



## Complaint Process In The United Methodist Church

Our Book of Discipline reminds us that “Ordination and membership in an annual conference in The United Methodist Church is a sacred trust.” (¶ 362) All individuals who take part in ministerial leadership occupy a position of power and authority and are called to maintain an environment that is safe for people to live and grow in God’s love. Yet, people in ministerial leadership sometimes violate the trust given to them. Sexual and professional misconduct within ministerial relationships inhibits the full and joyful participation of all in the community of God, hinders the mission of Jesus Christ, and is a betrayal of sacred trust.

Whenever the sacred trust of the ministerial office is violated, the appropriate response is to file a complaint. Both laypersons and clergypersons may file a complaint when the sacred trust of the ministerial office is violated. In some cases, a concern may be presented to a District Superintendent, and they can file a complaint on behalf of another person. The complaint process is a church process, not a secular one. Therefore, the goal of our denominational process is to follow a Biblical understanding of justice and process, by acting with pastoral concern through a fair process of justice-making for victims and survivors, real accountability for abusers, and healing for all parties.

Always keep in mind that in the State of Kentucky the law requires mandatory reporting of child abuse, neglect, and dependency and the abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation of adults who have a physical or mental disability and are unable to protect themselves. In the State of Tennessee any person with reasonable cause to believe a child is being abused or neglected must, under the law, immediately report to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services or to local law enforcement. Our denominational policy encourages immediate reporting to the civil authorities all allegations of abuse against a minor regardless of personal confidentiality issues.

All those who serve in ministerial leadership are called to protect the sacred trust of the ministerial office by avoiding actions and words that harm others. Ministry leaders are also called to protect the vulnerable against actions or words that cause harm. The Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference will not condone or tolerate instances of sexual or professional misconduct. Your conference leadership is committed to making every reasonable effort to prevent any such incidents.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church is clear with regard to the qualifications and duties of local pastors, associate members, provisional members, and full members of the Conference. **Whenever a person in any of the above categories, including those on leaves of all types, honorable or administrative location, or retirement, is accused of violating this trust, the membership of his/her ministerial office shall be subject to review. A complaint should be filed in response to any violation of the sacred trust of the ministerial office.**

Anyone who desires to discuss a concern regarding sexual or professional misconduct may contact their pastor, another United Methodist clergy person, or the district superintendent for their district. Persons may also choose to contact a confidential hotline, staffed by the Commission on the Status and Role of Women of the UMC, by calling 1-800-523-8290. However, in order for a complaint to be formally acted upon, it must be in writing, signed and dated.