



Safe Church Ministry

Abuse Awareness, Prevention, and Response



Synod has encouraged each classis to have a Safe Church team made up of representatives from each church. The team is a resource to churches, fulfilling three important mandates:

1. Provide opportunities for **awareness and education**, so that churches can recognize abuse, develop strategies to prevent it, and respond effectively. Prevention strategies include safe church policies; as well as prevention programs for children and youth such as the *Circle of Grace* program.
2. Provide **support**, so that churches can offer invaluable spiritual support to those who have been impacted by abuse. Churches are uniquely equipped to walk alongside those who are on a journey toward wholeness.
3. Offer the **Advisory Panel Process**, for use in handling an allegation of abuse against a church leader. This process brings the allegation into a more neutral place and provides important safeguards for all parties.

Safe Church Ministry is a resource for churches to prevent abuse, and to respond with compassion and justice where it has occurred. Five guiding goals show the practical outcomes of effective safe church ministry (see back).

For more information, visit:

www.crcna.org/safechurch

or contact Safe Church Ministry director, Bonnie Nicholas, at:

bnicholas@crcna.org or (616) 224-0735 (office); (616)485-4595 (cell).

"They will live in safety and no one will make them afraid." Ezekiel 34:28

Safe Church Ministry Guiding Goals

All Safe Church team members are responsible to be a resource to churches in regards to abuse prevention, awareness and response. The following "top 5" have been identified as characteristics of safe churches; we would like these to be true of all of our churches. Safe Church team members work to promote these goals.

5 Guiding Goals for Safe Church

- 1. Every church has a written safety policy in place which includes:**
 - a. Screening by all staff and volunteers - background check & references
 - b. All staff and volunteers aware of, committed to, and regularly trained in the policy
 - c. Accountability and consequences for those who do not follow the policy
 - d. A system for regular review of the policy

- 2. Every church is using a curriculum in church school and youth programs that teaches respect and promotes healthy relationships**
 - a. The curriculum uses age appropriate concepts and language in discussing healthy and unhealthy relationships
 - b. The curriculum includes an education component for teachers and leaders as well as information for parents

- 3. Every church has protocols in place for responding to misconduct by a church leader, which are carefully followed**
 - a. Church leaders and members know about and are encouraged to use the *Advisory Panel Process*, which has been approved by synod, in the case of an allegation of abuse by a church leader
 - b. Misconduct and abuse are taken very seriously; not minimized or hidden

- 4. Issues of abuse can be freely discussed. This includes:**
 - a. Acknowledgement that abuse happens and involves church members either in or outside of church
 - b. An understanding of the nature of offending, including the power & control dynamic, minimization, manipulation and entitlement
 - c. Disclosure of abuse is met with compassion and support for those who have been hurt

- 5. Leadership at all levels is committed to the importance of safe church ministry**
 - a. Safe Church team development is encouraged and supported financially and in other ways
 - b. Every church has a committee to oversee efforts regarding abuse awareness, prevention and response and is represented on a classis Safe Church team