

What You Need To Know — Victim

If you were abused by a church leader and want to request an Advisory Panel hearing (a fact-finding panel) conducted by the Classical Safe Church Team:

1. You have two options to begin the process within the Christian Reformed Church:
 - (i) You or your representative can contact a member of the Council. This is the Council of the church where the alleged offender is a member (only this Council has spiritual authority over the accused). You do not need to be a member of the church; however, you must be of legal age in the province to request a fact-finding panel.
 - (ii) You or your representative can contact a member of the Classical Safe Church Team with the charges in writing and to request a fact-finding panel.
2. In the case of (i) above, once you have informed Council of the allegations (minimal detail required), the Council's Executive should inform the Classical Safe Church Team and the Advisory Panel process begins. That is, the fact-finding process begins. If the classis does not have a Safe Church Team, the Executive should then request the nearest Classical Safe Church Team to conduct a Panel hearing. The Advisory Panelists may not be members of your church or of the accused's church nor may they have any ongoing affiliation with you or the accused. All members of the Advisory Panel will have had training in the Panel process and work under a strict pledge of confidentiality.
3. You may have an advocate with you during the panel process and to be present in the ecclesiastical settings after the panel process is completed. You are encouraged to find an advocate to provide support throughout this process.
4. The Chairperson of the Advisory Panel will contact you to arrange a meeting. There you will make your presentation detailing your allegations. Be prepared with all pertinent information and supporting witnesses if necessary (any written material, depositions, oral testimony, including hearsay testimony). The Panel proceeding is an *ecclesiastical* proceeding intended to give you a non-adversarial environment in which to present your allegations. You may also have present with you a support person and your advocate.
5. The Panel will then weigh the information from the meeting to determine probability and gravity. If the Panel finds the allegations not substantiated, the Panel will write a report for the Executive and the process ceases. You will be given a copy of this report.

6. If the Panel determines the allegation to be both probable and serious, the accused person is notified that an accusation has been brought against him/her and that an Advisory Panel meeting with you has taken place. He/she is then given full disclosure and invited to present his/her defense before the same Panel preferably within seven days.
7. Following this, a written report of findings and any recommendations by the Advisory Panel will be given to the Council's Executive and a copy given to you and to the accused.
8. The Church Consistory has responsibility to proceed with the matter. They may decide to close the matter, accept the report of the Advisory Panel, or conduct their own hearing. Consistory has 30 days from the receipt of the Panel's report to adjudicate the matter and take the next steps.
9. The Chairperson of the Panel can appeal to the Classical Interim Committee (CIC) the Consistory's handling of the Panel's report. There are two scenarios when an appeal may take place:
 - i. If the Consistory decides not to adjudicate the matter nor take any further steps, then the Chairperson of the Panel, in consultation with you or your advocate, will submit a copy of the report to the CIC with a request for further action.
 - ii. If the Consistory takes an action that is contrary to the Panel's findings, then the Chairperson, in consultation with you or your advocate, will submit a copy of the report to the CIC with a request for further action. Further action by the CIC could include the following:
 1. The CIC meets with the Executive, the Chairperson of the Panel, and the advocate to review the findings and discuss possible steps to take with respect to the report.
 2. The CIC meets with the Consistory to review the findings and discuss possible steps to take with respect to the report.
 3. The CIC reports on the matter at the next Classis meeting.
10. If at any time during the above process, you decide to take criminal or civil action, the work of the Advisory Panel ceases. You retain the right to take this action at any time.

*from the Classis Hamilton Safe Church Team
In cooperation with the Abuse Prevention Office, Grand Rapids, Michigan*