

## **What You Need To Know If Someone Has Accused You Of Abuse**

1. An allegation of abuse was made against you to the Executive of your church council.
2. The Executive or the accuser notified the Classical Safe Church Team to convene an Advisory Panel to hear this allegation.
3. The Panel held a meeting with your accuser. In addition to this informational letter, you will receive a letter with details concerning the accusation.
4. You are asked to attend a meeting with the Advisory Panel to respond to the allegation of abuse. You are entitled to receive from the Panel, in writing, specific details of the allegation(s) made, the supporting evidence, and the names of any witnesses to the alleged occurrences. You may ask a support person to accompany you during this hearing, though this person may not participate in the testimony you give and may not serve as your legal counsel.
5. You are encouraged to bring any and all evidence and testimony in your response. This may include written material, persons to provide oral testimony and depositions taken under oath. The meeting will be tape recorded. You have just this one opportunity to respond to the Panel.
6. Upon hearing your response, the Advisory Panel forwards a summary of their findings and recommendations to your church council. The Panel does not adjudicate, but assists the council by gathering and evaluating evidence and testimony.
7. Consistory has 30 days from the receipt of the Panel's report to adjudicate the matter.
8. 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 the victim or his/her 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 the victim or his/her 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.
9. This is not a judicial or civil hearing. It is an ecclesiastical hearing, and therefore civil or criminal procedures are not typical in this process. This setting is provided as a non-adversarial environment to discuss these matters.
10. This procedure does not restrict your accuser's rights to access civil or criminal means of redress. Because of this, materials produced in this setting may be subject to subpoena under criminal or civil law. If your accuser should decide to begin a criminal or civil action, this ecclesiastical proceeding would be suspended.

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