

Computer Screen

Wendy was visibly uncomfortable as she sat down to talk with Cheryl, the associate pastor. Wendy, the church secretary, was concerned and upset about the well-being of the church, about her job, and about her relationship with Stan, the lead pastor. She had debated going directly to Stan to talk about the issue, but the idea was just too overwhelming for her.

Earlier in the day Wendy had stepped into Stan's office to pick up a letter Stan had signed that was ready to be mailed. Stan had stepped out of his office to run an errand. As she picked up the letter, she accidentally bumped the mouse on his desktop which caused the screensaver to disappear and there on the screen was a pornographic image. She quickly went back to her office and hoped that the screensaver would come back on before Stan returned, which it did.

This was actually the third time over the last several months that Wendy had wondered about what was on Stan's screen. The first time she saw an inappropriate image, the adult Sunday school class was in the middle of a series on sexuality and she told herself that Stan had probably accidentally happened on the site while he was doing research for the series. The second time her glimpse had been so brief that she wasn't actually sure about what she'd seen and she decided that it was probably just a suggestive advertisement. But this third time it seemed obvious to her that Stan was intentionally viewing pornography on his computer. At a loss as to what to do, Wendy went to Cheryl and released all the emotions and confusions that had built up in her related to this situation.

Cheryl has been the associate pastor at Fountain of Life Church for just over three years. Her areas of responsibility include family ministries as well as pastoral care and counseling. Stan has been in his position for the last ten years. Fountain of Life Church is an Anglo congregation with regular attendance of 250. Wendy is the church's full-time secretary and started in this position several years before Stan was hired as the senior pastor.

Stan, 56, is about 20 years older than Cheryl, and Cheryl often feels the generational gap when they are discussing approaches to ministry. Cheryl, who preaches once every two months, is a gifted preacher and the congregation responds positively to her sermons. Sometimes she suspects that this makes Stan feel threatened because, though Stan does most of the preaching, he is not particularly gifted in this area. While Cheryl is outgoing and warm, Stan is more aloof. Some in the congregation experience him as detached. This, too, makes Cheryl wonder if he feels threatened by her. While Cheryl feels generally supported by Stan, she wouldn't say that they are close personally – she would describe their relationship as a cordial professional one.

In the church structure, Cheryl reports to Stan, but Stan does not have the authority to determine her salary or to terminate her. The authority for these decisions lies with the church board. Stan does, however, have the authority to hire and fire office staff.

Nora is Cheryl's best friend in the congregation and is also the current chair of the church board. When Cheryl and her husband moved to town for Cheryl to take this job as the associate pastor, one of the first people to welcome them was Nora. Nora took Cheryl out to lunch, introduced her to others in the congregation, and offered perspectives on the current dynamics within the congregation. The two quickly became good friends and they and their husbands often spend time together socially. Sometimes Cheryl wonders how much to share with Nora about church issues Cheryl is dealing with. Nora is a friend, a church member, and the chair of the board, and a different type or level of sharing seems appropriate in relation to each of these different roles. Given the fact that they are good friends, Cheryl has been sensitive to the fact that Stan could easily feel ganged up on in certain situations, and Cheryl has worked hard to avoid this dynamic.

As Wendy left Cheryl's office, Cheryl sat in her chair staring out the window. She sat there for a long time as she pondered and prayed about what she should do next.