

# POLICY STATEMENT ON MISCONDUCT OF A SEXUAL NATURE

## I. Statement of Policy

Central United Methodist Church affirms the 2012 Book of Resolutions, Sexual Abuse Within the Ministerial Relationship and Sexual Harassment Within the Church, which states that sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship and sexual harassment within the church as incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. In accordance with the 2012 Book of Discipline (§161.F) we affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God, and thus have been made equal in Christ. As the promise of Galatians 3:26-29 states, all are one in Christ, we support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation, or gender.

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (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, co-worker, volunteer, person being counseled or any other person to whom the minister relates in his/her capacity as a minister.

Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive.

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 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.

Misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the church interferes with its moral mission. The Central United Methodist Church stands in opposition to the sin of misconduct of a sexual nature in the Church and society at large and commits itself to fair and expedient investigation of any charge of sexual misconduct within the church and to take action deemed appropriate and in compliance with the Book of Discipline. Further, the United Methodist Church bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, which is free of misconduct of a sexual nature and encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ.

## II. Procedures

- A. If you experience what you consider to be inappropriate behavior, keep a written record of your experiences including dates, times, places, and witnesses. Keep any written material you may have received from the person.

You may wish to confront the person with the inappropriate behavior and demand that it cease.

If you choose not to confront the person alone, you may choose to ask someone to accompany you to confront the person and seek reconciliation.

If you choose not to confront the person, or if the behavior continues, report the incident to the chair of the person's appropriate evaluating committee (e.g., a pastor or church staff member would be reported to the chair of the staff/parish relations committee; a district superintendent to the chair of the committee on superintendency; a bishop to the chair of the committee on episcopacy).

If the conflict is not resolved to your satisfaction, the committee chair shall convene the entire committee to meet with the accused, the person bringing the accusations, and each supporting person.

If the situation is not resolved to your satisfaction following these efforts, then follow the Discipline's procedures for grievances, complaints, and charges.

- B. If you are confronted by someone who has experienced or observed inappropriate behavior on your part, listen to the accusation and agree to change the behavior or otherwise resolve the situation and reconcile the relationship.

If you are unable to resolve the situation with your accuser, contact the chair of your appropriate evaluating committee. Ask to meet with your accuser and committee chair to resolve the conflict. The accused and person bringing the accusation each has the right to bring a supportive person to this meeting.

If the conflict remains unresolved, the committee chair shall convene the entire committee to meet with the accused, the person bringing the accusations, and each supporting person.

- C. If you receive a report of inappropriate behavior, listen seriously and objectively. Help the person follow the steps outlined above.

If you are a clergy/church professional in a paid supervisory position in the local church or a conference agency, and an employee is being harassed, you should immediately take corrective or preventative action.

According to Arkansas law, any person receiving a report from a child under age 18, indicating sexual abuse of that child, is required to report the abuse to the proper authorities.

After a proper investigation of the facts, employees who are found to be guilty of sexual misconduct are subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.