theft
- to present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source.

In other words, plagiarism is an act of fraud. It involves both stealing someone else's work and lying about it afterward.

All of the following are considered plagiarism:

- turning in someone else's work as your own
- copying words or ideas from someone else without giving credit
- failing to put a quotation in quotation marks
- giving incorrect information about the source of a quotation
- changing words but copying the sentence structure of a source without giving credit
- copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your work, whether you give credit or not (see our section on "fair use" rules)

Most cases of plagiarism can be avoided, however, by citing sources. Simply acknowledging that certain material has been borrowed, and providing your audience with the information necessary to find that source, is usually enough to prevent plagiarism.”ⁱ

The Board has identified five levels of plagiarism, from least to greatest offense, as follows:

1. Attributed quote (in quotation marks) with no end note.
2. Verbatim with an end note with no quotation marks or improper paraphrasing that is attributed.
3. Improper paraphrasing that is unattributed.
4. Unattributed verbatim of material in the paper.
5. Copying so many words or ideas from *a single source* that it makes up the majority of your work, whether it is accredited or not.

ⁱ http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_article_what_is_plagiarism.html.