



Safe Church News

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February 2016

Respect and Healthy Relationships

February is *Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month* in the U.S. It's a great time to talk about healthy relationships. Did you know that one in ten teens has been sexually or

physically hurt in a dating relationship within the last year? That's a lot of teens. What are we doing about that in our congregations? A national respect announcement states: With Valentine's Day around the corner, we'd like to remind you that everyone deserves a safe and healthy relationship. Remember, love has many definitions, but abuse isn't one of them. If you or someone you know has a question about a relationship, healthy or unhealthy, visit loveisrespect.org or text "loveis" to 22522". Find out more [here](#). Could this be something that your youth leader needs to know?

Any time is a good time to teach children and youth about respectful relationships. The *Circle of Grace* program can help. It carries a strong message of God's presence and the sacredness of all relationships. Implementing this program is an easy way to help prevent abuse by building communities of respect.

Connections, Networks, and Resources – We're Better Together!

The Lord has given gifts to his people and has also extended his grace and gifts to those who don't yet know him. Many have been gifted with a passion to end abuse that harms people, families, congregations, and communities. As people with different gifts, but with one passion, *we are better when we work together*. Below are some networking and connecting opportunities; choose one or two that interest you and follow the links.

The newest issue of *Breaking Barriers*, the quarterly newsletter published by the office of [Disability Concerns](#), focuses on the connection between abuse and disabilities. It features articles by safe church team members, Elizabeth Schultz and Elly Van Alten. Check it out [here](#).

The Network is aptly named as it provides a forum for people to join their voices in conversation on many topics. Check out recent postings by Monica Brands, a Calvin Seminary Student who is acting as our Safe Church Network Guide. Did you know that there are parallels between church leader abuse and "the Cosby effect"? Join the conversation [here](#).

A session led by the **Trauma Healing** Institute, established by the American Bible Society, was attended by several people who are active in safe church ministry. Trauma healing is an important part of our work in responding to abuse. We look forward to further discussions and collaboration in this area. The gathering is described [here](#).

The mission of **Dove's Nest** is to empower and equip faith communities to keep children and youth safe in their homes, churches, and communities. An article is featured this month, "10 Ways Your Church Can Prevent Child Abuse. They also offer a speaker's bureau and training opportunities. Find out more [here](#).

Prevent Connect is an online project dedicated to the primary prevention of sexual assault and domestic violence. We can join in with this community of abuse prevention experts. Tuesday, Feb. 23 is the next in a web-conference series about ending child sexual abuse. Find out more about **Building a Movement to End Child Sexual Abuse** [here](#). What can we, as safe church team members, learn from these prevention experts? How can we, as Christians, become valuable salt and light in these conversations? We're better together.

At the Office – An Update

A team of folks have worked hard together on a report mandated by Synod 2015. We've discussed the topic, and written, reviewed, and proposed revisions for Church Order Articles 83-84, which address reinstatement of officebearers following sexual misconduct. The report will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees this month. The report will appear in the **Agenda for Synod 2016**. Look for it sometime in April.

A **Safe Church promotional video** is coming!!! We are very excited about this 2-3 minute, professionally-done video that will highlight the value of Safe Church Ministry. We hope to have it ready soon and will let you know as soon as it's posted online – hopefully in time for some spring classis meetings!

Speaking of Classis ...

Do you know who is responsible for bringing safe church ministry to your spring classis meeting? Ideally, the classis safe church team is a standing committee of classis, and as such, presents a report. This report could be as simple as an announcement, perhaps about our upcoming conference in November (we'd love to see at least two people from each classis attend). Or it could be an educational opportunity on a topic of interest related to safe church ministry. It could also highlight one of our resources such as: our brochure, a handout about healthy boundaries in ministry, or information about *Circle of Grace*. Of course, when our new video is ready, you may want to plan on showing that. If you need ideas for classis meetings or help to get on the agenda, please contact us – we're more than happy to help with ideas, connect you with the right people, and/or to ship resources. Synod has encouraged each classis to have a safe church team. It's up to us, together, to make that vision a reality.

"They will live in safety and no one will make them afraid." Ezekiel 34:28