

VII. LEGISLATION

RS 204 Policy on Sexual Ethics

(Adopted 06/08/2019)

WHEREAS In June 2012 the Western PA Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted RS 207, “Sexual Harassment Policy.”

WHEREAS In 2018 all active clergy participated in ethics training and at this time it was determined the current policy needed to be updated to reflect the 2016 *Book of Discipline* and also to more fully reflect the intent of the 2016 *Book of Resolutions*, specifically resolutions #2045 and #2046.

WHEREAS A draft revision of the current policy was made and from January to March 2019 that revised policy was brought before the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, the Board of Ministry, the Board of Laity and the Coordinating Cabinet for further discussion and review.

WHEREAS In March 2019, the revised policy was supported by each of the following groups by vote: the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, the Board of Ministry, the Board of Laity, the Coordinating Cabinet.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Western PA Conference of The United Methodist Church adopt this revised “Sexual Ethics Policy.”

Sexual Ethics Policy

Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

Statement of Policy

A clergyperson or professing member of a local church of the Western PA Conference of The United Methodist Church shall not engage in sexual misconduct, including but not limited to sexual and/or gender harassment, of another professing member or clergy member of The United Methodist Church (2016 *Book of Discipline*, ¶¶ 605.9, 2702.1 and 2702.3).

Theological Foundation

All persons are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). God intends all persons to have worth and dignity in their relationships (1 John 2:10-11). The Church is one connected body, and when one part of the body is injured physically, emotionally or spiritually, the entire body suffers and is rendered less than what God intended (1 Corinthians 12:26). Misconduct of a sexual nature of any kind violates a person's wholeness and is an unjust use of status and power and a sinful behavior against God and one another. The Scripture witnesses to a God who brings about justice, mercy and grace. The Church is called to express God's love in concrete actions of compassion and healing of all people.

Definitions

1. Sexual Misconduct: "Sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships is a betrayal of a sacred trust. It is a continuum of 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 another." (2016 *The Book of Resolutions*, pp. 776-777). The 2016 *Book of Discipline* identifies sexual misconduct as a chargeable offence for clergy (§2702.1) and lay members (§2702.3).

2. Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is a form of sexual misconduct and is defined in our Social Principles 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." (2016 *Book of Discipline*, ¶161.J). Behaviors considered sexual harassment can include "unwanted sexual jokes, repeated advances, touching, displays, or comments that insult, degrade, or sexually exploit women, men, elders, children or youth" (2016 *Book of Resolutions*, page 777). Sexual harassing behaviors may occur in person or by phone, e-mail, texting, and social networking sites.

3. Power: Clergy are generally considered to be in positions of power due to their professional role as spiritual leaders within a church. There are, however, situations in which professing members of a church have the power to create a hostile or abusive environment which undermines the ministry of the clergy person serving within the appointment to the local church. Factors include gender, race, age, wealth, education, and status within the community.

4. Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse means unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature, or sexualized behavior that may include, displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, touch, fondling, or other physical contact and sexual relations (2016 *Book of Resolutions*, p. 777).

Reporting

Clergy and other persons who have knowledge of a possible violation of this policy by a professing member should report the same to the chairperson of the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent. Upon receipt of any reported possible violation, the Staff/Parish Relations Committee with the guidance of the District Superintendent will investigate, consider any response, and take action to seek a just resolution. If the chairperson of the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations has been possibly involved in the violation of this policy the Vice-Chair or Secretary shall assume the chairperson's responsibilities.

Complaints against clergy, including clergy currently serving as a District Superintendent, should be reported to the Bishop, in accordance with ¶362 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline*. If the District Superintendent has been possibly involved in the violation of this policy the Bishop or another District Superintendent appointed by the Bishop shall assume the District Superintendent's responsibilities.

Complaints against the Bishop should be handled in accordance with ¶413 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline*.

Allegations involving minors or an adult incapable of self-reporting shall be reported to the appropriate government authorities. For reference, in Pennsylvania, a report of suspected child abuse shall be made to PA ChildLine 1-800-932-0313 and a report concerning suspected abuse of an adult incapable of self-reporting shall be made to Protective Services Hotline 1-800-490-8505. In addition to this report, a report shall also be made as described above in this policy.

Media Response

Media response should be handled under the Conference standards, with any questions directed to the District Superintendent.

Resolution

The process for resolving any possible violations of this policy shall be the processes outlined in ¶¶ 221, 228, 361, 362, and 2702 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline*.

Commitment to Reducing Sexual Misconduct

Education and awareness are key elements in the reduction of sexual misconduct. The Western PA Conference will provide education to clergy in ministerial roles to reduce sexual misconduct.

This education shall include:

1. ethical standards of behavior
2. resources for spiritual, emotional and physical well-being;
3. a description of the complaint process and resources available to affected individuals and congregations.

Basic education and training shall be required for all clergy:

1. Prior to the clergy person being issued a license
2. As part of the provisional process, for those seeking ordination

Ongoing education and training shall be offered and/or approved by the Western PA Conference and required for all clergy persons every four years while serving in a ministerial role.

Congregations shall become educated about issues related to appropriate boundaries and sexual misconduct; be aware of the demands on the time of their ministerial

leaders and establish reasonable expectations; and support continuing education and training for their clergy and lay leaders.

Congregations shall draft, approve and follow a local church policy regarding Sexual Harassment, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct that uses this policy as the base standard. Until such a policy has been adopted, the Conference policy and procedures will be in effect for the local church.

Revision of Policy

This policy may be amended by a majority vote of the annual conference. This policy may be editorially updated by the Conference Secretary, or one designated by that person, to reflect any changes made in the *Book of Discipline* or *Book of Resolutions*, such as paragraph number, or quotations. All amendments and editorial revisions shall be reported to the annual conference and published in the *Conference Journal*.

Additional Resources

The *Book of Discipline*, Abingdon Press, 2016.

¶362 details complaint procedures and ¶2702 details chargeable offenses.

For information on how to contact District Offices, resources for the local church, and a copy of this policy:

<https://www.wpaumc.org/SexualEthicsPolicy>

For resources and more information about the complaint process and healing:

<http://umsexualethics.org/>

1-800-523-8390, is a Toll Free Number operated by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women

The portion of this policy on reducing sexual misconduct has been adapted, with appreciation, from the West Virginia Conference of The UMC.

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Eric Raygor and David Janz, Co-Chairs, Board of Ministry

Sharon Gregory, Conference Lay Leader and Chair, Board of Laity

Angela Rishell, Chair, Conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women

Patrick Lenox, Dean of the Cabinet