

Misconduct of a sexual nature is about power – power which is abused through sexualized behavior.

Power is of God, but like all God's gifts, humankind has the freedom to misuse power. When this happens, it becomes corrupt, and it violates and dehumanizes others. Powerlessness limits human development and denies persons their promised fulfillment.... We have each been given the power to do what we can do, but are we willing to claim it? To accept it? Or is it safer to ignore or rationalize it away? Is claiming this kind of power worth the cost of change or the risk of rejection? – **Helen Bruch Pearson**, *Do What You Have the Power to Do*

We use the words "misconduct of a sexual nature" because the focus must be on the misuse of power. Sometimes this misuse is through sexualized behavior. In those instances the misconduct is sexual misconduct. However, to label the subject as primarily sexual is to avoid the deeper subject of sacred clergy office and authority.

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. (*The Book of Resolutions 2012, #139*)

How the Church Defines Sexual Misconduct

As stated in the UMC Book of Resolutions, "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 and is a chargeable offense in The United Methodist Church." (2012 Book of Resolutions, #2044)