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Amend Resolution #2044 Sexual Misconduct Within Ministerial Relationships

Sexual Misconduct Within Ministerial Relationships

The abuse of power occurs when we use power to gratify our own needs rather than to carry out God's sacred trust. It happens when we refuse to own the responsibility of guardianship that comes with the privilege of power. . . . until we understand that power is the responsibility to give, instead of the opportunity to take, we will continue to abuse it."

——— "There is little doubt that sexual misconduct in church and society is significant and troubling for our communities and congregations worldwide. This unwanted behavior damages the moral environment where people worship, minister, work, and learn. In 1996, the General Conference made a commitment to focus on sexual misconduct within the church and took action to address this brokenness and pain within The United Methodist Church" (*The Book of Resolutions, 1996, p. 128; 2000, p. 135; 2004, p. 150*)

Sacred Trust, Power, and Responsibility

The Book of Discipline, 2012, ¶ 161F, declares all human beings have equal worth in the eyes of God. As the promise of Galatians 3:26-29 states, "you are all God's children"; therefore, we as United Methodists support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation, or gender. In our congregations and settings for ministry, we seek to create an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, which is free from misconduct of a sexual nature and encourages respect, equality, and kinship in Christ.

Those in positions of authority in the church, both clergy and lay, have been given much responsibility, vested with a sacred trust to maintain an environment that is safe for people to live and grow in God's love. Misconduct of a sexual nature inhibits the full and joyful participation of all in the community of God. Sexual misconduct in church and ministry settings impedes the mission of Jesus Christ. Ministerial leaders have the responsibility not only to avoid actions and words which hurt others, but also to protect the vulnerable against actions or words which cause harm.

As our children, youth, and adults come to worship, study, camps, retreats, and schools of mission, they bring a heightened awareness of the issues of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, incest, rape, and sexual assault. Ministerial leaders have the responsibility not only to avoid actions and words that hurt others, but also to protect the vulnerable against actions or words that cause harm. In the safety and sanctity of the church's settings, we as church leaders, both clergy and lay, paid and volunteer, must be held to the highest standard of conduct as we lead, provide guidance and support, and work with children, youth, and adults in ministry settings. Sexual misconduct in any form is a violation of the membership and ordination vows we take as laity and clergy in The United Methodist Church. Sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment are chargeable offenses both for clergy and laity per *The Book of Discipline*, ¶ 2702.

Definitions

Sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships is a betrayal of 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 the vulnerability of another. It includes criminal behaviors in some nations, states, and communities.

Sexual harassment is a form of sexual misconduct and is defined in ¶ 1611 (*Book of Discipline*, 2012) in the Social Principles. To clarify further, it 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.

Sexual abuse 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

(1996 *Book of Resolutions*, p. 130). It can include coerced or forced sexual contact (including those unable to give informed consent), sexual interaction or contact with children or youth, and sexual exhibitionism or display of sexual visuals or pornography.

Sexualized behavior is behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples include, but are not limited to displaying sexually suggestive visual materials; use of pornography in church programs on or with church property, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body; touching another person's body; touching another person's body/hair/clothing; touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person; kissing; and sexual intercourse. Sexualized behavior can be a form of sexual misconduct when this behavior is unwanted by the recipient or witness, is a violation of society's or the Church's law, breaks the sacred trust in the ministerial role, or violates the vows taken at membership or ordination.

The continuum of behaviors called sexual misconduct within the ministerial relationship represents an *exploitation of power* and not merely "inappropriate sexual or gender directed conduct." Sexual misconduct in any form is unacceptable in church and ministry settings whether it is clergy to lay, lay to clergy, clergy to clergy, lay to lay, staff to staff, staff to volunteer, volunteer to volunteer, or volunteer to staff. Anyone who works or volunteers under the authority or auspices of the Church must be held to the highest standards of behavior, free of sexual misconduct in any form.

Those in Ministerial Roles

Both laity and clergy fill ministerial roles in our Church. In addition to clergy or professional staff, any United Methodist may fill a ministerial role by participating in ministries including, but not limited to:

- leading and participating in lay servant ministries;
- counseling or leading events for children, youth, and adults;
- teaching and leading in church schools for children, youth, and adults;
- counseling victims of violence, domestic violence, or sexual abuse;
- counseling couples about marriage, divorce, or separation;
- leading in worship as speaker from the pulpit, liturgist, communion server, or usher;

- volunteering to chaperone trips, work camps, or special events;
- working in Walks to Emmaus and Chrysalis retreats;
- mentoring;
- supervising church staff members; and
- working with computers, websites, and the Internet in church property/programs.

Progress and Troubling Trends

The General Conference not only has mandated adoption of policies in our churches, conferences, agencies, and schools, it called for training, advocacy practices, and surveys of progress as a denomination conducted by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women:

Now twenty years after General Conference first committed to the elimination of sexual misconduct in the Church (1988), good work has been done:

- Thirty-five annual conferences now assign oversight of sexual misconduct issues to a “team”;
- Many conferences require sexual misconduct awareness training for all clergy, lay leadership, and appointees;
- The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women has provided support and counsel to victims and church officials in hundreds of cases.

Work remains to be done. Recent findings show the experiences of leadership of the Church on many levels—local church, seminary, annual and general conferences in particular:

- Awareness of the denomination’s policy on sexual misconduct is high, but awareness of the resources for victims and congregations is much lower.
- Harassment is still a significant problem: well over three-fourths of the clergy (men and women) and half of the lay women had experienced sexual harassment in the Church (about one-third of laymen).
- Holding offenders accountable, removing errant pastors, lay staff, or volunteers as needed, and requiring counseling, training, and supervision before resumption of ministerial roles are remedial steps our episcopal and superintending leader should use;

- Follow-up on situations of misconduct so that appropriate and effective remediation is achieved so that the behavior stops, does not reoccur, and relationship and ministry are returned to wholeness as much as possible;
- Placing justice for victims above protection of offenders, including pastors, is an equally pressing need;
- With this global Internet age and the growing use of computers by clergy and laity has come more frequent reports of the use of pornography and sexualized materials by laity and clergy within church programs or with church computers or property.

Progress in four areas is not adequate: prevention, education, intervention and healing. Additional work is now needed:

1. Resources for various constituencies addressing prevention, education, intervention, and healing after lay or clergy sexual misconduct (including the United Methodist website on sexual ethics www.umsexualethics.org);
2. Updated training (initial, follow-up, and advanced) for the various constituencies within the church, including education on the prevention and the use of pornography, its destructive impact on users, and its potential for abuse in or with church programs or property;
3. Implementation of models for intervention and healing in order to provide a consistent and thorough response when complaints are initiated;
4. Development of a model for ongoing assessment of policies, practices, and responses of conferences;
5. Appropriate handling of the presence and involvement of legally convicted sexual offenders in local congregational activities and ministry;
6. Opportunities for annual conferences to share their resources and experience.

Therefore be it resolved, that The United Methodist Church renews its stand in opposition to the sin of sexual misconduct within the Church worldwide. It further recommit all United Methodists to the eradication of sexual misconduct in all ministerial relationship, and calls for:

1. The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, to continue to convene and coordinate a cooperative interagency group to address the areas of prevention, education, intervention, and healing including a representative of the Council of Bishops, the General Boards of Discipleship, Higher Education and Ministry, Global Ministries, Church and Society, the General Council on Finance and Administration,

~~the Division on Ministries with Young People, and representative of annual conference Response/Crisis Teams and Safe Sanctuary Teams (each agency member responsible for his or her own expense and a share of the expense of the annual conference representatives);~~

- ~~2.—The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women be provided resources sufficient to develop/distribute resources for leaders of lay events and programs with the church in order to help train and equip them to raise this important issue with laity (including lay servants, lay leaders, Christian educators, persons in mission, leaders in School of Christian Mission, Walks to Emmaus, Chrysalis, and leaders of events with young people);~~
- ~~3.—The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, through the interagency group, to ensure that resources for laity and clergy in ministerial roles are identified and promoted for use in conferences, districts or clusters, and local congregations;~~
- ~~4.—The Council of Bishops to reaffirm its commitment to preventing and eradicating sexual harassment, abuse, and misconduct in the church through education, training, and sharing of resources. Each episcopal area will implement policies, procedures, and ongoing plans to coordinate person involved in prevention and intervention, including but not limited to: district superintendents, boards of ordained ministry, boards of laity, advocates, intervention and healing teams, trained mediators, and staff parish relations committees;~~
- ~~5.—United Methodist related schools of theology to provide training on the prevention and eradication of sexual harassment, abuse and misconduct within the ministerial relationship;~~
- ~~6.—Annual conference boards of ordained ministry to provide education (entry level, follow up, advanced) for all appointed clergy, local pastors, and commissioned members. Annual conferences are also encouraged to provide similar education and training for those employed in ministerial leadership;~~
- ~~7.—Episcopal areas to require that all clergy, local pastors assigned laity, and commissioned members appointed in each annual conference have regular, up to date sexual ethics training to be in good standing for appointment;~~
- ~~8.—The General Board of Church and Society to continue to advocate for just laws that address or counter sexual harassment and abuse in our larger societies.~~

Sacred Trust, Power, and Responsibility