
Sexual Misconduct within Ministerial Relationships

“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.”

(Book of Resolutions 2012, p. 137)

“*Sexual misconduct* within ministerial relationships is a betrayal of sacred trust. It is a continuum of 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.)

What is the ICARE Team?

The ICARE Team is a group of clergy and laity in our conference entrusted with the roles of:

- ~ *Intervention*
- ~ *Care*
- ~ *Advocacy*
- ~ *Response*
- ~ *Empowerment*

for persons and congregations involved in cases of alleged sexual misconduct by those in ministerial roles (both clergy and lay, paid and volunteer).

What is the Vision of the ICARE Team?

The ICARE Team is a resource to support persons and congregations as they move toward:

Understanding ~ Reconciliation

Wholeness ~ Healing

What the ICARE Team is NOT

The ICARE Team is not a replacement of the investigation process directed by the Bishop when there is a complaint of alleged sexual misconduct. That process is conducted in compliance with The Book of Discipline. The ICARE Team is not a replacement for legal advice or professional counseling. Rather, the ICARE Team is considered a resource to provide appropriate emotional and spiritual support to persons and congregations engaged in that process.



The
Eastern
Pennsylvania
Annual
Conference

ICARE Team

presents . . .

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Strict confidentiality is maintained in all cases, except in matters concerning minors, or threats of harm to self or others, in which case, the laws of Pennsylvania govern disclosure.

Sexual Misconduct Response Guidelines

The following guidelines are the steps to be followed in cases of Sexual Misconduct. Any person who has credible reason to believe a violation of the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference's Policy on Sexual Misconduct Involving Adults* (June 2016) has occurred should bring the matter to the attention of church authorities. (For reporting abuse of children or youth, see EPA Safe Sanctuaries Policy.**)

These are the usual procedures for handling cases for reported sexual misconduct involving United Methodist Churches, their pastoral and lay staff, and laity.

Possible Points of Entry There are several possible ways to initiate the process in cases of alleged sexual misconduct.

- Contact the Episcopal office
- Contact the District Superintendent
- Contact your Pastor (if a lay person is involved)
- Contact your Staff Parish Relations Committee Chair (if a clergy person is involved)

In any case, once contact is made, there is an opportunity to explain the circumstances of the alleged misconduct. In addition, the intervention process is explained. This is a time of listening and sharing information. The Bishop's representatives, District Superintendents and ICARE Team members are trained to listen and help the person reporting the alleged misconduct to decide what her/his next step will be.

- The ICARE Team may be asked to assist in making a formal complaint, which must be in writing. Refer to the Book of Discipline 2016, paragraph 362 for specific procedures for filing and handling a complaint.
- When a formal complaint is written, it is filed with the appropriate District Superintendent, who then notifies the Bishop.
- If a formal (written) complaint is not filed, there can be no further administrative or judicial action.

If a Complaint is Filed Once a complaint is filed, the Bishop and the District Superintendent will meet to confer in prayer and concern. This marks the beginning of the formal intervention process. It is at this point that the person making the complaint and the person accused of alleged misconduct will be offered the support of an ICARE Team member.

- If the offer of support is accepted, each party will receive a different support person from the ICARE Team.
- The Bishop, in consultation with the District Superintendent and the ICARE Team Chairpersons, will determine which ICARE Team Member(s) will be assigned.
- Family members may, if desired, also receive ICARE Team support.

As a complaint is investigated, it may be helpful to the District Superintendent and the congregation to assign support persons for the congregation. If so, the Bishop, in consultation with the District Superintendent and the ICARE Team Chairpersons, will assign a Congregational ICARE Support Team. These persons provide care and support for members of the congregation as they seek to cope with the alleged misconduct. In the case where a pastor is to be suspended, a Congregational ICARE Support Team will be provided.

Cases involving legal charges beyond the local church often hold requirements that affect how ICARE can work.

* EPA Policy on Sexual Misconduct Involving Adults can be found at <https://epaumc.org/resources/icare/>

** EPA Safe Sanctuaries Policy can be found at <https://www.epaumc.org/resources/safe-sanctuaries/>