

Susquehanna Conference Sexual Ethics Policy

Approved June 2011

What Do We Expect of Church Leaders?

Church leaders should do no harm.

The church is a unique environment in which we expect no harm to be done. The church seeks wholeness and healing, in unity expressed as the Body of Christ. Where such unity prevails, there is no exploitation, no humiliation, and no abuse.

Persons in a ministerial role will be held accountable.

The ministerial role is one of power and responsibility. Persons called to ministerial roles are expected to dedicate themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life for the sake of the church and the most effective witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Conduct is as important a witness as the sermons preached, the rites celebrated, the counsel offered and other church tasks performed. Church leaders, whether clergy or laity, must maintain appropriate sexual boundaries that respect the fact that a power differential exists between them and those whom they serve.

What Is Sexual Misconduct According to The United Methodist Church?

Sexual misconduct is a chargeable offense, for both laity and clergy. Chargeable offenses include, but are not limited to: child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, crime, and immorality. (*The Book of Discipline 2008*¹, par. 2702.1, 3.)

DEFINITIONS

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 ministerial position using sexualized conduct to take advantage of the vulnerability of another.

Sexual harassment is “any unwanted sexual comment, advance, or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive. Sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual issue. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender.” (*The Book of Discipline 008*, par. 161.I)

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.

Pornography is sexually explicit material that portrays violence, abuse, coercion, domination, humiliation, or degradation for the purpose of arousal. Any sexually explicit material that depicts children is pornographic.

How Does The United Methodist Church Respond to Sexual Misconduct?

The Book of Discipline sets forth the plan by which we United Methodists govern ourselves. It reflects our understanding of the Church and of what is expected of its laity and clergy as they seek to be effective witnesses in the world as a part of the whole body of Christ. Complaints will be handled according to *The*

¹ *The Book of Discipline* is published by Abingdon Press and is available through [Cokesbury](http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=679753) stores or online at <http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=679753>

Book of Discipline. *The Book of Discipline* will not substitute for actions which might be brought in a civil or criminal court. Any person reporting sexual misconduct shall be heard with sympathy and empathy. All appropriate support shall be afforded the complainant(s), the respondent(s), their families, and the congregation or Conference agency involved.

1. If you feel you are a victim of sexual misconduct by a/an
 - a. clergyperson in a United Methodist church in this Conference →contact your District Superintendent or the Bishop.
 - b. employee or volunteer leader in a Conference-sponsored activity →contact the Bishop.
 - c. layperson in a ministerial role in a United Methodist church in this Conference →contact your District Superintendent.
 - d. layperson in a local church leadership role →contact your pastor.
2. Allegations involving minors or an adult incapable of self-reporting shall be reported as outlined above and also to the appropriate government authorities. In the case of a minor, CHILDLINE shall be contacted (1-800-932-0313) and the church's Safe Sanctuaries Policy shall be followed.
3. Retaliation on account of a good faith report of sexual misconduct shall not be tolerated and shall be considered a separate violation of this policy.

What Support Does the Susquehanna Conference Offer to Those Affected by Sexual Misconduct?

A Sexual Misconduct Response Team shall be named and maintained by the Bishop consisting of persons specially trained to respond as outlined by *The Book of Discipline*. This Team and the Cabinet shall consult and agree upon appropriate case management procedures.

How Will We Help Reduce Sexual Misconduct?

Education and awareness are key elements in the reduction of sexual misconduct and in effective intervention when sexual misconduct occurs. We will provide education to laity in ministerial roles and clergy to reduce sexual misconduct.

This education shall include

1. ethical standards of behavior,
2. information about boundaries and personal self care, and
3. a description of the complaint process and resources available to affected individuals and congregations.

Basic education shall be required

1. for clergy - within six months after initial appointment,
2. for laypersons in ministerial roles – within six months after {enlistment? engagement?}

Following completion of basic education, supplemental education on these subjects shall be required both for clergy and laypersons in ministerial roles at least every two years while serving in a ministerial role.

Congregations shall

1. become informed about issues related to appropriate boundaries and sexual misconduct,
2. draft, approve and follow a local church policy regarding Sexual Harassment, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct,
3. show concern for their own health and that of leaders,
4. be aware of the demands on their pastor's time and establish reasonable expectations, and
5. support continuing education, training, consultation, and peer connections for their clergy and lay leaders.