

United Methodist Church North Alabama Conference, 2000
**Policy on Sexual Misconduct by Church Professionals
in the North Alabama Conference, The United Methodist Church**

1. Purpose

A church professional is in a position of great trust, power, and responsibility. This provides the opportunity for unique relationships of grace and caring. Church professionals sometimes violate the trust given them. Sexual misconduct is one of the gravest violations of this trust.

Incidents of sexual misconduct and harassment have been reported in United Methodist churches, agencies, and institutions. It is both the ethical and legal responsibility of the Annual Conference to ensure that there are mechanisms for addressing grievances in matters of sexual misconduct.

The purpose of the Policy on Sexual Misconduct is to ensure that fair and clear policies and procedures will be employed when someone is accused of misconduct.

Misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the Church interferes with its moral mission. The North Alabama Annual Conference 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 North Alabama Annual Conference accepts 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.

2. Theological Foundation

All persons are created by God. In the Genesis stories, as in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, it is affirmed that we are created in the image and likeness of God. God values human life, intending all women, men, and children to have worth and dignity in all relationships with God and other. God calls us into covenant with each other. We are one connected body, holy in Christ, created equal. Where one part of the body is injured, physically, emotionally, or spiritually, the entire body is rendered less than God's intended wholeness. We are called to use our bodies, including our sexuality, in a responsible way. Sexual misconduct of any kind violates a person's integrity and is an unjust use of status and power, and a sinful behavior against God and one another.

The Old and New Testaments witness to a God who brings about justice and gives special care to those who have been wronged. The Church is called to express God's love in concrete actions of justice and compassion. Victims of sexual misconduct by church professionals especially need and are entitled to the pastoral care, understanding, and the spiritual support of the faith community.

Once who repents for sinful behavior is promised forgiveness. However, discipline should be distinguished from forgiveness. A church professional guilty of sexual misconduct needs and may receive forgiveness and be offered avenues for redemption and change. And yet, the church must still take steps to protect the people of God.

3. Definitions

Sexual misconduct occurs when a church professional engages in sexual conduct or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, etc. (adult, teenager, or child) within the professional relationship. Sexual misconduct includes sexual harassment and any form of criminal sexual conduct.

Paragraph 65(I) of the 1996 Social Principles defines sexual harassment as “any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either 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. 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.”

For purposes of this policy, a church professional is a clergy person, diaconal minister, or local pastor whose appointment is set by the Bishop.

4. Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Complaints

Anyone who desires to discuss a concern regarding sexual misconduct may contact their minister, another United Methodist minister, a district superintendent, or the Bishop.

The procedures for reporting and responding to complaints shall be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Book of Discipline.

All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences. However, in those circumstances when knowledge of child sexual abuse is required to be disclosed under Alabama law to state authorities, it is the policy of the Annual Conference that clergy shall provide the same information to the Bishop.

Approved by the North Alabama Conference, United Methodist Church, at its June 1999 Session.

SEXUAL ABUSE WITHIN THE MINISTERIAL RELATIONSHIP

... occurs when a person in a ministerial role of leadership engages in sexualized behavior with a person within that relationship. The North Alabama Conference of The United Methodist Church believes that the ultimate goal of any response to sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship should be justice, reconciliation and a return to wholeness for all involved.

If you believe you may be a VICTIM
of sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship and you would like to talk with an
Advocate

Call Jan Conway at (205) 322-4197 ext.13

You will be referred to a trained support person. No action will be taken without your consent.

Strictly Confidential

Committee on Ministerial Integrity
“Do Justice, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly with God.”
Micah 6:8