



**Misconduct of a sexual nature is a chargeable offense, for both laity and clergy.<sup>1</sup>**

Chargeable offenses include: child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct [including pornography], sexual harassment, gender discrimination, crime, and immorality.<sup>2</sup>

**Sexual misconduct** 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.

**Sexual harassment** is a form of sexual misconduct and is defined in ¶ 161.I in the Social Principles 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. 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 (including volunteers), 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 employee or volunteer’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.

**Sexual abuse** 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 (1996 *Book of Resolutions*, p. 130). 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

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<sup>1</sup> The following excerpts are direct quotations from *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—2008* and *The Book of Resolutions—2008*. Copyright © 2008 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Discipline* 2008, ¶ 2702.1 and 3, and *The Book of Resolutions* 2008, p. 155.

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 **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.<sup>3</sup>

**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 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, a chargeable offense for laity and clergy** in The United Methodist Church.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "2044. Sexual Misconduct Within Ministerial Relationships," *The Book of Resolutions 2008*, pp. 133 – 139.

<sup>4</sup> "2082. Prevention of the Use of Pornography in the Church," *The Book of Resolutions 2008*, pp. 153 – 156.