

2020 SPRING MEETING

OF

KNOX PRESBYTERY



COMMUNION OF REFORMED
EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

Virtual Meeting via ZOOM
April 23, 2020

Knox Presbytery, 2020

MINUTES

Thursday, April 23, 2020

PRELIMINARY MATTERS

- At 9:05 am – Knox PM Pastor Stuart Bryan called the meeting to order.
- An invocation was offered by Pastor Alan Burrow
- Exhortation from the Scriptures was delivered by Pastor Edwin Iverson
- Roll was called by PM Bryan and a quorum was established at 9:25am.
 - Christ Church – Missoula, MT – Taylor Crawford present.
 - Christ Church – Moscow, ID – Douglas Wilson & Toby Sumpter present.
 - Christ Church – Spokane, WA – Kenton Spratt & Andre Fowlkes present.
 - Christ Covenant Church – Enterprise, OR – Terry Tollefson & David Hurley present.
 - Christ Covenant Reformed Church – Billings, MT – Christopher Schrock present.
 - Emmanuel Church – Helena, MT – Jonah Barnes present.
 - Holy Trinity Church – Colville, WA – Edwin Iverson, Luke McGuire present.
 - King's Cross Church – Wenatchee, WA – Gene Helsel present.
 - The King's Congregation – Meridian, ID – Alan Burrow present.
 - Trinity Church – Coeur d'Alene, ID – Kevin Peterson, Ken Harris present.
 - Trinity Covenant Church – Fort St. John, BC – Adam Harris, Desmond Jones present.
 - Trinity Reformed Church – Moscow, ID – Joshua Appel, Timothy van den Broek present.
 - Valley Covenant Church – Lewiston, ID - Absent
- Visitors Included: Ben Zornes from Christ Church, Moscow ID; Tim Ansett from Christ Church, Spokane WA; Brian Brown and Justin Riley from Trinity Church, Denver CO.
- Discussion of Knox PM Committee Work
 - Kenton Spratt - Proposed Memorial on Abuse from the Knox PM Committee on Abuse. [See [Appendix A](#)]
 - **Motion** (04/23/20:01) - The committee would like to move that Knox Presbytery approve the attached document for presentation to Council in 2020 for the purpose of gaining Council's approval for the draft so it can ultimately be adopted as a memorial at the subsequent Council. **Motion carried** (18-0-1).
 - Christopher Schrock - Update from Knox PM Committee on Confessional Statements. [See [Appendix B](#)]
 - **Motion** (04/23/20:02) was made by Pastor Christopher Schrock that Knox Presbytery instruct PM Bryan to amend the task of the Committee to (1) identify areas within each confessional statement where there are potential conflicts with the CREC Constitution or other confessional statements and (2) suggest a process for preventing division arising as a result of these hot spots. Seconded by Pastor Edwin Iverson. **Motion Carried** (19-0-0).

- Update from Terry Tollefson regarding Christ Covenant Church, Grande Prairie, AB.
- Nominations for Presiding Ministers:
 - **PM of Council:**
 - **Motion** (04/23/20:03) was made by Elder Timothy van den Broek that Knox Presbytery nominate Pastor Virgil Hurt to serve another term as Presiding Minister of Council. Seconded by Pastor Gene Helsel. **Motion carried** (16-0-3).
 - **Motion** (04/23/20:04) was made by Pastor Joshua Appel that Knox Presbytery nominate Pastor Randy Booth to serve as Presiding Minister of Council should Pastor Virgil Hurt decline. Seconded by Pastor Alan Burrow. **Motion carried** (18-0-1).
 - **PM Pro-Tem of Council:**
 - **Motion** (04/23/20:05) was made by Pastor Joshua Appel that Knox Presbytery nominate Pastor Stuart Bryan to serve as Presiding Minister of Council Pro-Tem. Seconded by Pastor Edwin Iverson. **Motion carried** (19-0-0).
 - **PM of Knox:**
 - **Motion** (04/23/20:06) was made by Pastor Terry Tollefson to nominate Pastor Gene Helsel to serve as PM of Knox Presbytery beginning Fall 2020 following our next presbytery meeting. Seconded by Pastor Alan Burrow. **Motion carried** (19-0-0).
 - **PM Pro-Tem of Knox:**
 - **Motion** (04/23/20:07) was made by Pastor Alan Burrow to nominate Pastor Kenton Spratt to serve as PM Pro-Tem of Knox Presbytery beginning Fall 2020. Seconded by Pastor Toby Sumpter. **Motion carried** (19-0-0).
- Knox PM Pastor Stuart Bryan reminded the Knox delegates that the Triennial Council Meeting will be September 21-25 in Chicago, Illinois. Delegates to Council 2020 include Knox PM Pastor Stuart Bryan and Pastor Douglas Wilson. Alternate: Pastor Alan Burrow.
 - **Motion** (04/23/20:08) was made by Pastor Edwin Iverson that Knox Presbytery extend an invitation to CREC Council to host the 2023 CREC Council Meeting in Moscow, ID. Christ Church, Moscow ID has offered to be the hosting church. Seconded by Pastor Terry Tollefson. **Motion carried** (19-0-0).
- Delegates gave brief church reports and prayed for one another.
- Knox PM Stuart Bryan asked Pastor Douglas Wilson to provide thoughts on responding to the current Covid-19 crisis. Pastor Wilson read and spoke from Leviticus 26.

12:00 PM ADJOURNMENT

- Knox PM Stuart Bryan adjourned the meeting at 11:56am. Pastor Joshua Appel closed in prayer.

Appendix A

Proposed Memorial on Abuse from Knox PM Committee
on Abuse

Proposed Memorial X - Confusion Surrounding Abuse

(Draft CREC statement - Not for public distribution - 2020 Mid-Year Knox Presbytery)

Rationale & Background

“Memorials state the position of the CREC on issues on which a confessional statement has not been made” (Introduction to Book of Memorials).

The church must not be reactionary or feel the need to respond to every intellectual fad or wind of doctrine. But when certain non-Christian ideologies so infiltrate a culture, causing division and sowing confusion among the brethren, it is incumbent upon wise and godly shepherds to speak the truth in love, drive away the wolves, and so protect Christ’s flock (Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

In our day, the topic of abuse – as often represented in terms like oppression, justice, victimhood, equality, and power – has become the battleground for the souls of many. Because of the prevalence of real abuse in a fallen world, the resulting pain and destruction caused by abuse, and the natural human longing for justice and healing, human societies are always tempted to try to construct their own paths to redemption. However, apart from God’s sure, life-giving Word, all autonomous human attempts will result in unjust weights and measures, and therefore new forms of oppression, new victims, and no true deliverance.

The church must not only have a firm grounding in basic biblical principles of justice but speak God’s clear word into this confusion. The church must not become a cover or enabler of abuse, and neither may the church become a naïve pawn of humanistic culture. While there has been an increasing number of resources available for the church, few are grounded in a covenantal and Reformed understanding of the Scriptures, and many receive the world’s language and categories without sufficient discernment and caution.

Therefore, this Memorial on Abuse is offered and commended to the CREC aiming to define and explain what abuse is in explicitly biblical language and categories, defining and distinguishing sins and crimes, affirming the sufficiency of God’s Word and the spheres of lawful sovereignty ordained by God, lifting up the clarity of God’s law, the protections of due process, the healing power of the cross, the necessity of justice and forgiveness, all while giving some measure of guidance to Christians in general and pastors in particular on how to think through the various opportunities and threats we face on this topic.

"The committee would like to move that Knox Presbytery approve the following document for presentation to Council in 2020 for the purpose of gaining Council's approval for the draft so it can ultimately be adopted as a memorial at the subsequent Council."

Introduction: God Hates Abuse

We fail to love God and others when we do not rightly hear the cries for justice in light of God's standard for judgment. When justice is slow and we do not feel that we are being heard, we tend to cry louder, which is often an appropriate response. Our cries for justice and desire for redress should fill our prayers, worship, and honest appeals to God's established authorities (Ex. 2:23). They also form part of the evidence for the established authorities (Dt. 22:23-26). But the cry of abuse without appeal to the wisdom of the God who hates abuse can only lead to the kind of confusions which further serve to harm real victims and enable perpetrators. The stakes of our current cultural confusion are high. Jesus was clear about the seriousness of harming others, even warning us that unlawful angry outbursts against others deserve hellfire and that those who cause little ones to stumble are better off drowned with a millstone hung around their neck (Mt. 5:22; 18:6).

In order to love God and others faithfully, the Church must stand firm on the basic biblical principles that pertain to abuse when they are challenged by our culture. The Church's failure to uphold biblical standards of justice and provide wise pastoral care have contributed to our culture's confusion surrounding abuse. The Church's failure includes its misunderstanding of abuse, its handling of accusations of abuse, and its ministry of reconciliation. When these confusions take hold, they manifest themselves in the age-old behaviors we see in the pages of Scripture: we 1) call good evil and evil good, 2) misuse or dismiss authority, 3) blur biblical distinctions, 4) evade moral responsibility, 5) cave in to cultural pressures to pervert justice, and 6) fail to act impartially.

1. God Defines Sin

We call good evil and evil good.

We fail to love God and others when we use the word abuse without reference to God's law. Abuse is generally understood to occur when we mistreat someone by neglect, cruelty, or violence, especially regularly or repeatedly. But we sometimes apply the word abuse to actions that are not sins (e.g. godly corporeal discipline (Prov. 13:24) or the just exercise of the death penalty (Gen. 9:6)) and often studiously avoid it for actions that are. This is how a culture comes to call good evil and evil good (Is. 5:20). The law of love requires those who would judge righteously to employ a carefully chosen and biblically informed moral vocabulary. Real abuse will always be some form of sin, some breach of God's law.

Abuse implies a right use. This right use is determined by God alone who created us to love Him and one another for love "does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10 NKJV). When Scripture informs our judgments,

love will not only lead us to condemn serious abuses such as striking one's wife or sexually molesting a child but also to condemn culturally controversial but likewise horrific, actions such as murdering children through abortion (Ex. 21:22, 23) or mutilating God's image in man by sex reassignment surgery (Gn. 1:27 cf. Dt. 22:5). We are loving those we are ministering to when we faithfully maintain biblical moral distinctions. The God who made us in His image is love, and He alone can inform our understanding of what might constitute abuse.

2. God Establishes Authority

We misuse or dismiss authority.

We fail to love God and others both when we misuse authority and when we wrongly dismiss legitimate authority. Misusing one's position of authority is abhorrent because God established authorities to be a blessing (Eph. 6:2, 3; Rom. 13:4). Scripture records a long history of the weak and vulnerable crying out to God for vindication: Jacob suffered under Laban; Joseph was mistreated by his brothers and falsely accused by Potiphar's wife; Israel was oppressed by its Egyptian taskmasters; David was persecuted by Saul; the disciples of the Lord were hounded by the one from Tarsus breathing threats and murder; and our Lord Jesus endured insults and mockery from Roman soldiers. God has never been deaf to the cries of the oppressed (Ex. 3:7; Heb. 5:7).

Dismissing legitimate authority is wicked because rightly submitting to lawful human authority is how we acknowledge God's authority over us (Eph. 5:21). And so, it is for our blessing that God requires that those under authority should obey their husbands, parents, pastors, and civil magistrates. God even required obedience where there were such disparities of power as existed between indentured servants and their masters (Col. 3:22). Because all authority is from God, human authorities can neither be submitted to unquestioningly nor dismissed outright because of failings. The former may include the biblical duty to disobey an authority who requires disobedience to God's word (Acts 5:29). The latter may necessitate confident patience when suffering under an unrighteous authority or when attempts at earthly justice fall short (Jer. 15:15; 1 Pet. 2:18-20; 3:1-2). Our ultimate hope and comfort in this life are in the God who holds all authority and who will ensure that perfect justice awaits all at the final judgment (Acts 10:42; 1 Pet. 4:5).

3. God Makes Distinctions

We blur biblical distinctions.

We fail to love God and others when we blur Biblical distinctions between wrongs. God gave these distinctions in order that we might address the wrongs faithfully. One of the most basic distinctions is that not all sins are crimes. God has given the family, church, and state particular ministries for addressing different kinds of human problems, and

these problems often involve more than one of these three spheres of authority. For example, hatred, jealousies, and angry outbursts are serious sins that need to be dealt with by families and churches, but physical assault, rape, and murder are crimes and must also be dealt with by the civil authorities (Gal. 5:20; Rom. 13:4). This kind of distinction is not made to make room for sin, but to prevent tyranny by any authority, and encourage discipline, repentance, and restoration wherever required by God.

It is also for the sake of familial discipline, pastoral care, and civil justice that we not only make the distinction between sins and crimes, but also consider each sin's degree of deviance from God's standards (Ex. 21:24-25). The gravity of sins and crimes is greatly compounded when these sins and crimes are chronic (Ps. 7:12), premeditated (Ex. 21:13, 14), hard-hearted (Prov. 29:1), or perpetrated against those who are weaker and more vulnerable (Ezk. 34:4). Our vocabulary and responses should reflect these aggravations analogous to the way the Bible distinguishes degrees of murder and consistent with how they have been historically reflected in Western civil law. The love of justice, which is foundational to the love of God and others, requires different authorities to make measured judgments based on these kinds of distinctions after the careful evaluation of evidence. God makes these kinds of moral distinctions and so must we.

4. God Requires Obedience

We evade moral responsibility.

We fail to love God and others when we allow anyone — abusers or abused — to dismiss or minimize their moral responsibility. It is part of our creational dignity and glory that we are all morally responsible for our actions. God teaches us that we may not hide our moral responsibility behind our circumstances. This includes the circumstances of authority and power, but also ignorance (Ezk. 45:20; Heb. 9:7), financial status (Ex. 23:3; Job. 34:19), ethnicity (Mt. 25:32), sex (Dt. 22:22), or other people's actions (Dt. 24:16; Acts 23:1-5). We may find ourselves both sinned against and sinner; victim and victimizer (Ps. 3 cf. 2 Sam. 12:7-9). While God certainly sides with the victim of sin against the victimizer, He does so with absolute equity and therefore holds all people morally responsible for their own actions (Ezk. 18:20).

Accepting moral responsibility on the part of the abused in no way diminishes the sin of the abuser or the real seriousness or pain of abuse. Vicious words, rejection, isolation, shame, and assault leave physical and emotional wounds that do not heal easily. But pain, like power or wealth or any number of circumstances, can cloud our vision. Just as the rich and powerful throughout history have deluded themselves into thinking they are above God's law (Ps. 10:5), victims today are sometimes encouraged by the predominant culture to embrace a similar delusion in the name of "justice." It can

be tempting to justify sinful behaviors in response to abuse in the name of pursuing justice, but this is not righteous and therefore cannot result in God's blessing, whatever our intentions may be.

5. God Requires Courage

We cave in to cultural pressures to pervert justice.

We fail to love God and others when we give in to pressure from others to pervert justice or distort God's wisdom. Society has always placed pressure on those in authority to commit injustice, but currently, coercive pressure to pervert justice has particularly come from social activists whose sentimentalized message is driven by intellectual trends like those found in critical studies of gender, race, and class. These intellectual trends have weaponized victimhood and the anger that surrounds allegations of abuse. In order to help real victims, those exercising authority must not acquiesce to these cultural demands but carefully evaluate each situation in the fear of God and by His word. This means maintaining the presumption of innocence, the requirements for evidence, and the steps of due process. It means faithfully affirming the complete sufficiency of the Scriptures for faithful judgments, even while acknowledging that all men are not equally sufficient in handling the Scriptures to those ends. And it also means affirming the Scriptures' sufficiency in the face of so-called experts who may contradict Scripture.

We acknowledge that those with extensive experience with certain forms of abuse can provide real benefit to pastors and other authorities. For example, these sources may help authorities recognize patterns of abusive behavior. However, expertise that sets aside the wisdom of God in identifying wrong or providing help must be rejected. God requires those in authority to have the courage to resist all pressure that demands action without full and careful biblical evaluation or resorts to unbiblical solutions (Ex. 23:2).

6. God Protects the Weak

We fail to protect the weak by not acting impartially.

We fail to love God and others when we do not act with impartiality. Impartiality evaluates with equal weights and measures, that is, it judges others with the same standard by which we would be judged. Impartiality is the means God has given those exercising judgment to protect the weak. It is impossible to be truly helpful until, by this means, you have determined who the weak are. In many cases, the one reporting abuse is in the position of weakness, but in some cases, where victimhood is being weaponized, the accused is actually in that position (e.g. Gn. 39:7-20).

While impartiality must wait for sufficient evidence to emerge, it also honors the right of personal protection. Abuse is frequently hidden and not in the open.

Perpetrators are good at covering their tracks, manipulating others, and blaming the victim. It is often difficult to know whom to believe, and corroborating evidence is not always readily available. Therefore, the right to protect oneself from harm or to flee from harm should be supported by the church and culture (Dt. 23:15). This judgment of one's need to flee must ultimately belong to the individual in the situation. And while this right to flee or protect oneself must be upheld, it cannot constitute all the evidence needed to convict the accused. God always sides with and protects the weak, and He teaches us, in a provisional way, to provide the same protections for the weak in His name.

Conclusion: God Saves Sinners

We love God and others when we hold fast to the glorious scandal of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This should not be confused with the shameful scandals of Christian authorities who mishandle abuse. Love never sinfully overlooks or covers-up real abuses, or entrusts those with an abusive past with access to or oversight of people or areas associated with their former sin. Importantly, grace does not enable sin; forgiveness is not the same thing as trust, and love does not lead people into temptation. And yet to affirm this prudence of biblical wisdom on behalf of the weak is not to deny God's resurrection power on behalf of sinners. Any statement or implication that sinners are beyond redemption is false.

The gospel is truly scandalous because God's grace is available to both victims and perpetrators, and this grace grants both a share in the resurrection of the just (1 Cor. 6:9-11). God's word is true, that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13; Joel 2:32). This grace manifests itself in honest confession of each person's particular sins, repentance, restitution, and forgiveness from the heart, all biblically defined. It so embraces God's righteous eternal judgment that it includes the willingness on the part of perpetrators to submit to temporal punitive justice, including the death penalty. This grace prevents victims of abuse from claiming any status that prevents them from confessing their own sins or classifying their repentant abusers differently from themselves in their relationship with God.

The scandal of God's grace also affirms that He brings real healing on earth to perpetrators and victims. It grants them both a new identity—not perpetrator or victim, but Christ—and a growing ability to put sin to death and walk in obedience to God. Therefore, we reject all language that states or implies that abusers may not be free of their sins or that victims cannot leave behind their wounds. The grace of Christ is built on the only fully innocent victim in the history of the world, upon whom God's justice laid all the particular sins, attendant shame, and consequent pain of those who have sinned and those who have been sinned against, in order to make all things new. By His stripes we are healed.

Appendix B

Knox PM Committee on Confessional Statements Procedures

Trinity CHURCH | CREC

Knox Presbytery PM Committee on Confessional Statements

Committee Charge

Presiding Minister Stuart W. Bryan

January 22, 2020

Purpose: Knox Presbytery PM Bryan is appointing this committee to recommend mandatory exceptions or additions to certain of the accepted Confessional Statements recognized by our Constitution, with a view to presenting such recommendations at Knox Presbytery's 2020 Stated Meeting.

Commission: Knox Presbytery at its 2019 Stated Meeting took the following action:

Motion (10/09/19:05) was made by Pastor Douglas Wilson that Knox Presbytery task PM Bryan to appoint a committee to recommend to Knox Presbytery mandatory exceptions or additions to the accepted Confessional Statements recognized by our Constitution where necessary to harmonize with CREC polity or Constitutional provisions. Seconded by Pastor Christopher Schrock. **Motion carried** unanimously (22-0-0). (*Pastors Joshua Appel and Christopher Schrock expressed willingness to serve on the committee.*)

Members of the Committee: The members of this committee include the following pastors from Knox Presbytery: Christopher Schrock (Christ Covenant Reformed Church, Billings, MT), Joshua Appel (Trinity Reformed Church, Moscow, ID), and Jonah Barnes (Emmanuel Church, Helena, MT).

Background: This action of Knox Presbytery was inspired by a paper presented to the 2019 Stated Meeting by Pastor Christopher Schrock entitled, "Proposal Regarding Use of the 39 Articles in the CREC" (attached). Rather than adopt Pastor Schrock's proposals in that paper, it was suggested that a committee work on the matter, review his proposals and consider others, and then make a recommendation.

Charges: The Knox Presbytery PM Committee on Confessional Statements is charged as follows:

1. By February 21, 2020, members of the committee should choose one of their number to serve as the chair of said committee and inform PM Bryan of the same.
2. No later than July 15, 2020, the Committee should supply PM Bryan with a rough draft proposal. Committee members are encouraged to solicit input from individuals outside of Knox Presbytery on the proposal. After he receives the rough draft, PM Bryan will submit it to Knox Presbytery via our email loop for questions and feedback.
3. No later than August 15, 2020, the Committee should supply PM Bryan with a final proposal that can be forwarded to the delegates to the 2020 Knox Presbytery Stated Meeting (September 21-25, Chicago, IL).

May the Lord bless your labors and enable them to be for the blessing of Knox Presbytery and the broader Christian community for years to come.

Blessings,

Stuart W. Bryan

Presiding Minister, Knox Presbytery