

Good Practice Guidelines for Churches: Sexual Harassment

Contact Name and Details	Mrs Jill Baker, Past Vice-President of the Conference
Resolutions	<p>53/1. The Council endorses the production of Good Practice Guidelines for Churches on Sexual Harassment for publication and launch at the Methodist Conference and directs Mrs Jill Baker to oversee the finalisation of the guidelines in conjunction with representatives from Faith and Order, Equality Dix, Safeguarding, Complaints and Discipline and the Learning Network.</p> <p>53/2. The Council expresses its thanks to Place for Hope for its work on this.</p>

1. Background

MC/20/16, considered at the January 2020 Council, introduced work being done to produce Good Practice Guidelines on Sexual Harassment for the Methodist Church.

2. Current position

Since then, further meetings and conversations have taken place and the draft guidelines are almost complete. Please see Appendix 1.

Recognising that the production of these guidelines is only one step on a journey to which the Church needs to continue to be committed, the Council is now asked to endorse the publication of the guidelines, devolving the final approval of the full text to the Chair of the Council, in conjunction with relevant connexional officers.

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Sexual Harassment: Good Practice Guidelines for Churches

DRAFT 5, 28 February 2020

Foreword

To be added

Introduction

As a community of Christians modelling the love of God in Jesus Christ, it is important that we can be open and honest with one another. At the same time it is important that we understand and respect appropriate boundaries. Stepping over these boundaries can violate another person's sense of self, dignity and integrity. Even if unintentional, the impact of our behaviour can sometimes be offensive or demeaning of others. We each have a responsibility to raise our own levels of awareness in this regard.

Faith-basis of Guide to be added here.

The Purpose of Good Practice Guidelines

This Guide is intended **firstly** to raise levels of awareness in our churches, and in our communities, about where stepping over the boundaries mentioned above might be defined as 'sexual harassment.' This awareness-raising needs to take into account our different backgrounds, cultures, generations, and experiences. The awareness-raising is not intended to excuse unacceptable behaviour.

Secondly, the aim of this Guide is to offer clear information about what to do should you experience or witness sexual harassment, including guidance on how to offer pastoral care or support to those who have experienced sexual harassment.

A **third** purpose of this Guide is to remind us that Christian communities are also human communities where sexual harassment is experienced. A report commissioned by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in 2016 concluded that more than half of all women polled had experienced some form of sexual harassment in the workplace. Churches and church communities are places of work for many. They are also places of sharing, close contact, and 'family-style' relationships. Churches are not exempt from sexual harassment or other forms of sexual misconduct.

A **fourth** purpose of this Guide is to support a growing shift in the culture of our church, from one of failing to recognise, excusing or hiding unacceptable behaviour, to one of robust and honest exchange about difficult issues which we can address positively at all levels. Our churches seek to be caring communities, where people meet for worship, sharing and education. We are each responsible for nurturing a culture of care. This includes seeking opportunities to listen and learn; to challenge and to change when our behaviour falls short of this culture of care. As each one of us changes through increased self-awareness, new habits, and affirmation of good practice, so our culture overall changes, from one of blame or shame, to one of compassion and care. The Positive Working Together programme is one example of this culture shift, with an increasing awareness in our churches of the dynamics of conflict, including bullying and harassment, and positive ways to respond.

To help fulfil these purposes, we must be clear what we mean by sexual harassment.

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which:

- violates your dignity
- makes you feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated
- creates a hostile or offensive environment

Sexual harassment is a form of unlawful discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. The law says it's sexual harassment if the behaviour is either meant to, or has the effect of:

- violating your dignity, or
- creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment

Sexual harassment can include:

- inappropriate comments or jokes of a sexual nature
- uninvited touching, hugging or kissing
- physical behaviour, including unwelcome sexual advances
- various forms of sexual assault
- displaying pictures, photos or drawings of a sexual nature
- sending emails with a sexual content
- requests or demands for sexual favours

(taken from the Equality Act 2010, via the Citizen's Advice UK web-site)

How is Sexual Harassment different from Sexual Misconduct?

The term 'Sexual Harassment' covers a wide range of behaviours, all of which are unacceptable. This Guide deals specifically with Sexual Harassment as defined above. Definitions are not always clear cut, with people using terms in different ways. 'Sexual Misconduct' is sometimes used only to refer to offences within the context of a workplace or where behaviour is regulated by a Code of Conduct.

There are many offences classed as 'sexual offences' under law. These include rape, sexual assault, abuse or violence, stalking and exposure. These offences often involve the abuse of a position of trust. They are criminal offences and should always be reported. See below for more information about how this might be handled within the Methodist Church.

Other definitions

What do we mean by 'Confidentiality'?

The Methodist Conference has adopted a clear policy regarding confidentiality and this is available to download. In some ways, this advice is common sense, but in some situations it is easy to upset people when information is not shared appropriately.

Anyone, lay or ordained, who is involved in pastoral work needs to be aware of the following guidelines. You may also wish to discuss this advice with church members or groups in a way you feel would be most effective.

The following bullet points are a basic checklist but it is important to read the full set of guidelines. (Search for 'With Integrity and Skill' on the Methodist Church website www.methodist.org.uk)

The basics of confidentiality

- Things people share should be treated in confidence.
- Do not assume that a person's friends or family know any details.
- Confidentiality is just as important with children as with adults.
- Do not share information without express permission, even in open prayer or intercessions.
- If you know someone in more than one context, remember to keep the boundaries.
- If you believe someone to be at risk disclose the information only to the relevant authorities.
- The limits of confidentiality should be set by open and agreed policy rather than assumption.

Pastoral workers

- Every pastoral worker should be supported by a supervisor.
- Pastoral workers should not share any details with their own friends or family.
- All persons or groups discussing the status of an individual need to be aware of the rules of confidentiality.

Technology

- Remember when disposing of or passing on computers to delete all sensitive information.
- All sensitive information on computers or data storage devices should be password protected.
- Treat email, text or messages on other social media platforms with the same level of care and security as written correspondence.
- Shred all documents containing personal or sensitive information.

How do we understand Safeguarding?

Safeguarding is the action the Methodist Church takes to promote a safer culture. This means we will:

- promote the welfare of children, young people and adults
- work to prevent abuse from occurring
- seek to protect and respond well to those that have been abused.

The Methodist Church has a Safeguarding Policy. It is the aim of this policy to “create Christian communities of love and care, where good practice to promote the welfare of children, young people and adults becomes a way of life.” The full policy can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/safeguardingpolicy

Exploring Assumptions

There may be some assumptions at play in our churches when it comes to guidance for responding to sexual harassment. For example, our culture, our generation, the language that we use may dictate much of our unconscious behaviour, and may give unintended offence. Likewise, while we would be correct to assume that most people who experience sexual harassment are women, men do also experience sexual harassment. What care do we take of the boundaries of trust, power, openness and honesty which are part of the fabric of our community lives? What happens when we step over these boundaries inappropriately? What care do we take of ourselves in the midst of this?

Language and Culture	Boundaries	Gender	Self Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The words we use convey meaning and carry weight - whatever our intention. •How might a word, joke or phrase 'land' for someone who has experienced sexual harassment? •Phrases such as 'church family', 'touch on', 'feel our way', or jokes of a sexual nature may be offensive for those who have experienced sexual harassment. •Consider alternative language. Ask why the joke needs to be told. •Are there cultural differences about appropriate hugging, touching or kissing that we must be alert to? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The boundaries we hold on a personal and a corporate level vary between individuals, and across cultures. •For some the experience of a church 'family', or 'community' may not include an unwanted hug, touch, or kiss. •Consider the times in our church community when we assume physical contact is OK. •How can we ensure appropriate boundaries when e.g. sharing the peace, offering a hug, or inviting a 'kiss of peace'? •If in doubt, always ask, and respect the answer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Women in Europe are almost three times as likely to be subjected to sexual harassment as men (Eurofound, p57) •The fact that men are less likely to experience sexual harassment may exacerbate feelings of shame or embarrassment when it does happen. •Members of the LGBTQI+ communities may experience harassment because of their sexuality. This is discriminatory and unacceptable. •Sexual harassment is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men. ('Sexual Harassment in the Workplace') 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •How well do we know ourselves and our own needs? •What are the tools we reach for when we know we need self-care? •How courageous are we in asking with 'clean' (direct, un-laden) language for support and care for ourselves? •What signals is our body giving us when we need to reach out for help? Not sleeping, depressive thoughts, loss of appetite, exhaustion? •Are there moments, or experiences when in aiming to express our own need we may have stepped over an appropriate boundary, however unintentionally?

Good Practice Guidelines

Sexual harassment is never appropriate. There are five clear steps we can all take to protect ourselves and each other and to change our church culture. These steps are outlined below.



1. Recognise...

- Recognise that sexual harassment does happen in church contexts and within Christian relationships. This means we might observe behaviour around us that is unacceptable.
- Recognise what sexual harassment is by ensuring that all in our church communities know what it is and how to respond.
- Recognise that our own attitudes and ways of thinking about other people may cause offence or belittle others. Each of us is part of the culture change.
- Recognise that if someone tells us about an incident which happened to them, they may be asking us for help.
- Recognise that it takes courage to stand up and speak out about unacceptable behaviour. Doing so helps us all to be aware of what causes hurt and how we can be a more loving and safer church community.
- Recognise that the church is a community where we take responsibility for one another.
- Recognise that there are times when the behaviour of a minister or someone in a position of leadership may need to be challenged. No-one is always right.
- Recognise that different people have different boundaries; this may be because of cultural differences, or personal preferences. All have a right to have those boundaries respected.
- Recognise and understand existing policies and codes of conduct eg Safeguarding, Complaints and Discipline, Bullying and Harassment (Positive Working Together).

2. Respond...

- Respond by seeking out someone with whom you can have an honest and supportive conversation; it may be a Minister, a Safeguarding Officer, or a Church Steward.
- Respond by telling a trusted friend if you have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment, and by asking for support to refer the issue further.
- Respond by saying 'I believe you' to the one who has experienced sexual harassment, and by referring the issue on with their permission.
- Respond by offering pastoral care and support to the one who has experienced sexual harassment, being mindful of language, culture and boundaries.
- Respond within your capacity, and the Safeguarding or Complaints guidelines already in place
- Respond by noticing and affirming in yourself and in others the courage it takes to speak out and to step up against unacceptable behaviour.
- Respond by noticing that there are different routes to take, depending on the situation. Some incidents might be settled through talking or mediation. Others must be followed up through the church's processes (see 'Refer' below). Some, but not all, may need to move to a formal Complaint.

3. Refer...



The Methodist Church Safeguarding Policy offers this further guidance:

“Pastoral care for victims/survivors of abuse and other affected persons

The Church will offer care and support to all those who have been abused, regardless of the type of abuse, when or where it occurred.

Those who have suffered abuse within the Church will receive a compassionate response, be listened to and believed. They will be offered appropriate pastoral care, counselling and support, according to their expressed and agreed need, as they seek to rebuild their lives.

An appropriate pastoral response to the family, local church, circuit and wider community will be provided, with due regard to the right of privacy of those directly involved, and to the administration of justice.”

Record....

- Record the incident by writing down dates, times and summary of the misconduct. Share this with your Local Church Safeguarding Officer.
- Record the incident by ensuring when and by whom appropriate action is taken. Share this with your Local Church Safeguarding Officer.
- Record any learning for you, your leadership team, your local church or the wider church, and ensure that this learning is implemented.

4. Reflect....

- Reflect through ongoing listening to and offering pastoral care for all who have experienced sexual harassment.
- Reflect through continuing to learn about boundaries, behaviours, and culture change for the whole church, local, regional and national.
- Reflect through ongoing training and continual equipping of your local church to recognise and respond to sexual harassment.
- Reflect through exploring the Positive Working Together pages of the Methodist Church web-site and taking up opportunities for training.
- Reflect by reading through the references at the end of this Guide to inform yourself and those around you of your learning.

A personal reflection:

Bringing these guidelines together has been the work of several years, initially seeking to respond to a number of confidential disclosures while I was Vice-President of the Conference. These made it very clear that, sadly, there are many within our Methodist Church who have experienced sexual harassment. One female presbyter wrote to me 'I have often been groped in church, only to have this behaviour laughed off, I am relying on you to break the silence'. Another female professional employed by the Methodist Church told me she had never experienced sexual harassment before coming to work for the Church. What an indictment upon us.

During this period of consultation with many individuals and areas of work within and beyond the church, to whom I am hugely grateful, I have often reflected on what it might mean for us to live as a broken, but healing community. We are broken; we all recognise that we do make mistakes, we do misunderstand each other, we do misread the signals and cause offence. Sometimes this is intentional, an abuse of power or trust, sometimes it is unthinking; it always needs challenging and we need to change. That is where we can demonstrate that as well as being broken, we can be healthy, we can change, we can heal, we can learn new ways of behaviour, we can pay more attention to the needs of the body as a whole.

It is time to move beyond words to action; my hope and prayer is that these Good Practice Guidelines will help us in that.

Jill Baker, Chair of the Methodist Council

Resources

(referenced in the Guide)

- Methodist Guidelines on Confidentiality
https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf08_confidentialityguidelines_0808.pdf
- Methodist Church Stewards Handbook
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/15203/3321-church-stewards-handbook-2019-4.pdf>
- Methodist Church Ministerial Covenant
- ‘With Integrity and Skill: Confidentiality in the Methodist Church
https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Conf08_18_With_Integrity_and_Skill.pdf
- Courage, Cost and Hope: The Report on the Past Cases Review
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/4409/past-cases-review-2013-2015-final.pdf>
- Positive Working Together
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/positive-working-together/training-in-positive-working-together/>
- Equality Act 2010
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>
- “Fifth European Working Conditions Survey”, Luxembourg, Publication Office of the European Union, Euorfound 2012
- “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: a literature review”, EOC, Working Paper Series No.59, 2007
- “Still just a bit of banter? Sexual harassment in the workplace 2016”, TUC in association with the Everyday Sexism Project
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>

Additional resources:

- Barbara Glasson 'A Spirituality of Survival: enabling response to trauma and abuse', Continuum, 2009
- "Declaring the Church's Response to Survivors of Abuse", Methodist Safeguarding Conference 2017 Report and papers
- "#MeToo Toolkit – resources for a faithful response" General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, The United Methodist Church
- "Out of Control – couples, conflict and the capacity for change" by Natalie Collins, SPCK
- "Equally Safe at Work" an accredited programme to support employers to improve their employment practice to advance gender equality at work, and prevent violence against women. <https://www.equallysafeatwork.scot/about/>

Technical Data

This Guide was commissioned by the Methodist Church in Britain and prepared by Place for Hope with input from Complaints and Discipline, Safeguarding, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Faith and Order and the Learning Network.

Contact Details

Safeguarding Team

t: 020 7467 5189 e: safeguarding@methodistchurch.org.uk

or w: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/safeguarding/i-have-a-concern-contacts/>

Complaints and Discipline Team

e: conferenceoffice@methodistchurch.org.uk

Place for Hope supports the Methodist Church through delivery of training on conflict, and on bullying and harassment under the Positive Working Together Programme. Place for Hope is a charity registered in Scotland that accompanies and equips people and faith communities so that all might reach their potential to be peacemakers who navigate conflict well. www.placeforhope.org.uk

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