be supported by a classis or an adjoining classis. A better solution would be to *encourage* classes to take a larger proactive role in supporting new or current Resonate missionaries without *requiring* a classis or adjoining classes to raise *all* the support for missionaries.

Grounds:
1. Missionaries already have rich relationships with individuals and churches that they will not want to give up if assigned to a particular classis to raise all their support.
2. There is some concern as to whether a classis (let alone adjoining classes) could successfully compel their churches to support Resonate Global Mission missionaries.
3. There is concern as to the capacity of some classes to fully support Resonate missionaries in addition to church planters, campus ministers, and other regional mission work.
4. More and more support comes from individual donors who may not be limited to a region.
5. Resonate is improving home service practices through a review initiated in fall 2018.

H. That synod take note of the COD's endorsement of the report of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee and consider and respond to the following recommendations contained within the report (COD Supplement section I, G and Appendix C):

1. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Ms. Kathy Vandergrift and Ms. Patricia Van Reenen, cochairs, when matters pertaining to the report of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee are discussed.

2. Training of pastors

    That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to form a committee to develop a training program on abuse of power. The committee shall include members from the offices of Candidacy, Pastor Church Resources, Safe Church Ministry, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin College (because of available expertise). The training program shall

    - be a requirement for all persons entering vocational ministry in the CRC.
    - focus on dynamics of power within the variety of pastoral relationships, boundaries, tools for positive use of power and influence, and tools for preventing harmful use of power and influence.
    - be widely available and presented as enabling effective ministry (not as an impediment to entering ministry).
    - take into account the cultural diversity within CRC churches.

3. Code of conduct

    That synod mandate the committee appointed by action in Recommendation 1 to draft a code of conduct for all employed ministry staff within the CRC. The draft code of conduct will be presented to Synod 2020 for approval. The code of conduct shall be

    - signed by all ministry personnel who are employed by the CRCNA, local churches, and classes.

- reviewed annually, as part of annual evaluations.
- included in the Supplement to the Church Order, with links to relevant Church Order articles.

4. Prevention of abuse in CRCNA offices

    That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to review the adequacy of the training provided to CRCNA staff, the adequacy of the provisions for support to a complainant, and mechanisms to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the process for dealing with complaints. A review should be informed by careful listening to persons who found the processes helpful and persons who did not.

5. Training at classis and local levels

    a. That synod encourage all classes to develop a strategy to train officebearers and key church leaders to be alert to power dynamics within the communities they serve and to be equipped to prevent abuse of power. The goal of the strategy is to ensure that all officebearers receive initial training and refreshment through ongoing educational initiatives. An effective strategy will include the following:

        - appropriate training resources
        - reasonable time allocation for training
        - acknowledgment and monitoring of completion of training

    b. That synod encourage all classes to monitor implementation of the training strategy and to consider adopting policies to include completion of training and safe church policies in the regular review of credentials or as a requirement for being seated at a classis meeting.

    c. That synod mandate the executive director to develop, in cooperation with Safe Church Ministry, Pastor Church Resources, Calvin College, and others, a resource toolkit for training officebearers and leaders, readily accessible through the CRC website and Faith Alive Christian Resources.

6. Strengthening Safe Church Ministry

    a. That synod mandate the executive director to oversee the development of appropriate measures for responding effectively to emotional abuse. Such measures will include definition, inclusion in relevant CRC policies, and appropriate responses through restorative practices and the safe church advisory panel process.

    b. That synod mandate the executive director to oversee a review of the adequacy of safe church policies for follow-up in reported cases that involve church leaders. Findings and actions taken by the executive director shall be reported to the Council of Delegates to ensure that the CRCNA is exercising due diligence to prevent repeat occurrences or transfer of abusive leaders to other churches. The review shall consider best practices in church abuse ministry.

    c. That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to examine in detail the potential for conflicts of interest in current safe church procedures and to evaluate the need for and

benefits of using outside experts to deal with situations that have a high potential for conflicts of interest.

7. Policy on non-disclosure agreements

That synod direct the executive director to do the following:

- review the history of the use of nondisclosure agreements within the CRCNA to draw learnings from it, be transparent about its frequency, and contribute to greater public accountability
- develop a policy with criteria for the use of NDAs that limits their use to cases in which it is clearly in the best interests of the victim and the church and not acceptable when solely motivated by protection of the reputation of the church and its leaders. The policy should include a provision for some form of review by an independent party before final signature by the two main parties.
- develop good practices and protocols on the use of NDAs for distribution to classes and councils when faced with situations that might lead to the use of a nondisclosure agreement
- develop a reporting and accountability mechanism to monitor practices going forward

8. Funds for counseling services

a. That synod encourage all classes to take measures to ensure that survivors of abuse within their classis have access to appropriate counseling services.

b. That the annual report of each classis for the CRC *Yearbook* include information about a counseling fund or other arrangements to ensure access to counseling services for abuse survivors.

9. Abuse prevention resources for culturally diverse churches

That synod mandate the executive director to give a high priority to providing information about existing policies and mechanisms for abuse prevention and response in forms that use the language, examples, and styles of learning that are culturally appropriate for the Korean, Latino, Chinese, African-American, and Indigenous communities, through Safe Church Ministry and Pastor Church Resources. In each context, the tools shall be developed with input from members of the community to ensure they will be accessible and useful for members of the community.

10. Recordkeeping

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates and executive director to put in place a system of recordkeeping of cases that come to the attention of all levels of church authority, to allow for the analysis of patterns and trends over time, without compromising the confidentiality of individual persons. Collection of data should include some record of responses and outcomes, as well as reporting of incidents.

11. Creating a culture that prevents abuse of power

a. That synod affirm the following as core values for the culture within the CRC:

- mutual respect for every person as created by God and equally responsible to respond to God's call to use their gifts for God's mission in the world, including the ongoing work of building God's church
- an understanding of servant leadership that emphasizes mutual submission as a corrective to the hierarchical tendencies within our culture
- mutual accountability through checks and balances built into governing structures

b. That synod affirm the importance of care in the use of language within church assemblies, with attention to the impact of language that harms the ability of others to fully exercise their gifts and calling.

c. That synod refer this report to the Classis Renewal Advisory Group to consider how the role of regional pastors and church visitors might be strengthened to foster a respectful culture and support churches with early assistance in situations that may give rise to concerns about abuse of power.

d. That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to establish a team that would act as a guardian of our commitment to foster a culture characterized by respect for all and mutual service. Consideration should be guided by the following features, which draw on good practices in other sectors of society for preventing and responding to all forms of abuse of power:

- The mandate would include the use of a range of measures designed to allow early intervention in response to complaints, including mediation, conflict resolution, and restorative justice tools.
- The mandate would include concerns about abuse of power that may cross lines between the denomination, classes, and individual churches. The team might serve an "ombudsperson" role within the internal human resources system and for cases that cross jurisdictions, without violating CRC governance of the local church by the local council.
- Position holders outside the "chain of command" within the established organizational and management structure would help to foster confidence because they are "independent" but accountable through reporting to the Council of Delegates and through their ability to bring issues to the attention of the Council of Delegates if needed.
- The role of the team would be reviewed after three years for effectiveness, as part of the follow-up to this report.

12. Implementation

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to ensure implementation by

- monitoring progress at each meeting of the COD.
- making necessary adjustments in specific plans.
- reporting to synod each year on progress made toward specific objectives and toward the general goal of creating a culture in which abuse of power is not tolerated and any incidents are dealt with in a way that contributes to the healing of broken relationships.

I. That synod take note of the annual report provided regarding classes that have implemented a Safe Church team, and progress by the remaining classes; also reported is the

number of congregations that have Safe Church teams and policies (COD Supplement section II, A, 4 and Appendices D1 and D2).

J.   That synod receive the agencies and institutional unified budget as information and approve a ministry share of $346.48 for calendar year 2020 (COD Supplement sections II, B, 1-2).

K.   That synod adopt the 2019-2020 denominational salary grid for senior positions as proposed (COD Supplement section II, B, 4).

L.   That synod adopt the following recommendations with reference to agencies requesting to be placed on the recommended-for-offerings list:

1.   That synod ratify the list of above-ministry share and specially designated offerings for the agencies and institutions of the CRC and denominationally related ministries, and recommend these to the churches for consideration (COD Supplement section II, B, 5).

2.   That synod ratify the list of nondenominational agencies, previously accredited, that have been approved for calendar year 2020 (COD Supplement section II, B, 6).

3.   That synod ratify inclusion of the following organization on the accredited agency list (COD Supplement section II, B, 7):

> *United States*
>
> The Colossian Forum
>
> > *Ground:* The goal of the Colossian Forum is to contribute to the reversal of the exodus from the church by equipping leaders to engage divisive cultural issues in ways that are far more interesting than the wider culture in its fragmentation. They do so by drawing on tradition-specific practices, confessions, and resources that cultivate in believers the virtues they need to engage "wicked problems" productively (see the *Wicked Problems* short video at colossianforum.org/wicked-problems).

H.   That synod take note of the COD's endorsement of the following actions of the Pension Trustees (COD Supplement section II, B, 8):

1.   The three-year average salary to be used to determine retirement benefits beginning in 2020 for ministers of the Word in the United States is $54,054 and in Canada is $56,140.

2.   That the 2020 per-member assessment for the Canadian Plan remain $42.96 and that the Canadian per-participant assessment remain $9,840. Similarly, that the 2020 per-member assessment for the U.S. Plan remain $37.20 and the U.S. per-participant assessment remain $7,704.

> Council of Delegates of the
> Christian Reformed Church in North America
> Paul R. De Vries, chair

Appendix C
Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee

Executive Summary

Power can be used to serve God and others; it can also be misused and do great harm to others and the community. Abuse of power can take many forms. All of them have serious impacts, including spiritual impacts—especially when they occur within the church family. This report combines scriptural reflection, research, and learning from experience to better understand the dynamics and impacts of abuse of power within the church family. With Jesus as our model for exercising the power of love, rather than the love of power, this report focuses on listening, learning, and caring for those who are most affected when power is abused.

Abuse of power happens within all communities, including the Christian Reformed Church. Effective prevention and response require focused attention and intentional actions at all levels of the church, from the local church to the denominational offices. Appropriate actions include strengthening awareness and training, assistance and restoration for persons who have been abused, appropriate discipline, and accountability.

This report describes the complex interrelationships within the CRC that need to be considered to develop effective measures to prevent abuse, end the silencing and minimization of abuse when it happens, and engage in practices that can restore broken relationships.

In a close community like the CRC, addressing abuse of power requires checks and balances within our systems of governance. This report examines available evidence of patterns of abuse within the CRC, what is presently being done to prevent and respond to abuse, and gaps in our policies and practices. The analysis draws on what is known about good practices in abuse prevention in church communities. Based on this analysis, the report addresses systemic gaps from training to accountability.

Recommendations for action include a strategy for training at all levels, including measures to ensure that all employed ministerial staff will have some training. A code of conduct is recommended to articulate common expectations about respectful behavior within our complex set of relationships. Recommended measures to improve our response to abuse include greater recognition of the harm done through emotional and verbal abuse, improved vigilance to prevent repeat occurrences, reducing the use of nondisclosure agreements, incorporating more restorative practices, and improved monitoring and reporting for greater accountability.

Outline of Report
I.   Introduction and mandate
II.   Biblical foundation and pastoral theology
    A.   *Learning from Scripture*
    B.   *Implications of Jesus' model for pastoral practice*
III.   Understanding abuse of power
IV.   Understanding abuse of power within the CRC
    A.   *Evidence and indicators of patterns of abuse of power within the CRC*
    B.   *Understanding cultural factors that relate to abuse of power in the CRC*
    C.   *Understanding abuse of power and cultural diversity within the CRC*
V.   Preventing and responding to abuse of power
VI.   Measures to strengthen prevention of abuse of power
    A.   *Strengthening prevention through training for pastors*

     B.   *Strengthening prevention through a code of conduct/code of ethics*
     C.   *Strengthening prevention of abuse of power within the CRCNA offices*
     D.   *Strengthening prevention through the screening process for appointment to leadership positions in the CRCNA*
     E.   *Strengthening prevention through training for officebearers and leaders in classes and local churches*

VII. Measures to strengthen responses to abuse of power
     A.   *Strengthening response to abuse of power through Safe Church Ministry*
     B.   *Strengthening response to abuse of power by ending secrecy in nondisclosure agreements*
     C.   *Strengthening response to abuse of power through funds for counseling survivors*
     D.   *Strengthening response to abuse through culturally appropriate resources for culturally diverse churches*
     E.   *Strengthening response to abuse of power through increased accountability*

VIII. Creating a culture that does not enable or tolerate abuse of power
IX. Implementation
X. Recommendations
Addendum: Budget Implications of Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee Recommendations

I. Introduction and mandate

    Abuse of power can happen in all social, cultural, and religious groups. The damaging impacts of abuse within the CRC were drawn again to the attention of synod in 2018. Pastoral concern to prevent harm and restore broken relationships motivated the establishment of this committee and our work to prepare the following report.

    At the recommendation of its Advisory Committee 4, Congregational Services I, in response to an overture to "address patterns of abuse of power," Synod 2018 instructed the Council of Delegates, in consultation with the executive director,

> to appoint a small team to bring recommendations through the Council of Delegates to Synod 2019 regarding how the CRCNA can best address patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination.
>
> *Grounds:*
> 1.   It is necessary for us to continue to examine and update how best to protect all people against abuse, including the abuse of power, especially at the local level.
> 2.   Requiring the appointed team to report in 2019 does not delay action unnecessarily long.
> 3.   The appointed team should find new measures that will extend the actions of previous synods in protecting persons who are vulnerable.
> 4.   Overture 2, along with the work now begun by Pacific Northwest and other classes, should be able to provide the appointed team a helpful start for their consideration (i.e., requiring training of all pastors in the area of awareness of abuse of power).
> 5.   We are not equipped as an advisory committee, nor as delegates on the floor of synod, to discern the best way forward regarding Church Order or steps that might be possible or effective.
>   (*Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 523-24)

The mandate adopted by the Council of Delegates for an ad hoc team reporting to the COD is as follows:

> To provide suggested goals and methods for the CRCNA to address patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination. In developing the suggested goals and methods, the ad hoc team shall consider the grounds synod provided with the instruction.

Synod 2018 and our committee accepted the basic description of the issue of abuse of power in Overture 2 to Synod 2018 (see crcna.org/synodresources or *Agenda for Synod 2018*, pp. 282-307). In its work our committee focused on strategies and specific measures that could be implemented by synod to prevent abuse of power and improve the response to those who suffer harm as a result of abuse of power. As well as the grounds provided by Synod 2018, the committee offers to Synod 2019 a reflection on the biblical foundations for both prevention and pastoral response to abuse.

Synod 2018 explicitly asked the committee to build on and not repeat previous reports and recommendations, including recommendations adopted by Synods 2010, 2014, and 2016. The committee reviewed those reports, affirmed them, and recommends them to the churches for implementation. We then focused attention on gaps in current policies and on practical recommendations to advance implementation. The committee also carefully considered the intent of synod to include all forms of abuse of power, which is broader in scope than the safe church issues that prompted the earlier reports. This report responds to the repeated call during Synod 2018 to also address the deeper factors that contribute to incidents of abuse and that cause harm to members of the body of Christ within the CRC.

II. Biblical foundation and pastoral approach

A. Learning from Scripture

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!
>
> (Phil. 2:1-8)

> The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals.
>
> (Ezek. 34:1-5)

The Scriptures are not silent about abuse of power and its destructive impacts. King David's manipulation of events for a selfish sexual encounter with Bathsheba and its consequences are described in detail (2 Sam. 11-12). The Lord, speaking through Ezekiel, confronted the shepherds of Israel about the damage done by their abuse of power (Ezek. 34). These are just two examples of damage done to the abused and consequences for the abuser. In the first case, David was disciplined; in the second, the Lord says the shepherds of Israel will be held accountable and removed from their positions.

In contrast to these stories, Jesus' ministry is a positive model for exercising power. The full power of God is available to him; but instead of manipulating events for his own benefit, Jesus uses power to bring life for others—for individuals and for the world. In Philippians 2, Paul describes how Jesus exercised power. He did not use power to take control of the people he was sent to love and redeem. In a very profound way Jesus demonstrated God's use power by becoming human like us in order to serve us. The life of Jesus is an example of love and power—but not love of power. The love of power destroys people and communities. The power of love builds and restores people and communities.

Power, understood as relational human capital, can be used to benefit the possessor or do for others what they cannot do for themselves or might have difficulty doing by themselves. Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. In doing so, Jesus serves as a model for our use of power. Our use of power can also be life giving, life limiting, or death dealing. The biblical witness is clear in its intent for the use of power: it should be used in service to the other and not for "selfish ambition or vain conceit" (Phil. 2:3). Power is most safely employed when, in humility, we value others above ourselves. The ministry of Jesus includes many stories in which Jesus shows restraint in using his legitimate authority to judge or condemn others; instead Jesus uses his power to restore life to others.

Jesus' model of using power for restoration is remarkably different from what was modeled by the religious leaders around him. The restoration that abuse survivors desire was missing in the approach taken by the religious leaders, but it was found in the way Jesus used power to restore dignity and honor. Survivors have often found the church's leadership and its structures as unsupportive and thus causing further harm. Unfortunately those who disclose abuse often experience the negative use of power to bring a person down rather than the positive use of power to be understood and find safety and restoration.

Power must be propelled by the Christian love ethic. Using personal and communal power to serve the other (the most vulnerable or the "least of these" among us) is consistent with and demonstrates the love of God. The synoptic witnesses are clear that our love of God is inseparably connected to the way we treat other people.[1] Jesus works against the established power of the religious rulers and instead loves people in such a way that their dignity is restored and they can return to a rightful place in the community.

B.   *Implications of Jesus' model for pastoral practice*

Misused power has the ability to steal, hurt, and destroy. Instead of a life of faith lived out in gratitude, a survivor is thrust into a life of guilt and shame. As a result, a survivor naturally questions the reality of grace. Marian Lovelace captures the spiritual impacts of abuse in the church:

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[1] See Matthew 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34.

You stole my unquestioned belief in my Heavenly Father's love;
You stole the preciousness of solitude in God's presence.
You stole the joy of coming together to share Eucharist
You stole my reverence for the deep meaning of a church family.
You stole my ability to be quiet and hear God's voice.
You stole my belief in the phrase "God answers prayers."
You stole the joy I felt in calling myself "Christian."[2]

The experience of survivors is a starting point for ministry. Care for people whose spiritual well-being, lives, and bodies have been broken by abuse of power needs to be at the center of discussions about church polity, the theology of abuse, and local church programs. If the harm done is minimized, abstract policy statements may appear godly and reflect the letter of the law but fail to live out the spirit of the law and deny the power of God to transform lives.[3] If abuse occurs within the church, the Christian response should include taking responsibility to recognize the abuse, hold the perpetrator(s) and enabler(s) of abuse accountable, and use the appropriate authorities and resources within and outside of the church to begin the process of healing and restoration. All abuse within the church, whether it is physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse, is also spiritual abuse and has spiritual impacts for the church as the family of God. This also needs to be considered in a Christian response.

To deny our power at all levels of the church is to live in an illusion, and it is sinful. Denying one's power reflects an attempt to abdicate one's responsibility to God and neighbor. We are called to use power to exercise grace; consider the effects of the abuse of power on individuals, congregations, and the denomination; and practice restoration. Each member plays a part in providing safety and recovery within the institutional church.

The Christian Reformed Church could be a positive public witness in our current society, with the focus on #MeToo and #ChurchToo, by following Jesus' model for using power in life-giving and faith-affirming ways. As a committee, we hope that the recommendations in this report will encourage the church to be a bearer of shalom. With Christ as our model, we minister to all members of the church, move toward the practical outcomes of his teaching, and anticipate its integration at all levels within the CRC.

III. Understanding abuse of power

The term *abuse of power* is often defined as "misusing power to harm another person, or using power and influence for personal gain at the expense of another person." This captures the core in a wide range of types of abuse, from bullying and harassment to emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual assault. It focuses attention on the misuse of a position, authority, or influence to take advantage of, manipulate, or control another person. In the church context, abuse of power draws attention to the responsibility of those with power to be mindful of the dynamics of relationships in which the other party has less power and may be vulnerable to undue influence or manipulation.

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[2] Poem titled "Stolen, Not Lost" by Marian Lovelace from *Responding to Clergy Misconduct: A Handbook by Marie Fortune* (Seattle, Wash.: Faith Trust Institute, 2009).
[3] See 2 Corinthians 3:4-6; 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

Power can be used positively or negatively as articulated by Andy Crouch in his highly regarded book *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power.* This is also reflected in the following typology developed by Rollo May:
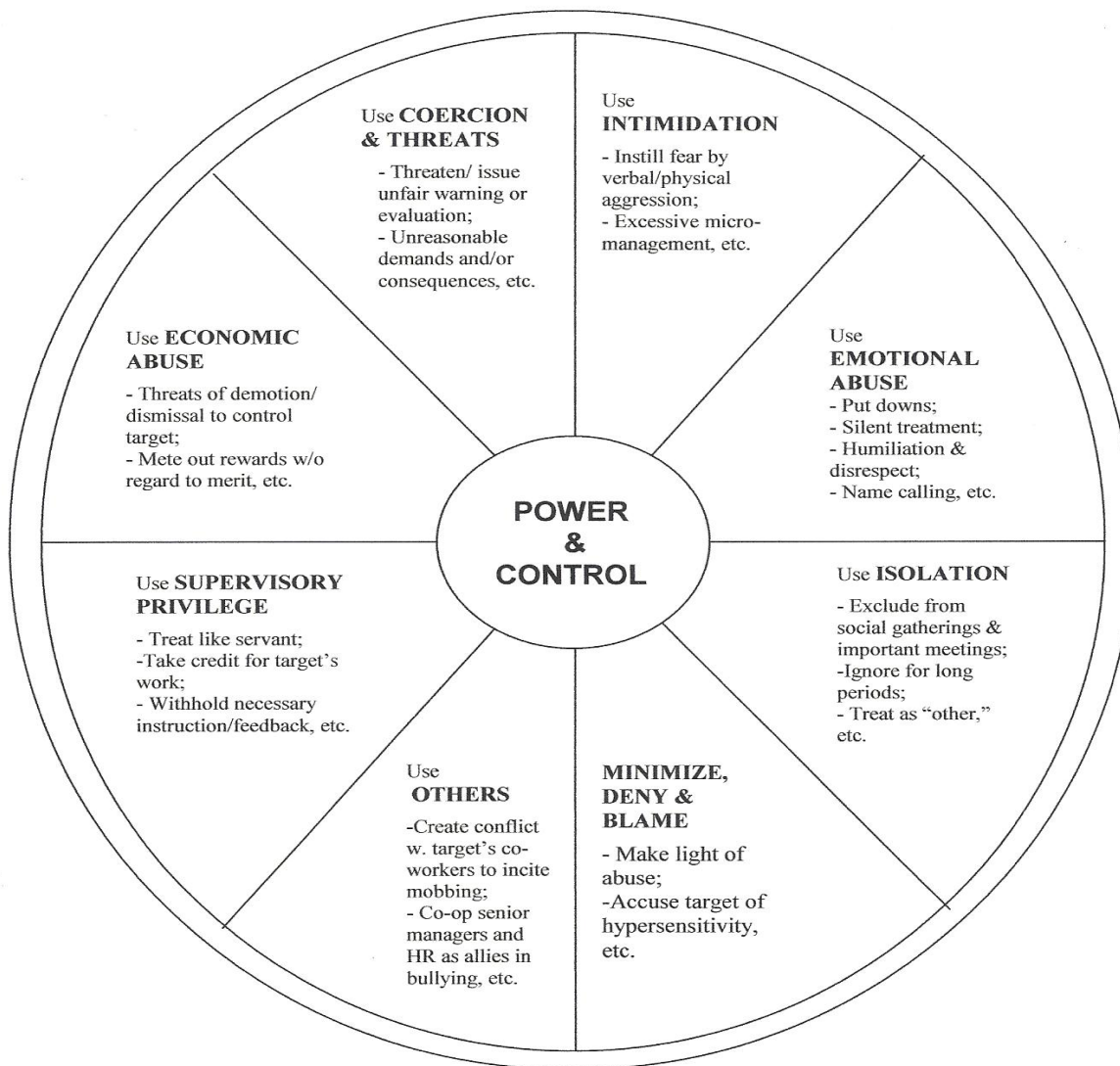
- *Exploitative* power dominates by force and coercion.
- *Manipulative* power controls by more subtle and covert psychological means.
- *Competitive* power is ambiguous since it can be used constructively where parties are relatively equal but is destructive where they are unequal (as in most pastoral relationships).
- *Nutritive* power sustains and empowers.
- *Integrative* power takes the freedom of others seriously and seeks to harness the other person's (potential) strengths.[4]

To better understand the relationship between different forms of abuse of power, it is helpful to use a tool such as the Power and Control Wheel, which has been adapted for different contexts. Power, depicted at the center of the wheel, is present in all relationships. The wheel illustrates various behaviors that can be unconsciously or consciously used by those with power to gain unfair advantage or to harm others. The more these behaviors are evident in a relationship, the greater the risk for abuse and potential violence.

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[4] See Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, c. 2013). The typology of Rollo May, from his book *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Power* (1972) is used by Kat Litchfield to analyze power dynamics in *Tend My Flock: Sustaining Good Pastoral* Care (London: Canterbury Press, c. 2006), pp. 36-42.

WORKPLACE POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL*

Use **COERCION & THREATS**
- Threaten/ issue unfair warning or evaluation;
- Unreasonable demands and/or consequences, etc.

Use **INTIMIDATION**
- Instill fear by verbal/physical aggression;
- Excessive micro-management, etc.

Use **ECONOMIC ABUSE**
- Threats of demotion/ dismissal to control target;
- Mete out rewards w/o regard to merit, etc.

Use **EMOTIONAL ABUSE**
- Put downs;
- Silent treatment;
- Humiliation & disrespect;
- Name calling, etc.

POWER & CONTROL

Use **SUPERVISORY PRIVILEGE**
- Treat like servant;
- Take credit for target's work;
- Withhold necessary instruction/feedback, etc.

Use **ISOLATION**
- Exclude from social gatherings & important meetings;
- Ignore for long periods;
- Treat as "other," etc.

Use **OTHERS**
- Create conflict w. target's co-workers to incite mobbing;
- Co-op senior managers and HR as allies in bullying, etc.

MINIMIZE, DENY & BLAME
- Make light of abuse;
- Accuse target of hypersensitivity, etc.

This graphic was adapted by Patricia G. Barnes (http://abusergoestowork.com) from the Duluth Model Power and Control Wheel, a tool created 30 years ago by domestic violence advocates to help explain the phenomenon of domestic violence. See: http://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheelgallery.php

IV. Understanding abuse of power within the CRC

The reality of abuse of power within the CRC community is recognized. During deliberations at Synod 2018 delegates were asked to raise their hands if they had personal knowledge of sexual abuse, one form of abuse of power. A large majority raised hands. Whenever abuse is discussed at synod, many delegates speak from painful knowledge of cases within their experience. In 2010 synodical delegates engaged in a time of repentance for the

collective failure to respond adequately to cases of physical and sexual abuse in our denomination.

A.   Evidence and indicators of patterns of abuse of power within the CRC

In 1989 a survey and study of abuse within the CRC concluded that the prevalence of abuse within the CRC is similar to its prevalence in society. Twenty-eight percent of respondents reported experiencing at least one of the three forms of abuse considered in the survey: 12 percent reported physical abuse; 13 percent, sexual abuse, and 19 percent, emotional abuse. Reported cases by gender indicated women victims accounted for 85 percent of sexual abuse, 78 percent of emotional abuse, and 77 percent of physical abuse. The majority of physical and emotional abusers were family members; that was not true of reported sexual abusers. While this study named *abuse of power* as a central element of all forms of abuse, it did not use that terminology in the survey.[5]

While the existence of cases of abuse of power is widely recognized, accurate data about the patterns of abuse does not exist. Most incidents of abuse of power are not officially reported. Many are dealt with at the local level, and records are not kept. Reported incidents are not tracked in any systemic way. There is no sharing of data, central recordkeeping, or analysis of incidents for patterns or trends. The committee discerned patterns of abuse through careful listening and confirming common experiences in different places and parts of the CRC.

There are indications of a wide range of types of abuse. The Office of Pastor Church Resources, for example, reports an increase in requests for advice and workshops to deal with bullying and emotional abuse. Cyberbullying and personal attacks through social media are increasing within the CRC, as well as in society. Abuse of office, sexual misconduct, and "ungodly conduct"—the generic term in the Church Order—are found as the reasons for removal of pastors, other officebearers, and hired staff from their positions each year, but more specific records are not kept. A repeated complaint from churches is that they find out about previous patterns of abuse by a pastor only after a repeat incident, because there are no notations on personnel records and churches do not share that information when a pastor is called to a different church. There have been legal actions against individual CRC churches and classes for failure to adequately respond to cases of abuse. Records are not kept, and there are no available statistics or analyses of these cases. The committee notes that reporting and learning from analysis are important for healing within churches and for effective prevention.

Patterns that warrant more attention also emerge from the experience of Safe Church Ministry. The Safe Church Ministry office responds to enquiries about a wide range of abuse issues. However, the approved protocol for responding to abuse, the Advisory Panel Process, is limited to allegations of physical or sexual abuse against a church leader. Data provided by the Safe Church Ministry office over the past three years indicate an increase in significant incidents of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse: 42 situations in 2016, 46 in 2017, and 76 in 2018. The incidents range from inappropriate contact and harassment to sexual abuse by a pastor. A majority of enquiries relate to current incidents, while a few seek help for the impacts of past experiences. In 2017 three classes used the Advisory Panel Process to respond to allegations of sexual abuse by church leaders, and each of them resulted in discipline of a pastor.

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[5] Committee to Study Physical, Emotional, and Sexual Abuse (Report 30), *Agenda for Synod 1992*, pp. 313-385 (available at calvin.edu/library/database/crcnasynod/1992agendaacts.pdf).

The Safe Church Ministry office responds to calls with advice, but it does not have a mandate to follow-up and does not have records of whether further action was taken. This is true even in cases that might be considered violations of the law if they were reported to the police. In cases of child abuse, callers are informed of mandatory reporting requirements. It is important to respect the agency of the complainant to report or not report an incident, but it is also important for the church to identify patterns of abuse early in order to effectively respond and prevent additional harm within the community.

An overview of enquiries to Safe Church Ministry reveals patterns that are commonly identified in available research on abuse within churches:

- denial and minimization of the seriousness of what was done
- silencing the victim in order to protect the reputation of the leader or church
- not officially reporting incidents, including ones that might be considered assault or sexual assault under current laws
- leaving the church because of failure to respond when abuse was named

B.   *Understanding cultural factors that relate to abuse of power in the CRC*

Abuse of power is a relationship issue. Relationships within the CRC warrant particular care because many of them cross the boundaries of different kinds of relationships: friends, birth families, extended families, close-knit church families, officebearer to member relationships, pastor to member relationships, pastor to governing body relationships, and professional relationships such as counselling and pastoral care. Church councils were identified in the 2010 Abuse Task Force report as the critical link for effective action. They find themselves in tension between supporting the pastor, depending on the pastor's leadership, and having to call the same pastor to account in complicated and sensitive situations. Pastors need to differentiate and establish boundaries to manage multiple roles. Church councils and congregations need to recognize the many different layers of the pastor's role and support them in setting boundaries.

The CRC places strong value on loyalty to family and church and on honoring and following leaders and authority figures. High priority is given to defending the reputation of "our church," with a tendency to suppress individual members who bring forward uncomfortable evidence that could threaten that reputation. Trust and reluctance to question leaders with charisma is common in all churches and is identified in the literature on abuse prevention in churches. It is difficult to call popular leaders to account, and group-think in close cultures and council rooms tends to rally behind leaders, leaving individuals who find the courage to disclose abuse of power easily marginalized. Stories indicate a pattern of leaving the church rather than speaking up. The committee also heard that "spiritual" and pious language are frequently used to manipulate others in cases of abuse of power within the church.

Pastors and other ministry personnel can also be vulnerable to abuse of power, particularly in contexts where churches are under stress and individual lay leaders assume control to save "their church." Abuse of power by lay leaders puts pastors in vulnerable positions under our current systems of governance. The committee also heard about experiences of abuse of power by pastors from other pastors. The contexts include internships, senior pastor/associate pastor relations, and dynamics between pastors at classis or synod. Harm can be done when the line between appropriate exercise of authority and abuse of power is crossed. This speaks to the importance of training and access to avenues to address issues early with restorative practices.

The committee also heard of cases in which staff within the CRCNA office have been subjected to harassment, name-calling, and attacks on their personal and spiritual integrity by elders from individual churches. The behavior goes beyond disagreements over specific actions or policies to harmful personal attacks. These cases present complexities in relation to our governing structures, especially in the context of the current focus on being responsive to local churches.

Resolving differences and related power struggles can be challenging in a culture that puts a high premium on right beliefs and direct links between beliefs and personal life. Conformity is valued, and tolerance for diversity in the way members understand their God-given callings is not high. The CRC's theological commitment to restorative justice as the way to acknowledge harm done to others and repair broken relationships has not permeated its culture.

These cultural factors can contribute to situations in which people enable abuse of power but concurrently want to deny that it happens in "our church." Close communities like the CRC require intentional checks and balances within all levels of governance in order to effectively prevent and respond to abuse of power. The recommendations of this committee are designed to strengthen those checks and balances.

C.   *Understanding abuse of power and cultural diversity within the CRC*

Addressing abuse of power in institutions that want to respect cultural diversity requires a nuanced understanding of power in the context of diversity. Definitions that originate in the dominant culture can be perceived as lacking respect for cultural expressions of piety in another culture. Forcing a dominant cultural understanding on another culture can be received as another form of "abuse of power." As Christians committed to covenant relations, this issue requires that we discern together how best to walk with God in our personal and church lives and how to publicly witness to God's vision for healthy relationships within and between all cultures. That means careful attention and nuance in multicultural settings.

The committee recognized that including persons from diverse backgrounds in the "small group" required by our mandate would be important but could never be adequate on its own, might be perceived as tokenism, and could leave out important voices. To be more effective, the committee decided to meet with various identified subgroups within the CRC to discuss how abuse of power is understood within each community and what would be effective strategies to prevent and respond to it.

The short time frame allowed for our work made this a challenge. Some members of the committee listened to concerns voiced by some members of CRC churches that work in Korean, Chinese, Latino, African-American, and Indigenous communities. While more discussion and more voices need to be heard, some common patterns were identified, and some suggestions are included for moving forward.

The committee heard some common patterns in the experiences shared:

- Abuse is hidden because of reluctance to talk about it within the church.
- Members who are experiencing abuse do not know where to get help.
- High respect and deference to charismatic leaders, authority figures, and elders silences those with less power.
- Protecting the church and its reputation gets priority over the needs of persons who have been abused.

The committee heard that in some cultural contexts older women serve as "go-to" listeners and advisers for those who experience abuse, but they have limited institutional power to effect change. In other contexts, such as Indigenous churches, the long history of abuse of power, often by those who also brought the gospel message, has left whole communities feeling powerless. Leaders and parents, suffering the impacts of abuse themselves, struggle with limited resources to address continuing patterns of abusive relationships.

In some contexts, such as in Chinese and Korean churches, different life experiences by immigrant parents and children born in North America contribute to misunderstandings that can lead to abuse of power. In emerging culturally diverse churches, as well as in older churches, there are incidents of powerful lay members both taking advantage of their positions within the church and engaging in abusive treatment of pastors. In each cultural context boundaries between what is acceptable behavior and what is disrespectful behavior need to be discussed and clarified because they change over time.

1. Culturally diverse churches and abuse of institutional power

    In addition, the committee heard that some culturally diverse churches within the CRC experience a different kind of abuse of power that could be described as abuse of institutional power. Established churches and leaders from the dominant culture who "know how things are done around here" have power within our system of governance that can do harm to persons from minority cultures who are struggling to find their place within the CRC. The committee heard about situations where those who know the Church Order by heart use it as a weapon to dismiss, marginalize, or silence concerns being raised by minority members and leaders who do not know the Church Order. This leaves them feeling powerless and expected to conform to the "way it has always been done."

    It was also noted that positions of influence within the CRC, such as those of regional pastors and church visitors, are not often held by young people, women, or members of minority cultures whose experience might make them alert to abuse of institutional power. When minority members are part of "emerging churches," the potential for abuse of power is heightened because they have no identified place within the structures that have significant power to determine their future. The business and "good order" motifs in CRC culture can squash those who are struggling when it is used to "fix" problems without a deep understanding of the context.

2. Suggestions for addressing abuse of power within different cultural contexts

    The committee heard that it is a good time to address abuse of power within culturally diverse communities. Opening up the subject to foster discussion and increased transparency was perceived as positive, particularly for younger members of these communities. Creating a culture that actively engages young people in the life of the church is a shared goal for all churches in the CRC; preventing abuse—one element of that culture—is a common goal, but will require training methods that fit each cultural context.

    There was positive response to the suggestion of establishing mechanisms that have some distance from established lines of authority, with a mandate to hear concerns about possible abuse of power and to intervene early to prevent situations' being entrenched and more destructive within close communities.

At the level of the local church, effective strategies will include the following:

- intentional steps to talk about abuse of power, reject secrecy, and promote transparency
- using specific contextual stories, without names, to show that abuse of power is real and to foster discussion
- helping local churches to inform their members and to create local policies they can use easily
- inclusion of minority voices in the development of resources and response teams

At the level of classis and the denomination, effective strategies will include the following:

- training that includes examples from specific cultural contexts and opportunities for continuing education and awareness for all church leaders within classes
- training leaders from the dominant culture to be aware of the dynamics of cultural power before they engage with church communities that have a different culture
- finding practical solutions to the "weaponization of the Church Order" within the CRC
- establishing a "place to go" to get help early to resolve situations that suggest abuse of power and to prevent them from becoming more destructive within the community
- appointing more young people, women, and minority leaders as regional pastors and church visitors with training to be alert to and assist early in situations that include concerns about abuse of power. Perhaps positions could be designated to cross the typical geographic boundaries in order to respond more effectively to equally important factors such as cultural difference, gender issues, and generational divides.

Additional discussions within culturally diverse church communities will be held to further inform this work so that the CRC can include culturally sensitive strategies in the implementation phase.

V. Preventing and responding to abuse of power

The serious impact of abuse of power warrants more effective action to prevent it and to respond appropriately when it occurs. That was articulated in Overture 2 and accepted by Synod 2018. It was noted that many of the actions recommended by Synod 2010 and reinforced by Synods 2014 and 2016 have not been implemented. Year after year, synod has passed recommendations for classes and churches to take identified actions to prevent abuse, such as establishing safe church teams. Synod 2018 took note of the fact that many churches still do not have in place the basic tools for preventing and responding to abuse.

There has been some progress. Early results of a *Yearbook* survey for 2019 suggest modest improvement. At this time 760 churches have responded, out of a total 1062 churches who received the survey. Out of the 760 respondents,

- 86 percent have a written safe church or abuse prevention policy.
- 36 percent have protocols in place for responding to church leader misconduct.
- 28 percent have a safe church team or committee.

- 16 percent require training for pastors, elders, and deacons regarding the use and potential abuse of power associated with their position.
- 7 percent use a prevention program with children and youth (Safe Church recommends *Circle of Grace*).

Reports from classes indicate that, with 48 classes reporting, 12 have an active safe church team and 28 are working toward an active team. Eight classes did not answer the question; five provided a name of a contact who provides leadership for safe church within the classis.

So, while the issue is being addressed to varying degrees in some CRC churches, many still do not have training, policies, or protocols in place for addressing abuse of power. The committee reviewed previous decisions, explored reasons for lack of implementation, and identified gaps for a more systemic approach that would be more effective.

The implications of our covenantal, locally based form of governance were considered in order to present practical options for action. Failures to take abuse seriously by one part of the church body affect other parts. The committee heard about the following pattern, for example: Church X puts a focused effort into preventing and responding to abuse. They call a new pastor, and only later do they learn about a history of abuse that was not part of the record when the pastor was called. This amounts to breaking covenant between churches as much as does holding beliefs that are not consistent with CRC creeds, but there is no accountability for such violations of covenantal relationship within the CRC community.

Persons who have experienced abuse of power within the CRC and have been silenced and shunned legitimately feel their covenant relationship with the CRC was broken when they disclosed the abuse. The committee heard stories of people leaving the CRC because of failures to handle abuse cases well, including significant numbers in individual churches in some cases, but there is no tracking of that pattern.

The committee heard evidence of victims being re-victimized or sidelined as appeals of their cases were processed by the Judicial Code Committee and synod as matters between pastors and classes, while the victims were talked about but their voices were no longer heard. This practice breaks the covenant relationship between an individual and the CRC at a critical point when a person should be able to count on all levels of the CRC for support and healing. It also violates the basic principles of restorative justice, which the CRC has officially endorsed.

All of these considerations weighed on the committee. This led to a focus on strategic actions that synod and the CRCNA can take within their spheres of influence to exercise due diligence in prevention, in dealing with allegations of abuse, and in responding to those who have been affected. The recommendations below are designed to strengthen policies and mechanisms that can provide more checks and balances within our covenantal community to prevent abuse to the best of our ability and to respond more effectively when it does happen.

VI. Measures to strengthen prevention of abuse of power

Given the serious harm done when power is abused, the first priority is to take all feasible measures to prevent abuse of power. This includes creating conditions that foster respectful relationships, with special attention to the dynamics of relationships between those with power by virtue of position or influence and those who are vulnerable to being unduly influenced by

those in positions of power. The goal is to create a culture that does not tolerate abuse of power or enable it through actions or failures to act.

A growing body of research on good practices in prevention of abuse within churches highlights the following components:

- broad-based awareness
- training of leaders
- using codes of conduct for accountability
- strong, independent processes for dealing with complaints

The CRC is making significant progress in two of these areas: broad-based awareness and an advisory panel process for dealing with complaints of physical and sexual abuse. The committee, in keeping with the directions of synod, focused attention on two big gaps in the CRC: the training of leaders and a code of conduct that provides a clear basis for enhanced accountability. The committee reviewed what is presently done with regard to training, screening, and other preventive strategies and makes the following recommendations.

A.   Strengthening prevention through training for pastors

Seminaries in general deal with the issue of abuse of power in two ways. First, many seminaries have written policies on abuse of power and screen seminary students before admission. Policies also provide protocols for reporting when abuse occurs within the seminary. Second, some seminaries offer courses in which one of the objectives is learning to deal with abuse of power issues. This is typically covered in courses on pastoral care, spiritual formation, or ethics.

Calvin Theological Seminary informed the committee that psychological testing of applicants is extensive and that topics related to abuse of power are covered in various courses, such as Bible study, pastoral theology, systematic theology, and leadership in ministry. Training continues through the Vocational Formation program and by way of case studies in the Capstone course. Mandatory reporting is included in the pastoral care class; CRC Church Order is taught in the church polity class; and voluntary town halls are hosted with Safe Church Ministry staff.

However, not all CRC ministers attend Calvin Theological Seminary; training varies in other seminaries; and some pastors do not attend seminary. So it is not simple to discern what training pastors have. Therefore an effective training program for pastors in the CRC will need to take into account the various paths into ministry. There are at least five ways to enter ministry in the CRC:

1.   Pastors are ordained after graduation from Calvin Theological Seminary and obtain credentials through a process managed by the CRCNA.

2.   Commissioned pastors are called by a particular church for specific ministries. They are encouraged to take a certification program at Calvin Theological Seminary.

3.   The Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC), for persons seeking ordination who are graduates of seminaries other than Calvin Theological Seminary, requires one semester at the seminary to fulfill candidacy requirements.

4. Under Article 8 of the Church Order, a pastor who is ordained in another denomination (besides the RCA) may be examined and ordained in the CRC through a *colloquium doctum* at the classis level.

5. Under Article 7 of the Church Order, persons with extra special gifts and a calling for ministry can be examined and ordained through a process within their classis.

Currently there is no requirement for training to understand power dynamics and to respond to abuse of power that would apply to all paths into ministry within the CRCNA. The committee identified the following options to ensure that all pastors receive training:

1. Inclusion in the curriculum of Calvin Theological Seminary and in the required class on church polity in the EPMC program.

2. Required training at the level of classis for commissioned pastors and ordained pastors who come into the CRC through Articles 7 and 8.

Recommendation 1 – Training for pastors

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to form a committee to develop a training program on abuse of power. The committee shall include members from the offices of Candidacy, Pastor Church Resources, Safe Church Ministry, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin College (because of available expertise). The training program shall

- be a requirement for all persons entering vocational ministry in the CRC.
- focus on dynamics of power within the variety of pastoral relationships, boundaries, tools for positive use of power and influence, and tools for preventing harmful use of power and influence.
- be widely available and presented as enabling effective ministry (not as an impediment to entering ministry).
- take into account the cultural diversity within CRC churches.

B. Strengthening prevention through a code of conduct/code of ethics

Codes of conduct are used by many professional groups (i.e., doctors, psychologists, social workers, lawyers, and teachers) to provide a guideline or standard for expected behavior in the exercise of their profession. Various denominations also have either a ministerial code of conduct or code of ethics.

A code of conduct provides clarity about the attitudes and behaviors that parishioners can expect from a pastor or from ministry staff in the practice of ministry. The behaviors and ethical practices described in the code are essential for healthy and safe ministry, with significant implications for the recipients of ministry, those in ministry roles, and the church. The code provides guidance for both the parishioner and the pastor/ministry staff, thereby encouraging accountability. A code of conduct is different from the Covenant for Officebearers, which describes beliefs and doctrine but does not include descriptions of behavior.

The Bible is the ultimate guide for Christian living, but it does not provide specific guidance for day-to-day decision making in ministry. Church Order Article 83 provides general guidance by calling for special discipline of officebearers who are "guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct." A code of conduct would

supplement the Church Order by providing more specific guidance and a common standard of expectations for ministry staff, councils responsible for their supervision, and recipients of ministry within the CRC.

A code of conduct can also provide guidance on aspects of contemporary ministry that were not envisioned in biblical times. For example, the handling of information is becoming more important in all walks of life; the church is no exception. Pastors are often confidants, and they are encouraged to guard confidences carefully.

A code of conduct is especially helpful when it is difficult to determine right from wrong or when the boundaries within relationships are not clear or overlap. For example, a pastor frequently has dual roles within a church, such as pastor, friend, and confidant. The ministry role of a pastor can be blurred if a pastor is distracted by a friendship role. Codes articulate boundaries of behavior as well as expectations for behavior. They provide clear markers as to behavior that is prohibited and behavior that is expected.

Recommendation 2 – Code of conduct/code of ethics

That synod mandate the committee appointed by action in Recommendation 1 to draft a code of conduct for all employed ministry staff within the CRC. The draft code of conduct will be presented to Synod 2020 for approval. The code of conduct shall be

- signed by all ministry personnel who are employed by the CRCNA, local churches, and classes.
- reviewed annually, as part of annual evaluations.
- included in the Supplement to the Church Order, with links to relevant Church Order articles.

C.   *Strengthening prevention of abuse of power within the CRCNA offices*

The committee reviewed the policies, training, reporting, accountability, and dispute resolution processes that apply to employees of the CRCNA. The CRCNA policies prohibit a wide range of abusive behaviors and provide access to a complaint process, appeal process, and dispute resolution process. While the committee heard anecdotal stories, it did not have time for a thorough review of the outcomes of CRCNA practices to assess their effectiveness.

Two areas were identified for possible improvement:

1. Training and continuing education about the dynamics of power.

2. Naming someone in an ombudsman-type role with a primary mandate to support a complainant through established processes, with no conflict of interest in other roles or perceived bias toward protecting the reputation of the CRCNA.

Recommendation 3 – Preventing abuse of power in the CRCNA

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to review the adequacy of the training provided to CRCNA staff, the adequacy of the provisions for support to a complainant, and mechanisms to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the process for dealing with complaints. A review should be informed by careful listening to persons who found the processes helpful and persons who did not.

D.   Strengthening prevention through the screening process for appointment to leadership positions in the CRCNA

The committee made enquiries regarding CRCNA practice in screening candidates for senior leadership positions with regard to awareness of dynamics of power, awareness of boundaries in unequal power situations, and awareness of responsibilities to create a culture that does not tolerate any form of abuse. During the course of our work, the CRCNA was able to include these matters in a review of current practice and in a call for proposals that was already under way. The CRCNA has now retained a consulting service that will include awareness of power dynamics and prevention of abuse in testing and interview processes for leadership candidates.

E.   Strengthening prevention through training for officebearers and leaders in classes and local churches

The committee benefited from a parallel initiative under way in Classis Pacific Northwest to develop an effective strategy to prevent abuse of power at the classical level. Synod 2010 adopted recommendations for training at the local church level, but these have not been implemented widely. To encourage implementation, the committee considered a suggestion that questions related to Safe Church Ministry and training on abuse of power should be just as important as other questions that are part of the process for reviewing the credentials of churches within a classis. Such questions might include the following:

1.   Does your church have a current safe church policy? If so, what is the date of the latest review of the policy?

2.   What is the name of the church representative on the classis safe church team?

3.   Have officebearers received training to prevent abuse of power in the exercise of their duties?

If churches cannot provide this information when they come to classis, they can be offered support to develop a policy, receive training, and report to the classical interim committee on their progress. This is a practical way in which classes can encourage the most basic elements of abuse prevention in all churches.

The committee noted that Classis Pacific Northwest has adopted a requirement of four hours of training annually for officebearers on issues of abuse, boundaries, ethics, and the impact of pornography. They recommend that pastors pursue an additional four hours per year of training for self and soul care.

With regard to general awareness-raising, the committee affirms recommendations made by previous synods and resources available from Safe Church Ministry and Pastor Church Resources.

Recommendation 4 – Training at classis and local levels

1.   That synod encourage all classes to develop a strategy to train officebearers and key church leaders to be alert to power dynamics within the communities they serve and to be equipped to prevent abuse of power. The goal of the strategy is to ensure that all

officebearers receive initial training and refreshment through ongoing educational initiatives. An effective strategy will include the following:

- appropriate training resources
- reasonable time allocation for training
- acknowledgment and monitoring of completion of training

2. That synod encourage all classes to monitor implementation of the training strategy and to consider adopting policies to include completion of training and safe church policies in the regular review of credentials or as a requirement for being seated at a classis meeting.

3. That synod mandate the executive director to develop, in cooperation with Safe Church Ministry, Pastor Church Resources, Calvin College, and others, a resource toolkit for training officebearers and leaders, readily accessible through the CRC website and Faith Alive Christian Resources.

VII. Measures to strengthen responses to abuse of power

> "Anyone who may have been victimized by people in power
> needs to know that the church of Jesus is their refuge and champion."
> —Pastor John Ortberg [6]

The committee considered measures to strengthen responses to abuse of power in ways that mutually hold each other accountable within the covenantal body of Christ known as the CRC and lead to healing and to the restoration of broken relationships where possible.

A. Strengthening response to abuse of power through Safe Church ministry

The committee considered the need to strengthen current safe church policies and practice in the following areas:

1. Adding emotional abuse to the definition of abuse that guides the advisory panel process, to be more consistent with the inclusive definition that is used in education and preventive strategies.

2. Follow-up on enquiries that involve church leaders, with respect for the choice and agency of the complainant, to help ensure that patterns of abuse are not allowed to continue, with potential risk to others. Evidence shows that persons who have continuing support are more likely to take the step of reporting the abuse. Reporting and accountability are essential elements of an effective strategy.

3. Addition of an ombudsman-like role that would include monitoring all incidents within the CRC to better discern patterns of abuse and considering the potential for conflict of interest when staff are involved with both the claimant and the decision-making body in a situation. The committee noted that questions about perceived conflicts of interest have been raised frequently in the history of Safe Church Ministry.

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[6] Ortberg, John. Blog titled "Observations on the *Chicago Tribune* article re: Willow Creek Leadership," April 2, 2018. Available at johnortberg.com/observations-on-the-chicago-tribune-article-re-willow-creek-leadership/

4. Consideration of the option of calling in outside experts to deal with situations that involve a high potential for conflicts of interest because of the many complex relationships within the close CRC community. There are now a growing number of parachurch agencies with expertise in handling situations involving allegations of abuse; they could provide more impartial discernment without perceptions of being biased in favor of one of the parties.

5. Increasing avenues for survivors of abuse to be part of training, response, and monitoring mechanisms to help ensure that input from those who have suffered abuse is considered.

Most situations that come to the attention of Safe Church Ministry involve a mix of emotional abuse and physical or sexual abuse. Rarely in church circles does physical or sexual abuse occur without significant emotional abuse; in some cases, the emotional abuse is more significant to the claimant than the physical or sexual abuse. It is impossible to separate all abuses into distinct categories. It is not helpful for claimants, when they find the courage to come forward and disclose their story, to find out that only the evidence about physical and sexual abuse will be taken seriously by the church council in making its decision. It is even more devastating when a case is dismissed on grounds that the sexual misconduct was not considered serious enough to warrant discipline, and yet the emotional abuse that caused serious harm to the claimant has no weight in the final decision making.

Further, excluding emotional abuse is inconsistent with the CRC's commitment to restorative justice. Restorative practices do not make artificial divisions between the types of abuse that contributed to the harm done. They start with clarifying the harm done, of all kinds, and then move to address the harm in a holistic way toward restoring broken relationships. One cannot restore broken relationships by treating emotional abuse as less important than physical or sexual abuse in a Christian approach to abuse response.

The exclusion of emotional abuse has been raised a number of times by members involved in the work of Safe Church Ministry, but it has been dismissed on the grounds it could not be defined. Work in abuse response has advanced enough, however, to develop a working definition of emotional abuse for the purposes of use in Safe Church Ministry, especially in restorative practices. Many secular governments have found adequate definitions for including emotional abuse in laws; ongoing exclusion by the CRC would therefore be a poor public witness. Churches should lead in abuse response rather than lag behind the helpful advances of secular approaches.

The committee heard a suggestion that spiritual abuse should also be included in the advisory panel process because it is always involved in abuse that happens within the church family and it does as much damage as physical and sexual abuse. While there are more definitional challenges involved for including this in an advisory panel process, further development of a more comprehensive approach should include spiritual abuse.

Recommendation 5 – Strengthen safe church practices

1. That synod mandate the executive director to oversee the development of appropriate measures for responding effectively to emotional abuse. Such measures will include definition, inclusion in relevant CRC policies, and appropriate responses through restorative practices and the safe church advisory panel process.

2. That synod mandate the executive director to oversee a review of the adequacy of safe church policies for follow-up in reported cases that involve church leaders. Findings and

actions taken by the executive director shall be reported to the Council of Delegates to ensure that the CRCNA is exercising due diligence to prevent repeat occurrences or transfer of abusive leaders to other churches. The review shall consider best practices in church abuse ministry.

3. That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to examine in detail the potential for conflicts of interest in current safe church procedures and to evaluate the need for and benefits of using outside experts to deal with situations that have a high potential for conflicts of interest.

B. *Strengthening response to abuse of power by ending secrecy in nondisclosure agreements*

The role of secrecy in many cases of abuse of power was recognized by Synod 2018. Questions about the use of nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) to settle cases were examined by the committee. The term *nondisclosure agreement* refers to a legal contract between parties that requires the parties not to disclose information covered by the agreement, along with other elements of a settlement. Nondisclosure agreements have been and are used within the CRC, but there is no available record, statistical analysis, or evaluation of their use.

In practice, the confidentiality requirements in NDAs constrain the ability of survivors to process their experiences. Not being allowed to speak about what happened can hinder the healing process. NDAs also create barriers for healing processes between a survivor and the church community because they silence potential agents of reconciliation. NDAs are also critiqued for protecting the reputation of the offender and/or the church while the survivor continues to deal with the impacts. NDAs are sometimes initiated by a claimant or done with full, free, and informed agreement; in many cases, however, claimants feel pressured into them to protect the reputation of the church. If claimants refuse, they may face judgment, accusations of not being willing to forgive, or ostracism as disloyal to the church. In some cases, survivors later regret having signed an NDA, but there is no recourse. There may be cases in which an NDA can avoid a lengthy and damaging adversarial court process; in such situations, the option of restorative justice processes can also be considered.

For the church, NDAs can prevent identification of patterns of abuse and can contribute to repeated offenses or to covering up a culture of abuse. Silencing abuse prevents understanding within the larger church community. Exposure and public accountability are required in order to shift a culture that enables or tolerates abuse of power. Awareness of the negative impacts of NDAs in the church context has grown in recent years. Good practice now suggests reducing or abolishing the use of NDAs as one of the strategies for responding to incidents of abuse.

Recommendation 6 – Policy on nondisclosure agreements

That synod direct the executive director to do the following:

- review the history of the use of nondisclosure agreements within the CRCNA to draw learnings from it, be transparent about its frequency, and contribute to greater public accountability
- develop a policy with criteria for the use of NDAs that limits their use to cases in which it is clearly in the best interests of the victim and the church and not acceptable when solely motivated by protection of the reputation of the church and its leaders. The policy should include a provision for some form of review by an independent party before final signature by the two main parties.

- develop good practices and protocols on the use of NDAs for distribution to classes and councils when faced with situations that might lead to the use of a nondisclosure agreement
- develop a reporting and accountability mechanism to monitor practices going forward

C.   Strengthening response to abuse of power through funds for counseling survivors

Synod 2010 recommended that classes establish funds to ensure that survivors of abuse can access counseling as needed. Some classes have established such funds, and some churches have partnerships with counseling agencies that include counseling for survivors of abuse.

Many classes have not taken this action.

Recommendation 7 – Funds for counseling services

1.   That synod encourage all classes to take measures to ensure that survivors of abuse within their classis have access to appropriate counseling services.

2.   That the annual report of each classis for the CRC *Yearbook* include information about a counseling fund or other arrangements to ensure access to counseling services for abuse survivors.

D.   Strengthen response to abuse through culturally appropriate resources for culturally diverse churches

The committee heard that members in culturally diverse churches who are experiencing abuse of power do not know where to get help. Including them in existing programs and measures within the CRC requires transposition of existing resources into the languages used in their communities, with examples that reflect their cultural context, and approaches to learning that fit with their ministries.

Recommendation 8 – Abuse prevention resources for culturally diverse churches

That synod mandate the executive director to give a high priority to providing information about existing policies and mechanisms for abuse prevention and response in forms that use the language, examples, and styles of learning that are culturally appropriate for the Korean, Latino, Chinese, African-American, and Indigenous communities, through Safe Church Ministry and Pastor Church Resources. In each context, the tools shall be developed with input from members of the community to ensure they will be accessible and useful for members of the community.

E.   Strengthening response to abuse of power through increased accountability

Exposure of abuse is now widely recognized as a significant element of effective prevention strategies. Reporting and analysis are also important for the healing process within churches and for learning from individual cases to protect others. More victims and families are willing to be named publically in order to ensure that offenders do not re-offend. In the current Canadian and U.S. contexts, minimizing abuse, silencing victims, and ignoring or burying evidence is not only unethical; it is more likely to lead to serious damage to reputation than greater transparency. At the same time the CRC needs to ensure that due process is followed

for all the parties involved. The public demand for greater accountability by all institutions for failure to take adequate measures to prevent or respond to cases of abuse of power is evidence of God working through nonchurch means. It would be wise for the CRCNA to review its current practices with regard to accountability.

Recommendation 9 – Strengthen accountability

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates and executive director to put in place a system of recordkeeping of cases that come to the attention of all levels of church authority, to allow for the analysis of patterns and trends over time, without compromising the confidentiality of individual persons. Collection of data should include some record of responses and outcomes, as well as reporting of incidents.

VIII. Creating a culture that does not enable or tolerate abuse of power

> "A culture that silences its members from speaking
> with each other about suspected abuse is one
> where abuse will almost always flourish."
> —Basyle Tchividjien, director, GRACE: Godly Response
> to Abuse in Christian Environments. [7]

> **Q.   What is God's will for you in the sixth commandment?**
> A.   I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor—
> not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture,
> and certainly not by actual deeds—
> and I am not to be party to this in others;
> rather I am to put away all desire for revenge. . . .
> —Heidelberg Catechism, Q. and A. 105

The role of church culture in enabling abuse of power is well documented in research on abuse prevention in the church context. Culture refers to an organization's values and default behaviors, including unspoken and unwritten patterns of acceptance and response to practices.

Research on prevention of bullying and verbal abuse, for example, provides quantitative as well as qualitative evidence of the difference that bystanders can make in the culture within a school, a virtual network, or public space.

Given the close community of the CRC, proactive measures are warranted to develop a culture that does not tolerate abuse of power or enable it. The culture within the CRC was also on the agenda of the CRC's Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture. It addressed factors within the culture that were a barrier to collaboration between "silo" ministries and departments, along with recommending major changes in structure and management positions. The challenges of changing culture permeated their annual reports. Their final report recognized that, in the time they had, they were not able to pay adequate attention to broader cultural dynamics within the CRC. Culture shifts are a long-term and complex process.

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[7] Tchividjien, Basyle. "Walls of Silence: Protecting the Institution over the Individual," article on website of GRACE: Godly Response to Abuse in Christian Environments, netgrace.org/resources/2018/11/11/walls-of-silence-protecting-the-institution-over-the-individual.

It is important to repeatedly reinforce the CRC core value of mutual respect for all persons as equally created and called by God to be agents of reconciliation within God's world, as articulated in *God's Diverse and Unified Family*. Language is an important element that can both positively affect or erode a church culture in relation to abuse of power. In addition, mechanisms and processes can be built into governing systems to draw early attention to patterns of behavior that contribute to abuse of power. With that in mind, the committee makes the following recommendations to begin a longer process of intentional care to create a culture that prevents abuse of power.

Recommendation 10 – Creating a culture to prevent abuse of power

A. That synod affirm the following as core values for the culture within the CRC:

- mutual respect for every person as created by God and equally responsible to respond to God's call to use their gifts for God's mission in the world, including the ongoing work of building God's church[8]
- an understanding of servant leadership that emphasizes mutual submission as a corrective to the hierarchical tendencies within our culture
- mutual accountability through checks and balances built into governing structures

B. That synod affirm the importance of care in the use of language within church assemblies, with attention to the impact of language that harms the ability of others to fully exercise their gifts and calling.

C. That synod refer this report to the Classis Renewal Advisory Group to consider how the role of regional pastors and church visitors might be strengthened to foster a respectful culture and support churches with early assistance in situations that may give rise to concerns about abuse of power.

D. That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to establish a team that would act as a guardian of our commitment to foster a culture characterized by respect for all and mutual service. Consideration should be guided by the following features, which draw on good practices in other sectors of society for preventing and responding to all forms of abuse of power:

- The mandate would include the use of a range of measures designed to allow early intervention in response to complaints, including mediation, conflict resolution, and restorative justice tools.
- The mandate would include concerns about abuse of power that may cross lines between the denomination, classes, and individual churches. The team might serve an "ombudsperson" role within the internal human resources system and for cases that cross jurisdictions, without violating CRC governance of the local church by the local council.
- Position holders outside the "chain of command" within the established organizational and management structure would help to foster confidence because they are "independent" but accountable through reporting to the Council of Delegates and

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[8] See paragraphs 10, 11, 29, and 39 of Our World Belongs to God, along with the biblical texts cited with these paragraphs. See also *God's Diverse and Unified Family*, a synodically approved statement, and the Belhar Confession, with associated biblical texts.

through their ability to bring issues to the attention of the Council of Delegates if needed.
- The role of the team would be reviewed after three years for effectiveness, as part of the follow-up to this report.

IX. Implementation

The mandate of the committee established by Synod 2018 is to recommend more specific goals and action steps "to address patterns of abuse of power at all levels of the denomination." The timeframe of one year is too short to develop all the details for measures such as training programs. Implementation of adopted recommendations is a continuing challenge in the area of abuse prevention. The committee considered what kind of structure might lead to more effective action.

Recommendation 11 – Ensuring implementation

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to ensure implementation by

- monitoring progress at each meeting of the COD.
- making necessary adjustments in specific plans.
- reporting to synod each year on progress made toward specific objectives and toward the general goal of creating a culture in which abuse of power is not tolerated and any incidents are dealt with in a way that contributes to the healing of broken relationships.

The Council of Delegates is encouraged to include selected members of the advisory committees of the related ministry areas in its implementation plans. These include Safe Church Ministry, Pastor Church Resources, Disability Concerns, and Classis Renewal.

X. Recommendations

This section is a summary of recommendations made throughout the report.

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Ms. Kathy Vandergrift and Ms. Patircia Van Reenen, cochairs, when matters pertaining to the report of the Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee are discussed.

B. Training of pastors

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to form a committee to develop a training program on abuse of power. The committee shall include members from the offices of Candidacy, Pastor Church Resources, Safe Church Ministry, Calvin Theological Seminary, and Calvin College (because of available expertise). The training program shall

- be a requirement for all persons entering vocational ministry in the CRC.
- focus on dynamics of power within the variety of pastoral relationships, boundaries, tools for positive use of power and influence, and tools for preventing harmful use of power and influence.
- be widely available and presented as enabling effective ministry (not as an impediment to entering ministry).
- take into account the cultural diversity within CRC churches.

C. Code of conduct

That synod mandate the committee appointed by action in Recommendation 1 to draft a code of conduct for all employed ministry staff within the CRC. The draft code of conduct will be presented to Synod 2020 for approval. The code of conduct shall be

- signed by all ministry personnel who are employed by the CRCNA, local churches, and classes.
- reviewed annually, as part of annual evaluations.
- included in the Supplement to the Church Order, with links to relevant Church Order articles.

D. Prevention of abuse in CRCNA offices

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to review the adequacy of the training provided to CRCNA staff, the adequacy of the provisions for support to a complainant, and mechanisms to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the process for dealing with complaints. A review should be informed by careful listening to persons who found the processes helpful and persons who did not.

E. Training at classis and local levels

1. That synod encourage all classes to develop a strategy to train officebearers and key church leaders to be alert to power dynamics within the communities they serve and to be equipped to prevent abuse of power. The goal of the strategy is to ensure that all officebearers receive initial training and refreshment through ongoing educational initiatives. An effective strategy will include the following:

   - appropriate training resources
   - reasonable time allocation for training
   - acknowledgment and monitoring of completion of training

2. That synod encourage all classes to monitor implementation of the training strategy and to consider adopting policies to include completion of training and safe church policies in the regular review of credentials or as a requirement for being seated at a classis meeting.

3. That synod mandate the executive director to develop, in cooperation with Safe Church Ministry, Pastor Church Resources, Calvin College, and others, a resource toolkit for training officebearers and leaders, readily accessible through the CRC website and Faith Alive Christian Resources.

F. Strengthening Safe Church Ministry

1. That synod mandate the executive director to oversee the development of appropriate measures for responding effectively to emotional abuse. Such measures will include definition, inclusion in relevant CRC policies, and appropriate responses through restorative practices and the safe church advisory panel process.

2. That synod mandate the executive director to oversee a review of the adequacy of safe church policies for follow-up in reported cases that involve church leaders. Findings and actions taken by the executive director shall be reported to the Council of Delegates to

ensure that the CRCNA is exercising due diligence to prevent repeat occurrences or transfer of abusive leaders to other churches. The review shall consider best practices in church abuse ministry.

3. That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to examine in detail the potential for conflicts of interest in current safe church procedures and to evaluate the need for and benefits of using outside experts to deal with situations that have a high potential for conflicts of interest.

G. *Policy on non-disclosure agreements*

That synod direct the executive director to do the following:

- review the history of the use of nondisclosure agreements within the CRCNA to draw learnings from it, be transparent about its frequency, and contribute to greater public accountability
- develop a policy with criteria for the use of NDAs that limits their use to cases in which it is clearly in the best interests of the victim and the church and not acceptable when solely motivated by protection of the reputation of the church and its leaders. The policy should include a provision for some form of review by an independent party before final signature by the two main parties.
- develop good practices and protocols on the use of NDAs for distribution to classes and councils when faced with situations that might lead to the use of a nondisclosure agreement
- develop a reporting and accountability mechanism to monitor practices going forward

H. *Funds for counselling services*

1. That synod encourage all classes to take measures to ensure that survivors of abuse within their classis have access to appropriate counseling services.

2. That the annual report of each classis for the CRC *Yearbook* include information about a counseling fund or other arrangements to ensure access to counseling services for abuse survivors.

I. *Abuse prevention resources for culturally diverse churches*

That synod mandate the executive director to give a high priority to providing information about existing policies and mechanisms for abuse prevention and response in forms that use the language, examples, and styles of learning that are culturally appropriate for the Korean, Latino, Chinese, African-American, and Indigenous communities, through Safe Church Ministry and Pastor Church Resources. In each context, the tools shall be developed with input from members of the community to ensure they will be accessible and useful for members of the community.

J. *Recordkeeping*

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates and executive director to put in place a system of recordkeeping of cases that come to the attention of all levels of church authority, to allow for the analysis of patterns and trends over time, without compromising the confidentiality

of individual persons. Collection of data should include some record of responses and outcomes, as well as reporting of incidents.

K. Creating a culture that prevents abuse of power

1. That synod affirm the following as core values for the culture within the CRC:

    -   mutual respect for every person as created by God and equally responsible to respond to God's call to use their gifts for God's mission in the world, including the ongoing work of building God's church
    -   an understanding of servant leadership that emphasizes mutual submission as a corrective to the hierarchical tendencies within our culture
    -   mutual accountability through checks and balances built into governing structures

2. That synod affirm the importance of care in the use of language within church assemblies, with attention to the impact of language that harms the ability of others to fully exercise their gifts and calling.

3. That synod refer this report to the Classis Renewal Advisory Group to consider how the role of regional pastors and church visitors might be strengthened to foster a respectful culture and support churches with early assistance in situations that may give rise to concerns about abuse of power.

4. That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to establish a team that would act as a guardian of our commitment to foster a culture characterized by respect for all and mutual service. Consideration should be guided by the following features, which draw on good practices in other sectors of society for preventing and responding to all forms of abuse of power:

    -   The mandate would include the use of a range of measures designed to allow early intervention in response to complaints, including mediation, conflict resolution, and restorative justice tools.
    -   The mandate would include concerns about abuse of power that may cross lines between the denomination, classes, and individual churches. The team might serve an "ombudsperson" role within the internal human resources system and for cases that cross jurisdictions, without violating CRC governance of the local church by the local council.
    -   Position holders outside the "chain of command" within the established organizational and management structure would help to foster confidence because they are "independent" but accountable through reporting to the Council of Delegates and through their ability to bring issues to the attention of the Council of Delegates if needed.
    -   The role of the team would be reviewed after three years for effectiveness, as part of the follow-up to this report.

L. Implementation

That synod mandate the Council of Delegates to ensure implementation by

-   monitoring progress at each meeting of the COD.
-   making necessary adjustments in specific plans.

- reporting to synod each year on progress made toward specific objectives and toward the general goal of creating a culture in which abuse of power is not tolerated and any incidents are dealt with in a way that contributes to the healing of broken relationships.

The Council of Delegates is encouraged to include selected members of the advisory committees of the related ministry areas in its implementation plans. These include Safe Church Ministry, Pastor Church Resources, Disability Concerns, and Classis Renewal.

> Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee
> Sherry Fakkema
> Elsa Fennema, secretary
> Heather Garretson
> Carel Geleynse
> Dajuma Gibson
> Darren Roorda, staff
> David Sung
> Patricia Van Reenen, cochair
> Kathy Vandergrift, cochair

Addendum
Budget Implications of Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee Recommendations

Training program for pastors
    Content to be developed or sourced by current staff; design of course materials
    and production of online course materials can be done by contract: $25,000
    Staff time for ongoing supervision, estimate: $10,000

Code of conduct
    Development by in-house committee for approval by Synod 2020
    Design of a brief two-page document for presentation: $1,000

CRCNA human resources training
    Modification of existing training program and staff time to deliver it: $10,000

    Research into ombudsman function or position: $2,500

Resource toolkit for classis training
    Content will draw on existing resources; design of online kit: $4,000

Recordkeeping system
    Consultant to develop system and legal review of plans: $5,000

Team to guard culture
    Volunteer appointments for pilot project—honoraria and travel costs: $3,000

Appendix D1
Safe Church Update Regarding Synod 2018 Directives

I. Safe church in our churches

Synod 2018 affirmed recommendations from synods in the past, including the five guiding goals for Safe Church, which were developed in 2012 by safe church team leaders from across Canada and the United States and approved by Synod 2014 (*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp 559-60). In 2018, questions were added to the Annual *Yearbook* Survey to churches to track these key indicators.

Questions asked in the 2018 Annual Yearbook *Survey:*

1. Has your church implemented a written policy for abuse prevention?
2. Does your church include *Circle of Grace* or another abuse prevention program in its church school and youth education? (Recommended: *Circle of Grace*)
3. Does your church require training for pastors, elders, and deacons regarding the use and potential abuse of power associated with their position?
4. Does your church have protocols in place for responding to church leader misconduct? (Recommended: "Guidelines for Handling Allegations of Abuse against a Church Leader")
5. Does your church have a team or committee that regularly meets regarding abuse prevention? If yes, please list the leader's name and email address.

Of the 760 of 1,055 total churches responding to the survey:

1. 86 percent have a written safe church or abuse prevention policy.
2. 36 percent have protocols in place for responding to church leader misconduct.
3. 28 percent have a safe church team or committee.
4. 16 percent require training for pastors, elders, and deacons regarding the use and potential abuse of power associated with their position.
5. 7 percent use a prevention program with children and youth.

It's important to note that not all CRC congregations are included in this data. Also, there seem to be some discrepancies between these numbers and what our safe church coordinators on the ground report. This is the first year that this data has been requested; we trust that as churches become accustomed to tracking this data, and with better communication with our classis coordinators, this picture will become more accurate going forward. These goals represent a minimum level of commitment to abuse prevention and response, and applying these goals will help protect our churches from liability associated with abuse. A chart showing the complete data from the Annual *Yearbook* Survey is available upon request.

II. Safe church at the classis level

Synod 2018 also requested that Safe Church report to synod annually regarding classis safe church teams. The data received from the Annual Classis Survey from the total number of 48 classes at the beginning of 2019 showed the following:

- 12 reported having an *active safe church team*, defined as meeting at least twice per year (25%).
- 13 reported having no team (27%).
- 23 left the question blank (48%).
- 24 reported having a *safe church coordinator* (50%).
- 15 answered no or left the question blank (31%).
- 9 answered that they were working on this or had it on their agenda (19%).

Since that time, Safe Church Ministry staff have been working hard to connect with our classis safe church coordinators and stated clerks to get a more accurate picture of what's happening and to increase communication, which is a critical part of effective safe church ministry.

We recognize that safe church ministry looks different in different places, which is good and important because needs and contexts vary from place to place. At the same time, it's important to establish some indicators to measure progress at the classis level. Toward that end, we are working to more clearly define the terms *safe church coordinator* and *safe church team*. A classis safe church coordinator is tasked with three things: (1) connect with the churches—equipping others who are actively doing safe church ministry at the congregational level; (2) connect with the classis—building relationships within the classis and reporting regularly to classis as an integral part of the classis structure; (3) connect with Safe Church Ministry—communicating regularly for ongoing support and training, and knowing the resources available from Safe Church. A classis safe church team can consist of representatives from each church meeting regularly, or it can be a much smaller group—say, three to five people—who meet together regularly and also connect with liaisons from each church to support safe church ministry at the congregational level. Both of these team models seem to have worked well over the years.

Our most current data reflect the following information with regard to the total number of 48 classes:

- 12 are being served by both a safe church team and a coordinator (25%).
- 5 are being served by a safe church team alone (10%).
- 18 are being served by a classis coordinator alone (33%).
- 4 are being served by a point person or liaison alone (8%).
- Of the 30 classis coordinators, 13 are new positions created in the classis within the past year, and 10 are compensated for their service with either a salary or an annual stipend

A chart summarizing this data is available upon request; it represents the most current data that we have at the time of this update. We will continue to connect and work with churches and classes to maintain and update this data. And we will continue to pray for so many incredible people working behind the scenes in our classes and congregations to equip others in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. It takes all of us working together to ensure that the Christian Reformed Church is a body of Christ where the value of each person is honored and people are free to worship and grow free from abuse—and where abuse has occurred, the response is compassion and justice that foster healing.

Safe Church Classis Teams Report
April 2019

Classis	Safe Church Team	Safe Church Coordinator	Name of Coordinator
Region 1 - Canada West			
Classis Alberta North	No	Yes	Ken Vis
Classis Alberta South/ Saskatchewan	No	Yes	Elza Bouwman
Classis B.C. North-West	Yes	Yes	Faye Martin
Classis B.C. South-East	Yes	Yes	Faye Martin
Region 2 - Canada East			
Classis Chatham	Yes	Yes	Yvonne Lammers
Classis Hamilton	Yes	Yes	Al Karston
Classis Huron	Yes	Yes	Atie Ott
Classis Niagara	Yes	No	
Classis Toronto	Yes	Yes	Rev. Bart Velthuisen
Classis Eastern Canada	Yes	Yes	Rachel Boehm
Classis Quinte	No	Yes	Fiona DeVries
Region 3 - USA East			
Classis Atlantic Northeast	No	No	
Classis Hackensack	Yes	Yes	Rev. Meg Jenista Kuykendall
Classis Hudson	No	Yes	Richard Ostling
Classis Southeast U.S.	Yes	No	
Region 4 - Great Lakes			
Classis Thornapple Valley	No	No	
Classis Grand Rapids East	No	Yes	Pujita Sieplinga
Classis Grand Rapids North	Yes	Yes	Jeanne Maher
Classis Grand Rapids South	No	Yes	Jane Elzinga
Classis Grandville	No	Yes	Bryna Parsells
Classis Georgetown	Yes	No	
Classis Holland	No	No	
Classis Kalamazoo	No	Yes	Andrew Yonkers
Classis Muskegon	Yes	Yes	Jane Degroot
Classis Zeeland	No	Yes	Rev. Lloyd Hemstreet
Classis Lake Erie	No	No	
Classis Northern Michigan	Yes	Yes	Dave Embertson
Region 5 - USA Central			
Classis Central Plains	No	Yes	Sara Vandenberg Van Zee
Classis Northcentral Iowa	No	No	
Classis Wisconsin	No	No	
Classis Lake Superior	No	Yes	Jeff Vanderhooft
Classis Chicago South	No	No	
Classis Illiana	No	No	
Classis Northern Illinois	Yes	No	
Classis Heartland	No	Yes	Tara Boer
Classis Iakota	No	Yes	Tara Boer
Classis Minnkota	No	Yes	Roger Sparks
Region 6 - USA West			
Classis Arizona	No	Yes	Donna Lowe
Classis Red Mesa	No	No	
Classis Rocky Mountain	Yes	No	
Classis Yellowstone	No	Yes	Barb Cole
Classis California South	No	No	
Classis Greater Los Angeles	No	Yes	Annie Biggs
Classis Hanmi	No	No	
Classis Ko-Am	No	No	
Classis Columbia	No	Yes	Lori Leep
Classis Central California	No	No	
Classis Pacific Northwest	Yes	Yes	Ed and Sherry Fakkema

TOTAL Yes:	17	30	
TOTAL Classes:	48	48	
Percentage:	35%	62%	
TOTAL New Coordinators:		13	
TOTAL Paid:		10	
TOTAL Point Persons:		8	