Affirming Appropriate Clergy-Laity Relationships within the Local Church

Clergy relationships with laity and staff within a clergy's congregation are one of the most sacred trusts we hold. Clergy have the sacred responsibility not only to avoid actions and words which could potentially hurt others, but also to protect the vulnerable against actions or words which could cause harm.

The power and position of the pastor can never be fully removed from the relationship, and inappropriate relationships, no matter the intent, can lead to ethical, relational, and systematic issues within the congregation. It is the clergy's responsibility to be aware of the reality, or perception, of inappropriate relationships.

Professional and ethical boundaries are crossed when physically or emotionally intimate relationships begin with staff or parishioners after a pastor is appointed to a congregation. Violating the expected ethics of no physically or emotionally intimate relationships with staff or parishioners is documentable and could lead to an administrative complaint.

Relationships that pre-date an appointment, such as when a non-parishioner significant other decides to begin attending church, are not ethically inappropriate, but can be systematically difficult. The superintendent should be notified when a significant other becomes a regular participant in the life of the congregation.

Policy developed by The Mountain Sky Annual Conference of The UMC
I. Purpose

A church ministry professional is in a position of power and authority, which is a sacred trust to maintain an environment that is safe for people to live and grow in God’s love. Church ministry professionals sometimes violate the trust given them. Sexual and professional misconduct within ministerial relationships inhibits the full and joyful participation of all in the community of God, hinders the mission of Jesus Christ, and is a betrayal of sacred trust.

Ministry professionals have the responsibility to avoid actions and words that hurt others, but also to protect the vulnerable against actions or words, that cause harm. It is both the ethical and legal responsibility of the Annual Conference to ensure that there are procedures for making and responding to complaints in matters of sexual and professional misconduct. The North Carolina Conference will not condone or tolerate instances of sexual or professional misconduct, and is committed to procedural justice and pastoral concern through a fair process of justice making for victims and survivors, real accountability for abusers, and healing for all parties.

This policy serves to provide guidelines for the prevention of incidences of sexual or professional misconduct, and for reporting and responding to incidences of sexual or professional misconduct should they occur. (Book of Resolutions 2012, ¶2044).

II. Theological Foundation

We affirm that we are all created in the image of God and therefore possess sacred value, which must be respected in all relationships. We are one connected body, and when one part of the body is injured physically, emotionally, or spiritually, the whole body suffers.

Galatians 3:26-29 encourages us with these words: “you are all God’s children.” United Methodists support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation, or gender. We further seek to create environments of hospitality for all persons that are free from misconduct and encourage respect, equality, and kinship with Jesus Christ.

Sexual and professional misconduct are abuses of power and authority, and are not only an act against one person, but an act against fellow ministry professionals; members in the local congregation; the church at large; and God (Book of Resolutions 2012, ¶2044).

III. Definitions

A. “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.... 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, ¶2044). Additionally, “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, ¶2081, ¶2082)

B. “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 must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual issue....” (Book of Discipline 2012, ¶161.1). “It can create a hostile, offensive environment that can include unwanted [inappropriate] sexual jokes, repeated advances, touching, displays, or comments that insult, degrade, or sexually exploit women, men, elders, children, or youth.” (Book of Resolutions 2012, ¶2045)

C. A complaint is a written, signed, and dated report claiming misconduct. Reports of “Professional Misconduct” can include actions such as: abuse of pastoral authority, breach of confidentiality, funds mismanagement, dishonesty, plagiarism, improper dual relationships, and giving or receiving excessive or inappropriate gifts. Reports of misconduct can also be made claiming unsatisfactory performance of ministerial duties as defined in (Book of Discipline 2012, ¶2702.1): These can include the following offenses (subject to the statute of limitations in ¶2702.4): “(a) immorality including but not limited to, not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage; (b) practices declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings, including but not limited to: being a self-avowed practicing homosexual; or conducting ceremonies which celebrate homosexual unions; or performing same-sex wedding ceremonies; (c) crime; (d) disobedience to the Order and Discipline of The United Methodist Church; (e) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (f) relationships and/or behavior that undermines the ministry of another pastor; (g) child abuse; (h) sexual abuse; (i) sexual misconduct or (j) harassment, including, but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; or (k) racial or gender discrimination.”

D. A complainant is a person who submits a written, signed, and dated complaint regarding an alleged incident of sexual or professional misconduct.

E. A respondent is a person against whom a complaint is made.

F. “A just resolution is one that focuses on repairing any harm to people and communities, achieving real accountability by making things right in so far as possible and bringing healing to all the parties.” (Book of Discipline 2012 ¶363)
IV. Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Complaints of Misconduct

A. Anyone who desires to discuss a concern regarding sexual or professional misconduct may contact their pastor, another United Methodist clergyperson, a district superintendent, or the Director of Ministerial Relations.

B. Persons may contact a confidential hotline, staffed by Lighthouse Services, by calling 1-800-946-2926. The information will be relayed to the Director of Ministerial Relations for appropriate follow-up.

C. The two aforementioned processes are first steps toward making a formal complaint. However, in order for a complaint to be formally acted upon, it must be in writing, signed and dated by the complainant. The Report of Clergy Sexual or Professional Misconduct Form is a standardized form used for reporting concerns of clergy misconduct in writing. The form can be obtained by contacting any United Methodist clergy person, a District Superintendent, the Director of Ministerial Relations, or the form can be downloaded from the conference website at nccumc.org.

D. When an allegation of misconduct is subject to mandatory reporting requirements by the state (as in the case of a minor or an adult incapable of self-reporting), it shall be reported to the Bishop, and to the appropriate authorities and agencies.

V. Cyberspace and Social Media Guidelines

Social Media is comprised of a variety of online activity, and anything posted remains accessible, even if it has been deleted. Sexual and professional boundaries can be violated in cyberspace. Messages that contain threatening, obscene, offensive, vulgar, profane, pornographic, racist, sexist, hurtful, tactless, demeaning, libelous, defamatory, sexually explicit, sexual innuendo, and the like, even though no hurt or harm is intended, are inappropriate. Anyone who participates in this form of misconduct is subject to discipline. Care should be taken to be wisely selective about sites visited, and messages that are posted online.

VI. Dating Between Clergy and Parishioners

The question of whether it is acceptable for a clergyperson to date a parishioner continues to be the subject of much debate. Despite varying opinions, the Judicial Council asserts that dating, romantic or sexual relationships between clergy and their parishioners “are never appropriate because of imbalance of power.” (Decision 1228).

Therefore dating between clergy and their parishioners cannot be considered a situation of two consenting adults entering into a relationship.

VII. Sexual and Professional Misconduct Response Teams

A. The purposes and function of the response teams:

1. To provide objective support, compassion, direction, just resolution, and healing for the complainant, the accused, their families, the congregation, and any others affected by allegations or incidents of sexual or professional misconduct.

2. To provide the complainant with a safe, non-threatening environment in which he/she can reveal allegations of sexual or professional misconduct and receive support, compassion, direction, just resolution and healing.

B. The response team members:

1. The team is led by a coordinator and is comprised of approximately twelve members with an inclusive focus in regards to: gender, ethnicity, age, geography, lay and clergy, who may have experience in areas such as counseling and social work, and are objectively supportive and compassionate.

2. The members of the team receive specialized training focusing on responding to incidents of sexual and professional misconduct with objectivity and compassion.

3. When an incident of sexual or professional misconduct takes place, the coordinator will deploy team members based on the particular needs of the situation.
Preamble
The Tennessee Annual Conference does not approve of and will not tolerate sexual misconduct. The Conference is committed to the eradication of this conduct if it should occur and to the creation of an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, that is free of sexual overtones and implications, and encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ. This policy aims to provide an avenue to report sexual misconduct while assuring that any person doing so in good faith will be protected from retaliation.

All church professionals (see definition) have positions of great trust, power, and responsibility. This provides the opportunity for unique relationships of grace and caring. While church professionals can sometimes violate the trust given them within these relationships, sexual misconduct is one of the gravest violations of this trust. This policy seeks to address the abuse of power by church professionals who engage in sexual misconduct. While this policy is binding for appointed church professionals, it is our hope that it may serve as a guide for other church professionals such as local church laity staff and volunteers.

The intent of this policy is to provide guidance to both laity and clergy of the Tennessee Annual Conference and the local church regarding sexual misconduct and, thereby, protect the relationship between church professionals and parishioners, staff members, colleagues and others. It is both the ethical and legal responsibility of the Tennessee Annual Conference to ensure that there are mechanisms for preventing sexual misconduct and addressing allegations of the same. This policy provides guidance regarding the definition of sexual misconduct, procedures for filing and addressing allegations of sexual misconduct, and training expectations and requirements designed to prevent sexual misconduct in the Tennessee Annual Conference. The primary focus of this policy shall be the search for truth to assure justice for the complainant and the accused. This policy is not intended to supplant or substitute for the formal complaint process and its attendant fair process protection in the current Book of Discipline, which must, where applicable, be followed in addition to this policy. Failure by church authorities to use or follow any of the procedures herein is not a chargeable offense, nor can it be used as grounds for an appeal of a formal grievance, complaint, review or trial as defined in current Book of Discipline. We are committed to procedural accuracy and pastoral care in the pursuit of justice for victims and survivors, real accountability for abusers, and healing for all parties.

Theological Foundation
We believe and affirm every person is created in the image of God. We further believe and affirm sexual misconduct within the ministerial relationship and in the church is incompatible with biblical teachings and ethical standards. Sexual misconduct violates the sacred worth of persons who are created in the image of God. Such misconduct is particularly reprehensible in the context of the ministerial relationship that should represent the care of God. It should be understood that sexual misconduct is an abuse of power and authority. This misconduct alienates persons from the ministry of the church. It tarnishes the church’s ministry and mission. Those guilty of sexual misconduct bring real harm to persons, congregations and the church as a whole.

Forgiveness is a sacred teaching of the church, but this teaching in no way protects a person guilty of sexual misconduct from the discipline of the church. Representing the church as a church professional is a privilege requiring the highest professional conduct. Forgiveness by God or by a person harmed by sexual misconduct does not automatically restore the privilege of serving as a church professional. It is not appropriate for church authorities to pressure persons harmed by sexual misconduct to forgive the offender as a way to restore to the offender the privilege of serving as a professional in the church. Central to the task of church authorities is to protect the vulnerable and to eradicate sexual misconduct from the church.

Definitions
A. Church Professionals
1. Appointed Church Professionals
   Appointed church professionals shall include full, associate and provisional ministerial members of the Tennessee Annual Conference, as well as ordained deacons (full and provisional) and elders, diaconal...
ministers and local pastors, in both the effective and retired relationships, supply pastors, and other persons serving the Tennessee Annual Conference or any local church under appointment of the Bishop or under the supervision of a District Superintendent, including persons keeping their membership in another annual conference or in another denomination and persons holding orders issued by these conferences while on honorable or administrative location. Additionally, this includes lay and clergy persons employed directly by Conference agencies including but not limited to the Conference Council on Connextional Ministries.

2. Other Church Professionals
Other church professionals shall include anyone in a position of power, authority, or leadership employed by or serving as a volunteer in a ministry in the Tennessee Annual Conference.

B. Book of Discipline
The 2012 Book of Discipline refers to The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012, which sets forth the laws, plans, polity and processes by which The United Methodist Church governs itself. It contains insight and information about the distinct United Methodist understanding of the nature and mission of the Church, and about what is expected of its clergy and members as they seek to be faithful and effective disciples of Christ.

C. Book of Resolutions
The Book of Resolutions 2012 refers to the volume containing the text of all resolutions or pronouncements on issues approved by the General Conference and currently valid. The Book of Resolutions contains not only the resolutions and policy statements passed by the most recent General Conference, but also all such statements still considered to represent the position of The United Methodist Church. The text of any resolution is considered the official position of the denomination on that subject.

D. Sexual Misconduct
Misconduct of a sexual nature is a chargeable offense, for both laity and clergy. Chargeable offenses include: child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct [including pornography], sexual harassment, gender discrimination, crime, and immorality.

Sexual misconduct is abuse of power and authority, and is not only an act against one person, but an act against fellow ministry professionals; members in the local congregation; the church at large; and God. (Book of Resolutions 2012, ¶2044).

Sexual misconduct includes but is not limited to:

- child or adult sexual abuse,
- sexual abuse of youth or those without capacity to consent,
- rape or sexual assault,
- gross sexual imposition like prolonged gazing, fondling, grabbing, or stalking,
- sexual harassment,
- unwelcome touching and advances,
- inappropriate and unwelcome contacts of a sexual nature either in person or via phone, digital media, or cyberspace.
- sexualized verbal comments, gestures, or visuals,
- use of sexualized materials including pornography,
- sexualized behavior,
- solicitation of sexual activity or other sex-related behavior by promise of rewards,
- coercion of sexual activity by threat of punishment,
- or misuse of pastoral or ministerial position using sexualized conduct to take advantage of the vulnerability of another (umsexualethics.org, Book of Resolutions 2012, ¶2081, ¶2082).

Each alleged occurrence of sexual misconduct requires its own unique and appropriate investigation (as described below) and response, depending on the facts and circumstances.
Sexual harassment is a form of sexual misconduct and is defined in The 2012 Book of Discipline, ¶161(I) 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 an exclusively sexual issue. 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.” To clarify further, it is unwanted sexual or gender-directed behavior within a pastoral, employment, ministerial (paid or unpaid), mentor, or colleague relationship that is so severe or pervasive that it alters the conditions of employment or volunteer work or unreasonably interferes with the complainant’s performance by creating a hostile environment that can include unwanted sexual jokes, repeated advances, touching, displays, or comments that insult, degrade, or sexually exploit women, men, elders, children or youth. “It can create a hostile, offensive environment that can include unwanted inappropriate sexual jokes, repeated advances, touching, displays, or comments that insult, degrade, or sexually exploit women, men, elders, children, or youth” (Book of Resolutions 2012, ¶2045). Both sexual and gender harassment are exploitations of power and are discriminatory by law (GCFA Legal Manual, http://www.gcfa.org/gcfa-legal-manual).

Sexual abuse is a form of sexual misconduct and occurs when a church professional engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, coworker, or volunteer (2012 Book of Resolutions, page 136). It can include coerced or forced sexual contact (including those unable to give informed consent), sexual interaction or contact with children or youth, and sexual exhibitionism or display of sexual visuals or pornography.

Sexualized behavior is 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’s own or another person’s body; touching another person’s body; touching another person’s body/hair/clothing; touching 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 Judicial Council asserts that dating, romantic or sexual relationships between clergy and their parishioners “are never appropriate because of imbalance of power” (Decision 1228, 2012). For the sake of maintaining healthy boundaries and preventing a betrayal of sacred trust, a clergyperson who has a genuine desire to date a parishioner must contact their District Superintendent, and in consultation with the DS, determine a reasonable course of action for discontinuing the pastor/parishioner relationship before beginning a dating relationship.

Pornography is sexually explicit material that portrays violence, abuse, coercion, domination, humiliation, or degradation for the purpose of arousal. Any sexually explicit material that depicts children or adults is pornographic. “The United Methodist Church declares that 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, is a chargeable offense for laity and clergy in The United Methodist Church” (Book of Resolutions 2012, ¶2081, ¶2082).

E. Complainant
A complainant is a person who submits a written, signed, and dated statement alleging an incident of sexual or professional misconduct. A complainant may be a parent or responsible party for a minor or an adult incapable of self-reporting.

F. Respondent
A respondent is a church professional against whom a complaint has been made.

G. Complainant Advocate (Response Team Member)
A trained complainant advocate is a Response Team Member who actively supports a complainant of church professional misconduct/sexual abuse through the denominational complaint process. The role of Advocate is one of care-giving, not investigation. (¶362.2, 363, and 2702.1 in The 2012 Book of Discipline)

www.tnumc.org/safe-spaces-ministry
H. Respondent Advocate (Response Team Member)
A trained respondent advocate is a Response Team Member who actively supports a Respondent who is accused of sexual misconduct/abuse through the denomination complaint process as discussed in paragraphs ¶362.2, 363, and 2702.1 in The 2012 Book of Discipline. The role of Advocate is one of care-giving, not investigation.

I. Conference Response Team Coordinator
The Conference Response Team Coordinator oversees the complaint process, serves as a resource for District Superintendents, Bishops, complainants, and respondents and maintains the integrity of the process including documentation of complaints for the office of the bishop. This may be the Assistant to the Bishop, an appointed conference response team member, or appropriate Tennessee Conference personnel. The role of Conference Response Team Coordinator is one of care-giving, not investigation.

Making a Report
Any concern a person has about sexual misconduct by a church professional should be promptly reported to any District Superintendent or the Bishop. The list of names of the current persons in these positions and their contact information may be found at www.tnumc.org or by calling the conference office at 615-329-1177. If for any reason such person finds it difficult to report his or her concerns to a District Superintendent or the Bishop, the person may contact a trained advocate or the Conference Response Team Coordinator, who is available to assist any complainant with the process in making a report to either a District Superintendent or the Bishop. A list of the members of the Conference Response Team along with the Conference Response Team Coordinator’s contact information can be found in each volume of the Journal of the Tennessee Annual Conference following each Annual Conference Session or at www.tnumc.org/safe-spaces-ministry. (¶363, The 2012 Book of Discipline)

Mandatory Reporting.
In no way should this policy be interpreted or applied in a manner that interferes with any licensed practitioner in fulfilling his/her mandatory reporting requirements.

All allegations of sexual misconduct with minors or vulnerable adults occurring in the State of Tennessee will be reported to the appropriate governmental agencies, as required by mandatory reporting laws of the State of Tennessee.

Policy Against Retaliation
No retaliation will be tolerated on account of a good faith report of sexual misconduct. Prohibited retaliation will be considered a separate and independent violation of this policy, and appropriate action may be taken against that retaliator. Anyone who believes they have been retaliated against may also report such retaliation as detailed above in “Making a Report.” The person is encouraged to report retaliation immediately to a District Superintendent or the Bishop, or contact his or her trained advocate or the Conference Response Team Coordinator for assistance in reporting the concern to a District Superintendent or the Bishop.

Investigation
Upon receipt by a District Superintendent or the Bishop of a report, a prompt and thorough investigation into the allegations of sexual misconduct against any church professional will be conducted and appropriate corrective action, if called for based upon all of the facts, shall be taken and concluded within a reasonable period of time. The scope and details of each investigation will depend on the nature of the report and the related circumstances. In circumstances involving church professionals, by doctrinal law, the procedure may be governed by paragraphs 362 and 2701-2719 of The 2012 Book of Discipline. In each instance, the investigation will be handled with as much discretion as the circumstances permit to protect the privacy of the individuals involved. All persons having reported suspected sexual misconduct should refrain from contacting the person suspected of such conduct. Likewise, the persons suspected of such conduct shall refrain from contacting the complainant or alleged victim, unless otherwise directed by the Bishop or District Superintendent. All persons serving as witnesses in the investigation should refrain
from contacting the complainant or the respondent, unless directed by a District Superintendent or Bishop to do so, in order to preserve the integrity and confidentiality of the investigation and confidentiality.

All persons having received a report of sexual misconduct, including anyone specifically engaged to serve as an advocate or investigate such reports, shall keep all reports confidential, except as required by The 2012 *Book of Discipline*, where applicable, or necessary to investigate and resolve such matters, and/or to respond to any related legal or administrative proceedings.

During the course of an investigation, a trained complainant advocate may be assigned to provide ongoing support to a complainant or alleged victim. Likewise, a trained respondent advocate may be assigned to provide ongoing support to the respondent. Both advocates are bound by the confidentiality provisions of this policy.

All allegations of sexual misconduct with minors or vulnerable adults occurring in the State of Tennessee will be reported to the appropriate governmental agencies, as required by mandatory reporting laws of the State of Tennessee.

**Training**

Appointed Church Professionals (see definition) serving in the Tennessee Annual Conference are required to attend official Tennessee Annual Conference trainings on 1) Healthy Boundaries/Sexual Ethics and 2) Safe Sanctuaries each quadrennium. All transfers and candidates for ministry are required to complete these trainings prior to commissioning or appointment, whichever comes first. Compliance with these training requirements and a completed criminal background check are conditions of employment or ministerial appointment. A church professional failing to comply with these conditions of appointment may be cited an administrative charge by the Bishop in accordance with ¶362 of the 2012 *Book of Discipline*.

It is strongly suggested that Other Church Professionals (see definition) attend official Tennessee Annual Conference trainings on 1) Healthy Boundaries/Sexual Ethics and 2) Safe Sanctuaries each quadrennium.

**Healthy Boundaries/Sexual Ethics Team**

The 2010 report of the Sexual Ethics Task Force recommended to the Annual Conference that a Healthy Boundaries/Sexual Ethics Team be formed to guide the portion of the Safe Spaces Ministry tasked with reviewing policies and implementing training opportunities in the best practices to create and maintain healthy boundaries for ministry. The Healthy Boundaries/Sexual Ethics Team is a subteam of the Safes Spaces Ministry Committee. This committee is made of the three teams: 1) Healthy Boundaries/Sexual Ethics Team; 2) Safe Sanctuary Team; 3) Conference Response Team. The Safe Spaces Ministry serves to insure that policies and procedures necessary for keeping ministry safe in order for sacred space to be created are developed, reviewed, appropriately presented and training provided for members of the Tennessee Annual Conference. The work of the committee is funded through apportionment giving as allocated through the CCOCM budget on an annual basis. The CCOCM, the Nashville Episcopal Area Office of Ministerial Concerns and the Tennessee Conference Board of Ordained Ministry work collaboratively to guide this vital ministry.

**Availability of Policy**

This policy shall be presented annually in the Journal of the Tennessee Annual Conference. Further, it shall be posted at www.tnumc.org continuously. It should be made available in at least one common area of every church in the Tennessee Annual Conference. It is strongly recommended that the *Sexual Misconduct is Never Okay* flyer be prominently displayed in one common area of every church in the Tennessee Annual Conference. This flyer is available for download at www.tnumc.org/safe-spaces-ministry. Questions about the policy should be directed to the staff liaison to the Healthy Boundaries/Sexual Ethics Team through the Tennessee Annual Conference. This liaison will be identified on the conference website where the policy is located.
Sexual Misconduct Quick Response Card
TNUMC Safe Spaces Ministry
PLEASE POST THIS IN A PROMINENT PLACE IN YOUR CHURCH BUILDING.

Sexual Misconduct is Never Okay.

RECOGNIZE
REPORT
PREVENT

The Tennessee Conference of The United Methodist Church is committed to ministry and work environments that are free of discrimination, including sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and sexual violence.

Tennessee Conference of The United Methodist Church

For help and resources about our policy, visit http://www.tnumc.org/safe-spaces-ministry

For emergency assistance call 911.

For non-emergency situations, report sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, or sexual violence to the District Superintendent of your district. This number can be located at http://www.tnumc.org. If you have difficulty contacting your District office, please call the Conference Response Team Coordinator whose number can be found at http://www.tnumc.org/safe-spaces-ministry.

All allegations of sexual misconduct with minors or vulnerable adults occurring in the State of Tennessee will be reported to the appropriate governmental agencies, as required by mandatory reporting laws of the State of Tennessee.

Safe Spaces is a ministry committee of the Tennessee Conference of The United Methodist Church. This committee is made of 3 teams: Healthy Boundaries/Sexual Ethics Team, Safe Sanctuaries Team, and the Conference Response Team.

Tennessee Conference of The United Methodist Church - 304 South Perimeter Park Drive, Suite 1, Nashville TN 37211
615-329-1177

www.tnumc.org/safe-spaces-ministry
Social Media Principles for the Church

Sept. 2018

United Methodists of Arkansas
disciples making disciples
Social Media and the Church

Social media is a useful and necessary means of developing relationships and making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The purpose of the following guidelines and practices encourage the frequent, intentional, and appropriate use of the various forms of social media.

Use of Guidelines

These guidelines are intended for clergy, church staff members, church volunteers and ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. These guidelines are offered to be included as is – or adapted for context – in staff and volunteer handbooks in the churches and related ministries of the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Purpose of Guidelines

This policy provides parameters in order to guide clergy, church staff and, employees when social media tools are used on behalf of the United Methodist Church or when the United Methodist Church becomes part of a social media dialogue.

Social media includes all online platforms that facilitate activities such as professional or social networking, posting commentary or opinions and sharing pictures, audio, video, print or other content. Social media includes Church and personal email, websites, all type of online communities (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, chat rooms, message boards) and blogs.

Responsible Use of Social Media

In all we do, we reflect the love of Christ to and for the world. In the world of social media, this applies to the content of our posting to various social media sites. Clergy and lay staff are held to a high standard of behavior while online, in their professional and personal online presence. Churches should also adopt a social media policy as part of an employee manual. Some points to cover with church staff:

- Clergy and church staff should not create a church social media account (including any public or private group) without the knowledge of the church.
- Once a church social media account is created, there should always be more than one person, including at least one staff person and at least one lay person with full administrative rights.
- Clergy and church staff should utilize the same judicious wisdom when posting from both professional and personal social media sites. They should understand that all social media interaction reflects upon the church which employs them, and all postings should reflect their status as an employee of a United Methodist congregation.
Top Ten Best Practices of Social Media

1. When using social media, observe Wesley’s General Rules:
   - Do no harm
   - Do good
   - Attend the ordinances of God

2. Claim, maintain and monitor your congregations’ social media profiles and websites. Ensure the online profiles, websites and administrative responsibilities are kept current.

3. If you’re not sure about appropriate use of social media, ask for help. If you’re not sure about a post, do not post it. Political commentary, personal opinions on social issues, mixing personal and professional information, negative or vulgar language all becomes part of your reputation. Be aware of the potential impact on you, fellow staff and the church. Ask yourself: Is this post/information timely? Newsworthy? Most importantly: Does it reflect God’s love?

4. Be respectful, collegial, and intentional of other’s privacy including the announcing of prayer concerns and where location services are concerned. Ask yourself: Is this my news to tell? Do I have permission to share this information?

5. Be professional and maintain the integrity of the office of clergy, church staff, and church volunteers through social media. Remember that you are not authorized to speak on behalf of the United Methodist Church – or even your own local congregation.

6. Protect the safety of congregants, minors, vulnerable adults, and yourself. Do not share the addresses and locations of congregants and minors via social media, including tagging people in check-ins.
7. When in doubt, **be positive**. Whether someone has posted something mean, rude or distasteful, take the high road at all times. Consider reaching out to the individual privately to discuss the issue (in a tasteful manner) rather than replying in a public format. If someone posts negative, offensive, hurtful, etc. on a post, consider deleting or hiding the comment from the public.

8. It’s important to **use care in your language**, as meaning and tone are often lost in translation. Take the time to carefully craft words, especially when dealing with potentially sensitive topics. In the world of social media, what is intended as playful might be read as flippant. Direct, brief wording can come across as dismissive, arrogant or mean. If you would hesitate to say something in person, don’t say it on social media. Ask yourself: Does this do harm? Does this do good? Does this reflect love of God, neighbor and self?

9. **Be Accurate** when posting. Review content you are posting for factual and grammatical errors.

10. **Be Aware** of your social media presence. The pages and posts that you “like” and “follow” are also a representation of the church, whether it’s on your individual personal social media account or the church’s professional social media accounts. Be aware of who you “follow,” what posts you “like” and the type of audience that you are reaching. Always remember that a public post is open to the world. If you wouldn’t say something in public don’t say it online. Do not EVER assume confidentiality when using social media!

**You are not authorized to speak for the United Methodist Church**

To give your opinions, especially on hotly debated topics, can be construed as making a statement on behalf of the church. It’s smarter to say nothing at all, especially if you’re inclined to make a statement contrary to the UMC’s policies or theologies which you have taken a vow to uphold. Even with a disclaimer, by virtue of your position in the community, what you say and do does reflect on your church as well as the denomination. If you’re contacted by the media regarding a current event topic, please refer to conference media protocols. **In the event of a crisis, contact Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church’s Center for Communication team** ([communications@arumc.org](mailto:communications@arumc.org)) **prior to responding to ANY posting or comments relating to the crisis.**
Technical Overview

Digital Platforms for Different Messages

Every social platform for your church needs to be uniform – same profile picture, same name, and preferably the same handle. Each social network varies widely in its membership makeup, culture, look and feel. It’s important to not only know who your audience is, it’s important to use the right digital platform for each message, too.

**Facebook**

**Audience:** Women in their 30s and 40s and an increasing contingent of older users (50+)

Facebook is a great news source outlet. Share inspirational stories of what the church is doing, remind members of upcoming events, Facebook Live is a popular medium that allows you to interact with members of the congregation in a new way. Also, keep up with how often you’re posting. More than two or three times a day will cause your posts to fight with each other for attention. When posting, make sure the posts are scheduled far enough apart so that you’re not posting three different things within a three-hour span.

**Twitter**

**Audience:** Men in their 30s and 40s

Twitter is a great news outlet. Share the same things here as with other platforms. It’s recommended that you keep it short even if you’re not on Twitter. The longer the post, the less likely your followers are to read it.
**Instagram**

**Audience:** Youth, young moms and women in their 20s

More than 60% of users are between the ages of 18-29, making Instagram a natural fit for youth-oriented information.

Because Instagram is all about the image, this is a great place to share pictures from events, as well as graphics that promote future series or events. Instagram is the place to be creative. Use clear, high-quality lifestyle pictures for announcements instead of using flyers. Make captions short and sweet – only include the needed information. Instagram is less of a news source, and more of a creative space to show current and potential members what the church is doing to help others. Try to only post once, at the most twice, a day.

**YouTube**

It’s easy to create a YouTube account for your church, and to create the privacy settings you think best (you may only want church members to be able to view videos). Videos can be a really great way to share personal stories, Sunday services, announcements, fun things your church is doing, etc.
Social Media Checklist

- Does your featured website link to an active web page?
- Is your name the same across all platforms? (if it’s Example City UMC on Facebook, it needs to be Example City UMC on Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, etc.)
- Is your profile picture clear, high quality and the same across all platforms?

Know what to share

- Daily scripture
- Links to resources (books, previous sermon series, devotionals)
- Photos from regular meeting times and special events
- Highlights of important causes and events within the community
- Responses to current events

Know what not to share

Social media is not the place for hotly debated social issues or self-promotion. If your church is going to be a positive presence on social media, be careful about the following:

- Anything that promotes a particular leader based on personality. This creates a culture around that person, rather than the church itself.
- Controversial statements about political beliefs. It’s not wrong to care about these things, but social media is never the place to get into a controversial conversation about it.
- Photos of members of your church without their permission, particularly children.*

*The Conference Center for Communication can provide media release forms by request.