

The Importance of an Apology

The first step to making a good apology is making sure you are sincere. In your apology make sure you acknowledge what you did was wrong, accept responsibility for your action, make attempts to atone for the wrong you committed, and give assurances that the transgression will not happen again.

Some people make the mistake of thinking they are apologizing, and yet not really apologizing for the act they are accused of. You can see this in examples such as, "I'm sorry if what I said upset you," or "I'm sorry you took it the wrong way," or "I'm sorry that you didn't understand what I was trying to say." You're not apologizing for the other person's feelings or for "making" them feel bad. You're apologizing for your own behavior or things you said. It may seem like an unimportant distinction, but it goes back to sincerity. The receiver of your apology has to hear that you are taking responsibility for your actions.

Specific apologies are best. Apologizing for all the past hurts you've caused another person, or for all your previous transgressions has a lot less impact than apologizing for the specific behavior or situation you're taking responsibility for.

Don't over-apologize or generalize the behavior you're apologizing for. People want to be reassured that this was a specific issue that can be fixed.

- John M. Grohol, Psy.D.

<https://psychcentral.com/blog/how-to-make-an-adept-sincere-apology/>

See samples of apology letters on next page.

Apology from Bishop

Dear _____ (complainant)

On behalf of The _____ Conference of The United Methodist Church I write to express my appreciation for your decision to come forward with the information contained in your formal complaint of sexual misconduct against _____. I offer my sincerest apology for what you have experienced. You did nothing wrong. It is spiritual violence when sexual misconduct is committed by a ministerial leader. It is a clear violation of sacred trust. The abuse of inherent power in the leadership position will not be tolerated. And, again I say “thank you” for your willingness to report this conduct to our office.

In my position as bishop, I am responsible for the development of policy which provides preventative and corrective measures around the chargeable offense of sexual misconduct. Today, I offer a recommitment to this work. My office will review our policy to ensure it is clear regarding what constitutes sexual misconduct and precisely how and where to report incidences. We will make sure each local ministry setting receives the policy along with education about sexual misconduct and best practices for receiving information from an alleged victim. The policy will also be easily available through our conference website.

The United Methodist Church states our response to sexual misconduct will be one which hold persons accountable for behavior and offers healing for all affected. Resources will be provided for parties named in complaints as well as for staff and congregations within the local ministry setting where the offense took place. Funding will be made for each of these priorities.

If you have any questions after receiving this letter please contact my office. You remain in my prayers as I give God thanks for you, your witness, and pray that you experience deep, deep, peace in your life.

Apology from Perpetrator

Dear (Survivor),

I am writing this letter to tell you how very sorry I am for my decision to violate my boundaries as a ministerial leader and perpetrate sexual misconduct. As your spiritual leader, I had a sacred trust which I dismissed when I engaged in these actions toward you. I am sorry. You did nothing wrong. Your decision to reach out to me during your personal life challenges (or for whatever reason) was the right thing to do. I chose to misuse and abuse the power I had as a leader, hurt you, and disrupt your spiritual foundation. For that, I am deeply sorry.

I know I have much work to do. And I know this apology will not mean much unless I am willing to do the long, hard work ahead of me. It is important for me to fully understand how I allowed myself to become a person who would commit such acts. If, at some time in the future, I am in a position to help people understand the sin of sexual misconduct, I am hopeful I will hold myself responsible to do so.

I pray that at some point in your healing you will be able to forgive me. I know for certain I may not receive it and may not be entitled to it. But I know I want to ask you for it.

If you have chosen to read this letter, I am appreciative.

