

# Congregational Respect Policy

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**of  
Webster Presbyterian Church  
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**Approved by WPC Session at stated meeting on \_\_\_\_ 2025**

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Congregational Respect Policy**

**Change History**

<b>Change</b>	<b>Meeting of Session Approval</b>	<b>Reviewed By:</b>
September 22, 2015	September 2015 Stated Meeting	Courtenay Clifford, Lynn Snowden
March 18, 2025	Modified from the Sexual Harassment Policy to the Congregational Respect Policy	Michael Cooper, Joe Schwarz, Dennis Waehner

# **Webster Presbyterian Church**

## **Congregational Respect Policy (Prevention of Sexual Misconduct, Harassment and Discrimination/Anti-Racism)**

### **1. Introduction and Purpose**

In accordance with the PC (USA) *Book of Order (G-30106<sup>1</sup>)*, Webster Presbyterian Church (WPC) has adopted and implemented this Congregational Respect Policy. It has been formulated in order to ensure that everyone associated with our church will be able to work, worship, study and enjoy fellowship in a safe environment, free from sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination, in any form. As a community of believers in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we take seriously the responsibility of spreading the Gospel and offering the love of God to any and all who are within our church walls or participating in any of our sponsored activities. Therefore, this policy has been prayerfully and carefully considered and formulated.

To that end, our policy gives definitions of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination. In addition, there are procedures provided in the event that sexual misconduct is observed or experienced. As a church and a session, we seek to prevent sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination from happening and will actively assist those who become involved in such incidents.

We believe that all people were created by God. God values all human life equally. Therefore we must respect the worth and dignity of all human beings. We also believe in justice for all. Sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination are abuses of power and trust and therefore are unjust.

The purposes of writing this Congregational Respect Policy are:

- To attempt to break the conspiracy of silence surrounding sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination within the church community;
- to recognize that the church is responsible for the professional conduct of its pastors, staff, contract employees, and church-related conduct of other workers, volunteers, members, congregants and guests, and must act to prevent misconduct from causing harm to all who are part of the life of this congregation;
- to outline procedures for the session and staff for responding to allegations of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct; and

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<sup>1</sup> Book of Order 2013/2015, Paragraph G-3.0106 says “All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy.” In the Book of Order the term council includes the session which “is responsible to guide and govern the life of the congregation” (G-1.0103).

- to identify areas in which healing and reconciliation can be supported within the church community following occurrences or accusations of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, harassment or discrimination.

This Policy on Congregational Respect is to be used in conjunction with the WPC Child Protection Policy, WPC Personnel Policy and the Presbyterian Church (USA) Book of Order.

## 2. Our Call to Act: A Biblical Foundation

This policy and its implementation are of utmost importance to us because we, as the church of Jesus Christ, are called to ensure the safety and well-being of all God's children in our community. We believe that all forms of abusive behavior, and especially sexually abusive behavior, exact immeasurable spiritual, psychological and physical costs in terms of suffering, human potential, social stability and damage to the credibility and commission of the community of Christ. We, as instruments of Christ's compassionate peace, are called as a church body to create environments in which victims of abusive behavior can find support and healing. We, as instruments of Christ's justice and love, are called as a church body to prevent abuse and abusive behavior, and to deal with and resolve directly and fairly instances of abuse should such arise in our communities. We are informed and encouraged by the examples found in the Bible for handling abuse with a spirit of openness and courage. All biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of Holy Scripture.

*But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? [The lawyer] said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise' (Luke 10:33-37).*

- The Samaritan acknowledges the problem from the point of view of the victim.*
- The Samaritan acts directly to provide care by drawing upon available resources.*
- When further care is required, the Samaritan mobilizes additional resources.*
- The Samaritan commits to ongoing concern expressed over time.*

*Anyone then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin (James 4:17).*

*The word of the Lord came to me: '...Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?...You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured...Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live...because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild animals...I am against the shepherds, and I will demand my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed*

*themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, so that they may not be food for them. For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. (Ezekiel 34:1-11).*

The Bible guides and informs the church as it seeks to understand sexual abuse by a church leader or caregiver. The prophet Ezekiel is adamant that God opposes leaders who fail to strengthen and nourish those under their care, but instead prey on them to meet their own needs:

*If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea...Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven (Matthew 18:6,10).*

Jesus has great concern for those who are vulnerable, and requires his disciples to be concerned and to act on those concerns for the welfare of his people.

### **3. CONGREGATIONAL RESPECT POLICY**

#### **3.1 THE POLICY**

It is the policy of Webster Presbyterian Church (WPC) that all people who are a part of the life of our church, including pastors, staff members, contract employees<sup>2</sup>, workers, volunteers, members, congregants and guests, are entitled to an environment free of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination in any form. Our policy also extends to all people at WPC-sponsored events, whether on our campus or not. Sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination of any type by any pastor, staff, contract employee, worker, volunteer, member, or guest is unacceptable behavior and strictly prohibited. Everyone is responsible for imposing limits and maintaining appropriate boundaries in all relationships.

- A.** Preventing sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination is the primary concern of this policy thus the policy requires the use of appropriate pre-screening, the removal of opportunities for sexual misconduct, harassment and discrimination, and the education of staff, volunteers and the congregation.
- B.** All employees and church volunteers who work with or around Protected Individuals<sup>3</sup> are required to pass a background check every two (2) years at the expense of WPC.
- C.** Allegations and charges of misconduct will be dealt with swiftly, fairly, and with compassion and justice for both the accused and the accuser or victim.
- D.** This policy shall be available to all staff, officers, members, and congregants of WPC.
- E.** The policy shall be reviewed with all staff members on an annual basis.
- F.** WPC makes every effort to comply with the PC (USA) *Book of Order* and the state laws of Texas concerning sexual misconduct.
- G.** Teaching elders, commissioned ruling elders, and certified Christian educators are bound by this Policy, the Sexual Misconduct Procedure and Procedures of the Presbytery of New Covenant (Adopted by the Presbytery, June, 2011, Adapted to *nFOG*, July, 2011)

#### **3.2 COMPANION DOCUMENTS**

This policy and its procedures are designed to be applied in conjunction with the following

- A.** WPC Child Protection Policy;
- B.** WPC Personnel Policy;
- C.** “Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures of the Presbytery of New Covenant,” Adopted by the Presbytery, June, 2011, and Adapted to *nFOG*, July, 2011;
- D.** “Sexual Misconduct Policy and Its Procedures” adopted by the General Assembly in 2011;
- E.** “Rules of Discipline”, *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

#### **3.3 STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS**

- A.** The ability of WPC to respond promptly and justly to accusations of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, harassment or discrimination is related in part to the opportunity to receive allegations and gather evidence soon after the occurrence. However, the procedures regarding sexual misconduct recognize the special problems related to discovery and recognition of various forms of sexual misconduct. Child sexual abuse may not be

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<sup>2</sup> While contract employees are covered by this policy and are expected to follow its requirements, the background check, sexual misconduct training, and any personal actions are the responsibility of the contracted organization. However, WPC reserves the right to perform its own back ground check, to require WPC specific training, and to request that a specific employee of the contracted organization not be allowed to work with WPC.

<sup>3</sup> Protected Individual is defined in Section 3.6 of this Policy

recognized until the victim reaches adulthood. Recognition of abuse and willingness to come forward by an adult victim may also be delayed for many years. The Texas Statute of Limitations (Tex. Code Crim. Proc. art. 12.01) applies to criminal proceedings and does not prohibit the church from investigating allegations.

- B. Regardless of when the incident of misconduct or abuse is alleged to have occurred, WPC strongly encourages and supports people with information to report the incident to church leaders and/or staff. For the disciplinary offense of sexual abuse of another person, in accordance with the *Book of Order (D-10.0401)*, charges must be filed no later than five years from the time of the commission of the alleged offense, or later than one year from the date the investigating committee was formed, whichever occurs first, with exceptions noted in the *Book of Order*. Pastoral care for victims of sexual abuse, whenever it occurred in their lives, and for perpetrators, whenever they abused, will be freely and lovingly given.

### 3.4 PROVISIONS FOR REVIEW OF POLICY AND PROCEDURES

- A. Ultimate responsibility for writing, maintaining and enforcing the Policy on Congregational Respect lies with the session of WPC. Unless or until the session chooses otherwise, the session assigns the oversight and implementation of the policy and procedures to the Personnel Committee (PC).
- B. The PC shall conduct an annual review of the policy, identify any necessary and/or desired changes, verify that the policy complies with the requirements of the church's insurance carrier and the *Book of Order*, and then make recommendations to the session for any needed changes. Additionally, if the policy is used at any time, the PC will evaluate the procedures outlined herein and, based on the experience, make recommendations to the session for any needed changes.

### 3.5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF POLICY

- A. All members of session, trustees, board of deacons, and such other persons as session may require shall, at the start of their term, review this policy and procedures and sign the **Policy Acknowledgement Form** (see Appendix A). This form shall be maintained in a file by the church secretary under the authority of the pastor/head of staff.
- B. All volunteers working with Protected Individuals in activities that include, but are not limited to, Christian Education classes, youth fellowship and meals, children's events, youth retreats, Vacation Bible School, Summer Spotlight, Family Promise, youth or children's musicals and choirs, child care, and such other persons as the session shall require shall, at the start of their service, review this policy and procedures and sign the **Policy Acknowledgement Form** (see Appendix B). This form shall be maintained in a file by the church secretary under the authority of the pastor/head of staff.
- C. All staff and employees covered by the Personnel Policies shall annually review this policy and procedures and sign the **Policy Acknowledgement Form** (see Appendix C). This form shall be maintained in the personnel file of the employee by the church secretary under the authority of the pastor/head of staff.

### 3.6 DEFINITIONS

**A. Sexual Misconduct** is the comprehensive term used in this policy to include:

1. Sexual abuse as defined below;
2. Sexual harassment as defined below;
3. Viewing, storing or transmitting pornographic material for any purpose on church property, during church-sponsored events and/or using church-owned devices such as, but not limited to, computers, wireless and wired networks, Internet, copiers, fax machines and cell phones.

**B. Sexual Abuse** Sexual abuse of another person 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 the mental capacity to consent; or
2. Any person when the conduct includes force, threat, coercion, intimidation, or misuse of ordered ministry or position.

**C. Sexual conduct** is any contact or interaction between persons when one is being used for the sexual stimulation of the other person or of a third person. This behavior between a child or protected individual and an adult is always considered forced whether or not consented to by the child.

**D. Sexual Harassment** is defined as, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature;
2. Presentation, transmission or posting of written, graphic, pictorial, video or audio materials with sexual content. This includes inappropriate use of social media, cell phones, fax machines, computers and the church's Internet. Any misuse of cyber-technology transmissions of all of the above items is prohibited.
3. Suggesting or forcing submission to such conduct which is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or involvement, or his/her continued status in WPC.
4. Conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.
5. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for decisions affecting such individual.
6. Such conduct, having been previously declared to the offending party, has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment based on the judgment of the affected individual.

**E. Sexual Malfeasance** refers to the breach of trust expressed in deliberate physical contact with the breast, buttock or genital area within a ministerial, employment, leadership, counseling or professional relationship.

**F. Abuse of the Pastoral Care or Counseling Relationship** refers to a pastor or counselor who permits sexual discussions to move from the clinical into the interpersonal realm. It is never acceptable for the pastoral care or counseling relationship to include sexual contact or relationship. This applies to all ministerial relations in which pastoral care or counseling occurs.

Any consensual sexual relationship between a minister or counselor and a parishioner, client, student or employee is presumed to be abuse, and the minister or counselor carries the burden of proof to the contrary. The control and dependency relationships of counseling and pastoral care are considered, for the purposes of this policy, to extend for two years beyond the termination of actual counseling or pastoral care and the requirements in this paragraph apply to that period as well.

**G. Accused** is the term used to represent the person against whom a claim of sexual misconduct is made.

**H. Accuser** is the term used to represent the person claiming knowledge of sexual misconduct by a person covered by this policy. The accuser may or may not be the victim of alleged sexual misconduct. A person such as a family member, friend or colleague of the victim may be the accuser whose information initiates an inquiry.

**I. Children and youth** are in the age range of birth until their 18th birthday.

**J. Congregant** is a person who, though not a formal member, participates in the life, programs and/or worship of WPC. This may include but is not limited to one who attends worship services, sings in the choir, attends youth fellowship meetings, has received pastoral care or counseling, or attends adult education programs.

**K. Discrimination** is the unfair and prejudicial treatment of people based on groups, classes, or other categories to which they belong or are perceived to belong, such as race, gender, age, religion, disabilities, physical attractiveness or sexual orientation.

**L. Employee/Staff** is a person who works for WPC for salary or wages. This includes contract employees and pastors.

**M. Guest** is someone who has not established an ongoing relationship with WPC.

**N. Harassment** covers a wide range of behaviors of offensive nature, which is behavior that demeans, humiliates or intimidates a person. Also including behavior that is disturbing, upsetting or threatening.

**O. Investigating Committee** as defined by the Book of Order (D.-10.0200) is the body charged with looking into allegations of sexual misconduct by a member of WPC. Session will appoint three to five active members of WPC who are not currently serving on session to serve on this committee. Their activities will be held in strict confidence in order to protect all involved parties.

- P. Member** means baptized, active and affiliate members of WPC (Book of Order G.-1.04).
- Q. Minor** is anyone under the age of 18 years old. This includes all children and youth.
- R. Protected Individual** is any person under the age of 18 years or anyone over the age of 18 without the mental capacity to defend themselves against sexual misconduct.
- S. Response Team** consists of the pastor/head of staff, clerk of session and chair of the Personnel Committee (PC) which investigates an allegation of sexual misconduct that has been lodged against a church employee other than a pastor.
- T. Victim** is the term used to identify the person alleged to have been injured by sexual misconduct as defined in the policy.
- U. Volunteer** (adult or youth) refers to a person who provides services for WPC and receives no remuneration or monetary benefits. Volunteers include, but are not limited to, persons elected or appointed to serve on session, boards, committees, teachers and youth sponsors, hospitality volunteers who cook, serve, clean-up and decorate for WPC events and all other groups under the jurisdiction of the session.

**Attachment A: Congregational Respect Policy Officer Acknowledgement Form**

**For Session, Board of Deacons, Trustees, and others as directed by WPC Session**

I hereby acknowledge that on (date) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I received and read the *Congregational Respect Policy* of Webster Presbyterian Church.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand its meaning; and

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to conduct myself in accordance with the policy.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that a copy of the full policy, procedures and guidelines will be provided upon my request or on the website.

\_\_\_\_\_ I will notify in writing the pastor/head of staff within 5 days of any convictions or formal charges of sexual misconduct which occur subsequent to the initial signing of this form.

**Name (printed)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Position** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

This form shall be maintained in a file by the church secretary under the authority of the pastor/head of staff.

# Attachment B: Congregational Respect Policy Volunteer Acknowledgement Form

## For Adult Volunteers Working with Protected Individuals

I hereby acknowledge that on (date) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I received and read the *Congregational Respect Policy* of Webster Presbyterian Church.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand its meaning, and I agree to conduct myself in accordance with the policy.

\_\_\_\_\_ I also certify by the signature below that no civil, criminal or ecclesiastical complaint has ever been sustained or is pending against me for sexual misconduct.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have never resigned or been terminated from a paid or volunteer position for reasons related to sexual misconduct.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that Webster Presbyterian Church intends to take appropriate action to protect the children and youth who participate in its programs and will also protect the confidentiality of all volunteers.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that a copy of the full policy, procedures and guidelines will be provided upon my request or on the website.

\_\_\_\_\_ I will notify in writing the pastor/head of staff or chair of Personnel Committee within five (5) days of any convictions or formal charges of sexual misconduct which occur subsequent to the initial signing of this form.

**Name (printed)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Position** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

This form shall be maintained in a file by the church secretary under the authority of the pastor/head of staff.

# Attachment C: Congregational Respect Policy Acceptance and Release Form

## For Employees (Except Teaching Elders)

I hereby acknowledge that on (date) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I received and read the *Congregational Respect Policy* of Webster Presbyterian Church.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand its meaning, and I agree to conduct myself in accordance with the policy.

\_\_\_\_\_ I also certify by the signature below that no civil, criminal or ecclesiastical complaint has ever been sustained or is pending against me for sexual misconduct.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have never resigned or been terminated from a paid or volunteer position for reasons related to sexual misconduct.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that Webster Presbyterian Church intends to take appropriate action to protect the children and youth who participate in its programs.

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that a copy of the full policy, procedures and guidelines will be provided upon my request or on the website.

\_\_\_\_\_ I will notify in writing the pastor/head of staff or chair of Personnel Committee within 5 days of any convictions or formal charges of sexual misconduct which occur subsequent to the initial signing of this form.

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 with Webster Presbyterian Church. I also agree that I will hold harmless Webster Presbyterian Church or judicial authority from any and all claims, liabilities and causes of action for the legitimate release or use of any information.

**Name (printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Position** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

This form shall be maintained in the employees personnel file by the church secretary under the authority of the pastor/head of staff.