

## You may have experienced sexual misconduct if:

- You feel uncomfortable and confused after an improper interaction with a ministerial leader even if you are initially flattered, and even if initially you believe you consented.
- You are receiving inappropriate personal gifts from the ministerial leader.
- You are receiving counseling and your sessions are focused more on meeting the ministerial leader's needs and talking more about his or her problems than yours.
- The ministerial leader invites you out for intimate, social occasions.
- The ministerial leader touches you in a way that you find confusing, uncomfortable, or upsetting.
- The ministerial leader uses theological rationale for questionable conduct. For example: "It is God's will for us to be together."

## If you feel you have experienced an act of sexual misconduct:

- Did the situation make you feel uncomfortable? Honor your feelings of discomfort and confusion.
- Say "NO" to the perpetrator. Be direct and tell him or her to "STOP" the behavior.
- Leave the situation as soon as you are able.
- Remember that you may not be the only person who has experienced this behavior.
- Share your feelings of hurt, betrayal, confusion, anxiety, or fear with someone you trust.
- Keep a record of the dates, times, places, and witnesses of the incidents. Save emails, letters, cards, voicemail messages, receipts, or notes.
- Remember that you may not be the only person to whom this has happened.
- Your action may help prevent another occurrence of sexual or professional misconduct to you or someone else.

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1-800-437-0028

**“Sexual harassment and misconduct, and other like actions, disrupt the sacred covenant of God with us and are unacceptable in the community where Christ’s ministry of grace is proclaimed and experienced.”**

The West Ohio Conference  
Ministerial Sexual Ethics Policy

Sources: *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* 2016, *The United Methodist Book of Resolutions* 2016, and The New England Conference "First Contact Sexual Misconduct Information" brochure.



**West Ohio Conference**  
The United Methodist Church

# Sexual Misconduct

a guide to help your church know what to do and what resources are available

### **Churches**

Please make copies of this brochure available in a prominent area of the church.

[www.westohiounc.org](http://www.westohiounc.org)

# What is Sexual Misconduct?

**Sexual misconduct** in the church occurs when a person in a church leadership role, either by position or perception (pastor, retired pastor, staff member, youth leader, unpaid volunteer, etc) participate in inappropriate behavior.

**Including, but not limited to:** sexual contact, sexual language, or sexual behavior. It can include actions such as: child, youth or adult sexual abuse, harassment, rape, sexual assault, sexualized verbal comments or visuals, unwelcome touching of body, hair, or clothing, unwelcome advances, pressing up against your body, blocking movements, inappropriate hugging or kissing, tickling, playful aggression, rubbing oneself in the presence of another, stalking, and sexual intercourse. Inappropriate sexual innuendos, flirtations, jokes, or touching are unacceptable even when the offender states they were “Just kidding” or “Didn’t mean any harm”.

This behavior is unacceptable and such conduct will not be tolerated. The relationship among the clergy, church and an individual is one of covenant. When sexual misconduct occurs, this sacred covenant has been broken. Churches as well as individuals may experience brokenness and grief.

# Making A Report:

## First Steps

Making the initial contact from the list below sets things in motion. You will be guided through this process and you deserve support in this process.

### Contact any of the following:

- If the perpetrator is not the pastor, you may contact the pastor
- The Staff Parish Relations Committee chair. Contact information for this person can be found by calling your church office.
- If the pastor is the alleged perpetrator, contact your District Superintendent. If you do not know who that is, visit [www.westohioumc.org](http://www.westohioumc.org) or call 1-800-437-0028

## A few Things to Know and Remember

- Sexual victimization is not limited to physical contact. Sexually inappropriate language and suggestive behavior also constitutes sexual misconduct.
- Churches are not immune to misconduct. They are sacred places. Churches are filled with and led by fallible humans. Your concerns are valid and important, as you have a right to feel safe in the church.
- Misconduct of this type is often very difficult to face, as you may feel disloyal. In order for a congregation to heal, an open and honest disclosure of misconduct is the most loyal act for all.

## Reporting Sexual Misconduct

The effects of abuses of power in the form of sexual misconduct are devastating to the point that the spiritual life of some victims and survivors suffers greatly, and many leave the church completely. These acts of misconduct are not only an act against one person, but an act against families: fellow ministry professionals, members in the local congregation, the church at large, and God.

Legitimate complaints are encouraged and will be taken seriously. Retaliation against anyone who reports an act of ministerial misconduct in good faith will not be tolerated and will be handled through appropriate disciplinary action. However, individuals who make false, frivolous, or malicious complaints will be held accountable.

- If a person is making a complaint, listen to them in a non-defensive way. If it is in your power to do so, make sure you remove the victim or perpetrator from further contact. Then make one of the contacts in the box on the left.
- If you are suspicious that sexual misconduct may be occurring but no one has come forward, voice your concerns to one of the contacts.
- If you have observed any of the afore mentioned, report it to one of the contacts listed under First Steps
- Document dates, times, and places of the offenses. Include the nature of the exploitation. This information will be requested of you, so it will be good to have it readily accessible.
- The West Ohio Conference has a response team who are trained in responding to the betrayal of boundaries and the violation of sacred trust.