

Sexual abuse in pastoral relationships

In connection with the broadcast of Zembla of June 22 2009 on sexual abuse in pastoral relationships the board of the general synod declares:

The Protestant Church unconditionally condemns crossing of borders and sexual abuse in pastoral relationships. The board of the general synod underlines once more the statement of the synod in January 1999: 'Sexual abuse is a sin: evil in God's eyes and an injustice towards the fellow man. The church is obliged to choose straightforward for the victims.'

The church should be the place where vulnerable people are safe and can feel safe. Where ministers of the church cross borders they harm vulnerable people and lose sight of the essence of the profession. That is unacceptable. It is also not acceptable if sexual abuse in one or other way should be concealed in the church. Victims of sexual abuse are entitled that what has happened to them is taken seriously and also that they are properly taken care of after a report of sexual abuse. This includes that in no way is tried to excuse or conceal behaviour of a border crossing nature.

The Protestant Church will do everything in her power to fight sexual abuse, make it open for discussion and support the victims. In addition the board will also take complaints on the procedure utterly serious. In the past years the church paid a lot of attention to the control of sexual abuse. The church is for example member of SMPR (samenwerkingsverband tegen Seksueel Misbruik in Pastorale Relaties = cooperation against sexual abuse in pastoral relationships). The SMPR (www.smpr.nl) helps to fight and prevent sexual abuse in pastoral relationships. Also a protocol has been designed for congregations which are confronted with (sexual) abuse in pastoral relationships and material has been developed for counselling of abuse-victims. There is also an offer for help for victims from the SMPR and there is a contribution to policy development in the churches for this area. When abuse takes place within the Protestant Church and a complaint is lodged, the complaint is handled by the independent supervisory board which examines and judges every complaint extensively; the procedure foresees the engagement of experts who are specifically competent in seeing through sexual abuse on pastoral relationships. In the past years two-third of the lodged complaints led to a conviction of the minister in question.