

OPTIONS FOR REPORTING CLERGY MISCONDUCT

The Conference policy in dealing with formal misconduct grievances is contained in ¶ 2702 of The 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. To initiate a grievance, you must contact the Bishop of the North Texas Conference or any of the District Superintendents. Their names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses are in the contact section of this document.

RESOURCE PERSONS

Resource Persons are available to assist those who may have suffered clergy sexual misconduct. As a trained layperson, they provide assistance to the aggrieved; they are not employed by the Conference or any related church body. Support from this person continues through the Conference's complaint process so the aggrieved is empowered to reclaim their voice and the church may again be a sanctuary.

A Resource Person is an ally, listener, helper, clarifier and supporter. A Resource Person is not a judge, therapist, lawyer, decision-maker, rescuer, or mediator.

The role of the Resource Person is:

- Listen to and support the aggrieved
- Explain the church's processes and procedures
- Provide resources and referrals

If the aggrieved decides to file a formal complaint:

- Help the aggrieved write a formal complaint if requested
- Accompany the aggrieved to meetings during the complaint process as allowed by The Book of Discipline
- Make the Bishop aware of hostile, vindictive, or insensitive situations during the complaint process and let the Bishop know if the process outlined in The Book of Discipline is not properly followed.

(You do not have to register a complaint, formally or informally before accessing a Resource Person, nor do you need permission from any level of The United Methodist Church to access a Resource Person. You do not have to identify yourself to talk to a Resource Person nor are you required to use a Resource Person.)

CONTACT US

BISHOP

BISHOP RUBEN SAENZ, JR
(972) 526-5015 – bishop@ntcumc.org

DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS

EAST – Rev. Cassie Wade
(903) 439-1117
ds@ntceastdistrict.org

METRO – Rev. Edlen Cowley
(214) 941-7712
cowley@ntcumc.org

NORTH CENTRAL – Rev. Debra Hobbs Mason
(469) 342-6864
dmason@ntcumc.org

NORTHWEST – Rev. Todd Harris
(940) 767-6621
harris@ntcumc.org

THE CRISIS RESPONSE AND CARE TEAM

REV. LIZ GREENWELL
Crisis Response and Care Team Coordinator
(972) 526-5040
greenwell@ntcumc.org

*If you would like to have a confidential conversation with a person outside of the official process to help discern your next steps, you may contact:

Margaret Nicholson, Lead Resource Person
(214) 450-7457 – mag7958@sbcglobal.net



CLERGY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT: WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

DEFINING CLERGY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT: WHAT IS IT AND WHY IS IT WRONG

Clergy Sexual Misconduct is sexual contact or sexualized behavior between a pastor and a person with whom he or she has a professional relationship. Conduct may be physical contact, verbal behavior, and/or visual gestures or images. It may involve behavior that creates a hostile or intimidating environment, explicit use of authority, and/or implicit use of power to manipulate someone into sexual contact.

Clergy persons are in a position of trust and authority. This creates an imbalance of power inherent and always present in the ministerial relationship between a pastor and a layperson.

Because of this unequal power, a parishioner or employee cannot give meaningful consent to sexual contact with a pastor. No matter who initiates, it is the pastor's responsibility to maintain proper boundaries in the relationship. A pastor who initiates or allows sexual contact to occur crosses the boundaries and commits a breach of professional ethics.

EXAMPLES OF CLERGY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Whether or not the behavior is welcomed or unwelcomed, sexual misconduct may include:

- Sexual touch, including a touch of sexual areas and inappropriate caressing or fondling outside or underneath clothing
- Prolonged embrace when a brief hug is appropriate or pressing against your body when hugging
- A kiss on the lips when a kiss on the cheek is appropriate
- Tickling, stroking, or other playful touch that makes you uncomfortable
- Touch that disregards your feelings or is against your will
- Comments that sexualize a relationship by expressing or implying sexual interest
- Inappropriate comments about your body
- Suggestive comments, jokes or innuendo
- Intimate questions, including questions about your current or prior relationships
- Discussion of the intimate details of the pastor's own relationships or experiences

Behavior creating feelings of discomfort or confusion about your relationship with your pastor may be a warning sign of sexual misconduct. For example, you may feel uneasy because your pastor has given you a personal gift or excessive personal attention, or your pastor wants to talk about his or her own problems when you meet for counseling.

IS SEXUAL CONTACT WITH MY PASTOR EVER APPROPRIATE?

It is not unusual for a member of a congregation to feel attracted to his or her pastor. There is nothing wrong with you because you have these feelings. If you express your feelings, it is your pastor's professional responsibility to explain why a relationship is inappropriate. He or she should respect your feelings and not make you feel bad about yourself. In other words, by "rejecting" you, your pastor is maintaining the integrity of the ministerial relationship.

It is complicated and never advisable for a pastor to enter into a romantic relationship with a member of his or her congregation. If there are mutual interest and equal power between the pastor and the parishioner, which is a must for meaningful consent by the parishioner, the pastor may ethically pursue the relationship after fully removing himself or herself from the ministerial relationship with the parishioner. This is difficult for a pastor to do successfully if he or she has served as a counselor to the parishioner. Unwillingness by the pastor to be open and honest with the congregation about the relationship indicates manipulation is present and a healthy relationship is not possible.

It is natural to feel fear, anxiety, and confusion if you have experienced sexual harassment or abuse. In many cases, aggrieved persons assume blame because they did not object to the behavior in the beginning. Even if you did not object, your pastor has engaged in sexual misconduct if he or she has abused power by taking advantage of your vulnerability. It helps to share your feelings with someone you can trust.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church is committed to the well-being of all persons in the Conference and maintaining healthy relationships between pastors and the persons they serve.

The terms "clergy persons" and "pastors" are used to include all clergy or laity serving as ministers, counselors, or in other positions of power in the Conference. The conduct described is inappropriate for any of these persons.

Victims of clergy sexual misconduct need information to help recognize misconduct and assist in beginning the healing process.

The Conference's primary goals are to:

- Work quickly and fairly to begin the healing process
- Protect the vulnerable by preventing further abuse from occurring
- Provide an aggrieved person with information about the church's policies and procedures
- Seek justice by acknowledging the aggrieved has been wronged and holding the offender accountable through appropriate discipline
- Encourage the aggrieved and the offender to receive appropriate counseling or treatment to facilitate healing
- Restore the well-being of the congregation and others who have been affected
- Treat everyone involved with the fairness, respect and compassion our faith demands