

What is Sexual Misconduct?

Sexual misconduct in the church occurs when someone in a ministerial role (i.e., pastor, church musician, youth advisor, Sunday School teacher, whether clergy or lay) sexually contacts or uses sexual behavior with a church member, employee, student or counseling client in the ministerial relationship.

Any conduct or communication that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment, or interferes with the services received from the church is unacceptable. It is unacceptable for a ministerial leader to require submission to sexual contact in exchange for ministerial services or employment. It is unacceptable for a ministerial leader to punish, reject, or reward submission to sexual contact.

Physical Contact

Sexual misconduct can include physical contact by a person in a ministerial role such as:

- Sexual touch, "accidental" touch of sexual areas of the body, and offensive contact such as patting, pinching, blocking movements
- Suggestive or insulting whistling or gestures, leering
- Tickling and playful aggression that seem uncomfortable to you
- Any inappropriately intimate hugging or kissing
- Pressing up against your body when hugging
- An inappropriate gift from someone in this role (such as lingerie)
- Sexual intercourse

Verbal Contact

Sexual misconduct can also include verbal behavior initiated by a ministerial leader when such behavior sexualizes a relationship. For example:

- Innuendo or sexual talk, jokes, or humor
- Suggestive comments
- Tales of his/her sexual exploits or experiences
- Inappropriate questions about the intimate details of your relationships
- Looking for sympathy about his/her partner's sexual inadequacies
- Inviting you to share a hot tub or swim naked, etc.
- Sexual overtures on the internet

Your Boundaries Have Been Crossed When:

- You feel uncomfortable and confused with the interaction even if you are initially flattered.
- You are receiving personal gifts from the ministerial leader.
- You are receiving counseling and you end up talking more about his/her problems than about yours.
- The ministerial leader invites you out for intimate, social occasions.
- The ministerial leader touches you in a way that you find confusing, uncomfortable, or upsetting.
- The ministerial leader uses theological rationale for questionable conduct. For example: "God has brought us together."

What should you do?

- Pay attention to your feelings and trust yourself.
- Say "no" to the perpetrator. Be direct and tell him/her that you want the behavior to stop.
- Keep records of what happened and where. Save letters, cards, or notes.
- Document dates, times, places, witnesses, and the nature of the exploitation.
- Share your confusion, fear, or anxiety with someone you trust.
- Remember that you are not to blame, even if you agreed to the relationship in the beginning.

If a minor has been sexually abused by someone in a ministerial role, make an immediate report to a law enforcement agency in your community.

First Contact Team

If you feel your boundaries have been crossed, you can contact a member of the Synod's "First Contact" team. This team is comprised of one lay female and one female clergy contact person. They are familiar with the Synod's procedure for dealing with complaints about sexual misconduct in the church. They will offer you guidance, support, and tell you about our Synod's policies. The team will listen carefully and act expediently upon your report. The church cares about and is concerned for victims of ministerial misconduct and will facilitate an appropriate response to stop the exploitation. Specific allegations will be relayed to the Bishop's office.

Remember that you might not be the only person to whom this has happened and that your action can help both you and others.

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Resources:

Faith Trust Institute
2900 Eastlake Ave E., Suite 200
Seattle, WA 98102
(206) 634-1903

American Association of Pastoral Counselors
9504A Lee Highway
Fairfax, Virginia 22031
(703) 385-6967

National Sexual Violence Resource Center
123 North Enola Drive
Enola, PA 17025
(877) 739-3895
<http://www.nsvrc.org>

National Sexual Assault Hotline
(800) 656-HOPE

Synod Contacts:

Ms. Lyn Wasilewski
(508) 791-1530 x105
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The Rev. Sara Anderson
(508) 791-1530 x301
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FIRST CONTACT



New England Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

**How to Receive Help
in the Event of
Sexual Misconduct
in the Church**