

**Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting
Sexual Misconduct Task Force**

August 16, 2019

Dear Friends,

This letter invites our monthly meetings to participate in a procedure that arose from the 2019 Yearly Meeting sessions. See the documents, accepted there as first drafts, 1) a policy for responding to allegations of sexual misconduct and 2) queries to guide discussions of the topic of sexual misconduct. We recognize that with further consideration and use, the yearly meeting as a body is likely to come to a fuller understanding of ways to respond to sexual misconduct between adults of our meetings. While OVYM has long had a policy for preventing sexual abuse of children by adults, this is our first attempt at a policy regarding sexual misconduct between adults.

We invite Friends to read the documents carefully. An ideal method for spending some time on this matter would be to schedule an adult education time for worship sharing over the attached queries. Also attached are resources to assist meetings in educating themselves on these matters (we appreciate that some meetings may already be engaged in this process).

If addressing this matter is new to your meeting, or you anticipate some resistance or discomfort, the Task Force members extend an offer of accompaniment during this process. A number of us (and other OVYM members with experience and expertise in this area) have committed to attending, accompanying, and assisting all monthly meetings who express a desire for such resources. We also welcome offers to help with this work from additional Friends who are interested.

We invite your monthly meeting's feedback as the Task Force further discerns the way forward toward a policy and procedure for reporting and evaluating allegations of sexual misconduct. We seek to develop a policy that meets our collective aspirations to be fully welcoming, inclusive, and committed to equality and justice in communities of compassion and Spirit-inspired love. Some monthly meetings may be led to adopt these policies for their own use or to use them as a starting point for a custom-appropriate set of their own.

Below is a brief history of the Yearly Meeting's growing appreciation of the need for such a policy, followed by a listing of our Task Force Group Members and contact information both for feedback and for requests for accompaniment through this process.

BACKGROUND

As some of you may be aware, in recent years Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting Friends have been grappling with the issue of sexual misconduct (forms of sexual misbehavior ranging from sexual harassment to sexual assault). We are challenged to determine how to respond to allegations of sexual misconduct within our meetings. OVYM's exploration of this issue began when our Religious Nurture and Education Committee became aware of such an allegation within one of our monthly meetings. Without a policy or clear guidance, this committee struggled with the appropriate way to respond.

In 2018, this issue was brought to annual sessions with the request that the yearly meeting develop a policy for responding to allegations of sexual misconduct. That year the Friend alleged to have committed the sexual assault attended those sessions. A number of Friends who were aware of the allegation felt strongly that he should be asked to leave because his presence made some Friends, especially young women, feel unsafe. After some deliberation and consultation, and hearing about other incidents of inappropriate behavior by the Friend, he was asked to leave.

This incident reinforced our yearly meeting's need for a policy for how to handle allegations of sexual misconduct. At a subsequent business session, the yearly meeting approved the formation of a task force on sexual misconduct whose responsibility was to 1) draft a policy for responding to allegations of sexual misconduct and 2) develop guidance for Friends to come to a better understanding of sexual misconduct, a topic seldom discussed in our meetings.

Betsy Neale, outgoing clerk of OVYM, agreed to lead the task force and recruit other members. The resulting task force includes nine Friends (listed below) (Several Young Adult Friends who do not have time to serve as full members have agreed to consult with the larger group, as we are sensitive to several ways in which these issues can be perceived differently by younger Friends).

If your meeting is engaged in education, awareness, and advocacy on this issue, we would very much appreciate hearing about your journey and particularly the resources, whether from national organizations, or from your local contacts, that have proved particularly helpful to you.

In Friendship,

Sexual Misconduct Task Force

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