

SEXUAL ETHICS POLICY OF THE LOUISIANA CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Statement of Policy and Commitment

Clergy and laity in ministerial roles, lay employees and volunteers of the Louisiana Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church shall not engage in sexual abuse, sexual harassment, gender harassment or sexual misconduct. Further the Louisiana Annual Conference 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. The Louisiana Conference will not condone or tolerate instances of sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, gender harassment, or sexual abuse and is committed to a prompt and thorough investigation of allegations, in compliance with *The Book of Discipline*.

Theological Foundation

We affirm that God creates all persons with intrinsic and sacred worth, value and dignity, and these values must be upheld in all relationships. We are one connected body, and when one part of the body is injured physically, emotionally or spiritually, the entire body is rendered less than God intended. Misconduct of a sexual nature of any kind violates a person's wholeness. It is an unjust use of status and power and a sinful behavior before 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 justice, compassion and healing for all people.

Definitions

1. **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." (Book of Resolutions 2008, p. 134).
2. **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 includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender." (Book of Discipline 2008, ¶161.1). "[I]t 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." (Book of Resolutions 2008, p. 135)
3. **Gender harassment** is unwelcome or unwanted conduct which is gender specific, either cross gender or same gender. Although not specifically "sexual", gender harassment may be recognized in patterns of behavior creating a hostile or abusive working environment. Both sexual and gender harassment are exploitations of power and are discriminatory by law." (GCFA Legal Manual, p. III-45: <http://www.gcfa.org/gcfa-legal-manual>).
4. **Sexual abuse** [in ministry] 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." (Book of Resolutions 2008, p. 135)
Furthermore, "the use of pornography in church programs, on church premises or with church property by persons in ministerial roles (lay and clergy) is a form of sexual misconduct." (Book of Resolutions 2008, p. 155)
5. **Clergy and laity in ministerial roles** shall include clergy as defined by the Book of Discipline ¶141, retired clergy members of the annual conference, and any other person in a ministerial role as explained and illustrated on p. 136 of the Book of Resolutions 2008.
6. **Pornography** as defined on pg. 149 of the Book of Resolutions.

Abuse of Power

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role and exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Similarly, sexual and gender harassment are usually understood as exploitations of power relationships rather than as exclusively sexual or gender issues. This does not mean that clergy could never be the victim of sexual harassment or sexual abuse by laity (See Book of Discipline ¶605.8. and Louisiana Annual Conference policy for Professing Members regarding harassment of clergy).

Implementation

The Annual Conference will use its best efforts to provide all clergy and laity in ministerial roles (including retired clergy), volunteers, employees, and local churches of the Annual Conference with a copy of this policy and shall conduct training on this policy periodically. In addition this policy shall be posted on the Conference website. It is the responsibility of each clergy person, active and retired, lay employee and volunteer to be familiar with and understand the terms of this policy and to attend the training events sponsored by the Annual Conference.

Making a Complaint

Persons who have knowledge of possible violations of this policy by clergy or laity in a ministerial role, lay employee or volunteer are urged to report the same to any District Superintendent or the Bishop. The contact information for these persons can be found on the conference website, www.la-umc.org under "Contact Us – Annual Conference Staff". Individual staff persons, leaders and volunteers of the Louisiana Conference are expected to report immediately any knowledge of harassment, abuse or misconduct to the appropriate person listed above. The Louisiana Conference, including the aforementioned persons, will not retaliate against any person who brings forward a complaint. Prompt and appropriate investigation and corrective action will be taken, including discipline. Persons who make false accusations will be held accountable.

Honest and good faith complaints are welcomed, and all complaints will be taken seriously. Upon any complaint, the Conference will take action in accordance with the provisions of the current *Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church. Any allegations of abuse concerning a child or youth under age 18 must be reported to the appropriate authorities. All appropriate support shall be afforded the complainant(s), the respondent(s), their families and the congregation or Conference agency.

Information Sharing

While the Louisiana Conference of The United Methodist Church cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, it seeks to make every reasonable effort to maintain confidence by disclosing information about the complaint only on a "need to know" basis as necessary to promote God's call for justice, reconciliation and healing. Staff and members of this annual conference will follow the mandatory reporting laws of the State. When there is potential for conflict between the obligation imposed under church law and state law (e.g., *Book of Discipline*, ¶341.5), legal advice should be sought.

Commitment to Justice and Healing

The Louisiana Conference of The United Methodist Church will take appropriate corrective action upon completion of an investigation and affirms the goals of reconciliation and resolution, leading to justice and healing for all parties involved.