



Council of Bishops

The United Methodist Church



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 23, 2018

United Methodist leaders respond to #metoo and #churchtoo movement

Over the recent weeks and months, and continuing on a seemingly daily basis, the media have been saturated with stories of persons coming forward with allegations of sexual misconduct perpetrated by individuals in positions of power and authority. The pervasiveness of the power imbalance is a part of every story being told. Responses have ranged from immediate termination of employment of the accused and bribery for silence to invitations for victims to feel shame.

The Council of Bishops together with the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women reaffirm the core beliefs found in The United Methodist Church's Social Principles which clearly state, "sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship and interfering with the moral mission of the Church."

Further we recognize "sexual assault as wrong no matter the circumstances," and "among women and men, [we] reject the erroneous notion [that] one gender is superior to another." Further, our General Rules, founded by John Wesley direct us to do no harm and do good in every possible way at all times. The sin of sexual misconduct must be named by the Church at every level of ministry. Further, we must confront the environment of coarser public dialog and discourse that provides license and cover for sexual harassment, abuse and assault.

We acknowledge that the Church is also a place where sexual misconduct happens when persons in power positions choose to abuse their power. The stories are all too similar. Alleged victims are often reluctant to come forward fearing they will not be believed or they will experience retaliation and the decision to report will be held against them. Sexual misconduct is a symptom of a systemic problem within our Church and society where patriarchy flourishes.

The Church is a place for spiritual growth. Unfortunately, spiritual violence happens every time a person experiences sexual misconduct within the Church. Nothing excuses this behavior.

In November 2017, before the most recent flurry of stories came forward, the Council of Bishops affirmed, through its members, renewed commitment to addressing the

systemic causes of sexual misconduct and abuse of power. Upon invitation, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women provided two training sessions to the bishops during their recent meeting on topics of sustaining integrity in ministry and response to sexual misconduct.

The Council of Bishops is committed to leading The United Methodist Church in the prevention of sexual misconduct, to offering healing to the victims, and to finding paths for Christ's love to be shown to the perpetrator while maintaining standards of accountability.

The Council of Bishops joins with The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women to strongly encourage and support the reporting of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment allegations within the Church. Our denomination's website, www.umsexualethics.org offers information and a toll free, confidential number for support through the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

To the extent of our ability, we pledge to do the right thing in every complaint received, including listening well to hear the story and developing a response which holds persons accountable and offers healing for all affected.



Bishop Bruce R. Ough
President
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of The United Methodist
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Bishop Tracy Malone
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Dawn Wiggins Hare
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