

BOR #2043: Response Team Ministry for Sexual Misconduct

Introduction: Misconduct of a sexual nature committed by laity and clergy is an ongoing problem throughout the Church. Three percent of women attending church in any given month reported being sexually harassed or abused by a clergyperson at some point in their adult lives according to a nationwide study (Diana Garland, "The Prevalence of Clergy Sexual Misconduct with Adults: A Research Study Executive Summary, 2009"; <<http://www.baylor.edu/clergysexualmisconduct/index.php?id=67406>>, accessed 16 July 2010). Continued revelations about mishandlings of religious leaders across all faith communities offer a sobering reminder to United Methodists to face our own abuse crisis (M. Garlinda Burton, "United Methodists Need to Face Abuse Crisis: A UMNS Commentary," [umc.org](http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=1wL4KnN1LtH&b=5259669&ct+8437677&tr=y&auid=6486686) 2010; <<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=1wL4KnN1LtH&b=5259669&ct+8437677&tr=y&auid=6486686>>, accessed 14 June 2010). The United Methodist Church averages between 140 and 500 known cases of clergy sexual misconduct annually in the US alone (Sally Badgley Dolch, *Healing the Breach: Response Team Intervention in United Methodist Congregations*, Doctor of Ministry, Wesley Theological Seminary, 2010, pp. 131-32). The most recent Sexual Harassment survey in The United Methodist Church revealed significant increases in sexual harassment perpetrated by laypersons (Gail Murphy-Geiss, "Sexual Harassment in the United Methodist Church," Chicago: General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, 2005). The responsibility for handling these complaints rests with our judicatory leaders.

Bishops and district superintendents are responsible for ensuring that the church responds to allegations of sexual misconduct by either a lay or clergy person within a ministerial relationship, attending to both procedural justice or pastoral concern. In the church's response to misconduct, there can be no true procedural justice in the absence of pastoral concern just as there can be no

true pastoral concern without procedural justice. The dual needs of procedural justice and pastoral concern are far better met by team effort than by one individual. A full account of justice-making requires the involvement of different persons in distinct roles throughout a process of disclosure, adjudication, and healing. A trained Response/Intervention/Care Team is a group of persons with expertise in specific areas of trauma ready to be deployed by the bishop or bishop's designee to facilitate the process of healing mandated by the Book of Discipline.

Definition: Response Teams are called into a situation of trauma in order to promote the possibility of healing for the congregation and the individuals involved. Response Team ministry provides a way for judicatory leaders to enable effective assessment, intervention, training and resourcing of congregations experiencing events affecting congregational health by enlisting a group of persons with training, expertise, and resources in specific areas of ministry. Members may be paid or unpaid. The Response Team is not called to any judicial or disciplinary processes for legal resolution of a situation. The Response Team is called into action by the bishop or bishop's designee, often a district superintendent, and is accountable to the bishop.

Disciplinary Mandate to Provide for Healing: The bishop and cabinet are mandated to "provide a process for healing within the congregation" or other ministry context as part of the supervisory response (§ 363.1f, Book of Discipline 2012) and judicial process (§ 2701.4.c). The Discipline also allows for the use of a Response Team to provide pastoral care when handling and following-up on a complaint: the bishop may select "persons with qualifications and experience in assessment, intervention, or healing" to assist during the supervisory response (§ 363.1b, Book of Discipline 2012). These persons may perform distinct roles, such as individual support for the accused and individual support for the congregation and families affected. These roles are in addition to any interim appointment made in accordance with the

Book of Discipline 2012, ¶ 338.3. In all cases, the bishop initiates and guides the church's response to ministerial sexual abuse. Effective use of a Response Team can lessen legal liability and promote justice. When victims feel that the church is attending to their needs and seeking a thorough process for justice-making, they are more likely to continue engaging the church in problem-solving and resolution rather than reactively pursuing civil procedures (e.g., suing the conference). Spreading the work of pastoral care and justice-making among several persons, each with a distinct role, also reduces real and perceived conflicts of interest. A trained and ready Response Team, assembled in a timely manner, can assist the bishop with the holistic task of justice-making.

The United Methodist Church commends the use of Response Teams in cases of sexual misconduct by ministerial leaders and urges judicatory leaders to train and employ them. Only 18 annual conferences in the US maintain an active, trained Response Team ("Active" is defined as having responded to more than one congregation within a three-year period. Six additional conferences used a Response Team once between 2007 and 2009. Sally B. Dolch, *Healing the Breach*). Between 2007 and 2009, these teams responded to 156 incidents, averaging nearly three cases per conference per year. Extrapolating this data to all jurisdictions, we estimate that an additional 112 cases of ministerial sexual misconduct are handled by annual conferences in the US every year without the assistance of a Response Team. We urge bishops, district superintendents, chancellors, and other conference leaders in The UMC to seek out training in the use of a Response Team, to organize and provide for training Response Team personnel, and to employ these teams as partners in the healing ministry required when someone in leadership violates the sacred trust of ministry through sexual misconduct.

For more information on how judicatory leaders and Response Teams may collaborate in promoting congregational healing, see

When a Congregation Is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct by Beth Ann Gaede and Candace Reed Benyei (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006, pp. 102-16) and the “Guide to Using a Response Team,” <http://umsexualethics.org/ConferenceLeaders/ResponseTeams.aspx>.

ADOPTED 2012

RESOLUTION #2043, 2012 BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS

See Social Principles, ¶ 161J.