

Christian Reformed Church regrets clergy sex abuse, adopts new policies

Not reporting it is not an option

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The Christian Reformed Church has acknowledged its failures in dealing with victims of clergy sexual abuse and has passed recommendations aimed at improving awareness, prevention and justice.

At the CRC's annual Synod, meeting recently in Palos Heights, Illinois, delegates prayed for forgiveness in failing to respond justly and compassionately over the years to abuse victims, according to a news release posted on the CRC Web site.

Delegates also repented the fact that perpetrators of abuse have not always been disciplined adequately by church councils.

The prayer session followed a lengthy discussion on a report from the denomination's Abuse Victims Task Force, which was asked by the Synod several years ago to establish guidelines on how churches should handle abuse allegations. Many delegates, the news release said, acknowledged that abuse has been a problem in their churches and that their church councils have not always responded in the best manner, often because of a lack of knowledge or proper training.

The Synod approved recommendations:

- Urging church councils to provide for the pastoral-care needs of all concerned, including the accused, when an allegation of sexual abuse by a church leader is made.
- Reaffirming a 2005 decision to support the application of restorative justice, or mutual resolution, in abuse cases, recognizing that it will not be appropriate in all such cases.
- Asking denominational staff to develop training, prevention and awareness-raising materials that can help church councils and others better address the complex factors involved when a complaint of sexual abuse is made against a church leader.

Although the recommendations do not explicitly state that churches should report cases of sexual abuse to civil authorities, "we understand that, first of all, you meet all the legal requirements," said Henry Hess, the CRC's director of communications, in an interview. "Not reporting it is not an option," he said. —*Religion News Service*