TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Sexual Harassment Policy (REVISED 2015)

Trinity United Methodist Church (TUMC) is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and nurturing environment in keeping with God’s sacred trust. Sexual misconduct on the part of any clergyperson, employee, or volunteer violates the mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Sexual harassment is expressly prohibited and will not be tolerated. Sexual misconduct includes sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation. The guidelines for the prohibition of sexual abuse or molestation of a minor (under 18 years of age) are set forth more specifically in the Safe Sanctuary Policy (see separate policy document). (TUMC) believes that every person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), that all Christians are equal in Christ (Galatians 3:26-28), and that we are called to love our neighbors as well as enemies (Matthew 5:42). We are committed to the prevention of sexual misconduct in any form and to address allegations justly.

“Contrary to the nurturing community, sexual harassment creates improper, coercive, and abusive conditions wherever it occurs in society. Sexual harassment undermines the social goal of equal opportunity and the climate of mutual respect between men and women.” (Book of Discipline 2012, ¶161.I). Furthermore, “Violent, disrespectful, or abusive sexual expressions do not confirm sexuality as God’s good gift.” (Book of Discipline 2012, ¶161.H). Trinity United Methodist Church bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of hospitality for all persons that encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ. We will neither condone nor tolerate instances of sexual misconduct, harassment or abuse.

Definitions

“Sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships is a betrayal of sacred trust. It is a continuum of unwanted sexual or gender-directed behaviors by either a lay or clergy person within a ministerial relationship (paid or unpaid). It can include child abuse, adult sexual abuse, harassment, rape or sexual assault, sexualized verbal comments or visuals, unwelcome touching and advances, use of sexualized materials including pornography, stalking, sexual abuse of youth or those without capacity to consent, or misuse of the pastoral or ministerial position using sexualized conduct to take advantage of the vulnerability of another.” (Book of Resolutions 2012, p. 136).

“Sexual harassment [is] 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 includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender.” (Book of Discipline 2012, ¶161.I). “[I]t is unwanted sexual or gender-directed behavior within a pastoral,
Sexual abuse [in ministry] is a form of sexual misconduct and occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (lay or clergy, 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, coworker, or volunteer.” (Book of Resolutions 2012, p. 136) 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.

“Sexual behavior is a behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples include, but are not limited to displaying sexually suggestive visual materials; use of pornography in church programs on or with church property, making sexual comments or innuendo about one or another person’s body; touching another person’s body; touching another person’s body/hair/clothing; toughing or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person; kissing; and sexual intercourse. Sexualized behavior can be a form of sexual misconduct when this behavior is unwanted by the recipient or witness, is a violation of society’s or the Church’s law, breaks the sacred trust in the ministerial role, or violates the vows taken at membership or ordination.

The continuum of behaviors called sexual misconduct within the ministerial relationship represents an exploitation of power and not merely “inappropriate sexual or gender-directed conduct. “Sexual misconduct in any form is unacceptable in church and ministry settings whether it is clergy-to-lay, lay-to-clergy, clergy-to-clergy, lay-to-lay, staff-to-staff, staff-to-volunteer, volunteer-to-volunteer, or volunteer-to-staff. Anyone who works or volunteers under the authority or auspices of the Church must be held to the highest standards of behavior, free of sexual misconduct in any form.”

Sexual and gender harassment, sexual abuse and misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the Church interfere with its moral mission. (TUMC) prohibits and will not tolerate these behaviors, which are sinful, demeaning, abusive, and wrong. (TUMC) 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 Book of Discipline. Further, (TUMC) 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 sexual harassment can be resolved easily and informally between the parties or facilitated mediation. In all other instances, the conduct must be reported immediately to the chair or another member of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPR) and the pastor in charge. If the conduct involves the pastor in charge or another clergy person, it must be reported to the pastor’s supervisor, district superintendent or the bishop.
(TUMC) will not retaliate against any person who brings forward a complaint. All staff leaders and member are expected to immediately report any knowledge of harassment, abuse or misconduct to any one of the persons listed above. Prompt and appropriate investigation and corrective action will be taken, including discipline. Persons who make false accusations will be disciplined.

While (TUMC) cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality, it will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing information about the complaint only on a “need to know” basis and as necessary to promote God’s call for justice, reconciliation, and healing.

In the State of Tennessee, sexual misconduct by clergy can be a criminal offense. Furthermore, “the use of pornography in church programs, on church premises or with church property by persons in ministerial roles (lay and clergy) is a form of sexual misconduct.” (Book of Resolutions 2012, p. 162)

**Reporting abuse of children and youth**

Anyone who has cause to believe that a child’s physical or mental welfare has been or is being adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person has a legal responsibility to report it to the appropriate state or law enforcement agency. In addition, any allegation of child abuse in church settings shall be reported to the Bishop. Anyone who becomes aware of sexual abuse or molestation involving a minor shall also follow the reporting procedures outlined in the Safe Sanctuaries policy of (TUMC).

**Reporting sexual misconduct between adults**

Nothing in this policy requires the person alleging sexual misconduct, harassment, or abuse to report the matter to the individual who is the subject of the allegation. Any person who believes that he or she is being subjected to any type of sexual misconduct, harassment or abuse in the church should bring the matter to: Pastor: Rev. Don Thomas, phone (865)256-0120, Associate Pastor: Rev. Brenda Dowell, phone (865)973-8463.

If the conduct involves a clergy person or chair of SPRC, reports should be sent to: Presiding Bishop of Holston Conference, District Superintendent: Nathan Malone, phone (865)776-9919.

**Investigations**
(TUMC) is committed to a prompt and thorough investigation of allegations, in compliance with The Book of Discipline. It is intended that the privacy of the persons involved be protected, except to the extent necessary to conduct a proper investigation and to provide appropriate disclosure to affected parties. We will cooperate fully in any criminal investigation. Non-retaliation (TUMC) will not retaliate against anyone who reports sexual misconduct, harassment or abuse in good faith.

Corrective action

If the investigation substantiates that the allegation is valid, immediate corrective action designed to stop the sexual misconduct, harassment or abuse and prevent its recurrence will be taken. Such corrective action may include discipline, up to and including discharge or dismissal of the offending person. In conjunction with this policy statement, (TUMC) has the following policies and procedures on related issues to prevent sexual harassment and to aid in promoting a safe environment:

1. Safe Sanctuary Policy
2. Trinity Sexual Abuse Prevention and Youth & Children Protection Guidelines
4. Safe Sanctuary Covenant
5. Church Staff and Personnel
6. Use of Communications Technology on Church Premises
7. Contract with the offending person and adults from the church who will be responsible for overseeing sex offender while on church property, at church events, etc.
8. Ministry with Registered Sex Offenders
9. Each of these policies is available in the Church Office

This is a policy statement of (TUMC), 2015. Anyone who has any questions or concerns about this policy or the issues addressed is encouraged to air those questions or concerns to the SPR.