

REACT

Conversation methodology for local communities

Aim

Groups (adults or youth) who want to think about appropriate interactions within church contexts can find a methodology below, which can initiate conversation.

What do you need?

A large cardboard, on which you draw the squares of *The Game of the Goose*. You could use an existing game board as well. It is important that the squares all have one of five different colors, which all occur about the same number of times.

In addition, you will need cards on which questions are printed. These may all be of the same color.

How does it work?

Roll the dice and move your pawn as many squares as the number of eyes you rolled. The number of the square you land on determines which case you will discuss. The color of the square indicates which discussion question to keep in mind while discussing. The player whose turn it is reads the case clearly and calmly. Before others respond, the player himself first answers the discussion question. After the first player's input, the other participants can also respond and share their insights. The discussion of each case should last up to three minutes (or longer if there is a lot of time planned or if there are few participants). Then it is the next player's turn to throw and the game proceeds in the same way.

Why?

REACT is a working form developed at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies as part of the REACT project. The goal of REACT is to create space to discuss transgressive behavior in a church context. Those in need of further background or support on this topic can contact:

- Vlaams Meldpunt Grensoverschrijdend Gedrag: <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaams-meldpunt-grensoverschrijdend-gedrag>
- Sensoa: <https://www.sensoa.be/vlaggensysteem-hoe-reageren-op-seksueel-grensoverschrijdend-gedrag>
- CAW: <https://www.caw.be>
- Otheo: <https://www.otho.be/artikel/stel-vraag-over-misbruik-kerk>

Want to know more about REACT?

Contact Prof. Dries Bosschaert (dries.bosschaert@kuleuven.be) or Prof. Annemie Dillen (annemie.dillen@kuleuven.be) or visit the website: <https://criid.be/react/>.

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Conversation questions around case studies

Each of these questions refers to a different color – for example, a = red, b= green, c= blue, d= orange and e = black.

When you arrive at a blue square, read aloud the case on the conversation card and discuss the question listed under ‘c’.

- a) What are your thoughts and feelings upon hearing this case study?
- b) How do you think this case affects the faith and community of those involved?
- c) What responsibility does the Church bear in this case?
- d) In this case study, do you undertake action and/or react when you yourself are involved?
- e) In this case study, do you undertake action and/or react when you see it happening?

Cases

- 1) A deacon makes regularly inappropriate comments towards several women of the local church community. He rather looks down on them and occasionally comments on the women's appearance. They perceive this as disruptive behavior, but do not intervene further.
- 2) A pastor has been trying to be flirtatious with some of the women in his parish for several months. He gives them conspicuous compliments, tries to make eye contact in uncomfortable ways and tries to touch the women in subtle ways when greeting them. The women have indicated several times that they do not find it pleasant, but the priest laughs this off and says they are exaggerating.
- 3) The sexton of a local church community is known to be very affectionate and, as a result, he occasionally dares to hand out unsolicited hugs. He has already received comments about this from some children who do not like this at all. A while ago, a parent went to report this to the pastor. The sexton and the pastor get along very well, so the pastor protects him. Other than that, reports from parishioners are not paid attention to.
- 4) A pastoral worker is sending some teenagers within the local parish inappropriate messages via social media, this has been going on for a while and actually started out quite innocently. The teens confided in her, but after a while they noticed that the pastoral worker began to take advantage of this. She started asking all kinds of personal questions that made the teens uncomfortable.

- 5) Some of the faithful have been noticing for some time that the local parish priest has been drinking heavily lately. As a result, he is aggressive and very unfriendly toward his parishioners. A while ago he had made very derogatory remarks to one of his altar boys. The boy's parents were not at all pleased with this, and they fear that next time their son might be physically assaulted.
- 6) A Catholic parish with a long history and close-knit community has been struggling with sexual abuse issues for some time. The parish is led by a much-loved priest known for his inspiring sermons and tireless commitment. Behind the scenes, horrible things have been happening recently. Several vulnerable boys from the parish are being sexually approached by the priest. He has been manipulating the teenagers for several months and driving them to the point of abuse. The boys feel very bad about this, but they are afraid to come forward with it. They fear that no one will believe them because the priest is so beloved. Even at home they have no confidants with whom they can share about these terrible events. The priest knows this and takes serious advantage of it.
- 7) A young member of a religious community shares with a confidant within the church that he is uncomfortable with the attention an elderly lady from the parish is paying him. They raise this issue with the community leader, who intervenes by confronting the woman with her behaviour. After a few months, the woman tries to approach the young believer again.
- 8) Matthieu is an altar boy and last week, after he served Mass, he received a pat on the shoulder from the priest. The priest told him that he had done his task very well and gave him a rather firm tap on the shoulder. Matthieu wasn't really pleased with this afterwards and felt that the pastor's compliment was enough and that the pat on the shoulder had been too much. It made him feel uncomfortable.
- 9) During catechesis, you notice that a catechist from another group always punishes the same boy. The boy is known to be quite loud, but even when he is quiet, he is taken to task by the catechist.
- 10) During the local church community's catechist weekend, the catechists and communicants sleep in the same room. The communicants share with each other that they find this strange and uncomfortable. Before going to bed, one of the catechists is shamelessly watching a communicant who is changing clothes.
- 11) The priest compliments one of his altar servers on her haircut. He says: "You look beautiful!" It is not the first time that this has happened. The girl timidly takes the compliment but feels rather nervous about it. Furthermore, the priest has been getting more and more handsy lately and the other altar servers have noticed this as well.
- 12) A mother of a communicant is reading from a children's Bible during a meeting. One of the children comes to sit on her lap, which she encourages. When the child feels uncomfortable and wants to go sit back in his seat, she has difficulty letting the child go.
- 13) During a parish activity, a pastoral worker asks one of the children what he already knows about sexuality. The boy is surprised and stammers that he hasn't learned much about it in school. The pastor laughingly says that he will learn about it soon

enough and that if he has questions, he can always come to him for advice. The boy doesn't understand much and goes back to his mom and dad.

- 14) An altar boy is not paying attention during Mass. The sexton gives him a little push so that he would perform his tasks better. The boy feels bad about this because at home things aren't going well either. His parents have gotten into a fighting divorce, so he regularly receives a tirade at home as well. After Mass, the boy is once again reproached for not doing well and the sexton threatens to replace him with someone else next week.
- 15) Matthias comes from a busy family, where both parents are unable to pick him up from school at the end of the day due to lack of time. Karin, a pastoral worker at the parish, suggests that she will pick Matthias up.
- 16) After Mass, priest Koen tells Aaron, one of his altar boys, that they have a confidential relationship and that he can share all his secrets with him. The boy is happy to get his heart out, because things have not been going well at home for a while. Priest Koen takes advantage of the situation and begins to manipulate the boy. He makes him come to the rectory regularly on Sundays and makes him do chores and other things that Aaron has little desire to do. On the other hand, Aaron is glad to be away from home because his parents only argue with each other. Priest Koen knows this and conveniently takes advantage of it.
- 17) Emma's classmates say she is the favourite of the religion teacher. Mrs. Janssens is always very strict in her class and wants everyone to be silent and cooperative. Everyone has to take their turn to solve an assignment. Emma, on the other hand, is spared from the hardest work every time and Mrs. Janssens is always very sweet and kind to her. After class she asks Emma to stay and says she wants to have a chat with her, although Emma has no desire for this at all. A few weeks later, Mrs. Janssens walks through the classroom while the students are taking a test. She passes by Emma's bench and asks her how the test is going. Emma says it is going well, and Mrs. Janssens is pleased and caresses her over her head. This goes too far for Emma and she feels very embarrassed.
- 18) Priest Jan always greets his parishioners after Mass. He kindly reaches out to everyone and strikes up a conversation with whoever wishes it. Only with Kelly things have been a little different lately. Every time she leaves the church he tries to give her a kiss on the cheek. Everyone notices that he has been more attracted to Kelly lately and she finds this rather annoying. When she confronts the priest about this, he says he doesn't mean any harm and that he's not thinking about it. Kelly also quickly notices that this only happens to her and not to the other ladies.
- 19) During the Eucharist, one of the children is upset and Evelien, one of the pastoral workers, takes him to a separate room. She gets angry with the child and yells very loudly. She says that hefty boys don't cry in church. The child gets scared and starts crying even louder. To silence him, she decides to give the boy a small but firm tap. The child is startled and, as a result, immediately stops crying. She brings him back to his mom and dad who don't notice anything....
- 20) Judith and John (both pastoral workers) discuss with their colleagues information from pastoral conversations they had with young people, without having

specifically asked permission to share that information. One of the youth has recently begun a relationship with someone and it has been going rather badly lately. The boy went to discuss this with Judith and John and they seemed very understanding about it and gave the boy advice. What the boy does not know, however, is that the pastoral workers are discussing this confidential information with their colleagues behind his back.

- 21) Kamino organizes a summer camp for children and youth at the church. During one of the evenings, the game "capture the flag" is scheduled. However, it had already been a busy day and Niek, Kevin and Thomas are already quite tired. One of the camp counselors invites them to come to her tent to watch a movie so the boys don't have to join the game.
- 22) Jerome and Amy are in class together and are both altar boys at their local parish as well. The priest makes up the altar boys' schedule so that he makes sure they always have to serve Mass together. The sexton jokingly tells Amy and Jerome that he does know why they always have to serve Mass together.
- 23) The choir director of the local church choir thinks one of his choir members has a beautiful voice and asks if would like to stop by after the rehearsal to discuss a possible solo part.
- 24) The priest asks Joost, who is an altar boy, to help him clean the altar. As Joost does so, the priest puts his hand on his shoulder and says, "Joost, you do that very well, you are a good help here in the Church".
- 25) Elise is working as a pastor at the hospital. One of her patients has some questions and sends her an e-mail for this purpose. Soon the email contact intensifies, and the patient shares a lot of personal information with Elise. Elise tries to keep a professional distance, but the patient keeps approaching her, emphasizing that he would like her not to share this with others.
- 26) During Kamino's Taizé weekend, Lea and Julie talk about their sexual experiences. A facilitator overhears this and intervenes in the conversation. She shows interest and thinks it is important that young people dare to speak openly about these issues.
- 27) During the joint summer camp of several parishes there are only three showers available. As there is little time for showering after the volleyball tournament, the young people are urged by the camp leaders to shower with more than one at a time so that they can continue with the program in time.
- 28) During catechesis, the catechist wants to try new more active forms of work. The young people are instructed to work in groups to perform a small play around that evening's theme. The catechist himself participates in one of the groups and, while performing the play, touches "accidentally" the buttocks of one of the young people.
- 29) The confirmands go on an outing by bus and one of the catechists comes and sits next to a confirmand while there are still many empty seats on the bus. The catechist starts talking to the boy and after a while puts her hand on his leg. She comforts him because the boy is homesick.

- 30) A couple visits the presbytery for marriage catechesis; the topic of the evening is sexuality within marriage. After a while, the priest asks the woman if she is still a virgin.
- 31) Tom notes during the summer barbecue of the parish that one of the pastoral workers regularly takes pictures that always include his sister. He wonders if this is done intentionally or if the pastoral worker just wants to capture the evening for the parish.
- 32) At the campfire night of a Catholic organization's summer camp, a boy reveals that he regularly sends nude photos to his girlfriend, and coincidentally, this is overheard by the deacon who co-leads. He afterwards reprimands the boy for this.
- 33) During a mourning visit to a family home, the wife of the deceased is very emotional. As a sign of sympathy and comfort, the deacon puts his arm over the wife's shoulder.
- 34) A confirmation catechist is organizing a catechetical meeting for 25 children in the rectory with some other catechists. When the children become too noisy, the catechist starts shouting and says that the children really cannot sit still and are not worthy of receiving their confirmation in this way.