

Proposed Overture to the 88th GA (2022) of the OPC

I. Proposed:

That the 88th General Assembly:

- A. Form a special committee of seven, consisting of four ministers, two ruling elders and one deacon, elected by the Assembly, to do the following:
 1. Collect, study, and develop resources on topics related to the many forms of abuse that manifest themselves in the church (sexual, domestic, verbal, emotional, psychological, etc.).
 2. Produce and recommend to the church resources to equip officers, sessions and presbyteries to recognize and respond to allegations and instances of abuse in ways that honor Jesus Christ; comport with the laws of the land; and promote justice for victims and perpetrators.
 3. Recommend to a future General Assembly, if appropriate, possible amendments to the Book of Church Order that more explicitly address the sin of abuse.
 4. Report to the 89th General Assembly.
- B. Authorize the committee to invite Christians knowledgeable on the topic of abuse to assist the Committee as non-voting consultants.
- C. Grant the committee a budget of \$15,000.00.

II. Grounds:

1. Allegations and instances of misuse of power of various kinds (commonly termed “abuse”) have become increasingly known in our society and in the church. Reports, testimonies and confessions of abuse raise complex legal, theological and pastoral issues we cannot minimize, ignore or dismiss.
2. The sins of abuse are expressly forbidden by Scripture and the Westminster Standards. (For example, see 2 Timothy 3:2-5; Jude 7; Exodus 21:15; Deuteronomy 22:25-27; also, *WLC* 135 and 139) and are especially heinous as they are “against the express letter of the law,” “many commandments,” “admit of no reparation,” often involve various other aggravations (*WLC* 151); and have devastating and life-long effects on victims (2 Samuel 13:1-22)
3. It is the responsibility of the elders of Christ’s Church to exercise their authority, jointly and severally, to shepherd those under their care by guarding against such sinful behavior; to care for those victimized by the sins of others; and to exercise judicial discipline for such sins in terms of the goals expressed in Book of Discipline I.3.
4. Giving careful study to the complexities and consequences of abuse will help us recognize and remedy gaps in our theology and practice in order that we might more effectively minister to victims of abuse with the hope and consolation of the gospel and more readily confront perpetrators of abuse with the need for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.