

CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRIES

Chair: William J. Delleman
Reporter: Michael J. Kooy

I. Council of Delegates

A. Materials

1. Council of Delegates Report – *deferred from 2020* (section II, A, 19), pp. 139-40
2. Council of Delegates Supplement – *deferred from 2020* (section I, I, including Appendix A), p. 204, 206-16
3. Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) Report – *deferred from 2020*, p. 345
4. Council of Delegates (sections II, A, 17, a and c; B, 5-6, including Appendix G), pp. 41-42, 47-48, 90-114
5. Council of Delegates Supplement (sections I, G and K, including Appendices C1, C2, and E)

B. Privilege of the Floor: Mr. Andy DeRuyter, chair of the Council of Delegates; Rev. Michael TenHaken, vice chair of the Council of Delegates; Mr. Colin P. Watson, executive director; and members of the executive staff as needed.

C. Recommendations

1. That synod adopt the following recommendations as suggested by Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) regarding review and use of the New City Catechism (COD Supplement 2020 section I, I; Appendix A).
 - a. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Chris Schoon, director of Faith Formation Ministries (FFM), when matters related to the report in Appendix A are being discussed. (part of consent Agenda)
 - b. That synod encourage CRC churches to share with Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) the ways in which they are engaging in catechetical teaching in their local contexts, particularly with regard to people who come to faith as adults. Churches can share ideas at faithformation@crcna.org.
 - c. That synod consider the report in Appendix A in fulfillment of the directive by Synod 2019 for Faith Formation Ministries (FFM) to provide a curriculum review and advice regarding the use of the New City Catechism by our churches.
2. That synod take note of the updates provided within the COD report on addressing directives of Synod 2019 regarding the abuse of power (II, A, 17, c):
 - Current review of the appeal process
 - Development of restorative practices resources and training for staff
 - Abuse of power training for candidates for ministry
 - Ongoing implementation and monitoring of synod's directives

3. That synod take the following actions to improve the appeal process (COD Supplement section I, G, and Appendices C1 and C2):
 - a. Adopt the following proposed revisions to Church Order Supplements Articles 30-a and 42-b as proposed in Appendix C1:

Proposed Church Order Supplement, Article 42-b, section b (the current Supplement, Article 42-b would become section a)

- b. *When allegations of abuse against a church leader are brought forward to a church council, the council will contact the classis interim committee, which will appoint church visitors to do the following:*
 1. *Meet with the church council of the accused for the purposes of advice, encouragement, and support as the council determines the most appropriate process for investigating and responding to the allegations (advisory panel process, independent investigation, mediation/restorative conversations, other).*
 2. *Participate as an observer on the panel if an advisory panel process is initiated.*
 3. *Advise the church council as they discern how to follow up on and respond to the advisory panel findings.*
 4. *Prepare a report detailing their observations of the advisory panel proceedings and the council's response. The report will be submitted to the church council and, if requested, to the claimant, the claimant's advocate, the accused, and the support person for the accused. The report is to be kept confidential and may be submitted to classis only if there is an appeal of the council's decision. All parties shall commit to maintaining the confidentiality of the report.*

Proposed addition to Church Order Supplement, Article 30-a: section A, 3 (the current sections A, 3 and 4 would become A, 4 and 5)

3. Appeal Process in Situations of Abuse That Are Appealed to Classis

Involvement of Synodical Deputies. When an appeal of a council decision involving allegations of abuse against a church leader comes before classis, the synodical deputies will advise the classis in order that fair process and proper respect and care for all involved may be maintained (per Church Order Art. 48-c).

Orientation and Training. Before handling an appeal involving abuse allegations against a church leader that have been taken up by an advisory panel process, classis delegates will participate in a 60-minute Safe Church Ministry orientation and training on due process, abuse awareness, and response.

Independent Investigations. If an investigation hasn't already been done, classes or their interim committees may choose to arrange for an independent investigation into the allegations claimed. An independent investigation is strongly recommended in the following situations:

- a. *The accused or claimant is a prominent leader in the community or region such that impartiality is especially elusive.*
- b. *The accusations consist of multiple victims or multiple jurisdictions.*
- c. *Real or perceived conflicts of interest make impartiality especially elusive.*
- d. *The case is appealed to classis because of alleged irregularities or mishandling of the allegations.*

Responsibilities to the Claimant and the Accused

- a. *Orientation to the process: Classes or their interim committees shall ensure that the claimant and the accused are familiar with the process, understand what is expected of them, and know how best to prepare.*
- b. *Commitment to confidentiality: Delegates to the classis meeting addressing the appeal will commit to holding all matters of the testimony and discussion, including the identity of persons involved, in confidence according to the Rules for Synodical Procedure (section V, B, 11). Breaches of confidentiality will be reported to the councils of any delegates who violate this commitment.*
- c. *Communication: The clerk of the classis that is taking up the appeal will communicate in a timely fashion the decisions of the classis to the claimant and the accused.*

Follow-up Care. After the proceedings are finished, the church visitors and/or the classis Safe Church coordinator will arrange for restorative circle conversations to be made available to the persons most affected by the allegations of abuse and by the appeal process, to provide a pathway forward for healing and restoration to the community. Classes are also strongly encouraged to set aside funds for follow-up counseling for affected parties.

Proposed addition to Supplement, Article 30-a: section B, 8

- 8. *When an appeal of a classis decision involving allegations of abuse against a church leader comes before synod, members of the synod advisory committee will participate in a 60-minute Safe Church Ministry orientation and training on due process, abuse awareness, and response.*
- b. Adopt the revised "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader" document as proposed in Appendix C2.

Grounds:

- 1) The proposed changes provide greater support for the local council and the classis to act with justice and compassion when allegations of abuse against a church leader are brought forward.
- 2) The proposed changes increase awareness about how to adjudicate allegations of abuse by those who are authorized to respond on behalf of the church, in order to ensure better outcomes.
- 3) By expanding the use of the Advisory Panel Process, those who bring forward allegations of abuse and those who are accused will all be given a safe, objective process by which to have their voices heard.

- 4) The proposed changes reduce the likelihood of appeals to classis and synod involving allegations of abuse.
- 5) The proposed changes ensure proper support and care for the claimant and the accused should the allegations be appealed to classis.
- 6) The proposed changes are consistent with the recommendations proposed by the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee report approved by Synod 2019.