

RECOMMENDATION #6

Ministerial Sexual Ethics Policy

Adopted as amended

Whereas the West Ohio Annual Conference has had a Ministerial Ethics Policy in place since June of 1994, and

Whereas the Policy has not been revised to correspond with the changes in the Book of Discipline since 1997;

Therefore, be it Resolved that the West Ohio Conference adopt the following revision which corresponds to the 2008 Book of Discipline.

Introduction:

The purpose of this policy is to set forth mandatory standards of behavior for those serving in leadership roles in the church and its many forms of ministry. It is meant to give guidance to laity and clergy in the establishment of boundaries, and to encourage those who are aware of sexual misconduct or sexual abuse to disclose that to the appropriate persons. While acknowledging that there may be honest misunderstandings between people and that there may be some risk of false accusations, we as an annual conference pledge that all complaints will be taken seriously, investigated thoroughly, and followed through to the full and necessary extent of applicable annual conference and disciplinary policies and procedures. Retaliation against complainants who faithfully disclose potential misconduct or abuse shall be considered a chargeable offense according to The Book of Discipline (2008) ¶2702.

The Context:

Those in ministry commit themselves to purposeful covenant relationships marked by ethical behaviors. Those behaviors encompass a wide range of interests, styles, and contexts. Because we live in an era when instances of sexual misconduct by persons in ministerial leadership are a matter both of public and of ecclesial conversations and concern, as well as legal activity, we – as the West Ohio Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church – adopt the following with regard to sexual ethics. These ethical insights are intended to express a necessary facet of our covenant life, as well as to provide a basis for our sexual ethics training. This document includes a statement of covenant, pertinent definitions, standards of conduct, a process for reporting allegations of sexual misconduct, harassment or abuse, and a statement regarding confidentiality, all of which are applicable to our covenant life. It also understands that this policy as lived out in our covenant life requires further considerations such as clergy and congregational education that will be coordinated through the Office of Representative Ministry of the Annual Conference.

Our Covenant:

The grace of Jesus Christ calls us into a covenant relationship with God and one another. This covenant relationship requires a life of mutual trust, support, and accountability as we engage in a ministry of hope, reconciliation, justice, and peace. Sexual misconduct and harassment, and other like actions, disrupt this sacred covenant, wounding souls, relationships, and the fruitful witness of the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ. Therefore, all Christians are called to identify and prevent sexual harassment and misconduct whenever, however, and wherever it is encountered.

Definitions:

Minister: The term *Minister* is used in this policy to include full, associate, and provisional members of the West Ohio Conference as well as diaconal ministers and local pastors in both the effective and retired relationships, and other persons including Certified Lay Ministers and Supply Pastors serving the Conference in or beyond the local church under appointment by the Bishop or under the supervision of the District Superintendent.

Sexual misconduct: Sexual misconduct is an abuse of power through sexual harassment, contact, or activity (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which the minister violates the free choice, or abuses the vulnerability of a parishioner, client, church staff person, or colleague of any age; or allows the parishioner, client, church staff person, or colleague to engage in inappropriate sexual behavior with the minister. Due to the imbalance of power inherent in any relationship between a minister and parishioner, client, church staff person, or colleague, it is the responsibility of the minister to establish and maintain proper boundaries. The use of pornography in any form in a United Methodist Church ministry setting may be considered sexual misconduct. ¶2082 Book of Resolutions, (2008)

Sexual harassment: Sexual harassment is defined as “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.” ¶161.1) The Book of Discipline (2008) Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive ministry or working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender.

Standards for Ministerial Conduct:

All ministers serving in the United Methodist ministry “Agree for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world and the most effective witness of the gospel, and in consideration of their influence as clergy, to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life as set forth in ¶¶ 102 – 104; 160 – 166 The Book of Discipline (2008). To this end they shall exercise responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, social responsibility, and growth in grace and knowledge and love of God.” ¶311.2.d) The Book of Discipline (2008) This prohibits any sexual misconduct with a parishioner or client entrusted to his or her sacred care.

Reporting Sexual Abuse, Harassment, or Misconduct:

If the alleged perpetrator is not the pastor, contact the pastor or the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee Chair. If the pastor is the alleged perpetrator, contact the District Superintendent or the Assistant to the Bishop. Contact information is available by calling 1.800.437.0028. The provisions of ¶361 The Book of Discipline (2008), shall determine the complaint procedure.

Confidentiality:

Because the Church is a place for healing and justice, it must recognize, prevent, and stop sexual misconduct and harassment. As a part of the Covenant Community of faith, all ministers and laity bear sacred responsibility to address sexual misconduct and harassment as they become aware of such behavior. Lay and clergy alike bear responsibility for confronting one another with knowledge of sexual misconduct and harassment. When the covenant of the clergy has been broken by instances of sexual misconduct or harassment, there are pain and disruption in the community. In those moments pastors are called to bring about healing, reconciliation, and restoration of all parties. This may include encouragement and support of an aggrieved person, care for one committing the offense, and initiation of complaint procedures. Every complaint will be taken seriously.

If any provision of this policy is in conflict with the current The Book of Discipline, the Discipline shall prevail. Such conflict shall not be grounds for invalidating this policy.

Edited to correspond with The Book of Discipline (2008). Prepared February 12, 2010.

Rationale:

In June of 1994, the West Ohio Annual Conference adopted a Ministerial Sexual Ethics Policy. It was revised in 1997 to correspond with the 1996 The Book of Discipline. Following the General Conference in 2008, Bishop Ough called together a Task Force and charged it to review and revise the Policy where needed. In his statement to the task force, Bishop Ough acknowledged two reasons for the proposed revision: 1. “We live in a time when the consequences of sexual abuse and harassment are upon us more acutely. These consequences have to do with personal and congregational pain and brokenness, legal and financial difficulties, and decreased public confidence in the moral and spiritual voices of our

churches in the public realm.” and 2. “All of our clergy are required to participate in initial and renewal training and orientation regarding proper and improper sexualized behavior in the ministry. A renewed ethics document will provide a basic and common understanding for these orientation sessions and for our subsequent behaviors as a covenant community.” This document has been revised to correspond to the 2008 The Book of Discipline. Rev. Roger L. Grace, Chair of Task Force, February 12, 2010.