

CREC Review Committee Mission Statement

On October 3, 2015, the CREC publically announced the formation of a Review Committee to look into “legitimate questions and concerns regarding some of the past actions and practices in two cases of sexual abuse” that occurred in Moscow, Idaho, approximately 10 years ago. The Committee is specifically tasked to inquire into the pastoral care and counseling ministry of the two churches with regard to their handling of sexual abuse cases.

Background

On September 14, 2015, the immediate past Presiding Minister of the CREC Council (2008-2014), Rev. Jack Phelps, sent a letter to the Session of Christ Church, Moscow, suggesting that a review of the church’s handling of these two cases and of the recent public discussion of them on social media would be in order. Shortly thereafter, Christ Church requested the formation of an *ad hoc* Committee of Council to perform a thorough review. A few days later, Trinity Reformed Church, Moscow, also requested such a review on a related matter.

Composition of the Committee

On October 8, 2014, the CREC Council, meeting at Lake Tahoe, Nevada, elected Rev. Douglas Wilson to a 3-year term as Presiding Minister of Council. At the same meeting, Rev. Randy Booth was elected Assistant Presiding Minister of Council, also for a 3-year term. Because the Review Committee was to be tasked with reviewing the practices of the church where Rev. Wilson is pastor, he immediately recused himself from participating in the selection and appointment of and any direct involvement in the proposed committee. Under established CREC procedures, the responsibility for leadership of the committee defaulted to Rev. Booth, as Assistant Presiding Minister of Council. Pastor Booth then appointed seven men to the Review Committee.

To ensure that the committee would be balanced and truly representative of the denomination at large, Rev. Booth appointed the Presiding Ministers of each of the CREC’s regional presbyteries to serve on the Review Committee. Each of these men is a pastor in a CREC church who has been duly elected by his respective presbytery to serve a three year term. They are, therefore, truly representative of the churches in their presbyteries. In the case of Tyndale Presbytery, the Presiding Minister was not available to serve, so the Assistant Presiding Minister of Tyndale was appointed in his stead.

Mission and Purpose

It is important to understand what the Review Committee is not. First, this is not a *church court*. No ecclesiastical charges have been filed, nor have any formal complaints been made under any provision of the CREC Constitution or Book of Procedures. At no time has there been any allegation that anyone in leadership at these two churches is personally suspected of any sexual impropriety or offence. There is, therefore, nothing to adjudicate, nor is there, at the present time, any known reason to believe that formal charges would be in order. Second, this is not an *investigation* in the sense that such would be conducted by an agency of the government like the Sheriff’s Office or the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The men on the Review Committee are pastors, and their role is pastoral. What they have been called upon to determine is whether there were errors, sins or any sort of malfeasance committed by either the Christ

Church or Trinity Reformed Church leadership in their handling of the two cases. We will offer advice on any needed corrections as well as potential new policies, procedures or guidelines for future conduct. It is possible that part of the Committee's work will include bringing in outside and independent counsel to help with its efforts as well as provide training in dealing with matters of abuse that may arise within our churches in the future.

The situation has been complicated by a host of rumors and allegations and with both legitimate and illegitimate questions about how the churches have handled things. These are sister churches in the CREC, led by and populated with real people. The Committee members care about the churches and feel a strong responsibility to enable them to improve their ministry and learn from any mistakes that might have been made in the past. The Committee also feels deep sympathy for the victims in these cases and is hopeful that this inquiry will help them heal from the damage done to them by their victimizers.

With that in mind, the Review Committee is engaged in seeking answers to three basic sets of questions:

1. In handling the cases under review, did the pastors or elders commit sins or grievous malfeasance against anyone involved of which they need to repent and have not yet repented? Moreover, the Committee seeks to discover if there was any corruption involved in the handling of these cases or any subsequent effort to cover up any sins, errors or corruption.
2. In these cases, did either Session, *acting on what they knew at the time*, do anything they should not have done, or fail to do anything they should have done? This set of questions concerns the *contemporaneous exercise of wisdom* in handling the cases.
3. An additional wisdom issue is also being considered by the Review Committee. This has to do with a *retrospective* consideration. *With what is now known*, are there matters that would have been handled differently by the leadership or that should be handled differently in the future?

In conducting its work, the Review Committee has asked for and has been given unfettered access to the records of both churches. It has been allowed to interview anyone in a leadership position at either church who was serving at the time of the events or is presently serving. It has also sought to interview a wide range of affected parties and to compile relevant documents from a wide range of sources, including Session minutes, court records and correspondence between many different people. Examining hundreds of pages of documents and conducting many hours of interviews have already helped give the Committee a fairly detailed overview of the facts, feelings and opinions of those involved. The Committee is attempting to gather testimony from all those who were directly involved in or affected by these cases, to the extent to which it is both reasonable and feasible.

The Committee recognizes that in the end it is likely that there will be individuals and factions who will not be satisfied with any report it will produce. However, the members of the Review Committee are fully committed to doing their work diligently and honestly. The Committee is determined to follow the record wherever it may lead and will not hesitate to clearly identify any sins, errors of omission, errors of commission, errors of wisdom, malfeasance, corruption or cover-up that may be discovered in the course of its review. It takes seriously its responsibility for the purity of the church, the care of souls and of fairness to all parties. It is the Committee's sincere hope that its work will result in recommendations leading to the improvement of policies and practices of all the churches within the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches to the glory of God and in the service of our individual church members.