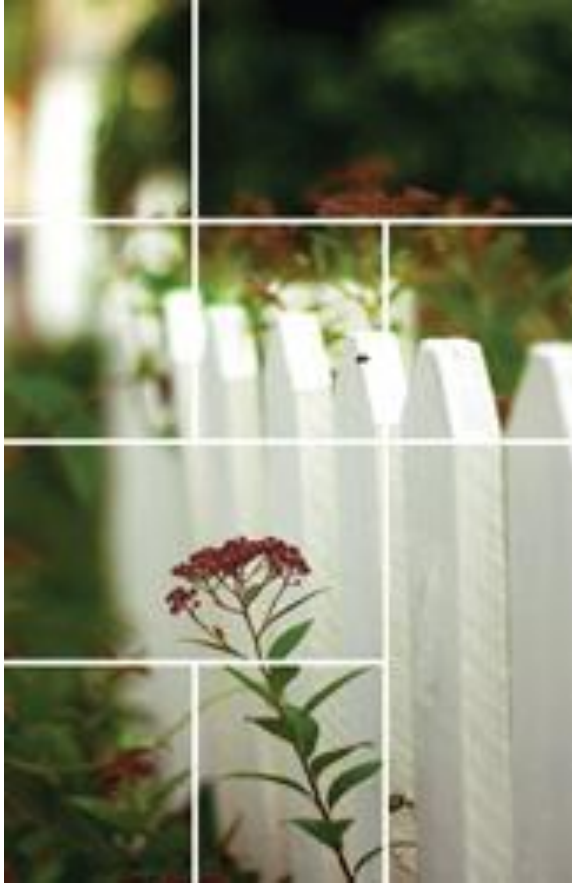


Safe Church Ministry: What is it and why is it important?



A Brief History:

The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1989 convened a committee to study the problem of abuse among the membership of the CRC. A survey was commissioned and conducted by the Calvin College Social Research Center. It showed that 28% of adults in the CRC experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and 15% of adults in the CRC had abused another person.

Synod of 1994 created the office now known as Safe Church Ministry and appointed a fulltime director to continue the efforts of the study committee. In 1997, Abuse Prevention published a book to help a church implement a policy to reduce the risk of abuse in church facilities and programs. In addition, two protocols were adopted by Synod. One protocol was for responding to abuse allegations brought by a child and the other for allegations brought by an adult. Synod approved both protocols.

Synod encourages each Classis to form a Safe Church Team, which has three mandates: to provide education to church members regarding issues surrounding abuse, to offer the Advisory Panel Process in cases of allegations against a church leader, and to support those affected by abuse. The Office of Safe Church Ministry provides training for Safe Church Teams.

The Goal of Safe Church Ministry:

Safe Church Ministry exists to be a resource for local churches so that all CRC churches will be safe places; safe from any threat of abuse, where each person is treated with the dignity and respect they deserve as people created in the image of our Lord; therefore abuse is not tolerated.

We live in a culture where violence, disrespect, and abuse are far too common, even in our churches. Safe Church Ministry provides resources for churches to fight against these forces to maintain healthy church environments for all people. Healthy churches are proactive in acknowledging abuse and working toward solutions to prevent it and to respond appropriately. Safe church policies, when carefully followed, can prevent abuse from occurring and also protect churches from false allegations abuse. When the existence of abuse is acknowledged, it frees people so that they may receive needed help and compassionate understanding, as well as justice and accountability with the Lord and with his people.

You may think that your church is safe, is not affected by abuse, and doesn't need Safe Church Ministry. Think again:

(The following are statistics are based on US Dept. of Justice records)

Child Abuse: A report of child abuse is made every ten seconds. 90% of child sexual abuse victims know the perpetrator in some way.

Sexual Assault: There were 248,300 sexual assaults in 2007; that's about once every two minutes.

Intimate Partner Violence: IPV resulted in 2,340 deaths in 2007; of these deaths, 70% were females and 30% were males.

Teen Dating Violence: 10% of students report being physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past 12 months.

Clergy Sexual Misconduct: An extensive study (over 3500 participants) conducted by the Baylor University School of Social Work in 2008 showed that over 3% of all adult women who attend religious services at least once a month have been the victims of clergy sexual misconduct since turning 18.

Healthy churches are safe churches; Safe Church Ministry works to keep them that way with dignity and respect for all.

