

Classis Huron Safe Church Committee Report, May 17, 2023

Mandate: Classis Huron Safe Church Committee is mandated:

1. **Advisory Panel:** To function as an Abuse Response Team according to Synodical Guidelines (as annotated for Classis Huron).
2. **Education:** To provide comprehensive and on-going education, training and resources to our churches in the prevention of and response to abuse.
3. **Support:** To provide support services* to our churches, a victim of abuse, an offender of abuse and/or their family members.

*Support services may include: resources and suggested written material, phone calls, visits, accompanying persons to civil or criminal legal proceedings, making referrals for treatment/counselling, being a prayer partner

Classis Huron Safe Church Update:

A draft “Classis Huron Safe Church policy” as required by our insurance provider, was presented to the CMC and AdCom for their perusal and approval. The policy will be presented to the May Classis meeting for final approval. This policy provides guidance and direction to all those staff/volunteers working on behalf of Classis Huron but who are not covered under their local church’s policy.

Membership Update:

Those churches who do not currently have a representative on the Classis Safe Church Committee are encouraged to appoint a representative. The Acton, Cambridge, Drayton, Lucknow and Vanastra churches do not currently have a representative on the committee.

Representatives have a key role in contributing to the ongoing issues and events, ensuring that all churches in Classis Huron have a voice and are kept informed of upcoming training opportunities, webinars and resources.

Annual Inter-Classis Safe Church Conference a Success

“Joyce joined Everytown CRC after a challenging season in life,” begins a case study discussed at the latest Inter-Classis Safe Church Conference. The case study continued, “After a year of attending the church, she joined the art team and felt more connected than ever. The church prided itself on creating vibrant worship through the arts, and they had recently hired an art director. Soon this art director (who was married) invited Joyce to 1:1 meetings so they could work together on some ambitious projects. He loved to create spaces where others could be themselves and would emphasize that it was okay to be vulnerable.”

Case studies such as this were a key part of the conference designed to equip churches and church leaders to prevent and respond to abuse within their communities.

Almost 60 people from across Ontario and Michigan gathered at Waterloo (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church on March 4 for the event. The annual conference was able to meet in person again after a two-year pause resulting from pandemic-related restrictions.

In a plenary morning session, participants heard an update on ongoing Safe Church work in the Christian Reformed Church in North America from Amanda Benckhuysen, a Safe Church adviser for CRC congregations. Afterward a selection of four workshops was offered in morning and afternoon sessions.

Presentations and discussions included topics such as repentance and accountability as steps toward forgiveness after abuse; complexities of power, trust, harm, and abuse; responding restoratively to

people who have experienced abuse or offended sexually in a church community; and a shortened version of the Abuse of Power training now required for candidates for ministry in the CRCNA. Presenters came from a variety of backgrounds, including the Mennonite tradition; Christian Horizons, a community and support organization that serves people with developmental disabilities; Safe Church; and Community Justice Initiatives.

[Resources](#) were available to participants in workshops and displayed in the main hall of the church during the conference. In some workshops, participants spent time in groups to discuss hypothetical reality-based scenarios and responses such as the case study above. They discovered together what could be done differently to create better outcomes for every person involved. Participants in the Abuse of Power workshop received resources such as power audits, a 10-point boundary-setting test, a proposed code of conduct, notes on restorative practice, and guidelines

One participant commented that the event's presenters were "great speakers," saying, "I liked how they engaged the audience." Another noted that the information presented was very useful to them as a member of a church council. Yet another participant said they appreciated that they were given a lot of information they could take back to their home church community. Atie Ott, Classis Huron Safe Church Coordinator, noted that the feedback forms included many encouraging comments and an average rating of 94 percent approval.

Heavy snowfall and some freezing rain the night before the event resulted in traveling difficulties for some people who had registered. "We had 21 cancellations from people who either could not get out of their driveway or did not feel comfortable driving," said Ott. Still, 57 of the 78 who had registered were able to attend, she said – "which is amazing, given the weather conditions. It speaks to the desire and need for face-to-face events after years of only [online] events."

Anita Brinkman, CRC Communications

Updates from the office of Safe Church Ministry

Due to staff changes and increased volume of work, the monthly newsletters are currently not being published and Fall webinars have not yet been finalized.

The theme of the Fall webinars will be "The Power of Trauma-Informed Ministry", resources and additional info will become available later this summer. This will also be the theme of this year's Abuse Awareness Sunday scheduled for September 23rd.

The new 60 minute video council training on "How to handle allegations of abuse" is now available and we are ready, willing and able to facilitate a session.

The code of conduct document will be presented for approval at the upcoming Synod meeting, your prayers for good discernment are requested.

As always, your Classis Safe Church Committee is available for consultation, training and support. In addition, we have available many resources such as books, PowerPoint presentations, and videos to assist your church with orientation and training.

Respectfully submitted

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Classis Huron Safe Church Committee

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