

Position Paper
United Pentecostal Church International
Weldon Spring, Missouri
UPCI.org

ABUSE AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Adopted by the General Board in 2019, Amended 2021

The UPCI opposes all types of abuse and sexual misconduct. The church should do everything within its power to prevent the occurrence or coverup of abuse and exploitation of children, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations. When an allegation of abuse is presented, it should be investigated and considered with both great diligence and discretion, in addition to being referred for investigation and adjudication by appropriate authorities when so directed by the law and/or ethical standards. All church leaders involved in an investigation or hearing must keep confidentiality, but exceptions are to be made when it is appropriate to notify the proper authorities of abuse or sexual assault.

Guiding Philosophy

It is the responsibility of every local church to cultivate a culture of protection, both to prevent abuse and to support victims who have been abused. The UPCI condemns any instance in which a leader uses his or her position of authority in a sexually inappropriate manner. Further, we repudiate the abuse of power by any leader who attempts to silence or marginalize victims or to protect perpetrators of sexual abuse. The local church should have clear procedures governing interactions between leaders and the populations they serve. If these guidelines are violated, local church discipline should be administered. Such forms of church discipline, however, do not negate the fact that sexual abuse and some other forms of abuse are crimes to be investigated and prosecuted in the context of governmental entities. Moreover, certain church leaders and administrators may be required by state or provincial law to report child and/or sexual abuse to the authorities.

The UPCI charges our ministers and our institutions to create a culture in which victims can safely share instances of abuse and receive necessary care and protection throughout the process. We urge all church leaders to implement policies designed to protect against and confront any form of abuse, and to do everything possible to ensure the safety of the abused. We call all ministers to report allegations of sexual or other child abuse immediately to the proper authorities as required by law and/or ethical standards, and to exercise appropriate church discipline upon those who have committed such abuse.

While both victim(s) and perpetrator(s) are created in the image of God, and as such, are His children, the primary responsibility of the church must be to protect and support the victim(s), then attempt to restore the perpetrator(s) spiritually to forgiveness and right fellowship with God. True repentance for perpetrating abuse requires an acceptance of the consequences of sin, both in the context of governmental entities and in the context of the local church. Through the grace of God, survivor(s) of sexual abuse can forgive their abuser(s), but such forgiveness is not a substitute for justice for the crime of sexual abuse. Forgiveness also does not require victims to have an ongoing relationship with their abuser(s) in order to be in right standing with God or their church.

Sexual Misconduct

- Within the United Pentecostal Church, the term “sexual misconduct” means any behavior not in keeping with biblical guidelines regarding human sexuality. This would include, but not be limited to, those behaviors listed in the Position Paper adopted by the General Board in September 2015 titled “The Biblical View of Human Sexuality.”
- Further, sexual misconduct would include acts of sexual harassment which is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.
- We encourage all local churches and all districts with employees to adopt a written policy which specifically prohibits sexual harassment. Such a policy can be adopted by the board of directors and should also (1) contain encourage victims to report incidents of harassment, (3) assure employees that complaints will be investigated promptly, (4) assure employees that they will not suffer retaliation for filing a complaint, (5) discuss the discipline applicable to persons who violate the policy, and (6) assure the confidentiality of all complaints and complainants.
- It is to be understood that for churches, the courts may well treat volunteers as employees for legal purposes, and pastors may be deemed the equivalent of supervisors since they are in a position of authority. All our ministers are encouraged to understand that there are legal as well as moral ramifications for sexual misconduct, even when the conduct may be considered private activity between consenting adults whether or not it rises to the level of adultery.
- Under the UPCI Judicial Procedure, the district must investigate all formal complaints received by it of sexual misconduct against a credentialed minister.
- Under the UPCI General Constitution, if a credentialed minister is found guilty of a sexual offense such as those described in the above-referenced position paper, then his or her credentials must be revoked and cannot be reinstated. If a credentialed minister is found guilty of sexual harassment, appropriate discipline will be enacted by the governing district board depending on the severity of the conduct, up to a lifetime revocation of his or her ministerial credentials.
- The UPCI Employee Manual contains a section on “Sexual and Other Harassment” for the definition, prevention, reporting, and prompt investigation of alleged sexual misconduct on the part of all staff and/or volunteers at UPCI World Headquarters.

Abuse

- Abuse is generally defined as physically, sexually, or mentally injuring a person. This broad term incorporates specific categories of abuse, including but not limited to child abuse, domestic abuse, and sexual abuse.
- The term “child abuse” is understood to mean any act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of

serious harm. Such “caretakers” could include any church employee, volunteer, or attendee.

- All UPCI ministers and churches are expected to abide by all federal, state or provincial, and local laws regarding mandatory reporting of abuse of a child, the elderly, the disabled, or other vulnerable populations. They are further expected to cooperate fully with all proper authorities investigating the same.
- All formal complaints of abuse against credentialed ministers must be investigated by the governing district board according to the UPCI Judicial Procedure. A credentialed minister found under the UPCI Judicial Procedure to have engaged in abuse may have his or her ministerial credentials revoked, whether or not he or she is charged with a crime.
- No individual having pled guilty or having been adjudicated guilty by a court of law of sexual abuse of a child shall be granted ministerial credentials with the United Pentecostal Church. Any credentialed minister having pled guilty or having been adjudicated guilty by a court of law of sexual abuse of a child will immediately have his or her ministerial credentials permanently revoked.
- The UPCI Global Council Policy and Procedures (which governs churches outside of the United States and Canada) contains a sample Judicial Procedure for every national church “to prevent the occurrence or coverup of abuse and exploitation of children, the elderly, and other vulnerable populations.”
- Every effort should be made to provide professional counseling to victims of abuse. If the abuse was committed by a credentialed minister, the governing district board is encouraged to fund such as a gesture of compassion, though not as any admission of liability. If the abuse was committed by a non-credentialed member or volunteer of a local congregation, that church is encouraged to pay for the needed counseling.

Governance & Awareness

- The UPCI has a congregational form of church government, which means the local church is self-governing. The UPCI does not own or have an ownership interest in local churches or their property. The UPCI does not operate or supervise local churches or ministries. The UPCI does not control, and does not have the authority to control, the manner, means, methods, or daily activities by which local churches operate. Local churches and ministers are not subsidiaries, employees, or agents of the UPCI. The local church is responsible for the screening, hiring, supervision, and retention of its ministers, employees, and volunteers, and of those of any subsidiaries. The UPCI does not assign ministers to churches or transfer ministers from one church to another and does not have the authority to terminate the employment of a minister by a church. The doctrinal and disciplinary jurisdiction exercised by the UPCI, or available for its exercise, is guided by religious conviction and religious law, not by employment relationships. It is ecclesiastical and not temporal.
- The UPCI encourages its ministers to stay abreast of evolving issues involving such matters as negligent hiring, negligent supervision, sexual misconduct, and child abuse. All congregations are encouraged to cooperate with their individual insurance companies regarding these issues.