

Eastminster Presbyterian Church Anti-Harassment Policy

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). 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”) Because we believe this, and seek to live it out in all aspects of our personal and corporate life, we at Eastminster believe that harassment in all its forms is incompatible with who we are as followers of Jesus. We oppose all forms of harassment and seek to provide space where all can flourish free of harassment.

What is harassment? Simply put, harassment is “repeated unwanted behavior.”

- a. *Behavior*: harassment consists of words or actions that demean, threaten, offend, or humiliate another person. This includes, but is not limited to, name-calling in private or public, or in electronic communication such as email; offensive or demeaning social media posts; stalking; and mockery of another person’s appearance, demeanor, gender, or racial/ethnic identity.
- b. *Unwanted*: teasing or humorous language that might appear offensive 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.
- c. *Repeated*: in an emotionally-charged setting, a person may use insulting or demeaning language. Ideally, this leads to apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation. But when the insulting or demeaning language is repeated, it becomes harassment.

What is unlawful harassment? “Unlawful harassment” is conduct that has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment; substantially and unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance; or otherwise adversely affects an individual’s employment opportunities because of the individual’s membership in a protected class. Unlawful harassment includes, but is not limited to, epithets; slurs; jokes; pranks; innuendo; comments; written or graphic material; stereotyping; gossip; or other threatening, hostile, or intimidating acts based on race, color, ancestry, national origin, gender, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, age, disability, veteran status, or other characteristic protected by state or federal law.

What is sexual harassment? While all forms of harassment are prohibited, special attention should be paid to sexual harassment. “Sexual harassment” is generally defined under both state and federal law as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature where:

- a. Submission to or rejection of such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of any individual’s employment or as a basis for employment decisions; *or*
- b. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Other sexually oriented conduct, whether intended or not, that is unwelcome and has the effect of creating a work environment that is hostile, offensive, intimidating, or humiliating to workers may also constitute sexual harassment.

Approved by Session: August 13, 2024

How do we prevent harassment in the Church? Jesus is our model for how we treat each other. But we don't always live up to that standard.

- a. 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. We acknowledge together that harassment in all its forms is wrong, and we commit ourselves to repentance and genuine reconciliation whenever harassment occurs.
- c. 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.

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. If that doesn't work, bring in others. Document any conduct you believe might violate this policy including dates, times, locations, individuals involved, and descriptions of the behavior.
- c. Anyone who believes they have been personally subject to or witnessed discrimination or harassment of another person at Eastminster, is requested and encouraged to make a complaint. Bring your complaint directly to the Pastor or a member of Session with whom you feel comfortable. If the pastor is the one being accused, the Commission on Ministry of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan will be informed immediately. Complaints about the pastor will be investigated by the presbytery. All other complaints will be investigated promptly by the Session and, to the extent possible, with regard for confidentiality. If the investigation confirms conduct contrary to this policy has occurred, Eastminster will take immediate, appropriate, corrective action.
- d. The pastor and session should counsel the person engaging in harassing behavior. If that doesn't lead to repentance and reconciliation, it may be necessary to seek resources from the presbytery or 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)

What about the law? Sexual and other unlawful harassment is a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), as amended, as well as Michigan law. Harassment based on a characteristic protected by law, such as race, color, ancestry, national origin, gender, sex, sexual

orientation, gender identity, marital or domestic partner status, religion, age, disability, veteran status, or other characteristic protected by state or federal law, is prohibited. Any retaliation against an individual who has complained about sexual or other harassment or retaliation against individuals for cooperating with an investigation of a harassment complaint is similarly unlawful. Under Michigan law, you have 180 days from the date of the harassment to file a complaint with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

This policy takes effect when it is approved by the session. The session/council will review it annually 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 Eastminster Manual of Operations.

Acknowledgement of Receipt

I hereby acknowledge that on (date) _____, I received a copy of the Anti-Harassment Policy of Eastminster Presbyterian Church; that I have read the policy; that I understand its meaning; and that I agree to conduct myself in accordance with the policy. I understand that this acknowledgement shall be retained in church files.

Signature:

Name:

Date: