



Spirit Inspired  
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## How Many Ways Can I Say It?

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I've mentioned before that changes are coming to our Book of Order. Your Presbytery leaders are getting ready for those changes and how we can assist congregations. The changes impact all of us, and they take effect on July 9. So, it's good – especially for church leadership – to begin thinking about how you want to contextualize the changes for your congregation.

This week, Office of General Assembly staff met with mid-council (presbytery and synod leaders) to start thinking through some of the new policies that will be required by the Book of Order. Three captured our attention: harassment policy, boundaries training, and anti-racism policy. Today, I want to focus on the requirement for a harassment policy. The Book of Order doesn't define this term, so we took a run at it.

One piece kept sticking with me: how many ways do we need to describe how not to treat another person? In the definition of harassment, we generally agreed the behavior must be repeated and unwanted. Being rude one time, probably is not harassment, some thought. With these broad parameters, I could come up with a long list of harassing behaviors. Some of them the Presbytery of Milwaukee previously named when we expressly adopted the [Standards of Ethical Conduct](#) and made them part of our commitment for how we will interact together. This could be a good starting point for discussion among congregational leaders.

And yet, what if we leave a bad act off the list? Can someone now feel free to engage in mean behavior because it's not "on the list" or "in the policy"? Will we look for loopholes to justify, after the fact, our hurtful actions?

Several years ago, when the Presbytery modified its staff personnel policies, we included a social media policy. Instead of simply naming what we *should not do*, we also add the behaviors that were desirable. We have both:

Don't Do	Do
<p>The following actions are forbidden: using disparaging, abusive, profane, or offensive language; creating, viewing, or displaying materials that might adversely or negatively reflect upon the Presbytery or be contrary to the Presbytery's values or best interest; and engaging in any illegal activities, including piracy, extortion, blackmail, copyright infringement, and unauthorized access of any organization-provided equipment. No messages or posts should be created or sent if they contain intimidating, hostile, or offensive materials concerning race, color, religion, gender, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other classification protected by law.</p>	<p>Employees should write e-mail communications, social media posts, or internet communications with care, judgment, and responsibility. Always be fair, courteous, and respectful. Be honest and accurate when posting information or news on behalf of the Presbytery; acknowledge and correct any mistakes as soon as they are discovered. The following standards should be observed:</p> <p>Where appropriate, electronic communications should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be informative / educational</li> <li>• be inspirational</li> <li>• challenge us to live more fully into our faith</li> </ul>



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<p>...</p> <p>Electronic communications should not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promote personal agendas</li> <li>• be judgmental, divisive, insulting, or “snarky”</li> <li>• use inappropriate or offensive language or images</li> <li>• endorse politicians or specific political views</li> <li>• share private posts of others without permission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• help us see our commonality as God’s children</li> <li>• inspire us to go and “do likewise”</li> <li>• promote community within the presbytery, the larger national church, and our ecumenical partners</li> <li>• make us aware of work still to be done toward God’s will</li> <li>• promote our events</li> </ul>
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As we begin considering our harassment policies, I wonder whether we should approach the task with the intent of creating the Ten Commandments – replete with “Thou shalt not” statements, balanced with a few affirmative commandments (e.g. remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy). Or, do we organize ourselves primarily around the affirmative commandments that Jesus gave us: to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves?

There are no right answers and no one way of writing the policy. Each congregation will tailor the policy to their setting and the language that will best lead people to act with love toward others, with accountability for when we slip, as we inevitably will do.

The goal is for the church to be a place of respect, love, care, and safety. We might not agree on the best way to write a policy, but I think we can agree that’s a goal we share.