

## **SEXUAL ABUSE WITHIN MINISTERIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

*There is little doubt that sexual misconduct in church and society is a significant and troubling topic for our communities and congregations worldwide. We are aware that this unwanted behavior damages the moral environment where people worship, work, and learn. In 1996, the General Conference made a commitment to focus on sexual misconduct within the church and take action to address this brokenness and pain within The United Methodist Church.*

In accordance with *The Book of Discipline*, para.161F, all human beings have equal worth in the eyes of God. As the promise of Galatians 3: 26-29 states, "all are one in Christ"; therefore, we as United Methodists support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation, or gender. In our congregations and settings for ministry, we seek to create an environment of hospitality for all persons, male or female, which is free from misconduct of a sexual nature and encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ.

Sexual misconduct by either a lay person or clergy person within a ministerial relationship can be defined as a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role, and the exploitation of those who are vulnerable in that relationship. Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship 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 conduct or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, coworker, or volunteer.

*The 2004 Book of Resolutions*

### **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\*  
Referral\*Education

for persons and congregations involved in cases of alleged sexual misconduct related to our conference churches.

### **What is the Vision of the ICARE Team?**

The ICARE Team is a resource to help persons and congregations move toward:

Understanding \*Reconciliation\*Wholeness  
as the Body of Christ

### **What is the Hope of the ICARE Team?**

The ICARE Team will take appropriate steps for:

Prevention\*Intervention\*Support

with the hope that persons and congregations will achieve an optimum sense of well-being.

The ICARE Team is NOT a replacement for the intervention process, directed by the Bishop in compliance with the *Book of Discipline*. Rather, ICARE is considered a resource for appropriate care and information for those engaged in that process.

# **The ICARE Team of the Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference**

## THE BISHOP AND CABINET

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## ICARE TEAM MEMBERS

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## **Sexual Misconduct Response Guidelines**

The following guidelines are steps to be followed in cases of sexual misconduct. These steps are further detailed and explained in the 2008 United Methodist Book of Discipline, the 2010 EPA Conference Journal, and on the Conference website Sexual Misconduct link.

Possible Points of Entry – There are two possible ways to initiate the process in case of alleged sexual misconduct:

- Contact the District Superintendent
- Contact an ICARE Team member

In either 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.

- District Superintendents and ICARE members are trained to listen and help the person reporting 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.

- 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 judicial action.

If a Complaint Is Filed – Once a complaint is filed, the Bishop and the DS will meet to confer in prayer and concern. This marks the beginning of the formal intervention process. At this point 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 Team.
- The Bishop, in consultation with the DS and the Team Chair will determine which Team members will be assigned.
- Family members may, if desired, also receive ICARE Team support.

As a complaint is investigated, it may be helpful to the DS and the congregation to assign support persons for the congregation. If so, the Bishop, in consultation with the DS and the Team Chair, will assign a Congregational 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 of a pastor being suspended, a Congregational Support Team will be provided.

***Strict confidentiality is maintained in all cases, except in matters concerning minors, in which case the laws of Pennsylvania govern disclosure.***