

GLOBAL MISSION AND DENOMINATIONAL UNITY

Chair/Reporter: Eric Schlukebir

Council of Delegates

A. *Materials* - Council of Delegates (section II, A, 17, b, including Appendix F), pp. 41-42, 83-90

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. *Recommendation*

That synod adopt the following recommendation regarding implementation of the CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders (II, A, 17, b, 1; Appendix F):

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 and ministry leaders, on occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations, shall signify their agreement with the expected behavior of leadership in the church by signing the Code of Conduct.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 5-b

***Supplement, Article 5-b**

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 thriving of others.

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, 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 serve people, a way of holding power that confronts and contrasts with the ways that the world uses power.¹

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 Christlike 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 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.² It emerges out of a response by Synod 2018 to patterns of abuse that had been brought to its attention³ and is aimed at preventing such abuse in the future. May God's peace be among us.

Code of Conduct

Abuse of power is a misuse of position, authority, or influence to take advantage of, manipulate, or control. Abuse of power occurs when a person with power, regardless of its source, uses that power to harm and/or influence another for personal gain at the other's expense. All abuse by faith 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 background, see Acts of Synod 2019, pp. 587-615).

¹ See Mark 10:35-45. Note that there are other Scripture texts that address the use of power to bless, such as 1 Peter 5:1-4. In addition, there are texts that describe abuses of power and the damage that such abuses cause (see, for example, 2 Sam. 11 and Ezek. 34).

² See Belgic Confession, Article 28, and Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 55, 107, 111. See also the statement in the Confession of Belhar that says, "We believe . . . that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others" (Confession of Belhar, Article 4). Further, in *Our World Belongs to God* we read that the church is a "new community," gathered by God, in which "all are welcome" (para. 34); that the church's mission in this broken world is a mission of proclaiming the gospel and its implications for life today (para. 41); and that, "restored in Christ's presence, shaped by his life, this new community lives out the ongoing story of God's reconciling love, announces the new creation, and works for a world of justice and peace" (para. 39). Such statements describe the mission of the church in general and provide foundation for the specific code of conduct presented here. ³Bev Sterk's overture to Synod 2018, titled "Address Patterns of Abuse of Power That Violate the Sacred Trust Given to Leaders and Recognize How These Hinder Due Process and Healing," and appendices specifically related to it, can be found in the Agenda for Synod 2018, pp. 282-307 (see crcna.org/SynodResources). The subsequent action of Synod 2018 was to form an "Abuse of Power Committee" to study "how the CRCNA can best address patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination" (Acts of Synod 2018, pp. 523-24). The work of Synod 2019 related to this overture can be found in the Acts of Synod 2019, pp. 794-96 (see [cncna.org/SynodResources](http://crcna.org/SynodResources)). The particular recommendation calling for a code of conduct is recommendation 3, c (p. 795).

As a ministry leader, I commit to the following:

Confidentiality

I will use confidentiality appropriately, which means I will hold in confidence whatever information is not mine to share. I will not use information shared with me in confidence in order to elevate my position or to depreciate that of others.

My use of confidentiality will also be guided by mandatory reporting as required by law.

Relational

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).

I will conduct myself with respect, love, integrity, and truthfulness toward all—regardless of position, status, race, gender, age, or ability.

To the best of my ability, I will contribute to an environment of hospitality.

Financial

I will ensure that funds are used for their intended ministry purposes.

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

I will appropriately use accepted accounting practices and regular reviews and/or audits.

Intimate Relationships

I will maintain standards and appropriate boundaries in all relationships, which are informed by the Scriptures.

I will keep all of my professional relationships free from inappropriate emotional and sexual behaviors. This includes not engaging in inappropriate intimate contact or a sexual relationship, unwanted physical contact, sexual comments, gestures, or jokes.

Safety

I will actively promote a safe environment where all persons are respected and valued, where any form of abuse, bullying, or harassment is neither tolerated nor allowed to take place.

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

I will support adults who disclose physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in a way that appropriately empowers the person who has been victimized.

Spiritual

I will acknowledge the use of Scripture and the Spirit's work in the community of the church and, therefore, refrain from presuming to be the sole "voice of God."

I will teach, admonish or discipline in ways that are biblical, Christlike, and seek other people's well-being. (Matthew 18, Colossians 1:28; 3:16),

I will use my position as a way to serve the body of believers, rather than myself, for the common good and the cultivation of the gifts of the Spirit. .

Additional Commitments

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

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

I will disclose any perceived or actual conflict of interest.

In all that I do, I will seek to use my position, power, and authority prudently and humbly and in nonexploitive ways.

In the event that I misuse my power, either intentionally or unintentionally, as a ministry leader, 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 to ensure that I use any power entrusted to me fully in service to Christ.

(Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council of Delegates 2021, p. 633)

**To be signed by . . . [a description of ministry leaders who will sign this Code of Conduct (similar to the notation following the Covenant for Officebearers)]*

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

Supplement, Article 13-c, section c

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 the Code of Conduct.

- 3) Revise Church Order Article 83 as indicated by the following addition in italics:

Article 83

Special discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Covenant for Officebearers or the Code of Conduct, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct

- b. That synod adopt the following guidelines related to the CRC Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders:

- 1) Who signs the code?

- CRCNA staff members
 - Council of Delegates members
 - Churches and classes should implement the code for council members and employees as part of an annual review.
 - The Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders is referenced in the Abuse of Power Training. It would also be included in the Calvin Theological Seminary Church Order course after the adoption of proposed Church Order changes. The Candidacy Committee will recommend that all Article 8 candidates be required to take the Abuse of Power training.
- 2) Who is responsible for ensuring it is signed (e.g., councils, classes, and CRCNA ministry staff)?
- Councils, classes, COD, and denominational leadership
 - Safe Church Ministry has been encouraging churches to include a reference to the Code of Conduct in their policy. It is reviewed as part of the Safe Church training.
- 3) What are the implications if individuals refuse to sign or deviate from the code?
- There are guidelines in the Supplement to Church Order re gravamina.
 - Each governing body would decide the ramifications.
 - Another team is discussing ramifications for Council of Delegates members for consideration by the COD.
 - Discipline would be tied to their position (not membership in the church).
 - Discipline is a local matter (for church or classis).
- 4) Suggestions for incorporating the Code of Conduct include the following:
- Require all ministry staff in classes and churches to sign the Code of Conduct when they sign their contract upon hiring.
 - Conduct annual performance reviews with questions related to abuse and the code of conduct (see Addendum below) to ensure meaningful conversations. It is suggested that an elder, human resources professional, or personnel committee conduct the review so that an employee may freely share any potential forms of abuse. Or consider holding a separate conversation at another time of year to review the sample questions—an employee may not be as forthright in a performance-review conversation, considering the possibility of promotion/demotion/raises.
 - Incorporate into council training and orientation.
 - Include in church visitor training (also with the Healthy Church Executive survey from Pastor Church Resources).
 - The current CRCNA staff Code of Conduct can incorporate new elements from the Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders and be reviewed at the annual performance review.

Grounds:

1. The abuse of power is an urgent matter.
2. Synod 2019 recognized the urgent need for a code of conduct policy and asked that one be created. Three years later the need is even more apparent.
3. The policy and implementation process was created in consultation with experts in the field, including safe church advocates and pastor church relations staff.
4. The COD has already deliberated, approved, and implemented this policy for members of the COD.

Ingrid Beck
Alice Joose
Sally Larsen
David Nightingale
Ron Rupke
Joe Sanderlin
Eric Schlukebir, chair/reporter
Marilyn Stulen