

**GA-1923**

**Recommended Language for Prevention of Harassment for  
General Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
(Operational, Policy and Organizational)**

**WHEREAS**, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada (the Church) employs many persons, both clergy and lay, through its affiliated and recognized General Ministries; and

**WHEREAS**, the Church seeks to be a safe and just employer, ensuring that all employees may work in an environment free from harassment of any kind, and where all persons are seen as part of the creation of God; and

**WHEREAS**, the Church seeks to continually live into its commitment to Pro- Reconciliation/Anti-Racism; and

**WHEREAS**, the Cabinet of General Ministries convened a Human Resources Task Force to provide recommended language and minimum standards for policies on harassment, including sexual harassment, verbal harassment, anti-racism, and discrimination of any form; and

**WHEREAS**, the Cabinet of General Ministries has approved the recommended draft language and minimum standards presented with this resolution;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the General Assembly charge all General Ministries to revise and implement their Human Resources policies to meet the minimum standards drafted in the attached "Recommended Language" document; and

**FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED** that the General Ministries of the Church communicate their policies to all employees of their ministries upon revision of their respective Human Resources policies to be in compliance with this resolution.

Administrative Committee

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**The General Board recommends that the General Assembly ADOPT GA-1923.  
(Discussion Time: 12 minutes)**

## **RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE for General Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Prevention of Harassment**

ABC strives to create and maintain a work environment in which people are treated with dignity, decency, and respect. The environment of the church should be characterized by mutual trust and the absence of intimidation, oppression and exploitation. ABC will not tolerate unlawful discrimination or harassment of any kind, through enforcement of this policy. By providing education for staff & ministry affiliates of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), ABC will seek to prevent, correct and discipline behavior that violates this policy.

### **Objective**

All staff, regardless of their position are covered by and expected to comply with this policy and take appropriate measures to ensure that prohibited conduct does not occur. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken against any employee who violates this policy. Based on the seriousness of the offense, disciplinary action may include verbal or written reprimand, suspension or termination of employment. The employer may report charges regarding inappropriate conduct by clergy to the appropriate commission of ministry that governs the individual standing, who will determine if an additional investigation is required.

This policy applies to all employment practices. This policy is applicable, but not limited to, the areas of: recruitment, selection, compensations and benefits, professional development & training, reasonable accommodation for disabilities, promotion, transfer, termination, or other terms and conditions of employment.

This policy may apply to discrimination (including harassment) that occurs between staff, or between staff and ministry affiliates of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that takes place outside the workplace (including, but not limited to, online conduct or conduct utilizing the internet or other electronic media).

### **Definitions**

- **Confidentiality** means all complaints and investigations are treated confidentially to the extent possible and information disclosed strictly on a need-to-know basis. The identity of the complainant is usually revealed to the parties involved during the investigation, and the \_\_\_\_\_ will take adequate steps to ensure that the complainant is protected from retaliation during and after the investigation. All information pertaining to a complaint or investigation under this policy will be maintained in secure files within the organization.
  
- **Cyber Bullying** – the use of electronic communication to bully another individual, typically by sending communication of an intimidating or

threatening nature.

- **Discrimination** – it is a violation of ABC’s policy to discriminate in the provision of employment opportunities, benefits or privileges; to create discriminatory work conditions; or to use discriminatory evaluative standards in employment if the basis of that discriminatory treatment is, in whole or in part, the person’s race, color, national origin, age, religion, disability status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, marital status or political beliefs.
- **False Reporting** – the complainant makes a report knowing that what is alleged did not occur and, therefore, could not constitute any form of harassment. Malice may or may not exist.
- **Harassment** – ABC prohibits harassment of any kind, including sexual harassment, and will take appropriate and immediate action in response to complaints or knowledge of violations of this policy. For purposes of this policy, harassment is any verbal or physical conduct designed to threaten, intimidate or coerce an employee, colleague, or any person working for or on behalf of ABC.
- **Hostile Work Environment** is a form of sexual harassment, where frequent pervasive and sexually hostile working conditions unreasonably interfere with an employee’s ability to do his or her job.
- **Non-verbal harassment** includes distribution, display or discussion of any written or graphic material that ridicules, denigrates, insults, belittles or shows hostility, aversion or disrespect toward an individual or group because of race, color, national origin, age, religion, disability status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information or marital status.
  - **Examples: pinching, patting, rubbing, purposefully brushing up against another person, sharing demeaning pictures, cartoons, jokes; demeaning gestures, unwanted hugs, hitting, pushing, groping and other touching.**
- **Retaliation** means no hardship, loss, benefit or penalty may be imposed on a member of the staff in response to: filing or responding to a bona fide complaint of discrimination or harassment; appearing as a witness in the investigation of a complaint; or serving as an investigator of a complaint. Lodging a bona fide complaint will in no way be used against the staff member or have an adverse impact on the individual’s employment status. However, filings that are groundless or malicious is an abuse of this policy and will be treated as a violation. Any person found to have violated this aspect of the policy will be subject to discipline up to and including termination of employment.
- **Sexual Harassment** is a form of unlawful employment discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and is prohibited under ABC’s anti-harassment policy. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), sexual harassment is defined as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual

nature...when...submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions, or such conduct has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

- **Examples: inappropriate sexual comments, remarks about someone's body, explicit emails and phone calls, sexually inappropriate images or videos, suggestive letters or notes, or inappropriate gestures.**
- **Verbal harassment** includes comments that are offensive or unwelcome regarding a person's race, color, national origin, age, religion, disability status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, marital status or political beliefs.
  - **Examples: whistling, slurs, derogatory or threatening comments, racist slang or phrases, wearing clothing that could be offensive to an ethnic group, jokes, innuendos, name-calling and insults.**

### **Reporting an Incident of Harassment, Discrimination or Retaliation**

ABC encourages reporting of all perceived incidents of discrimination, harassment or retaliation, regardless of the offender's identity or position. Individuals who believe that they have been the victim of such conduct should discuss their concerns with their immediate supervisor or \_\_\_. See the complaint procedure described below.

In addition, ABC encourages individuals who believe they are being subjected to such conduct to promptly advise the offender that his or her behavior is unwelcome and to request that it be discontinued. Often this action alone will resolve the problem. ABC recognizes, however, that an individual may prefer to pursue the matter through complaint procedures.

If the complaint is against the Chief Executive, the complaint shall be reported to the Chair of the Board of Directors or equivalent governing body.

### **Complaint Procedure**

Individuals who believe they have been the victims of conduct prohibited by this policy or believe they have witnessed such conduct should discuss their concerns with \_\_\_.

ABC encourages the prompt reporting of complaints or concerns so that rapid and constructive action can be taken before relationships become irreparably strained. Therefore, while no fixed reporting period has been established, early reporting and intervention have proven to be the most effective method of resolving actual or perceived incidents of harassment.

Any reported allegations of harassment, discrimination or retaliation will be

investigated promptly. The investigation may include individual interviews with the parties involved and, where necessary, with individuals who may have observed the alleged conduct or may have other relevant knowledge.

ABC will maintain confidentiality throughout the investigatory process to the extent consistent with adequate investigation and appropriate corrective action.

Retaliation against an individual for reporting harassment or discrimination or for participating in an investigation of a claim of harassment or discrimination is a serious violation of this policy and, like harassment or discrimination itself, will be subject to disciplinary action. Acts of retaliation should be reported immediately and will be promptly investigated and addressed.

Misconduct constituting harassment, discrimination or retaliation will be dealt with appropriately. Responsive action may include, for example, training, referral to counseling or disciplinary action such as a warning, reprimand, withholding of a promotion or pay increase, reassignment, temporary suspension without pay, or termination, as ABC believes appropriate under the circumstances.

If a party to a complaint does not agree with its resolution, that party may appeal to [Company Name]'s executive director or the chief executive officer.

False and malicious complaints of harassment, discrimination or retaliation (as opposed to complaints that, even if erroneous, are made in good faith) may be the subject of appropriate disciplinary action.

Punishment for harassment depends on the severity of the offence and may include counseling, reprimands, suspensions or terminations. Employees who violate this policy are subject to appropriate progressive corrective discipline as outlined in the employee handbook. If an investigation results in a finding that this policy has been violated, the mandatory minimum discipline is a written reprimand. The discipline for very serious or repeat violations is termination of employment. Persons who violate this policy may also be subject to civil damages or criminal penalties.

**Recommended Corrective Action Steps are listed below:**

*Step 1: Counseling and verbal*

*warning Step 2: Written warning*

*Step 3: Suspension and final written warning*

*Step 4: Recommendation for termination of employment or removal of standing*