

## **SEXUAL CONDUCT OF CHURCH WORKERS**

### **Bethany Presbyterian Church**



Church workers are human; they are as susceptible to the pressures of life as anyone else. Like other helping professionals they are sometimes faced with situations where intimate sexual contact is possible and scriptural standards of sexual conduct can be abused. The church's response to this problem must address all church workers (i.e., paid church employees, church-supervised missionaries, and volunteers).

Professional church leaders and church-supervised missionaries are responsible for the emotional, spiritual, and physical protection of persons in the pastoral relationship. The sacred trust involved in this relationship makes sexual misconduct especially destructive to the church and all other persons involved. Any violation is a breach of professional ethical behavior.

Though church volunteers have a different legal status from church professionals, they are still considered church workers, and are held to the same scriptural standards as the pastoral staff; standards that define proper moral and ethical behavior for all members of the church. All such improper activities bring shame upon the vocation, the church, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Bethany Presbyterian Church ("Bethany") is committed to maintaining an environment free of sexual misconduct. To clarify our Christian role in society, Bethany adopts the following policy concerning the sexual conduct of church workers:

## Sexual Misconduct: Basic Guidelines

*An offense is any act or omission by a member or a person in an ordered ministry of the church that is contrary to the Scriptures or the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
Rules of Discipline D-2.0203  
Book of Order, 2011-13 ed.*

As applied to sexual misconduct, we at Bethany understand the above passage to mean that intimate sexual activities are prohibited outside of marriage.

### Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define inappropriate interaction between a church worker and a child, and to outline the responsibility of Bethany Presbyterian Church for taking action against this form of behavior.

### Definitions

**Child** means individuals of less than 18 years of age.

**Church Worker** includes any paid/volunteer children's teacher/helper, nursery worker, youth teacher/helper or any church-affiliated person working with church children.

**Sexual abuse or misconduct** includes touching or non-touching interaction for the purpose of sexual stimulation between a church worker and a child. This behavior is always considered forced when the interaction involves a child and a church worker, whether or not the victim has consented.

**Sexual misconduct by a church worker** is defined as sexual activity outside of marriage (not limited to coitus) in which a worker causes or allows a parishioner, client, or employee of Bethany to engage in sexual activity with him/her. Such misconduct is unethical behavior and shall be deemed a violation of responsibility.

**Sexual harassment** includes sexually oriented jokes or humor, sexually demeaning comments, verbal suggestions of sexual involvement or sexual activity, questions or comments about sexual behavior, graphic or degrading comments about an individual's physical appearance, display of sexually suggestive objects or pictures, or repeated requests for social engagements after an individual refuses.

### Standards of Conduct

The above definitions of sexual abuse, misconduct and harassment explain behaviors that are not acceptable between paid/volunteer church workers, youth helpers or any church-affiliated person and the children they interact with.

In additions, adults should take care not to act in a sexually stimulating way during any church activity. Common expressions of affection (hugs), affirmation (pat on the back), support (prayer), or physical care taking (diapers, etc.) are appropriate in this community of caring Christians. Care must be taken, though, that physical expressions of affection are not excessive or imposed upon another individual.

Workers and helpers should work in pairs. This includes Sunday School teachers, youth workers, and nursery staff. It is recommended that children be transported in groups, rather than alone.

## **Reporting Sexual Misconduct**

### **Specific Procedures: Reporting to the *Response Group***

Victims and/or those with knowledge of sexual misconduct by church workers are strongly encouraged to report immediately to Bethany's on-call *Response Group*. Serving one-year terms, as voted by Session for the calendar year, the Group will be comprised of four members, including a church staff member, an attorney, and a current elder. The fourth member will be drawn from a pool of five parishioners with expertise relating to particular issues (e.g. counseling, child abuse, etc.).

In cases of sexual misconduct involving a minor or developmentally-disabled adult, professional church workers are considered "mandated reporters" and are *required by law* to report within 48 hours. Bethany, however, encourages all church workers, mandated or not, to report immediately to the *Response Group* any sexual misconduct involving minors or developmentally-disabled adults.

### ***Response Group* Procedures**

When an alleged incident has been reported to the *Response Group*, the *Group* will confer, gather needed information, and determine an appropriate course of action, which may include:

1. Seeking an attorney as necessary.
2. Reporting to Child Protective Services or other appropriate agencies (if alleged victim is a minor or developmentally-disabled adult).
3. Requesting the Clerk of the Session to proceed with the steps outlined for investigation according to the Rules of Discipline, when applicable.

Victims and their families are often afraid and uncertain about reporting cases of sexual misconduct. Extreme care will be taken to protect the privacy of the alleged victim, the person accused of misconduct, and the reporter. Pastoral care and communication will also be provided to all involved parties throughout the procedure.

The Session may choose, at its discretion, to offer professional and/or financial support to the victims of sexual misconduct by church workers. The Session also may recommend that the offending church worker pay for the expenses of the victim as related to her/his offense. Also, documented sexual misconduct may become part of the worker's personnel record and may be forwarded to potential employers.

### **Special Policies Regarding Children's and Youth Ministries**

In order to provide a safe environment for minors and church workers at Bethany, Bethany will implement the following preventative procedures:

- I. Initiate a background check on all church workers including but not limited to all individuals working with minors.
  - A. Church workers recruited for ministry at Bethany must complete a formal application prior to acceptance. This application process should include:
    1. A written application including the statement:  
Have you ever been arrested, charged or convicted of any offenses involving minors? If so, please specify.
    2. The completion of the Washington State Patrol, Request for Criminal History Information Child/Adult Abuse Information Act Form and may include fingerprint identification.
  - B. Volunteers who (1) refuse to comply with the application procedure, (2) have reason to answer "yes" to question I.A.1. as stated above or (3) have a previous record of offense documented by the Washington State Patrol identification process (I.A.2. above) will be excluded from participating in Children's and Youth Ministries. There will be no exceptions to this policy.
- II. All Sunday school teachers and staff working with minors must participate in, or have evidence of having participated in, an educational program regarding the recognition of child abuse, reporting procedures, and appropriate behavior and touch for adults working with minors.

**Bethany Presbyterian Church  
Sexual Conduct Policy**

I have read this document; I understand it; and agree to comply with its policies.

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*Bethany Presbyterian Church*

At its November 14, 2017 meeting, the session of Bethany Presbyterian Church approved the new *Statement on Ordained Leadership and Program Staff*.

## **2017 Statement on Ordained Leadership and Program Staff<sup>1</sup>**

**At Bethany, our ordained officers and program staff<sup>2</sup> should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be shaped by Scripture, testify to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They should be people of sound judgment, honest repute, sincere compassion, sexual integrity, wisdom, brotherly and sisterly love and maturity of faith having demonstrated gifts in leadership. They should be sober-minded, temperate, hospitable, not quarrelsome and not recent converts.**

**Ordained officers (deacons, elders, and pastors) must have the approval of God's people in a congregational meeting. Program staff must have the approval of the session. Authority to approve all other non-ordained volunteers and leaders will rest with ministry area staff members and elders as delegated to them by the session.**

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the content of this statement comes from 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and the PC(USA) Book of Order.

<sup>2</sup> "Program staff" are staff who lead program ministries at Bethany.

## Background Paper

Upon its approval by the session, the new *Statement on Ordained Leadership and Program Staff* replaced the previous *Holiness and Leadership Statement*. **How has God led us to this new statement? Below is a description of our journey.**

### Listening for God's Leading

In Spring 2016 Bethany Presbyterian Church engaged in a four-phased communal discernment process, *Listening for God's Leading*. In the second phase, the session heard God give us a question to bring before the Lord:

*“Given our diversity of positions on the issues of gay marriage and leadership standards, Lord God, what do you have to say to us about being united in Christ, providing a sanctuary (safe place) for all people, and learning to love each other across our differences with the same abundant love you continually give to us?”*

The congregation met to bring this question before Jesus. The session took what was heard by the congregation and prayed through these themes. Here is what we heard God saying to Bethany:

- **Be centered on and united in Christ**
- **Open my sanctuary to all in a way that is both safe and holy**
- **Be courageous in loving one another across differences**

Through continued listening to God it became clear we should begin to take two steps in the fall of 2016:

1. **Revisit the Holiness and Leadership Statement**
2. **Equip the congregation and the session with tools for engaging this issue further**

The 2017 Statement on Ordained Leadership and Program Staff is the session's attempt to fulfill this first step.

### History:

Because Bethany Presbyterian Church is a church that waits on the Holy Spirit, we are not a static body. Our journey regarding Bethany and the LGBTQ<sup>3</sup> community reflects this.

In the early 1990s, a former Presbyterian minister who was gay began worshiping at Bethany with some hopes to help Bethany become a congregation that affirmed same-sex relationships. At that time, this would have meant a radical departure from Bethany's culture, theology and

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<sup>3</sup> “LGBTQ” is commonly understood to mean lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer/questioning.

ethos. Although he was encouraged to continue to worship at Bethany and did so, this man was refused church membership, because Bethany's leadership believed that those in same-sex relationships did not meet Bethany's membership standards at that time. This determination remained in effect for a decade.

Eventually, pastoral and elder leadership grew uncomfortable with the membership policy that specifically excluded people in same-sex relationships while ignoring those in extramarital heterosexual relationships. Did we have a double standard? The Holy Spirit was leading us on a journey. At that point, session affirmed that membership should be open to all who desired to follow Jesus with the understanding that we are all, those outside and those within the LGBTQ community, in the process of becoming whole in Christ. This affirmation aligned with the membership standards of our denomination's constitution.

Around the same time, in 2002, Bethany's *Holiness and Leadership Statement*, which identified standards for leadership on a number of issues including materialism, bigotry, sexual integrity, and pride, was approved. The statement prohibited people in same-sex relationships, as well as those in extramarital heterosexual relationships, from leadership. It was re-affirmed by session in 2006, and again in 2011. (Our own denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), at that time had a similar policy regarding ordained leadership, prohibiting those in same-sex relationships from being ordained. That denominational prohibition was lifted in 2012.)

Through a series of Roundtable discussions in 2015 and our five month-communal discernment process in 2016, the session is once again sensing the Holy Spirit leading us on a journey. At this point in our journey, the following statements outline our essential unity and our significant place of divergence.

### **Unity and Diversity at Bethany Presbyterian Church**

As a body of believers at Bethany we are:

**United** in our commitment to Jesus, and through him believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**United** in our reliance on the free grace of Jesus Christ, this undeserved gift of a God who loves, seeks, and welcomes us while we are still lost in sin. We are called as a congregation to reflect Christ's welcome to all.

**United** in waiting on the Holy Spirit through prayer, listening and scripture study, anticipating that the Holy Spirit will guide us.

**United** in our confidence in the Bible as God's inspired Word and our rule for faith and life. The Bible was written by humans, but inspired by God through the Holy Spirit, and is God's authoritative written Word to us, pointing us to Christ and providing God's perspective on what it means to live faithfully as Christians.



**United** in our honesty about the power of sin to deceive and hold us captive. However, we are equally confident that the cross of Jesus has broken the power of sin.

**United** in the belief that the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are visible signs of God's grace, bearing witness to and offering a foretaste of the kingdom to come.

**United** in our corporate worship, bringing together the reformed/evangelical, contemplative, charismatic, holiness and social justice traditions.

**United** in our affirmation of the Apostle's Creed and the other historic Christian creeds.

**United** in placing a high value on lay leadership in all areas of ministry.

At the same time, as a body of believers we are:

**Not United** in our understanding/beliefs about the place of individuals in monogamous gay relationships in the life of the church. Some of us believe that the Bible gives clear prohibitions against homosexual acts and that Jesus followers may not be in a same sex relationship while still remaining faithful to our Lord. Others of us, while acknowledging these Biblical texts, believe they address ancient Roman and Greek homoerotic practices that were oppressive and idolatrous, rather than the monogamous, committed relationships of some in the Christian LGBTQ community. As a body of believers, we are not of one mind on this matter, and we live in the tension of this reality. We are not completely comfortable in this place, but it is where we are. (A more detailed outline of the "historic" and "emerging" views can be found on our website [Brief blog Link](#))

In the midst of this disagreement, we remain:

**United** in defining ourselves not at the boundaries of our faith, but, rather, at the center of our faith, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the "Word become flesh" whose life, death and resurrection announce God's victory over death and evil.

**United** in the belief that this One who overcame the God-human divide can bridge our divisions and empower us to be courageous in loving one another across our differences. Trusting in God, we remain committed to each other, praying that the Holy Spirit will empower us in mutual forbearance, patience and love as we learn from each other.

**United** in mission around our belief that God intends for our worshipping community to be grounded in God's love, centered on Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to be a blessing to our world, our city and one another.

### **Leadership Selection**

Today, we continue our practice of the last decade and a half of receiving people from the LGBTQ community into our congregational life and membership. When selecting ordained

leaders and program staff, we will no longer use the 2002 *Holiness and Leadership Statement*. Instead, we will use the standards for leadership outlined in the new *Statement on Ordained Leadership and Program Staff*. These standards will be used as the measure for future leaders by the Nominating Committee and ultimately by the congregation when it votes by written ballot on church officers at congregational meetings. Staff search committees will also be guided by this statement. As in the past, we will trust the Holy Spirit to guide us through a discernment process that will include prayer, scriptural guidance, and Presbyterian polity to determine our ordained leaders.

### **Sexual Integrity on the Part of Leaders**

We affirm that ordained leadership is the result of a mutually discerned calling and that ordained leadership and staff submit to the Lordship of Christ in all of life. We recognize that the stewardship of one's sexuality is one of many factors in the call process. Our position is that one's sexual orientation and living out of that orientation – through chastity in singleness or fidelity in marriage – does not preclude consideration for ordination.

The *Statement on Ordained Leadership and Program Staff* neither affirm nor rejects monogamous same-sex relationships; we are not in agreement on this issue. We recognize that our approach to this issue is particularly troublesome for those who believe that a faithful Christian should not be in a same-sex relationship. However, at the same time, we believe this is not an essential issue of Christian discipleship nor an issue we need to resolve in our written leadership standards. The *Statement on Ordained Leadership and Program Staff* treats affirmation of monogamous same-sex relationships as a disputable matter. By "disputable", we mean this is an area in which faithful Christians can disagree but remain in communion with each other.

In this way, our approach to this issue is very similar to what the apostle Paul addressed in Romans 14:1-15:6 when Gentile believers and Jewish believers in Jesus could not agree on the most divisive issue in the church at the time: Sabbath laws and kosher dietary rules. Paul names the issues, but he does not resolve them. He basically says that both sides have good reasons. And then he says two things: First, "Each one should be fully convinced in his or her own mind." (Rom. 14:5) That is, as *The Message* puts it, "Each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience." And second, "Each of us will be accountable to God. Let us therefore no longer pass judgement on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister." (Rom. 14:12-13).

### **Regarding Weddings on the Bethany Campus**

In our process of discernment, the session has focused on revisiting the leadership policy, and has not addressed our current policy of hosting only marriages between a man and woman on the Bethany campus. We recognize there are some inconsistencies between our policy on marriage and our policy on leadership selection. However, the inconsistencies are reflective of our current state of disagreement on this matter and the tensions therein. We also recognize that our current policy places a burden on those who affirm, desire or participate in same-sex

marriages. That said, we recommend settling into our new *Statement on Ordained Leadership and Pastoral Staff* before addressing this matter further.

It is important to recognize that there is a division of authority regarding the conduct of weddings. In our Presbyterian form of government, pastors are given authority to discern whether a couple is ready to enter the covenant of marriage. However, the local session of a congregation has authority on how church property is to be used. Currently, our session's policy does not allow the use of Bethany property for weddings for same sex couples. When a wedding is not on church property, Presbyterian pastors are free, based on their own conscience and discernment, to decide whether they will marry a couple.

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**FOR PROGRAM STAFF ONLY**

**I have read and understand the 2017 Statement on Ordained Leadership and Program Staff:**

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_