

**SEXUAL ETHICS POLICY FOR PROFESSING MEMBERS  
OF THE LOUISIANA ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
Regarding harassment of clergy appointed to the local church**

**Statement of Policy**

A Professing Member of the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church shall not engage in harassment, including but not limited to sexual and/or gender harassment of clergy (paragraphs 605.8 and 2702.3 in the 2008 *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 Harassment: Sexual harassment is a form of sexual misconduct and is defined in the Social Principles as "any unwanted sexual advance or demand, 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" (2008 Book of Discipline, paragraph 161). Sexual harassment of clergy includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive environment which undermines the ministry of the clergy person serving within the appointment. (2008 Book of Discipline, paragraph 2702.3). 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" (2008 *Book of Resolutions*, page 135). Sexual harassing behaviors may be in person or by phone, e-mail, texting, and social networking sites.
2. 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. Some of those situations are related to gender, race, age, wealth, education, and status within the community.
3. Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse means unwanted physical conduct of a sexual nature, sexual contact or sexualized behavior and may include, by example, touching, fondling, other physical contact and sexual relations.
4. Sexual Misconduct: The 2008 *Book of Discipline* identifies sexual misconduct as a chargeable offense for clergy (paragraph 2702.1) and for lay (paragraph 2702.3).

**Making a Complaint**

Clergy and other persons who have knowledge of a possible violation of this policy by a Professing Member may report the same to the chairperson of Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee and District Superintendent. Upon receipt of any complaint, the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee

with the guidance of the District Superintendent will investigate, consider any response, and take action to seek a just resolution. All complaints will be taken seriously, and investigated and handled in a prompt and timely manner. All appropriate support shall be afforded the complainant(s), the respondent(s), their families and the congregation or Conference agency.

## **PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING, INVESTIGATING, AND RESOLVING VIOLATIONS OF THIS POLICY**

The clergy person who feels harassed by a lay person is encouraged to use the following procedures. If the offending behavior and complaint is sexual abuse or sexual misconduct, then the immediate procedure is a formal complaint as outlined in the *Book of Discipline* paragraph 2703.4. Identifying sexual or gender harassment depends on a determination of what a reasonable person would perceive as unacceptable. It is important to resolve complaints confidentially and, if possible, informally.

### **Initial Resolution Process**

1. Clergy are responsible for establishing and maintaining clear boundaries of professional conduct.
2. Therefore, a clergy person should respond immediately and clearly to the harasser that such behavior is unwelcome and uncomfortable
3. If the behavior continues:
  - a. Avoid being alone with the harasser
  - b. Keep accurate records of the harassing behavior
  - c. Contact the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (if the Chair of SPRC is the harasser then contact the District Superintendent directly).
  - d. Notify the District Superintendent to begin the informal process for complaint resolution
4. The District Superintendent will meet with the chair of SPRC (or person designated) to explain the informal process and introduce two advisors.

### **Informal Resolution Process**

1. After meeting with the District Superintendent, the chair of SPRC (or a person designated) and the two advisors will form the intervention team and will meet separately with the clergy person and with the accused. The purpose of the meeting is to:
  - a. Determine if the complaint is valid or a miscommunication and a misunderstanding.
  - b. Ask the accused to make an appropriate written statement to the clergy person. The written response may include explanation of the behavior resulting in a misperception of intent, an apology, and a promise not to repeat the behavior.
2. If the clergy person finds the response satisfactory then the complaint will be considered as resolved and the District Superintendent will be notified of the result.
3. If the response of the accused is not satisfactory or the accused refuses to respond, then the complaint will move to the formal process and the District Superintendent and Staff Parish Relations Committee will be notified that a formal process of complaint has been initiated. At any point during the informal process the clergy person, the accused or the SPRC committee may request in writing to the District Superintendent a formal resolution process.

### **Formal Resolution Process**

1. If the District Superintendent determines that the process outlined above has been followed and the complaint is not resolved, then the District Superintendent will appoint a committee on investigation according to paragraph 2703.4 in the 2008 *Book of Discipline*.
2. The final decision of the committee will be communicated in writing to the clergy person, the accused and the Staff Parish Committee.