

# Covenant United Presbyterian Church



## ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY

**Current Effective Date: 4/20/2026**

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**Review Cycle: Annually**

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## **I. Introduction**

**Covenant United Presbyterian Church** is committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment for all members, visitors, staff, and volunteers. We believe that all people are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. This policy reflects our commitment to fostering a community of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation in the name of Jesus Christ.

## **II. Definition of Harassment**

Harassment is defined as unwanted behavior that demeans, threatens, offends, or humiliates another person. Harassment includes but is not limited to words and actions based upon an individual's sex, race, color, national origin, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or any other legally protected characteristic. Harassment includes, but is not limited to:

1. Verbal harassment: comments that are offensive or unwelcome such as cursing, innuendoes, insults, jokes, mocking, name-calling, slurs, threats, epithets, negative stereotyping and or yelling, including comments with regards to a person's nationality, origin, race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, body, medical conditions, disability, appearance.
2. Nonverbal harassment: Displaying or distributing written or graphic material, making gestures, or engaging in behavior that ridicules, denigrates, insults, belittles, or shows hostility, aversion, or disrespect towards another, including when the above is done for reasons of nationality, origin, race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, body, medical conditions, disability, or appearance.
3. Physical harassment: Unwanted touching, physical assaults, or interference with movement.
4. Sexual harassment: behavior characterized by the making of unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks, physical advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal and physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment may take many different forms, including but not limited to Verbal, nonverbal, and physical sexual harassment.
5. Electronic harassment: Using email, social media, text messages, blogs, online games, forums, instant messaging, mobile phone pictures, or other electronic means to harass, intimidate, or bully.
6. Retaliation: any hardship, loss, benefit, or penalty imposed on any person in response to filing or responding to a bona fide complaint or discrimination or harassment.

## **III. Prohibited Behaviors**

1. The following behaviors are expressly prohibited within our congregation:
  - Any form of harassment as defined above
  - Retaliation against individuals who report harassment or participate in investigations
  - Knowingly making false accusations of harassment

#### **IV. Reporting Procedures**

1. Any person who experiences or witnesses harassment within the congregation should report it promptly to one of the following:
  - A Pastor
  - A member of the Session
  - The chair of the Staff Support Committee
  - Presbytery
2. Reports should be made in writing when possible, but may be made in writing or verbally. While anonymous reports will be accepted, they may be more difficult to investigate fully.
3. All reports will be taken seriously. When a report of harassment is made, the Staff Support Committee will appoint a Harassment Response Team to investigate.
4. The Harassment Response Team will gather all available information, including interviews and reports as appropriate.
5. In cases where both sexual harassment and harassing behaviors that are not sexual harassment have been reported as part of the same situation, those responsible for appointing a response team will take both situations into account in determining the best response in accordance with both the Harassment Policy and the Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy.
6. The Harassment Response Team will refer their report and recommendations to the appropriate group, usually the Personnel Committee in cases involving employees or the Session in other situations. Outcomes might include:
  - Dismissal of the complaint
  - Counseling or mediation
  - For employees: initiation of disciplinary processes defined in the church Employee Handbook. For church leaders: requests for resignation from positions of leadership.
  - Referral to the Session for further action as indicated
  - Referral to the Presbytery for cases involving Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Commissioned Ruling Elders, and Certified Church Educators
  - Filing of an allegation of offense with the clerk of session for those under the jurisdiction of the congregation, and with the Stated Clerk of the presbytery for those under the jurisdiction of the presbytery.
7. If an allegation is filed in accordance with the Church Discipline procedures defined in the PC(USA) Book of Order, all further action will be governed by the Church Discipline Process.
8. In all cases, a Pastor or the Session may contact the Presbytery for support and assistance.

#### **V. Confidentiality**

1. All reports and investigations will be handled with as much confidentiality as possible, while still allowing for a thorough investigation and appropriate action.

2. The Session is committed to providing a safe space for those who have been subjected to harassment. Confidentiality and safeguards against retaliation will be implemented in all circumstances, including the right of victims to refuse the invitation to explain the circumstances, to decline to file a written statement of the alleged offense, or to decline to be interviewed or otherwise participate.
3. Written statements of alleged offense involving rape or sexual assault, or sexual abuse of children under the age of eighteen, or one who allegedly lacks the mental capacity to consent, shall be additionally reported to civil authorities, as governed by the Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Policy.

**VI. Education and Prevention**

Covenant United Presbyterian Church commits to:

1. Providing regular training on this policy and harassment prevention for all staff, volunteers, and church leaders
2. Educating the congregation about this policy and our commitment to a harassment-free environment

**VII. Pastoral Care**

We recognize that instances of harassment can be traumatic for all involved. Pastoral care and support will be made available to those affected by harassment, including the complainant, alleged victims, the accused, and the broader congregation, as needed.

**VIII. Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Session and updated as necessary to ensure its effectiveness and compliance with current laws and the policies of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

**Approved by the Session of Covenant United Presbyterian Church on 4/20/2026**

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Clerk of Session

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Moderator of Session