

A COMMITMENT TO GENDER SAFETY AND EQUITY IN MINISTRY SETTINGS

A Resolution of Witness

Submitted by the Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ

Adopted by the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Synod of the United Church of Christ, July 17, 2021.

WHEREAS The General Synod of the United Church of Christ has taken a firm, unyielding stance for the human rights and safety of women, refuses to condone any form of violence against vulnerable people, and strongly encourages clergy and laity to support survivors of sexual violence; and WHEREAS The majority of women, both cisgender and transgender, whether they identify as women or as non-binary, are objectified and subjected to the violence and degradation of sexual assault and unwanted sexual advance; and

WHEREAS Sexual harassment and gender discrimination, including attacking, undermining and dismissing women and non-binary persons' leadership, is a form of violence; and occurs within a national context of escalating violence against women in positions of public leadership; and

WHEREAS Women and non-binary persons risk further discrimination, violence, loss of employment, ostracism or death in daring to say no or confront the harasser, and penalty of being silenced or not believed when they dare to report; and

WHEREAS Gender expression continues to be a minefield for women and non-binary persons, who are pressured to exude the amount of femininity that makes others comfortable – “too feminine” is seen as helpless or intentionally seductive, but “too masculine” is considered confrontational and disrespectful - and women are still judged on their appearance, rather than on their skills, ideas, achievements, or other non sexual/non-gendered attributes; and

WHEREAS Women are still subject to economic violence, primarily in that they are paid less than men for the same or similar work, and this lower pay in turn reduces their pension, retirement benefits and Social Security payments; they are overcharged for “women’s products” and penalized for carrying out the responsibilities of home and family; and

WHEREAS These experiences of bias, discrimination and violence occur in ministry settings, and are experienced by clergy and lay women and non-binary persons holding positions of leadership within the Church; and

WHEREAS Such discrimination is founded in misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and racism, which are antithetical to the way of Jesus; and WHEREAS Our society is in the midst of a cultural transformation, with the #metoo movement empowering survivors to break the silence and share their stories of rape, abuse, and sexual harassment, and women and non-binary persons have begun sharing their #churchtoo stories of how this occurs within the Church; and

WHEREAS Clergy, chaplains and faith leaders are called upon to provide pastoral care to those navigating gender discrimination, sexual harassment and violence, some of which occurs within our ministry settings; and

WHEREAS The United Church of Christ Ministerial Code of Ethics requires ministers to “not use my position, power, or authority to exploit any person”;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-third General Synod of the United Church of Christ, confesses its complicity, active participation with, and passive acceptance of systems of sexism, misogyny, transphobia, and gender oppression that inhibit and limit leadership; directs the United Church of Christ Board and urges all other settings of the United Church of Christ – including (but not limited to) local congregations, Committees on Ministry, and Justice and Local Church Ministries Teams – to explore ways to promote gender safety, to empower women, transgender, gender-expansive, nonbinary, genderqueer, gender fluid, gender non-conforming, and two-spirit persons (hereinafter referred to as “Included Persons”), both lay and authorized ministers, and to raise issues regarding sexism and discrimination, reinforcing the covenants and standards of behavior which bind us together as conferences, associations, congregations, authorized ministers, lay leaders and members; and

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the Thirty-third General Synod of the United Church of Christ affirms the physical and sexual autonomy of Included Persons: the right not to have any other person invade their personal space without permission; the right not to be touched, or abused, either emotionally or physically, in any way by another person; the right to express gender in the ways they choose; the right to communicate autonomously, without reproach or censure based on sexism, misogyny, transphobia and gender oppression; the right to expect that any such action will in no way be held against them for any reason in the workplace, including all ministry settings, or in any social situation; and

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the Thirty-third General Synod of the United Church of Christ directs the UCCB and urges all settings of the UCC to commit to gender equity and address inequities (e.g., compensation, benefits, senior leadership roles, other employment opportunities, hiring, promotion, and termination, etc.) for all Included Persons, both authorized ministers and laity who serve the Church; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Thirty-third General Synod asserts that this work must simultaneously address the threats and realities of violence that result from racism, heterosexism, classism, xenophobia, immigration status (real and assumed), ableism, and other intersectional oppressions impose on the daily life and leadership of Included Persons in the Church.

**FUNDING:** The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

**IMPLEMENTATION:** The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.