

Presbytery of Missouri River Valley

Anti-Harassment Policy

Pending Approval

1. Introduction: As the Church of Jesus Christ, love is the rule of our relationships.

- a. Jesus said, “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets,” (Matt. 7:12), and “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35).
- b. The Book of Order states, “The Church is to be a community of love, where sin is forgiven, reconciliation is accomplished, and the dividing walls of hostility are torn down.” (F-1.0301, “The Calling of the Church: the Church is the Body of Christ”)
- c. Because we believe this, and because we seek to live it out in all aspects of our personal and corporate life, we believe that harassment in all its forms is incompatible with who we are as followers of Jesus.

2. What is harassment?

- a. Harassment, simply put, is “*repeated unwanted behavior.*” To take the parts in reverse order:
- b. *Behavior:* harassment consists of words or actions that demean, threaten, offend, or humiliate another person.¹ This could include, but is not limited to, name-calling in private or public, or in electronic communication such as email; offensive or demeaning social media posts (see the presbytery’s Social Media Policy); stalking; and mockery of another person’s appearance, demeanor, gender, or racial/ethnic identity.
- c. *Unwanted:* teasing or humorous language that might appear inoffensive to an observer is characteristic of some relationships, but if the person who is being teased in this way finds that teasing offensive or demeaning, it has crossed the line into harassment. In these cases intention is irrelevant; it is how the language is received that is crucial.
- d. *Repeated:* in an emotionally-charged setting, a person may use insulting or demeaning language. Ideally, this leads to apology, forgiveness, and

¹ This language is adapted from the National Archives document, “Factsheet about Workplace Harassment,” <https://www.archives.gov/files/eo/policy/facts-about-workplace-harassment.pdf>

reconciliation. But when the insulting or demeaning language is repeated, it becomes harassment.

3. How do we prevent harassment in the Church?

- a. Jesus is our model for how we treat each other. But we don't always live up to that standard. That means we must begin with ourselves in stopping harassment of our fellow believers. One way is to ask ourselves before we speak in a meeting or write in an email, "will what I am about to say or write tend to build up the community or break down the community?" More specifically, "have I fallen into a pattern of using dismissive or demeaning language toward this person or this group?" This does not preclude legitimate criticism; it does mean that when criticism is necessary, it must be done in genuine love and concern not only for the body as a whole but also for the individual.
- b. Jesus is our model for how we treat each other. But we don't always live up to that standard. That means that we acknowledge together that harassment in all its forms is wrong, and we commit ourselves to repentance and genuine reconciliation whenever harassment occurs.
- c. Jesus is our model for how we treat each other. But we don't always live up to that standard. Those in positions of power like pastors, ruling elders, and youth leaders are particularly tempted to use insulting or demeaning language to those with less power. Men are more likely to harass women. If we are in a position of power, we need to test our words and actions by Jesus' standards.

4. What do we do when harassment takes place?

- a. Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15-19 are a good place to begin:
If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.
- b. If you are being harassed, or if you witness harassment, call it out, if possible. It may be that the person engaging in harassing behavior will recognize their fault, repent and apologize.
- c. If that doesn't work, others should be brought in.
- d. Finally, the session should counsel with the person engaging in harassing behavior. If that doesn't lead to repentance and reconciliation, it may be necessary to initiate a Disciplinary Process under Chapter VII of Church Discipline section of the Book of Order, always remembering the purpose of

church discipline (D-1.0301) and the duty to conciliate and mediate whenever appropriate (D-1.04)

5. This policy takes effect when it is approved by the session/presbytery council. The session/council will review it every three years and change it as necessary to fulfill the requirements of the Book of Order. Each session member will be provided with a written copy of this policy. *The policy will be included in the Presbytery Manual of Operations.*

This policy statement is by its nature stated in negative terms. At the same time, it is written to be consistent with the Statement of Ethical Conduct of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),² in the belief that those who adhere to the ethical conduct set forth in that document will avoid the kind of harassing behavior the present document is meant to deal with.

² The Standards of Ethical Conduct can be downloaded here: [Standards of Ethical Conduct PCUSA](#)