

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH & AFFILIATES POLICY STATEMENT SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

First United Methodist Church of Houston affirms *The 2004 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 are incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. In accordance with *The 2004 Book of Discipline*, 161F, all human beings, both male and female, are 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 involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role and exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Similarly, gender or sexual harassment are usually understood as exploitations of power relationships rather than as exclusively sexual or gender issues.

Sexual and gender harassment, sexual abuse and misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the Church interfere with its moral mission. First United Methodist Church prohibits and will not tolerate these behaviors, which are sinful, demeaning, abusive and wrong. First United Methodist Church commits itself to fair and expedient investigation of any complaint of sexual and gender harassment, sexual abuse or misconduct of a sexual nature within the church and to take action deemed appropriate and in compliance with the latest *Book of Discipline*. Further, First United Methodist Church bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, which is free of these sins and encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ.

Some instances of harassment can be resolved informally by conversation between the parties or facilitated mediation. In all other instances, the conduct must be reported immediately to the chair or another member or the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee (PPRC) and the Senior Pastor in charge. If the conduct involves the Senior Pastor or another clergy person, it must be reported to the pastor's supervisor, the District Superintendent, or the Bishop.

A. PURPOSE

First United Methodist Church of Houston and its affiliates (hereafter referred to as the "Church") is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all individuals who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the Church. (The term "Church" encompasses First United Methodist Church of Houston and all its subsidiaries and activities, including , Quillian Center and Neighbors In

Action). The following procedures reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this Church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

B. DEFINITIONS:

- Definition of 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 or volunteer.
- Definition of gender harassment is behavior that is harassing in nature against a woman because she is a woman and against a man because he is a man.
- Definition of 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 harassment also includes inappropriate sexually based behavior that renders the workplace atmosphere intimidating, hostile or offensive. Sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than 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 (*2004 Book of Discipline* Paragraph 161 I).

C. REPORTING

When anyone believes that they have been the victim of sexual misconduct involving a member or employee of First United Methodist Church of Houston, he or she should report the allegation to the respective Director and/or Senior Pastor immediately. In addition, any person who has reason to believe that sexual misconduct by a member or employee of First United Methodist Church of Houston has occurred should promptly report the facts supporting their belief to the appropriate Director and/or Senior Pastor.

D. RESPONSE

The person accused of misconduct shall be notified that there will be an immediate investigation of the allegations.

All Clergy and Staff who are aware of the problem will:

1. Keep the matter confidential and only discuss it with those who have a need to know.
2. Treat each allegation seriously with respect for the privacy of all involved persons
3. Cooperate fully with all investigating personnel.

E. INVESTIGATION AND ACTION

An initial investigation will be conducted by the Senior Pastor and the Chairman of the PPRC. They will make certain that all efforts at handling the investigation are documented in writing, including dates and times.

If after the initial investigation there is believed to be justification to proceed further the:

1. PPRC in cooperation with the Senior Pastor will assemble a response team that will investigate the allegation and develop specific recommendations that are appropriate for each case. Investigations involving any clergy shall follow the guidelines from the latest publication of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*.
2. The allegations will be resolved within the shortest period of time necessary to conduct a thorough investigation.
3. The confidences and sensitivities of all persons involved in the incident will be respected.

F. NON-RETALIATION

1. This procedure prohibits retaliation against anyone who, in good faith, reports allegations of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct or assists in investigating charges.
2. Anyone found to have participated in retaliatory actions will be subject to disciplinary action which may include termination as a volunteer or employee of First United Methodist Church of Houston.