

# THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN ENDING CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

PRESENTED BY BONNIE NICHOLAS & LINDA CROCKETT  
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## CRC SAFE CHURCH MINISTRY

Equipping congregations in abuse awareness,  
prevention, and response

### **Abuse Prevention**

policies &  
education

### **Abuse Response**

In & outside the  
church



Photo courtesy of Dan Nicholas  
Photos by Dan can be found at : [www.dannicholasphotography.com](http://www.dannicholasphotography.com)

## CRC SAFE CHURCH GUIDING GOALS

### CRC Safe Church Top 5

1. Every congregation abides by a written **safe church/abuse prevention policy**
2. Every congregation uses an **age appropriate prevention program** for children and youth
3. Misconduct is taken seriously; Every congregation follows approved **protocols for responding to church leader misconduct**
4. **Abuse is acknowledged and addressed**; people understand the dynamics and impacts of abuse.
5. **Leadership at all levels is committed** to safe church ministry

## CRC SAFE CHURCH STRUCTURE

### Each Classis or Region: A Safe Church Team

#### Each Classis Team:

Connects with a representative or liaison from each congregation

#### Each Congregation:

A safe church team or committee



## ***SAMARITAN SAFECHURCH BUILDING A SOCIAL MOVEMENT***

- Works deeply with a group of congregations over a one year period to **shift culture** from denial or apathy about child sexual abuse (CSA) to proactive engagement in church and community, creating SafePlaces to keep children safe from sexual, and other forms, of abuse.



## ***WHY ENGAGE CONGREGATIONS IN MOVEMENT BUILDING TO END CSA?***

- By calling on common Christian values using Biblical narratives, we can inspire people of faith to become proactive in preventing CSA in their churches AND communities.
- People of faith were key in past social movements (ending slavery, civil rights, etc.). When faith grounds a commitment to social change, significant 'staying power' is available for long-term work.
- Samaritan **SafeChurch** is part of larger emerging social movement to end CSA!

## CORE ASPECTS *SAFECHURCH*

- 1) Integration of child sexual abuse prevention and response practices in congregations as a core theological commitment and community covenant
- 2) Educate and empower parents, children and other congregants to prevent sexual abuse in the broader context of a child's "safe world" of school/scouts/sports, etc.
- 3) Lift up and empower adult survivors in congregations to become leaders in creating resources for their faith communities

## "CLUSTERS" OF 6-10 CONGREGATIONS

Engage in a one year  
process of learning about  
CSA...

To inspire and equip adults  
to take action to prevent  
CSA.



## SAFECHURCH ONE YEAR PROJECT SCOPE

21 hours of training for core team

- *Policy making + education about CSA*

2 hours congregational education at each church

- *Provided by Samaritan staff/professionals*

One day retreat for adult survivors

4 hours training for staff/volunteers

+

Circle of Grace curriculum & teacher training

Interactive policy template developed by Samaritan

## NOT AN EASY TOPIC



**1 in 4 girls**

**1 in 6 boys**

sexually  
abused by  
age 18

It's **NOT OK!**

Sexual abuse is hidden among us.  
We don't know what we don't know.

Photo courtesy of Thomas Norsted  
www.freeimages.com/photo/776852

## CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AT CHURCH

### Top 5 Reasons Churches End Up in Court

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Reason #1</b>	 Sexual Abuse of a Minor	 Sexual Abuse of a Minor	 Sexual Abuse of a Minor	 Sexual Abuse of a Minor	 Sexual Abuse of a Minor
<b>Reason #2</b>	 Personal Injury	 Property Disputes	 Personal Injury	 Insurance Coverage Disputes	 Personal Injury
<b>Reason #3</b>	 Property Disputes	 Personal Injury	 Insurance Coverage Disputes	 Religious Freedom	 Property Disputes
<b>Reason #4</b>	 Insurance Coverage Disputes	 Zoning	 Property Disputes	 Property Disputes	 Insurance Coverage Disputes
<b>Reason #5</b>	 Zoning	 Insurance Coverage Disputes	 Zoning	 Personal Injury	 Affordable Care Act*

\*This category for 2014 included cases involving churches and religious organizations.

ChurchLawAndTax.com  
A ministry of Christianity Today

## THE SHORT COURSE OF ABUSE

1. Expect DENIAL from everyone – including yourself
2. Abuse is primarily about POWER and CONTROL
3. Offenders use GROOMING tactics
4. What is seen and heard is only the TIP OF THE ICEBERG
5. CHAOS breaks out when abuse is disclosed



## WHERE BLAME BELONGS

Be Aware: We all have a strong tendency to place blame on the one who has been sexually abused

- That person caused the trouble
- If it's that person's fault, I feel safer

Abuse will never end until those who abuse stop doing it – the blame belongs here

## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

We Follow Christ in Community

- Each person is created in God's own image and deserves to be treated with dignity
- We are **One Body** (1 Corinthians 12)
- The **misuse of power** in abuse is contrary to the Gospel of Christ (Philippians 2)

## JESUS LOVES CHILDREN



Photo courtesy of Bonnie Nicholas  
Taken at First Reformed Church, Peilo, IA

## DEFINITIONS

### Sexual Abuse:

*Any act of a sexual nature performed in a harmful and/or exploitive manner, as with a child or with a non-consenting adult, for the purpose of sexual gratification and/or for the purpose of gaining power and control*

- **Touch:** inappropriate fondling, touching, intercourse
- **Non-Touch:** sexual comments, pornography, watching sexual activity



## IMPACTS FOR CHILDREN

### Trauma & brain development

- **Cognitive delay:** language development, intelligence, trouble in school ...
- **Emotional impairment:** attachment disorders, inability to form relationships, isolation ...
- **Spiritual formation stunted:** inability to believe that God is good or that they are loved by God

## IMPACTS FOR ADULTS

### Impacts can last a lifetime

- **Health Impacts:** obesity, gastro-intestinal problems, headaches, diabetes
- **Psychological Impacts:** depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, addictive behaviors
- **Spiritual Impacts:** inability to trust and form relationships, loss of faith & hope

## INDIRECT IMPACTS

- Family members and friends are impacted by abuse of loved ones
- Communities are affected
- As the body of Christ, what affects one part affects the whole body

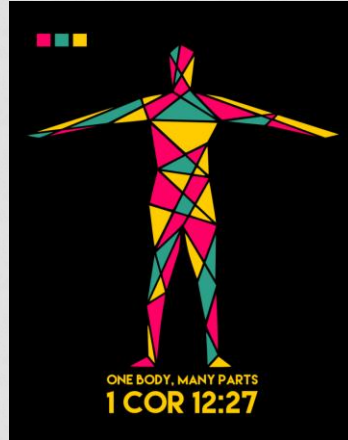


Photo courtesy of Tyler Neyens  
www.flickr.com/photos/squeekrocks/15828798485

## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

*"An ounce of prevention  
is worth a pound of cure"*

It's never more true than in situations of abuse

The best strategy is to **stop it BEFORE it happens**

So, how does this happen?

When we understand more, prevention efforts are more effective.

## GROOMING

### Phases of Grooming Behavior:

1. **Engagement** – targeting and building trust; isolating and creating dependence
2. **Sexual Interaction** – Gradually increased sexually inappropriate behavior
3. **Secrecy** – Maintaining control in the relationship, blame, threats, etc.

## PHASE 4: DISCLOSURE/DISCOVERY

### What prevents disclosure?

#### Fear:

- Of not being believed
- Of real or perceived threats
- Of causing trouble or being punished
- Of impacts on relationships that are important (parents, family, or friends)
- Of consequences to the one perpetrating abuse (they may be taken away or go to jail)

## PHASE 5: SUPPRESSION

Optional but **typical!**

Those who discover the relationship tend to:

- Deny or Minimize
- Redefine
- Blame

Leads to "retract" or  
stop talking  
about what happened



Photo courtesy of Jeremy Doorten  
[www.freeimages.com/photo/do-you-trust-me-1310128](http://www.freeimages.com/photo/do-you-trust-me-1310128)

## RESPONSE IS CRITICAL

What **children need:**

- To be believed
- To be told it's not their fault
- To be told that they are not alone
- To be reassured that they will be helped
- To know what will happen next

## THOSE WHO ABUSE

There is no one personality – all walks of life

Common characteristics include:

- Often popular, **charismatic**, and well respected
- Often good at **minimizing**, denying, deceiving, and manipulation
- May have a sense of **entitlement**
- May **seek** positions that give them **access** to children or vulnerable adults

## RESPONSE IS CRITICAL

Those who sexually abuse need:

- Specialized **professional services** to change behavior – group intervention
- To **take responsibility** for their actions and acknowledge the harm done
- Strict **accountability** for a long, long time

## A WORD ABOUT FORGIVENESS

- Forgiveness is NOT an alternative to justice
- Quick forgiveness can be very harmful to everyone involved
- Forgiveness is separate from reconciliation
- Forgiving the unforgivable  
(Deep wounds leave scars, which “remember” the pain)

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them...”

Survivors of abuse may need to do the same

## NOW WHAT?

- What is the responsibility of the Church, given the prevalence of child sexual abuse?
- Now that we know more about child sexual abuse, **what can we do about it?**



## The Church's Role in Ending Child Sexual Abuse



Q & A



## NEED MORE INFORMATION?

### **CRC Safe Church Ministry**

[www.crcna.org/safechurch](http://www.crcna.org/safechurch)

[bnicholas@crcna.org](mailto:bnicholas@crcna.org)

### **Samaritan SafeChurch**

[www.samaritansafechurch.org](http://www.samaritansafechurch.org)

[lcrockett@scclanc.org](mailto:lcrockett@scclanc.org)