

Harassment-Free Ministry Environment Policy
Presbytery Approved – February 1, 2025

The 225th General Assembly amended the Book of Order G-3.0106 to include: *All councils shall adopt and implement ... a harassment policy...* A policy to define what constitutes harassment, and to address its corrosive effects on the body of Christ. This conversation would enable churches to strengthen and preserve covenantal community in an era when civility is diminishing in the broader American culture. Rejection of harassment is necessary for our communal life.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. James 1:22

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:29

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. Matthew 25:40

For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the spirit. Galatians 5: 14-17a

Rationale for policy: Congregations and councils can experience a number of forms of non-sexual harassment including a) psychological and spiritual harassment through verbal, written, and online communications and social media; b) repeated failure or refusal to cease harassment even after appropriate intervention; and c) attempts to undermine the reputation or intentions of ministers of the Word and Sacrament, ruling elders, and other fellow church members or church entities.¹

Presbytery Response: The Presbytery of Plains and Peaks is committed to maintaining a ministry environment free of harassment. This policy defines what harassment is, our steps to prevent harassment, and our process to report, investigate, and respond to complaints of harassment. The Presbytery of Plains and Peaks does not tolerate intimidation, humiliation, physical abuse or mental abuse in our ministry environment. Those found to engage in this behavior will be disciplined, up to and including termination.

Definition:

Harassment is unwelcome or offensive behavior that intimidates, degrades and/or humiliates another person.

Types of Harassment

1. **Physical** or threatening behavior toward a person or property – in its extreme, it can be termed assault.
2. **Personal/Psychological** harassment can include bullying, where the victim is subjected to inappropriate or unwanted remarks, insults, offensive and derogatory statements. It may include, but is not limited to, offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name calling, physical assaults or threats, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, and interference with work performance.
3. **Discriminatory** harassment is offensive remarks directed at someone's race, color, national origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ethnicity characteristics, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, disability, or genetic information,

¹<https://www.pc-biz.org/search/3000929>, 225th General Assembly, 2022.

4. **Cyberbullying** harassment is threatening or offensive conduct on social media.

5. **Sexual harassment** includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature on the part of supervisors, employees, and nonemployees.

6. **Third-party** harassment is often someone who witnesses harassment in the workplace and is adversely affected by it.

Actions to Prevent Harassment

- This Harassment-Free ministry environment policy is required reading by all new presbytery members and staff.
- We strive to create a ministry environment where members & staff feel free to raise concerns and are confident those concerns will be addressed.
- The Personnel Committee of Plains and Peaks will require Harassment Awareness Training of all staff every 3 years.
- Harassment Awareness Training will be included during Presbytery meetings no less than every 3 years.
- All Sessions in Presbytery of Plains and Peaks will adopt and implement a harassment free policy.

Reporting, Investigating, and Responding to Complaints of Harassment

- Persons who find themselves the target of harassment or in a situation that makes them feel uncomfortable are strongly encouraged to inform the harasser directly that the conduct is unwelcome and must stop and if it does not, the person will discuss the situation with the Executive Presbyter, Stated Clerk or Chair of Personnel if it involves a staff person.
- If personal safety for a person or others is determined to exist, the offender will be removed from premises. The incident must be reported to the Executive Presbyter and may be followed by an investigation and possible disciplinary action.
- If serious harassment is observed or reported, such as assault, verbal or written threats, steps should be taken to separate the parties, with or without the aid of police. The incident must be reported to the Executive Presbyter and the Stated Clerk and Moderator of Personnel (if it involves staff) who may take immediate steps as deemed appropriate.
- If the harassment continues and the person being harassed wishes to formally document the harassment, a formal letter of complaint needs to be sent to the Stated Clerk who then works with the Presbytery Council to initiate an investigation committee according to the Presbytery's policies.

Where the policy models Workplace laws that protect employees

Harassment is unlawful when (1) enduring such conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, and/or (2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive. If the harassment is based on race, color, national origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ethnicity characteristics, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, disability, or genetic information, it can be a form of employment discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, or the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Anti-discrimination laws also prohibit harassment against individuals in retaliation for filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or lawsuit under these laws; or opposing employment practices that they reasonably believe discriminate against individuals, in violation of these laws.

Other PCUSA supportive statements to policy:

In the [Standards of Ethical Conduct](#)² for members, employees, and volunteers as well as ordained officers approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998) in the report "Life Together in the Community of Faith," the standards state especially in the member code of conduct the following...

- Treat all persons with equal respect and concern as beloved children of God;
- Refrain from gossip and abusive speech;
- Honor the sacred trust of relationships within the covenant relationships with the covenant community and observe appropriate boundaries;
- Show respect and provide encouragement for sisters and brothers in Christ.

F-1.0303 The Notes of the Reformed Church

“Where Christ is, there is the true Church. Since the earliest days of the Reformation, Reformed Christians have marked the presence of the true Church wherever:

the Word of God is truly preached and heard,

the Sacraments are rightly administered,

and ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.

In our own time, we affirm that, in the power of the Spirit, the Church is faithful to the mission of Christ as it:

... Nurtures a covenant community of disciples of Christ, living in the strength of God’s promise and giving itself in service to God’s mission.”

²<https://www.pcusa.org/resource/standards-ethical-conduct/>