

Sexual Harassment Policy

Sexual harassment in congregations is considered sexual abuse and is incompatible with biblical teachings about hospitality, justice, and the obligation to treat one another with dignity and respect. Because we are created in the image of God and have equity with one another, those who participate in the servant ministries of the congregation and all who worship and affiliate with the congregation deserve the freedom to worship in the congregation and participate in other congregational activities without fear of sexualized language, humor, behavior, or discrimination. Sexual harassment is a form of sexual abuse and interferes with the congregation's ministry and will not be tolerated.

Definitions:

Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual comment, advance, or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive.

Sexual harassment frequently includes the exploitation of a power relationship, and one of its effects is intimidation. Sexual harassment is not exclusively a sexual issue. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination.

Gender harassment is behavior that is gender directed, denies advancement on the basis of gender, or is harassing in nature because of a person's gender. It may include either verbal or physical conduct that is experienced by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual jokes, innuendo, gender-directed comments on physical appearance, and pornographic pictures placed within the recipient's view are considered sexual harassment. Actual or threatened physical violence, verbal intimidation, written abuse or threats, name-calling, teasing, racist comments related to sexuality, verbal or physical harassment based on sexual orientation, and stalking are harassing behaviors that will not be tolerated.

Complaints:

Members, constituents, and staff members of the congregation are urged to immediately report any harassment, abuse, or misconduct. In some instances, the conduct of concern is resolved informally by conversation between the parties and facilitated mediation. In other circumstances, the conduct is reported to a pastor, ministry area coordinator, or the chair or other member of the congregation's personnel committee (SPR). If a complaint is against paid staff and is not resolved after mediation, and the complaint is determined to be valid by the employee's supervisor or the personnel committee, steps may be taken to terminate a job contract. In some cases, civil charges may be filed. If the complaint is against a clergy person (as perpetrator or recipient), this concern is directed to the personnel committee, the clergy person's supervisor, or the regional or conference office.

Members, constituents, and staff members of the congregation can reasonably expect that they will not be retaliated against for bringing a complaint forward. Every effort is made to maintain confidentiality for the person filing the complaint unless mandated by law or for the protection of others from harm. When a resolution is not forthcoming, civil charges may be filed. In the case that a person's conduct falls within local, state, or federal abuse-reporting guidelines, knowledge of this conduct will be reported to protective service agencies and law enforcement. Anyone having questions about this policy or the issues it addresses may contact the SPR Chair or any of its members.