Church Order and Related Matters

Chair: Matthew Ford
Reporter: Ryan Braam

Council of Delegates

I. Materials

A. Council of Delegates Report (sections II, A, 9, b), including: Appendices A, B, pp. 36-38, 54-73
B. Council of Delegates Report (sections II, A, 12, a), pp. 40-41
C. Overture 4: Classis Zeeland
D. Overture 5: Classis Columbia
E. Overture 6: Classis Minnkota
F. Overture 7: Classis Lake Superior
G. Overture 8: Classis Lakota
H. Overture 9: Classis Southeast U.S.
I. Communication 2: Classis Northcentral Iowa

II. Privilege of the floor

Andy de Ruyter, chair of the Council of Delegates; Michael L. Ten Haken, vice chair of the Council of Delegates; Zachary J. King, general secretary; and members of the executive staff as needed

III. Recommendations

A. That Synod adopt the proposed revised “CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders” and adopt the accompanying FAQ sheet (see Addendum B) with the included introduction and the limited amendments to the text of the code of conduct.

Grounds:

1. Classes and churches have had adequate time to give feedback and input into the Code of Conduct as requested by Synod 2022.
2. The proposed revised CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders and the FAQ sheet address the feedback, questions, and concerns received from classes and local churches about the Code of Conduct and the implementation plan.
3. Approving the Code of Conduct fulfills the intentions of Synod 2019 in its directives regarding the abuse of power.

B. That Synod affirm that the Code of Conduct is subservient to Scripture and our Confessions, and must be interpreted and utilized accordingly.

Grounds:
1. Romans 12:2 - Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

2. Hebrews 4:12 - For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (NIV)

C. That synod adopt the following revisions/additions to the Church Order and its Supplements (indicated by italics)

1. Add the following new Article 5-b and Supplement, Article 5-b to the current Church Order Article 5 and its Supplement (the existing Article 5 and its Supplement would become Article 5-a and Supplement, Article 5-a).

   **Church Order Article 5-b**
   
   All officebearers shall uphold the standards of behavior summarized in the CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders.

   —Cf. Supplement, Article 5-b

   **Supplement, Article 5-b**
   
   [The full text of the CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders in Appendix A.]

D. Revise Church Order Supplement, Article 13-c, section c as indicated by the following addition in italics:

   **Supplement, Article 13-c, section c**
   
   The duties of the minister are spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling, and such duties do not conflict with the minister’s commitment to the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church as required by one’s signature to the Covenant for Officebearers and as articulated in the Code of Conduct.

   **Grounds:**
   
   1. These changes to the Church Order reflect the intention of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee to implement a Code of Conduct that all ministry leaders commit to uphold.

   2. Concerns about the original implementation plan (found in Addendum C) were that it gave the impression that the Code of Conduct would be on the same level as the Covenant for Officebearers. This was reflected most clearly in the requirement for officebearers to sign both the Covenant for Officebearers and the Code of Conduct on all occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations. The proposed revisions correct that impression by clearly distinguishing between the Covenant for Officebearers and the Code of Conduct.

E. That synod encourage councils and classes to implement the Code of Conduct for all staff (non-ordained as well as ordained) and volunteers who are providing leadership in the church or classis.
F. That synod mandate the general secretary to oversee the development of training modules that orient ministry leaders to the Code of Conduct.

   *Grounds:*
   1. Training modules on the Code of Conduct were requested in the feedback to help churches introduce and orient ministry leaders to expectations and appropriate behaviors.
   2. Training modules will help to ensure that the Code of Conduct shapes the leadership culture of our denomination and has a real impact on addressing the misuse of power.

G. That Synod offer sincere thanks and gratitude to the Committee Addressing the Abuse of Power, to the Council of Delegates, and to the Code of Conduct Review Team for their countless hours and valuable efforts in laying the groundwork for the Code of Conduct.

H. The preceding motions are committee 2’s response to overtures 4,5,6,7,8,9 and Communication 2.

**Overture, Communication, and Appeal**

I. *Materials:*
   B. Appeal 1: St. Joseph CRC, pp. 621-22
   C. Communication 5: Classis Holland Response to the appeal of St. Joseph CRC, Supplement pp. 893-895

II. *Recommendations*
   A. That synod sustain A and B of appeal no 1, (C has been appropriately addressed).

   *Grounds:*
   1. Church order (a. 81) gives primary authority to the local consistory in matters regarding church discipline, including the rights and privileges of members
   2. The local consistory suspended the rights and privileges of membership including the right to submit overtures
   3. Synod 1991 sought to give consistories greater freedom in exact modes of operation pertaining to discipline (Acts of Synod 1991: 715-723; 768-769)
   4. While synodical rules preserve the right of classes to process unprocessed overtures, the overture in question was not “unprocessed,” it was deemed illegitimate by the local consistory.
   5. There are mechanisms of appeal for discipline in the judicial code (Church order 30.)
   6. We appreciate Classis Holland’s acknowledgement of the breach of confidentiality which they have apologized for.
B. That synod declare this recommendation to be its response to Overture 10, Appeal 1, and Communication 5.

C. That synod direct the General Secretary to assemble a task force (or similar body) to design and/or clarify an appeals process for those under discipline. This body shall address processes for members under general discipline.

_Grounds:_

1. Neither Church Order nor the Judicial Code seem to provide clear provisions for members under discipline to appeal their discipline.
2. While the authority for discipline and its implementation is given to the local consistory, there should be a clearly defined process for members and officebearers to appeal that discipline.
Introduction (adapted from the FAQ):
Congregations and ministry leaders are both well served by clearly identifying expectations for Christlike behavior. A code of conduct enables churches to be proactive in educating staff and volunteers about expectations rather than reactive when unspoken expectations are not met.

When implemented well, a code of conduct helps to shape the culture of a congregation, particularly with respect to how people are treated, fostering a culture in our churches where the value of every person is protected and where everyone is free to worship God and grow in faith free from harm.

Key to cultivating a culture of dignity and respect in the church is creating safe and receptive avenues for reporting abuse or misconduct. Those who have been harmed need to be heard and cared for by the church. This posture, however, does not assume the guilt of the accused. Allegations of violations should be examined and assessed through a fair process. The local church council is responsible for deciding the best way to follow up on the allegations.

Ministry leaders have a significant amount of authority and spiritual influence over the people who participate in the ministries of the church. People extend a great deal of trust to ministry leaders, inviting them into their lives at times and on occasions of significant vulnerability: birth, death, sickness, times of fear, doubt, joy, and suffering. It is a rare privilege to come alongside and support someone in their faith journey, being the presence of Christ to them. The stewardship of such power is a great responsibility—responsibility to use this power in ways that lead to shalom.

Typically, ministry leaders are mature Christians who exemplify good character and integrity, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Still, like all human beings, they are prone to sin, and they make mistakes. Stress, anxiety, burnout, and disappointment may lead them to act out of their old selves rather than their new life in Christ. As a result, they may fail to use their authority in redeeming ways and instead use it in a way that brings about harm. When this happens, the congregation’s flourishing and the integrity of the church’s gospel witness is affected. For this reason, it is crucial that the church put tools and measures of accountability that help ministry leaders use their authority and influence responsibly in order to build up the people to whom they are ministering.

The implementation of the Code of Conduct is the responsibility of the local council that holds the membership or credentials of the ministry leader. A classis has responsibility to implement the Code of Conduct for classical ministry leaders and employees. For CRCNA staff members, this oversight is shared with the Human Resource departments for denominational staff.

The assembly that implements the Code of Conduct is also responsible for determining how to enforce the Code of Conduct and the ramifications for people who violate it based on the gravity
of the offense and the harm done. Safe Church coordinators, denominational Safe Church staff, and the Dignity Team are available for consultation and advice as needed.

The Bible is our guide for faith and life. The confessions are systematic summaries and interpretations of the Bible around which we are united as a denomination and which we confess to be faithful and true to the teachings of Scripture. The Code of Conduct is a document that establishes Biblical standards of behavior and practices for contemporary realities, addressing appropriate interpersonal relationships, confidentiality, financial integrity, pastoral leadership, and mandatory reporting. It is a summary of Christian standards for contemporary ministry leadership. It clarifies for ministry leaders what is required for healthy and safe ministry, and it communicates to parishioners what they can expect from ministry leadership.

Preamble

In Philippians 2, the apostle Paul brings to his Philippian readers the words of a hymn in which Christ Jesus is acknowledged as being, in his very nature, God. Among other things, this means that Christ is the one to whom all power belongs. The hymn goes on to say that Christ did not consider equality with God as something to be used to his own advantage. In fact, he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, and humbling himself toward a life-sacrificing kind of obedience. In other words, he used his power for the glory of God and the thriving of others.

Mark 10:35-45 displays two very different approaches to the use of power. The disciples are exposed as being power hungry and vulnerable to a worldly expression of power. Jesus intervened by clarifying that a worldly view of power “lords it over” those it influences. Jesus proclaimed, “it shall not be so among you, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (43). Jesus displays that power and influence are not negative in themselves but are a gift of God for good. However, Jesus also insists that a misuse of power is not acceptable for leaders in his kingdom. Rather, he demands that they lead as humble servants for the glory of God and the thriving of others. After all, they follow the one who, “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (45).

All of us who are united to Christ by faith and who serve in the life of the church are called, in this passage and others (Phil. 2:1-10), to this way of being. Jesus himself, in response to the desire for power expressed by his disciples, called them (and us) to use power to bring glory to God and serve people - a way of holding power that confronts and contrasts with the ways that the world uses power.

Not only do we have this call from Christ, but we actually have Jesus living and growing within us (Gal. 2:20). As a result, we find ourselves being transformed into the kind of people who hold and use power in a Christ-like way.

That being said, until Christ returns and brings us to perfection, we will continue to wrestle with the urge to misuse power and abuse others. Ugly realities such as verbal, emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse are found among us. The power that we hold by virtue of our person or our position can always be twisted into the project of building up ourselves and our own kingdoms at the expense of others. This is true for pastors, lay ministry leaders, and church members alike.
In awareness of these ugly realities and in the beautiful hope of Christ’s transforming work, the following code of conduct is offered for ministry leaders. It is shaped by Scripture and by commitments found in our confessional statements and contemporary testimonies. (See Belgic Confession, Article 28; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A’s 55, 107, 111.) It emerges out of a response by Synod 2018 to patterns of abuse that had been brought to its attention and is aimed at preventing such abuse in the future. May God’s peace be among us.

**Code of Conduct**

“Ministry leaders” are all officebearers (ordained ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, and deacons), CRCNA staff members, and members of the Council of Delegates. Local church councils are also encouraged to regard all church staff (whether or not they are ordained) and volunteers who are providing leadership in the church as ministry leaders. Ministry leaders have been empowered by God and the church to serve the body of Christ for good. They are called to resist all temptations to abuse their power through the misuse of position, authority, or influence. Abuse of power is often defined as misusing power to harm another person or using power and influence to take unjust advantage of another person. All abuse by ministry leaders within the church is also spiritual abuse and has spiritual impacts that often heighten the harm caused to individuals and to the family of God. For more on the use and misuse of power, see the report of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee (Acts of Synod 2019, pp. 587-615).

As a ministry leader, I will, to the best of my ability, commit to the following:

**Relationships**

1. I will speak and act, in all my personal and professional relations, in ways that follow the pattern of Christ, who used his power to serve (1 Pet. 5; Mark 10; Phil. 2; 2 Tim. 4:2).

2. I will respect, love, and treat with integrity and truthfulness people of every position, status, race, ethnicity, gender, age, or ability.

3. I will maintain appropriate emotional, physical, and sexual boundaries in all relationships.

4. I will keep all my relationships free from inappropriate, unwanted physical contact, emotional or sexual intimacy, sexual comments, gestures, or jokes.

**Safety**

1. I will actively promote a welcoming and respectful environment where all persons are treated with dignity and value as image bearers of God, and where any form of abuse, bullying, or harassment is neither tolerated nor allowed to take place.

2. I will report known or suspected cases of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect of minors or vulnerable adults to the proper authorities.

3. I will support those who disclose physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in a way that empowers the person who has been victimized to seek out justice and healing.
Pastoral Leadership

1. I will promote truthfulness, transparency, and honesty in all of my work.

2. I will use my power, authority, and position to build up the community of believers and seek first the kingdom of God.

3. I will work within my professional trained competence, especially in counseling situations, and I will refer individuals to other professionals as appropriate.

(Note the inversion of points 4 and 5 to begin with positive)

4. I will preach, teach, admonish, or discipline in ways that are biblical and Christlike, promoting the shalom and flourishing of those to whom I am ministering (2 Timothy 3:16)

5. I will refrain in my pastoral care and counseling from using references to Scripture or God to manipulate, coerce, or threaten another person.

6. I will disclose any perceived or actual conflict of interest.

Confidentiality

1. I will maintain and uphold confidentiality appropriately, which means I will hold in confidence whatever information is not mine to share.

2. I will not use information shared with me in confidence in order to elevate my position or to depreciate that of others.

Finances

1. I will ensure that funds for which I am responsible or which are under my control are used for their intended ministry purposes.

2. In all financial matters, including the acceptance of gifts, I will act with scrupulous honesty, transparency, and appropriate accountability.

3. I will appropriately use and encourage accepted accounting practices and regular reviews and/or audits of ministry funds.

In the event that I misuse my power, either intentionally or unintentionally, in my dealings with others, in word or deed, if I fail “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly” (Micah 6:8) as outlined in the scriptures and our confessions I will acknowledge the harm that has been caused and the trust that has been broken, and I will actively seek restoration with justice, compassion, truth, and grace. I will humbly submit to the insight and accountability of others the body that implements this code of conduct to ensure that I use any power entrusted to me fully in service to Christ.
In the beautiful hope of Christ's transforming work, in all I do, I will seek to use my position, power, and authority prudently and humbly to support and encourage all the members of his body in my care.


**Code of Conduct (Clean)**

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3.