

Presbytery of Southern New England

Anti-Harassment Policy

First Reading May 3, 2025

Approved [DATE]

Anti-Harassment Policy of the Presbytery of Southern New England

God has created all people in God's own image and thus has made us equal in Christ (Genesis 1:26). The Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is given shape and life and is meant to reflect our relationship to one another and to God. We firmly believe that God intends all human life to have worth and dignity in all relationships. Through these relationships, we are bound to serve and respect the dignity of every human being (F-1.0301). This respect and dignity afforded to all of God's creation is through the creation and maintenance of a safe environment within our community, free of harassment.

This policy applies to staff, volunteers, members of congregations, and participants in new worshipping communities and other ministries. The Presbytery, in conjunction with existing policies and procedures and in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local anti-discrimination and harassment laws and regulations, enforces this policy, as stated, in accordance with the following definitions and guidelines.

- *Verbal Harassment:* Verbal harassment is harassment established by a pattern of conduct of unwelcome or unwanted spoken or written comments. Those comments can include, without limitation, insults, jokes, slurs, false and misleading information, and threats. This could also include, but is not limited to, stereotyping based on a person's nationality, origin, race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, body, medical conditions, disability, and appearance.
- *Nonverbal Harassment:* Nonverbal Harassment includes, without limitations, distribution, display, or discussion of any graphic material that ridicules, denigrates, insults, or belittles. This may also include and is not limited to a show of hostility, aversion, or disrespect toward an individual or group because of nationality, origin, race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, body, medical conditions, disability, and appearance.¹
- Both Verbal and Nonverbal Harassment include, without limitation, persistent unwanted contact (verbal or nonverbal), bullying, intimidation, and interference in the ministry of the church or organization.
- *Sexual Harassment:* Sexual Harassment is the behavior characterized by the making of unwelcome and/or inappropriate sexual remarks, physical advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal and/or physical conduct of a sexual nature.² Sexual harassment may take many different forms including, but not limited to, verbal, nonverbal, and physical sexual

¹ U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Harassment. Accessed January 31, 2024. <https://www.eeoc.gov/youth/harassment>

² U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Sexual Harassment. Accessed January 31, 2024. <https://www.eeoc.gov/sexual-harassment>

harassment. More information about this can be found in the Presbytery Policy Regarding Sexual Misconduct.

- *Electronic Harassment*: Electronic Harassment is the use of electronic communication to harass a targeted person or group, including, but not limited to, emails, blogs, social networking websites, online games, forums, instant messaging, Zoom, and other virtual conferencing modalities, text messaging, and mobile phone pictures and videos. Harassment perpetrated through these online media have come to be known as "cyber bullying."³
- *Retaliation*: Retaliation is any hardship, loss of benefit, or penalty imposed on any person in response to filing or responding to a bona fide complaint or discrimination or harassment.⁴⁴

In our efforts to create a church where all persons are treated with respect and dignity the Presbytery of Southern New England commits to:

- Provide anti-harassment training for our staff, volunteers, officers, commissioners and leaders to encourage education, understanding, and growth;
- Acknowledge and thoroughly investigate all allegations of harassment, providing support through the use of Book of Order defined processes.
- Strive to create a Presbytery where harassment of all kinds is not tolerated or accepted, where all people of God are welcome and safe.

Acknowledgement

PSNE is indebted to Philadelphia Presbytery who overturned the 225th General Assembly to amend G-3.0106 to require all councils to adopt a harassment policy. This policy is heavily drawn from the policies adopted by the Presbytery of Detroit and Philadelphia Presbytery in 2024.

Appendix A

Sample Actions that Describe Harassment

Examples of conduct that are prohibited may include, but are not limited to:

- Spreading malicious rumors, gossip, or innuendo.
- Excluding or isolating someone socially.
- Intentionally browbeating, bulldozing or bullying a person.
- Undermining or deliberately impeding a person's work.
- Physically abusing or threatening abuse.
- Removing areas of responsibilities in or to harm an individual.
- Constantly and unnecessarily changing work guidelines.
- Establishing unreasonable deadlines that will set-up the individual to fail.
- Withholding necessary information or purposefully giving the wrong information.
- Making jokes that are obviously offensive by spoken word or email regardless of intent.
- Intruding on a person's privacy by pestering, spying or stalking.
- Assigning unreasonable duties or workload which are unfavorable to one person

³ US Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, Electronic Harassment – Concept Map and Definition. Accessed January 31, 2024. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/electronic-harassment-concept-map-and-definition>

⁴ US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Enforcement Guidance on Retaliation and Related Issues. Accessed January 31, 2024. <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/enforcement-guidanceretaliation-and-related-issues>

(in a way that creates unnecessary pressure).

- Avoiding assigning an individual responsibility with the intention of creating a feeling of uselessness.
- Yelling or using profanity.
- Criticizing a person persistently or constantly.
- Belittling a person's opinions.
- Unwarranted (or undeserved) punishment.
- Unwarranted blocking applications for training, leave or promotion.
- Tampering with a person's personal belongings or work equipment.
- Using racist slang, phrases, or nicknames.
- Making remarks about an individual's skin color or other ethnic traits.
- Displaying racist drawings, or posters that are intended to be offensive to a particular group.
- Making gestures that are intended to offend others.
- Making offensive reference to an individual's mental or physical disability.
- Sharing inappropriate images, videos, e-mails, letters, or notes in an offensive nature.
- Offensively talking about negative racial, ethnic, or religious stereotypes.
- Making derogatory age-related comments.
- Wearing clothing that is intended to be offensive to a particular ethnic group.
- Gaslighting
- Harassing communications can be verbal, written, electronic (e.g., email or text messages), or social media (e.g., X, FB, IG).

Appendix B

Steps to Prevent Harassment

1. Create a Safe Environment

Be vocal. Let your staff and congregation know you take harassment seriously. Those who work at and attend the church should feel safe if they need to come forward with an accusation of harassment.

Define policies. If there aren't policies in place concerning harassment in your church, create them now. The church must be prepared if an allegation surfaces. Provide awareness training. Consider using an appropriate video to enhance discussion.

2. Keep a Safe Environment

Practice Accountability. One way to keep your staff accountable is to stay aware of any change in behavior or individuals. Declining performance, increased absences, inability to concentrate and/or

changes in work habits could indicate an employee being harassed.

Check your insurance. Make sure your church insurance covers employment related claims, such as a harassment claim.

Address allegation. When an non-anonymous allegation surfaces, follow the guidelines in the Church Discipline section of the Book of Order.

3. Annual Requirement

Upon approval of the policy, communication and education on this policy shall be made widely available to the presbytery, and incorporated into boundary training resources offered to Sessions.

At least once a year, this policy will be presented and reviewed on the floor of a Stated Meeting of PSNE. Each staff member, volunteer, officer, and commissioner to the Presbytery needs to understand how to create a harassment-free environment. An annual review will help us to keep our eyes on the image of God in each other. Also review the guidelines in the Church Discipline section to know how to file an allegation when necessary. Be certain to encourage policies in each congregation. Presbytery representatives should encourage the church of their membership to adopt and annually review similar policies.