

**Central Texas Conference Policy Statement
On Misconduct of a Sexual Nature
(This policy was adopted by the 1998 Annual Conference)**

The Central Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist denomination affirms the 2004 *Book of Resolutions Sexual Abuse Within the Ministerial Relationship and Sexual Harassment Within the Church*, which states that sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship and sexual harassment within the church is incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. Further, the Central Texas Annual Conference bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, which is free of misconduct of a sexual nature and encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ. The Conference will provide education for the awareness and prevention of misconduct of a sexual nature. The church is a sanctuary and misconduct of a sexual nature will not be tolerated.

The policy which follows is designed in conjunction with *The Book of Discipline*, to apply to both clergy and laity in ministerial roles or professional roles of leadership.

Theological Statement

In the Genesis stories, as in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is affirmed that we are created in the image and likeness of God. God values human life, intending all women, men and children to have worth and dignity in all relationships with God and others. God calls us into covenant with each other in God through the grace of Jesus Christ. This covenant, which we share together in Christ's body, the Church, is intended by God to be a means of reconciliation, justice, faith, hope, and love. Misconduct of a sexual nature disrupts the sacred covenant of God with us and is unacceptable in the community where Christ's ministry of grace is proclaimed and experienced. As the promise of Galatians 3:26-29 states, all are one in Christ, therefore, we support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation, or gender.

Definitions

Sexual Harassment as defined in the Social Principles of the 2004 Book of Discipline ¶161.I. We believe human sexuality is God's good gift. One abuse of this good gift is sexual harassment. We define sexual harassment as any unwanted sexual 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. Contrary to the nurturing community, sexual harassment creates improper, coercive, and abusive conditions wherever it occurs in society. Sexual harassment undermines the social goal of equal opportunity and the climate of mutual respect between men and women. Unwanted sexual attention is wrong and discriminatory. Sexual harassment interferes with the moral mission of the Church.

Sexual Misconduct includes sexual harassment as defined above, sexual abuse, as defined below, and sexual behavior that gratifies one's sexual needs through the exploitation of another person who has less social or professional power and who may be coerced or influenced to consent to the behavior because of the difference in status, power or authority. Sexual misconduct may also take place in sexual behavior between adults who consent, but for whom a sexual relationship is morally inappropriate because of the marital or professional status of one or both of the parties.

Sexual Abuse is behavior including but not limited to rape, statutory rape, sexual assault, indecent exposure, engagement in or promotion of prostitution, incest, pornography involving children, or fondling, molesting, or sexually assaulting a child. Sexual abuse involves: a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of leadership roles in the church and exploitation of those who are vulnerable.

Questions and Concerns

Some instances of sexual harassment can be resolved informally between parties. Anyone who desires to discuss a concern regarding misconduct of a sexual nature may contact his or her pastor, or if the pastor is the one accused, the grievant should contact another United Methodist clergy, a District Superintendent, the Bishop, or a person trained to function as an Advocate. Such contact and discussion does not constitute the reporting of a grievance. Persons with complaints are encouraged to work toward resolution and/or reconciliation at the local church level whenever possible.

Advocacy & Support

Advocates have been trained to provide support and to explain the procedure available within the structure of the Church for dealing with misconduct of a sexual nature.

An Advocate may be reached by calling the Advocacy Hotline or by contacting a District Superintendent or the Bishop. The Advocacy Hotline number may be obtained from clergy or diaconal ministers, a district office, the conference office, the chairperson of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women or the chairperson of the Board of Church and Society.

Note: Talking with an Advocate does not constitute the reporting of a grievance.

Reporting Misconduct of a Sexual Nature

The Central Texas Annual Conference commits itself to fair and expedient investigation of any charge of sexual misconduct in the church. Appropriate action shall be taken in compliance with *The Book of Discipline*. Concern shall be taken for safeguarding the confidential nature of the process, protecting of potential victims and not tolerating retaliation. Reconciliation and resolution shall be a continuing goal of the process, so long as these efforts are not used to hinder fair process.

Contact Person. A person who believes he or she has experienced misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the Church from a clergy person in a ministerial role or professional role and wishes to make a report should contact the Bishop or a District Superintendent. (If a District Superintendent is accused, the grievant should contact another District Superintendent or the Bishop.)

A person who believes he or she has experienced misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the Church from a lay person in a ministerial role or professional role and wishes to make a report should contact his or her pastor, a clergy person, a diaconal minister, or a District Superintendent. (If his or her pastor is accused, the grievant should contact a clergy person, a diaconal minister, or a District Superintendent.)

Procedure. The procedure to be followed in making a report of clergy misconduct of a sexual nature is delineated in the *2004 Book of Discipline* ¶362 and ¶2601-2719.

The procedure to be followed in making a report of lay misconduct of a sexual nature is delineated in the *2004 Book of Discipline* ¶2601-2719.

Note: When an allegation of misconduct of a sexual nature is subject to mandatory reporting requirements by the state, it shall be reported to the Bishop, and to the appropriate authorities and agencies.

This policy statement shall be visibly posted in each local church.

Each local church and United Methodist related institution shall have a policy on misconduct of a sexual nature.

For further information or to report ministerial misconduct, contact the Central Texas Conference victim/survivor advocacy and response team at 1-817/266-9511.