

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 office-bearers 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 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

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 Appendix D).