**Handy Guide to CRCNA Safe Church Church Order**

**And Position Statement about Abuse**

**CRCNA Position Statement:**

**Abuse:**

Abuse is a sin against the biblical directives that govern human actions and relationships. It is striking evidence of the misery that pervades human life as the result of sin. The failure of men and women and of adults and children to relate to each other in a biblically healthy, affirming manner is the root cause of abuse.

Church councils should publicly acknowledge that the sin of abuse exists even in churches and should take positive steps to make their congregations safe for all persons. They should support efforts to address abuse promptly so that the abused and the abusers may experience the healing power of God's grace, should become aware of the laws and procedures applicable in their areas, and should create continuing-education opportunities for church leaders to become informed and sensitive about abuse issues. They should also adopt procedures to deal immediately and decisively with situations in which a person in a position of authority or influence in the church is alleged to have committed abuse. Synod has encouraged all classes of the CRC to establish Abuse Response Teams (also known as Safe Church Teams).

**From CRCNA Church Order and its Supplements – 2013:**

**Article 2:** Church offices, Minister of the Word, Elder, Deacon and Ministry Associate differ in mandate and task but not in dignity and honor.

**Article 83**

Special discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Form of Subscription, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.

**Article 84**

Persons who have been suspended or deposed from office may be reinstated if they give sufficient evidence of repentance and if the church judges that they are able to serve effectively. Requests for reinstatement to office by those deposed for acts of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct shall be dealt with according to guidelines adopted by synod.

—Cf. Supplement, Articles 78-84

—Cf. Supplement, Articles 82-84

—Cf. Supplement, Article 84

**Supplement, Articles 78-84**

*Guidelines for Confidentiality*

Synod affirmed the necessity for strict confidentiality on the part of councils and consistories in all matters relating to admonition and discipline by recommending the following guidelines to the churches:

1. Every church should state its membership commitments very clearly, including the expectation that all members are to participate in and be subject to the admonition and discipline of the church.
2. Officebearers should scrupulously observe confidentiality with respect to persons who come under their counsel and discipline.
3. Careful and confidential records should be kept whenever a discipline case reaches the level of action by the elders and/or announcements are made to the congregation.
4. Special care should be observed in the wording of public announcements. The sin of the person should not be mentioned, but only that he/she is unrepentant.
5. Established policies with respect to procedures and public announcements should be consistently followed by the elders of the church. (*Acts of Synod 1991,* pp. 723, 769

**Supplement, Articles 82-84**

*The Admonition and Discipline of Officebearers*

1. General discipline shall not be applied to an officebearer unless he/she has first been suspended from office.
2. The appropriate assembly shall determine whether, in a given instance, deposition from office shall take place immediately, without previous suspension.
3. Suspension/deposition of elders, deacons, and ministry associates
4. The suspension or deposition of an elder, deacon, or ministry associate shall be imposed by the council with the concurring judgment of the council of the nearest church in the same classis.
5. If the neighboring council fails to concur in the position of the council of the elder, deacon, or ministry associate involved, the latter council shall either alter its original judgment or present the case to classis.
6. Suspension/deposition of ministers
7. The suspension of a minister of the Word shall be imposed by the council of the minister’s church with the concurring judgment of the council of the nearest church in the same classis.
8. If the neighboring council fails to concur in the position of the council of the minister involved, the latter council shall either alter its original judgment or present the case to classis.
9. The deposition of a minister shall not be effected without the approval of classis together with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies.
10. Ministers subject to two councils
11. A minister of the Word whose membership resides with a congregation other than the calling church is subject to the admonition and discipline of the councils of both churches. Either council may initiate disciplinary action, but neither shall act without conferring with the other.
12. If the councils disagree, the case shall be submitted to the classis of the calling church for disposition.
13. The lifting of suspension is the prerogative of the assembly which imposed suspension.
14. The council of the church which deposed the minister shall declare the deposed minister eligible to receive a call upon the affirmative judgment of the classis which approved the deposition, together with the concurrence of the synodical deputies. Upon acceptance of a call, the previously deposed minister shall be reordained.

(*Acts of Synod 1991,* pp. 719-20)

*Note:* Councils and classes should take note of the regulations regarding suspension and/or deposition from ministerial office adopted by Synod 1998 (see *Acts of Synod 1998,* pp. 396-99).

**Supplement, Article 84**

*Regulations for Reinstatement of Office Bearers Guilty of Sexual Misconduct*

When reinstatement is requested by a former officebearer who confessed to or was determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct leading up to suspension and deposition from office:

1. Reinstatement to office shall be denied to individuals who:

1. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct against a minor.
2. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct against more than one victim in a single church or community.
3. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct in more than one community or church.
4. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct and other related ungodly conduct.

Examples of related ungodly conduct include but are not limited to engaging in adult or child pornography, engaging a prostitute for sexual contact, exhibitionistic or voyeuristic behavior, attending a nudist camp, sexual addiction, and so forth.

2. Councils and classes shall not reinstate a former officebearer suspended or deposed for sexual misconduct or ungodly conduct not covered in items 1, a-d without receiving the advice of legal counsel concerning the church’s liability and the advice of a Christian licensed psychologist concerning the likelihood of an officebearer’s reoffending.

*Note*: In Church Order Article 84 and its Supplement, the expression *sexual misconduct* is defined as: The sexual exploitation of a parishioner, minor or adult, regardless of age or consent, for the purposes of sexual gratification and maintaining control over the person. The expression *determined abuser* is defined as: An officebearer who either confesses to or is adjudicated to be guilty of sexual misconduct by a court of competent jurisdiction or an ecclesiastical assembly. (*Acts of Synod 2004*, pp. 611-12)

**Article 85**: “No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no office bearer shall lord it over another office bearer.