

The Holston Conference of  
The United Methodist Church

**Clergy Sexual Ethics and Boundaries Seminar**

**AGENDA**

- 8:30 Check in begin ..... Task Force Members**
- 9:30 Welcome, Opening, Introductions ..... Task Force Members**
- 9:40 Worship**
- 9:50 Overview ..... Rev. Dr. Karen A. McClintock**  
Goals for the day:
- Celebrate and honor the call to ministry
  - Become more familiar with ethical boundaries in ministry
  - Identify high risk psychological conditions and personal behaviors
  - Learn about necessary policies and ways to reduce harassment and abuse
  - Explore the damage of sexual secrets and shame in congregations
  - Learn ways to replace shame with grace
- 10:00 Introduction to Problems and Possibilities..... Rev. Dr. Karen A. McClintock**
- The extent of the problem of clergy and laity abuse
  - Sexual shame as an underlying dynamic in abuse and congregational decline
  - The context in which we meet today
- 10:30 BREAK**
- 10:45 Learning to Talk about Sex ..... Workshop Participants**
- Things we agree to
  - A quick survey
  - Small groups explore church teachings about sex
- 11:30 Clergy at Risk ..... Rev. Dr. Karen A. McClintock**
- High risk behaviors
- 12:00 LUNCH**
- 1:00 Holston Foundation: Your Partner in Stewardship ..... Paul Bowman**
- 1:05 Guidelines for Maintaining Professional Boundaries ..... Rev. Dr. Karen A. McClintock**
- 2:00 Congregational Issues ..... Workshop Participants**
- Case studies
  - How to respond to expressions of intimacy
  - Ethical responses to pornography
  - When it is not touching to be touching
- 3:00 BREAK**
- 3:15 Protective Policies ..... Rev. Dr. Karen A. McClintock**
- 3:45 Remaining Questions and Theological grace notes ..... Rev. Dr. Karen A. McClintock**
- 4:00 Closing, Attendee exit code, Check out ..... Task Force Members**



## THINGS WE AGREE TO DO

### Right to Pass:

I have the right not to talk in the group when I don't want to. I can just say "pass."

### Talking and Listening:

I agree to listen to others in the group and expect that others will listen to me in return. I will respect other people's beliefs, content, feelings, and conclusions and respect my own.

### Limited Access:

I agree that people's stories belong to them and I won't repeat what someone says in group outside of group. I agree not to blame or shame people for what they say during the conversation or afterward.

### Basic Respect:

I agree not to put-down, make fun of, minimize, or verbally challenge other people in the group. I agree to avoid speaking negatively about my own opinions ("well, this probably isn't important," or, "this may sound stupid") and I will avoid speaking negatively about the opinions of others. I agree to respect the diversity of opinions, feelings, and experiences expressed in this group.

### Each Statement Stands Alone:

I have a right to speak in group without having it debated. I also get to make statements that stand alone without the agreement or support of others. I will avoid making a point by dragging anonymous others into the conversation (i.e. "I know a lot of people feel this way too," and "everyone knows that.") My own ideas are powerful in their own right.

### Feelings:

Everyone in the group experiences feelings of hurt, sadness, boredom, passion, or anger at some time. Expression of feelings is part of the learning process. I agree to respect and welcome the expression of those feelings, including my own.

### Respect the Process:

I agree to stay for the full time. I agree to "try on" new ways of understanding. I can express ideas and concerns about the day to the workshop leader after the meeting, and I will participate in an evaluation at the end of the event.



A quick and totally unscientific survey:

In my family when I was growing up we talked about sex:

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Too often

The style of communication my parents used in talking to me about sex was:

- Brief
- Embarrassing
- Anxious
- Calm
- Repetitive
- Focused only on safe-sex
- Theologically based
- Hilarious

I learned about sexual intercourse from:

- Books or magazines
- T.V. or movies
- My church
- The internet
- A peer
- A parent
- A sibling
- School
- An older adult
- Some of the above
- All of the above
- Other...

The fact that we're going to talk about sex today makes me feel:

- Free
- Embarrassed
- Anxious
- Hopeful
- Skeptical
- Some of the above
- All of the above
- Other....



## HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOU ARE AT RISK

- Men have a greater risk than women of becoming perpetrators of a sexual boundary violation – with risk of entering a sexualized relationship increasing with age and years of service (Lamb & Catanzaro).
- Studies show that women have a 63-75% chance of being sexually harassed or abused by laity or colleagues. In a recent study in which 52% of female clergy said they were victims of sexual misconduct, 40% of them said their experience was minimized or dismissed.\*
- One study showed that 51% of church employees and 39% of laity indicated that they had experienced harassment in their congregations. In a 2005 study, a small sample of male clergy reported harassment rates as high as 66% (Murphy-Geiss).
- All clergy have an eleven-percent chance of engaging in a sexual boundary violation when providing counseling, supervision or education. Working beyond one's training level, or seeing a person for more than 2-3 sessions of pastoral care increases risk.
- Clergy who are more likely to violate sexual boundaries violate other kinds of professional boundaries as well, particularly in the financial arena.
- The risk of becoming a perpetrator increases with job stress and fatigue.
- Your risk for crossing sexual boundaries or becoming a victim increases if you have depression - symptoms include hopelessness, spiritual malaise, fatigue, negativity, lack of motivation, and low self-esteem.
- Other risk factors include: Overwork and lack of time away, lack of playful time with friends/family, lack of mental, emotional, and sexual replenishment.
- Guilt and shame are risk factors- feelings of guilt about time off, feelings of shame related to sexuality, and feelings of unworthiness in the sight of God increase risk.
- If you lack the reality testing of therapy, consultation and/or supervision with colleagues.
- You are at risk if you find yourself giving special attention to one parishioner or staff member, such as putting extra care into how you look and dress, or what you say, and meeting together with increasing frequency.
- You are at increased risk if your congregation is a closed system, if your congregation has had a prior history of sexual misconduct that remains secretive or unhealed.
- The greater the suppression of discussions about sexuality at home or church, the greater your risk of abusing or being abused.
- You are at greater risk if you have unhealed sexual issues. The less you pay attention to your body and your sexual desires, the more likely you are to have biological/biochemical responses that seem frightening or beyond your control.

## HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOUR PASTOR OR STAFF MEMBER IS AT RISK

- The risk of engaging in sexual misconduct increases with job stress and fatigue and for clergy, the number of years in ministry.
- Your professional staff members are at greater risk if they are depressed – symptoms include hopelessness, spiritual malaise, fatigue, negativity, low motivation or intense overwork, and low self-esteem.
- Clergy who are idealized are also at risk due to a sense of privilege and entitlement. Sexual abuse is about access and power.
- Other risk factors include: Overwork and lack of time away, lack of playful time with friends/family, lack of mental, emotional, and sexual replenishment.
- Access to computer pornography has become increasingly problematic. In the general population nearly 60% of men use pornography on a regular basis, and the UMC discipline strictly prohibits its use by clergy.
- Your pastor or staff member is at risk if they use social media inappropriately, and if you lack a social media policy.
- Guilt and shame are risk factors for clergy - feelings of guilt about time off, feelings of shame related to sexuality, and feelings of unworthiness in the sight of God.
- Your staff members are at risk if they isolate themselves and if they lack the reality testing of going to therapy, getting consultation and/or joining a supervision group with colleagues.
- Clergy who cross sexual boundaries often feel themselves to face impossible demands and when they take time off they receive a good deal of criticism for it.
- Your pastor or staff member is at greater risk if your congregation is a closed system, if your congregation has had a prior history of sexual misconduct that remains a secret, partially disclosed or never fully healed.
- Your congregation is at risk if you have not provided laity with forums for education and respectful conversations about human sexuality across the lifespan, or sex and gender harassment.
- Your pastor or staff member is at risk if you lack policies that include procedures for filing complaints, amnesty for the filing of complaints, and steps to correct the problem. You are at risk if you haven't made those policies known to your entire congregation.
- Your congregation is at greater risk if a system of checks and balances isn't in place, where people can ask questions, express discomforts, and point out professional boundary violations.



## GUIDELINES FOR MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

### Counseling:

- Provide pastoral care within the limits of your specific training and under supervision
- Know when to refer parishioners to professionals and get to know some of the counselors in your area
- Counsel individuals only in your professional office setting, during regular hours, when someone else is present in the building
- On marital issues, see both spouses together (with the exception of domestic violence) and refer them after one or two meetings to professional counselors
- Standard of practice is usually three sessions of pastoral counseling or biblical counseling and then refer
- Make pastoral home visits to individuals who live alone with laity or staff
- Document the times, dates, and brief content of these meetings
- Provide everyone you counsel with a copy of your confidentiality guidelines and limits

### Sexual Feelings:

- Be aware of your own sexual feelings/attractions with congregants/staff/employees
- Discuss these feelings with a trusted professional therapist, colleague, or supervisor
- Do not discuss your sexual feelings or attraction with the object of these feelings or with others who might be affected
- Do nothing to act on the feelings, even if something is initiated by the other person

### Self Care:

- Provide for your own physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual needs: time off, educational leave, family vacations, personal/marital counseling, spiritual direction, etc.
- Develop and nurture a circle of close friends and colleagues
- Avoid over-work which leads to burnout: if needed redefine your job description
- If you begin to feel that you are ineffective, burnt-out, or no longer the right person for the job, consult someone you trust

### Dual Relationships

- Be aware of multiple, conflicting relationships, (relationships where you have more than one identified role)
- When you become aware of having roles that entangle you emotionally with someone discuss the situation with a professional colleague or supervisor.
- Establish clear expectations and boundaries with persons with whom you have dual relationships

### Professional Support

- Maintain an on-going relationship with a professional therapist/consultant/supervisor
- Make use of available in-service opportunities
- Look to other organizations or counselors in your area who provide workshops on burn-out, confidentiality, boundary setting, dual relationships, and secondary trauma
- Catch yourself if you are seeking solace, support, or other emotional care from parishioners which is a breach of professional conduct



# Sample First United Methodist Church

## Local Church Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy

### I. INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

Sample United Methodist Church (the “Church”) is committed to preventing sexual harassment and sexual misconduct but addressing it when it occurs. Effective ministry in Christ requires that we maintain an environment in which all persons are respected and safe. The Church will respond to allegations of misconduct with justice and compassion. To that end, this policy has been adopted.

It is the Church’s policy that all church members, church officers, ministers, teachers, employees and volunteers working in, with and for this Church, are to maintain the integrity of ministerial, employment, and professional relationships at all times. The Church prohibits sexual misconduct of any kind and will take appropriate and immediate action in response to complaints or knowledge of violations of this policy.

#### **Theological Foundation**

We believe and affirm every person is created in the image of God. By recognizing that all human beings have sacred worth and are created in the image of God, we convey the good news of the gospel and provide an understanding of God. We further believe and affirm that sexual misconduct within the church is incompatible with biblical teachings and ethical standards. Sexual misconduct is an abuse of power and authority. It alienates persons from the ministry of the church. It tarnishes the church’s ministry and mission. Those guilty of sexual misconduct bring real harm to persons, congregations and the church as a whole.

Forgiveness is a sacred teaching of the church, but this teaching in no way protects a person guilty of sexual misconduct from the discipline of the church. Representing the church is a privilege requiring the highest standards of conduct. Forgiveness by God or by a person harmed by sexual misconduct does not automatically restore the privilege of serving the church. It is not appropriate for church authorities to pressure persons harmed by sexual misconduct to forgive the offender as a way to restore to the offender the privilege of serving in the church. *Central to the task of church authorities is to protect the vulnerable and to eradicate sexual misconduct from the church.*

### II. PERSONS COVERED

- A. Persons covered by this Policy are Employees, persons seeking employment, Volunteers (while acting on its behalf), and Teachers.
- B. This policy also covers Members who are accused of sexual misconduct where the action that is the basis for the complaint occurred in the course of, or related to, the Member’s attendance at the Church or service on a committee, group, council, or board of the Church.
- C. Whenever a Church Professional/Clergy Person is accused of Sexual Misconduct, any complaint shall be handled in accordance with the Policy on Church

Professional Sexual Misconduct adopted by the Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, as amended from time to time.

### III. DEFINITIONS

#### **Sexual Misconduct**

Misconduct of a sexual nature is a chargeable offense, for both Members and Church Professionals. (§ 2702, *The Book of Discipline*). Sexual misconduct is an abuse of power and authority, and is not only an act against one person, but an act against fellow ministry professionals; members in the local congregation; the church at large; and God.

Sexual misconduct by a Church Professional/Clergy Person includes, but is not limited to, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, the use or possession of pornography, and any form of criminal sexual conduct. (§ 2702.1, *The Book of Discipline*). Sexual misconduct by a Member includes, but is not limited to, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and any form of criminal sexual conduct (§ 2702.3, *The Book of Discipline*). Sexual misconduct by an Employee includes, but is not limited to, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, the use or possession of pornography, and any form of criminal sexual conduct, and while not a chargeable offense under *The Book of Discipline*, may lead to termination of employment. 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.

**Sexual Harassment** is a form of sexual misconduct that is defined in *The Book of Discipline*, § 161(J) as, “*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 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.*” To clarify further, it is unwanted sexual or gender-directed behavior that is so severe or pervasive that it alters the conditions of employment or volunteer work or unreasonably interferes with the complainant’s performance or worship experience 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.

Courteous, mutually respectful, pleasant, non-coercive interactions between Employees and Members, including men and women, that are appropriate in the congregation and acceptable to and welcomed by both parties are not considered to be harassment.

**Pornography** is sexually explicit material utilized for the purposes of sexual excitement and erotic satisfaction. This includes but is not limited to material that portrays violence, abuse, coercion, domination, humiliation, or degradation for the purpose of arousal. In addition, any sexually explicit material that depicts children is pornographic and is a criminal act to access, possess and/or distribute.

A **Complaint** is a written, dated and signed statement claiming harassment or sexual misconduct.

A **Church Professional** is a clergy person, diaconal minister or layperson in any status or relationship with the Annual Conference who has been appointed to Sample First United Methodist Church by the Bishop.

**Complainant** is the person claiming knowledge of harassment or sexual misconduct by a person covered by this policy. The Complainant may or may not be the Victim of alleged harassment or sexual misconduct. A person such as a family member, friend, or colleague of the Victim may be the Complainant whose information initiates an inquiry.

### **Book of Discipline**

*The Book of Discipline* refers to *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, which sets forth the laws, plans, polity and processes by which The United Methodist Church governs itself. It contains insight and information about the distinct United Methodist understanding of the nature and mission of the Church, and about what is expected of its clergy and members as they seek to be faithful and effective disciples of Christ.

**Accused** is the person against whom a claim of harassment or sexual misconduct is made.

**Employee** is any individual who is hired or called to work for this Church for salary or wages, other than a Church Professional.

**Member** is a person who has joined Sample United Methodist Church by letter or statement of faith and is on the membership roll of the Church.

**Teacher** is the term for a volunteer or paid employee who assumes authority for educating others in the church.

**Victim** is the term used to identify the person alleged to have been injured by harassment or sexual misconduct.

**Volunteer** is the term used for those who provide services for the Church and receive no benefits or remuneration. Volunteers include persons elected or appointed to serve on boards, committees and other groups. For purposes of this policy, Volunteers are treated the same as Employees.

## **IV. ROMANTIC OR SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Sample United Methodist Church prohibits romantic or sexual relationships between a supervisory employee and his or her staff (an employee who reports directly or indirectly to that person) or volunteers because such relationships tend to create compromising conflicts of interest or the appearance of such conflicts. In addition, such a relationship may give rise to the perception by others that there is favoritism or bias in employment decisions affecting the staff

employee. Moreover, given the uneven balance of power within such relationships, consent by the staff member/volunteer is suspect and may be viewed by others or, at a later date, by the staff member/volunteer as having been given as the result of coercion or intimidation.

The atmosphere created by such appearances of bias, favoritism, intimidation, coercion or exploitation undermines the spirit of trust and mutual respect that is essential to a healthy work environment.

If there is such a relationship, the parties need to be aware that one or both may be asked to terminate their relationship with the congregation. (Clergy relationships fall under the Conference's **Policy on Church Professional Sexual Misconduct** which also prohibits harassment.)

## V. COMPLAINT PROCESS

### A. Overview

The Church will courteously treat any person who makes a complaint falling under this policy and/or within policies of *The Book of Discipline*. The Church will handle all complaints swiftly and confidentially to the extent possible in light of the need to take appropriate corrective action. Lodging a complaint will in no way be used against the Complainant. Because of the damaging nature of harassment to the victims and to the entire Church, Victims are strongly urged to use this procedure. However, filing groundless or malicious complaints is an abuse of this policy.

### B. Confidentiality

During the complaint process, the privacy of the information received, the privacy of the individuals involved and the wishes of the complaining person will be protected to as great a degree as is possible. The Complainant must, however, submit a written, signed and dated complaint. The expressed wishes of the Complainant for confidentiality will be considered in the context of the egregiousness of the complaint, any legal obligation of the Church to act on the charge, and the right of the Accused to obtain information. However, a certain degree of transparency is essential for the process of just resolution, real accountability, and healing for all parties. Utmost care will be given so that persons experiencing trauma be protected from further emotional harm. In addition, any notes or documents written by or received by the person(s) conducting the investigation will be kept confidential to the extent possible and according to any existing state or federal law.

### C. Retaliation

No hardship, loss, benefit or penalty may be imposed on an Employee, Volunteer, Complainant, Member, or Victim in response to:

- A. Filing or responding to a bona fide complaint of discrimination, harassment, or sexual misconduct.
- B. Appearing as a witness in the investigation of a complaint.
- C. Serving as an investigator of a complaint.

Retaliation or attempted retaliation in response to lodging a complaint or invoking the complaint process is a violation of this policy. Any person who is found to have violated this aspect of the policy will be subject to sanctions up to and including termination of employment. Volunteers found to have violated any aspect of the policy may be asked to step down from serving in specific roles, vacate leadership positions, and/or terminate their membership.

#### **D. Complaint Procedure**

1. The Church has herein established the following procedures for **filing** a complaint of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, or retaliation. The Church will treat all aspects of the procedure confidentially to the extent reasonably possible.
2. An individual who feels harassed, who has experienced sexual misconduct, or who feels retaliated against may initiate the complaint process by filing a complaint in writing with the Church's pastor or co-pastors in charge or the District Superintendent. No formal action will be taken against any person under this policy unless the Complainant submits a written and signed complaint containing sufficient details to determine if the policy may have been violated.
3. As promptly as possible, but in no more than **10** working days of receiving the complaint, the Pastor(s) will notify the Accused, the District Superintendent, and in the event the complaint involves an Employee, the Staff Parish Relations Committee, and shall initiate an investigation to determine whether there is a reasonable basis for believing that the alleged violation of this policy occurred.
4. The Pastor and/or District Superintendent shall designate one or more persons, who together with the Pastor and the District Superintendent or the District Superintendent's designee, may form a "Discovery Team", which shall interview the Complainant, the Accused and any witnesses to determine whether the alleged conduct occurred. If the Accused is an Employee, the Discovery Team shall include at least one member of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.
5. When investigating allegations of sexual misconduct or harassment, the Pastor should first advise the Complainant that investigation will be conducted in a professional, thorough manner and as discretely as is possible. The Pastor should also advise the Accused of the purpose of the investigation, the fact that no conclusion has been made regarding the investigation, and that the same rules of confidentiality which apply to the Complainant also apply to the Accused.
6. Any investigation shall be taken and concluded within a reasonable period of time. The scope and details of each investigation will depend on the nature of the report and the related circumstances.
7. All persons having reported suspected sexual harassment or sexual misconduct should refrain from contacting the person suspected of such conduct. Likewise, the persons suspected of such conduct shall refrain from contacting the

complainant or alleged victim. All persons serving as witnesses in the investigation should refrain from contacting the complainant or the respondent in order to preserve the integrity and confidentiality of the investigation. All persons having received a report of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct shall keep all reports confidential, except as required by *The Book of Discipline*, where applicable, or where necessary to investigate and resolve such matters, and/or to respond to any related legal or administrative proceedings.

8. If the Accused is a Member, the pastor or district superintendent should take pastoral steps to resolve any complaints. After the complaint is filed, steps may include a just resolution process. (See ¶ 261.1c of *The Book of Discipline*).
9. Whenever a written complaint is made against a Member for any of the offenses in ¶2702.3 of *The Book of Discipline*, the complaint process in ¶ 2704.4 of *The Book of Discipline* will be followed from this point. In addition to the steps outlined in *The Book of Discipline*, the local church Pastor, in consultation with the District Superintendent, may have legal counsel review the complaint.
10. The results of the investigation should be communicated to the Complainant and the Accused, and appropriate corrective action taken. The type of corrective action taken will depend on the nature and severity of the allegation(s). In the case of an Employee or Volunteer, such action may include appropriate discipline, up to and including termination.
11. After the investigation and any action that has been taken, the Pastor or District Superintendent should remind all individuals with knowledge of the allegations that all information obtained in the investigation, and possibly even the disciplinary action itself, is confidential.
12. If the Accused is a Member, the Accused may choose to withdraw from the process by withdrawing his or her name from the roll of professing members at any time without further review.
13. Alternative legal remedies. Nothing in this policy may prevent the Church, the Complainant or the Accused from pursuing formal legal remedies, mediation, or resolution through local, state or federal agencies or the courts.

*This policy has been developed for use in the United Methodist Church. While it has been reviewed by legal advisors, you are welcome to consult a local attorney regarding the adoption of this policy for your local congregation. Permission has been granted for you to adapt and use this resource.*



## CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

When you come to this congregation to receive pastoral care, participate in small groups, or have prayer, it is understood that you may share personal stories with the pastoral staff. These disclosures will be handled with the utmost care and with consideration for your right to control their dissemination. When you receive pastoral counseling, the pastor will consider what is shared to be a sacred trust. This information will remain confidential with a few legal and ethical exceptions. These exceptions are determined by State and Federal laws and the ethics codes of clergy in each denomination. If you disclose to a pastor, lay minister, group leader, or other mandated reporter that a child (someone under the age of 18) has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed, or that an elderly person or disabled person has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed, the information necessary to protect individuals from such harm will be forwarded to protective services.

If you tell a member of the pastoral staff that you are in danger of harming yourself, being harmed, or harming someone else, the information shared with our staff may no longer be considered confidential and may be forwarded to protective services or state law enforcement agencies. If the disclosure falls under state or federal law as a mandated report, it will be disclosed according to those laws.

Although there are circumstances under which some state laws may protect a one-on-one “privileged” conversation between a clergy person and a parishioner from disclosure, this only happens in very limited situations, such as a confessional booth with a priest or the confession of an incarcerated person facing execution. In the daily practice of ministry where counseling is provided, children and adults are offered prayer and education or supervision is provided, this information is not “privileged.” Disclosures made to members of the clergy while passing in the hallway of a church, at a church function, or where others are present are not “privileged” under the law. When parishioners turn to ministers for guidance these conversations are not protected from disclosure if harm has occurred or would likely occur if such disclosure is not forthcoming.

As a Christian fellowship we are called to create an atmosphere of personal respect and safety. We intend to be a congregation that is free of rumors or gossip. When you share your story with pastoral staff or lay members in the congregation we recognize that you are entrusting us with your personal and spiritual information, and we will do all we can to honor that trust. Pastoral confidences will be honored within the limits of these legal and ethical guidelines regarding the reporting of harm to others. When harm is not of concern, pastoral confidences are held in sacred trust, and as such will not be passed to anyone else in the congregation or outside of the congregation without your documented verbal permission or written permission. We believe that with these guidelines in place, and regular evaluation of these guidelines, we create and maintain a congregation of safety and respect.

(McClintock, 2019) Also available to download from <http://healthycongregation.com>



## **HOLSTON CONFERENCE SEXUAL ETHICS FOR MINISTRY PROFESSIONALS**

**Statement of Covenant:** We have been called into covenant with God and one another through the grace of Jesus Christ. This covenant, which we share together as Christ's body, the Church, is intended by God to be a means of reconciliation, justice, faith, hope, and love. Sexual harassment and misconduct, and other like actions, disrupt the sacred covenant of God with us and are unacceptable in the community where Christ's ministry of grace is proclaimed and experienced. Therefore, all Christians are called to identify and prevent sexual harassment and misconduct whenever, however, and wherever it is encountered.

**Preamble:** In light of our covenant, it is the intent of this policy to provide for an experience of grace, justice, and reconciliation for both the aggrieved, the respondent and all affected parties when sexual misconduct is alleged or proven. Victims of sexual misconduct experience a devastating betrayal of trust. The victim(s) has trusted that the power and the authority entrusted to the ministry professional will be used for the well-being of persons. In turning to that ministry professional, persons become vulnerable and trust that their vulnerability will be respected and not abused. When the ministry professional uses power to abuse and disrespect the trust and vulnerability of persons, the effects are painfully traumatic. Furthermore, we understand that while grace means that we are loved by God unconditionally, it does not mean that we escape the consequences of our actions. There may come a time when we can no longer continue in ministry or employment because our personal behavior is not compatible with the sacred office of the ministry.

When incidents of sexual misconduct are alleged or proven, the greatest possible care shall be taken to assure that victims are not further victimized. When sexual misconduct occurs in a community, all are affected. When sexual misconduct has occurred, all who are hurt are encouraged to seek appropriate therapeutic assistance. Truth-telling is risky and painful and may stir up strong feelings of fear and anger for both those who tell and those who hear. But, truth-telling has the power to release persons accused and victims from secrecy, denial, and guilt that result from sexual misconduct. Therefore, truth telling must be encouraged and truth tellers must be protected.

**NOTE:** *The term "ministry professional" is used in this policy to include all ordained, licensed, consecrated and commissioned persons both male and female, married or single, serving in the Holston Annual Conference. This includes those ministers serving extension ministries, those who are on leaves, those who have been honorably located, and those who are retired. "Ministry professionals" also includes any person, professional or volunteer who serves in a position of leadership, power, or authority in a ministry of the Holston conference.*

### **A. DEFINITIONS**

1. **Sexual Misconduct:** Is a chargeable offense for ministry professionals and lay people in the United Methodist Church. Chargeable offenses include: child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, use of pornography, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, crime and immorality. Sexual misconduct is an abuse of power through sexual harassment, contact, or activity (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which the ministry professional violates the free choice or abuses the vulnerability of a parishioner (including children), client, church staff person, colleague or any other person who acknowledge the authority of the ministry professional; or causes or allows the parishioner, client, church staff person, or colleague to

engage in inappropriate sexual behavior with the ministry professional. For a fuller definition of sexual misconduct see Book of Resolutions 2016, Resolution 2044. It is an act not just against a single person, but against all members in a local church, the wider Church, fellow ministry professionals and God.

At the core of this definition of sexual misconduct is the *abuse of power* that occurs when a person initiates or allows sexual behavior with or from someone who is in a position of trust and dependence in the relationship. Sexual misconduct breaks a sacred trust. Any such sexual misconduct is a violation by the ministry professional who then bears the responsibility for his or her behavior. Each alleged case of sexual misconduct requires an investigation and response that is in line with procedures outlined below in section B When Sexual Misconduct is Alleged.

**2. Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment is a sin. The United Methodist Church defines sexual harassment in The 2016 Book of Discipline, ¶161.J as “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 2016 Book of Resolutions, Resolution 2045 further clarifies, “It creates a hostile, offensive environment that can include unwanted inappropriate sexual jokes, repeated advances, touching, displays, or comments that insult, degrade or sexually exploit women, men, elders, children or youth.” Furthermore, sexual harassment can include inappropriate questions or comments about sexual behavior or preference, inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance, and/or repeated requests for social engagements.

**3. Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse is a form of sexual misconduct. When a ministry professional engages in sexualized behavior or conduct with a parishioner, employee, student, coworker, subordinate, client, or volunteer the ministry professional is engaging in sexual abuse. It can include coerced or forced sexual contact, intercourse or contact with children or youth, and sexual exhibitionism or display of sexual images or pornography.

**4. Pornography:** Is defined in the 2016 Book of Discipline ¶161.Q. It is “sexually explicit material that portrays violence, abuse, coercion, domination, humiliation, or degradation for the purpose of sexual arousal. Pornography sexually exploits and objectifies both women and men. Any sexually explicit material that depicts children is abhorrent and victimizes children.” The Book of Resolutions 2016, Resolution 2081 further clarifies our stance on pornography. To summarize this resolution at its simplest form, “We oppose all forms of pornography.” While sex and sexuality are God's gifts to us pornography has the capacity to teach and encourage unhealthy, unrealistic and exploitive views of sex and sexuality particularly in the young. The church should be a place where healthy sexuality is encouraged and taught.

## **B. WHEN SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IS ALLEGED**

It is the purpose of this policy to encourage proper standards of behavior and, thus, the disclosure of sexual misconduct. Therefore, it is important to protect those persons who truthfully disclose such misconduct. When an allegation of Sexual Misconduct is made to any ministerial professional, it should promptly be reported to the relevant District Superintendent or the Bishop. Any allegation of sexual misconduct involving a minor or any other person covered by State Mandatory reporting laws should also be reported to appropriate governmental authorities. The

list of names of District Superintendents and the Bishop and their contact information can be found at [www.holston.org](http://www.holston.org) or by calling (865) 690-4080.

When a complainant contacts the District Superintendent or Bishop, they should be given a clear understanding of what it means to file a formal complaint. Explanations and examples can be found at [www.umsexualethics.org](http://www.umsexualethics.org).

Upon receipt of a report by a District Superintendent or the Bishop, a prompt and thorough investigation into the allegations of sexual misconduct against any ministry professional will be conducted and, if needed, appropriate corrective action will be taken. Each investigation will vary in scope by the nature of the report and the related circumstances. When involving ministry professionals, the procedure may be governed by paragraphs ¶362, ¶2701-¶2719 and any other relevant paragraphs of the current Book of Discipline. All investigations will be handled with as much discretion as the circumstances permit to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

All persons having reported suspected sexual misconduct should refrain from contacting the person suspected of such conduct. Likewise, the persons suspected of such conduct shall refrain from contacting the complainant or alleged victim. All persons serving as witnesses in the investigation should refrain contacting the complainant or the respondent, in order to preserve the integrity and confidentiality of the investigation.

All persons having received a report of sexual misconduct, including anyone specifically engaged to serve as an advocate or investigate such reports, shall keep all reports confidential, except as required by The Book of Discipline, where applicable, or necessary to investigate and resolve such matters, and/or to respond to any related legal or administrative proceedings. All allegations of sexual misconduct with minors or vulnerable adults occurring in the Holston Conference will be reported to the appropriate governmental agencies, as required by mandatory reporting laws of each State in the Holston Conference.

### **C. STANDARDS OF MINISTERIAL CONDUCT**

1. Ministry professionals related to the Holston Annual Conference are always accountable for the ways they respond to persons who ask for their ministerial assistance and over whom they have authority. Any breach of this ministerial relationship, ministerial responsibility, and ministerial authority is abusive and unethical. All those within the covenant of the church are encouraged to discern when particular collegial support, therapy, or other assistance should be sought for ministry professionals with regard to both clergy to clergy and clergy to lay relationships.

2. Ministerial self-discipline requires self-awareness. Personal integrity and mature professional conduct are a part of every ministerial relationship. This prohibits any sexual behaviors with a parishioner or client entrusted to his or her sacred care. Since the balance of power is always on the side of the ministry professional, it is the ministry professional who is always responsible for keeping the relationship free from sexualized behavior. This power difference makes consent impossible in the relationship.

3. All ministry professionals have the responsibility for developing healthy and ethical relationships with other persons. Married ministry professionals have covenanted to nurture and maintain a faithful marital relationship. The covenant also reminds single ministry professionals that dating relationships must maintain full attention to sexual conduct as understood in our

Christian teaching, outlined in ¶330.5.c (3) and ¶335.c (3) of The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016.

These standards apply to all ministry professionals as defined in this policy.

#### **D. Social Media Guidelines**

Social Media is the ever-expanding array of web-based and mobile technologies used for both public and private communications. Examples include texting, emailing, video chat, picture/video sharing services and applications. Social Media can be a useful and increasingly necessary way of developing relationships and growing community. However, as useful as Social Media can be there are also potential pitfalls.

Interactions on Social Media can seem much more private than they really are. Content may also remain accessible, even after it seems to have been deleted. The words and images we use need to be selected with care. The meaning and tone of words can be lost or misconstrued when removed from tone, body language and other context clues. Images of parishioners should not be posted without the consent of the people in them or of children without the consent of parents. Other images may be copywritten and we may not legally be able to post them. Therefore, care must be taken to exercise wisdom and discretion about what is posted, what sites are visited, messages that are sent and to whom.

Messages and posts that contain words or images that can reasonably be seen as sexually explicit, offensive, profane, racist, sexist, demeaning, libelous, threatening, offensive and the like, even if no hurt or harm was intended, are inappropriate. Anyone who uses social media in ways that constitute misconduct is subject to discipline.

Social media and its best practices may represent a shifting goal. There are some areas in which best practices do exist. The first best practice is to remember that you are a ministry professional even when you are on Social Media. Therefore, think that for the person reading a post it is in the voice of the Pastor, District Superintendent, Bishop, Church leader or other Ministry Professional that is being heard.

When communicating with parishioners, the ministry professional should not delete those communications. Ministry professionals should seek and receive permission from parents/guardians before communicating with minors on social media; and all communications should be saved. Disappearing message applications and services should not be used by ministry professionals to communicate with parishioners, clients, youth or about church business or professional matters. As technology changes, our guiding principle of social media use must be: "Does this further the work of the Church and does it meet the high ethical standards of our calling?"

#### **E. RESPONSIBILITY FOR REPORTING SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND HARASSMENT**

Because the Church is a place for healing and justice, it must recognize, prevent, and stop sexual misconduct and harassment. As a part of the covenant community of faith, all ministry professionals and laity bear sacred responsibility to address sexual misconduct and harassment as they become aware of such behavior. Both laity and ministry professionals bear responsibility for confronting one another with knowledge of sexual misconduct and harassment. Ministry professionals in particular are called not only to confront one another but to report sexual misconduct and harassment to the district superintendent and/or the Bishop. Relevant State

Mandatory reporting laws should also be followed. Every complaint will be taken seriously. When the covenant of trust has been broken by instances of sexual misconduct or harassment, there is pain and disruption throughout the covenant community. In those instances, the whole community is called to encourage and support an aggrieved person, care for one committing the offense and initiate complaint procedures as outlined in ¶361 and ¶2701 through ¶2719 in The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016.

**F. Availability of Policy** This policy shall be printed annually in the Journal of the Holston Annual Conference. Further, it shall be posted at [www.holston.org](http://www.holston.org) continuously. It should be made available in at least one common area of every church in the Holston Annual Conference and kept on file in each church office. It is also strongly recommended that each church place a copy of the General Commission on the Role and Status of Women Flyer found here <http://umsexualethics.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/GCSRW-Sexual-Ethics-Flyer-0420105-Crops.pdf> somewhere in their church.

**If any provision of this policy is in conflict with the current edition of *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, the current Book of Discipline shall prevail. Such conflict shall not be grounds for invalidating this policy.**





The location of the training event you attended: \_\_\_\_\_

**WORKSHOP CONTENT**

What did you hope to learn at this workshop?

Did this workshop fall short of, live up to, or exceed your expectations?

Was the content relevant to your current needs and experiences?

What new learning took place for you at the workshop?

What else would you have covered if you were the presenter?

Did you feel the materials helped you to see problems from a variety of perspectives?

**WORKSHOP RESULTS**

What obstacles to open conversations about sexual harassment and abuse do you face?

What you will do back home to let others know what you have learned?

I can help my congregation move forward in the following ways...

I will use what I learned in this workshop by...

I am more equipped to handle sexuality issues in my congregation and will start by...

Thank you for attending this event and taking time to complete this evaluation!

