

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH POLICY STATEMENT ON MISCONDUCT OF A SEXUAL NATURE

First United Methodist Church, Grand Rapids, affirms the 1996 *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 as incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. In accordance with the 1996 *Book of Discipline*, paragraph 65.F, 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 occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader or other position of leadership) engages in sexual contact with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, co-worker or volunteer.

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 includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive work environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender. (the *Book of Discipline*, paragraph 65.I)

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, sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual issue.

Misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the Church interferes with its moral mission. First United Methodist Church stands in opposition to the sin of misconduct of a sexual nature in the Church and society at large and commits itself to fair and expedient investigation of any charge of sexual misconduct within the church and to take action deemed appropriate and in compliance with the *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 misconduct of a sexual nature and encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ.

Some instances of sexual harassment can be resolved easily and informally between the parties. In all other instances, misconduct of a sexual nature should be reported to the chairs of the Pastor Parish Relations Committee and the Lay Personnel Committee and the pastor in charge. If the conduct involves a clergy person, it should be reported to the district superintendent or the presiding bishop.

Adopted by the Administrative Board of First United Methodist Church, Grand Rapids, on January 20, 1997