

5. The NIV and ESV are already being used by many CRC congregations and by English-speaking congregations in many denominations around the world.
6. The 2011 NIV and 2016 ESV have effectively replaced all previous editions of these translations, which are no longer in print.
7. The approval of “Bible versions suitable for use in worship” is one of the primary tasks of synod, according to Church Order Article 47.

Classis Huron

Vic Vandermolen, stated clerk

## **Overture 2: Address Patterns of Abuse of Power That Violate the Sacred Trust Given to Leaders and Recognize How These Hinder Due Process and Healing**

### **Outline**

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*Note:* The Program Committee of synod (officers of last year’s synod) decided to remove an appendix from this overture for reasons of confidentiality as noted in the *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, section V, B, 11 (p. 10).

Scripture Passages That Address Justice

### **I. Summary of overture**

The purpose of this overture is to increase awareness that power is being abused in threatening situations to protect those in power and the institution at the expense of those harmed, resulting in the betrayal of a sacred trust given to church leaders that causes harm to the church, and to offer recommendations to address abuse of power.

*Overture recommendations:*

- A. Mandate training to raise awareness of abusive behavior
- B. Require a code of conduct for pastors
- C. Require training for restorative practice and principles
- D. Encourage training at seminary level regarding abuse of power
- E. Consider a task force/study committee to address addictions and personality problems, especially pornography and narcissism

- F. Encourage ways to hear more women's voices regarding abuse
- G. Address and evaluate nondisclosure agreements
- H. Encourage classes to implement a CRC victims' fund
- I. Revise Church Order Article 85
- J. Take steps to insure adequate resources for implementation of Safe Church recommendations

*General grounds:*

- 1. Equip leaders to do no harm
- 2. Equip leaders to follow due process
- 3. Equip leaders to respond in a healthy, healing, and trustworthy manner

When leaders are honest, they acknowledge that these patterns of abuse of power are and have been a problem in the CRC. This overture is not about specific situations in the CRC; it is about addressing patterns.

Appendix A: Specific Grounds for Recommendations (see Overture Recommendations for list)

Appendix B: Brief Explanation of Patterns of Abuse

Define abuse and specifically look at common patterns of abuse of power, recognizing each pattern has many, many ways that it can be used as an abuse of power.

- 1. Secrecy
- 2. Silence
- 3. Control
- 4. Cover-up
- 5. Intimidation/fear/bullying
- 6. Abuse (beyond bullying) – especially spiritual, emotional, and verbal abuse
- 7. Manipulation
- 8. Deception
- 9. Cause confusion and chaos
- 10. Deny, deny, deny
- 11. Minimize and dismiss
- 12. Forgive and move on
- 13. Blame shifting
- 14. Various distortions
- 15. Technicalities
- 16. Empty words

Appendix C: Confidentiality: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The Good: How confidentiality is to be used

The Bad: How confidentiality is misused

The Ugly: How confidentiality is abused

Appendix D: Victims Support Fund

Appendix E: Past Recommendations Adopted by Synod

Recommendations adopted by Synod 2010 from the Abuse Victims' Task Force Report

Recommendations adopted by Synod 2014 from the Office of Safe Church Ministry Report

Appendix F: References and Resources: A list of resources used to support statements made in this overture. There are twenty-seven references throughout the overture with the sources listed in this appendix.

## Scripture Passages That Address Justice

### II. Overture

Bev Sterk respectfully overtures Synod 2018, requesting all levels to specifically and intentionally raise awareness and address ways power is abused (see Grounds) resulting in due process being thwarted and people who seek justice and support from their church leaders being revictimized and diminished. When abuse of power happens in the church, it is also spiritual abuse! This overture requests classes and synod to **prayerfully and carefully** consider and implement the recommendations in this overture so that patterns of abuse of power can be discerned, confronted, and exposed when they happen, possibly preventing abuse of power from happening in the first place in some situations, and helping bring healing to those harmed by abuse in the CRC.

### III. Background (see also *Agenda for Synod 2010* (pp. 475-509), Abuse Victims Task Force [AVTF] Report, I, A; Appendix F, #21)

This overture arises from the recognition that **power is being abused in threatening situations to protect the institution and those in power in churches at the expense of those harmed**. This is sometimes referred to as clericalism.(1) This is the exact opposite of how Jesus and Peter call leaders to respond, as abuse of power is an example of “lording it over” and “domineering” leadership (Matt. 20:25; 1 Pet. 5:3) (Appendix F, #26).

It is a serious and grievous matter when the response by leaders in the church to threatening situations, far too often further harms those already harmed by the original incident, which often but not always involves some level of sexual misconduct and/or abuse. The harmful response by leaders results in further **betrayal of a sacred trust**, the trust that church leaders have been given to protect, support, and seek justice on behalf of those who have been harmed.(2) Church leaders are called to do what is right, even when it is painful and costly to themselves, their colleagues, and the institution. The failure to do what is right, including refusing to hold someone accountable for their misconduct, not only erodes and destroys the sacred trust given to church leaders (especially if the misconduct is by a leader); it also allows the potential for others to be harmed by the same person or type of situation when it is not addressed in an honest, forthright, transparent manner. Healthy confrontation eliminates deception and addresses displacement of responsibility.(3)

When the response to various abuses is inadequate, the patterns of abuse are allowed to continue, and **people continue to be harmed**. The Roman Catholic Church is the most notorious and most public example of how this happens. Addressing abuse of power will require a humility that recognizes we need to be slow in pointing fingers at the Catholics and quick to the difficult and sobering task of self-examination.(4)

The general trend of the established institutional church, including the CRC, is of continued decline in membership\*, while the “Dones,” “De-churched,” and Spiritual Refugees (14, 15) continue to grow. Might **abuse**

**of power be a key factor** as part of the reason why so many faithful are leaving the established institutional church (\*Synod 2017, Overture 11)?

**This is our watch.** We are the problem. We are de-churching people. How we respond will have an impact, positive or negative, dependent on how we choose to address these abuses. The secular spheres are addressing the abuse of power in government and in the workplace. We, as the church, can do no less and must do much more!

#### **IV. Recommendations**

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Sex addiction experts say that “clergy malfeasance is rampant,” and some fear that clergy violations involving sexual behaviors are of epidemic proportions.(3; p. 65) It seems that sexual misconduct/abuse or responding to such behavior in the church tends to bring out the worst types of abuses and responses, but it is essential we also recognize that **abuse of power is not limited to sexual abuse, harassment, and misbehavior.**

With this in mind, Bev Sterk overtures synod to adopt the following:

- A. That synod mandate that all officebearers in the CRC have two to four hours of training specifically dealing with abuse, boundaries, ethics, and sexual misconduct/porn\*\*\* every year (17, 24). (2010 AVTF, II, D; III, J, K, and L)
- B. That synod require all pastors to sign a code of conduct, detailing specific ethics that they are to follow, similar to other professions.
- C. That synod require that all classes offer training on restorative practice principles every three to five years, as this concept continues to develop and grow and be used positively in many settings where there has been sensitive conflict. We are to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5). God calls the church to be leading the way here, and it seems many leaders are still unaware of these principles (AVTF, II, B; III, D, E, F, and I; also see Synod 2011, Overture 23; Synod 2005 committee report on restorative justice).
- D. That synod encourage Calvin Theological Seminary to pursue adding comprehensive training regarding abuse of power to the requirements of becoming a pastor (2010 AVTF, II, D).
- E. That synod consider mandating a task force/study committee to address narcissistic-type behaviors and other personality problems such as sexual addictions\*\*\* in the screening and discernment process for pastors, as these issues continue to increase instead of decline.
- F. That synod encourage practical ways to increase the number of women’s voices in dealing with situations of abuse, since the significant majority of those affected are women.
- G. That synod address confidentiality and nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) on a case-by-case basis, in which the person with less power has the option of continuing it or not, and create a policy to limit NDAs in the future (see Appendix C: Confidentiality: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly).
- H. That synod encourage safe church teams to implement a victims support fund at the classis level (2010 AVTF, II, C; III, G; see Appendix D: Victims Support Fund Suggestions).

I. That synod revise Church Order Article 85, which currently reads, “No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer.” This is inadequate. The proposed revision is indicated by underline: “No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer, or lord it over the priesthood of all believers or over anyone.”

J. That synod take the necessary steps to insure that there are adequate resources to implement the Safe Church decisions made by synod and encourage leadership at all levels to be supportive of the Safe Church Ministry (2010 AVTF, III, N; Synod 2014, recommendation d, 5; Appendix E: Recommendations Adopted by Synod).

The 2010 Abuse Victims Task Force Report (AVTF) is an amazing document and gift to the CRC, and it is crucial to more fully implement the recommendations adopted, but its primary focus is sexual misconduct and abuse. We need to consider intentionally expanding our recognition of abuse of power to beyond situations of sexual misconduct to misuse of power, and misuse of spiritual authority. Abuse of power/lording it over can happen in many other ways besides physical and sexual abuse that are also harmful to those affected by abusive and domineering leadership styles.

Further action is needed on these recommendations to show that we take abuse of power seriously and stop denying, minimizing, and/or resisting that this is a significant problem not just in the world but also in the church/CRC. These recommendations can be a next step, recognizing that a more long-term comprehensive investigative review is also required, as abuse of power and spiritual abuse is a complex issue\*\*\*.

\*\*\*It is essential that leaders deeply comprehend the serious negative influence of pornography. Research indicates participation in pornography seriously affects the brain. Research indicates there is a strong correlation between porn and narcissistic behavior. Research indicates that porn is a key cause in over 50 percent of divorces. If this overture did not mention porn and the horrific damage it causes at all levels, it would be negligent in following due diligence. Researchers that have studied porn use for thirty years have found absolutely no benefit to porn, only significant damage, contrary to what the conventional culture would have many believe. Increasing awareness of the epidemic use of porn by people in the church, including by leaders, is about far more than lust. Participation in porn compromises values and desensitizes people to others . . . so porn feeds and fuels abuse, deception, selfishness, objectification of people, misogyny, narcissistic behavior, prostitution, violence against women, human and sex trafficking, etc. Leaders that have a porn problem are compromised to various degrees on walking in honesty, integrity, doing what is right, especially when they will look bad and/or might lose their position of influence, power, and prestige, etc., as a pastor and in the pulpit. Abuse of power can be fueled through the progression of viewing porn to acting out the behavior viewed with porn, which is often very demeaning, degrading, dehumanizing, etc. Pornography is a grievous sin against the God-given dignity of humanity made in his image. Research indicates porn is a huge problem in the church . . . and the CRC is not exempt. The extent of the porn problem requires far more drastic

measures to more effectively address the porn epidemic than has been the case for the last several decades as porn fuels abuse of power, exploitation, and objectification of the very people leaders are called to serve (18, 19).

Quote:

Maybe we should name the elephant in the room – **the reality that mental health professionals like me now assume people are addicted to porn.** It's not the exception, it's the norm. Yes, men who've been formed in the sexualized liturgy of our culture are stuffing the shame and pretending to be ok when it's not ok. . . . Can I tell you how many people have said to me, "I started experimenting a bit in middle school – looking at images, masturbating – **but no one ever talked about this, not my parents, not my school, not my youth group, and never, ever my pastor**" (bold emphasis added). Chuck Degroat, <https://blog.perspectivesjournal.org/2017/12/16/we-need-to-talk-about-sex/>

Recommended resources for research on porn follow:

<https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/>  
<http://www.covenanteyes.com/blog/> ; <http://www.covenanteyes.com/e-books/>  
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/pornography/upload/Create-in-Me-a-Clean-Heart-Statement-on-Pornography.pdf>  
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/pornography/index.cfm>  
<https://fightthenewdrug.org/get-the-facts/>  
<https://www.recoveryranch.com/articles/whats-connection-sex-addiction-narcissism/>; July 12, 2017

## V. General grounds (see Appendix A for specific grounds for each recommendation)

A. One of the core principles of the counseling, educational, medical, and social service professions, especially in conflict sensitive situations, **is to do no harm**. When the response of the leaders to a difficult situation is secrecy, silence (i.e., confidentiality and nondisclosures), control, cover-up, coercion, intimidation/fear, bullying, emotional, verbal and/or spiritual abuse, manipulation, deception, creating confusion and chaos, denial, shifting the blame, minimizing and dismissing the seriousness of what happened in many ways, etc. (see Appendix B for a brief description of various patterns of abuse of power), far too often significant further harm is being done to those who have already been harmed in some way.

When various tactics are used by "the powers that be" as damage control, to "neutralize" the situation, effectively protecting those in power at the expense of those not in power, it almost always hinders the healing journey of those who were harmed and can often add to the harm done as well. As Jeremiah shares, "They [leaders] have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly, saying "Peace, peace" when there is no peace" (Jer. 8:11, NKJV). The healing that can happen in one to three years is instead taking ten to thirty years, if not a lifetime, due to the resistance and harmful response by leaders regarding sensitive, threatening types of situations.

The response of the church leadership must be safe. **It's difficult for "spiritual refugees" (15) to trust church leadership because the betrayal of the sacred trust was significant, and a place of trust turned into a place of hurt and pain.** Violations of the due process increase the "spiritual refugees'" burden instead of relieving it. Mistakes in the process further destroy the trust, increasing the harm and damage done, and therefore hindering the healing process, causing the church to fail in her God-given calling to protect and minister to the oppressed(16) (2010 AVTF, III, B and C).

B. Even though the CRC has the Safe Church Ministry, the Church Order, and synod's response to the 2010 Abuse Victims Task Force Report to follow along with the Word of God, **the process for seeking truth, justice, restoration, and restitution can be manipulated** when the "powers that be" use it to their advantage—again, protecting those in power, often at the expense of others who do not hold an office—or have similar influence in some way. Policies can look really good on paper, but, in practice, abuse of power causes due process to be seriously hindered in various ways, adding to the harm already incurred. Abuse of power is not exclusive to the CRC, but neither is the CRC exempt. This is a call for repentance and reform in the CRC, not protectionism or preservation of the institution and/or those in power, but transformation with the help of the Holy Spirit (21) (Appendix E; 2010 AVTF report).

There seems to be a built-in bias in the Church Order to protect the leaders, particularly for false allegations, but that bias also contributes to additional harm and revictimization of those who follow the process regarding legitimate concerns they have. It is very, very difficult to hold leaders accountable for spiritual, verbal, and emotional abuse and abuse of power. There has to be better awareness and training in alternative options available (i.e., restorative practices, victims advocate panels) for a less harmful process for concerns to be addressed.

(See comment by Bonnie Nicholas, CRC director of Safe Church Ministry, on <https://network.crcna.org/elders/when-churches-lose-members>.)

C. We recognize that there will always be incidents of abuse on an individual level, and the hope is that this overture's recommendations will help decrease those to some extent, but **this overture is primarily geared to require specific training to equip and encourage leaders to respond to abusive-type incidents in a healthy, healing, and trustworthy manner**, first for those harmed, their family, and support group, and secondarily for the one who caused the harm, instead of defaulting to a "circle the wagons" response. Also, these recommendations will help equip leaders to recognize when power is being abused by increasing awareness of some of the patterns and tactics so leaders can recognize these patterns in their own responses, as well as in others. We also need to recognize that a more comprehensive investigative review is required as well.

## VI. Further support

This overture refrains from mentioning specific situations, with the exception of that of Wesley Heersink, which Wesley's family has given full permission to share here. There is a list of resources (Appendix F) for further



research for those inclined to dig deeper and study this more, and those resources include many specific situations, but the focus of this overture is not a request to address specific details of situations but a request to increase awareness of systemic patterns connected to abuse and hopefully bring healing and address some of the harm through a victims support fund.

Sadly, there are far too many testimonies that support the fact that abuse of power is and has been a problem in the CRC (2, 16, and various CRCNA Network – Safe Church Ministry posts). This overture is in recognition and validation of those who have been harmed in the CRC, and this overture specifically would like to acknowledge and honor the family of Wesley Heersink, himself a victim of sexual abuse in the CRC, who died while fighting for justice on behalf of those abused in the CRC (<https://www.thebanner.org/news/2011/01/abuse-victim-dies-leaves-legacy>). Abuse of power seriously harmed Wesley, causing him immense suffering and pain, and the institutional church failed him in his journey to seek healing and justice. Wesley’s family has been left with much unresolved conflict from the abuse of power that happened through the CRC process. The prayer is that this overture will bring a measure of healing to those deep and painful wounds.

Sadly, many more situations in which power has been abused in the CRC have been silenced in various ways, mainly through confidentiality demands, including nondisclosure agreements and executive sessions that effectively silence those involved in the process, which often allows others to be victimized (see Appendix C: Confidentiality). The solution to this problem is not to silence it and keep it secret. The prayer is that this overture will help us all be more sensitive and loving in how we respond to various abuses and abuse of power in the church, recognizing that part of the solution is to increase awareness of abuse of power, what types of situations trigger it, and how abuse happens.

When leaders are honest, they acknowledge that these patterns of abuse of power are and have been a problem in the CRC.

## VII. Conclusion

This overture acknowledges that significant progress has been made through Safe Church Ministry in addressing abuse, especially physical and sexual abuse in the CRC, since the inception of the ministry office. However, the research of various recommendations and concerns brought to the attention of and approved by synod over the years, reveals gaps where recommendations were never implemented. This overture requests that the CRC take the next steps and seriously consider all of these recommendations again and recognize the time has come to implement them in all classes and in all congregations.

Bev Sterk, Lynden, Washington

*Note:* This overture was submitted to the council of Second CRC, Lynden, Washington, and to Classis Pacific Northwest at its meeting in March 2018, but neither the council nor the classis adopted it. Therefore it is being forwarded to synod by the author.



## Appendix A

### Specific Grounds for Recommendations

The overture regarding violations of the sacred trust through abuse of power in the CRC requests synod to adopt the recommendations given in the overture, keeping the following specific grounds in mind:

A. Mandate that all officebearers in the CRC have two to four hours of training every year specifically dealing with abuse, boundaries, ethics, and sexual misconduct/porn every year (17, 24).

Specific grounds for this recommendation include that almost all professional positions are required to obtain continuing professional education (CPE), and ethics is often included as a part of that. Professions that require CPE include teachers, counselors, attorneys, accountants, doctors, and nurses in the medical field—and recently, in November of 2017, both the U.S. House and Senate legislated sexual harassment training is required for all politicians, staff, interns, and volunteers. When required continuing education for pastors has been recommended in the past in the CRC, it has been rejected. When leadership chooses not to require continuing education, especially dealing with abuse, boundaries, and ethics, leadership fails to build trust with those who have been harmed by officebearers in the CRC. That this is needed is indeed a sign of the sad state of the church, but failing to make sure that all leaders are committed to this type of training at this point would be negligent. This recommendation is a bare-minimum requirement, as many professions require 20-40 hours a year. It is imperative that all officebearers be required to take this type of training as the various abuses, including abuse of power, are something all leadership must take seriously. It is vital that leadership continues to increase awareness of this type of behavior. There is no executive privilege for leaders to be exempt from ongoing training, and this overture specifically targets addressing various abuses in the church.

B. Require all pastors to sign a code of conduct, detailing specific ethics that they are to follow, similar to those of other professions.

Specific grounds for this recommendation are similar to those stated in Recommendation A. A code of conduct or similar document is required by similar professions, and officebearers can be held accountable to the level of conduct that is not only at the same level as the world, but even a higher level. This is different from the Covenant for Officebearers as that pertains to doctrine. The code of conduct would pertain to behavior. We should be held to a higher standard than the world, and at this point, the world has been doing a better job than the church in dealing with abuse. As one CRC officebearer (also a military veteran) stated: “Abuse of power is bad in the military, but it’s worse in the church.” Whether one agrees with that statement or not, that this could even be possible is unacceptable. Officebearers are to be above reproach.

C. Require that all classes offer training on restorative practice principles every three to five years. This concept will continue to develop and grow and be used positively in many settings where there has been sensitive conflict. We are to be ministers of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5). God calls the church to be

leading the way here, and it seems many leaders are still unaware of these principles (see also *Agenda for Synod 2011*, Overture 23; and *Agenda for Synod 2005*, committee report on restorative justice).

Specific grounds for this recommendation include that over the years, efforts to raise awareness of restorative practices have been made (2005, 2010), but with little change. A comment was made by a pastor in a CRC leadership meeting that it would be helpful to have a way that bridges the gap between council and judicial code to resolve conflict better. Restorative principles does this. They are a beautiful and powerful way to bridge this gap, and they work because these are universal principles based on Scripture. The justice system and public schools use restorative practices far more than the church does. As mentioned in the recommendation, the church is actually called to lead the way in the ministry of reconciliation per 2 Corinthians 5. Sadly, at this point, restorative practices are mostly ignored in the church. It looks good on paper, but is not happening in practice.

D. Encourage Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) to pursue adding comprehensive training regarding abuse of power to the requirements of becoming a pastor.

Specific grounds for this recommendation include receiving very mixed messages for where CTS is at in addressing various abuses, including abuse of power. A very intentional assessment of the curriculum should be seriously considered to determine how best to address this in a comprehensive manner at the seminary level. This assessment should include interviewing graduates to get an idea of where there are gaps in training that deals with the various abuses.

E. Consider mandating a task force/study committee to address narcissism and other personality problems such as sexual addictions\*\*\* in the screening and discernment process for pastors, as these issues continue to increase instead of decline.

Specific grounds for this recommendation include the fact that narcissistic-type behavior is on the increase. Porn use also continues to increase. These behaviors feed each other by affecting the same area of the brain. Addictions breed deception, and porn users become increasingly selfish and increasingly objectify, demean, devalue, and dehumanize people, especially women. When these types of problems are not addressed, great harm is done to the unsuspecting and unprotected flock when a pastor is allowed to lead, preach, and counsel with these types of serious character issues.

F. Encourage practical ways to increase the number of women's voices in dealing with situations of abuse, since the significant majority of those affected are women.

Specific grounds for this recommendation include that when women's voices are silenced or not heard, decisions are often made by the men that lack sensitivity to the women's perspective. There is a reason the "good old boys club" is a common phrase, but "the good old girls club" does not have a similar familiarity. The church is called to be a priesthood of *all* believers; the contribution of the women's voice is essential and indispensable, and the mission of the church is hindered when the women are disrespected and silenced. This is not about women having a title; this is about the women's

voices being asked for and listened to, especially on behalf of women who have been harmed. Otherwise the “voiceless” do not get heard. It would be very beneficial for women to connect with a formal female authority that can advocate on their behalf. How can the CRC establish formal channels of input for women and ensure that they are given permission to use those channels? If there is only one woman in the room, do not assume that they have entered the conversation at the same level as the men, as they may not necessarily feel safe enough to voice their thoughts (see Jen Wilkin @ 45 minutes; Advance 2017, General Session #2, ACTS 29 conference; November 2017; <https://vimeo.com/243476316>).

Male pastors will prioritize relationships and conversations with men. Women lose on the relational capital there, because the women’s voice is not allowed to be a part of the conversation. When conversations are exclusively with men, the church loses. If the disciples included the women, then we should take that seriously: “They [disciples] all joined together constantly in prayer, **along with the women**” (emphasis added) (Acts 1:14a).

G. Address confidentiality and nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) on a case-by-case basis, where the person with less power has the option of continuing it or not, and create a policy to limit NDAs in the future (Appendix C – Confidentiality: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly).

Specific grounds for this recommendation include recognizing that non-disclosure agreements have been used in an abusive manner to silence those harmed, and to protect the leaders at the expense of those already harmed and at the expense of those that will be harmed as it is covered up and kept secret. This is abuse of power. God’s way is in the light.

H. Encourage safe church teams to implement a victims support fund at the congregation and classis levels (Appendix D—some suggestions).

Specific grounds for this recommendation include the fact that a victims support fund was mentioned in the 2010 Victims Task Force Report approved by synod and has had limited implementations since then.

I. Amend Church Order Article 85, which currently reads, “No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer.” This is inadequate. The following proposed revision to Article 85 is indicated by underline: No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer, or lord it over the priesthood of all believers or over anyone.

Specific grounds for this recommendation acknowledge that lording it over is abuse of power and betrays the sacred trust given to officebearers. Scripture specifically states that we are not to lord it over anyone (Matt. 20:25; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). This addition intentionally clarifies whom that includes and that it is not limited to officebearers. When leaders exercise dominion (lord it) over those entrusted in their care, this implies a wrong exercise of authority. This serves the interest of the leaders, instead of those they serve, which is abuse of power. *Dominie* is based on the Latin word from which *dominate* and *domineer* are also derived. This is lording it over instead of servant leadership.

Also, this recognizes that the NIV translations of 1 Peter 5:2 use “under your care” and every other version uses “among” or “entrusted.”

“Under” can make leadership more about a hierarchy of power rather than serving other believers.

Jen Wilkin, a speaker, writer, and teacher of women’s Bible studies, states: “Anytime that there is privilege in the form of power, if a person is moral, if a person loves the Lord, the privilege is something they will lay down for those who don’t have it, and if they are wicked, they will use it to beat others down” (from Advance 2017, General Session #2- Jen Wilkin @ 40:40; <https://vimeo.com/243476316>).

J. Take the necessary steps to insure that leadership at all levels support the Safe Church Ministry and that there are adequate resources to implement the decisions made by synod concerning this ministry (2010 AVTF, III, N; Synod 2014, recommendation d, 5).

Specific grounds for this recommendation are that over the last twenty years, since the start of the CRC Safe Church Ministry (formerly Office of Abuse Prevention), only about half of the classes have a safe church representative and about half of the churches have safe church policies. The rate of implementation of recommendations indicates that even though synod says we take safe church seriously and it is a high priority, there is a significant disconnect in practice in the CRC. These decisions of synod are empty words if on paper but for the most part not happening in practice. This is not acceptable. We can and we must do better!

## Appendix B

### Brief Explanation of the Patterns of Abuse\* Listed in Grounds

The following is a list of common patterns where power can be used to “neutralize” situations.<sup>(5)</sup> This list is not even close to complete. Each section is just a brief summary of a pattern, and there are a thousand and more ways to use that pattern. Many of these patterns are very intertwined, giving an indication of how power can be abused in almost limitless ways and how those exposing the deeds of darkness, pursuing due process, can run into considerable resistance in doing so.

\* What is abuse? The definition of *abuse*: A pattern of coercive control (ongoing actions or in-actions) that proceeds from a mentality of entitlement to power, whereby, through intimidation, manipulation, and isolation, the abuser keeps their target subordinated and under their control. This pattern can be emotional, verbal, psychological, spiritual, sexual, financial, social, and physical. Not all of these elements need be present—for example, physical abuse may not be part of it (from A Cry for Justice website; <https://cryingoutforjustice.com/how-can-i-identify-an-abuser/>).

1. Secrecy: This includes abusing confidentiality through things such as nondisclosure agreements and executive session meetings, in which participants are enjoined to silence (see Appendix C on Confidentiality: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly). This culture of secrecy also includes back-room dealings, manipulation, etc., going on behind the scenes in a “good old boys club” mentality (Ezek. 8). Lack of transparency, keeping abuse and misconduct in the dark, is the enemy’s way per John 3:19-21.

Ephesians 5:11 calls for exposure of what is hidden in the dark; this is God's way. Confidentiality has been used to rationalize the enemy's way of keeping something in the dark, that God wants dealt with in the light. When there are serious concerns and problems being intentionally hidden, this gives a false perception that all is well. Authoritarian styles of leadership often use secrecy to control that things look good from the outside, and they are more concerned about appearance than doing what is right, especially if it is perceived as a threatening situation to leadership.

2. Silence: There is an unspoken code of silence(6) that often goes hand in hand with various types of abuse in the church. This can be manifested in many ways, including misusing confidentiality, which has already been referred to in the section on secrecy. A response of silence includes when leaders refuse to acknowledge, address, respond to a complaint or situation, or when they stonewall and stall, so that "it" will go away. This often "works" because the person who is bringing the situation to the leaders has already been harmed and often does not have much emotional capacity to also deal with resistance from leadership. Whatever happened already has been painful and hurtful for them, and the response often makes it worse. Victims are often already weak and vulnerable, and running into resistance can be too much for them. They have to protect their emotional stability, and so give up. So "sin works."(8)

Victims who share their story are frequently told (by leaders) that they are "slandering" and/or "gossiping." Sometimes leadership will make those harmed sign a nondisclosure agreement as a way to silence the victims. These can be manipulative types of spiritual abuse.

3. Control: Controlling/authoritarian leaders expect submission and loyalty. This can include narcissistic leaders. These leaders feel very threatened by anyone that might expose them and their unhealthy behavior. Narcissism and the systems it breeds is a huge discussion on its own. However, "threatened systems kill their prophets," so it is very difficult for narcissism to be discussed and exposed.(9)

Controlling, narcissistic leadership can use what is called "the silent treatment." It is probably one of the most common forms of emotional abuse used by narcissists when all the above tactics have been tried and have failed. Narcissists use the silent treatment as a form of punishment for not acquiescing to their point of view or as the way to gain the upper hand and control in their relationships. The "silent treatment" can include something as subtle and seemingly slight as refusing to shake your hand, but shaking everyone else's hands. This sends the message "you do not deserve to even be acknowledged" that no one else can hear. The "silent treatment" is also a way to avoid discussing important issues in the relationship and avoid taking accountability for wrongdoings. The silent treatment is intended to make the victim feel unloved, invalidated, and insignificant. The use of the silent treatment is usually about control.(10)

4. Cover up: It is a sad fact that many leaders in organizations, when faced with the choice of protecting an abusive leader or victim, choose to protect the leader (and thus the institution) rather than the victims of that abuse. All too often, victims report that the failure of the leaders to respond well

to their cries for help cause more harm than the original abuse. That is the exact opposite of what God calls his leaders/people to do.

5. Intimidation/fear/bullying: A quick way for churches to NOT have to deal with abuse victims or culpability is to bully them till they leave. This is another tactic that leaders will use and abuse to various degrees. Victims and their supporters are threatened that they will lose their jobs. They are shunned, bullied, discredited, shamed/humiliated, and attacked. If you question or challenge the leaders, there is backlash and repercussions, including being blocked from serving in leadership positions and being shut down. The leaders make victims give up and quit/drop the charges. The victims (and having to deal with the problem) go away.
6. Abuse (beyond bullying)—especially spiritual, emotional, and verbal abuse: Leaders will twist Scripture to silence victims and shut victims and advocates down. Examples include calling the victims and advocates who are seeking justice divisive, gossips, slanderers, unforgiving, demonic, unwilling to submit to authority, etc. Victims and advocates “get thrown under the bus.” Revilers/abusers are addressed in 1 Corinthians 5; irresponsible and abusive shepherds are addressed in Ezekiel 34.
7. Manipulation: Abuse of power is often very subtle and very difficult to discern and prove for various reasons. Sometimes there are master manipulators orchestrating the various types of tactics to protect those in power, possibly themselves. The manipulation can be subtle, indirect and covert, so it can be very hard to discern and prove, but if the one who abused is now perceived as the victim and the victim is now perceived as being abusive, that is a good indication one may be dealing with a master manipulator.(10)
8. Deception: Leaders can reframe the narratives to be very misleading, distorted, and inaccurate, and can twist the meaning of words, etc., similar to propaganda tactics. When confronted, abusive leaders will call their deception a misunderstanding, deny being deceptive, or play word games for what the leader meant.(11)
9. Cause confusion and chaos: Things do not add up. This includes a lack of clarity, inconsistent behavior, mixed messages, etc. (Ps. 55:21). This is sometimes referred to as “gaslighting” or “crazy making.”
10. Deny, deny, deny: If leaders do acknowledge the complaint, the response is often to outrightly deny it. Once this tactic starts, then the leaders put themselves in a position that will make them look even worse, if it is true, and then have to cover up the cover-up. Again, many victims give up when they run into continued resistance from leadership, when they were hoping that the leaders would be helping them seek justice, protection, restitution, or whatever the case might be. This is what some leaders hope for, whether intentionally or not, that this “problem” will go away. This often leaves those who are hurt stuck in their pain and adds years to the healing process, if not decades.
11. Minimize and dismiss: If they can no longer deny the allegations, this is often the next level that leaders will try to use to make the case go away.



Leaders will try to minimize the seriousness of the situation or the harm done in a multitude of ways, using statements such as “Hey, we all sin”; “We each just need to look at our own sin”; “All sin is the same in God’s eyes”; and other “Nobody’s perfect” types of statements(13).

12. Forgive and move on: Victims can be pressured/forced to forgive before they are ready—and if they don’t, then they are perceived as the perpetrators. Even with forgiveness, it is very difficult for those who are hurt to move on when there is very little to no effort by leaders to restore the sacred trust by doing what is right. Leaders can push “forgiveness” in a spiritually abusive way, with the intent to make the person go away and be quiet instead of dealing with the wrongdoings. It is very helpful to understand that forgiveness does not restore trust in leaders; it only opens the door for leaders to restore that trust. It is the responsibility of the leaders, who *must* restore the trust through their accountability and actions, or the sacred trust will continue to erode.
13. Blame shifting: Shifting the blame to the person harmed is a very common pattern. A common example is to blame a woman for being raped because of what she was wearing or because she was drinking. Another common shift is to blame the person exposing a problem and to make that person the problem, instead of the problem itself.
14. Various distortions: Greater fear of legal liability than fear of the Lord; more concern with violating the Church Order than violating the Word of God; the institution becomes primarily about sustaining itself, so people are serving the institution, instead of the institution serving the people(12); those in the pulpit (dominie/clergy) are treated as more important than those in the pew (laity) allowing a “lording it over” leadership style(26) instead of viewing all as the priesthood of all believers; we distort Jesus when we cover up the horrors of abuse within our churches in order to allegedly “protect the reputation of Jesus.”(23)
15. Technicalities: Technicalities, whether legitimate or not, are sometimes used to avoid doing what is right or to avoid dealing with a difficult issue. Technicalities are sometimes used to dismiss or delay an appeal/ overture when leaders do not want to deal with the substance of the issue for various reasons. Technicalities are sometimes used as a reason to dismiss any restitution or response to the situation, allowing the leadership to abdicate or postpone its responsibility. This is harmful and hinders due process and hinders the healing of those already harmed. This is the exact opposite of what God calls leaders to do, and its sadly more in line with pharisaical patterns (2 Cor. 3:6).
16. Empty words: Recommendations and decisions look good on paper but are not practiced. Ephesians 5:6 tells us not to be deceived with empty words. Decisions can be made and approved to address something, so the resolution is on paper, but it never gets implemented, and the trust in leadership continues to erode. The CRC has done this with some of the decisions made in the past dealing with abuse and safe church issues. In a recent hearing, a victim impact statement by Olympic gymnast Aly Raisman included “talk is cheap” and “talk is worthless” without



action(25). Congregations, classes, it is past time to implement the Synods 2010 and 2014 decisions.

Almost all, if not all, of these patterns are used by people with a narcissistic-prone personality, but these patterns of abuse of power are not limited to narcissistic leaders.

## Appendix C

### Confidentiality: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: How Confidentiality Is Used, Misused, and Abused

First, to be clear, confidentiality is a good thing in the right context. There are times and situations for it. However, far too often in institutions we have sacrificed transparency, integrity, discernment, and bringing things into the light, on the altar of confidentiality. Silence, secrecy, and cover-up have deceptively been called “confidentiality.” This deceptive confidentiality has been used far too often to disregard God’s principle of bringing things into the light. It has been used to keep victims silent, which almost always hinders their healing. It has been used to cover up and hide ungodly behavior that is meant to be publicly rebuked and exposed (1 Tim. 5:20), and it allows the abuse to continue and others to be harmed as well.

Certainly, there are privacy concerns and procedures to follow, and reasons why things are done as they are. But when it comes to sexual misconduct, harassment, and unwanted touch and words inside the church, the price for silence is extraordinary—just ask the Catholics.(C4)

There is an almost universal reluctance to deal with certain problems, especially sexual sins, which make us very uncomfortable. Exposure of sinful behavior can cause serious consequences, and human nature prefers a “safe” environment to disclose our dirty deeds, so we won’t have to face the consequences. This is unhealthy and unbiblical. It hinders the healing that discipline brings to the person committing the misdeed, and it hinders the healing of those who have been harmed by such misdeeds.

A key Scripture that reveals how “confidentiality” can be misused and abused is John 3:19-21:

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Alarm bells should be going off in our head if we are hiding something, if we are afraid of what will happen if people know about our behavior. That is a warning that whatever deed we are doing, we probably should not be doing. That is one of the ways the Spirit is helping lead us out of temptation (1 Cor. 10:13).

Confidentiality is a complex issue, and it takes wisdom and discernment to evaluate this on a case-by-case basis. Strict confidentiality is not possible for Christians who practice counseling in the context of a local church; there are limits to our confidentiality in a church setting.(C2)

**The good:** Yes, there are a few proverbs that talk about keeping things in confidence. This is appropriate as long as it is in the best interests of protecting the vulnerable, the weak, and the voiceless, and as long as they have a voice in that decision and are not coerced into silence. Counselors, lawyers, pastors, and other professions have an expected ethic of keeping things in confidence that have been shared with them. The breaking of confidence can destroy trust. But whether confidentiality should be kept or not depends on whether it is in the best interests of those harmed and of those who have the least power.

The CRC ordination liturgies stress that our leaders “hold in trust those matters confided to them in counsel and confession,” “guiding and counseling in strictest confidence,” “keeping in confidence those matters entrusted to them,” and “hold in trust all sensitive matters confided” to them—over and over and over, confidentiality is emphasized.(C3) That is a good thing in many situations, but in some situations it is not.

**The bad:** The bad involves misuse of power that is not intentional and can be out of ignorance or negligence. Silence and secrecy labeled as “confidentiality” ironically can destroy the sacred trust that is given to leaders, as the leaders misuse and abuse confidentiality. In some instances, confidentiality has been used at a cost to those who have been harmed and misused at an incalculable cost to the *ekklesia*, to the bride of Christ. As one CRC leader stated, “Confidentiality is killing us.” Another spiritual leader recently wrote regarding the church’s lack of response to the #metoo movement: “Listen, the silence [of the church] is really loud.” So it is time to tear down this often subtle and invisible wall of silence and secrecy that is being used in ungodly ways to protect those in power at the cost of those harmed. This wall has been used to allow offenders not to be held accountable and instead insulates them from the consequences (Prov. 17:15), which sends the message that they and others can commit ungodly conduct and get away with it(C1; p. 126). Others come to believe that they too can engage in ungodly conduct without immediate consequences(C1; p. 128). When churches refuse to hold offenders accountable, they are standing not only against the oppressed and defenseless but also against God(C1; p. 187). Sin that is not confessed and dealt with will always grow worse and worse(C1; p. 125). Sadly, the *ekklesia* is paying the price by the eroding and destruction of the sacred trust when abuse gets covered up.

“Confidentiality” can stunt the growth of the *ekklesia*, the priesthood of all believers, when the rationale is used that the people should not know about something because they might gossip about it. This indicates that the leaders have not helped to teach and equip the *ekklesia* on how to process such information in a mature and responsible way. Treating the *ekklesia* like children stunts the growth and maturity of the bride of Christ. It sounds like a good reason, but it is actually unhealthy. The church needs to take the next steps and train and equip people for how to use wisdom and discernment with the knowledge one has(C7; *Spiritual Abuse Recovery*, Barbara Orłowski; p. 113, footnote 168).

Following is an example of when “gossip” was used as an excuse to silence parents, resulting in decades of suffering for the children who were abused:

I often give the example of an investigation we were involved with a number of years ago where a missionary doctor had been sexually victimizing a number of the missionary children. When one of his victims came forward and disclosed the abuse, the leaders of the mission field brought the other families together and informed them that this doctor had admitted to sexually abusing a child and had been sent home. Unfortunately, the mission leaders also proceeded to tell the families, "We're going to take care of this; we're handling it, and any discussion of the matter will be considered gossip." Most of the parents heeded that directive, and as a result never asked their own children whether they had been abused by this man. Tragically, a handful of the . . . children had been, but it wasn't until 15-20 years later that this information surfaced. The children, who by then were young adults, could not understand, in all of their grief, in all of their trauma, why mom and dad had never asked them about it, had never broached the topic with them. They could have had twenty years of counseling behind them, and a lot of trauma and self-medication could have been avoided had the parents made the inquiry, but because they were following this ridiculous directive not to gossip, they never did. And that wounded the lives of many young people. (<http://www.claireroise.com/2017/05/02/interview-with-boz-part-one/>)

Nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) are often part of an agreement between parties in conflict that each party will agree to not discuss whatever happened. There are times and situations where this might be appropriate, but NDAs tend to be overused. NDAs can be very unhealthy for the one harmed, as not being free to talk about what happened hinders their healing, and the anger and bitterness take longer to resolve, and that hinders other people's healing. Sharing and processing whatever happened is a key part of the healing journey. When the victim is silenced, the healing takes much longer. Silence empowers the abusers. Speaking empowers those who have been harmed. Giving opportunities for those who have been harmed to share their story brings healing, opens doors for justice, and empowers others to share their stories. The church needs to recognize it is to the advantage of those in power to silence these stories, and it is to the advantage of those harmed that these stories are shared. Who are we called to serve? The task of a leader is to show how grace seeks out the lost soul, reawakens the spiritually demoralized, and encourages spiritual growth (C7; *Spiritual Abuse Recovery*, Barbara Orłowski; p. 56, footnote 159).

**The ugly:** The ugly is abuse of power that is intentional to benefit and/or protect those in power at the expense of others. Abusers thrive on secrecy and silence—it is the tool of the enemy. Secrecy and silence hide the corruption going on in the "old boys club" powers that be. The weak and vulnerable often pay the consequences. Protecting the offender while silencing the victim is injustice under the guise of mercy. The conspiracy of silence in the church may be an invitation for narcissistic leaders to be emboldened to continue their abusive practices (C7; *Spiritual Abuse Recovery*, Barbara Orłowski; p. 29, footnote 28).

"Woe to those who . . . rob the needy of justice and . . . take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless" (Isa. 10:1-2, NKJV).

There are unspoken rules in our society and churches. One such rule is the "do not talk about it" rule, also known as the "code of silence." There is a reason *Time* magazine on December 6, 2017, named "the Silence Breakers"

as the persons of the year for 2017. *Time* recognized how silence has been protecting those who abuse their power at the expense of those harmed.(3)

Good people never pretend to be evil, but evil people pretend to be good(C1; p. 59). There are master manipulators (<https://exploringyourmind.com/7-ways-identify-master-manipulator/>).

The following are some of the ways abuses have been kept secret, and these tactics can be very similar to those mentioned under "The bad."

Nondisclosure agreements: Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees. God is outraged by those who "make decrees" in order to rob the needy of justice. Unrighteous decrees include written policies and procedures, confidentiality agreements and nondisclosure agreements that silence the voices of those harmed and their families to keep things secret, protecting the reputation of those in power(C1; p. 162). Silence seriously hinders the healing of those harmed. Many people have unresolved trauma for decades due to being silenced. Mitch Garabedian, attorney for more than 80 abuse victims of the Catholic church, encouraged his clients to refuse to sign NDAs (Mitchell Garabedian; attorney; Boston; [http://www.snapnetwork.org/mitchell\\_garabedian\\_interview\\_with\\_here\\_now](http://www.snapnetwork.org/mitchell_garabedian_interview_with_here_now)).

Executive and strict executive sessions: this effectively silences any discussion of the situations. In some situations, it can be used as a gag order and to protect the institution from liability. Again, secrecy is the result, protecting the perpetrator. This is in direct opposition to the Word of God, which says leaders are to be rebuked in public for ungodly conduct, before all as a warning to others (1 Tim. 5:20). Executive sessions do not qualify as public in any way, shape, or form. It seems there is a greater fear of litigation than a fear of the Lord.

Forced forgiveness: the intent can be to get the situation behind the leaders as quickly as possible with minimal damage to the leaders and institution, not what is best for the victim. The leaders are sending the message "You don't matter, your pain doesn't matter, and the injustice doesn't matter. We just want our life and ministry to be undisturbed"(C1; p. 119). The message is "The leader is more important than the victim." Then, once the victim forgives, leaders tell them they cannot talk about the situation anymore, because if they do, that will show they did not really forgive that person. Again, this type of response does not help with healing, as it is spiritual abuse and can add to the harm.

Do not gossip: Talking about abuse is often called gossip. It is not! Gossip is idle chatter. Abuse is not an idle matter. It is a very serious matter, and awareness and education regarding abuse and ungodly conduct need to increase. Ignorance is not acceptable. We need to give people permission to talk about it instead of accusing them of gossiping, as sharing their story is part of the healing journey. When abuse can't be talked about, people feel isolated and alone, instead of connecting with others who have gone through similar experiences. "If a leader can control someone by saying that if they speak about a situation, they're gossiping and that's sinful, well . . . that works with many people. . . . *Oftentimes, the gossip threat is just another way of church leadership silencing people so they can handle it in their own way. It's really all about control*" (emphasis added; Boz Tchividjian – professor of law, founder of GRACE [Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment], <http://www.claireroise.com/2017/05/02/interview-with-boz-part-one/>)

These are some ways Scripture is twisted as scriptural concepts such as confidentiality are distorted and used to silence the victims and empower the abusers. This is the exact opposite of what God calls the church to do. This is spiritual abuse!

Victims cannot heal in silence. An untold story never heals. Let's work toward encouraging open and honest dialog, dignifying victims by listening to their stories.(9)

Anyone, especially believers, who is aware of something being covered up that allows abuse to continue and others to be harmed, has a responsibility to speak up and not stay silent, no matter what they signed or agreed to.

Churches must say "No" to conspiracies of silence!

**Resources:**

- 1) *Tear Down This Wall of Silence: Dealing with Sexual Abuse in Our Churches (an introduction for those who will hear)*, Dale Ingraham, Rebecca Davis (Ambassador International, Apr. 3, 2015)
- 2) <https://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2012/06/12/strict-confidentiality/>
- 3) *1987 Psalter Hymnal*, CRC; liturgical forms, pp. 996, 1004-1005
- 4) <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers/>;  
<http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers-choice/>
- 5) <http://pres-outlook.org/2017/12/metoo-silence-church/>
- 6) <http://www.geftakysassembly.com/Articles/AssemblyTeachingPractice/CodeOfSilence.htm>
- 7) *Spiritual Abuse Recovery: Dynamic Research on Finding a Place of Wholeness*, Barbara M. Orlowski (Wipk & Stock, 2010)
- 8) <https://theestablishment.co/how-abusers-rely-on-shame-to-keep-victims-down-87f2d8b9f57d>
- 9) <http://www.marydemuth.com/when-rapists-win/>

**Appendix D**

**Victims Support Fund** (see *Agenda for Synod 2010*, AVTF, II, C and III, G)

There are many options here. This appendix lists just a few. The hope is that the Safe Church Ministry can increase its funding/resources so that the synodical decisions can be adequately implemented in 100 percent of the congregations and classes and help facilitate a Victims Support Fund (VSF) at the congregational and classical levels.

Some suggestions follow:

Encourage CRC congregations to take a special offering once a year on Safe Church Sunday. Sharing \$5-\$10/member to benefit Safe Church Ministry with additional resources would help bear one another's burdens and assist with the cost of counseling and other costs for people who have been harmed in the CRC due to various abuses on a case-by-case basis. This sharing of counseling and other related costs on behalf of other believers would be based on the New Testament principles of sharing needs in the family of God. When the body of Christ comes together to pray, encourage, and provide for one another, burdens are lifted and God is glorified (Samaritan Ministries).

Create/organize a voluntary board to help oversee the VSF. This board could include members who have experienced harm either directly or indirectly due to abuse in the CRC (this would be helpful in their healing to be a part of the solution), along with counselors, safe church reps, etc. This board would not be just for financial provision but also for prayer and encouragement for those who have been harmed, and for support and encouragement for the safe church teams at the local and classical levels along with the CRC Safe Church Ministry staff, recognizing they qualify as some of the *TIME* people of the year for 2017!

Each request can be assessed, processed, and extended on a case-by-case basis as appropriate, by the local safe church team and/or the classis level of safe church or the voluntary board that was created specifically for this fund. For example, the VSF could use a portion of the funds to cover counseling for up to one year, up to \$5,000 to start with, where there has been abuse by someone who is/was in the CRC.

In especially difficult situations, the classis level VSF could use a portion of the funds to help people like Wesley Heersink who had very serious needs, far above and beyond counseling.

These funds can be used to help someone process an appeal and retain an advocate. Otherwise the appeal process can be a financial burden. The victims can experience loss of work time, along with the emotional and spiritual burden the process already adds. Appeals are often not an option because of the financial strain they can add to an already difficult and painful situation.

These funds can be reevaluated annually, depending on how long the gifts last.

A portion of the offering/fund can be used to augment the CRC Safe Church Ministry so that it is adequately resourced to carry out the recommendations adopted by synod and achieve 100 percent participation at the classical and congregational levels.

## **Appendix E**

### **Past Recommendations Adopted by Synod**

#### **I. Recommendations adopted by Synod 2010 from the Abuse Victims Task Force Report**

(Each of these had grounds included in the report; see *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 862-66.)

1. That synod urge councils to provide for the pastoral care needs of the claimant, the accused, families, and congregation when an allegation of sexual abuse against a church leader is brought forward.
2. That synod urge councils, when an allegation of sexual abuse against a church leader is brought forward, to immediately appoint a person or small group of persons, accountable to the elders, who will ensure that the pastoral care needs of the claimant, the accused, families, and congregation are addressed; when circumstances make it extremely difficult to address the pastoral care needs of any of those involved using pastoral resources of the congregation, that the council arrange for pastoral care through a neighboring congregation or other caregivers.

3. That synod reaffirm the decision of Synod 2005 in its support for restorative justice principles and their application in the way that churches respond to abuse issues, recognizing that it will not be appropriate in all cases.
4. That synod encourage churches and agencies to take steps to increase awareness and understanding of restorative justice teachings and their relevance for life within the church, among both pastors and church members.
5. That synod, to begin implementation, allow for pilot projects in the use of restorative justice practices in response to specific situations of abuse by church leaders, provided that recognized restorative justice facilitators are available and participation is genuinely voluntary. Pilot projects and evaluations of them will be coordinated by the Safe Church Ministry to share the learning for application to other cases.
6. That synod encourage councils to develop a plan for providing financial assistance for abuse-related counseling, if and when it is needed, as a diaconal response to a person in need, as early as possible and without judgment regarding any future claims. Options for consideration are a classis counseling fund, an arrangement with a local counseling or mental health agency, or other appropriate means.
7. That synod advise councils to annually review their policies for abuse prevention and liability coverage.
8. That synod encourage councils to use a restorative justice framework in decisions regarding restitution following sustained sexual abuse allegations against a church leader.
9. That synod strongly encourage councils to participate in yearly training on topics such as effective abuse prevention, the complexities of abuse situations, the denominational abuse response guidelines, and comprehensive healing for everyone affected by the situation.
10. That synod direct the BOT to instruct the executive director to develop additional educational resources on abuse prevention and church leader misconduct that are easy to understand and readily accessible for church members in general (e.g. brochures for church information centers, and specific resources on the dynamics of abuse by church leaders for church council members).
11. That synod direct the BOT to instruct the executive director to develop a handbook, as soon as possible, that clearly describes the roles and responsibilities of church council members when an allegation of sexual abuse by a church leader arises, for distribution to church council members as soon as it becomes available and to every new council member when each begins office as well as when a case arises, and for easy reference throughout the process.
12. That synod adopt the revised "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader" as indicated in Appendix A.
13. That synod direct the Board of Trustees to take the necessary steps to ensure that adequate resources are available to implement the recommendations in this report (emphasis added).
14. That synod dismiss the Abuse Victims Task Force with thanks.

Also:

That synod make the following declaration of confession in response to Communication 1:

We, the Christian Reformed Church, confess that we have not always justly and compassionately helped those who have been sexually abused. Furthermore,



we confess that we have not always justly or adequately disciplined church leaders who have been abusers. We humbly ask forgiveness from those we have failed. We thank God for the progress we have made, and we commit with God's help to do better in the future."

Note: The above declaration was read in the form of a prayer by the delegates to synod.

(*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 866-67)

## II. Recommendations adopted by Synod 2014

(See *Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 559-60.)

- a. That synod commend the work of the Office of Safe Church Ministry as it seeks to educate, encourage, and lead churches in implementing and maintaining policies approved by previous synods.
- b. That synod again remind all churches in the denomination of the critical importance of documenting, developing, and implementing a safe church policy and remind all classes in the denomination of the vital importance of a safe church team. There are many resources available from the Office of Safe Church Ministry and on its website. The director informs us that only 22 of the 46 classes have formed safe church teams. A safe church team is an important part of the pastoral care that the church offers to its members. Awareness and prevention, if given high priority, can minimize the risk of abuse and the damage it causes.
- c. That synod instruct the executive director to work with staff teams, such as the Better Together team, to explore ways of developing and promoting safe church teams in each classis.
- d. That synod take note of the following five goals that continue to guide the work of Safe Church Ministry:
  - 1) Each church has implemented a written Safe Church/abuse prevention policy.
  - 2) Each church includes abuse prevention in its church school and youth education. Programs such as Circle of Grace, which teach positive respect in relationships, are recommended.
  - 3) Each church has protocols in place for responding to misconduct and is aware of the recommended "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations against a Church Leader" approved by Synod 2010.
  - 4) Abuse is acknowledged as an important issue and can be freely discussed.
  - 5) **Leadership at all levels is supportive of Safe Church Ministry, and each church is represented on a classis Safe Church team** (emphasis added).

## Appendix F

### References and Resources

- 1) <https://ruthkrall.com/downloadable-books/elephants-in-gods-living-room-volume-one/>; chapter 12 - Clericalism
- 2) *Forgiving the Church*, Judy De Wit (IUniverse, 2011), pp. 32-44; *Understanding Abusive Church Leadership*, Judy R. De Wit (IUniverse, Inc., 2012)
- 3) *Clergy Sexual Misconduct*, John Thoburn, Ph.D., Rob Baker, M.A. (Gentle Path Press, 2011), p. 72

- 4) <http://religionnews.com/2015/12/07/spotlight-its-not-just-a-catholic-problem/>; Boz Tchividjian
- 5) *In the Name of All That's Holy*, Anson Shupe (Praeger Publishers, 1995), pp. 79-100
- 6) *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, David Johnson, Jeff Van Vonderen (Bethany House, 1991), p. 68
- 7) <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/abuse-boz-tchividjian>
- 8) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2015/march-online-only/when-sin-works.html>; Chris Nye
- 9) "Narcissism and the System It Breeds," Dr. Diane Langberg, 2016; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BU3pwBa0qU>
- 10) <https://freefromtoxic.com/2015/06/16/the-8-most-common-narc-sadistic-conversation-control-tactics/>; Bree Bonchay LCSW
- 11) <http://religionnews.com/2015/05/15/a-grand-deception-the-successful-response-of-sex-offenders/>; Boz Tchividjian
- 12) <http://religionnews.com/2015/08/28/false-narratives-of-christian-leaders-caught-in-abuse/>; Boz Tchividjian
- 13) "Order more Millstones," 9.7.17; <http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/blog/marie-fortune/256>
- 14) Church Refugees, Josh Packard, Ph.D., Ashleigh Hope (Group, 2015), p. 61
- 15) Spiritual refugee definition: a refugee is someone that leaves their home/country, not because they want to but because it is no longer safe for them there. A spiritual refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their church in order to escape oppression, manipulation, or abuse. It is spiritually dangerous for them to stay. (<https://nakedpastor.com/2014/12/do-you-identify-as-a-spiritual-refugee/>)
- 16) *Breaking the Silence within the Church*, Judy R. De Wit (Iuniverse, 2010), p. 46
- 17) <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/14/564158465/after-sexual-harassment-accusations-congress-moves-toward-mandatory-training>
- 18) *Seven Snares of the Enemy*, Erwin W. Lutzer (Moody Publishers, 2001), pp. 79-95; <https://blog.perspectivesjournal.org/2017/12/16/we-need-to-talk-about-sex/>, Chuck Degroat
- 19) [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ellie-hamalian/how-pornography-fuels-exp\\_b\\_6187936.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ellie-hamalian/how-pornography-fuels-exp_b_6187936.html)
- 20) *Tear Down This Wall of Silence: Dealing with Sexual Abuse in Our Churches* (an introduction for those who will hear), Dale Ingraham, Rebecca Davis (Ambassador International, April 3, 2015)
- 21) [https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/safechurch\\_taskforce.pdf](https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/safechurch_taskforce.pdf)
- 22) <https://www.thebanner.org/news/2011/01/report-calls-for-better-response-when-leaders-abuse>
- 23) <http://religionnews.com/2017/12/19/winter-inside-the-church-and-the-hope-of-christmas/>
- 24) <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/sites/default/files/constituents/HEN17B45.pdf>
- 25) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWWFB6RZwgg&feature=youtu.be> (Aly Raisman, Jan. 2018)
- 26) <http://caryschmidt.com/2015/02/the-dangers-of-lording-leadership/#!prettyPhoto>

27) [crcna.org/sites/default/files/Safe%20Church%20Ministry%E2%80%9494A%20Church%20Leader%20Role.pdf](http://crcna.org/sites/default/files/Safe%20Church%20Ministry%E2%80%9494A%20Church%20Leader%20Role.pdf)

Suggested websites/authors for additional resources:

[crcna.org/SafeChurch/safe-church-teams](http://crcna.org/SafeChurch/safe-church-teams)

Boz Tjividian (GRACE/Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environment)

Diane Langberg (Global Trauma Recovery)

Judy De Wit (New Beginnings Counseling)

*Scripture Passages That Address Justice*

It is not right to acquit the guilty or deny justice to the innocent. —Proverbs 18:5, NLT

Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – both are detestable to the LORD. —Proverbs 17:15, NLT

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice. —Proverbs 31:8-9, NLT

Put a mark on the foreheads of all who weep and sigh because of the detestable sins being committed in their city. . . . The city is filled with injustice. —Ezekiel 9:4, 9, NLT

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign LORD (the LORD of Hosts): What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep? You who drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty. So My sheep have been scattered. . . . And though you were My shepherds, you didn't search for My sheep when they were lost. You took care of yourselves and left the sheep to starve . . . for you fat sheep pushed and butted and crowded My sick and hungry flock, until you scattered them to distant lands. —Ezekiel 34:2-5, 8, 21, NLT

"For they have treated the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' When there is no peace. —Jeremiah 8:11, AMP

After Jesus clears the temple in Jerusalem, driving all the dealers out with a whip (John 2:13-16), then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures (Ps. 69:9): "Passion for God's house has consumed me." —John 2:17, NLT

Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. . . . Beware lest anyone cheat you through (hollow) philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. —Colossians 2:4, 8, NKJV

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it must be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant. . . . For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. —Matthew 20:25-26, 28, NLT

He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. —2 Corinthians 3:6, NIV

### **Overture 3: Approve Transfer of Stephenville (Texas) CRC from Classis Central Plains to Classis Rocky Mountain**

With gratitude to God for the time it has spent in ministry with Stephenville (Tex.) CRC, Classis Central Plains overtures Synod 2018 to approve the transfer of Stephenville (Tex.) CRC from Classis Central Plains to Classis Rocky Mountain.

*Grounds:*

1. In past years, there were other CRCs which ministered in Texas and were members of Classis Central Plains. These churches have either disbanded or transferred to a different classis. This has left Stephenville CRC as the only church in Texas that is a member of Classis Central Plains.
2. Even though Classis Rocky Mountain meets in Colorado, there are several other CRCs in that classis located in Texas. The nearest CRC is in Austin, Texas—less than a three-hours drive from Stephenville. A transfer to Classis Rocky Mountain would allow Stephenville CRC greater classis involvement and greater awareness and support for its neighboring Texas churches.
3. The transfer would help Stephenville CRC foster greater collaboration when planning special ministry events or mission opportunities.
4. Sharing the same classis with the other Texas churches would help promote greater ministerial fellowship, in which challenges and opportunities unique to Texas could be more openly and readily discussed.
5. Travel from Dallas, Texas, to Des Moines, Iowa, at this time is fairly limited and makes travel to Classis Central Plains meetings extremely inconvenient. Travel options to Denver, Colorado, are far more plentiful and would provide an added relief in flexibility for delegates to classis.

Classis Central Plains  
Rod Spoelstra, alternate stated clerk

### **Overture 4: Permit Transfer of Stephenville (Texas) CRC from Classis Central Plains to Classis Rocky Mountain**

With a deep desire to follow God's leading and profound thanks in our hearts to Classis Central Plains, Classis Rocky Mountain of the CRCNA overtures Synod 2018 to permit the transfer of Stephenville (Tex.) CRC, from Classis Central Plains to Classis Rocky Mountain.

*Grounds:*

1. In past years there were other CRCs that ministered in Texas and were part of Classis Central Plains. Those churches have either disbanded or