

A Policy on Racial Harassment – Adopted June 8, 2002

A POLICY ON RACIAL HARASSMENT FOR THE NEW ENGLAND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

A. INTRODUCTION

The right of free speech and the open exchange of ideas and views are essential, especially in the environment of the church. The United Methodist Church strongly upholds these freedoms. The New England Annual Conference is committed to assuring dignity for all and desires that every church be welcoming to all persons. Harassment based on any irrational motive, including race, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national, cultural or ethnic origin, or disability results in loss of self-esteem for the victim, and the violation and breakdown in the sense of community within the church.

The policy and procedures which follow are intended to insure that the churches and other agencies of the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church have a clear understanding of the definition of racial harassment and of the fact that racial harassment, as well as other forms of harassment, are not permitted among us. While racial harassment is, at root, a moral and ethical concern, it is also illegal under state and federal law. Under our United Methodist Discipline, it is also a chargeable offense for both clergy and laity. This document proposes additional, advisory procedures designed to improve our ability to respond effectively to complaints of this nature.

B. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to laity, clergy, and lay employees of the New England Annual Conference in cases of racial harassment. The existence of a policy, including procedures for complaints, will act as a deterrent to inappropriate behavior.

C. THEOLOGICAL BASIS

“The first two chapters of the Book of Genesis describe the ‘creative genius of God.’ Psalm 24 ‘reaffirms the relationship between God and all of God’s creatures and the divinity of God.’ Yet, in spite of humanity’s common legacy as God’s descendants, we have consistently established differences among God’s children because of race... [engaging] in verbal exchanges and behavioral demonstrations which have rejected the sacredness of all persons. When [a] prejudicial and/or racist attitude is expressed in a behavior that is focused specifically in the abuse, humiliations and defamation of persons because of their race or ethnicity, it has become racial harassment.” (*The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church: 2000*, #157, “Racial Harassment,” p. 393)

As we seek to dismantle the racism **and cultural biases** in our structure, policies, and practices, we will also continue to work to create an environment in which all people are respected and welcomed. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” (1 Corinthians, 12:12) “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26)

D. DEFINITION

The General Conference of 1992 defines the following conditions as racial harassment:

1. Abusive and/or derogatory language that in a subtle or overt manner belittles, humiliates, defames, or demeans a person or a group of persons based on racial and ethnic traits, heritage, and characteristics;
2. A behavior (individual, group, or institutional) which abuses, belittles, humiliates, defames, or demeans a person or a group of persons based on racial or ethnic traits, heritage, and characteristics;
3. Documentation, printed or visual, which abuses, humiliates, defames, or demeans a person or group of persons based on racial and ethnic heritage, traits, heritage and characteristics.

(The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church: 2000, #157, "Racial Harassment," p. 393)

The New England Conference will not tolerate any acts or communications intended to intimidate, demean, annoy or insult an individual on the basis of his/her race, national, or ethnic origin. We prohibit behaviors that contribute to the creation of a racially hostile and offensive church or work environment. This environment is created when words or actions directed toward a group, or an individual of a particular race or ethnic origin, are unwelcome and seriously and pervasively offensive and demeaning to the victims.

These prohibitions against racial harassment apply to any person within the New England Conference, whether laity, clergy, or staff. The offended person may be another individual in the church, a recipient of the church's services, a staff member, or a community member. The prohibitions may apply at any place or time.

While all persons are expected to take part in maintaining an environment safe and free from racial harassment, each supervisor, pastor, and congregational leader is responsible for taking steps to create such an environment. This responsibility is also intended to cover any racial harassment complaints lodged against third-party providers of services to the New England Conference or individuals involved in business relationships with the conference. Those who have knowledge of incidents involving substantiated racial harassment and fail to respond appropriately also are in violation of this policy.

E. PROCEDURES

- I. If you are racially harassed:
 - A. State firmly and clearly to the harasser that this behavior is unwelcome and you want it to stop. It may be helpful to take another person with you for support. This action, in some cases, will resolve the issue.
 - B. Keep a journal which documents all incidents of suspected racial harassment including dates, times and descriptions of the incidents. Record the names of any witnesses to the harassment. Keep copies of all written materials you complete in reference to the harassment. If you receive any written letters, cards, or memos of a harassing nature, keep them and note the date and how the material was received (mailed to your home, left on your desk, etc.)
 - C. If the issue cannot be resolved through personal confrontation you may (1) inform your Staff-Parish Relations Committee, your pastor, the District

Superintendent, your immediate supervisor, or other such person or group. Keep copies of all correspondence. Remember that the church supports an environment free from racial antagonism and that the above named persons are committed to helping you. (2) you may present your situation to the Racial Harassment Prevention/Response Team or any member of that team.

- II. If you are accused of racial harassment:
 - A. Try talking with the individual who is making the complaint against you with the permission of him or her through a third party. Try to reach a solution. Document the agreement and actions taken.
 - B. If the issue cannot be resolved through personal dialogue you may (1) inform one of the above named persons or groups depending on which is appropriate (2) present the situation to the Racial Harassment Prevention/Response Team.

- III If racial harassment is reported to you:
 - A. Listen objectively and take it seriously.
 - B. Help the person follow the steps outlined above.

- IV. Any incident of racial harassment experienced, perpetrated, or observed is to be reported to the Racial Harassment Prevention/Response Team or any member of that team whose role it shall be to provide opportunity to reflect upon, learn from, and correct harassment behaviors in a spirit of sensitivity, and respect, and reconciliation. This policy is designed to be correctional rather than punitive.

- V. In any event, the procedures outlined in Par. 368 (clergy) and Par. 2702, numbers 1 and 3(laity) of the *2004 Book of Discipline, and other relevant sections*, may be pursued by either of the parties. These procedures are supplementary in nature and do not, in any way, supersede the tenets of the Book of Discipline.