

**Safe Church Co-ordinator Report**  
**Classis Huron**  
**September 25, 2024**

**Mandate:** Classis Huron Safe Church Committee is mandated as follows:

**Advisory Panel:** To function as an Abuse Response Team according to Synodical Guidelines (as annotated for Classis Huron).

**Education:** To provide comprehensive and on-going education, training and resources to our churches in the prevention of and response to abuse.

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

After 26 years of leading the Safe Church ministry in Classis Huron, and after continued efforts to make the church a safe place to worship, work and learn, Atie Ott is retiring from the position. Now it is my turn to take over from Atie as the Classis Huron Safe Church Co-ordinator. I am by no means an expert in Safe Church matters or in abuse prevention, but I was thrust into being involved throughout my years of ministry and have also served on the Classis BC South-east and Classis Huron Safe Church teams. I have served on the 2018 Synodical Addressing the Abuse of Power Committee and am presently a member of the denominational Dignity Team, a team that is tasked with supporting those who feel they have been victimized by abuses of power in the CRCNA as they seek healing and reconciliation.

It is my intention to take on this job in a transitional sort of way. So, I will be looking for someone to take this on as a more permanent role. If I am still at it 3 years from now, I hope someone reminds me that it was to be transitional.

The task of a Safe Church Co-ordinator includes:

1. connecting with the churches – equipping others who are actively doing safe church ministry at the congregational level;
2. connecting with the classis – building relationships within the classis and reporting regularly to classis as an integral part of the classis structure;
3. connecting with Safe Church Ministry (now Thrive) – communicating regularly for ongoing support and training, and knowing the resources available from Safe Church. (Acts of Synod, 2019, pg. 617)

4. being the “go to” person for abuse questions and support;
5. setting up an Advisory Panel when necessary;
6. taking yearly leadership in the setting up of a Safe Church Conference in order to fulfill the educational and training requirements of Safe Church policies;
7. providing educational material to the churches of Classis.
8. informing churches of upcoming educational opportunities;
9. keeping the Classical Safe Church policies up-to-date;
10. leading the Classis Safe Church Team, a team that is made up of representatives from each congregation. This team allows for conversation mutual encouragement, accountability, opportunities to pass on the latest information and helping each other with policy and insurance questions. The team meets regularly either in person or on-line to support and encourage safe church ministry at the congregational level.

### **Classis Huron Safe Church Committee Members**

Acton - VACANT  
 Blyth - Giena Nonkes  
 Cambridge - VACANT  
 Cambridge River City - Melinda Saunders  
 Clinton - Angela Kaptein  
 Collingwood - Victor Laarman (acting)  
 Drayton - VACANT  
 Exeter - Joseph Lubbers  
 Goderich Trinity - Tiffany Graig  
 Guelph First - Joshua Vriesema  
 Guelph New Life - Tom Bruulsema  
 Kitchener - Paula La Fontaine (Secretary)  
 Listowel - VACANT  
 Lucknow - VACANT  
 Maitland River - Yolanda Ritsema  
 Orangeville - VACANT  
 Owen Sound - Jack Van Dorp  
 Palmerston - Irene Drost  
 Stratford - VACANT  
 Vanastra - VACANT  
 Waterloo - Atie Ott

Please note the churches that are currently without a representative. Please prayerfully consider filling those vacancies.

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. They also assist the coordinator with advice, support and encouragement.

**Safe Church Conference:** Classis Huron has been the host of the annual Safe Church conference, held the first Saturday of March. It is our intention to once again host such a conference on **March 1, 2025**.

### **Importance of Safe Church:**

Over 100 municipalities in Ontario have declared intimate partner violence (IPV) as an epidemic. At a recent Safe Church Conference, a speaker on IPV stated that in 2021 the Waterloo Regional Police answered 6,000 calls related to IPV. Of those, 1,856 led to criminal charges. Bill 173, currently in second reading at the Ontario Legislature, if approved, will declare intimate partner violence as an epidemic in Ontario. Please note that IPV is different from domestic violence. Domestic Violence (DV) can occur between a parent and child, siblings, or even roommates. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) can only occur between romantic partners who may or may not be living together in the same household. All the past CRCNA studies, which led to the creation of the Safe Church ministry, suggested that the amount of abuse among those who inhabit the pews is similar to the amount of abuse in the general population.

Canadian megachurch leader Bruxy Cavey and a number of others involved in the Meeting House staff along with Ravi Zacharias, one of the most popular and influential preachers and Christian authors in the world, as well as Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche, are only three well-know Canadian pastors who were abusers of power and women. These, along with a host of others, including some in our own classis and even more in our own denomination, many whom we know by name, remind us of the damage that can be inflicted on the church and on people's faith. *"Clergy abuse is remarkably common--in one study, 12% of pastors admitted to having sex with a parishioner, and only 23% of victims ever reported misconduct to church officials."* (*Why Pastors Have Affairs: Sacred Boundaries and Sexual Abuse* - Rev. Dr. Steven Koster - November 1,

2023) The stories referred to above are only about pastors, but there are many other types of church leaders whose stories are of a fallen nature and they all remind us of how important it is that we continue to advocate for safety and for godly conduct in the body of Christ.

### **Code of Conduct update:**

Synod 2024 adopted changes to the Church Order that were proposed by Synod 2023 regarding the Code of Conduct. This included mandating that “all officebearers shall uphold the standards of behavior summarized in the CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders” (Art. 5; see also Supplement, Art. 5). The changes also included mention of the Code of Conduct in Church Order Supplement, Article 13-c (Regulation c), as follows: “The duties of the minister are spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling, and such duties do not conflict with the minister’s commitment to the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church as required by one’s signature to the Covenant for Officebearers and as articulated in the Code of Conduct.” In order to “uphold the standards of behaviour summarized in the CRCNA Code of Conduct...” means that councils ought to be familiar with the code and hold each other accountable. The code is readily available on the denominational website.

### **Conclusion:**

As I take on this task, I ask for your support and prayers. This is not an easy time for our denomination, but I look forward to working with the Classical Team. If I can be of help to your congregation in the area of Safe Church, please don’t hesitate to contact me. Meanwhile, if you know of someone who may be gifted in this area and willing to commit to the work of Safe Church, please also let me know.

Humbly submitted,

Carel Geleynse

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