

**The Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church**  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)  
February 10, 2012

**SEXUAL MISCONDUCT & ABUSE - POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

*We believe and proclaim that all people are created by God. God values all human life and intends that everyone—men, women and children—have worth and dignity in all relationships.*

*We further believe in justice for all persons. Sexual misconduct is an abuse of power and trust, therefore unjust. Scripture asserts that religious leadership involves a covenant relationship that presumes the trustworthy exercise of power in behalf of those in our care. A betrayal of this trust is more than just a personal tragedy for the victim. It reflects a tragic breakdown in the character of the abuser that seriously threatens not only those immediately affected but the well-being of the church itself.*

*For too long, incidents of sexual misconduct have been glossed over, rationalized, or subverted for "the good of the Church." The Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church here proclaims that the "good of the Church" can never be served by overlooking an abuse of power and trust; that sexual misconduct is wrong. We further declare that charges of misconduct must be dealt with promptly, fairly, and with compassion for both the alleged injured party and the alleged perpetrator.*

*The purpose of this policy is to make clear the Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church's position on sexual misconduct and abuse and to establish the procedures to be followed in investigating and resolving instances where misconduct is alleged to have occurred. The General Assembly Policy and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct and Albany Presbytery's Policy and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct have encouraged and informed this policy.*

**I. THE POLICY STATEMENT**

Sexual misconduct, defined as including sexual harassment and abuse, whether of a child or adult, is a violation of the principles set forth in Scripture and is never permissible. This policy applies to all clergy and staff, paid and volunteer, officers, church members and those using church property. This policy recognizes that victims of sexual misconduct may include church members and their children, church employees, ministers, and other persons regardless of church membership or association. It is the policy of this church that charges of sexual misconduct be treated with the seriousness they deserve and be dealt with promptly and fairly for the benefit of all parties concerned. In keeping with American law and tradition, the presumption of innocence regarding the accused must be respected.

It is against the policy of the Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church, and illegal under state and federal law, for any clergy and staff, paid and volunteer, officers, church members and those using church property to engage in any form of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment and abuse as defined by this policy.

The Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church is committed to providing a safe place for our faith community to worship, work and gather that is free from this unlawful conduct. The adoption and enforcement of the provisions of this policy are in keeping with this commitment.

## II. Definition of Terms

### A. What is "sexual harassment?"

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination. This policy applies to all members and employees of the Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church, both paid and volunteer, as well as those who use the property. Sexual harassment 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 employment or participation;
2. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a component of the basis for employment or participation decisions affecting the individual;
3. such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's participation in the community or work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive church environment.
4. Examples of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to the following, when such acts or behavior come within one of the above definitions:
  - a) either explicitly or implicitly conditioning any term of employment (i.e. continued employment, wages, pay raise, evaluation, advancement, assigned duties, assigned shifts, etc.) or participation on the provision of sexual favors;
  - b) touching or grabbing a sexual part of a person's body;
  - c) touching or grabbing any part of a person's body after that person has indicated, or it is known, that such physical contact is unwelcome;
  - d) continuing to ask a member or employee to socialize on or off church property when that person has indicated that she/he is not interested;
  - e) displaying or transmitting sexually suggestive pictures, objects, cartoons, posters, etc.
  - f) continuing to write sexually suggestive notes or letters if it is known or should be known that the person does not welcome such behavior;
  - g) referring to or calling a person a name with sexual connotations if it is known or should be known that the person does not welcome such behavior;
  - h) telling sexually suggestive jokes or using sexually vulgar or explicit language;
  - i) derogatory or provoking remarks about or relating to an employee's sex or sexual orientation;
  - j) harassing acts or behavior directed against a person on the basis of his/her sex or sexual orientation;
  - k) off-site conduct which falls within the above definition and affects the work environment or community of the church at large.

In addition, retaliation of any kind against a person for having filed or supported a complaint of sexual harassment (e.g., ostracizing the person, pressuring the person to drop or not support the complaint, adversely altering that person's job duties, work environment, or participation, etc.) is also against the law and a violation of this policy.

### B. What is Sexual Abuse?

Sexual abuse is any offense involving sexual conduct in relation to:

1. Any person under the age of eighteen years or anyone over the age of eighteen years without mental capacity to consent {D-10.0401b. (1)} or
2. Any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of office or position {D-10.0401b. (2)}.

3. Examples of sexual abuse include any and all of the following behavior:
  - a) punishing or threatening to punish a person for rejecting sexual attention, requests, and/or demands;
  - b) coercing, or attempting to coerce, a person into a sexual and/or dating relationship;
  - c) the use of spiritual or appointed authority to coerce or the attempt to coerce, persuade, or mislead a person to enter into sexual behavior;
  - d) basing employment, promotion, pay increases, training opportunities or participation in this faith community's events on a person's acceptance or rejection of sexual advances;
  - e) utilizing a position of trust to engage in sexual contact, with or without consent, involving a person who is subject to the implicit trust relationship which the position conveys (e.g., ministers, pastoral counselors, youth leaders, church school teachers, child care workers, etc.);
  - f) any sexual contact by force, threat, or physical intimidation, including but not limited to rape or attempted rape.

### **C. What is Child Sexual Abuse?**

Child sexual abuse includes any and all of the following behaviors, whether carried out either on or off site:

1. any inappropriate sexual interaction between any individual and a child, whether verbal or physical;
2. any sexual contact by force, threat, or physical intimidation, including but not limited to rape or attempted rape;
3. any contact or interaction between an individual and a child when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the individual or a third party.

## **III. Procedures for the Presbytery and Member Churches**

### **A. PRESBYTERY RESPONSIBILITIES**

It is the responsibility of the Presbytery to:

1. insist that Presbytery officers, staff, clergy members of Presbytery and elders of congregations which are members of Albany Presbytery set a personal example by not engaging in sexual misconduct in any form;
2. explain, through the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry, that sexual misconduct will not be tolerated. Presbytery will regularly conduct training and educational events and activities for both clergy and lay people, organized and supervised by the Committee on Ministry. Such an event is mandatory for clergy members of Presbytery at least once every five years.
3. take action to address all sexual misconduct by:
  - a) encouraging the reporting of all accusations;
  - b) following up with a person who reported sexual misconduct to ensure that the behavior has stopped, and that she/he has not experienced any retaliation or reprisal;
  - c) providing procedures to address sexual misconduct reports or accusations both at the Presbytery and congregational level including, but not limited to, the procedures outlined in this policy.
  - d) creating a response team as needed (see III D below) and provide by rule for the appointment of an investigating committee as needed (see III F below and D.10.0200, 2b in the Book of Order)

d) carrying out effective reference checking of teaching elders received into the Presbytery as well as background checks on employees and volunteers, including but not limited to a sexual misconduct employment questionnaire and release form (see Exhibits A & B attached).

4. protect anyone who reports an instance of sexual misconduct from any and all forms of retaliation.

## **B. SESSION RESPONSIBILITIES & RESOURCES**

Each session in the Presbytery of Albany is responsible for providing a sexual misconduct-free church environment for its employees and members and policies and procedures to enforce the investigation and prosecution of allegations of sexual harassment and abuse within its faith community. A copy of these policies and procedures is filed with the Stated Clerk of Albany Presbytery.

It shall be the responsibility of the session to:

1. inform all employees and volunteers, especially those who work with children or youth, of the church's Policy on Sexual Misconduct and provide them with a copy;
2. appoint two to four contact persons in the congregation, including at least one woman and one man, to whom an allegedly injured party may go as an alternative to calling the Pastor. It shall be the contact persons' chief responsibilities to explain the policy to the reporter, and to inform the Moderator and Clerk of Session, *who are strongly encouraged to inform either the Chair of Committee on Ministry or the Transitional Presbyter*. If the Moderator is the accused perpetrator the contact person must also contact the General Presbyter of Albany Presbytery.
3. recognize the importance of and maintain confidentiality regarding both the accuser and accused. It shall be the contact person's responsibility to ascertain what is appropriate confidentiality in discussion with the Moderator or Clerk of Session and to advise the reporter accordingly. It may be appropriate at some point for the session to inform the congregation of the situation and the parties involved. This should be done in consultation with the Transitional Presbyter, Chair of the Committee on Ministry, or the Presbytery's Response Team.

## **C. REPORTING PROCEDURES**

Reports of sexual misconduct will occur in a variety of ways. Because an individual church or the Presbytery cannot control to whom the accuser of sexual misconduct will first speak, it is important that all church leaders and employees understand how reports of incidents are to be channeled to the proper person. Reports of sexual misconduct should never be taken lightly or disregarded and allowed to circulate without concern for the integrity and reputation of the accuser, the accused, and of the church. Reports should be dealt with as matters of highest confidentiality both before and after they have been submitted to appropriate authorities.

All persons covered by this policy have a particular duty to report suspected child sexual abuse and shall report the incident to civil or criminal authorities as required by local or state law. All persons should be educated by their local church and must comply with state and local laws regarding incidents of actual or suspected child sexual abuse.

The importance of properly reporting allegations of sexual misconduct cannot be overemphasized. Attempts to resolve accusations informally, while understandable, can often result in inappropriate

responses, which may make matters worse. Accordingly, the following reporting procedures are to be followed.

1. A victim of sexual misconduct may be a church member, church employee, anyone on church property, or the teaching elder herself or himself. The injured party is encouraged to contact one of the following if she/he has been or is being subjected to any form of sexual misconduct:
  - a) The sexual misconduct contact persons of the local church, appointed by the session. These will be two to four people, including at least one woman and one man to whom the accuser may go instead of directly to the Moderator. It shall be the contact person's chief responsibility to explain the policy and to inform the Moderator and Clerk of Session of the accusation.
  - b) The Moderator
  - c) The Clerk of Session
  - d) Should the alleged offender be the Moderator, the Transitional Presbyter should be informed.
  - e) Should the alleged offender be the Moderator, the Clerk of Session is assigned the role of the Moderator wherever this role appears in this policy.
2. Allegations received from a third party, but as yet unsubstantiated by the presumed injured party, are to receive a prompt inquiry by the Moderator in consultation with the Transitional Presbyter or Chair of the Committee on Ministry. The accused shall be informed of the allegations.
3. A formal accusation by an alleged injured party will initiate a disciplinary case which will be handled as stipulated by the Rules of Discipline D-10.000 and following. This process is briefly identified in Section F.
4. Reprisals as a result of reporting allegations are forbidden and, should such occur, could lead to disciplinary process.
5. The reporting of false allegations as a vindictive act is also subject to disciplinary process if the person reporting is subject to Presbyterian discipline.

#### **D. RESPONSE TEAM PROCEDURES<sup>1</sup>**

1. The creation of a response team to carry out pastoral but not investigative functions shall be the responsibility of Albany Presbytery, and offered to the allegedly injured party by the General Presbyter as soon as an allegation comes to his or her attention.
2. The Committee on Ministry shall appoint a team of 2-4 members with special concern and sensitivity to sexual misconduct issues. There should be at least one woman and one man on the team. Training will be provided as needed.
3. A response team may not function as an investigating committee and the pool of persons identified in D.2 (above) shall not ordinarily serve on investigating committees during the time they are members of this pool.
4. If there is more than one response team involved in the same misconduct process, the teams shall not

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<sup>1</sup> the response team **only responds** and does not deal with any disciplinary actions. Coordination of the process will be done by the session in consultation with the Committee on Ministry as needed.

communicate directly with one another unless specifically requested to do so by the *General* *Presbyter*.

5. Response teams may be assigned one or more of the following functions:

- a) to lay out a clear process and to be available for guidance during this process, as well as to suggest appropriate resources
- b) To listen to and assist injured parties.

When a response team is asked to contact an injured party, it shall do so within five days of its notification to listen, to present procedural options, and to counsel with the person until a course of action is determined upon. The response team shall assist as needed in facilitating the use of Presbyterian polity.

- b) To consult with alleged offenders.

On the day that a response team meets with an injured party, the *Moderator*, *General* *Presbyter* or the *Chair* of the *Committee on Ministry* will communicate with the alleged offender to inform her/him of the allegations, and to discuss possible responses and next steps. When so desired, a response team will be appointed to consult with the accused. Such a response team will provide pastoral support to the alleged offender and/or family members.

- c) To offer support to families or congregations which have been injured by sexual misconduct and/or allegations of same.

When a response team is asked to provide support to families or congregations who have been injured by sexual misconduct or allegations of same, its role shall be one exclusively of support and it shall refrain from offering any counsel relating to disciplinary procedures.

- d) To evaluate third-party allegations;

When a response team is asked to evaluate third-party allegations, and it determines there is a need to contact the alleged injured party, it shall follow the procedure in a. above. If a formal inquiry is needed, this is to be done by a special disciplinary committee and not a response team.

- e) To see that the required reporting of any child abuse or other criminal behavior is provided to the appropriate authorities.

## **E. PROCEDURES FOR NON-DISCIPLINARY CASES**

It is expected that all allegations involving sexual abuse will lead to the creation of an investigating committee as provided for in the Rules of Discipline. (See F. Below)

In instances where the initial allegations relate to sexual harassment exclusively, the following procedures may be followed unless or until it becomes clear that an investigating committee is needed.

1. A response team will be selected to hear the party or parties bringing the report of sexual harassment. The same response team will then meet with the alleged offender and communicate the allegations.
2. If the response team is able to achieve a resolution of the report which is satisfactory to all parties, it shall report this to the session and chair of the *Committee on Ministry*. The session and/or the response team shall follow-up with subsequent reviews after one month and six months.
3. If the response team is unable to achieve a resolution of the report which is satisfactory to all parties, or if it believes further action is needed to assure no further misconduct will take

place, it shall consult with the session as to whether the Committee on Ministry, General Presbyter, or some other party needs to be involved to accomplish this objective.

4. A church session and/or the Committee on Ministry may be requested to admonish a person who has engaged in sexual misconduct and to monitor future behavior. If such behavior is repetitive, the monitoring group in consultation with a professional counselor may require the offender to undergo psychotherapy. The monitoring group may also determine whether a formal disciplinary process should be recommended to the Presbytery.

## **F. PROCEDURES FOR DISCIPLINARY CASES**

A formal accusation of an alleged sexual misconduct offense will initiate a disciplinary case which will be handled as stipulated by the Rule of Discipline, Chapter X. What follows is a simplified outline and should not be used in place of the Book of Order.

1. An individual submits a written statement of the alleged offense along with supporting information to the Clerk of Session or Stated Clerk (D-10.0101).
2. The Clerk of Session or Stated Clerk reports to the church or Presbytery that an offense has been alleged and of the necessity to appoint an investigating committee (D-10.0103). A rule enacted by Albany Presbytery in January 1995 (Minutes of Albany Presbytery, page 42) provides for the appointment of an investigating committee between Presbytery meetings.
3. The investigating committee inquires into the alleged offense and determines if charges should be filed (D-10.0200 and following).
4. If charges are filed, the investigating committee designates a prosecuting committee. (D-10.0202i).
5. If the investigating committee has decided to file charges, it informs the accused and asks if the person wishes to plead guilty. It indicates the censure it will recommend. (D-10.0302)
6. The charge is submitted in writing to the Clerk of Session who forwards it to the session of the Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church (D-10.040).
7. The session conducts a pre-trial conference. (D-10.0405).
8. The trial is conducted by the session (D-11). If the person is found guilty, the possible outcomes are rebuke, temporary exclusion from exercise of ordained office or membership, or removal from ordained office or membership.

## **G. PROCEDURES FOR ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE**

Administrative leave for an accused employee of Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church or clergy member of Albany Presbytery may commence:

1. as soon as an allegation is made
2. when charges have been filed
3. at the request of the Moderator, session, or COM\*\*
4. at the request of the accused to the session

During the first three months of administrative leave, full compensation will continue to be paid by the church. While it is desirable that the investigation be completed and the situation resolved within a three-month period, continued administrative leave, up to one year, is negotiable.

\*\*In the event that all three are in agreement, the administrative leave may begin immediately and simply be reported to the congregation and the Committee on Ministry. In cases where there is not

agreement among the parties, the Personnel Committee is charged with making a recommendation to the session and the session shall decide

#### **H. FOLLOW-UP WITH CONGREGATIONS**

The Presbytery acknowledges that special care may be needed for congregations following the departure of an alleged sexual offender. Church members and staff will likely face issues of betrayal, hurt, anger, loss, confusion, etc. The Committee on Ministry is urged to arrange for interim pastoral leadership and/or other professionals who are skilled in caring for congregations that have experienced such injuries.

Please complete, sign, and return Exhibits A &/or B (attached) to:

The Clerk of Session  
Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church  
1454 County Route 351, P.O. Box 47  
Rensselaerville, NY 12147

Approved by Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church February 10, 2012

Amended February 17, 2013



**Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

**RELEASE**

The information I have provided on this questionnaire is accurate to the best of my knowledge and may be verified by the employing entity. I hereby authorize Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church to make any and all contacts necessary to verify my prior employment history and to inquire concerning any prior arrest or criminal records or any judicial proceedings involving me as a defendant. By means of this release I also authorize any previous employer and any law enforcement agencies or judicial authorities to release any and all requested information to Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church.

I have read this release and understand fully that the information obtained may be used to deny me employment or any other type of position from the employing entity. I also agree that I will hold harmless the employing entity, as well as any prior employer, law enforcement authority, or judicial authority from any and all claims, liabilities, and cause of action for the release or the use of any information.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**EXHIBIT B  
Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT**

I hereby acknowledge that I received on \_\_\_\_\_(date) a copy of the Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures dated \_\_\_\_\_, that I have read the policy, understand its meaning, and agree to conduct myself in accordance with the policy.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_