

**CORNERSTONE P. R. C.  
SEXUAL ABUSE POLICY  
OCTOBER, 2023**

**CORNERSTONE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH SEXUAL ABUSE POLICY  
MAY, 2023**

**A. INTRODUCTION.** As a community, Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church is committed to protecting the vulnerable, caring for survivors, and holding accountable any who abuse power and trust. Our commitments come from God, who is a refuge for the abused and never ignores the cry of the abused (Psalm 9: 9, 12). Our community seeks to embody God’s care for justice and the vulnerable as we walk in His ways.

Sexual abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime) when one in a position of authority, power and trust violates or exploits someone who is often powerless to stop it. Sadly, abuse is a common reality in this secular world, but tragically, is also not uncommon in the church community which should be instead a sanctuary of protection. As Christians we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be “wise as serpents.” (Matthew 10:16). We all must take responsibility to become educated about sexual abuse and take accountability to uphold our Policy.

Our Policy goals are to prevent and respond appropriately to sexual abuse by becoming a community that is informed on forms of sexual abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable. All church members should experience an environment of safety and justice and one that is free from any form of sexual abuse.

By its very nature, our church community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. Sadly, predatory individuals often seek environments with vulnerable people. Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim and the community. Abusers utilize a variety of tactics to gain trust, deceive both victims and others within a community, and keep the abuse secret. We all must take ownership of this policy in our church community as we walk with God who loves justice and hates oppression.

**B. DEFINITION OF SEXUAL ABUSE.** Sexual abuse occurs when a person in a position of authority, power, or trust (e.g., a pastor, elder, mentor, parent, teacher, youth leader, chaperon, older child, etc.), exploits that position to engage in sexual behavior with a child or adult under their care, supervision, control or influence, inflicting grievous harm upon the victim. This abusive sexual behavior often does but need not involve any physical contact, but includes any sexual behavior used for the sexual gratification of the perpetrator. A child cannot consent to any sexual behavior with an adult or older child. Likewise, an adult under the care, supervision, control or influence of another adult cannot consent to sexual activity with that person.

**C. PREVENTION OF AND RESPONSE TO SEXUAL ABUSE.** Cornerstone PRC is committed to adopting a Policy that is designed to create a safe environment and prevent future abuse by: (1) insuring appropriate screening of youth leaders, staff and volunteers involved in children’s activities; (2) establish appropriate training and education for those who teach, counsel, lead or care for children; (3) set general rules and guidelines for safety from abuse; (4) appoint a Safeguarding Committee responsible for continuing education, training and implementation of effective sexual abuse prevention and appropriate response care for victims and survivors; (5) establish guidelines for the discipline and control of church members who are known sex abusers.

1. **Screening.**

- a. All workers, volunteers, and youth leaders in church activities in direct contact with children are to be interviewed and approved by an authority within the applicable activity, society or function and then approved by the Consistory.
  - b. All volunteers in activities with direct contact with children must be adults and should ordinarily have been members of Cornerstone PRC for a minimum of one (1) year.
  - c. No worker, volunteer or youth leader being currently investigated or convicted of a sexually related crime is eligible for service in a position having direct contact with children.
  - d. All workers, volunteers and youth leaders are required to comply with this Policy and will be immediately relieved of duties upon evidence of noncompliance.
2. **Training**
- a. All those who are involved in church activities in direct contact with children shall complete a training program for Mandated Reporters. Those to complete training include office bearers, catechism teachers, Sunday school teachers, young people leaders, FISH volunteers, nursery attendants, technology committee, etc.
  - b. The training shall consist of satisfactory completion of the Indiana Mandatory Reporting Public Online Training Course found at <https://reportchildabuse.dcs.in.gov/>.
  - c. Training must be completed before or within three (3) months of commencement of duties.
3. **Miscellaneous Rules and Policies.**
- a. **Nursery Policy**
    - i. The child nursery shall usually be staffed by at least two (2) females, one of whom must be an adult who is not a parent of a helper/assistant.
    - ii. List of nursery attendants must be approved by the Safeguard Committee.
  - b. **Restroom Guidelines**
    - i. A parent is required to accompany their children to the restrooms if the child is 7 years old and below.
  - c. **General Guidelines.**
    - i. Doors to classrooms and nursery should be windowed.
    - ii. Classes or activities with only one adult and one child are prohibited.
    - iii. Every adult staff member or volunteer is responsible to address suspicious behavior or behavior violative of this Policy and document and report same to the Consistory.
  - d. **Office Bearer Accountability Guidelines**
    - i. No officebearer is permitted to meet alone with a minor. No officebearer is permitted to have private communication with an unrelated minor.
    - ii. No officerbearer is permitted to transport an unaccompanied minor.
    - iii. No officebearer is permitted to meet alone with an adult woman in a private setting.
4. **Safeguarding Committee**
- a. The Safeguarding Committee shall be responsible for equipping the Cornerstone PRC community with educational and training tools for effective sexual abuse prevention, detection and response. The Committee shall be comprised of 4-6 members appointed by the Council and shall include (i) a husband and wife and (ii) at least one Council member. Members shall serve three-year terms and may volunteer for a successive term. The Committee's duties shall include:
    - i. Completion of their own appropriate education concerning sexual abuse.
    - ii. Annually remind the congregation of the importance of the Policy.
    - iii. Provide to the congregation educational resources regarding prevention and appropriate response to sexual abuse.

- iv. Conduct a background check of any (i) staff directly working with children and (ii) persons seeking membership in the Cornerstone PRC via the National Sexual Offender Registry at <https://www.nsopw.gov/>.
- v. Report semi-annually to the Council regarding its activities.
- vi. Monitor church activities involving children to determine whether the Policy is being observed and report violations to the Consistory.
- vii. Acquire informative resources to assist and encourage parents to educate their children about appropriate boundaries and the danger signs of grooming and sexual abuse.
- viii. Ensure that all parties requiring training under C.2.c. are in compliance.

**D. REPORTING SEXUAL ABUSE**

Cornerstone PRC is committed to providing a timely and effective response to allegations, disclosures or findings of sexual abuse within our church community. We anticipate an environment where anyone feels comfortable raising questions or concerns, coming forward with reports of any such abuse, and being proactive about preventing and responding to abuse. We will always prioritize the safety and needs of the victim(s) and other vulnerable persons. Since it is typically profoundly difficult for victims to report abuse, we will endeavor to never blame victims for struggling to come forward, delaying disclosure, or other common disclosure behavior. All allegations of sexual abuse will be received assuming the possibility of veracity.

*Response Protocols*

1. When there is reasonable belief that any person may be in immediate danger of severe harm, call 911.
2. In the event of another emergency situation involving a child that will not result in severe injury or death, call Child Protective Services (CPS) 1-800-800-5556.
3. In the event of suspected child abuse , allegations are to be reported to a consistory member of Cornerstone PRC, and the Consistory shall, if appropriate, engage the advice of counsel and make a single report to CPS in the names of all Mandatory Reporters following the CPS guidelines available at <https://reportchildabuse.dcs.in.gov/>. Consistory will also notify the parents or guardians of child victims.
4. All cases of adult sexual abuse shall be reported to the Consistory. However, if the alleged abuser is a Consistory member, the report shall also be made to the Safeguarding Committee. The Consistory and the Safeguarding Team shall respect the agency/permission in reporting suspected adult abuse to the civil authorities. All reports of sexual abuse will be handled forthrightly with due respect for victim’s privacy and confidentiality.
5. If the alleged perpetrator has official duties or responsibilities within Cornerstone PRC, the Consistory shall immediately place the alleged offender on administrative leave or suspend his/her duties until the completion of any investigation for the protection of the vulnerable, and in accordance with the Church Order.

6. Full cooperation will be afforded civil authorities when applicable.
7. No victim or any reporter of an allegation of abuse shall be subject to any form of retaliation by members, officers, volunteers, or those affiliated with Cornerstone PRC.

*Investigation Protocols*

1. All allegations will be investigated expeditiously by the Consistory of Cornerstone PRC.
2. No accused shall be addressed by any member other than the Consistory until the safety of the child or victim is secured.
3. The accused is to be prevented from having any physical or verbal contact with the victim until deemed appropriate.
4. All details, interviews, and information will remain confidential to those legitimately involved in the investigation.
5. All records of allegations and investigation shall be maintained by the Clerk of the Consistory.

Additional Information for Reporting Sexual Abuse and Care for Victims can be found in **Supplement A** attached hereto.

**E. CONSISTORIAL INVESTIGATION, DISCIPLINE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF SAFEGUARDS AND BOUNDARIES FOR CONVICTED, KNOWN, AND ALLEGED SEX OFFENDERS.**

Cornerstone PRC also desires to establish policy parameters to guide the Consistory in investigating and disciplining convicted sex offenders, known sex offenders, and alleged sex offenders who are members of or seek to become members of our church community. Although the Consistory must have the liberty to handle each situation on a case-by-case basis, it is also desirable to establish a general structure and basis for the discipline and formation of safety boundaries for the protection of the vulnerable in our church community.

Accordingly, the governing principles for (A) discipline of sexual offenders from Scripture and the Reformed Confessions and also (B) safety policies and boundaries for the protection of the church community are attached as **Supplement B**. In addition, a recommended form for Participation in Church Functions Agreement for Sex Offenders is attached as **Supplement C**.

Supplements B and C are available upon request.

## **Supplement A:**

### **Contact Information for Reporting Sexual Abuse and for Help for the Victim**

- Reports of adult sexual assault and rape should be made to legal authorities only with victim permission.
- Reports of child sexual abuse should be made to legal authorities whenever there is reason to suspect child abuse or neglect. All members of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church, whether they are a mandated reporter or not, should report child abuse suspicions and/or allegations first to the civil authorities outside of the church before they are reported to the consistory.

#### **To Report Sexual Abuse in Illinois**

For child abuse call: Department of Children and Family Services.

1 (800) 25ABUSE (1-800-252-2873)

For adult sexual abuse call: Adult Protective Services

1-866-800-1409

#### **To Report Sexual Abuse in Indiana**

For child abuse call: Child Protective Services (CPS)

1-800-800-5556

For adult sexual abuse call: Adult Protective Services

1-800-992-6978

#### **Sexual Assault Support**

RAINN: National Sexual Assault Hotline: Confidential 24/7 Support: [www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

#### **Independent Investigation**

GRACE: Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment:

GRACE's team of experts—from therapists, theologians, and former prosecutors—can conduct a thorough and objective investigation of abuse allegations at an organization's request:

[www.netgrace.org](http://www.netgrace.org)

#### **Counselling Help for the Victim**

Chicago Christian Counselling Center: <https://www.chicagochristiancounseling.org/>

Watch Hill Therapy - A Chicago-based therapy practice specializing in individual, couples, and trauma therapy, with a unique focus on enhancing relationships, healing from the past, and thriving individually.

<https://watchhilltherapy.com/>

Dina Zwiebel: individual and group counseling treating trauma, depression, anxiety and eating disorders

<https://dinazwiebel.com/about.html>

Erin Stewart, Main St. Counseling, Crown Point IN

#### **Support Services**

HAVEN of Mercy: HAVEN was organized in 2021 by 30 men and women from the PRCA to help victims of abuse and provide education regarding the realities of abuse.

[havenofmercypr@gmail.com](mailto:havenofmercypr@gmail.com)

## **Supplement B:**

### I. Governing Principles from Scripture and the Reformed Confessions for Dealing with Cases of Sexual Abuse

- A.** The consistory understands sexual abuse to be, in almost every instance, a violation of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> commandments of God's law.
1. It is a violation of the 1st commandment. Abuse is idolatry. The abuser is committing the sin of idolatry of self. Abusers worship themselves instead of God. Abusers see themselves at the center of their world and say/think they were created to be worshiped, to have their desires satisfied, to be in control and have others serve them. Abusers worship themselves by desiring to be in control and to live as God. Lord's Day 35 condemns this as idolatry: "Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God who has manifested Himself in His Word, to contrive or have any other object in which men place their trust."
  2. It is a violation of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment. Abuse almost always occurs when there is a power and authority differential between the abuser and the victim (e.g. parent and child, older sibling and younger sibling, teacher and student, coach and player, pastor and member). One in a position of power and authority abuses that position to take advantage of one with lesser power and authority.
  3. It is a violation of the 6th commandment. Abuse is an act of murder that damages not only a victim's body, but also their mind, soul, and personhood. Lord's Day 40 condemns this as murder: "That neither in thoughts, nor words, nor gestures, much less in deeds, I dishonor, hate, wound, or kill my neighbor, by myself or by another..."
  4. It is a violation of the 7th commandment. Sexual abuse is any unwanted contact or interaction that occurs for the sexual stimulation of the abuser. Lord's Day 41 condemns this as adultery: "...he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto."
  5. It is a violation of the 9th commandment. Abusers almost always are master manipulators, deceivers, and liars. Lord's Day 43 condemns this as bearing false witness: "That I bear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man's words; that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God..."
- B.** The consistory understands sexual abuse, when compared to other sins, to be a particularly heinous sin that does extensive damage and is a threat to many. This requires that a consistory handle cases of sexual abuse with the utmost seriousness.
1. Sexual abuse deeply impacts the abuser's whole person, spiritually and physically. God's teaching in I Corinthians 6:18 says: "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body."
  2. Sexual abuse is also a violent physical and spiritual act against another person. It is what is described by God as oppression. In Genesis 34:2, we read of Shechem's rape of Dinah: "And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her." Moses writes, he "seized" Dinah and "humiliated" her, otherwise interpreted as "oppressing" her.

3. Though not one of our official creeds, the Westminster Larger Catechism does accurately summarize the biblical teaching concerning the differences between certain sins in Q/A 151. Many of these things apply to the aggravation of the sin of sexual abuse.

“Q. 151 What are those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others?”

A. Sins receive their aggravations

1. From the persons offending: if they be of riper age, greater experience or grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others.
2. From the parties offended: if immediately against God, his attributes, and worship; against Christ, and his grace; the Holy Spirit, his witness, and workings; against superiors, men of eminency, and such as we stand especially related and engaged unto; against any of the saints, particularly weak brethren, the souls of them, or any other, and the common good of all or many.
3. From the nature and quality of the offence: if it be against the express letter of the law, break many commandments, contain in it many sins: if not only conceived in the heart, but breaks forth in words and actions, scandalize others, and admit of no reparation: if against means, mercies, judgments, light of nature, conviction of consciousness, public or private admonition, censures of the church, civil punishments; and our prayers, purposes, promises, vows, covenants, and engagements to God or men: if done deliberately, willfully, presumptuously, impudently, boastingly, maliciously, frequently, obstinately, with delight, continuance, or relapsing after repentance.
4. From circumstances of time and place: if on the Lord’s Day, or other times of divine worship; or immediately before or after these, or other helps to prevent or remedy such miscarriages: if in public, or in the presence of others, who are thereby likely to be provoked or defiled.”

- C. The consistory must deal directly with cases of sexual abuse. Victims and/or others who become aware of sexual abuse are not to confront the abuser privately or accompanied by others (i.e. to follow “the way of Matthew 18”), but must report the matter directly to the consistory.

1. It would be tremendously harmful for a victim of sexual abuse to be asked to confront their abuser on their own or even if they are not alone and are accompanied by others.
2. A private admonition would also not benefit the abuser, since the nature of this sin is so deeply ingrained that the abuser needs extensive, time-consuming help to give evidence of deep, sincere repentance. This extensive work is something that the consistory is in a position to carry out and oversee. (It is important to leave room for those with training and expertise. While pastoral guidance, including in the forms of accountability and discipline, may be very helpful for the abuser, the depth and complexity of an abuser’s issues, such as their self-deception, entitlement and the justifications that allow them to abuse others, often requires intervention by professionals that specialize in treating abusers.)
3. Reformed church polity allows for dealing with some private sins as sins which must be reported directly to the consistory because those sins are especially gross and a threat to others.
  1. Synod of Emden (1571): “...but hidden sins, those which might bring harm and ruin to the general welfare or to the churches, such as treason, or seducing of souls, shall be reported to the minister so that after his advice it may be determined what must be done.”



2. Synod of Dordrecht (1578): "In answer to the question which sins are public: A public sin is one which.... lastly because of its grossness is deemed worthy of public punishment. Thus the sins of David against Uriah and of Ananias and Sapphira against the Holy Spirit were made public and punished as public sins."
  3. Van Dellen and Monsma on CO Art. 72: "Sins that are not generally known should not be revealed *unless the nature of the transgression should require such*, (for example: theft, murder, etc., being crimes against the civil institutions) ..." (p. 301).
  4. Van Dellen and Monsma on CO Art. 73: "Common sense, however, still tells us that in case a brother or sister has committed a very grievous and dangerous sin, that then it may be to his own best interest and the safety of others, that at least his Minister be informed" (pp. 302-3).
- D.** The consistory must take seriously and deal with every accusation of sexual abuse.
1. Sexual abuse rarely happens with witnesses present. Those who disclose abuse must be believed. Deut. 22:25-27 indicates a situation where a woman was raped without any witnesses present to confirm her story but was still believed: "But if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then the man only that lay with her shall die. But unto the damsel thou shalt do nothing; there is in the damsel no sin worthy of death: for as when a man riseth against his neighbor, and slayeth him, even so is this matter: For he found her in the field, and the betrothed damsel cried, and there was none to save her."
  2. To believe those who disclose sexual abuse does not mean that there is no due process of investigation. However, it does mean that their word is taken seriously and efforts are made to protect them first. While false claims of sexual abuse are possible, they are rare.
- E.** The consistory must report cases of sexual abuse immediately to the civil authorities when required to do so by law, as God has entrusted the sword to the civil government for the punishment of evil-doers. See Supplement A.
1. Reports of adult sexual abuse should be made to legal authorities only with victim permission. Child sexual abuse is a crime and must be reported regardless of any and all other factors. Reports of child sexual abuse must be made to legal authorities whenever there is even a reason to suspect child abuse or neglect. All members of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church, whether they are a mandated reporter or not, should report child abuse suspicions and/or allegations first to the civil authorities outside of the church before they are reported to the consistory. Sins such as physical abuse, rape, sexual assault, physical assault, battery, kidnapping etc... are categorized as being reportable to public/governmental authorities. Non-reportable forms of abuse to public/governmental authorities include spiritual, verbal, emotional, financial abuse, doctrinal error, abusive leadership, sexual harassment, etc... Adultery, while a sin, is typically not defined as abuse as it involves two consenting adults.
  2. Romans 13:4 says of the civil government: "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Romans 13:1 sets forth our calling toward civil government, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." Titus 3:1 likewise says: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates..." And 1 Peter 2:17 also says: "Fear God. Honour the king."
  3. Belgic Confession Art. 36 sets forth the calling of civil government: "We believe that our gracious God, because of the depravity of mankind, hath appointed kings, princes and magistrates, willing that the

world should be governed by certain laws and policies; to the end that the dissoluteness of men might be restrained, and all things carried on among them with good order and decency. For this purpose he hath invested the magistracy with the sword, for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the protection of them that do well." The article goes on to describe what is the Christian's calling toward civil government: "[I]t is the bounden duty of everyone, of what state, quality, or condition so ever he may be, to subject himself to the magistrates...to show due honor and respect to them, and to obey them in all things which are not repugnant to the Word of God."

- F.** The consistory views it to be its solemn calling to prioritize the protection of the sheep and lambs and the care of the oppressed in the congregation.
1. God is a God who cares for the oppressed. Psalm 140:12 says: "I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor." Psalm 146:5, 7a says: "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God...Which executeth judgment for the oppressed..."
  2. The church must do likewise. God's command in Psalm 82:3-4 to rulers of the church is: "Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy, rid them out of the hand of the wicked."
  3. This commitment will manifest itself practically in the ongoing pastoral/consistorial care and support of victims and their families, including helping them find professional counseling help when needed. This will also manifest itself practically in the protection of the other members of the congregation, including by informing them of the sexual abuse committed when and how it is deemed appropriate.
- G.** The consistory will make public to the congregation, at the appropriate time, those who have committed the serious and heinous sin of sexual abuse.
1. Christian discipline is a labor of love and its purpose according to Calvin is "1) That the name of God may not be blasphemed by the world. 2) To safeguard the loyal members of the Church. 3) To move the sinner to shame and repentance." Article 71 C.O. Van Dellen and Monsma, page 299.
  2. As was noted in I.C above, these sins are to be considered, although private, yet as public and therefore Matthew 18 does not need to be followed. Therefore, a public announcement is required as the principle of Article 71 of the C.O., to "reconcile the sinner with the Church and his neighbor".
  3. As was noted in I.F above, the consistory views it to be a solemn calling to protect the sheep and lambs from such sexual predators. Therefore, a public announcement is required to safeguard the sheep and the lambs, in case, the sexual abuser may fall into this sin again, or if he is not honest in his confession and more members come forward who have been sexually abused by such a one.
  4. Commentary on Article 74 of the C.O. states "If repentance follows, then complete reconciliation with the aggrieved parties, and in case of public sins with the whole Church, can follow. If, however, the party concerned has sinned repeatedly, *or if the offense is very grievous*, it may be well for both transgressor and the Church that he be ordered to abstain from using the Sacraments for the time being." Emphasis Cornerstone PRC - Van Dellen and Monsma, page 308.
  5. Commentary on Article 75 of the C.O. states "In case of *extreme sins* a Consistory may feel itself bound to withhold the privileges of membership for the time being, especially that of partaking of the sacraments, Synod of 1578, Dort, even made a provision for this step in the Church Order (see Art. 98, Dort, 1578).....This right is also expressed by implication in the present article and its provision that reconciliation shall take place "upon sufficient evidence of repentance."" Van Dellen and

Monsma, page 310. Although Article 75 doesn't specify if reconciliation should be before the whole church or before the Consistory, "Consistories should be guided by considerations such as these: Which form of reconciliation (public or private) will glorify God most? Which is best for the Church? Which form is best for the repentant sinner? ... *On the other hand, offensive sins greatly dishonoring God's name and the Church of Christ should be confessed openly and personally so that all may see and know....*" Emphasis Cornerstone PRC - Van Dellen and Monsma, page 311.

- H. The consistory will labor slowly and at length with abusers with a view to their deep, sincere repentance and turning.
  1. The consistory will be on guard against an abuser's appeal to "cheap grace" by a quick apology and demanding forgiveness as a means to avoid discipline and to continue his abuse.
  2. The consistory will recognize the deep-seated, deeply ingrained nature of this sin and will not be satisfied with anything less than sincere repentance and obvious turning from this sin. 2 Cor. 7:10-11 will serve as the guide: "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."
  3. Part of the way in which an abuser shows penitence is by confessing fully and without qualification all the instances of and details of his/her sexual abuse, by understanding and verbalizing the extent of the damage caused, by actively (not reluctantly) seeking out accountability from those in authority, by siding with the victim rather than himself/herself, and by accepting without complaint and self-pity all the consequences of his/her sins (including jail time and a strict policy of not being near any children). On the matter of consequences, there are consequences for sin even if/when the abuser is repentant (cf. 2 Sam. 12:10-12, 14).
  4. At the same time, the consistory will not needlessly delay to proceed to further steps of Christian discipline if the abuser remains impenitent.
- I. There must be allowance for a certain measure of flexibility in the consistory's discipline work so that the work is carried out on a case-by-case basis. No set of rules will possibly cover every scenario. Van Dellen and Monsma comment on Church Order Art. 71: "It should also be noted in this connection that our Church Order merely indicates certain principles to be followed in the exercise of ecclesiastical discipline. The Church Order does not specify in detail how investigations are to be conducted; how long one should be disciplined before the final step of excommunication is taken; which specific sins are worthy of discipline, etc., etc. The civil authorities have a penal code by which they are guided. The Church has no penal code, for the Church does not seek to administer external punishment, but the Church seeks to save the sinner and to promote the glory of God. To attain these ends each case must be dealt with according to its own peculiar circumstances, and as soon as the end in view has been gained ecclesiastical discipline ceases. On this point Dr. F. L. Rutgers aptly remarked: 'No penal code can be constructed for ecclesiastical discipline. The purpose of discipline demands a maximum of variability in its application, not a set of rules for constant application. Just so the principles are established, and just so these are applied in every particular case, for only then will ecclesiastical discipline function correctly.'" (p. 292).

## II. Policy for Convicted Sex Offenders

**A Convicted Sex Offender (CSO) is a person who has been convicted by local, state, or federal governmental authorities as being guilty of sexual abuse and is therefore designated by government officials as a Convicted Sex Offender.**

- A. Purpose** – This policy applies to Convicted Sex Offenders who are members of or seek to become members of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church. While there is forgiveness for sexual abuse sins, the consistory recognizes the enslaving nature and power of this sin and is committed to care for and protect the members of our congregation from this sin of abuse. Furthermore, we acknowledge that there are consequences for all sin, especially the sin of sexual abuse. We also recognize that for those who have been abused, the effects are long lasting and even life altering. The intent of this policy is to obey God’s command in Psalm 82: 3,4 for rulers of the church to “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy, rid them of the hand of the wicked.” “I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.” (Psalm 140: 12) “Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God...Which executeth judgment for the oppressed:” (Psalm 146: 5,7a)

- B. True Repentance** - All Convicted Sex Offenders (whether visitors or members) shall make themselves known to the Consistory of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church. As a church, we desire the reconciliation of the Convicted Sexual Offender to God through the blood of Jesus Christ. No sin which a child of God commits cannot be forgiven. However, the consistory must also be on guard against false repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). *“Many sex offenders have found the value of “cheap grace” in faith communities. Simply put, these sex offenders have come to realize that if they cry readily and mouth the words of repentance, they won’t have to take any action to remedy the damage they have inflicted. Numerous clergy have been confronted with an offender who confesses to sexual abuse, emotionally expresses remorse and pledges abuse will never happen again. The offender begs for God’s forgiveness and some members of the clergy are quick to absolve the sinner and the sin. When this happens, many offenders return home, realize how easy it is to be forgiven and will sexually abuse again. An offender who is confessing sexual misconduct but is unwilling to address the physical or emotional needs of the victim, to disclose the abuse to his spouse (close family members) or to seek sex offender treatment may be seeking forgiveness but is giving no indication of an intention to repair the damage inflicted or to reform his/her behavior.”* ([www.netgrace.org](http://www.netgrace.org))

- C. Church Membership/Church Attendance** – Those seeking membership in Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church will be investigated/researched for criminal sexual crimes via the National Sexual Offender Registry at <https://www.nsopw.gov/>.

All Convicted Sex Offenders (CSO) who seek to become a member of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church or who wish to attend a function (including worship services) of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church shall make themselves known to the consistory. The consistory shall review all court and investigative records of the CSO. Additionally, the consistory shall communicate with the CSO’s parole/probation officer and with the local prosecutor’s office to determine the legality of the CSO becoming a member of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church and/or attending a church function.

If the consistory, after prayerful and diligent scrutiny, determine the CSO is truly repentant, the consistory will work on a case by case basis to determine if the CSO may become a member of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church and/or attend church functions. The consistory will take into consideration the length of time that has elapsed since the CSO has committed the sin of sexual abuse, whether or not the CSO is truly sorry for his/her sins and has been leading a life of true repentance, and whether the abuser's victim(s) is currently a member of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church.

Before the CSO is allowed to become a member of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church and/or attend a church function, the consistory shall first by name inform the congregation of the CSO's request to become a member or attend church functions. The consistory shall hear any concerns from current members of the congregation and take them into consideration when deliberating and making a decision on the CSO's request of membership and/or attendance at a church function.

**D. If Church Membership or Church Function Attendance is Granted to a Convicted Sexual Offender** –If it is determined by the consistory that a CSO may become a member and/or attend public functions (including worship services) of the church, the following protocols must be followed at all times.

1. The congregation will be notified of the CSO by name and that the consistory has approved the CSO to become a member and/or attend church functions following the protocols herewith. Prior to notification to the congregation, the CSO shall be made aware of this communication with the congregation.
2. The CSO must agree with, sign, and abide by a **Participation Agreement for Convicted Sex Offenders** drafted by Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church for each CSO individually. An example of a possible **Participation Agreement for Convicted Sex Offenders** is attached. [See Supplement C.](#)
3. The consistory reserves the right to revoke a CSO's allowance to come to church for worship services, programs, or activities.
4. If a CSO leaves Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church and begins attending another church, the elders will disclose the CSO's criminal conviction of abuse to the leadership at the next church (including if it is a church outside of the PRCA).

### III. Guidelines Regarding Known/Alleged Sexual Offenders

**A Known Sexual Offender is a person who has been found guilty of sexual abuse by the Church but has not been convicted by local, state, or federal government authorities. An Alleged Sexual Offender is a person who has an allegation of sexual abuse against them and is being investigated.**

#### A. Church Membership/Church Attendance

Many situations may arise regarding known/alleged sexual offenders. The consistory must be able to handle each situation on a case-by-case basis. In some instances, the consistory may view a sexual abuser to be guilty (Known Sexual Offender) even though he/she has not been prosecuted by law, and

therefore the consistory may wish to follow the Convicted Sex Offender policy. In other situations, the guilt or innocence of the Alleged Sexual Offender may not be known.

If the known/alleged offender seeks membership at Cornerstone PRC or seeks to attend church functions, the elders retain the right to refuse membership and/or attendance at church functions. Admission of the known/alleged offender to church services or related activities will be based on factors that arise out of the consistory's investigation of the known/alleged abuse such as if the alleged abuse occurred, and if so whether or not the offender is truly sorry for his/her sins and has been leading a life of true repentance; the extent of prior alleged convictions; the length of time that has elapsed since the offender has allegedly fallen into the sin of sexual abuse; whether or not the known/alleged offender's victim(s) attends Cornerstone PRC; and his or her willingness to follow guidelines set out by this policy. (This is not a comprehensive list of admission criteria.)

## B. Church Membership or Church Function Attendance is Granted

If the elders allow the known/alleged offender to join membership or to attend church functions, the consistory may demand that the known/alleged offender first agree to any or all of the following. (This is a guide for the consistory and not a comprehensive list of the consistory's demands from the known/alleged abuser.)

1. Inform/Verify any history of sexual offenses and disclose them to the consistory.
2. The consistory doing a thorough criminal background check. If the information provided by the known/alleged offender differs from the information gathered by the background check, that may be grounds for denying membership and attendance at church functions.
3. The consistory may first by name inform the congregation in a public worship service of the known/alleged offender's request for membership or to attend church functions. Prior to notification to the congregation, the known/alleged sexual offender shall be made aware of this communication with the congregation. The consistory shall hear any further allegations from current members of the congregation and take them into consideration when deliberating and making a decision on the known/alleged offender's request of membership or attendance at church functions.
4. The consistory may designate persons who will monitor the known/alleged offender while he/she is on the property or in attendance at any church related services, activities, or gatherings.
5. The consistory may wish to designate where the known/alleged abuser may and may not physically be while on the church property or at a church function.
6. The consistory reserves the right to forbid someone from coming to the church for worship services, programs, or activities.
7. Any other restrictions that the consistory determines appropriate.
8. A warning that the church will report any suspected activity to civil authorities.
9. A warning that any violation of the code of conduct (including further allegations or suspicion of abusive behavior) can result in discipline and banning from the church facilities or any church related programs and activities.
10. Sign a written document (drafted on a case-by-case basis) that details all of these items and/or anything else that the consistory deems important to include. This document could be similar to

the Participation in Church Functions Agreement for Convicted Sex Offenders. See Supplement C.

11. If the known/alleged sexual offender leaves Cornerstone PRC and begins attending another church, the elders will disclose allegations or self-admission or criminal conviction of abuse to the leadership at the next church (including if it is a church outside of the PRCA).

[Supplement B and C have been adopted with permission from the Crete PRC Sexual Abuse Policy (March 2023)]

## **Supplement C:**

### **Participation in Church Functions Agreement for Convicted Sex Offenders**

I recognize my sin of sexual abuse, the enslaving nature of this sin, and the consequences for my sin. I also recognize the concerns and responsibilities of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed to ensure a safe environment for its members. I therefore wish to comply with the following conditions that would allow my participation in church functions including the attendance of church worship services.

1. As a Convicted Sex Offender, I acknowledge that I must be monitored at all church functions at all times by a consistory approved chaperon. I agree to maintain accountability with the consistory and will make sure my whereabouts at church or church activities are known at all times to the consistory.
2. The Consistory has the prerogative to mandate that I will avoid all unsupervised contact with women, children, and youth on the church property or at church-sponsored events.
3. I shall only initiate contact either in person, via phone, e-mail, or any other mode of communication with individuals who have been previously approved by the consistory.
4. I will not possess or view a church directory.
5. I authorize Cornerstone PRC to obtain information regarding myself from my parole officer, case worker, governmental agencies or other person who might have information relative to my criminal records.
6. I will not invite members of Cornerstone PRC to my home.
7. I will not go to a church member's home without the attendance of an adult male member who is fully aware of my present convictions of sexual abuse. Furthermore, I will not go to church members' homes without full knowledge and prior consent of both the church member and the consistory.
8. I will not attend any functions at another church or congregation without the knowledge and permission of the Cornerstone PRC consistory. I understand that the Cornerstone PRC consistory will then notify the consistory of the other congregation and request permission from their consistory as well.
9. I agree to comply with any court mandated or parole restrictions, conditions, treatments, and/or requirements and recognize that these take precedence over any less restrictive parts of this agreement. Any conflict between this Agreement and court mandated restrictions will be resolved in favor of the court mandated restrictions, only upon written approval of the consistory.
10. I understand and agree the consistory, in fulfilling its responsibilities in providing a safe environment for its members and guests, will disclose an account of my past behavior and criminal history to parents, church leaders, members, volunteers, and all other persons who may need to have such information in order to meet their parental or supervisory responsibilities and interact safely with the church.
11. I consent to the disclosure of any of my personal information including but not limited to anything relating to or arising out of any of my activities at Cornerstone PRC or during the term of this agreement, to any person as Cornerstone PRC may deem necessary, in their sole discretion, for the purposes of implementing this agreement or protecting any person. I agree to sign a release of information for Cornerstone PRC to communicate with my probation officer, case worker, counselor, or therapist, and to release any personal information about me to any third party, upon that party's written request and upon notice (written or oral) to me of said release.



12. I understand that the provisions of this Participation in Church Functions Agreement do not create any personal and/or legal rights against the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA), Cornerstone PRC, or any other local congregation or any of their members, office-bearers, employees, agents, or volunteers. I hereby waive any rights and release and discharge Cornerstone PRC from and against any and all claims or causes of action whatsoever that I may have now or in the future against Cornerstone PRC arising out of or in any way connected with my participation in church activities or resulting from my execution or performance of this agreement. I further agree to indemnify and hold Cornerstone PRC and its members, office-bearers, employees, volunteers, visitors, and guests harmless for any claim, lawsuit or damages that I may cause directly or indirectly, including but not limited to those related to my actions or inactions at Cornerstone PRC or performance or nonperformance of this Agreement.
13. This Agreement shall remain valid until mutually terminated by a writing signed by Cornerstone PRC and myself. The obligations stated herein shall survive termination, for so long as Cornerstone PRC deems it necessary, in its sole discretion, for the purposes of protecting any person. Should I wish to transfer my attendance, participation, or membership to another congregation, a copy of this Agreement and any other documentation deemed suitable by the Cornerstone PRC consistory will be sent to the consistory of that congregation.
14. I swear and affirm, under penalty of perjury, that I have fully disclosed to the Cornerstone PRC consistory all aspects of my personal history, including all details related to my criminal convictions, the sentences related thereto and treatments and counseling received. I agree that if it is discovered that I have not fully disclosed such details, the church may terminate any further participation in any church activities. Further, I have read and understand the above conditions and agree to abide by them. If at any point I break one of the above conditions or in any way breach the terms of this Agreement, I recognize that church discipline may be exercised against me, and I shall not be allowed to attend church activities in Cornerstone PRC and that I will be reported to the appropriate governmental, police and/or parole authorities, as required by law or otherwise stated herein.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Participant's Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature/Title of Local Church Official: \_\_\_\_\_