



Sexual Harassment by Congregants: What You Should Know

“Sexual Misconduct within ministerial relationships is a betrayal of sacred trust, defined as 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, 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, and/or any 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.”
(2016 Book of Resolutions, #2044)

Sexual Harassment is “any unwanted sexual comment, 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.” (The Book of Discipline 2016, ¶ 161.J)

Who to Contact

If you would like to speak with someone about your options for taking action in response to sexual misconduct or harassment, please contact one of the following individuals:

Your District Superintendent

CART (Congregational Assessment, Response and Transformation) Team Coordinator
Rev. Liz Greenwell at greenwell@ntcumc.org
(972) 526-5040

Center for Leadership Development Director
Rev. Cammy Gaston cgaston@ntcumc.org
(972) 526-5006

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 at mag7958@sbcglobal.net or (214)450-7457

Steps if There Has Been a Boundary Violation

It is the responsibility of the ministerial person to maintain appropriate boundaries. If you have had boundary violations or harassment by a layperson, this guide will help you create appropriate professional boundaries.

- Pastor perceives an advance has been made
- Pastor needs to establish professional pastoral boundaries
- First, identify your role as the pastor
 - “I am your pastor...”
 - “As your pastor I....”
 - “The United Methodist Church takes this conduct seriously and considers this behavior to be sexual harassment...”
- Next, identify the person as part of a community, not just “you and me”
 - “We are in relationship to a congregation, denomination, calling(s), roles, responsibilities...”
 - Expand the awareness of your context by bringing in others you are both responsible for and in relationship with.
 - Then, state “I cannot be your pastor if...”
- Document interactions in writing and verbally to the SPRC Chair
- Inform the District Superintendent (DS) what the behavior or verbiage was by answering what, where, who, and when including date and time, share if there were witnesses, and what happened after clarifying boundaries.
- If the settings of appropriate boundaries trigger a crisis or mediation situation, call the Director of the Center for Leadership Development to engage CART process

If Inappropriate Behavior Continues

- Continue to establish boundaries
- State you will not meet privately and another person must be present but confidence will be maintained
- Reiterate your role to congregant
- DOCUMENT in writing to SPRC and DS.

If Violation of Boundaries Persist

- Call a meeting to clarify communally the role of the pastor and the appropriate behavior of congregants- in the North Texas Conference, this may be done by the CART Mediation Team who organizes and facilitates the meeting with the DS.
- Invite the DS, violator and SPRC Chair:
 - With the DS share the purpose of the meeting, follow up plan, and other details
 - At the DS's discretion, find out if appropriate to share with the annual conference Chancellor for any recommendations, suggestions, or simply being made aware
 - Violator – Ask them to bring a trusted friend or family member who can be reflective of them; lawyers are not suggested or advised
 - SPRC Chair
- Seek resolution with clear boundaries about appropriate behavior and why boundaries are maintained. Consider preparing a “Behavioral Covenant” identifying needs of the pastor and list the behaviors the violator needs to stop. Write the agreed “ways of being” for everyone to sign as witnesses and commit to being prayer regarding the situation.
- Plan a follow-up meeting to see if further clarification is needed, and provide supportive accountability.
- In a letter to all involved explain the purpose of the meeting, who attended, if a resolution was reached, note the specifics, thank everyone and seek continued prayer for everyone. Send a copy to DS.

If They Refuse to Sign a Behavior Covenant

- The violator is making a choice about their relationship to the church to not be in contact, communication, on church property or attend any church programming until they sign the behavior covenant.
- All attendees note and sign as witnesses to the refusal to sign by the violator. Send a certified letter to the violator, specifying a procedure they can initiate for future participation in any church-sponsored activities.
- Send copies of documentation via certified mail to the DS and possibly the Bishop's office. DS along with the pastor review the status with the Chancellor at this time.
- Meet with leadership stressing confidentiality.
 - SPRC Chair and Committee
 - Trustees
 - Lay Leader
 - Staff
 - Custodian(s)
- Share boundaries are taken seriously in the UMC and our congregants are responsible for maintaining a safe, healthy and respectful environment.
- Have a plan in place if the violator appears on church property, during church programs/services or makes contact with church leaders.

If Flirtation Has Happened (Mutual Attraction)

- **Name** and confess your participation in the boundary confusion as a pastor. Name the mixed messages.
- **Repent** – Identify your responsibility for maintaining professional relationships with the congregation and apologize by naming the confusion and harm your behavior has brought.
- **Reconcile** – Identify boundaries and cease misleading behaviors. Pastors talk with a grounded person to make a behavior covenant with accountability structures. Example: regular and frequent meetings reflecting on issues related to healthy and unhealthy professional boundaries.