



Updated: 2/09

**ASSOCIATION OF UNITY CHURCHES INTERNATIONAL  
POLICY ON CREDENTIALLED LEADERSHIP SEXUAL CONDUCT IN MINISTRY  
Appropriate Relationship Boundaries in Ministry**

**I. Purposes**

This policy addresses the issue of sexual misconduct including, but not limited to, sexual molestation, sexual abuse/harassment and sexual exploitation by Unity Credentialed Leadership.

The policy also specifies procedures by which a Unity Credentialed Leader can ethically transition a pastoral relationship into a personal or romantic relationship.

**II. Scope of Policy**

For simplicity, the term “Credentialed Leader” is used to apply to all a) ordained or licensed Unity Ministers, (active and inactive), b) licensed Associate Ministers, c) Licensed Unity Teachers, d) Spiritual Leaders serving Unity churches under special dispensation from the Association, e) Spiritual Leaders and Study Group Coordinators of churches and study groups affiliated with the Association of Unity Churches, f) Ministerial Education Candidates, g) Ministers in the Field Licensing Program.

Individual Unity ministries are strongly encouraged to formally adopt their own separate policy on sexual conduct to include lay leaders or associate “interfaith” ministers or guest presenters that are not under the sanction of the Association of Unity Churches. [A sexual conduct policy for guest presenters in Unity ministries is available on the website [www.unity.org](http://www.unity.org) ]

**III. Core Values in Sexual Misconduct Cases**

1. The Association of Unity Churches is called to respond compassionately and directly to every allegation of sexual misconduct by a Credentialed Leader. The Association has an intention to respond to the spiritual needs of all interested parties: the victim, the ones bringing the complaint, the Credentialed Leader against whom accusations are made, as well as the congregation and the Unity Movement as a whole. This is a very different set of priorities than is commonly found within the private sector.
2. Every allegation of sexual misconduct deserves careful consideration and a prompt appropriate response.
3. Fair procedures for handling complaints of sexual misconduct need to provide due process to all parties in interest.
4. Sexual predators will not be excused or exonerated in the Association of Unity Churches.
5. A uniform procedure of peer review for resolving allegations of sexual misconduct provides a sense of justice and impartiality for all concerned.

6. The Credentialed Leader/Ministry Review System [CLMRS] Case Review Team and/or the Judicatory Representative may consult with other persons with expertise concerning the issues and unique concerns regarding alleged incidents of sexual misconduct in order to facilitate their review.

#### **IV. Definitions of Sexual Misconduct by Credentialed Leaders**

1. The term “sexual misconduct” in the context of Credentialed Leadership embraces several distinct yet interrelated concepts, a) sexual molestation, b) sexual harassment and c) sexual abuse or exploitation.

- a. Sexual Molestation is the unwarranted sexualized touching of any person, including but not limited to, any sexual involvement or sexual contact with a person who is a minor or who is legally incompetent.
- b. Sexual Harassment by a credentialed leader can occur both in a situation where there is an employment, mentor or colleague relationship between the persons involved, or in a situation where there is a pastoral relationship. It includes, but is not limited to, conduct such as sexually oriented humor or language; questions or comments about sexual behavior or preference unrelated to legitimate employment qualifications; inappropriately sexualized comments about clothing or physical appearance; and/or or repeated unwelcome requests for social engagements or dates.

The term “sexual harassment” also includes, but is not limited to, acts which constitute a violation of the sexual harassment provisions of Title VII of the Federal Civil Rights Act of 1964:

- (1) “Quid pro quo” harassment refers to sexual harassment (requests for sexual favors, sexual remarks about an individual’s body or clothing, sexual stereotyping, unwelcome or offensive sexual comments, and other conduct of a sexual nature) by a supervisor or other person in authority which operates – either through submission or rejection by the victim – as the basis for any employment decision affecting the victim. Common examples of “quid pro quo” harassment are hiring, granting or denying a promotion, demotion, transfer, training, salary increase, discharge, work assignments and/or volunteer opportunities on the basis of the victim’s response to unwelcome acts of sexual harassment.
- (2) “Hostile work environment” harassment is any conduct that creates a hostile work environment even though the victim has not suffered a tangible employment injury as, for example, denial of raises or promotion or termination. To state a legal claim for “hostile work environment” harassment, the sexual harassment must be sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of the victim’s employment and create an abusive working environment.
- (3) Under federal law, “sexual harassment” also includes any reprisal or retaliation against anyone by any co-workers or supervisors because that person in good faith, reports a violation or suspected violation of sexual misconduct, whether or not the reported violation is substantiated by an investigation.
- (4) Any pertinent state or common law definition of “sexual harassment” that is enacted would also apply.

- c. “Sexual Exploitation” includes but is not limited to, the development of or the attempt to develop a physical or sexual relationship between a credentialed leader and an employee, church member or volunteer as well as any person with whom he/she has any pastoral or professional relationship, whether or not there is apparent consent from the individual.

2. The term “pastoral relationship” or “ministerial capacity” means: a relationship between a credentialed leader and any person to whom such credentialed leader provides counseling, pastoral care, prayer support, spiritual direction or spiritual guidance, including that received from Sunday services and/or church related classes, workshops, retreats, weddings, funerals or any other church related activity.

3. A “romantic relationship” includes dating and/or an expressed desire for personal, physical and/or sexual intimacy with another person.

4. The term “minor” means anyone who has not attained eighteen [18] years of age or as defined by applicable local law.

5. The term “professional counseling” means counseling by an accredited professional in the area of psychiatry, psychology, social work, or family therapy which does not include any elements of spiritual direction or guidance.

## **V. Sexual Misconduct**

1. Child sexual abuse and/or molestation includes physical, sexual and psychological harm to minor or any person who is incompetent or who has a diminished mental capacity that is at the level of a child. It includes, but is not limited to, any act against a minor or incompetent person that constitutes a crime under applicable state and federal law. Allegations of child sex abuse or molestation shall be reported to proper authorities.

2. Any unwelcome or non-reciprocal sexualized overtures or conduct, either verbal, non-verbal or physical by a credentialed leader towards a co-worker or a member of his or her staff or congregation constitutes sexual misconduct. It includes, but is not limited to, acts, which constitute a crime under state or federal law. It may include sexually oriented humor or language, questions or comments about one’s sexual behavior or preference, unwelcome or undesired physical contact, inappropriate comments about one’s clothing or body, or repeated requests for dates or social engagements.

Sexual harassment includes but is not limited to: **a.** Verbal sexual innuendo, suggestive comments, insults, degrading humor and jokes about sex or gender specific traits, threats. **b.** Non-verbal suggestive or insulting sounds; leering; whistling; obscene gestures; display of objectionable posters, cartoons, pictures and/or magazines. **c.** Physical touching such as pinching; brushing the body; coerced sexual relations; assault.

3. Sexual misconduct occurs whenever a Credentialed Leader has any sexualized or romantic contact, interaction and/or relationship with anyone whom the Credentialed Leader came into contact with while serving in any ministerial capacity. When there is an imbalance of power there cannot be meaningful consent for romantic or sexual relations between a Credentialed Leader and anyone the credentialed leader meets while in a ministerial role. One way to define "power" is having access to pertinent resources. Within a ministry, the Credentialed Leader has the greatest access to pertinent resources and therefore more power than others in the ministry.

Even if the possibility of romantic or physical involvement appears to be initiated by the congregant, it is the Credentialed Leader's responsibility to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship. The question of the intent of the Credentialed Leader is not a factor: romantic or physical involvement with an adult congregant is sexual misconduct until and unless the pastoral relationship has been discontinued by following the procedures specified in Section VI. Beyond the Pastoral Relationship.

## **VI. Beyond the Pastoral Relationship**

[**Note:** This is about helping the Credentialed Leader be responsible in reciprocal adult relationships, with provisions that protect the Credentialed Leader, Church, Association and other individuals involved.] The rule is that no Credentialed Leader shall have a romantic relationship with any person with whom s/he has a pastoral relationship. However, in circumstances in which a romantic relationship might develop, these are the procedures to follow to comply with the Association's Sexual Conduct Policy:

1. A relationship between a Credentialed Leader and a person with whom the Credentialed Leader has a pastoral relationship at the same time carries with it the risk of coercion, misuse of power, and consequently, sexual exploitation. As such, no credentialed leader shall have a romantic relationship with any person with whom he or she has any ongoing pastoral relationship.
2. Whenever a Credentialed Leader recognizes that a romantic relationship is developing in the course of a pastoral relationship, they will immediately terminate the pastoral relationship, while ensuring that the other person has been referred to another independent source for appropriate pastoral support.
3. The Credentialed Leader should promptly advise the Chair of the Board of the Association, and/or the President of the Association, and/or the President's designee of the existence of the romantic relationship and keep them apprised of any developments and be willing to openly discuss with the Chair and/or the President and/or the President's designee, the issues and dangers inherent in this type of romantic relationship. If the Credentialed Leader is an Associate Minister or LUT, they shall notify their Senior Minister and/or sponsoring minister as well.
4. No Credentialed Leader shall pursue or encourage romantic relationship with any person with whom he or she has ever had a prior pastoral relationship unless both parties meet for professional counseling, outside their regular areas of ministry and/or work involvement. The Credentialed Leader shall notify the same people as identified in the above paragraph before instituting and romantic relationship. Before a Credentialed Leader pursues or encourages any sexual or romantic relationship with any person with whom he or she had any prior pastoral relationship they must: a ) contact those identified above to review the requirements of the sexual conduct policy and to familiarize themselves with the issues and dangers inherent in pastoral congregant relationships and b) if serving at a local church must notify his or her board of a developing romantic relationship and c) before any sexualized contact occurs arrange a meeting with their prospective partner and an independent professional counselor who can advise them both of the inherent issues and dangers in a pastoral congregant relationship. The Credentialed Leader and/or their church shall pay for this counseling.

**ASSOCIATION OF UNITY CHURCHES INTERNATIONAL  
SEXUAL CONDUCT POLICY**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM**

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the Association Sexual Conduct Policy. I acknowledge that I am expected to know and be familiar with the contents. I understand:

- That as a Spiritual Leader, I am responsible to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship.
- That a variety of behaviors, some of which do not include physical contact, constitute sexual misconduct.
- That sexual misconduct is grounds for disciplinary action, including termination of employment or suspension from service.
- That this policy may be updated from time to time and that I will be responsible for reading and complying with the updates.
- That this policy does not create or affect any contract of employment and in no way limits the rights of the Association of Unity Churches to change its policies or procedures described herein.

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Signature

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Date