

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE CHURCH - NO LONGER NAMELESS**

Background

Sexual harassment has long been considered a hidden problem - one with no name - in all of society and in the church. Particularly in the church, there has been a pattern of denial of even the existence of such a problem. That has begun to change somewhat in the past two decades. What was once ignored, denied, tolerated or trivialized as mere flirtation or harmless attention is now illegal as well as unacceptable under federal gender discrimination regulations in many business, industry, education and other public sector settings. In 1986 the Supreme Court declared sexual harassment a form of sex discrimination, (*Meritor Savings Bank vs Vinson*) and increased public awareness of the issue.

Sexual harassment can and does occur in every setting of the church; a startling and disappointing fact in the institution that is based on values of equality and respect for all persons. The Coordinating Center for Women in its 1986 research project on the status of women in church and society learned that sexual harassment is a problem in the church. In response to the question "What is your experience with sexual harassment in the work place?" 25% of lay women reported sexual harassment in the workplace; 45% of clergywomen reported having had that experience. No men responding to the survey, clergy or lay, recorded having experienced such discrimination.

Even if women are unable or unwilling to name a behavior as sexual harassment, their sharing of experiences inside and outside the church describes and documents the experience. The clergywomen's network, women in seminary settings, women employed by the church and women who participate in the volunteer life of the church report a variety of experiences of sexual harassment in the church. There are two types of sexual harassment:

The first is characterized by the imposition of unwelcome sexual activity, suggestion, or behavior in a relationship of unequal power, i.e. pastor/parishioner; counselor/client; doctor/patient; instructor/student; senior minister/associate; manager/support staff; etc.

The second type of harassment is that which creates a hostile, intimidating or offensive atmosphere in the workplace, even in the absence of direct damage to victims.

Some examples of actions which may constitute either type of sexual harassment:

- unnecessary or unwanted touching, patting or contact with a person's body;
- deliberate assaults, molestation;
- demanding or suggesting sexual favors as a condition for favorable treatment or for employment;
- behavior patterns which include frequent and unwanted comments, jokes, or suggestions of a sexual nature, particularly out of context, or when accompanied by the other behaviors described.

Both clergy and laity may be victims of this unprofessional behavior from clergy as well as victims of inappropriate behavior directed toward them by lay persons. The United Church of Christ must deal with this issue as one for both the church as workplace and the church as faith community and

pastoral support system.

WHEREAS, all sexual relationships which breach Christian ethics are particularly troubling in the church as they profoundly affect pastor/parish relationships, educational and employment issues, as well as questions of morality and ethics;

WHEREAS, the church as employer has a responsibility to its employees to maintain a workplace free from the degrading and dehumanizing effects of sexual harassment;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod of the United Church of Christ requests the Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society, in cooperation with the Network for United Church of Christ Clergywomen, the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, the Office for Church in Society, the Office for Church Life and Leadership and the United Church Board for World Ministries to develop for consideration by General Synod Eighteen a pronouncement and proposal for action including an educational program to focus the attention of the whole church on the issue of Christian ethics dealing with sexual harassment and abuse within pastoral, professional, and personal relationships in the church. Problems which must be addressed include misconduct of clergy and other church professionals vis a vis parishioners, clients, staff colleagues, interns or students involving sexual harassment and abuse;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls on the whole church to learn to recognize sexual harassment and its implications;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon all local churches, Church and Ministry committees of Associations and Conferences, national agencies and Instrumentalities, seminaries and other institutions to become aware of sexual harassment within their jurisdictions and to develop ways to put it to an end.

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Title IX, A Practical Guide to Achieving Sex Equity in Education

Financial implications: Approximately \$5,000 to gather data and convene a drafting committee.

**11. RESOLUTION "DEPLORING VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE"**

Then Mr. Landis moved that the 17th General Synod adopt the Resolution "Deploring Violence Against Lesbian and Gay People." The Rev. Craig Hoffman (PNE) requested inclusion of a friendly amendment which was accepted. The amendment was

"Be It further resolved, the 17th General Synod calls upon the delegates of the 17th General Synod Conference, Association, members of local churches, and the Office for Church In Society to communicate and advocate support for the "Hate Crimes Statistics Bill (S419/USHR 1048) and support the inclusion of "sexual orientation in the bill; . . ."

89-GS-104 VOTED: The 17th General Synod adopts the Resolution "Deploring Violence Against Lesbian and Gay People."

## TUESDAY AFTERNOON

### DEPLORING VIOLENCE AGAINST LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE

WHEREAS, we are commanded to love God with hearts, minds, and souls, and to love our neighbors and ourselves (Mt. 22:37-39), to love one another, even as Jesus loved the disciples, and the quality of our love for one another is the identifying mark of faithful discipleship (Jn. 14:34-35);

WHEREAS, one expression of love is solidarity and support for those who are oppressed and who are the victims of violence;

WHEREAS, violent incidents against lesbian and gay people are markedly increasing, including 64 murders, as well as 835 documented physical assaults during 1987;

WHEREAS, the rise in the level of violence, as well as other discriminatory practices is partially attributed to increased homophobia related to the AIDS crisis;

WHEREAS, all oppressed communities including women, African Americans, Hispanics, Pacific and Asian-Americans, Native Americans, Jews, refugees, the poor, and the homeless are experiencing increased levels of both individual and systemic violence;

WHEREAS, society and all people benefit from individual and collective efforts aimed at reducing violence;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod of the United Church of Christ denounces violence against lesbian and gay people;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon the delegates of the 17th General Synod, Conferences, Associations, members of local churches and the Office for Church In Society to communicate and advocate support for the "Hate Crimes Statistics Bill (S419/USHR 1048) and support the inclusion of "sexual orientation" in the bill;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to develop and distribute educational materials on the topic of violence against all oppressed and minority groups including lesbian and gay people;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod calls upon all local churches, Associations, Conferences, national agencies, Instrumentalities and other institutions to become aware of oppressive violence against lesbian and gay people within their jurisdictions and to develop ways to put it to an end.

Financial Implications: Subject to the availability of funds.

### 12. SUSPENSION OF RULES FOR AIDS MINISTRY FUNDING NEW BUSINESS

89-GS-105 VOTED: The 17th General Synod suspends rules to introduce new business.

89-GS-106 VOTED: The 17th General Synod calls upon the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries to maintain its current level of financial support or greater for AIDS ministry, both in staff and funding, through the next biennium.

A division of the house was called for, there was some confusion and a recount was also taken. By a vote of Yes - 321,

No - 312 the vote on the AIDS funding motion carried.

### 13. SPEAK OUT

During the Speak Out, an opportunity for brief statements of concern, delegates and other participants brought matters to the attention of the Synod.

### 14. RESOLUTION "SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS IN CENTRAL AMERICA"

Assistant Moderator Alida Millham introduced the Rev. Richard Riddoch (RM), Chairperson of Committee 16, who presented the report of the Committee.

On behalf of the Committee Mr. Riddoch moved that the 17th General Synod adopt the Resolution "Support for the Peace Process in Central America."

89-GS-107 VOTED: The 17th General Synod adopts the Resolution "Support for the Peace Process in Central America."

### SUPPORT FOR THE PEACE PROCESS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

WHEREAS, the 15th General Synod of the United Church of Christ called for support of the peacemaking efforts of the CONTADORA countries to find a negotiated solution to the Central America crisis;

WHEREAS, on August 7, 1987, the five Central America presidents signed a peace accord, "Esquipulas II" which initiated a peace process for the region and provided a feasible alternative to end the war;

WHEREAS, the United States Government, in continuing to grant aid to the Contras, specifically violates the terms of the peace process;

WHEREAS, the Latin America Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches (at the Governing Board meeting in November, 1987) called upon all Christians in the United States to express support for the Central America peace process;

WHEREAS, the UCBWM church partners and ecumenical agencies in Central America are supporting actively the peace process - e.g. the appointment of Dr. Gustavo Parajon, CEPAD, to the National Reconciliation Commission and local church participation in regional reconciliation commissions in Nicaragua;

WHEREAS, 100 church leaders in Central America wrote a theological statement on this Kairos moment in Central America and asked for U.S. church support;

WHEREAS, the Roman Catholic churches in El Salvador initiated a national debate in July, 1988 to encourage dialogue on the peace process and the churches have asked for our support of that discussion;

WHEREAS, the UCBWM at its 179th Annual Meeting voted a resolution on support for the peace process in Central America;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, the 17th General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon all UCC members to send letters of support for the Central America peace accords