

Sexual abuse in any form is never permissible', Leaders' letter calls attention to PC(USA) policies, touts resources, 16-May-2002

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'Sexual abuse in any form is never permissible'
Leaders' letter calls attention to PC(USA) policies, touts resources

by John Filiatreau

LOUISVILLE - The current furor over child-sexual-abuse charges against Roman Catholic clergy around the United States has prompted leaders of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to remind stated clerks and synod and presbytery executives of PC(USA) policies and resources on child abuse and its prevention.

A pastoral letter, dated May 9, was dispatched over the signatures of the Rev. Jack Rogers, moderator of the 213th General Assembly; the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, stated clerk of the PC(USA); and John Detterick, executive director of the General Assembly Council (GAC).

"We believe that sexual abuse constitutes sinful behavior and violates the teachings of the Church as well as the covenantal relationship by which we are called to live with God and with one another," they wrote. "Sexual abuse in any form is never permissible."

The letter calls officials' attention to a sexual-misconduct policy adopted by the 205th General Assembly (GA) in 1993, as well as "Standards of Ethical Conduct" for PC(USA) members, employees, volunteers and ordained officers approved by the 210th GA in 1998. Both documents are available through the PC(USA) Web site.

It also recommends two church-produced resources on child abuse, both of which are available online or from Presbyterian Distribution Service. The letter concludes, "If you are aware of or have been victim to sexual abuse, please speak with someone you trust within your congregation or your presbytery."

The full text:

Friends and colleagues in Christ -

Recently, considerable public attention is being given to child sexual abuse by clergy and the response of churches when such abuse is discovered. It seems particularly important to remind Presbyterians of our policies that provide for quick and decisive resolutions if an allegation of sexual abuse is made.

According to Scripture, we are each created in the image and likeness of God and the church in polity and policy respects the integrity and value of each human person. We believe that sexual abuse constitutes sinful behavior and violates the teachings of the Church as well as the covenantal relationship by which we are called to live with God and with one another. Sexual abuse in any form is never permissible. The policies of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) regarding abuse enable us to act for justice, healing and restoration.

All ministry in the church is a gift from Jesus Christ. Members and officers alike serve mutually under the mandate of Christ: the one who came "not to be served but to serve." When a minister within the P.C. (U.S.A.) commits sexual abuse, it ruptures relationships, abuses the power and authority of ministry, and violates the very essence of the church of Christ as the body of Christ through which a new world reality as revealed by God is made available to everyone. In 1993, the 205th General Assembly adopted a sexual misconduct policy that unequivocally states that sexual abuse is not only a violation of the principles set forth in Scripture but also of the ministerial and professional relationships. In 1998, the 210th General Assembly adopted Standards of Ethical Conduct for members, employees and volunteers, and ordained officers in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). These policies may be accessed through the P.C. (U.S.A.) website at www.pcusa.org or through your presbytery.

The policies in conjunction with the Scriptures, the Constitution and more particularly, the Rules of Discipline, provide a means to prevent and eliminate sexual abuse within the church, to seek justice in determining the truth of allegations, to provide justice and retribution for persons involved, and to assure appropriate care and healing for all parties.

Two resources specifically directed toward the prevention of child abuse are additionally available. In 1993, the Child Abuse Ministry Project prepared a resource titled "Surely Heed Their Cry: A Presbyterian Guide to Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention and Healing." In 2002, the Child Advocacy Office prepared "We Won't Let it Happen Here! Preventing Child Abuse in the Church" (2nd edition). These are available through the Presbyterian Distribution Service at 1-800-524-2612 or via the web at www.pcusa.org/marketplace.

Many presbyteries and congregations have also adopted sexual misconduct and/or abuse policies and procedures in conjunction with the General Assembly policies. If you are aware of or have been victim to sexual abuse, please speak with someone you trust within your congregation or your presbytery.

May the Peace of Christ be yours,

Jack Rogers, moderator, 213th General Assembly Clifton Kirkpatrick, stated clerk, PC(USA) John Detterick, executive director, GAC