

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
BASIC POLICY STATEMENT
ON SEXUAL AND GENDER HARASSMENT
AND MISCONDUCT OF A SEXUAL NATURE

The _____ United Methodist Church affirms *The 2008 Book of Resolutions*, “2044. Sexual Misconduct Within Ministerial Relationships” and “2045. Eradication of Sexual Harassment in the United Methodist Church and Society”. We affirm that sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship and sexual harassment within the church is incompatible with the Biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. In accordance with *The 2008 Book of Discipline*, ¶161.F, “We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God.” As the promise of Galatians 3:26-29 states, all are one in Christ. We support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation, or gender.

“Sexual misconduct is a betrayal of sacred trust. It is a continuum of unwanted sexual or gender-directed behaviors by either a lay or clergy person within a ministerial relationship (paid or unpaid). It can include child abuse, adult sexual abuse, harassment, rape or sexual assault, sexualized verbal comments or visuals, unwelcome touching and advances, use of sexualized materials including pornography, stalking, sexual abuse of youth or those without capacity to consent, or misuse of the pastoral or ministerial position using sexualized conduct to take advantage of the vulnerability of another. It includes criminal behaviors in some nations, states, and communities.

Sexual harassment is a form of sexual misconduct and is defined in ¶ 161.I in the Social Principles. To clarify further, it is unwanted sexual or gender-directed behavior within a pastoral, employment, ministerial (including volunteers), mentor, or colleague relationship that is so severe or pervasive that it alters the conditions of employment or volunteer work or unreasonably interferes with the employee or volunteer’s performance by creating a hostile environment that can include unwanted sexual jokes, repeated advances, touching, displays, or comments that insult, degrade, or sexually exploit women, men, elders, children, or youth.

Sexual abuse is a form of sexual misconduct and occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (lay or clergy, pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader, or other position of leadership) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, coworker, or volunteer (*1996 Book of Resolutions*, p. 130). It can include coerced or forced sexual contact (including those unable to give informed consent), sexual interaction or contact with children or youth, and sexual exhibitionism or display of sexual visuals or pornography.

Sexualized behavior is behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples include, but are not limited to displaying sexually suggestive visual materials; use of pornography in church programs on or with church property, making sexual comments or innuendo about one’s own or another person’s body; touching another person’s body; touching another person’s body/hair/clothing; touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person; kissing; and sexual intercourse. Sexualized behavior can be a form of sexual misconduct when this behavior is unwanted by the recipient or witness, is a violation of society’s or the Church’s law, breaks the sacred trust in the ministerial role, or violates the vows taken at membership or ordination.

The continuum of behaviors called sexual misconduct within the ministerial relationship represents an *exploitation of power* and not merely “inappropriate sexual or gender-directed conduct. ”Sexual misconduct in any form is unacceptable in church and ministry settings whether it is clergy-to-lay, lay-to-clergy, clergy-to-clergy, lay-to-lay, staff-to-staff, staff-to-volunteer, volunteer-to-volunteer, or volunteer-to-staff. Anyone who works or volunteers under the authority or auspices of the Church must be held to the highest standards of behavior, free of sexual misconduct in any form.” (“2044. Sexual Misconduct Within Ministerial Relationships,” *The 2008 Book of Resolutions.*)

Sexual and gender harassment, sexual abuse and misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the Church interfere with its moral mission. The _____ United Methodist Church prohibits and will not tolerate these behaviors, which are sinful, demeaning, abusive and wrong. The _____ United Methodist Church commits itself to fair and expedient investigation of any complaint of sexual and gender harassment, sexual abuse or misconduct of a sexual nature within the church and to take action deemed appropriate and in compliance with *The Book of Discipline*. Further, the _____ United Methodist Church bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, which is free of these sins and encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ.

Some instances of sexual harassment can be resolved easily and informally between the parties or facilitated mediation. In all other instances, the conduct must be reported immediately to the chair or another member of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and the pastor in charge. If the conduct involves the pastor in charge or another clergy person, it must be reported to the pastor’s supervisor, district superintendent or the bishop.

The _____ United Methodist Church will not retaliate against any person who brings forward a complaint. All staff leaders and members are expected to immediately report any knowledge of harassment, abuse or misconduct to any one of the persons listed above. Prompt and appropriate investigation and corrective action will be taken, including discipline. Persons who make false accusations will be disciplined.

While the _____ United Methodist Church cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, it will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing information about the complaint only on a “need to know” basis and as necessary to promote God’s call for justice, reconciliation and healing.

Anyone who has any questions or concerns about this policy or the issues addressed is encouraged to air those questions or concerns to the PPRC or _____

Adopted by

Date