

**IMPLICATIONS OF COUNSELLING FOR MEMBERS OF THE
NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION**

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Abstract

This project offers an introductory exploration of a specific religious worldview within secular, contemporary counselling approaches. My intent is to provide a specialized handbook to describe the counselling process for members of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC) community and to summarize the cultural values and religious beliefs specifically for counsellors who may work with clients from this community. I have been a member of the NRC since birth. In my experience, members of the NRC community of Southern Alberta sometimes seem reluctant to access psychotherapy, perhaps due to fear and the stigma attached to seeking professional counselling. I hope to alleviate some of these fears by providing information regarding the counselling process so that individuals from this community who are struggling with personal, social, or professional issues may obtain professional mental health guidance to work through their concerns. I provide pertinent information for therapists so they might increase their understanding of the cultural and religious aspects of this faith, in the hopes that therapists will expand their cultural competency when helping clients who come from the NRC community. There are two parts within my project. Part I consists of a literature review and description of the topic, along with an outline of the strengths and limitations of this project. Part II is a specialized, applied handbook written for NRC members to read to gain understanding of what counselling is and is not. Part II also includes a section for therapists to give them insight into the worldview of an NRC client, to help with the formation of a working alliance, and to provide information for case conceptualization work.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the Netherlands Reformed Congregations of Southern Alberta. It truly is my desire that this work will be beneficial and helpful to community members who reach out for counselling when things in this temporal life become too difficult to manage on their own. It is my prayer that the Lord may bless the simple means of counselling, through secular therapists, to His honour, and for the edification of the members of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations.

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Chapter 1: Overview and Introduction

Religious and cultural groups have varying thoughts or beliefs regarding counselling. While some social groups embrace psychotherapy, other communities such as the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC), which was the focus of this project, may be more hesitant to access counselling provided by professionals outside of their cultural or religious communities. This chapter outlines the intent of this project, including the rationale and importance of the topic. In addition, a personal statement of interest, along with a personal reflection and analysis of bias is offered. Before introducing Chapter 2, an overview of the project and its structure will be presented.

Intent of the Project

My intent with this project was twofold: (a) to enlighten community members regarding counselling and (b) to highlight potential cultural and religious factors so counsellors receive a deeper understanding of the NRC beliefs and values. This project may be of interest to other religious or cultural groups who may see the value in addressing potential barriers for their own community. In addition, therapists may find this project essential, as this work provides an insider's perspective on some of the cultural and religious values that NRC community members respect and strive to hold fast.

Personal Statement of Interest

This project is of personal interest to me for a number of reasons. First, as a single mother of four children, I recognize the need for children to have access to counselling in order to help them process difficult experiences in life. As their mother, I struggled in the past with trepidation at the thought of letting my child speak with a

secular professional therapist, fearing that this may threaten the child's desire and ability to hold on to our core religious values. Since birth, I have been a member of the NRC, and I desired that my children would adhere to the values and beliefs shared within this conservative religious community. I feared that a secular therapist would manipulate my child's perspective of our religious beliefs and values, causing my child to question the power or role of the parent, the authority of the church, and the sovereignty of God. I viewed this threat as a greater negative force than having my children struggle through the difficult experiences of the demise of the marital relationship of their parents.

These fears hindered me from personally accessing counselling and prevented me from ensuring my children received long-term professional counselling. Since completing Masters of Counselling courses at the University of Lethbridge, I have come to appreciate and value the potential benefit that professional counselling can provide for all individuals. Through the education I received, I gained a better understanding of what counselling is and what counselling can do to help individuals to process difficulties they may face. I have learned to appreciate that counselling should not replace one's dependency on God, but rather that the Lord can use the humble means of counselling to assist an individual through personal and family difficulties.

A second reason for my interest in this project derives its origin from my experiences as a teacher in the religious community's private school. Having taught in middle and high school, I feel that some students struggle with issues that interfere with their ability to reach their full potential academically. I sense there are students who struggle with low self-esteem, leading them to make risky health behaviour choices. I have seen other students withdraw and become socially isolated. I feel many students

could potentially benefit from short-term counselling, as it may enable them to learn new coping strategies, see things from a different perspective, or benefit from various interventions. At times, when counselling has been recommended to parents, I sensed their hesitation at the idea, perhaps because they hold the same fears I experienced as a parent prior to entering this field of study.

Motivation to Complete This Project

This project materialized as I became aware of how my cultural and religious upbringing provided me with a worldview that differed and often clashed with the worldview presented through my pursuit of higher education at the University of Lethbridge. I have found myself shifting between differing perspectives, and at times I struggled to hold on to my core values and beliefs. As the first member of this southern Alberta religious community to enter and complete the Master of Counselling program, I feel the urgent need to help bridge the gap that may hinder NRC community members from accessing or progressing through counselling therapy. I believe this gap may be bridged by addressing some of the barriers that I feel exist for many community members, as well as for counsellors who may have difficulty understanding a worldview that differs so distinctly from their own.

I have the strong sense that members of the church community do not access counselling because of their fear, perhaps due to ignorance of what counselling is all about and the stigma attached to seeking mental health resources. People appear to be reluctant to seek help when they are struggling with issues, which causes individuals to suffer long-term effects as they fail to process negative life experiences, or results in individuals basing their concept of reality on misinterpretations of these experiences. I

hope that this project, through expounding NRC beliefs and worldview, may help counsellors understand and respect NRC's core values and beliefs, thereby encouraging counsellors to use interventions that are congruent to the NRC community's worldview.

The specialized handbook provided in Appendix A is intended to support and encourage NRC community members. This handbook identifies and addresses some of the cultural and religious factors and outlines the main elements that strongly influence their worldview. This handbook can be used as a tool to help therapists and their clients explore core values and beliefs that may otherwise be misunderstood by a therapist with origins outside of the NRC cultural and religious community. Misunderstandings in the therapeutic relationship can lead to client dissatisfaction and premature termination, causing a ripple effect within the community that may further entrench the distrust and stigma of counselling.

Personal Reflection and Bias

I grew up with the belief that one must be clinically diagnosed with a severe mental condition, such as a debilitating depression, before one needs to access counselling. While I was raised thinking it was normal to access, and negligent not to access, medical help for physical complaints, mental ailments were viewed differently. I grew up with the sense that a stigma is connected with psychological weakness. I am not alone in my interpretation, as Reverend Elshout (1997) captured these views when he acknowledged, "When those who are mentally weak or vulnerable cannot hold on too well or too long to faith-related matters (in whatever areas that may be), then all too often [some]one responds with stinging rebukes" (p. 71). Similarly, I have heard members in my community reflect upon mental weakness as a taboo subject, with some implying that

mental illness may even be due to a weakness that may lie in the realm of spirituality. I have seen some individuals hold the belief that these struggles are to be approached through a spiritual journey, rather than through seeking help from a trained therapist or practitioner who is not well versed in NRC religious beliefs. I sense community members' fear that an "expert counsellor" may advise against God's counsel. As a result, I worry an individual could hit rock bottom before admitting to having a mental weakness, perhaps leading to years of anguish and personal struggles before therapeutic help is sought.

I am aware members of my NRC community are not a homogeneous group. However, the majority of the members belonging to this community share the same core values and beliefs. I address these core values and beliefs in an attempt to bridge the gap that may be experienced by community members, which may be causing tentativeness or social stigma towards psychotherapy. Although I take this stance, I may not hold the same thoughts and beliefs as others do, as there is variability in my community regarding seeking assistance for medical and emotional issues. Some families within the NRC community may have more conservative views than others.

I recognize I hold a bias that promotes mental health treatment. This bias stems from my personal experiences, including occasions when I sought counselling. I have studied to become a counsellor and believe counselling for NRC members can strengthen, not weaken, one's faith. This project required me to engage in an extensive reflection process before I committed to working on it, as I intended for the project to explore and address core elements of the NRC doctrine. As a result, I fear that people who do not understand or appreciate the doctrine that I dearly adhere to may misuse the

information. I also fear that malevolent use of the information provided may skew or twist the meaning, in an attempt to bring dishonour to God and to our religious community. I also carry significant worry and fear that my community members may cast judgment, believing that I am seeking to elevate myself within this community. This is neither my intent nor desire; rather, I felt inclined to complete this project in an effort to help those who are struggling to gain access to professional help if needed.

In an effort to minimize the risks of this project as identified above, I proceeded prayerfully, sought guidance, and asked for wisdom. I contacted a minister who preaches in NRC congregations, as well as a few community members who belong to the NRC community in southern Alberta, to ensure that the information provided in this project is accurate and not based on personal interpretation alone. Further, my second reader, a previous member of the NRC community, completed a review of my work to ensure accuracy of the content provided in this project.

An Overview of the Project and Its Structure

This project consists of two parts. The first part is comprised of five chapters. This chapter provides an overview and introduction of the project. Chapter 2 outlines the methodology associated with this project. The conceptualization of culture and the rationale for culture-infused counselling is provided in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 offers an introduction to the NRC worldview. The religious beliefs and cultural values are also explored in Chapter 4. To support this information, a historical background of the NRC as well as a more in-depth explanation of the doctrine is provided in Appendix B. The final chapter explores the implications of the project, the strengths and limitations of this project, as well as a summary.

The second portion of the project is a specialized handbook, included as Appendix A of the final project. This handbook is written for the members of the NRC, as well as for counsellors working with clients belonging to this religious community. The applied portion of the project provides solid rationales to assist NRC community members in making an informed decision regarding access to psychotherapy, as well as to assist therapists by highlighting values and practices of the NRC community when working with clients belonging to this religion. This applied component of the project consists of three parts. First, the handbook includes a description of the counselling process and some information to better inform NRC community members in an attempt to alleviate the deeply rooted fears surrounding counselling therapy. Second, the handbook contains a summary of cultural and religious factors to ensure a deeper understanding, benefiting the relationship between the client and the counsellor as they explore the client's worldview and religious beliefs in a comfortable manner. Third, the handbook offers recommendations for therapists to consider when providing counselling services to members adhering to the NRC doctrine. This comprehensive project was completed using the methods outlined in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Methods

The research focus and processes used to gather information for this project are discussed in this chapter. The search terms and databases are identified as well as other means of gathering research. My ethical approach is discussed as a completion to this chapter.

Research Focus

As a member of the NRC community, I bring into this project personal and social experiences that I encountered being raised in this setting. This lived experience guided my research focus as I gathered information from a variety of sources. The focus I present in this research project is specifically based on the southern Alberta community consisting of members of the NRC. Although I am aware of many other churches in the region that share the term *reformed*, in this report I use this term to refer to the members of the NRC community. Some of the outcomes of this research may be applicable to other church communities, but there may be differences between these religious groups as well. For information on my bias and perspective, please refer to the Personal Reflection and Bias section in Chapter 1.

Research Process

I used research from a variety of sources including, but not limited to, information in books and scholarly journals. I had informal communications with members from the church community, including ministers knowledgeable in theology and the NRC doctrine. Although many books illuminate the doctrine (Brakel, 1992; Kersten, 1980, 1983), I struggled to find sources that seek congruency in counselling members of this

religion. In fact, I only found one resource that addressed an NRC minister's search for counselling to overcome a nervous breakdown and depression (Elshout, 1997).

Despite an extensive library research, no English academic literature was located that addressed counselling members adhering to the NRC religion. While there are many journal articles written concerning pastoral care and Christian counselling, no journal articles focussed on offering guidance for counselling members holding to the NRC doctrine. I used the following six search engines to gather data: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, ATLA Religion Database, and Google Scholar. Combinations of the following search terms were used with the six search engines: Netherlands Reformed, reformed theology, reformed faith, psychotherapy, counselling, and therapeutic interventions. To complete this project I used a variety of resources from the NRC, which included unpublished articles or manuscripts. As mentioned in Chapter 1, my understanding and interpretation of the resources has been scrutinized and verified by credible third parties.

Ethical Conduct and Code of Ethics

The *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2000) and the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (2007) *Code of Ethics* were adhered to at all times during the research and writing of this project. This project was based on literature, thus it did not include human subjects' research data.

In alignment with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association's (2007) Principles I, II, and III, I was careful to offer a respectful portrayal of my understandings of the writings in the NRC. I also received external validation of the

accuracy of my writings. I invited five esteemed community members to provide feedback on my project regarding the accuracy of my descriptions of the values and norms as it pertains to the NRC religious community. Relevant sections of my project were also forwarded to an NRC minister who could verify any theological or religious information provided in this project. As mentioned earlier, one committee member also has a base understanding of the religious community and the doctrine of the NRC. Thus, I believe I have done my best to minimize any false portrayal of information within this project.

The project was originally written from the perspective of the NRC community (of which I am a member) and from that collective viewpoint; however, the University of Lethbridge Master of Counselling program adheres to American Psychological Association's (2010) standards, which required that the "editorial we" (p. 69) not be used because I am the sole author of this report, and using the term we could introduce ambiguity. Most of the revisions to meet this requirement applied to Chapter 4. For example, I had written, "As NRC members, we believe there is one truth. . ."; this statement has been changed to "NRC members believe that there is one truth. . . ." In summary, to adhere to my program requirements, all statements describing NRC community members' beliefs and perspectives are written from a third-person perspective.

Summary

The research process has been outlined in this chapter. The databases and search terms were included, illustrating the need for this research with no academic articles currently available in English on this subject. The ethical conduct and code of ethics I

adhered to was provided. The following chapter will explore the importance for therapists to provide cultural sensitive counselling, recognizing the need to consider the role of one's values and beliefs in the therapy process.

Chapter 3: Rationale for Counsellors to Know the Worldview of Their Clients

For clients to experience counselling as a healing process, it is pertinent that a counsellor creates a healing environment through the therapeutic alliance. Rogers (1957) stated, “Significant positive personality change does not occur except in a relationship” (p. 96). A client often enters a therapeutic relationship in a vulnerable state, usually feeling anxious or nervous. It is the role of the therapist to engage the client into this relationship by being genuine, empathic, and providing unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957). The client needs to feel heard and understood, as if the therapist is walking alongside the individual, viewing the world through the client’s lens or worldview.

Every individual is a cultural being. Culture is learned and transmitted through social interactions, passed down from one generation to the next. According to Arthur and Collins (2010), “Culture includes shared clusters of: worldview, beliefs, and values; rituals, practices, customs, or norms; social, religious, or spiritual traditions; language, history, ties to geographic location; and social, economic, or political structures” (p. 14). The cultural identities of both the client and the counsellor are always present in the counselling process. This chapter provides ethical and counselling rationales for counsellors to know the worldview of their client as well as an exploration of how a counsellor can become culturally aware.

Ethical Rationale

In order for a therapist to practise in an ethical manner, one needs to be culturally (and religiously) sensitive when working with a client; this practice could be referred to as providing culturally sensitive therapy. Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) asserted,

“Professionals without training or competence in working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds are unethical and potentially harmful, which borders on a violation of human rights” (p. 480). “The provision of professional services to persons of culturally diverse backgrounds by persons not competent in understanding and providing professional services to such groups shall be considered unethical” (Korman, as cited in Sue et al., 1992, p. 480). Professional bodies that regulate the practice of counselling have created codes of ethics that describe adherence to the ethical conduct as endorsed by the regulatory body (Arthur & Collins, 2010, p. 41). Therapists need to be responsible and accountable in the provision of the services for their clients and should adhere to an ethical code.

In Canada, codes of ethics have been developed to guide the professional conduct of counsellors. For example, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) codes of ethics were applied to this project (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy [CCPA], 2007; CPA, 2000). Canadian therapists are expected to adhere to one of these codes when making professional decisions, as they are based on the “laws, regulations, and policies which are professionally relevant to their working environment” (CCPA, 2007, p. 1). The CPA’s (2000) *Code of Ethics* “articulates ethical principles, values, and standards to guide all members” (p. 1) belonging to this association.

Sections II.1 and II.2 of the CPA (2000) ethical standards provided under the “Principle of Responsible Caring” (p. 16) require therapists to “protect and promote the welfare of clients” (p. 16) and “avoid doing harm to clients” (p. 16). In Section II.10 of the CPA code, counsellors are encouraged to “evaluate how their own . . . culture, beliefs,

and values . . . influence their interactions with others, and integrate this awareness into all efforts to benefit and not harm others” (p. 17). In order for therapists to discern what will benefit and not harm their clients, Section II.14 of the CPA (2000) code requires therapists to be “sufficiently sensitive to and knowledgeable about individual, group, community, and cultural differences” (p. 17). Furthermore, Section II.21 of the same code indicates a therapist is to “strive to provide and/or obtain the best possible service for those needing and seeking psychological service” (p. 17), requiring counsellors to approach differences in cultural values or beliefs with utmost integrity.

According to the CPA (2000) “Principle of Integrity in Relationships” (p. 23), psychologists are not expected to be value-free, but to be as objective and unbiased as possible. For example, therapists need to consider if in self-disclosure their values and beliefs are culturally appropriate. It would be unethical for the therapist to impose his or her values and beliefs onto a client who holds a different religious or cultural worldview. The inappropriate practice of blindly imposing one’s values on a client would be detrimental to the counselling process as well.

Counselling Rationale

People’s values permeate into every aspect of their being, and this encompasses the professional role of the therapist. As a result, a counsellor needs to be self-aware of the culture he or she brings into the counselling process. Arthur and Collins (2010) emphasized, “Working as a culturally competent counsellor requires knowledge about the cultures of others as well as understanding of the influences of culture on self” (p. 30). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) summarized culture with a beautiful illustration: “A fish only discovers its need for water when it is no longer in it. Our own

culture is like water to a fish. It sustains us. We live and breathe through it” (p. 1).

Culture (which inherently includes religion) is a vital element to every individual, hence the emphasis in most nations on the value of religious freedom. However, seldom does one consider the significance of culture in shaping one’s worldview.

Although religion and spirituality are key aspects of cultural identity, therapists may feel uncomfortable discussing these topics (Helmeke & Bischof, 2002). Further, therapists who are not familiar with the “beliefs and practices of various denominations or religions . . . [may] not [be] aware of some of the practical implications of clients’ theological beliefs” (Helmeke & Bischof, 2002, p. 196). To create an effective working alliance, it is imperative that therapists utilize a culturally sensitive counselling approach, beginning with a reflection on their own religious and spiritual beliefs as part of their personal worldview (Arthur & Collins, 2010, p. 34).

The working alliance is a collaborative relationship between the client and the therapist; it lies at the centre of successful therapy. Researchers claim the outcome of therapy may be influenced more by the working alliance than the type of therapy or intervention used in the therapeutic process (Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000; Smith, Glass, & Miller, 1980; VandenBos & Pino, 1980). This alliance requires the client to have sufficient trust in the therapist; in addition, the therapist must have an understanding and appreciation for the client’s worldview in order to build an effective working relationship.

It is imperative for the counsellor and client to have a collaborative relationship in order to facilitate change. The impact of the therapist being unaware of or not appreciating the cultural or religious differences between the therapist and client may be

detrimental to the therapeutic process. Clients who feel misunderstood or disrespected may prematurely terminate treatment. Ruptures in the therapeutic process can have considerable consequences for the client as well as for the entire counselling profession. A client who does not feel validated or respected will not promote counselling services to others who are struggling, potentially causing a negative ripple effect in families and communities. Therapists who are culturally insensitive or unaware contribute to potential harm for individuals as well as communities through fostering a lack of trust in the profession.

Another important factor to consider is the adaptation of counselling assessments and techniques. One cannot apply a “one-size fits all” approach to the therapy process; rather, counsellors should adopt culturally sensitive and client-specific processes. To ensure the client is in the centre of the process, his or her worldview must be explored and validated. Research has demonstrated that the “relation of alliance and [therapeutic] outcome appears to be consistent, regardless of many of the variables that have been posited to influence this relationship” (Martin et al., 2000, p. 446). This affirms that counsellors need to use a culturally sensitive approach in therapy to help guide the selection and delivery assessments and interventions.

Becoming Culturally Aware

The culturally sensitive framework presented by Arthur and Collins (2010) included cultural self-awareness, awareness of the client’s cultural identity, and a culturally sensitive working alliance. A therapist can take action to become culturally aware and to ensure his or her ability to facilitate an effective healing process for the client.

Carney and Kahn (1984) have identified five stages of cultural awareness as a therapist progresses towards becoming culturally competent in his or her practice. Counsellors in the first stage “have limited knowledge of other cultural groups” (Carney & Kahn, 1984, p. 113); as a result, these counsellors view other people “based on ethnocentric attitudes” (p. 113). Therapists in this stage may experience “conflict between their own ethnocentrism and the egalitarian values of the profession” (p. 113) and may use “counselling approaches and goals that reflect . . . [the therapist’s] world view rather than the client’s needs and views” (p. 113). Therapists in the second stage have an “emerging awareness of [their] own ethnocentric attitudes and behaviours” (Carney & Kahn, 1984, p. 113). Although some knowledge of other cultural groups is present, this knowledge is unorganized and viewed “in a detached manner” (Carney & Kahn, 1984, p. 113). Professionals in the third stage may experience “feelings of guilt and responsibility” (Carney & Kahn, 1984, p. 113) and may respond to these feelings by “deny[ing] cultural differences or . . . becom[ing] immersed in [other] cultural group[s]” (Carney & Kahn, 1984, p. 113) to compensate for their guilt. In the fourth stage, there is an “emerging self-identity as a cross-cultural change agent and participant” (Carney & Kahn, 1984, p. 113); as a result, a counsellor in this stage “selectively blends new cross-cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills with desirable features” (Carney & Kahn, 1984, p. 113) of his or her own worldview. In the final stage, a therapist “assumes a self-directed activist posture in expanding [his or her] own cross-cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills, . . . promoting cultural pluralism” (Carney & Kahn, 1984, p. 113). This model can be useful for encouraging therapists to participate in self-examination as

a means to determine the therapist's stage of building cultural competence when working with clients holding an NRC worldview.

Research posited that stark differences in worldview could create problems in a therapeutic setting. Kwan (2009) noted that cultural differences based on Confucian-based collectivism and Western individualism created conflicts in societal and individual levels. Sandage, Hill, and Vang (2003) noted that positive psychology, positing forgiveness as a strength and virtue of character, was not congruent with the Hmong approaches to conflict resolution and relational repair. Ridley, Mollen, and Kelly (2011) identified competencies necessary for therapists and identified one competency as surmounting obstacles (p. 847). These authors stated, "Competent professionals do not shrink in the face of barriers. Instead, they strive to solve problems and overcome [barriers] (Ridely et al., 2011, p. 847).

One way for therapists working with NRC clients to avoid a therapeutic rupture due to misunderstanding of cultural values or religious beliefs is to become educated with the core values and beliefs that shape the NRC worldview. Rather than making errors that may unintentionally offend the client, the therapist can make use of this project to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and religious underpinnings that shape the NRC perspective. I provided Parts II and III in the specialized handbook (Appendix A), with the intent to do my part to ensure NRC members may benefit from the mental health services provided by trained professionals.

While a therapist cannot be value-free or unbiased, knowledge of the values and beliefs of an NRC client can assist the therapist in walking alongside the client through the gained knowledge and insight of the client's worldview. Martin et al. (2000)

indicated three themes should be present in the creation of an effective working relationship: “the collaborative nature of the relationship, the affective bond between patient and therapist, and the patient’s and therapist’s ability to agree on treatment goals and tasks” (p. 438). All three of these themes require a basic understanding of the client’s worldview. I believe the therapist should be familiar with the core values and beliefs before he or she can truly appreciate the impact or depth of an experience a client has had.

Summary

The premise of this chapter is that a therapist cannot provide ethical counselling without obtaining a good understanding of the client’s culture, which encompasses religion. It is imperative for a therapist to be culturally aware, understanding aspects related to culture, including the worldview, beliefs, and values of the client. For members of the NRC community, these aspects of culture lie at the core of the individual. For counselling to be effective and successful, the therapist needs to demonstrate an awareness of the NRC cultural identity to ensure the creation of a strong working alliance. The therapeutic process, as repeated to counsellors for decades by Carl Rogers (1957), can only be a healing journey for the client if he or she feels heard and understood; the counsellor can only truly validate the client’s experience through gaining an understanding of the client’s worldview. The following chapter will introduce some of the core religious beliefs and cultural values found within the NRC community.

Chapter 4: Introduction to the NRC Worldview and its Practices

The last chapter highlighted the therapeutic and ethical importance of counsellors understanding the worldview of their clients (Arthur & Collins, 2010, p. 43). By learning about NRC clients' religious influences, counsellors can make sense of how NRC clients make valuable decisions and how they believe they should live their lives. Therefore, I wrote this chapter to educate counsellors about the worldview of the NRC client. To accomplish this goal, there are eight main headings presented in the following order: (a) reassurance from the counsellor; (b) the NRC doctrine, which includes subheadings of creationism, the fall of humanity, pride, being unworthy of salvation, predestination, final judgment and eternal destination, and funerals and grieving; (c) the Ten Commandments and NRC's interpretation of this law; (d) commemoration of religious holidays, (e) foundational institutions in the NRC community, which consists of the church, family, and school; (f) the NRC lifestyle, including some specific values found within this community; (g) considerations for counselling interventions; and (h) the extending impact of this worldview, followed by a chapter summary.

This chapter explores important cultural and religious values a secular therapist may need to know in order to provide culturally sensitive therapy for the NRC client seeking counselling. This chapter expands on the religious worldview as the lens through which the client understands their world to assist secular counsellors through the therapeutic process and selection of culturally appropriate interventions and assessments.

Caveats

This chapter is written for the counsellor who is not familiar with the NRC doctrine and wishes to help an NRC client who is seeking counselling services. The

information is presented in a simple manner, without extensive reference to the Biblical and historical roots of the NRC religion. However, it may be easier to understand this chapter if the reader has knowledge of a Christian faith. While there are many concepts, principles, and teachings associated with the NRC doctrine, I have only elected to address the eight previously listed main topics based on what might be of most use and interest to a non-NRC counsellor.

Both my supervisor and I contend that a non-NRC counsellor only needs to be introduced to the context of some of the beliefs to gain a basic understanding of an NRC's worldview. However, if the counsellor wants to learn more about the NRC doctrine and is perhaps interested in Biblical underpinnings of the NRC church, with the input and validation from an NRC minister and a number of NRC members, I prepared a detailed account of the NRC beliefs, which is located in Appendix B.

In addition, I wrote this chapter based on my experiences and observations of how my religion is practised by NRC members. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, I am aware of my biases as well as the need to avoid overgeneralizing, and I took great care to represent my faith as best as I could.

Reassurance from the Counsellor

Cultural and religious traditions are very important within the NRC community, as members hold steadfast to what they believe in. I have heard NRC members express fear that their religion may be challenged if they seek support or assistance from a non-NRC counsellor. This chapter educates therapists about the NRC religion so they may enhance their understanding of the underpinnings of the NRC doctrine, thereby

increasing the possibility that the NRC beliefs and practices will have meaning for non-NRC people.

To demonstrate understanding to an NRC client, a therapist might want to express to the client that counsellors may not ethically or therapeutically change a client's religious beliefs. The counsellor may want to acknowledge how difficult it might be for an NRC member to seek counselling, as this is likely to be a new experience, and perhaps may come with a stigma attached. The NRC client may be fearful or feel uneasy, so recognizing how difficult this is may be reassuring and may help to normalize the process for the client. Another way to help the client feel at ease is to acknowledge how important the religious beliefs are for the client and to state that as a therapist you will do your utmost to respect the religious beliefs and values held by the client. Assure the client that if there is ever a time that he or she feels like the religious values or beliefs are not understood or respected the client may openly raise this with you, as it is not your intention to be disrespectful to the client's religion.

The NRC Doctrine

As Christians, members practise the structured doctrine of the NRC. The name Netherlands merely points to the country of origin—members do not need to be from the Netherlands to belong to the NRC. The word reformed is of great significance to NRC members, as it bears witness of God's preservation of the scriptural truth during times of persecution and errors prevalent during the Middle Ages.

NRC members believe there is one scriptural truth based on the King James Version of the Bible, so ideas or beliefs pertaining to other religions is something many individuals have implicitly learned to be wrong. For example, for NRC members, it is

false to believe that redemption comes in many forms. Members of this religion believe that salvation can only be obtained in one way, and this belief encourages NRC members not to stray from the truth of the King James Version of the Bible, or to accept new and novel thoughts or ideas that go against the Bible. This section outlines tenets of the NRC beliefs, starting with the view of creationism.

Creationism. The NRC believes in one Triune God consisting of three distinct entities, Who members also believe has been present from eternity, before the universe, including the Earth, was created. NRC members believe creation took place in 6 days, and God rested the 7th day. God created all things, from stars and planets in the solar system to the smallest atom or particle. God tells us in the Bible that this creation was perfect and designed solely for the purpose of bringing glory and praise to Him. Those adhering to the NRC doctrine know that besides the intricate design of each created item, the laws of nature, including the perfect pathways of moving objects in the solar system to the growth of newborn life from cells are constantly and continuously in His control.

Considering this portion of the NRC worldview, a therapist may want to consider providing psychoeducational components to the client from a creationist perspective. For example, to explain the fight, flight, or freeze responses to an NRC client using the caveman analogy linked to the evolutionist theory of people developing certain instinctual behaviours for the purpose of survival, denies the honour and glory due to the Creator. Since the NRC believe God created man with this instinct and God has all things in His control, the non-NRC counsellor could show respect to the NRC client's religion by explaining the activation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system by acknowledging this function as part of God's intricate and wonderful design of

the human body. Although God created human beings as perfect, holy, and upright, humanity did not remain in a state of perfection for very long; this topic is explored in the following section.

The fall of humanity. This tenet explains how the human race fell when Satan tempted Adam to sin. Adam, who NRC members believe was the head of the human race, resided in Paradise at the time of Creation. When Adam disobeyed God, this defiance resulted in the fall of humanity. The NRC believe that humans are born in a state or condition of corruption, known to us as *total depravity*. As such, NRC members believe there is nothing people can do to be restored back into God's favour. The NRC believe themselves to be deserving of Hell unless God saves them. Salvation is the only way to be kept from Hell and to be accepted into Heaven. NRC members believe there is nothing they can do to earn or be granted this salvation, but that God grants salvation to the people He has chosen to be saved. The people God has chosen to be converted during their lifetime are known as the *elect*. The NRC believes that individuals may experience the "assurance of faith"; however, members cannot ascertain who belongs to that population, as this is only revealed when life on this world ends—a day we call the *Day of Judgment*. Therefore, while NRC members are encouraged to be good to others and to do good deeds, these actions are not done with the intent to become worthy of Heaven, but out of thankfulness to God for continuing to offer and provide a means of salvation for humanity.

A therapist would be wise to consider the implications of the fall of humanity in counselling because this is an integral part of the NRC worldview. Two ideas that come

to my mind pertaining to this worldview are concepts of pride and of being unworthy of salvation.

Pride. I strongly advise counsellors not to use the word pride with NRC members. Therapists should not overly praise or instil a sense of pride in the NRC client, because it may result in the client feeling guilty. The Bible states in Proverbs 16:5 (King James Version): “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD . . . he shall not be unpunished.” In the NRC religion, pride does not honour the worldview that people are abased to the lowest and God elevated to the highest. The NRC child is raised not to be proud or boastful of self, as this would be a dishonest elevating of self. This is important for a counsellor to understand, as an NRC client may be struggling with low self-esteem. It is common for NRC parents not to give their children a lot of praise, as it may be feared that the child will become proud. Perhaps a difference needs to be made between self-esteem and self-worth. Exploring the inherent self-worth in every individual is different from elevating self through grandiose self-talk. It may be helpful for the therapist to assist the client in providing honest judgment of self, which many NRC members may find challenging. For example, it is okay for the therapist to say, “Good insight” or “Great work on your homework,” and to encourage the NRC client. However, a therapist may want to avoid saying to an NRC client, “I hope you feel proud of what you just accomplished.” Thus, those who belong to the NRC religion can be acknowledged for doing good (e.g., being nice to others); however, such acknowledgments must be done in a way that allows members to still attribute the goodness to God, rather than to feed their own egos.

Being unworthy of salvation. Most Christian therapists are trained to provide words of comfort out of the Scripture and often encourage the client to embrace these promises. However, from the NRC perspective, it is impudent to apply God's promises, which are intended for His elect, to ourselves. The NRC views the "offer of grace" reserved for the elect, which may not include all who hear the gospel preached. People of the NRC religion believe that unless one knows Jesus as his or her personal Saviour, one is not at liberty to accept any of God's saving promises unless they were given by God and applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit. The promises of salvation in His Word are only for those who belong to the elect, the population of men, women, and children for whom Christ died to redeem them from the eternal punishment for their sins.

For a more in-depth explanation of the NRC belief regarding two covenants in relation to the fall of humanity and the way of salvation, please turn to Appendix B. This information could be relevant to a therapist helping an NRC client presenting with depression or anxiety, as the individual may be struggling spiritually to seek affirmation from God that He has accepted the client into the Covenant of Grace. In other words, predestination from eternity means that the individual is either included in or excluded from the Covenant of Grace.

Predestination. God has preselected in eternity, before the Creation, all individuals who will be saved through the blood of His Son. It is the NRC member's belief that the Lord Jesus did not die on the cross for all humanity, but only for those who God the Father has elected from eternity. Members of the NRC do not know who belongs to the elect, as this is something the Lord has not revealed to people. The NRC

doctrine explains that the world will only exist until the last of the elect is born and saved (regenerated) sometime during his or her life on earth.

A therapist may want to extend hope to a depressed NRC client that he or she may still receive salvation. In alignment with the NRC doctrine, rather than identifying hope for salvation in the actions or beliefs of the NRC client, I advise the therapist point out the hope provided by God. For example, the therapist could encourage the NRC client to tap into the inner knowledge or faith that, as long as he or she is alive, there is still hope for the client to be saved through the love of God. NRC members believe this faith, hope, and love, as a gift of God, is possible all individuals until the day they die, when they are then required to appear before God for the final judgment.

Final judgment and eternal destination. The NRC worldview indicates that when a person dies he or she immediately appears before God the Father, as the Judge. NRC members believe eternity consists of two places: Heaven and Hell. Hell is a place of eternal torment, a bottomless pit filled with fire, smoke, and brimstone. It is a place of outer darkness, without God and without any love for one another. There Satan resides, the ruler over the demons, or evil spirits, sometimes called devils. The firm NRC perspective is that any person who lives and dies without receiving a true conversion from God is cast into Hell. Church membership, infant baptism, or even attending the Lord's Supper does not guarantee a person is saved; rather, because of the opportunities people receive by God to be saved, they will be held more accountable for all the blessings the Lord has given them during their lifetime. To the NRC, death is final—there is no purgatory or opportunity to seek God if a person enters Hell; rather, his or her

soul will be in constant pain and agony and will suffer terror of the soul and mind forever.

With respect to Heaven, NRC members are taught that those who have come to know Christ as their personal Saviour are accepted by God the Father to enter Heaven for all eternity. The NRC view of Heaven is that it is a beautiful place where God and the angels live, full of perfect love and happiness. There is no pain, sorrow, or death in Heaven. There is no night, for God Himself is the Light. In Heaven, believers may come to see God face to face, without fear or trepidation. As Jesus merited salvation for them, their sins are erased and will no longer be held against them, and God will not judge them.

For counsellors, this concept of Heaven and Hell can be used to explain that even when an NRC member feels unworthy of eternal salvation, God does not require individuals to be “worthy” through considerate actions or good deeds. The counsellor may want to help an NRC member who struggles with perfectionism to understand that God is not requiring perfection from people to make them worthy of salvation. An NRC client may become disheartened when considering all the sins he or she has committed, but a therapist may help the client by indicating that one sin is not worse than another. God is able and willing to forgive all sins, except the sin against the Holy Ghost that consists of blaspheming against the Holy Ghost (Mark 3:29, King James Version). Rather than to try and live a perfect or sinless life, the therapist may want to direct the NRC client to prayer, reminding the client there is no need (nor possibility) to live in perfection since the fall of humanity—it is not possible to obtain Heaven through living perfectly, but only through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Another way counsellors can use their understanding of this worldview is to help the NRC client during times of mourning. The loss of a loved one can be devastating for NRC family members, especially when clients struggle with not knowing the final destination of the soul of their loved one. From the NRC perspective, members do not assume their loved one is in Heaven, and only have hope for this if their loved one was able to testify of being saved while he or she was still alive. This can be especially painful for parents of a young child who has died. The NRC worldview holds that even a baby, stillborn inside the womb or a newborn child, is sinful. However, God may have this young child as one of His elect, and since salvation is not a result of one's actions, this child may also have entered Heaven. Loved ones will never know whether the child is in Heaven, unless God gives them confirmation of this by applying a promise found in His Word to their heart. The counsellor can still gently point out to the mourning client that there is still hope that the deceased may be in Heaven because the NRC believe all things are possible with God.

The most difficult experience in regards to death would be the loss of someone due to suicide. The NRC believes that in such an instance, the person who took his or her life met God face to face before God called him or her to come. The NRC believe that a person may not take his or her own life and expect to enter Heaven; rather, this person is cast into Hell for eternity.

Funerals and grieving. Funerals, within the NRC community, are very solemn services held in memory of those who have died. The NRC worldview sees the funeral as a service to those still alive, to encourage them to seek God and to avoid sin. The service is sombre, not bringing to the foreground the good deeds or accomplishments

during the life of the deceased; rather, this service is a warning for those who are still alive. All those who are present for the service are encouraged to seek God while there is still time to be saved. Remember, the NRC believe God will cast all people into Hell unless they are saved, so members must always strive to seek to have a personal relationship with Him. The NRC does not automatically assume a deceased loved one has entered Heaven.

When a community member passes away, it is the norm to provide an hour or more for relatives and friends of the bereaved family to say their condolences. This is generally scheduled the evening prior to the funeral, either at a funeral home or in the church reception room. The close family of the individual who passed away stand in a line of reception while community members shake their hand to extend a word of condolences to each close family member. While this may be a very difficult time for loved ones, it also can generate healing through the tokens of love and support that may be felt during a time of immense grief and loss.

A therapist needs to know that when a church member dies, it is a serious warning to the entire congregation to stop and reflect on the brevity of life and consider how they are living their lives. Thus, a therapist might want to enter into discussions about helping a client reflect on his or her life and help the client consider if he or she is living in the way the NRC doctrine intends one to live. This type of discussion might be helpful for a person who holds a grudge, has anger issues, or struggles with feelings of jealousy. The therapist may also want to encourage the client to discuss this reflection with the minister or consistory members of the client's church.

A therapist also needs to understand this worldview regarding death in order to help the NRC client who is struggling with issues of grief and loss. It is essential that the therapist does not voice thoughts suggesting that the loved one is now in a place without pain or sorrow, assuming the loved one is in Heaven. This assumption can cause NRC clients to experience deep agony, as they may fear that their loved one is not in a better place. Exploring these fears may be very difficult, but it is important for the therapist to acknowledge that the client does not know where his or her loved one is spending eternity. This is something hidden from humanity, as only God knows His elect. However, helping the client to shift the focus to his or herself may help the client see that there is still hope in receiving salvation through Jesus as long as he or she still has breath and life.

Some people may question if they can receive salvation or attain Heaven by adhering to the Ten Commandments in the NRC doctrine. According to the NRC beliefs, God did not issue the Ten Commandments for people to try to earn a right to Heaven; rather, they were given so people can strive to live according to these commandments out of thankfulness, love, and respect towards God. Next, I explain the Ten Commandments from the NRC perspective, with implications noted for counselling.

The Ten Commandments

NRC members believe it should become their desire for the Ten Commandments to guide their daily lives. The NRC recognizes that people are prone to break the commandments of God in thought, word, and deed. To summarize the commandments, people are required to have perfect love towards God and their neighbours. Since the fall

of humanity, the NRC believe that people are not able to love God or their neighbours perfectly any longer, unless this love is given by God.

In this section I explore the Ten Commandments and attempt to briefly explain how this impacts NRC members' decisions in their daily lives. To begin, the first four commandments have a huge impact on how NRC members are to live their lives, and a counsellor needs to understand this to fully appreciate why the NRC client may be sensitive to certain interventions or suggestions provided by a secular counsellor.

Commandment 1: Thou shalt have no other gods before Me (Exodus 20:3, King James Version). The NRC doctrine states the first commandment directs members to serve or trust in nothing else but God and to expect all good things from Him alone. As such, NRC members may not be involved in idol worship, superstition, hypnotism, or even therapeutic hypnosis. The NRC members are told to trust only in Him. For this reason, some NRC members may be hesitant to seek help from a counsellor. Some church members may feel that by turning to another person for help they are bypassing God and deliberately disobeying His command to place all trust in Him. Others may think it is permitted to seek help from a counsellor, just like going to a physician for ailments in the body. Some individuals may seek God's blessing on the counselling provided and ask Him to withhold them from the sin of placing trust in someone other than Him.

Commandment 2: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . . nor serve them (Exodus 20:4,5, King James Version). The second commandment forbids people who adhere to the NRC doctrine to create or use images to represent God. The NRC believe God is too great, holy, and wonderful to be represented by any creature or

symbol. NRC members may not serve God through the use of any object. The NRC client would feel uncomfortable if there is a visual representation through wall portraits or paintings of God or a nativity scene with Mary and the Lord Jesus. The NRC also do not feel it is right to wear a cross on jewellery. NRC churches and homes are not adorned with religious ornaments or artifacts.

Commandment 3: Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain (Exodus 20:7, King James Version). The third commandment states that people may not misuse the name of the Lord. NRC members may not swear or use God's name in a light context. This swearing includes common adages such as "Oh my God," "Gosh," or "Jeez." The NRC view these sayings as the profane use of the Lord's name. As well as refraining from abusing His names, NRC members must not be silent partakers when others use language like this; instead, members are encouraged to lovingly warn those who misuse God's name. The NRC believe "there is no sin greater or more provoking to God than the profaning of His name" (Lord's Day 36, Heidelberg Catechism, The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 73).

For NRC members, the Lord must always be spoken of and addressed with utmost respect and reverence. For this reason all names and pronouns referring to the Lord are capitalized in writing. In prayer, the NRC address the Lord with the pronouns *Thee* and *Thou* to elevate Him and to humble ourselves. While this is also the language of the King James Version of the Bible, NRC members adhere to it in prayers and discussions for two reasons. First, this terminology distinguishes between the singular and plural form better

than the common pronoun you, since the terms thee and thou are always singular.

Second, the NRC use these pronouns to display utmost respect towards God.

Commandment 4: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8, King James Version). The fourth commandment addresses the use of the Sabbath. The NRC adhere to the belief that in “six days shall work be done: but the Sabbath day is the Sabbath of rest . . . ye shall do no work therein” (Lev. 23:3, King James Version). With the resurrection of Christ on the Sunday, the NRC believe this day must be set aside from all of the other days of the week. Members are to use this day in God’s service, listening to the preaching of His Word, and to call on the Lord in public prayer. On this day, NRC members must refrain from all work, studies, recreational activities, and entertainment, as all activities must be devoted to God.

To uphold this command of God, NRC members must refrain from certain jobs or activities that require them or others to work on the Sunday. While there are lawful duties that may be done on this day, such as providing care for people in hospitals or institutions, caring for animals, or providing for the safety of the people through emergency care, most work on Sunday is unlawful labour. The NRC believes that when one’s actions require others to work on Sunday for one’s behalf, that person is guilty of causing others to disobey this commandment; this would be the case if a person eats at a restaurant or goes shopping. To abstain from work also means that NRC members do not use this day to complete homework or non-religious studies, wash laundry, clean the house, or prepare an extravagant dinner. Rather, members are required to use this day to God’s honour by refraining from reading fiction, purchasing fuel, going for picnics, organizing family functions, or travelling on the Sunday.

For the NRC community, Sundays are to be solely used for worshipping God in local churches. The NRC strongly believe that God most commonly converts a person under His preached word when he or she attends church. Out of responsibility towards themselves, members are required to do all they can to be present in the church whenever services are offered, particularly on Sundays. On Sundays, NRC members are encouraged to ask the Lord for a blessing on the Word that is preached.

For counsellors, this 6-day creation tenet implies that NRC clients cannot schedule counselling appointments on a Sunday. The NRC client also cannot complete counselling tasks on this day, such as incorporate an exercise program or complete writing or reading assignments. Any information required for assessments should be adapted so the NRC client can plan or record this on the Saturday or Monday. Treatment plans, such as creating a weekly dietary guide, should allow the NRC client to put in minimal work and effort into the preparation for the Sunday meals. I recommend the counsellor work in collaboration with the NRC client to prepare a food menu so the meal can be prepared one day in advance.

In terms of attending church, counsellors may want to ask clients how well they can focus on their days of worship, as this might offer baseline data to the extent of client symptoms since the norm is to be mindful during church services. For example, an NRC client suffering from depression may have lost interest in religious matters (Jenny, Pachur, Williams, Becker, & Margraf, 2013), or anxiety may result from rumination over matters a client struggles with (Cristea, Matu, Tatar, & David, 2012). Perhaps a counsellor may want to include attending church and being mindfully present for the

service as a behavioural indicator of change that could indicate symptoms of depression or anxiety are starting to fade.

Furthermore, an NRC client may struggle with feelings of guilt if Sundays were not used as a day of worship and rest. The client may feel guilt if an unexpected turn of events during a holiday or activity keeps the individual from the church service. A counsellor could help the NRC client process the difference between experiencing feelings of guilt over intentional actions versus an absence due to situations beyond the client's control. The counsellor may want to incorporate an activity to help the client identify different factors mitigating the responsibility, so this does not solely rest on the client. The client may feel a sense of relief when the counsellor can help the client identify factors that contributed to the absence from the Sunday worship service.

The counsellor can also assist the NRC client to become more assertive. For example, when the client receives a request that falls on the Sunday, it may be beneficial for the client to practise saying no in a respectful, clear manner. NRC clients may benefit from learning how to express their thoughts and feelings to non-NRC people. By encouraging clients to state how their religious beliefs inhibit the freedom to accept the request that falls on the Sunday, clients may feel encouraged to be more assertive in similar instances and to problem solve with others how the request may be met or completed by clients on another day of the week. Helping the client explore different options available may encourage the NRC client to feel empowered and to explain his or her perspective or worldview to others.

In addition, counsellors can inquire how their NRC clients spend their days of rest and what impact this rest has on their well-being. The counsellor may want to consider,

if therapeutically warranted, encouraging the NRC client to engage in prayer to help lower his or her stress response. It would be permissible to have the client engage in prayer on Sunday as a tool towards lowering anxiety symptoms and combating feelings of depression.

In the NRC religion, these first four commandments are designed to show love and honour to God our Maker. These are important elements for a counsellor to consider in how the NRC community applies these commandments to their daily life. The second table of the law consists of Commandments 5 through 10. These focus on NRC members' duties or responsibilities towards themselves and others. This table addresses the great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27, King James Version). All six of these commandments focus on a different aspect of Christian living.

Commandment 5: Honour thy father and thy mother (Exodus 20:12, King James Version). The fifth commandment addresses how children need to honour, love, and obey their parents. For the NRC client, this means he or she is to submit to Biblical instruction and guidance provided by the parents. NRC members are also raised to accept disciplinary actions and be obedient to their parental authorities. Within this commandment, NRC children are required to "patiently bear with their [parents'] weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand" (Lord's Day 39, Heidelberg Catechism, The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 75).

The NRC extends this belief such that members must submit to others in positions of authority. Wives are to submit to their husbands, employees to their employers, and

citizens to their rulers. This submission extends as far as it is deemed lawful and right by God. For example, husbands are told to love their wives and not be bitter towards them, and fathers may not provoke their children to anger (Col. 3:19, 21, King James Version). Employers must treat their employees with respect and provide what they have rights to legally. Likewise, Christians are required to pay their taxes lawfully and obey all those in authority over them, as long as this authority does not require one to sin against God through disobeying one of His direct commands.

It is important to clarify to all clients, and perhaps more so for NRC clients, that the therapist is not to have authority over the client. In all counselling there lies a danger of the client perceiving an element of power or authority in the therapeutic relationship. A counsellor may wish to continuously remind the client that he or she has many rights, including the right to disagree with the therapist. An NRC client may shy away from expressing his or her rights, so it is critical a therapist addresses clients' rights very carefully through the informed consent process. A counsellor may need to remind the client of the right to say "no" or "pass" if the counsellor notices a slight hesitation to a suggestion or senses the client feels uneasy about an intervention or the discussion, and then explore with the client what it is that made him or her feel uncomfortable.

Commandment 6: Thou shalt not kill (Exodus 20:13, King James Version).

For NRC members, like many other religions, the sixth commandment states one may not do harm to others. This includes any harm that may be done in thoughts, words, gestures, or deeds. This harm includes dishonouring, hating, wounding, or killing another person. NRC members may not harbour feelings of envy, hatred, anger, or revenge, as all of emotions have the potential to do harm to self or another. This means abortion and

euthanasia are forbidden acts, as are the practices of self-harm or suicide since God “commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves, to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and kindness [towards others]” (Lord’s Day 40, Heidelberg Catechism, The Psalter, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 76). In all things, NRC members are to prevent the harm of others and we are to “do good, even to our enemies” (Romans 12:20, King James Version).

For some individuals, there will be a disconnect between health risks resulting from unhealthy life choices requiring a change in health behaviours and the belief that health is determined solely by God. A non-NRC counsellor may wish to explore this concept with the client by providing some scenarios involving high-risk health behaviours. Asking the client to draw connections between choosing to partake in unhealthy life choices proven to be linked to disease may help the client reconsider his or her responsibility towards maintaining good health.

A related personal responsibility found within the NRC community is the need for self-care. Anything that can place one at imminent risk of harm or danger is to be avoided. This includes avoiding the use of illegal drugs, smoking, or excessive drinking. Although the use of alcohol is not forbidden, drunkenness is a sin from which one must abstain. Addictions are culturally viewed as a sign of weakness, although some youth do experiment with harmful health behaviours to the dismay of parents and community members. For a therapist of a client who engages in these maladaptive behaviours, it may be helpful to identify and process with the client what is contributing to the use of these risk-taking behaviours in an attempt to understand the underlying fears, which may include rejection, guilt, remorse, and self-loathing.

Counsellors may need to understand the guilt an NRC client may feel regarding thoughts of self-harm. The client may be reluctant to discuss suicidal ideation out of fear that these thoughts will make him or her guilty of trespassing against God's sixth commandment. However, it may be useful for the therapist to assist the NRC client in differentiating between the temptation and the deed. Understanding that temptation, in and of itself, is not sin may help relieve the NRC client's guilt.

Commandment 7: Thou shalt not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14, King James Version). The seventh commandment forbids all uncleanness and members are admonished to keep their bodies and souls pure and holy. In wedlock, this requires the husband and wife to be faithful to one another. According to the NRC doctrine, the Lord forbids all unclean actions, gestures, words, thoughts, and desires with this commandment. This extends further than the belief that there is to be no sexual relationships outside of the marriage bond.

According to the Heidelberg Catechism (The Psalter, 2008), this commandment forbids cohabitation, as well as the viewing of such lifestyles or relationships in movies. Sensual activities such as dancing or dressing in such a fashion as to cause sexual arousal are also forbidden. NRC members believe "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28, King James Version).

A therapist may have an adolescent NRC client who struggles with setting healthy boundaries in an intimate relationship. A therapist who does not understand the extent of the cultural and religious values surrounding this topic may not fully grasp the struggle of a client in setting clear boundaries regarding intimacy. A young client may need help to

explore how to refrain from sensually encouraging a partner through learning assertive communication. A counsellor may also need to be aware of this worldview to understand the internal strife a client may feel if he or she struggles with sexual orientation or a sexual addiction. Knowing that the struggle lies much deeper than breaking a social norm but reaches to an existential level, as it includes the breaking of the seventh commandment, may ensure the counsellor is empathic and sensitive when discussing this issue.

Commandment 8: Thou shalt not steal (Exodus 20:15, King James Version).

The eighth commandment forbids stealing, which extends beyond the outright robbery of an object that one does not have a right to possess. From an NRC perspective, members may not manipulate, bribe, or use underhanded tricks to obtain objects or privileges they desire. The NRC holds that members are forbidden to use counterfeit money or dishonest methods to obtain goods in a fraudulent manner. This means members must be honest in submitting tax information and must pay the honest amount for a product, rather than trying to “save a buck.” NRC members also may not sell goods under the pretence of the goods having more value than they really do. Members also may not purchase lottery tickets in an attempt to obtain riches without honestly working for the money.

While some of these points are also forbidden in society legally, the NRC doctrine explicitly states God’s anger at the breaking of this commandment. Members may not benefit at the expense of another. A therapist may be confronted with this concept, when, for example, a client struggles in making a business decision that necessitates or tempts the client to think in an individualistic manner, rather than a God-honouring approach. A therapist may also need to understand this view to appreciate the impact this perspective

may have on someone struggling with a gambling addiction, creating feelings of profound guilt towards God, others, and oneself, as well as experiencing shame and disgrace within the community.

Commandment 9: Thou shalt not bear false witness (Exodus 20:16, King James Version). The ninth commandment warns against dishonesty of words. NRC members may not bear false witness but always speak the truth. Members are required to defend and promote the honour and good character of others and may not be involved in any underhanded slandering of a person's character. While the NRC doctrine forbids gossiping, the counsellor may wish to inform the NRC client that expressing how one feels about an experience involving others is not considered gossip, since the intent is not to harm the character of another, but rather to find healing within oneself. The NRC members are told not to partake in the unjust (i.e., not based on God's law) judging of others. If a therapist is confronted with a client breaking this command, the therapist may gently point out how the actions of the client may be incongruent with the ninth commandment and perhaps guide the client into considering why he or she feels the need to slander another.

Commandment 10: Thou shalt not covet (Exodus 20:17, King James Version). The last commandment requires that NRC members do not desire or crave after anything that belongs to another. Members are to be content with what God has given them and not strive to out-do another in the possession of material goods or prestige. According to the NRC doctrine, NRC members are to be humble and esteem themselves lower than another. Since jealousy is not deemed acceptable in the NRC community, it may be difficult for a client to identify these feelings. When applicable, a

therapist may want to help the client process the feeling of jealousy, as it may be linked to shame or guilt.

A counsellor may encounter an NRC client who is hesitant to do or say something that may invoke jealousy in others. For example, a couple who are expecting a child may find it extremely difficult to share this news with family members or others who are unable to conceive. A therapist might be able to help the couple work through this concern by identifying that the conception is a blessing from the Lord, and the expected child is not the source of the pain or jealousy that may surface in others who are unable to conceive. The therapist can help the couple to articulate their concerns to others who are unable to conceive in a manner that is considerate and thoughtful.

The NRC doctrine states it is the NRC member's duty to respect others; even when opinions or beliefs may differ, members are told to treat others in a considerate manner. However, this does not mean that NRC members are to accept the beliefs of others as being of equal value. For example, the NRC believe there is one universal Truth, and anything contrary to God's Word cannot be accepted as being equal with God's Truth. However, there is the principle that one must love the sinner, but hate the sin. In this way, when someone has disobeyed God's law, it is not the individual who is to be unaccepted, but the wrongful thought, word, or deed committed that is rejected. In the NRC community, one is not excused from his or her wrongful actions, but held fully responsible for them. Thus, if a counsellor is working with an NRC client who was abused, the topic of forgiveness for the perpetrator's sins may surface. It may be beneficial for the therapist to guide the client into considering what may have caused the perpetrator to commit this sin, such as having experienced childhood abuse or neglect,

struggling with unresolved issues, and so forth. This may help ignite feelings of empathy for the perpetrator, rather than hatred or resentment. In the NRC doctrine, forgiveness is necessary for God to forgive the client of his or her own sins.

All 10 of these commandments are of equal value, with the breaking of one not being more sinful than another. In fact, with the NRC worldview, breaking one commandment makes the individual guilty of sinning against them all, since individuals are required by God to keep them all in their entirety.

Commemoration of Religious Holidays

As with most Christian churches, the NRC follows a liturgical calendar. This calendar consists of the annual commemoration or special services on the following days or seasons: Advent, Christmas, New Years Eve and New Year's Day, Prayer Day, Passion Weeks, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, Thanksgiving Day, and Reformation Day. Each of these days is devoted to special services focused on the topics commemorating the event or significance of that day or season. Within the NRC worldview, there is no ranking of these holidays; one holiday holds no more value than another.

Advent. During the time of advent, four Sundays are devoted to the provision of special sermons preparing for the birth of Christ. Services are often based on Old Testament prophecies of the coming of Christ. The message provided is for NRC members to seek the spiritual birth of Christ in their hearts, to be prayerfully minded, and to search for that spiritual relationship through faith. While others spend the time prior to Christmas purchasing gifts for loved ones and preparing for family dinners or festivities

with friends and colleagues, NRC members are encouraged to be busy preparing their hearts and minds in a prayerful manner for room to be made in their lives for Christ.

Christmas. On Christmas Day, there are two sermons focusing on the birth of Christ. While many other people commemorate Christmas with adornments and decorations, such as Christmas tree, a nativity scene, special meals, extravagant baking, and especially gift giving, it is typical for NRC families to go to church twice on this day without any other special festivities. NRC members do not seek to celebrate with external celebrations, but rather seek to worship God through public services and private personal communion with God. A counsellor may want to consider this different commemoration of Christmas, as the NRC client does not generally wish others a “Merry Christmas,” but rather wishes others a blessing under the preached Word during the Christmas church services. Some NRC clients may feel uncomfortable hearing someone say “Merry Christmas.”

New Year’s Eve. On the evening of December 31st there is a special service reminding NRC members that just as the year has ended, their lives are also another year closer to eternity. Members are reminded of the mortality of human life and that they are not to seek a life of pleasure with earthly experiences, but rather ought to be prayerfully seeking to be renewed spiritually so that when their lives end they are prepared to meet God. At the close of this service, all of the names of church members who have passed away throughout the year are brought to the congregation’s remembrance, and all members unite in singing to remember those who have died. This is a very touching, sombre occasion for the families who remember their loved one within the comfort of the congregational setting. For the NRC member, the year closes not with celebrations and

New Year's resolutions, but rather in a humble, realistic manner considering the brevity of life.

New Year's Day. New Year's Day also begins with a special service dedicated to beginning another new year, and the congregation unites in prayer and worship, seeking a blessing from God in the year that they have been privileged to begin together. Young children often receive a special book of their choice and a small treat bag from the consistory members. There are usually special addresses to the minister by the president of the consistory, as well as special addresses or well wishes on the labours conducted by the consistory members.

Prayer Day. Prayer Day is a special day set aside in the spring to unite and ask the Lord for His blessing upon the manual labours of the members. This day coincides with the spring season when the farmers are busy seeding their crops. Prayer is made for the Lord to preserve the seeds that have been planted and to provide the necessary rain and sun so the crops can germinate and grow. Just as people need the Lord to bless the tangible seed, they must entreat Him in prayer to bless the spiritual seeds spread in the congregation from Sunday to Sunday. Lord's blessing is sought on all of members' labours in whatever occupation they may find themselves. There is a special collection for the private school, as the Lord is also sought in prayer to remember the labours performed by teachers and school staff in instructing the children of the congregation.

Passion. The seven weeks of Passion include the Sundays prior to Good Friday. This season is devoted to special sermons selected on the suffering of the Lord Jesus. The Bible passages may be selected from Old Testament prophecies leading up to Christ's death, or the Biblical focus may begin in the New Testament and work back in

time through the prophetic verses located in the Old Testament. On Palm Sunday, which is the seventh Sunday during the Passion season, NRC members commemorate Jesus's entry into Jerusalem prior to His trial and crucifixion.

Good Friday. Good Friday is commemorated with one service, generally in the evening, when members of the congregation gather to remember the joyous event of Jesus dying on the cross for His people. NRC members are all encouraged to seek Him as the personal Saviour, who shed His blood for the remission of the sins of His people. This day can provide profound humility and thankfulness to God's elect, as they experience God's goodness towards them in spite of their evil human nature.

Easter. Easter is a special Sunday, with services to commemorate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, as He rose from the grave. This is a day of spiritual hope and members are encouraged to seek a spiritual renewal and quickening only possible through Jesus. Just as He is able and willing to raise Himself from the dead, so He makes it possible for all sinners to be quickened spiritually and rise out of the spiritually dead state that humanity is in by nature.

Although Easter is a special day of commemoration, the NRC family will usually not have a special dinner or plan family functions on this holiday, since it fall on the Sunday. Any family functions will be planned for another day of the week, since Sunday is to be kept holy and used solely for a day of worship and rest.

Ascension Day. Ascension day is a commemoration of when the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven. On this day NRC members honour His ascension by being present in the church service dedicated to this event, acknowledging the presence of the Lord Jesus who since then has been at the right hand of God, His Father.

Pentecost. Pentecost is the day when NRC members commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the congregation is led through prayer to ask the Holy Spirit to enter into their own lives. All members need the Holy Spirit to change people's naturally hard, cold hearts to make room for the love of Christ. Without the work of the Spirit, one cannot experience a personal relationship with Jesus, Who alone can mediate between man and God the Father who is Judge over all.

Thanksgiving Day. Thanksgiving Day is another day set aside annually to thank the Lord for His blessings and His sparing hand. NRC members unite in church for a service of thankfulness for God's blessings shown to the church and for His continual care and providence over the government, country, and nations worldwide. On this day members thank God for His providential care over them and acknowledge that, in spite of all of their sins and shortcomings, the Lord has dealt with them in a faithful manner.

Reformation Day. NRC members commemorate Reformation Day on October 31, the day Martin Luther posted his 95 theses in protest to the sales of indulgences onto the church door in Wittenberg in 1517 (Vreugdenhil, 1991, p. 252), contributing to the Reformation of the Christian church. The NRC, like many other Reformed and Lutheran churches, have a special service on this day in commemoration of God's faithfulness in preserving the truth. While contemporary society celebrates Halloween, NRC members do not participate in these festivities and activities, as they originate from Pagan rituals, but rather have this day set aside for the annual observance in connection with the reforming of the church that had departed from the Biblical teachings.

Summary of the commemoration of religious holidays. As counsellors, it will be important to honour these special days of worship. The NRC client may express a

longing for a particular event, seeking a personal spiritual blessing. Other NRC clients may struggle after a special event has passed by, particularly if they were unable to feel a personal connection or experience a blessing with the message that was preached. From the NRC perspective, the ministers who bring the Word are not responsible or able to bless the members with the convicting and convincing power of God. God alone can apply the preached Word, resulting in a personal meaning or experience accompanying the Word. The counsellor may want to explore the client's role in seeking the personal application of the Word.

Foundational Institutions in the NRC Community

This section describes how NRC members practise their religion within the systemic community. The three foundational institutions consist of the church, family, and school. These institutions are known as a *threefold cord*, which cannot easily be broken. This strong cord ensures that doctrinal truth and cultural traditions are preserved from one generation to the next. To effectively provide therapy for an NRC client, a counsellor from outside this community should understand the worldview held by the NRC community and also understand the framework of the community. In this section I address the three main institutions found within the NRC community: the church, family, and the school.

Church. The NRC church is set up according to what the congregation believe is in God's Word, as all the rules or interpretations can be explained through Biblical passages. I explore some main concepts found within the NRC church, focussing on the two-part population, church council, house visitation, the role of women in the church, and reproof or correction.

Two groups. Universally, the NRC believe there are two groups of people, believers and non-believers, but this does not mean that NRC members presume that believers are only found in the NRC church. Believers are only those who have received forgiveness of their sins through Jesus Christ. These individuals belong to the “invisible” church, since people cannot determine who are saved, as only God has determined this through predestination. NRC members believe that unbelievers are also among professing members of the NRC church.

Church council. Within the church, men are elected by the male members into the office of elder or deacon, and some congregations have a minister as well. The office bearers are called the *consistory*, and they hold a serving, rather than a ruling power over the congregation (Kersten, 1983, p. 484). These offices are responsible for different tasks or roles within the church framework. The male ministers are the only ones who may preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments. The role of the elders (all male) is to ensure that the members live according to God’s Word and that the minister preaches an accurate, truthful message. Deacons are responsible for collecting and distributing money. The consistory forms the council of the church, and any questions or concerns regarding the operation of the church may be brought to these men.

It may be important for the therapist to understand the roles of different individuals belonging to the NRC church because then the NRC member can be directed to seek clarification or assistance from the serving members of the church. The therapist should not advise the client to seek government assistance through welfare when a member who has lost a job or has been injured and cannot work, as the deacons will provide financial gifts until the client is able to earn his or her own income once again.

House visitation. Two consistory members also visit the home of each member for *house visitation* annually. These visits are intended to be used to explore or discuss the spiritual life of the family. Members may also bring up anything they would like to discuss or clarify with the office bearers. Generally, members do not challenge or question the doctrine, as they have agreed to the doctrine through the confession of faith when they became a confessing member of the church. Members are free to discuss their feelings about spiritual matters, knowing the discussion may be shared with all office bearers belonging to the consistory; however, confidentiality remains within the consistory.

A therapist can direct an individual who is struggling with spiritual concerns to turn to the elders or minister for spiritual guidance. For any mental health concerns, the consistory may feel inadequate and will probably encourage the struggling member to access counselling. A therapist may want to help a client by debriefing the house visitation or by helping a client who is struggling with a church-related matter to process the concerns so the client feels ready and able to raise the matter in an upcoming house visitation.

Role of women. While women are also members of the church, they may not speak in public meetings or vote when elections are held for office bearers. God's Word states, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law" (I Cor. 14:34, King James Version). Although women and children do not play an active role in the church governance, their important task consists of prayer to God, seeking for His wisdom and guidance, so He will be present at the male member meetings and guide the

elections according to His divine decree (Kersten, 1983, p. 468). In addition to that, women are often active in specific church functions such as visiting of the sick, elderly, and others who need help. In addition, in the religious instruction of young children, the mother generally plays a more important role than the father (C. Sonneveld, personal communication, October 17, 2013).

Reproof or correction. Church membership is granted to adult individuals who publicly profess to believe the NRC doctrine to be the truth. When baptised members reach adulthood they may join a Confession of Faith catechism class to learn the NRC doctrine in greater depth. This class culminates with an examination by the consistory members, upon which if one passes, the individual may make a public commitment in a special service to professing agreement and promising adherence to the NRC doctrine. This commitment does not insinuate that the individual has obtained saving faith; rather, the profession of faith occurs when it becomes evident in one's walk and talk that an individual possesses or has experienced the doctrinal truth that the NRC teaches. Membership allows males to participate in decision making and a confessing member may access the sacraments offered in the church. Membership also places individuals under the discipline of the church if they depart from the doctrine or engage in public sins. According to the Church Order of Dordt, Article 71 (Kersten, 2009), "Christian discipline is of a spiritual nature, and exempts no one from civil trial or punishment by the authorities" (p. 239). In circumstances in which the civil law has been broken, the proper legal proceedings must be followed according to the judicial system.

If a member were to transgress against the church doctrine or not adhere to the Christian lifestyle, a Biblical protocol is followed according to Matthew 18 (King James

Version), in which one who knows or hears of the sin will speak to the offender one on one to try to turn the offender from the sin. If this does not resolve the problem, then two or more members will confront the individual who has erred and lovingly provide guidance and correction as needed. If the loving admonition is not adhered to, the consistory may need to investigate and deal with the matter.

In very rare and extreme cases, if the member rejects the admonition of the consistory, a difficult decision needs to be made. The consistory has the power to exclude an individual from partaking of the sacraments, if a member continues to live in sin. The individual under censure may attend worship services in church and community functions during this time to aid in reflection and decision making. The member always has an opportunity to be reinstated through admission of guilt and remorse and a provision of evidence of departing from the wrongful behaviour.

A therapist may have an NRC client who is struggling with the need to admonish another member. The therapist can assist the client to follow the Biblical procedure in providing reproof to another member. Following the NRC protocol, the client can determine what is the best manner of fulfilling this requirement. A therapist may also encounter an NRC client who is struggling with being placed under censure. As this is a weighty matter, a therapist should devote time for careful consideration through utilizing an ethical decision making model. Through the use of this model, the therapist can explore with the client the behaviour that has caused him or her to be placed under church discipline to help the client fully understand the implications of the wrongful behaviour.

The family. Overall, NRC families must submit to God's Word as outlined in the NRC doctrine and promise to live according to the rules set out by the church. The NRC

family unit reflects the traditional family structure, consisting of a father, mother, and children. This section of the chapter explains the family life of NRC members by examining the beliefs around dating, marriage, children, divorce, and the roles of the husband and wife.

Dating. Within the NRC community, members are encouraged to date individuals belonging to the NRC denomination. There are many different NRC congregations throughout North America, as well as in The Netherlands, so often new members join the church community through marriage. The shared religious underpinnings are to be the foundation of an intimate relationship. The average time of dating is 2 to 3 years, and generally the couple becomes engaged to begin their wedding planning.

Although discouraged by family members as well as the consistory, an NRC member may date someone from outside of the church community. Generally, the NRC member is warned of the possibility that this may cause difficulties in the future, especially when raising children, if the couple do not agree on religious matters. However, a member may have an NRC church wedding with someone from outside of the NRC community, if the non-NRC partner promises to join the church by following Confession of Faith classes with the intent to become a member. If the non-NRC individual does not agree to these conditions, the couple may marry outside of the church if they still desire to continue with the relationship. The couple are always welcome to join the worship services and to participate in church functions; however, the male member may not participate in voting for consistory members or any decision-making process if he does not have a church membership.

Marriage. Since marriage is an institution of God, it is to be a firm, intimate bond between a man and a woman, which is honoured and blessed by God. The NRC follow the seventh commandment that requires members to protect the marriage and not break it (Heerschap, 1992, p. 221). Sexual relationships are only permitted within this marriage unit for the purposes of reproduction and as an intimate act of love. Sex is not openly discussed, but is a private matter between husband and wife. As such, a counsellor may want to refrain from asking specific questions regarding the sexual relationship, unless the client raises a concern that he or she may want to discuss.

Marriage between NRC members takes place on a weekday, with a church service provided by a minister of the NRC denomination. This service incorporates the reading of a marriage form, sanctioned by the NRC church, which includes the marriage vows the couple makes to one another in the presence of God and all those in attendance.

Aside from the church service, the wedding couple, along with their bridal party if they have bridesmaids, groomsmen, and so forth, usually have photographs taken with a professional photographer. Family photos with the married couple are also taken.

The couple generally provides a reception in the evening, usually extending the invitation to an average of 200 wedding guests, consisting of family and friends. The reception usually includes a meal, and the master of ceremonies presents a program of activities. Snacks and drinks are also provided later in the evening. The NRC wedding does not include a dance or secular music, but activities may include the singing of Psalters (NRC-approved musical pieces based on the Book of Psalms) or playing of instrumental musical arrangements for the enjoyment of the wedded couple and their guests.

The expenses incurred by the wedding ceremony are not always the bride's father's expense. Each family determines how to cover the costs. Some couples pay for all the expenses themselves and hire service providers to assist in the celebration. Other couples ask their parents to help cover some of the expenses and ask family or community members may provide services, such as the preparations of food or to take photographs.

Children. According to the NRC religion, children are viewed as a gift of God, a blessing upon the marriage bond. As such, individuals are not to obstruct the gift of children through abortion; although some members do use contraceptives, this is not endorsed by the church. It is common for NRC families to consist of many children.

Children are raised to respect and obey their parents and all those in authority. A child is usually given age-appropriate tasks by their parents to help with the household duties or chores on the family farm or business. Disobedient children are often seen as a reflection of negligent parenting, so children are generally raised in a very structured environment.

A therapist may encounter an NRC client who struggles with shame regarding children who leave the home or are disrespectful to those in positions of authority. It may be helpful for the counsellor to guide the parent or grandparent through processing this painful experience by helping the client to identify all the warnings they may have given to the child, as well as all the prayers and love provided for the child. The therapist may want to extend encouragement to the parent or grandparent with the NRC belief that although the child has left the parental home or church community, God is still able to protect and save the child wherever he or she may be residing.

A therapist may also have a young NRC client who struggles with issues relating to the sheltered upbringing. When NRC children become exposed to other views or beliefs, they may begin to question their own faith. While this experience can be a time of healthy self-exploration, some children may experiment with drugs or alcohol. It may be helpful for the young client to receive guidance regarding the life choices he or she is making. Helping the child to understand that parents place rules or restrictions within the family home out of love, not out of spite or maliciousness, may help the young NRC client to view his or her experiences from a different perspective. A therapist can help the young client to reframe the experiences through processing the reasons why the rules or restrictions are in place, including that God demands parents raise and nurture their children according to His law.

Divorce. In the NRC doctrine, marriage may be broken only for one reason, in the case of adultery (Heerschap, 1992, p. 225). Unhappiness, disagreements, or quarrelling between a husband and wife are not grounds for severing the marriage unit. Rather, disputes or discord need to be resolved to restore a healthy balance in the relationship. While marriage counselling is not yet commonly accessed within the NRC community, consistory members are often called upon to help resolve marital or family disputes.

In the case of family violence, the church will not intervene with the role of the proper authorities if the victim chooses to file a report against the abuser. The consistory members will visit both parties to see if they can be of assistance or advise the members to seek professional help. If possible, the marriage is to be saved. If an NRC couple approaches the consistory with a request to end the marriage, the case is investigated by

the consistory to determine if there are Biblical grounds for a divorce. An individual who broke the seventh commandment may need to publicly confess guilt in front of the church by answering specific questions asked by the minister. Depending on the circumstances of the divorce, the individuals may remarry; although these individuals assume responsibility for the subsequent marriage, this wedding usually takes place outside of the church.

Gender roles. Other traditional values include the roles of men and women based on concepts of masculinity and femininity. While this has slowly been shifting in recent years, NRC gender roles may still prove to be very difficult for individuals who feel drawn towards career choices that do not adhere to the community cultural norms. For example, a young man interested in a career of nursing or baking may experience rejection by his peers or experience opposition from immediate family members. Similarly, a young woman who wishes to pursue a career may question her own desire, as she may feel the social pressure to be married and raise a family. Young people, male and female, are encouraged to use their talents in various capacities, while recognizing that once children are born the primary role of the mother is with the children in the home and the father is to provide for his family.

The role of the husband. Within the NRC community, the father is deemed responsible for providing for the family's financial needs. He is expected to work to provide the necessities for his wife and children. For this reason, boys are strongly encouraged to learn a trade or find a career that will adequately provide for the financial needs of the family. The father must ensure that the family does not live beyond its financial means.

The father is also the spiritual head of the family. The adult male member has the right to vote at church meetings and represents his wife and family when it comes to elections or decision making in the church. The father is responsible for ensuring the family does not stray from the doctrinal beliefs and values and is the highest authority within the family unit. However, this does not mean that the man will not consult his wife in important decisions or that a woman has no say in family affairs.

The role of the wife. Women belonging to the NRC church are told to take an accommodating or yielding position to the husband when it comes to decision making within the family unit. Women are allowed to work outside of the home before children are born. However, with the arrival of children, the mother is expected to be at home as the provider for the children's daily needs. Women are generally responsible for household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and other household duties. Women are respected and honoured members in the community, especially in their role of providing for their children and husband.

While girls are encouraged to obtain an education, their career choice is to be one conducive to the role of a mother. If a woman becomes married and begins a family, the expectation is that her career will be set aside during her child-rearing years. While women may pray before and after meals or read the Bible to their family, if the man is present this is to be his task.

Summary of gender roles. Overall, the roles of family members are held in very high regard in the NRC community, which may be different from other religious and non-religious communities. Counsellors are encouraged to work within the framework presented. For example, it would be unethical to counsel an NRC member to leave his or

her married partner. If a client presents with a concern regarding an extra-marital affair, a counsellor can help the client work through an ethical decision-making model to help him or her consider all that is at stake with this affair. A counsellor needs to ask questions to invite the client to reflect upon the choices he or she is making, whether these choices are motivated by self-interest or with God's commands in view. The therapist may provide advice for the client to consult members in the church who could offer guidance and support.

The school. This section addresses Christian education, as the counsellor may be working with clients (e.g., children or parents) presenting with school-related issues, such as bullying, academic failure, teacher-child conflict, and so forth. This section explores the concept of parental vows, the structure of the Christian school system, teachers, and the school board.

Parental vows. With the sacrament of baptism provided to all NRC infants, parents of the child promise to provide or ensure the child will receive a Christian education. To assist the parents in fulfilling their baptismal vows for their children by providing them with religious education, many churches have created their own private schools wherein the religious beliefs and values are taught to the younger generation.

The Christian school system. The school in southern Alberta is the Calvin Christian School, located near Coalhurst. This accredited institution provides education to approximately 850 children from Kindergarten to Grade 12, providing the Alberta Programs of Study as approved by Alberta Education (n.d.). All subjects are taught through the lens of Christian values and beliefs held by the NRC church community,

taught in NRC churches in accordance to the Biblical teachings as outlined by the governance of the church, and are expected to be adhered to by the families.

Teachers. All teachers who are hired at the Calvin Christian School must be an NRC church member and have obtained an official teaching degree at a post-secondary institution. The teachers are required to live according to the rules outlined in the governance of the church. If a teacher fails to act in accordance with the rules of the school constitution, the school board will address these matters with him or her, asking the individual to leave if he or she cannot comply. In addition, if a teacher were to withdraw his NRC membership, he or she is no longer permitted to teach in the Christian school.

The school board. The school board, consisting of male consistory members of the three local churches and male community members, is responsible for making decisions regarding the daily operation of the school. If there are any questions or concerns held by teachers, parents, or students, these may be brought to the attention of the school board members, who will discuss and decide these matters based on what is in the best interest for the school. The school board is the final authority regarding the operation of the school.

A therapist may encounter a student or parent who has concerns about the ethical behaviour of a teacher. As such, the therapist may need to guide the client towards the proper authority if the school board is not dealing with the matter. However, rather than immediately encouraging the NRC client to take action in a certain direction outside of the systemic framework of the school, the therapist can explore the options available within this system to help the client work towards a resolution to issue or cause of

conflict. If the matter encompasses criminal activity, such as placing children at risk, the therapist as well as the school are required by law to report these actions to authorities.

NRC Lifestyle

A Christian lifestyle must begin with one seeking a personal intimate relationship with God, which is only possible through the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ. Since NRC members believe that only God can work this true saving faith in a person by His Holy Spirit, most members do not dare to profess this personal relationship, and without this personal relationship they dare not claim they will go to Heaven. The NRC member is urged to constantly seek forgiveness and ask God to save souls from perdition. All actions that are not for the purpose of seeking God's honour and His blessing are, therefore, discredited. For this reason, recreational activities are often not embraced, especially activities that detract or hinder one from seeking a personal intimate relationship with God.

Recreational activities. Recreational activities for children are more readily embraced, as this incorporates a sphere of physical wellness. For example, children are generally encouraged to spend time outdoors. Some NRC families do not allow children to wear or view others swim wear, so these members would not go swimming in public pools or tubing and rafting in the river. The NRC does engage in recreational sports, such as soccer, baseball, or volleyball; however, competing with other schools or teams is not condoned. Parents are also discouraged from enrolling their children in athletic teams. Once competitiveness is present, winning becomes the goal, and the activity is no longer for health and wellness but may become a source of pride or jealousy.

From the NRC perspective, idleness is viewed as a sin. This includes the time one spends on computers playing games or surfing the Internet. These activities can hinder one from striving to live to God's honour, and since there is no physical or often cognitive benefit, these types of activities are not heartily embraced.

Lack of media connection. Our families are not exposed to celebrities in movies, music, or mass media. NRC members are forbidden from having televisions. Counsellors might find it useful to know that NRC members consider mass media to be damaging to the spiritual well-being of church members. The NRC fears that television will infiltrate into the daily lives of people, filling the day with idleness and thoughts of temporal appeal rather than spiritual value.

Use of our time. From the NRC perspective, for every moment of the day, people will be held accountable with what they did with their time. Time spent in idleness is sin, as God has given people time for the purpose to serve and worship Him first, and second to provide for their daily necessities through work and fulfilling daily responsibilities. No time may be wasted in idle entertainment; rather, NRC members must use their time profitably to meet daily needs and to give to the service of the Lord.

Internet. Any technology that is used solely for entertainment is not to be embraced within the church community. Although the Internet is a valuable tool for business and personal use, the church requires members to use an Internet filter to block offensive or harmful content, if the family accepts this tool into the home. The Internet is endorsed for educational purposes; the Christian school also has a filter to protect students who use the Internet for research.

Music. NRC members are encouraged to listen to music with the purpose of glorifying God and singing to His honour. The concern of playing secular music is that the lyrics contain overt or covert messages, enticing one to support a contemporary lifestyle or worldliness. In the NRC church, members are encouraged to listen to music based solely on God's own words, rather than the musician's interpretation of experiences or emotions. For example, Christian rock is believed to instil a feel-good experience, using a catchy beat and rhythm; however, the NRC believe the intent of the music is not necessarily to glorify God, but to make people feel good and produce sales for the artist. With secular music, the messages often promote rebellion against God and His Word by directly going against the moral standards He has provided for His Word, which members strive to live by in the NRC community. Any music without God's honour as the intent is not to be accepted.

Movies. Most television programs and movies generate lustful thoughts and impure desires, which enter into people's thoughts, words, or behaviours. A Christian adhering to the NRC doctrine desires to live his or her life to God's honour; anything that draws one's thoughts or emotions away from what would be to His honour is sin. Aside from sheltering ourselves from the different worldviews of popular artists and movie stars, members do not want to reward their lifestyle and do not wish to have their influence in NRC families. Such people are often portrayed to be living in a glamorous existence; however, from the NRC perspective they are living in a godless, offensive manner.

Specific values and beliefs. This section discusses the specific values and beliefs of the members of the NRC church. These include hard work ethic, giving to the poor, views on mental health, submissiveness, and thankfulness.

Hard work ethic. The NRC highly esteems the ability to work hard at whatever occupation one has the talent for, as long as the work is morally acceptable. Hill (1996) explored work ethic from an economic perspective and suggested that one's work would be an indicator that one could belong to the elect; however, this argument is not accepted within the NRC perspective. The root of the hard work ethic most likely stems from the belief that idleness is considered a sin, so most NRC members strive for the opposite. In the NRC community, one may strive to demonstrate his or her hard work through a display of material goods, such as the vehicle one drives, the home one can afford, and the clothing one wears.

A counsellor may have a client who struggles with a medical issue hindering him or her from physical work. This may be extremely difficult for the client, and the counsellor may need to explore different options for earning an income or re-evaluating what constitutes hard work. Working to the best of one's capability is what is required, each working within his or her own capacity. A therapist may also be confronted with a client who is feeling angry or disappointed in a spouse or a child who is not displaying the desire to work hard. It may be necessary to process this with the client and explore how all individuals are responsible for their actions. Discussing the negative stigma directed to those who do not work hard in the community may help the client understand that there is more to the spouse or child than the lack of ability or desire to exert oneself in one's line of work.

Giving to the poor. Another specific value held by many of the community members is the responsibility of giving to the poor. Members are encouraged to donate liberally to those who have less. Most of these gifts are directed to synodically approved church organizations to carry out mission work and serve the less fortunate.

View of mental health. From the NRC perspective, the cause or origin of mental health issues are similar to physical ailments or disease. All of these originated through the fall of humanity, as a result of sin. From this perspective, NRC members are expected to be submissive in affliction, rather than rebelling in anger towards God. God did not inflict people with adverse conditions, but rather these conditions are a direct result of sin. All people can expect to experience weakness, disease, pain, and sorrow. From the NRC perspective, there is a certain element of submission in the afflictions people must endure, but NRC members also carry the responsibility to make choices that will enable them to live to their fullest potential to God's honour and glory.

Submissiveness. From this NRC worldview, individuals are required to be submissive to the Fatherly hand of God. NRC members must always seek His will and be patient in times of adversity. Rather than rise up to complain or feel bitter when plans go awry, NRC members must accept that all things are in His providence. As such, nothing happens by chance—everything has a purpose. NRC members are required to view life's experiences from this perspective and to proceed through life in dependency on the Lord. All decisions need to be made prayerfully, asking Him to guide one's thoughts to consider factors that should influence one's decision-making process.

A therapist may want to explore the concept of submissiveness with the NRC client who is struggling with adversities. Sometimes reframing the situation may help the

client accept the things he or she is unable to change. Exploring how God may have a purpose in the difficult experience may help lighten the burden for the client and help to empower the client through accepting, rather than fighting, the hardship.

Thankfulness. In the same way, when problems or concerns have developed favourably, NRC members must acknowledge God for His providence in guiding the outcome. Rather than taking personal credit for a favourable outcome by contributing success to personal strengths or attributes, NRC members need to credit God and thank Him for His guidance and direction.

An NRC member also displays submissiveness and thankfulness through daily prayer. Meals begin with a prayer, acknowledging God for His goodness in providing the food and drink that is available, while so many others in this world suffer from hunger and disease. It is common practice to ask for God's blessing upon the food, to read a portion of the Bible, and after the meal is finished, the NRC member will pray to thank God for the meal He once again provided. NRC members also pray upon rising in the morning and before retiring at night. These prayers are examples of the continual submissiveness and thankfulness that is to be present within the heart and mind of an NRC member.

Considerations for Counselling Interventions

Most counselling interventions consist of the means or tools with the ability to alter one's perspective or worldview. While changing maladaptive schema within is beneficial, the counsellor must ensure that the client is not exposed to ideas that contradict or threaten the religious foundation embraced by the individual. Many NRC members are hesitant to seek mental health therapy for this reason, especially considering

the malleability of the mind of a child. Some of the interventions or techniques that may make the NRC client feel uncomfortable include the following: role play, delving into the unconscious and interpreting this experience, guided meditations, hypnotism, astrology, the misuse of God's name, and the fight-and-flight response explained from an evolutionary perspective.

Role play. Role play may make the NRC client feel uncomfortable, as members are not allowed to pretend to be someone else. The basis for this, according to the NRC beliefs, can be found in Biblical historical accounts. First, Israel's King David pretended to be mentally disabled to evade danger while he was held captive in enemy territory. The enemy released him, but David should have depended on the Lord rather than to take matters into his own hands and pretend to be a mentally unstable individual (1 Samuel 21, King James Version).

Likewise, Jacob pretended to be Esau in an attempt to deceive his father to obtain the blessing meant for the eldest son (Genesis 27, King James Version). Later, Jacob had to suffer for his deceitful behaviour by being deceived himself many times by his uncle Laban and his own children. As a result, children are not allowed to participate in acting out plays, in or out of school. Likewise, a child who is seeking therapy may be offended or feel uneasy if asked to role play another individual as a therapeutic intervention. As such, counsellors are advised to avoid using the role play intervention with NRC members.

Altered state. Another technique rooted in the Freudian approach is to assist an individual in delving into the unconscious and then interpreting this experience. There is also the practice of dream analysis, which is not a realm the NRC member will

comfortably penetrate. NRC members will not be comfortable entering into any altered state. Often this is achieved through hypnotism, but also some guided visualizations are used for this purpose.

A guided visualization that makes reference to the client needing to seek within to feel or connect with the inner light would be counterproductive. The client will not feel comfortable with this humanistic approach to therapy. Astrology, using the heavenly bodies such as stars, planets, or solar bodies to provide direction or guidance is also rejected by the NRC. Even using interventions like tapping or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing may leave a client feeling uncomfortable, and unless the therapist can explain scientifically how these interventions are beneficial, such practices will likely lead up to the premature termination of therapy by the client before his or her goals are realized.

Language. The language used in the therapy session is also of utmost importance. First of all, as was previously mentioned, the therapist cannot loosely use the Lord's name out of a religious context (e.g., "Oh my God"). In addition, terms such as, "Bless you!" are not used by NRC members, since they believe only God can bless people. The common adage "My goodness" is also not used, because from the NRC perspective people are not good, they are sinful.

Self-worth. From the NRC perspective, based on God's Word, creation, and providence, every individual has worth. A counsellor may praise the personal traits or talents as being given by God to encourage the client to utilize these gifts to their fullest potential. A distinction is made in the NRC religion between praising personal accomplishments and attributes given by God and praising an individual for being a

“good” Christian or for strict adherence to sound religious duties, which NRC members believe will instill a false hope for eternity. NRC members are encouraged to view positive traits and accomplishments as gracious gifts of God and to express their gratitude for these gifts through humility and service to God and others. In the Bible, Paul stated, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (1 Timothy 4:14, King James Version). In the Parable of the Ten Talents (Matthew 25: 14–29, King James Version), Jesus praised the individual who used his talents to develop and gain more talents. As such, positive traits ought to be pointed out by the therapist as evidence that the individual has self-worth. Therapists may use such traits to encourage a client to realize he or she has worth and potential in this life.

The Extending Impact of this Worldview

The unique worldview of the NRC, composed of a spectrum of cultural attributes and viewpoints, has sometimes kept the community from uniting with other Christian churches or encouraging members to seek business partners or social connections outside of the church community. Immigrants who brought along their religious beliefs from the Netherlands founded the NRC community in southern Alberta. As members adhered to the traditions and doctrine of the early immigrants, the community has “fossilized” (Dr. R. Barendregt, personal communication, August 7, 2013) into a stagnant entity, one that has been resistant to change.

Something of noticeable distinction can be seen in the physical appearance of members of the NRC community. Members will dress in a neat and often professional manner. Girls and women generally wear skirts or dresses. Clothing is often matched in

a tasteful, yet contemporary style, and one's appearance is generally neat and well groomed.

Hairstyles and use of accessories like jewellery are selected to enhance one's physical appearance, although the use of makeup or nail art is not encouraged, mainly to seek humility inwardly as well as in the outward appearance. An NRC member will usually refrain from excessive piercings (abstaining from piercings beyond the single ear piercing), tattoos, or coloured hairstyles. From the NRC perspective, desiring to change one's natural look is tantamount to telling God that the individual is not satisfied with His creation of one's physical appearance. Besides the physical defamation of God's creation of the human body, it is believed that these behaviours proceed from a covert desire for personal advancement or individual gratification, which is not appreciated.

Within the NRC worldview, members must primarily present their bodies in God's honour, rather than seek personal gain or admiration. In all actions, including words, thoughts, and deeds, NRC members are to keep God's honour and glory in view. A therapist may want to consider this if confronted with an NRC client who is not adhering to these community guidelines. Perhaps the client is feeling anger or resentment towards his or her family or community. Exploring the root of this can be very beneficial for the client.

Since the NRC client may hold a unique worldview, a therapist cannot conceptualize a case using a contradictory therapeutic approach, such as the humanistic approach in which the client is "treated in a manner that emphasizes their innate goodness and potential" (Hurst, 2011, para. 5). A therapist should consider aligning the therapeutic approach with the worldview held by the NRC client.

Summary

This chapter first discussed the need for the counsellor to provide reassurance to members of the NRC community prior to engaging in therapy. This chapter also outlined some integral doctrinal tenets of the NRC doctrine, including the NRC worldview on creationism, the fall of humanity, and predestination. This chapter explored the NRC beliefs and values founded on the Ten Commandments. The religious holidays were briefly explained to assist the therapist in understanding these events, how the events are commemorated, and how therapists can help NRC clients explore the significance of these events. The chapter continued on to explain that through the provision of the main institutions of the NRC community, the church, family, and school, a therapist can assist the NRC client through a decision-making process following the community systems for the resolution of issues within these three institutions. The chapter also provided some recommendations for the non-NRC therapist to consider, as well as some recommendations regarding counselling interventions.

Understanding our Biblical worldview and using this knowledge to decide on which therapeutic interventions fit within the Christian perspective will allow the therapy process to unfold in a religiously acceptable and culturally sensitive manner. There may be many other interventions that I, as the author, have not considered in this project; however, if the therapist can place the intervention within a model that elevates God to the highest and allows the client to feel dependent on God in all things, healing the wounds within the NRC client will become possible. The final chapter of this project will explore the implications of this project by looking at the benefit it brings to the research community, the client, their families, and the mental health therapist.

Chapter 5: Synthesis

In this final chapter, I shall provide an overview of the project. I have explained the need for this project by providing the rationale and ethical guidelines why therapists should gain an understanding of their clients' worldviews. Strengths of this project and handbook are provided, outlining the value it offers for clients, therapists, young clients, parents, and the research community. The strengths and limitations of the literature review are explored, as well as areas of future research. My closing remarks conclude this project.

Need For This Project

The intent of this project is to provide pertinent information for therapists so they might increase their understanding of the cultural and religious aspects of the NRC doctrine. It is my desire that NRC members will feel safe working with a secular mental health therapist, knowing that the counsellor will expand his or her cultural competency by being informed of the NRC worldview. Once therapists can appreciate and understand the differences in worldviews, they are in a position to provide ethical practice to the NRC population.

According to the College of Alberta Psychologists (CAP) *Guidelines for Non-Discriminatory Practice* (Crozier, Harris, Larsen, Pettifor, & Sloane, 1996), it is pertinent that professionals “do not impose the dominant culture world view on those who are different” (p. 2). Part II of the CAP guidelines provided points for counsellors to ensure ethical practice with diverse populations (Crozier et al., 1996). Included in this guideline was the need for a therapist to “study group or cultural norms in order to recognize individual differences within the larger context” (Crozier et al., 1996, p. 4) and to

“respect, listen and learn from clients who are different from oneself in order to understand what is in their best interests” (p. 4). In this project I provide an organized handbook (Appendix A) outlining some of the main cultural and religious values held by the NRC community to assist in the sharing of this information to therapists who are interested in working with this clientele.

Strengths of Project and Handbook

The strengths of this project include the potential of providing benefit to clients and their families, therapists, and the research community. This project has potential to benefit all of these parties through providing an in-depth explanation of the cultural and religious values and beliefs found within the NRC community and how this relates to the ethical provision of mental health services for the NRC client. This section outlines how this project and handbook provide value for clients, therapists, young clients, parents, and the research community.

Value for the client. With this project and the easy-to-follow handbook, a client can benefit through gained confidence that the therapist will have the information provided to ensure the counsellor understands the client’s values and beliefs. Clients who provide a copy of this project and its handbook, which outlines the worldview to which they feel aligned, to their counsellors may feel assured that their values and beliefs will be considered in the formation and strengthening of the therapeutic relationship and throughout the therapeutic process. The act of offering a counsellor this information may be beneficial for clients, as it may be difficult for a person to verbalize his or her cultural or religious values, especially if the person is struggling with cognitive or emotional distress.

Value for the therapist. As has been stressed in Chapter 4, this project has immense value for therapists who feel the need to understand the various beliefs and values held by the NRC client. The therapist can use their deepened understanding to help build the therapeutic relationship. The process of engaging discussion on core values and beliefs is a strengthening factor in a relationship, and this project and corresponding handbook can be an invaluable resource to that end. A strong working alliance will reduce the risk of premature termination of treatment, since the client will continue to feel respected, understood, and valued. I suggest the therapist consider placing him or herself in the world of the NRC client to consider if the chosen theoretical approach will align with this client's worldview. I encourage the therapist to challenge him or herself to be cognizant and ever mindful of the worldview of the client and to use this information to select interventions that would fit within this framework.

This project and its handbook are intended to accompany the NRC member into the counselling setting. This project can be used to guide exploration between the therapist and the client, providing an organized guide to consider the fundamental values and beliefs belonging to the members of this community. The client can also express how he or she stands in comparison to the points outlined in the project and the handbook. Even if the client and counsellor hold differences of opinion, this guide can be used to help identify such differences during the therapy process. The project and handbook can also be beneficial during the informed consent process, as the therapist and client explore their rights within the therapeutic process. With this project and with documents similar to it, therapists as well as the research community can become more knowledgeable and informed to a worldview different from their own.

Value for young clients. This project and handbook may also be useful for younger clients. For example, in the preoperational stage, a child may experience egocentrism and may be unable to understand things from another perspective. While this is true in everyday learning experiences, it is especially true for cultural or religious opinions, beliefs, and customs. Certain experiences may be normal for the child, and, considering Piaget's preoperational stage (Muuss, 1967, p. 292), the young child may consider this normal for others as well. This knowledge may also provide comfort to the client's family members. Clients who are immigrants may also struggle to verbalize their core values and beliefs. Having this project and handbook as a guide for those who struggle with language barriers may prove to be invaluable for these clients, as well as for their therapists.

Value for the parent. Another potential benefit of this project and handbook is that it may assist NRC parents who may feel reluctant to consider counselling by enabling them to realize the benefits of counselling and to see therapy as a viable option for their child, thereby enabling the parent to give consent for their child to receive counselling. Parents may fear the therapist will not understand or respect their family's worldview. According to Vygotsky (as cited in McLeod, 2007), "Community plays a central role in the process of 'making meaning'" (para. 2). Parents may feel threatened when asked to allow their child to receive therapy from someone who does not understand the religious or cultural values the parents are providing for their child. This is not only true for parents of young children; those who care for vulnerable individuals may also be concerned, and care providers for the elderly and those with mental

disabilities may share the concern about potential ethical violations due to uninformed therapists.

Value for the research community. The research community can use this resource as a means to explore how specific interventions and counselling theories may clash with the core values and worldview held by a specific community living within society. Other religious or cultural groups may consider creating a handbook similar to this one, outlining differences of their cultural worldview from the mainstream contemporary worldview. Through a deeper understanding of the unique differences found among culture and religious groups, counselling interventions can be tailored by the therapist to suit the individual client.

Strengths of Literature Review

A number of sources were used to gather information for the literature review of this project. In search for information, I used five reputable databases: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, ATLA Religion Database, and Google Scholar. This search did not provide any English documentation or literature linking the reformed religious culture to theories and interventions commonly used in counselling. In addition to Chapter 4 in this project, Appendix B provides a more in-depth exploration of the NRC church and doctrine. The research on the NRC beliefs and cultural values is based solely from knowledgeable sources within this community, since they are experts in their own right. I have utilized writings from theologians who are knowledgeable in the NRC religious worldview. I have also incorporated the original documents or creeds outlining the foundational beliefs of this religious group. In addition to researching written material, I have obtained valuable information through email contacts and verbal

communications with individuals who belong to the Southern Alberta NRC community. A former pastor of this congregation assisted in this project; he proofread some of the chapters, provided extensive feedback for Appendix B, and offered clarification on topics as needed.

Limitations of Literature Review and Handbook

While I am a member of the NRC community and have been raised within this cultural enclave, I understand that all members may not uniformly adhere to all of the values or beliefs outlined in this project. Personal deviations do exist, and these may not be aligned to the cultural values and beliefs as expressed in this project. In writing this project I brought forward my own biases and was cognizant of divergence of opinions and practices within the community. However, considering the worldview shared by the majority of my community, I believe this work to be an accurate documentation representing the commonly held worldview.

Another limitation in this project is the attribution to counselling theories or interventions, as they are based solely on my own knowledge of counselling theories and interventions. Since this account is based on my interpretations of theoretical approaches and interventions, this needs to be considered as a limitation. Additionally, there may be other adverse interventions or theoretical perspectives not included in this project, perhaps becoming an area of interest for future research.

Not all points discussed in this document may be considered of equal value, which may be another limitation of this project. For example, what is considered highly offensive to one NRC member may not be as offensive to another individual. One needs to be cognizant of personal biases and differences within the community, as a one-size-

fits-all approach is not the correct way to proceed. The therapist should also be aware that a singular incident can affect people very differently. People's life experiences formulate their schemas and influence their worldviews. All clients are to be considered unique, regardless of their affiliation to a specific religious or cultural group.

Areas of Future Research

This project is an introductory exploration of a specific religious worldview within secular, contemporary counselling approaches. Many other areas may be of interest for further research. This project and handbook are not based on evidence from empirically validated studies; however, others may wish to research specific ideas derived from this project and handbook.

One specific research idea is to formulate a focus group of NRC members and counsellors to review this project and handbook. By offering feedback regarding its usefulness or limitations, this project can be improved using direct feedback from the intended users. Another specific research idea is to ask NRC clients what specific fears they experience in regards to accessing counselling. The researcher can use the data to determine if their fears have been addressed and answered in this project and handbook.

In addition, future research can explore what counselling theories best fit clients adhering to the NRC worldview. Using the theoretical underpinnings of counselling approaches, one may compare counselling approaches and interventions for suitability within this religious and cultural setting. Research formulated towards specific counselling methods could indicate which approaches would complement the NRC worldview and may provide rationale for avoiding specific interventions or approaches. An in-depth exploration of the different theoretical foundations to determine what

theories are most closely aligned with the NRC worldview would be beneficial. One may wish to conduct research focusing on specific interventions, explore the religious implications of using the intervention, and outline the strengths and weaknesses from an NRC worldview.

Closing Remarks

This project has had a great impact on me. The research and writing process has helped uncover and solidify my personal connection with the NRC religion and it has also helped me understand to what extent a member of any religious or cultural community feels threatened, unsafe, or uncertain about seeking counselling from a secular therapist. This newfound appreciation for the importance of providing cultural sensitive counselling will guide me when I encounter culturally diverse clients.

Through creating this project, I have faced a number of challenges. First, I found it challenging to find the right words used by the lay-person to convey the often-complex religious or dogmatic matters. My Academic Supervisor constantly reminded me to change my writing style in Chapter 4 to incorporate phrases such as “NRC members believe . . . ,” as I was raised that the NRC worldview is not just a belief, but that these religious facts are founded on Truth itself, and as such are applicable to the entire human race. Self-doubt often crept in, and I frequently struggled with feelings of inadequacy in tackling matters that are spiritual in nature.

I was under constant pressure to accurately convey religious matters pertaining to God and His honour. The fear of misrepresenting matters so delicate and invaluable was at times overwhelming, especially considering the existential nature of the NRC doctrine.

Reaching out to others in the religious community was an immense support to me, as I prayerfully tried to convey these matters with the correct words and expressions.

Another challenge I faced was to incorporate the counselling theories and interventions I have learned about and to consider how these fit into the NRC worldview. There are many interventions or theories that I am not well versed in; however, I hope that the exploration of the NRC values and beliefs will encourage therapists to consider the interventions they are inclined to use as to the appropriateness of the intervention when considering the client's worldview.

Creating this project has heightened my awareness and appreciation for therapists who provide culture-infused counselling (Arthur & Collins, 2010). These counselling techniques require the therapist possess a high level of self-awareness as well as an awareness and appreciation of clients' cultural identities. Arthur and Collins (2010) stated, "Where worldviews differ between the counsellor and the client, interactions are ripe for misunderstanding and miscommunication" (p. 72). My desire was to circumvent this so members of my community may experience the beneficial, healing aspect that counselling can provide.

The counselling knowledge and skills that I have acquired through post-secondary education have had a great healing impact on me and have raised my level of appreciation towards mental health therapy. It is my heartfelt desire to share this with members of my community. I believe that raising community support for counselling and increasing counselling awareness is necessary before my community will successfully embrace psychotherapy. As more community members access counselling and experience positive results, the community as a whole may shift into being more

open and accepting towards mental health services. This shift requires patience and persistence, as there is no quick solution; change is a complex process, requiring time to evolve. A Dutch adage that states, “Komt tijd, komt raad”—as time moves on, solutions will surface and problems will be solved.

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Appendix A:

COUNSELLING MEMBERS OF THE NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATIONS: A Handbook for NRC Members and their Counsellors



Figure 1: An understanding of our history is necessary to truly appreciate where we are today.
Photo Credit: Treena Van Hierden.

Note: All photos in this original manual are printed in colour; however, if reprints of this handbook are made, the individual may want to adjust the image to black and white to allow the photo to appear on the page in a clearer manner. The intent of including these figures was not to enhance the script but rather to offer some time for reflection and to make this handbook a more engaging read. I have received permission from all photographers and subjects (i.e., those being photographed) to use the images within this manual.

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Preface

OUTLINE: This handbook consists of three parts. Part I is structured with a



Figure 2: A young NRC mother and son enjoying the outdoors. Photo Credit: Sarah Oudshoorn

series of questions and answers about counselling. Part II contains cultural and religious factors that could be important to consider when working with NRC members. Part III consists of a list of recommendations for therapists to consider when providing counselling services to the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC) client. This handbook is written for adult members of the NRC who have at least a Grade-8 level of education.

WHY I WROTE THIS HANDBOOK

This project is written to address potential barriers that may hinder NRC members from accessing counselling; such barriers create a gap for people who are struggling with emotional issues. Using this handbook, the therapist and client are invited to discuss the process of counselling and explore the values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours found within the client's religious community. This open discussion may assist individuals in crossing the insurmountable gap (i.e., seeking counselling) that may have been an obstacle for NRC members. This handbook is designed to be a tool

towards bridging that gap, encouraging NRC individuals to reach out and seek professional help from therapists who may be outside of the religious community.

THE INTENT OF THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is intended to be used as a guide; it is not a prescription of how to conduct therapy. It is not intended to stifle the counsellor's creativity or to restrict the therapeutic process to a limited number of interventions. This handbook is intended to provide a general description of the NRC community without claiming to have accounted for every variation within the membership. Furthermore, although this handbook contains a detailed explanation of the NRC doctrine, it is not intended to be a religious tract.

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

As the author of this project, I waive my copyright of this project and handbook. NRC community members and therapists are free to build upon my work. However, individuals who intend to utilize this material should make reference to credit me as author accordingly:

Howe, G. (2014). *Implications of counselling for members of the Netherlands Reformed Congregation*. Unpublished master's project, University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

In text: (Howe, 2014).

CAUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Counsellors are advised to consult my chapters in the project or Appendix B to further their understanding of NRC historical factors and doctrinal underpinnings. The information I selected to put in this handbook includes the factors I deemed to be useful for an NRC client and his or her counsellor. However, each client is unique, and the extent of the client's embracement of these doctrinal facets may differ. The information in this handbook does not follow a specific order or sequence due to importance placed on the values or beliefs, but rather provides a flow of the material presented. There are many other religious and cultural values not included in this manual, as this work is but an introductory to the rich religion and doctrinal beliefs.

Clients are encouraged to express their views or embracement of the information provided, and this handbook is not intended to prescribe to the NRC member how the NRC doctrine is to be applied to one's life. I believe each individual will have unique life experiences; I have shared some of my



Figure 3: A child at play. Photo Credit: Treena Van Hierden

understandings of our religious and cultural background with the hope that they may be useful to others belonging to the NRC community.

Counselling Members of the Netherlands Reformed Congregation

Part I: For NRC Members



Figure 4: Photo of sunset at Park Lake Provincial Park, Alberta. Photo Credit: Sarah Oudshoorn

PART I: FOR NRC MEMBERS



Figure 5: Being out in nature can be a relaxing experience. Photo Credit: Diane Howe

Many people question if counselling would be beneficial for them. These questions are common when people do not know what to expect. This section addresses the following questions:

- What is counselling?
- Is counselling allowed for NRC members?
- Who is a counsellor?
- Can anyone be a counsellor?
- What can counselling help me with?

This handbook provides answers to some questions commonly asked by individuals who are newcomers to the counselling experience. As a potential client, you have the right to ask counsellors any of these questions before you commit to seeking counselling from the therapist.

WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

Counselling offers you a safe, confidential place to talk about your life and anything that may be confusing, painful, or uncomfortable for you. A therapist can guide you in resolving personal, social, or psychological problems. Counselling can help you to learn new ways to deal with issues or concerns that may leave you feeling overwhelming or out of control. As you may need to share personal or painful experiences, you may be afraid to

begin this process. However, you may find relief once you work through painful memories or experiences. Working with a therapist means you do not need to resolve these challenges by yourself. A therapist can help you obtain clarity and can encourage you to bring about the changes you desire so that you can live your life without becoming debilitated by difficult experiences. The counsellor should remain neutral and respect your cultural values and religious beliefs throughout the counselling process.

IS COUNSELLING ALLOWED FOR NRC MEMBERS?

Yes! This handbook is written for NRC members so they can see the value and richness of how seeking counselling can be a valuable aid in the pursuit of living with harmony, happiness, and contentment. Although it is impossible for you to live to the honour of God by nature, you are also responsible for your actions and the daily decisions you make. By obtaining a greater personal awareness of your strengths and weaknesses, you can begin to refine your thoughts, words, and deeds so they offer a more favourable outcome. Once you understand why you think, feel, or do things the way you have always automatically done them, you can work towards bringing about positive changes within yourself, and in doing so you may be a positive influence to others around you.

Why is counselling okay? NRC members know that ministers and consistory members are exceptional in providing spiritual guidance and can assist those who struggle with difficult situations. In addition, immediate or extended family and church members who offer prayers and support founded on God's Word can be like a healing balm. The Lord instructs

members to bear one another's burdens, and it truly can be comforting for NRC members to know they do not have to bear life's burdens all alone—people may turn to one another for support and guidance.

Just as you may seek a physician for physical ailments, counsellors undergo training for 4 to 12 years to learn how to assist people with mental health concerns. Counsellors help people of all ages and backgrounds who struggle with problems that disrupt their lives; these challenges often make it difficult for people to manage emotions, stay focussed, or cope. A therapist can help you discover new ways to manage life challenges, including reducing stress and seeking release from unrelenting emotions. Much like professionals trained in dentistry, orthopedics, or neuroscience, counsellors are taught to help their clients strive towards obtaining mental wellness and to assist people based on what they feel they need in order to live to their fullest potential.

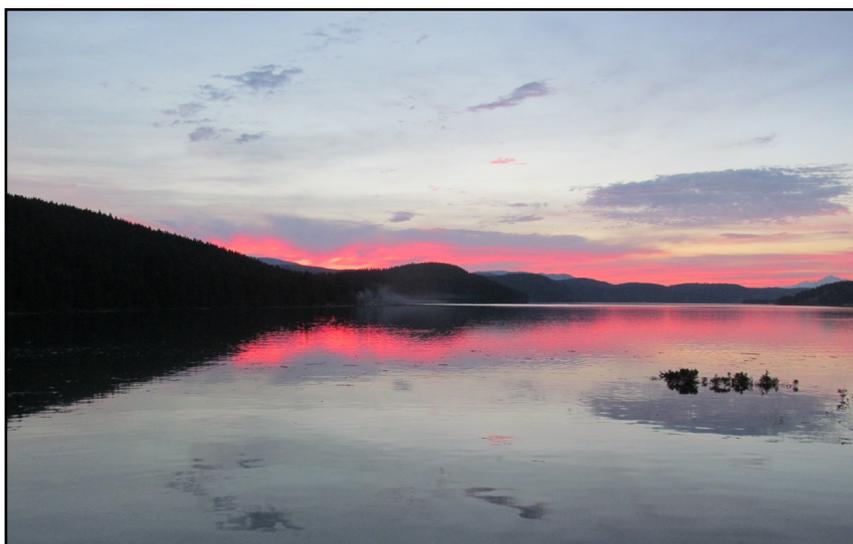


Figure 6: Finding a place of solace and beauty, such as experiencing a sunset on a lake, can help reduce the negative effects of stress. Photo Credit: Diane Howe

WHO IS A COUNSELLOR? CAN ANYONE BE A COUNSELLOR?

There are so many titles for therapists! Let me just name five off the top of my head: therapist, counsellor, psychologist, guidance counsellor, and psychiatrist. In this handbook, I use the terms counsellor and therapist interchangeably.

Training. Before you see a counsellor, it is important you verify that the counsellor has completed the proper training, because anyone can give him or herself a title without having received counselling education. Ideally, the therapist should have a completed bachelor's degree and a master's degree in social work, psychology, or counselling. Counsellors should be "registered," which means that he or she belongs to an association that monitors counsellors. For example, a counsellor might be a:

- registered social worker
- registered psychologist
- registered counsellor



Figure 7: Horticulture can be a therapeutic recreation. Photo Credit: Diane Howe

Rules counsellors must follow. A counsellor who is registered, absolutely must follow a list of rules known as a code of ethics (and sometimes also standards of practice) or he or she will lose the right to register as a therapist. You may want to ask your counsellor what code he or she adheres to. In Canada, counsellors typically adhere to one of the following ethical codes:

- Canadian Psychological Association's *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*,
- Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association's *Code of Ethics*, or
- Canadian Association of Social Workers' *Code of Ethics*.

Types of therapy. There are also differences in how a counsellor works. This refers to the types of therapy available to the public. It is important for you to ask a potential therapist if he or she has the experience and training to help you with your problem. You could also ask if his or her type of therapy is best suited for your needs.

SHOULD I SEE A COUNSELLOR WHO IS NOT PART OF THE NRC COMMUNITY?

While this may be a cause of concern, it may be comforting for you to know that the therapist is required to respect your beliefs and culture. A counsellor may not challenge your religious faith or be prejudice in any way. For counselling to work, you should feel comfortable with the therapist so you are able to express what is bothering you. A therapist from outside of the NRC doctrine may need you to explain what you believe so

that he or she can understand the issues from your perspective, but do not let that deter you from seeking help from outside of the church community. A good therapist will not intentionally disrespect your religious or cultural beliefs. Let this handbook guide you through that process!

WHAT CAN COUNSELLING HELP ME WITH?

Counsellors are trained to help you with a HUGE variety of issues. For example, the following sample of emotional issues can be a result of experiencing stress, conflict, health problems, trauma, or grief in your life. Counsellors can assist in helping you cope with these symptoms in a way that allows you to feel calm and grounded:

- feeling tired or unmotivated
- sleep difficulties including nightmares
- headaches
- feeling on guard a lot
- difficulty concentrating
- haunting memories
- fear
- guilt
- feeling helpless
- irritability
- couple conflict

Maybe you are experiencing some of these symptoms but do not know what is causing them. Talking to a therapist can help you reflect on your life experiences and understand your responses to these experiences. A counsellor can help you identify life style changes that could help you progress towards living in a more satisfactory and resourceful way. Counselling can help to alleviate physical health concerns, since physical health is closely related to mental and emotional wellness.



Figure 8: Raising young children can be very rewarding; however, a therapist can assist clients who struggle with parenting concerns.

Photo Credit: Sarah Oudshoorn

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A TYPICAL COUNSELLING APPOINTMENT?

Prior to meeting your counsellor face to face. If possible, it is a good idea to spend a few minutes talking to the counsellor over the phone before you make an appointment to see him or her. Some questions you may want to ask, but are not limited to, include:

- Are you a registered counsellor?
- What a code of ethics (or rules) do you abide by?
- What type of therapy do you offer? If you do not understand what the therapist is explaining, please know you can ask the therapist to clarify using friendlier or easier terms.
- Do you have any experience helping people with my type of problem? How do you help?

You can also ask a counsellor about other topics you are curious about. I encourage you to visit the Leanne Dorish Counselling website to review more questions to ask a counsellor (<http://ldcounselling.wordpress.com/2011/09/01/20-questions-to-ask-a-counsellor/>).



Figure 9: The counsellor's room is generally very comfortable.

Photo Credit: Diane Howe

Room. Counselling takes place in a private space. There are usually comfortable chairs to sit in, and you may be offered tea, water, or coffee. The room may be decorated in warm colors with a rug on the floor. Generally, the room looks and feels more home-like than like a clinical setting or office.

Seeking permission in first session.

Usually after you meet your counsellor, you will first get to know each other for a few minutes. Next, the counsellor should take some time to tell you about your rights as a client before asking you, "Why are you here?" You need to know your rights. Here are some examples of the many rights you have:

- The right to having your privacy protected and understanding special limitations to this right.
- The right to say, "No," "Yes," "I'm not sure," or "I would rather not answer that question (or share that information) right now."
- The right to end a session at any time.
- The right to ask for a referral to another therapist.
- The right to see the notes your counsellor writes about the sessions.



Figure 10: Support is available for parents and adolescents who may be experiencing a difficult time or conflict. Photo Credit: Sarah Oudshoorn

TIP #1: In counselling, you are the person in charge. This means that you decide what to discuss and how much you share or hold back.

TIP #2: Do not sign any paperwork the counsellor or secretary of the counsellor gives you until the counsellor has explained the risks and benefits of counselling and answered your questions about counselling.

TIP #3: Do not feel obligated to say or do anything in a counselling session that makes you feel uncomfortable. Remember, you have the right to say “No.”



Figure 11: Feeling heard and understood through the counselling process may enable clients to return to pleasurable hobbies and re-experience enjoyment in activities they used to do. Photo Credit: Emily Oudshoorn

Why are you here?

Once you know what your rights are as a client, the therapist will ask you what your main concerns are. Your counsellor should listen to you and seek to understand how your concerns are impacting your life, and those around you.

Your counsellor may ask you to provide a history of the problem and about other parts of your life to understand you. This can be a powerful part of

the session, as through explaining their history clients express feeling heard, understood, and validated, which can create hope. The process of talking to your counsellor may allow you to get a bit of distance from your problems to enable solutions to come to mind.

Goals. Usually in the first or second session, the counsellor will ask you how you want things to be different. Sometimes the counsellor will ask: “What are your goals, or what would you like to be better in your life?” The counsellor may ask, “How will you know your goals are met? What will you be doing, thinking, and feeling that you are not doing now?” The counsellor will help you with the task of setting goals, as it is sometimes very hard to decide what it is we want better.

What happens after the first session? After the goals are set, an action plan is created to help you meet your goals. Once your goals are met the therapy ends.

Depending on your goals, counselling may be a short-term process, consisting of a few sessions, or long-term process, spanning a number of months or even years. Some clients choose to come once a week, once a month, or even once every few months. You may ask the counsellor to recommend an appropriate length of therapy for you.

Change. It is important, when you feel ready and able, to integrate what you learn from your therapist into real-life situations. Changing habits may take hard work and determination. People do not change overnight, so be patient with yourself. You may have formed maladaptive thinking patterns or learned particular behaviours that are not helpful to you. Creating change is a slow process, but once the results are experienced,

you may feel a sense of freedom as you regain control over your behaviours and emotions. Once your goals are reached, the therapist may suggest ending counselling with a meaningful activity or reflection to celebrate your progress.



Figure 12: Clients can experience a sense of freedom as the therapeutic goals are reached. Photo Credit: Diane Howe

HOW CAN COUNSELLING HELP?

The aim of counselling is to help people work towards living a more meaningful, fulfilling life. While counselling approaches may vary from one therapist to another, the relationship formed between you and your therapist is the most important part towards improving mental and emotional health. This relationship should be built on trust, allowing for open and honest communication. When examining the positive outcome of counselling, several research studies have shown that the quality of the relationship between the therapist and the client is more important than the type of treatment a counsellor may use.¹

¹ Martin, D. J., Garske, J. P., & Davis, M. K. (2000). Relation of the therapeutic alliance with outcome and other variables: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, 68, 438–450.

Smith, M. L., Glass, G. V., & Miller, T. L. (1980). *The benefits of psychotherapy*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

VandenBos, G. R., & Pino, C. D. (1980). Research on the outcome of psychotherapy. In G. R. VandenBos (Ed.), *Psychotherapy: Practice, research, policy* (pp. 23–69). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

SHOW THIS HANDBOOK TO YOUR COUNSELLOR!

Part II of this handbook outlines in a clear, concise manner the worldview held by the NRC community. You can provide a copy of this handbook to the counsellor so he or she can understand you and your religion better. It can also be useful in guiding discussion to help your counsellor gain a better understanding of your values and beliefs.



**Figure 13: Rocky terrain may be difficult to navigate without a map. This handbook can be used like a map to navigate through the counselling process. This photo was taken along the Old Man River, Alberta.
Photo Credit: Diane Howe**

WHAT IF MY COUNSELLOR DOES NOT UNDERSTAND MY RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OR CULTURAL VALUES?

Don't give up! First, give your counsellor this handbook if you haven't already done so. Next, although this will likely be hard for you, mention to your therapist that you are concerned he or she is not understanding or respecting your culture and religion.

If, after discussing your concerns honestly, you still feel that the therapist is unable to understand your needs or concerns, find another

therapist. You could ask your therapist to refer you to another competent counsellor who may be a better fit for you.

Please...

- Do not become discouraged if it takes several attempts before finding the right therapist for you!
- Remember that the therapy process is about you getting your needs met. Do not feel like you have failed if it takes you a number of tries before you feel like you can trust and openly discuss your concerns with your counsellor.

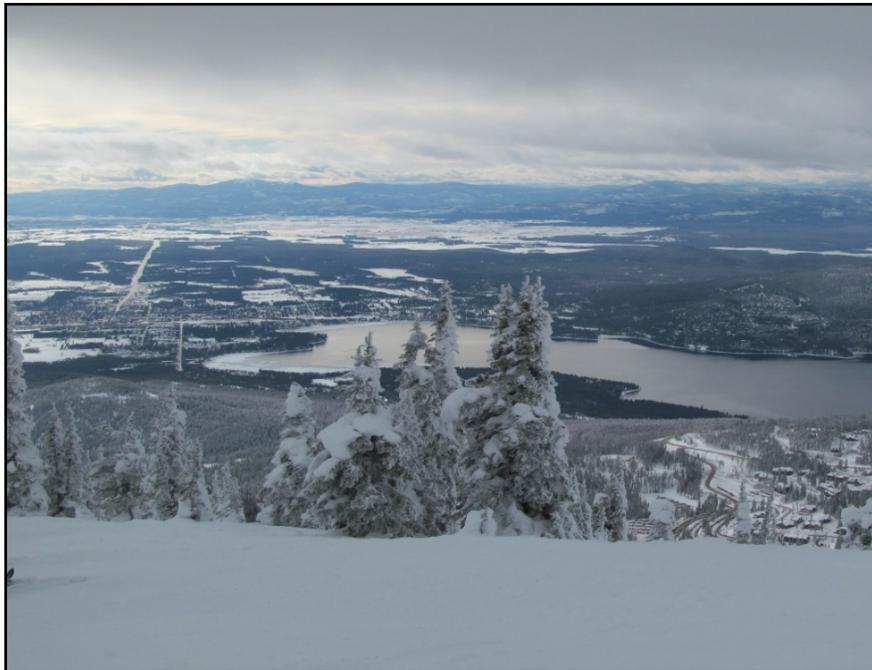


Figure 14: Similar to this wide and scenic perspective, a therapist will also need to be provided with an advantageous position to understand and appreciate the NRC beliefs and values. This photo portrays the panoramic winter view overlooking the vast valley below from an advantageous location at Whitefish Ski Resort in Montana. Photo Credit: Diane Howe

CLOSING REMARKS

There are some important things you may want your therapist to understand. The factors presented in Part II may play a significant role in how you formulate your daily decisions. While your beliefs may be a sense of strength and support, you may experience them as barriers when you are considering counselling. You may find the idea of having to explain what you value and believe daunting or unimportant. However, it is important to discuss these factors with your counsellor so that these aspects do not become barriers to the therapy process or relationship and to ensure your therapist understands your experiences in the context of your customs and beliefs.



Figure 15: Strong pillars of the reformed doctrine are the foundation of the NRC community in southern Alberta. This photo is of the High Level Bridge in Indian Battle Park, Lethbridge. Photo Credit: Sarah Oudshoorn

Counselling Members of the Netherlands Reformed Congregation

Part II: NRC Cultural and Religious Factors



Figure 16: Religious institutions can be compared to a strong fortress, set upon a rocky foundation.
Photo Credit: Diane Howe

PART II: NRC CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS FACTORS

The second part of this handbook is intended to help counsellors understand some of the NRC beliefs and practices. It may also be a helpful tool for the NRC member to use when explaining the NRC doctrine and beliefs to a therapist. The reader is advised to turn to the chapters in my project, as well as Appendix B, for a more in-depth explanation of the topics outlined in this section of the handbook if this is warranted.

Before the presentation of the culture values and religious beliefs of the NRC community, it is important to remind the reader of the information under the heading, “The Intent of this Handbook.” This information is only to help introduce someone to the NRC doctrine.



Figure 17: Artistic creation using the talents God has provided can be healing for the artist and the beholder. Photo Credit: Diane

The topics presented within this part of the handbook are not placed in a particular order nor are they based on value of importance. Topics were selected to present a list of values, facts, and practices found within the NRC community.

The intent of this handbook is not to provide a detailed guide, as this can be daunting and overwhelming for a non-NRC individual.

Referencing of the listed information is not

included because these are well-known cultural beliefs and practices within the NRC community, of which the author is a member.

NRC: BELIEF IN ONE, TRIUNE GOD

- God is all-knowing, everywhere at all times, and almighty
- God the Father is the Creator and Sustainer of all creation
- God the Son is the Lord Jesus, Saviour for the elect
- God the Holy Spirit applies the saving work of Jesus to the heart of a sinner
- God is holy and should be addressed with utmost respect



Figure 18: God's creation in nature can lead to pleasurable hobbies such as horticulture
Photo Credit: Diane Howe

NRC: CREATIONISM

- All things were created perfectly by God in a six-day creation period.
- Man was created perfect, without sin and able to serve God.

NRC: THE FALL OF HUMANITY

- Adam, as the head of humanity, disobeyed God.
- Humanity became totally depraved and worthy of Hell.
- Humanity became subject to pain, sorrow, disease, and death.

NRC: PREDESTINATION AND ETERNAL DESTINATIONS

- God has chosen His elect from eternity.
- Only the elect will be spiritually saved and will enter Heaven.
- Heaven is only for believers, saved through Jesus Christ.
- Hell is the destination of all those who are not believers.

NRC: TWO GROUPS OF PEOPLE, FOUR KINDS OF FAITH

- There are two kinds of people: believers and unbelievers.
- Unbelievers may have historical, temporary, or miraculous faith.
- Only believers have true, saving faith.

NRC: ONE WAY OF SALVATION

The saving work of the sinner requires the work of all three Divine Persons. People are incapable of saving themselves, no matter how well they live their lives, or how hard they try to believe in themselves. Humankind lost that ability with the fall of humanity through Adam, who was head of the human race.

From the NRC perspective, there are three steps to obtain salvation, all of these steps are a work of God, because people are incapable and spiritually dead since the fall in Paradise.

1. **Misery:** This is the first step of grace wherein an individual becomes aware of his or her sin and guilt and feels deep misery because of sins committed against God.
2. **Deliverance:** After one has experienced a state of misery, the Lord Jesus alone can provide deliverance, through His saving work of on the cross.



Figure 19: Student playing musical arrangements on the piano in the Christian school.
Photo Credit: Diane Howe

3. **Gratitude:** The saved person will seek to live the rest of his or her life in gratitude, striving to live in accordance to God's commandments.

NRC: THREEFOLD ENEMY

- Satan goes about as an angel of light, seeking to deceive the Christian.
- The world is full of temptations, trying to lure the Christian into sin.
- People's sensual desires for pleasure constantly entice them to stray from the commandments of God.

NRC: TRADITIONAL FAMILY UNIT

- Marriage is a union between man and woman.
- Divorce is not condoned.
- The father is the head of the household.
- The mother is the primary caregiver for the children.
- Children are raised to respect and obey their parents.



Figure 20: Traditional family unit.
Photo Credit: Sarah Oudshoorn

NRC: HARD WORK ETHIC

- Thoughtful consideration is to be made regarding occupational choice.
- NRC members are to make productive use of their time; living in idleness is viewed as a sin.
- NRC members are to work with an attitude of service to God.

NRC: SUNDAY – A DAY OF WORSHIP AND REST

- NRC members are to be in church to hear the preached message.
- No unnecessary work to be completed on this day.
- Sunday is not used for personal pleasure or recreation.

NRC: PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

NRC members are to...

- seek a personal, intimate relationship with God;
- ensure words, thoughts and deeds bring God honour;
- be submissive to the Fatherly hand of God;
- refrain from practices of self-harm;
- be responsible and give to the poor; and
- respect others in thoughts, words, and deeds.

NRC: VIEW OF MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELLING

- The cause or origin of mental health issues lies in the fall of humanity.
- NRC members may not rebel or become angry towards God.

- NRC members are responsible to live to their fullest potential to God's honour.
- There appears to be a stigma related to one requiring counselling.

NRC: OUTWARD PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

NRC members are to . . .

- present our body to God's honour;
- dress neatly, usually in professional attire;
- wear appropriate clothing (i.e., girls generally wear skirts or dresses);
and
- avoid tattoos, piercings, make-up, nail art, coloured or short hairstyles, as these changes to outward physical appearance implicitly declares one is dissatisfied with God regarding one's creation and natural appearance.

NRC: LIMITED EXPOSURE TO MEDIA

NRC members . . .

- limit knowledge of movies, television, contemporary music, or popular entertainment,
- ensure internet service in their homes is filtered to block out all offensive or harmful content, and
- only listen to or perform music for the purpose of praising God (i.e., refrain from listening to all contemporary music).

NRC: RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS WITH SPECIAL CHURCH SERVICES

- Christmas
 - There is little or no focus on gift-giving or decorations.
 - NRC members typically do not wish others a “merry Christmas,” but rather a blessed Christmas.
 - NRC members do not display nativity scenes or pictures pertaining to God, Jesus, Mary, or angels.
- New Year’s Eve
 - A special message is offered in a church service is devoted to the occasion.
 - NRC members express thankfulness for being spared in the past year; this is also a time for solemn reflection of God’s goodness.
 - There is a public announcement to remember NRC members who died in the past year.
- New Year’s Day provides an opportunity for seeking God’s blessing and favour in the year ahead.
- Prayer Day is a day set aside to ask God for a blessing upon our work.
- Good Friday includes an evening service to remember Christ’s crucifixion.
- Easter Sunday includes church services devoted to commemorating the resurrection of Jesus.
- Ascension Day includes an evening service held to commemorate Christ ascending into Heaven.

- Pentecost offers an evening service held to commemorate the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Thanksgiving is a day set aside with special services to thank God for His blessings, rather than placing emphasis on preparing a special meal for family gatherings.
- Reformation Day is when NRC members commemorate God's faithfulness in preserving the truth.

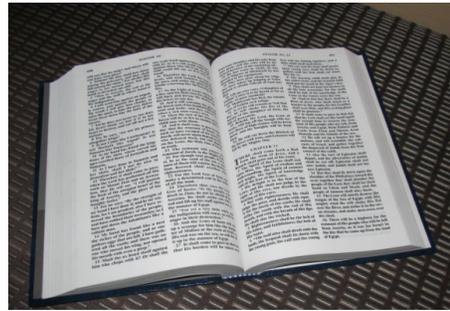


Figure 21: The NRC use the King James Authorized Version of the Bible.
Photo Credit: Diane Howe

OTHER NRC RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS

- The NRC endorse the Authorized King James Version of the Bible.
- Church attendance and adherence to doctrine does not imply the NRC member believes he or she will be saved and is going to Heaven.
- NRC members do not restrict or limit God's saving work to only NRC members and believe salvation extends to individuals in other churches, cultures, and races.
- The sacraments are not saving in value, but point to the need for salvation through the one-sided work of God.

NRC CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

- Membership provides a right to partake of sacraments.
- Membership places one under authority of church rules and discipline.
- Membership includes provision of pastoral care when necessary.

GOVERNANCE OF THE NRC CHURCH

- The local church council is called the consistory and is comprised of male NRC members.
- The synod and classis deal with issues beyond the scope of what the consistory is able to decide. The synod and classis are also comprised of male NRC members.
- Women's role is to pray for God's presence and blessing upon the men's meetings for favourable voting outcomes and congregational decisions.

CHALLENGES FACED BY MANY NRC YOUTH

- Young people may struggle with personal identity and low self-esteem as they may find it challenging to hold on to a worldview differing from other religious worldviews.
- Youth may struggle with setting healthy boundaries in forming intimate relationships, as sexuality is not openly discussed within the NRC community.

Counselling Members of the Netherlands Reformed Congregation

Part III: For Therapists



Figure 22: Hiking to Gargantia Caves, Crowsnest Pass, Alberta. Photo Credit: Ken Howe

PART III: FOR THERAPISTS

This final part of the handbook is designed to assist counsellors who may be approached by an NRC member who is seeking therapy. For a therapist to provide an ethical, culturally sensitive practice, it is pertinent for the counsellor to understand the NRC worldview. The project chapters focus on the core values and beliefs held by most members of the NRC community in Southern Alberta. The project information, and the content provided in Part 2 of this handbook, invites counsellors to become more aware how they may hold a different worldview than their clients.

PREFACE

The purpose of this final part of the handbook is to provide recommendations for therapists who intend to work with the NRC client. After exploring Part II with the NRC member, this final part of the handbook assists the counsellor in applying the understanding of the cultural and religious factors to the therapeutic process. Counsellors may benefit from an exploration of how these factors will affect therapy. Given that they are based upon various worldviews, some counselling theoretical foundations or interventions may not be congruent to the beliefs held by the NRC client.

TOP 10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNSELLORS

The following 10 recommendations may assist the counsellor in respecting the worldview of an NRC client. These recommendations are written to enhance the working alliance (e.g., allowing the client to set the agenda, providing unconditional positive regard, offering validation and normalization of struggles and feelings, etc.). It is assumed the counselling bond will flourish as the client feels understood and respected. It is also hoped that by implementing these 10 recommendations, the counsellor may circumvent the premature termination of counselling services that may result from misunderstandings in the therapy process.

1. The counsellor may want to reassure the client of the counsellor's commitment toward providing respect and understanding for the NRC beliefs and values.

a) Explanation

It is very difficult for the NRC client to turn to a secular counsellor for support. The NRC community has not yet fully embraced counselling, and, as such, a member may fear the social stigma that may still be present. The NRC client may also feel apprehension or fear that the therapist may not understand or appreciate his or her religious beliefs and may try to change or draw the NRC member away

from the acceptable and norm-based Biblical beliefs and community standards.

b) The reason why

The NRC client will most likely have been raised to embrace the belief that Christians must always be on guard against suggestions or ideas that may entice them to leave the religion. It may be very difficult for the NRC client to form a therapeutic bond based on trust. I recommend the counsellor provide a safe and trusting environment, and acknowledge the courage it must have taken for the client to seek counselling from someone outside of the religious community. (For more information please refer to Chapter 3, “Ethical Rationale” and “Counselling Rationale” sections, and Chapter 4, “The NRC Doctrine” section.)

- | |
|--|
| <p>2. The counsellor may want to show respect towards God by refraining from the misuse of His name.</p> |
|--|

a) Explanation

Adhering to this recommendation demonstrates an outward respect to God and for the NRC client. In accordance with the religion that NRC members believe is based on God’s Word, there is no sin greater, no act more provoking to God, than the profane use of His name.

b) The reason why

According to the NRC doctrine, when referring to the Triune God, it is only proper to address Him according to His instruction. God tells us in the Bible to use His name reverently. To gain more understanding, please refer to the following sections in Chapter 4: “Commandment 3” subsection under “The Ten Commandments” section and the “Language” subsection under the “Considerations for Counselling Interventions” section.

c) Other considerations

When addressing God in prayer, NRC members use the pronouns “Thee” and “Thou” to elevate Him and to humble ourselves. NRC members believe the Lord must be addressed and spoken of with utmost respect and reverence. In society today, people often hear phrases like, “Oh my God, or “Jeez”; the NRC believe this is misusing the names of God.

- | |
|---|
| <p>3. The therapist may find it detrimental to use secular music by popular artists as an intervention for topic exploration.</p> |
|---|

a) Explanation

Some therapists use music and lyrics to explore a topic of interest to the client or to help a client identify with a shared experience or emotion. While there may be an advantage in using music for this purpose, there also lies the danger of exposing the NRC

client to a worldview that clashes with his or her cultural and religious values, causing the client to feel very uncomfortable.

b) The reason why

The concern of playing secular music is that the lyrics contain overt or covert messages enticing one to support a contemporary lifestyle or worldliness. In the NRC church, members are encouraged to listen to music based solely on God's own words, rather than the musician's interpretation of experiences or emotions. For example, Christian rock is believed to instil a feel-good experience, using a catchy beat and rhythm; however, NRC members believe the intent of the music is not necessarily to glorify God, but to make people feel good and to produce sales for the artist. With secular music, messages often promote rebellion against God and His Word by directly going against the moral standards He has provided for His Word, which we strive to live by in the NRC community. To read more about this topic, please see the "Music" subsection under the "NRC Lifestyle" section found in Chapter 4.

c) Other considerations

A Christian adhering to the NRC doctrine desires to live his or her life to God's honour, and members believe that anything that draws their thoughts



Figure 23: Trees along the rocky shore of Lake Koochanusa, British Columbia.
Photo Credit: Diane Howe

or emotions away from what would be to His honour is sin. While not all contemporary music is considered to be “wrong” (e.g., singing the national anthem, Silent Night, etc.), the songs NRC members are taught to sing in the home, school, and church, contain lyrics created directly from the poetical Book of Psalms, with the intent to sing praises and worship to the Lord.

4. The counsellor may want to provide a creationist explanation of biological or physiological responses of the body.

a) Explanation

The NRC doctrine adheres to a Creationist perspective. If possible, the therapist may want to consider providing psychoeducational components using a creationist lens. For example, NRC members believe God must receive credit for the



Figure 24: An ultrasound image depicting the wonder of God's wonderful design of a child.
Photo Credit: Jessica VandeBruinhorst

sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous response in the body, when people encounter a stressor such as a confrontation with an unexpected perceived danger. We believe it is dishonouring not to acknowledge God and give credit to Him for His intricate design of the

human body. Essentially, a counsellor may want to refrain from providing the cave-man analogy based on the evolutionary belief of the survival of the fittest. From the NRC perspective, members believe nothing happens by chance; nothing can be created without God's divine work bringing forth its existence. For more information about Creationism, please turn to the "Creationism" subsection under "The NRC Doctrine" section found in Chapter 4. |

5. The counsellor may want to avoid making reference to any television, movie, or modern media artists.

a) Explanation

A therapist may be accustomed making connections or reference to the lives of models, actors and actresses, or music artists. Since the NRC client has limited exposure to the modern media, such references can be counterproductive and may cause self-doubt and instil negative emotions in the client, as he or she cannot make the requested connections.

b) The reason why

Typically, NRC members have not been raised with a television to provide access to modern media. As such, even cartoon figures or



Figure 25: A narrow view seen from an opening at the end of Cliff Cave, Alberta.
Photo Credit: Ken Howe

Disney characters are not part of the NRC experience. Although Internet service is provided in the home and school, the Internet is only to be accessed for educational or business purposes. NRC members are encouraged to use an Internet safety filter to block out all offensive or immoral content. For more information regarding modern media, please refer to Chapter 4, “Lack of Media Connection” subsection found under the “NRC Lifestyle” section.

6. The therapist may want to explore the client’s view on role play before asking him or her to assume the character of another.

a) Explanation

Role playing is commonly used as a therapeutic intervention to help a client gain insight into the self and others. For example, gestalt therapists use the “empty chair technique” for a client to address an individual who is not present or to assume the perspective of another person.



Figure 26: A backyard fishpond or water feature can provide one with a calm, safe, and relaxing place at home.
Photo Credit: Diane Howe

b) The reason why

Role playing may be viewed as offensive to the NRC client, since members are not encouraged to participate in drama or any activities that include acting or assuming the character of another. According to the NRC beliefs, the Bible contains examples of individuals who

deceived others through role playing (e.g., the history of Jacob and Esau in which one twin brother deceived his father to acquire his brother's birthright and the historical account of King David who pretended to be mentally disabled to evade danger). The NRC member may believe role playing to be a form of pretence, which is dishonest. Using the "empty chair" intervention for someone who has passed away may also invoke feelings of consternation, as the NRC believe there is no communication possible with individuals who have died. Perhaps writing to express one's feelings may be less daunting. For more information, please turn to Chapter 4, "Considerations for Counselling Interventions" section, "Role Play" subsection.

7. The counsellor may want to avoid the exploration, interpretation, or analysis of dreams.

a) Explanation

The NRC client may want to avoid the analysis of the contents and meaning of dreams. While the therapist may believe there is a connection between the client's dreams and reality, providing an interpretation for the meaning and purpose of the dream may offend the NRC client.

b) The reason why

Before the Word of God was given to man in print, the Lord often communicated with people through dreams. When there were

special meanings in these dreams, the Lord would give insight into the meaning. However, there were false soothsayers and oracles who claimed to have a gift of assigning meaning to dreams, such as during the time of King



Figure 27: A houseboat docked on the shore of Lake Koochanusa, British Columbia. Photo Credit: Diane Howe

Nebuchadnezzar. The

therapist may want to consider that the NRC client is expected to acknowledge God in everything—not in a light or casual manner, but sincerely—and to humbly ask Him for guidance and thank Him for any insight gained through the therapeutic process. For more information please see Chapter 4, “Considerations for Counselling Interventions” section, “Altered State” subsection.

8. The counsellor is advised to refrain from using guided meditations that connect one with an “inner spirit” or any form of hypnotism, astrology, or fortune telling.

a) Explanation

Some counsellors guide clients through spiritual meditations. These meditations guide the client with the intent to access an inner light, sound, or wisdom to promote self-healing. Others use hypnosis

to help clients make positive health changes, such as to stop smoking, facilitate weight loss, lessen anxiety, or manage depression. These types of treatment seek to tap into unconscious resources of the client to work towards positive change.

b) The reason why

These interventions are in direct contrast with the NRC beliefs regarding the total depravity of man. Based on this belief, there is no goodness to be accessed within man, unless God's goodness is applied by free and sovereign grace to the heart of man. The therapist should avoid anything that contradicts this fundamental belief; it may cause the client to feel extremely uncomfortable and guilty for participating in these types of guided spiritual meditations.

c) Other considerations

The therapist may want to consider interventions that acknowledge the client's need for dependence on God's providence and grace. It would be difficult for an NRC client who goes into counselling with prayer and dependence on God, only to have this challenged by using an intervention that contradicts this fundamental NRC worldview. For more information, please turn to Chapter 4, "Considerations for Counselling Interventions" section, "Altered State" subsection.

9. The therapist should assist the NRC client to manage conflict resolution through the approved process found in the community institutions: church, family, and school

a) Explanation

The NRC community consists of three main institutions: the church, family, and school. NRC members believe these three institutions to be a threefold cord that work together to create the strength and unity found in the community.

b) The reason why

According to the NRC perspective, God's Word offers a systematic way of dealing with conflicting issues. For example, elected male members of the church form the church council, called the consistory. These men hold specific offices to provide and be of service to the members. In the family unit, the father is the head of the household and has the final word in all family decisions. The Christian school has a school board consisting of men from the local churches who make decisions that impact the daily operations of the school. A therapist may want to consider reminding the NRC client of the proper channels available within this community to resolve conflicts, answer questions, or hear concerns. The client may benefit from practising assertiveness and using respect in preparing to discuss matters of concern to them. For a more in-depth explanation of the community

institutions, please refer to the “Foundational Institutions in the NRC Community” section found in Chapter 4.

10. The counsellor may need to be aware of the NRC community’s adherence to reserving the Sunday as a day of worship and rest.

a) Explanation

The NRC community is devout with the observance of the Sunday. NRC members believe God’s Word tells them to use this day solely for His purpose; as such, members are expected to attend the Sunday worship services and to refrain from conducting any work for personal financial gain or seeking recreational pleasure.

b) The reason why?

A therapist may want to consider this in regards to booking appointments, making phone calls, or creating treatment plans with the client. The therapist will need to schedule appointments on a weekday. When developing treatment plans, such as an exercise regimen, the counsellor could offer the NRC client an alternative to a 7-day exercise routine. From the NRC perspective, members are required to use this day to God’s honour by refraining from reading fiction, completing assignments, shopping or eating out, purchasing fuel, going for picnics, organizing family functions, or travelling on the Sunday.

c) Other considerations

The therapist may consider encouraging the NRC client to discuss the message provided in the worship services and to engage in prayer to ask God's blessing on the therapy provided. If the client provides a negative response to the question of attending church or the ability to be mindfully present, this could be indicative of depression or anxiety. Knowing what is the expected observance of the Sunday as a day of worship and rest can be useful for the therapist in understanding the NRC client. For more information, please turn to the "Commandment 4" subsection under the "Ten Commandments" section found in Chapter 4.

Appendix B: A Brief Exploration of the Netherlands Reformed Doctrine

Preface

This appendix provides a more in-depth explanation of historical and Biblical underpinnings of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (NRC) doctrine. While the information presented within this appendix presents more detail than the exploration of the NRC doctrine provided within the project chapters, this appendix only touches on a small selection of topics found within the NRC's religion. The information included in this appendix was compiled with the input and validation from a number of Netherlands Reformed church members, a former minister from the local congregation, and several of my colleagues from the Calvin Christian school; these NRC members freely gave their advice and feedback on this project. This appendix may be useful to the NRC audience to help them explain their position within this doctrinal framework. It may also be beneficial for Christian counsellors who practice and hold beliefs that differ from the NRC doctrine. It may also be of assistance to secular counsellors who may want to delve deeper into understanding the origin or foundation of the NRC worldview.

Caveat

The information in this appendix has been written from the NRC perspective and is held to be true for those adhering to the NRC doctrine. Rather than writing "the NRC believe God's Word states . . ." repeatedly throughout this appendix, the information will be written as factual; for example, "God states. . ." This may conflict with the beliefs found in other Christian churches, as there are different opinions or meanings prescribed to what is written in God's Word based on varying interpretations of the Bible.

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Netherlands Reformed Congregations

The NRC is one of many churches based on the Reformed doctrine defined by reformers such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli during the Reformation. The word *Reformed* is of great significance to members of the NRC, as it bears witness of “God’s preservation of His church when it was in danger of perishing due to errors and superstitions that abounded in the church during the middle ages” (Vogelaar, n.d., p. 1). The word *Netherlands* merely points to the country in which this denomination was founded. One does not need to be from the Netherlands to belong to the NRC. Focussing more in depth on the NRC doctrine, this appendix explores the NRC worldview as a Biblical worldview, explaining the NRC’s beliefs in a Triune God, creeds, sacraments, different kinds of faith, and the order of salvation. The appendix closes with a summary section.

Foundation of the NRC Doctrine

The doctrine proclaimed by the NRC is based on the Authorized King James Version of the Holy Bible (originally published in 1611), containing the Old and New Testaments. This version of the Holy Scriptures is considered the most “accurate and trustworthy, conforming to the Hebrew Masoretic Text of the Old Testament, and the Greek Textus Receptus of the New Testament” (Trinitarian Bible Society, 2013, p. 46). While there are many contemporary versions of the Bible, the NRC does not accept these versions as portraying an accurate translation of the original manuscripts of the written Word of God. Nearly all other English versions of the Bible omit phrases or verses that pertain to the following: the divinity of Christ, work of the Spirit, total depravity of man, and the necessity of regeneration.

Calvinistic Roots

Just as there are different versions of the Holy Bible, Christians around the world also profess to hold differing beliefs in theology. With regard to the issue of salvation and the free will of man, there are two main groups of theology within Christianity:

Arminianism and Calvinism. The NRC adheres to the system of Calvinism. Calvin lived in France during the 1500s during the time Martin Luther spoke out openly against the false doctrines prevalent at the time, sparking the Reformation (Slick, 2012). Calvin has developed a coherent worldview that centres upon and gravitates towards the glory of God. Everything should be subordinate to God's honour and glory. Calvin gave a place to the Christian's calling in this world, a life of holiness and service, the God-given task of the government, the importance of education, and so forth.

During the time of the Reformation during the 16th century in Western Europe, Martin Luther and John Calvin were two leaders that led the way to the Protestant Ethic.

The norms regarding work which developed out of the Protestant Reformation, based on the combined theological teachings of Luther and Calvin, encouraged work in a chosen occupation with an attitude of service to God, and viewed work as a calling. (Hill, 1996, para. 7)

In the NRC community, one may strive to demonstrate that one has a hard work ethic.

The NRC cannot be properly understood without understanding this worldview

(C. Sonneveld, personal communication, August 26, 2013).

The NRC doctrine is based directly on truths found in the Holy Bible, as Calvin also taught. Calvinism holds a "very high view of scripture and seeks to derive its

theological formulations based solely on God's word" (Slick, 2012, para. 2). The five points of Calvinism (a term not coined by Calvin himself but by his followers) represent these Biblical foundations and are considered to be the pillars of the NRC doctrine. These five points are the total depravity of man, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.

Total Depravity

The belief in the total depravity of man is derived from God's Word through various scriptures that reveal the human nature. Sin has affected every part of man: the heart, emotions, will, mind, and body. In the King James Version of the Bible, Romans 3:10 stated, "There is none righteous, no, not one." Mark 7:21–23 pointed out that the heart of man is evil. Romans 6:20 stated that man is a slave of sin. The apostle Paul pointed out that man is at enmity with God (Ephesians 2:15, King James Version), and we are all children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3, King James Version). Man is incapable of understanding spiritual things in his natural state (1 Cor. 2:14, King James Version).

Scriptures further support the belief in the total depravity of man. In the Garden of Eden, man was adorned with the image of God, consisting of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (the image of God in a stricter sense). Owing to the disobedience of Adam, who was head of all humanity, man lost this image. However, man still retains elements of God's image in a wider sense: the awareness that there is a God, a sense of good and evil (conscience), the possession of a soul, the capability to civil virtues, and so forth. These are remnants of God's image and reflect the truth of God's common grace. However, in the issue of saving grace, man is totally dependent on God. In the King James Version of the Bible, John 1:12–13 stated that those who are saved are saved

because it was God's will. Philippians 1:29 points out that those who believe in God are given that believing by God. John 6:28–29 says faith is a work of God. Calvin's point summarized as the "total depravity of man" holds that man is not capable or willing to obtain salvation. Salvation can only be acquired as a gift from God and is ordained for those set apart in predestination (Ephesians 1:1–11, King James Version).

Unconditional Election

The belief in the unconditional election of man means that God chooses His people "without any consideration of merit within the individual" (Slick, 2012, para. 7). The Lord has chosen His elect according to His own will. He does not look into the future to see who would be willing to serve Him, because God's Word explains humankind is totally depraved. Since the fall of the human race, people will never love Him unless God applies salvation to the heart of a person. Paul reminded that God told Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Romans 9:15, 21, King James Version). From this people can see that from eternity, the Lord has chosen some for election, and others not (Jeremiah 31:3, King James Version). However, this does not take away the responsibility of man as a rational and moral creature. Man is bound to the Word of God, the sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper), and prayer as means of grace. The elect are the only ones who receive atonement for their sins.

Limited Atonement

Limited atonement indicates that Jesus died only for the elect. His saving power is only extended or imparted to those who were given to Him by the Father from eternity. Although His death is sufficient to save all, Jesus's death is only effectual for the sins of

the elect. Jesus did not die for all mankind, but for “many” (Matt 26:28, King James Version). The Lord Jesus pointed this out in His parable of the good shepherd: He died for the sheep and not for the goats (John 10:11, 15, King James Version). Likewise, Jesus said that He prayed “not for the world, but for them which thou [God, the Father] hast given Me; for they are Thine” (John 17:9, King James Version). The Old Testament proclaimed that Jesus would be crucified to bear the sins of many, not all, of humanity (Isaiah 53:12, King James Version).

Irresistible Grace

It is not up to man to influence or determine whether he is saved, as this is determined by God from eternity through election. Man also is not capable of refusing the offer of grace if he belongs to the elect. Irresistible grace is the belief that when God calls His elect to salvation, they cannot resist God’s work in the heart. While God offers the gospel to all people, known as the external calling, only the elect receive the internal calling through the work of the Holy Ghost. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi that “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13, King James Version). John 1:12–13 (King James Version) pointed out that when a man is born again, it is not by man’s will, but by God’s. The Lord Jesus said, “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37, King James Version). All those that are saved can never become unsaved again.

Perseverance of the Saints

Perseverance of the saints is the belief that once a person is saved, he or she cannot fall from grace. The Lord will preserve them, so once a person is saved, he or she is eternally secure. Biblical verses to verify this belief can be found in Jesus’s words, “I

give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27–28, King James Version). God also promises never to test His people beyond what they can handle (1 Corinthians 10:13, King James Version). Salvation is also described as being eternal life (John 6:47, King James Version), indicating that once salvation is granted it has eternal value.

These five points of Calvinism lie at the root of the NRC doctrine. “It focuses on God’s sovereignty, stating that God is able and willing by virtue of his omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, to do whatever He desires with His creation” (Slick, 2012, para. 2). Those adhering to the teachings of Joseph Arminius (1560–1609) believe that God predestined His people based on His knowledge of whether or not the individual would seek Him and later would decide if he or she wants to be saved. Arminians maintain that “God gives indispensable *help* in salvation, but that ultimately it is the free will of man which decides the issue” (Marlowe, 2005, para. 1).

Preaching

The NRC preaching is both scriptural and experiential. The Holy Bible is the inspired Word of God and is, therefore, infallible and the only manuscript that is necessary to instruct people in the way of salvation. The preaching is based solely on these scriptures, authentically expounding the message through the work of the Holy Spirit. The preaching is also experiential, pointing out the differences between nominal Christians and true believers by describing the experiential grace as found in God’s Holy Word. The preaching is balanced between the explanation of the text and how these truths are experienced in the lives of God’s children.

The preaching is directed to the true believers and unbelievers in the church. Since only God knows the heart, NRC members believe He alone is judge of whether or not an individual is a true believer. Only true believers belong to God's Church, which is "universal, because [members are] gathered from all nations and kindreds, and people and tongues" (Kersten, 2009, p. 12). The Scriptures provide guidance to believers and warn against self-deceit. If one professes to be a true believer, there should be evidence that point to the marks of true faith (Vogelaar, n.d.). Though God alone judges the heart, there will be evidence of the work of grace that can be seen by a person's walk of life (Matthew 7:20; James 2:18, King James Version).

Four Kinds of Faith

A distinction is made in the Bible regarding different kinds of faith. Christian doctrines maintain there are only two kinds of people, believers and unbelievers, to which we are able to agree. True believers are only those who have experienced salvation and, as such, possess a saving faith. Among the unbelievers, there are those who have certain kinds of faith, known as historical, miraculous, and temporary faiths.

Those with historical faith believe the Bible. There may also be evidence from science to contribute to one believing in the historical documents. This kind of faith is important, and can lead one into seeking true saving faith, but in and of itself, historical faith is not deemed to be enough for the salvation of the soul.

Some people can testify of having experienced a miracle, such as surviving an accident or living through a near death experience. These individuals may feel extremely humbled by the experience and believe they have been a recipient of a miracle given by God. Those with miraculous faith believe in God's almighty power and can acknowledge

and testify of God having spared them in a miraculous way. Another form of miraculous faith occurs when people believe God can or will perform a miracle on them or by them. This faith will encourage miraculous believers to hold on to the belief that God is a miracle-doing God, but this kind of faith is also not enough to be accepted into Heaven.

Others have a temporary faith, where they may believe for a time, but when their life circumstances shift they forsake their faith and are no longer dependent on God. While there was hope that this faith was true, saving faith, it waned with time and proved only to have been of temporary benefit and not of lasting value.

It is the true, saving faith we need to strive to obtain. This faith, once it is given by God, will never be lost and can never be abandoned. As it is God's work, it alone can endure into eternity. God does everything perfectly; also in the saving of the soul NRC members believe He does perfect work. Obtaining this type of faith does not rely on man's good works, knowledge, abilities, skills, strengths, or beliefs. This faith is only acquired as a gift from God. This gift requires the work of a Triune God, with three distinct persons contributing to the saving of the soul.

Belief in One, Triune God

It is difficult, or rather, impossible to describe God; however, this does not mean that it is impossible to *know* God. Humans can know God as He reveals Himself in nature and in the Holy Scriptures. In John 4:24 (King James Version) we read that God is a spirit. He also reveals Himself as the *only* God in Deuteronomy 6:4 (King James Version), where it is written, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." The Bible teaches that there is only one God, and although God has many different names, these names help people to understand more about Who God is.

Attributes of God

God has many attributes that cannot be separated from one another, as “the attributes altogether . . . [and] each one separately are God Himself” (Kersten, 1980, p. 51). Some of the attributes of God revealed in the Bible are God is love (1 John 4:8, King James Version); God is light (1 John 1:5, King James Version); and God is holy (Amos 4:2, King James Version). He reveals Himself as being omnipresent (Psalm 139:7–10, King James Version), meaning He is everywhere or universal. He is omniscient or all-knowing (Psalm 147:5, King James Version). His Word describes God as being immutable or never changing (Malachi 3:6, King James Version). The Lord is the absolute or only independent One (Daniel 4:35, King James Version). God is eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, without beginning and without end (Genesis 21:33; Romans 16:26; Isaiah 41:4, King James Version). The Lord also reveals Himself as being a “gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (Jonah 4:2, King James Version). While God consists of all these attributes, they are never in conflict with one another (Kersten, 1980, p. 83).

The Trinity

The Scriptures also revealed to man that God consists of three distinct “persons”: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost (1 John 5:7; Matthew 28: 19; 2 Corinthians 13:14, King James Version). The three persons are one and yet are independent from one another, each having personal names, attributes, and works, but having one unified will.

God, the Father. The first Person is the Father, but this does not mean He existed first. All three persons were present from eternity. God the Father is revealed as “the

Fountain of all life, and the Source of all light in both the kingdoms of nature and of grace” (Van Reenen, 1979, p. 120). God the Father created the heavens and the earth (Psalm 33:6, King James Version), upholding and governing them. God the Father is able and willing to provide His people with all things necessary for soul and body, and He will cause all evil He sends upon His people to turn out to their advantage (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 37).

God, the Son. The second Person is God the Son, who also reveals Himself as Jesus and Christ. Jesus means “Saviour,” and He promises to save His people and deliver them from their sins (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 39). He is also revealed in the Scriptures as Christ, which means “anointed.” He was “ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost” to be the chief Prophet, only High Priest, and eternal King for His people. As man’s chief Prophet, God the Son has revealed to humankind the will of God the Father regarding the redemption of man. As the only High Priest, God the Son gave Himself, soul and body, to be the sacrifice to atone for the sins of His people, and as the eternal King, God the Son governs, defends, and preserves His people (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 40).

God, the Holy Ghost. The third Person is the Holy Spirit, also called the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost “proceeds from God the Father, and is imparted unto the whole church of Christ by the glorified Christ” (Van Reenen, 1979, p. 120). It is the work of the Holy Ghost to “make me by a true faith, partaker of Christ and all His benefits, that He may comfort me and abide with me forever” (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 48). The work of the Holy Ghost is to apply the saving

power of the Lord Jesus to the heart of the sinner. These foundational beliefs are formed into special creeds, which have been embraced and adopted by the NRC governing body as a guide to the core values and beliefs held by the church.

Creeds

The NRC church embraces three time-honoured, ecumenical, authoritative statements of faith known as *creeds*: the Apostolic Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. These creeds, originating from the first centuries of the general Christian church, are subscribed to by a substantial majority of Christian churches in the world today. They summarize the core beliefs shared and professed by members belonging to the Christian community. In addition to these general creeds, the NRC adhere also to the three so-called Forms of Unity. These include the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort.

Belgic Confession

Guido De Brés compiled the Belgic Confession, also known as the Confession of Faith, in the French language in 1561, during a time of severe persecution by Phillip II of Spain (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 5). De Brés desired to prove to the persecutors that people of Reformed faith “were not rebels as charged, but law-abiding citizens who professed only biblical doctrines” (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 5). This manuscript consists of 37 articles based on doctrines of theology concerning God, anthropology related to man, Christology pertaining to Christ, soteriology on the subject of salvation, ecclesiology with reference to the church structure, and eschatology about the last days and final judgment. The Reformed churches in the Netherlands accepted the Belgic

Confession after the translation into the Dutch language in 1562. This document was adopted by the Synod of Dort held in 1618–1619 as one of the doctrinal standards to which all Reformed churches were required to comply.

Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism was officially adopted as the second of the Three Forms of Unity at the Synod of Dort. This document, written by a professor of theology named Zacharias Ursinus and Casper Olevianus, a court preacher, was first approved at a synod held in 1563 in Heidelberg, Germany. This catechism is still used as a method of instruction in the Reformed churches and schools.

The Heidelberg Catechism consists of questions and answers that are divided into 52 sections called Lord's Day, so every Sunday of the year one section could be preached to the congregation. The 129 questions and answers are divided into three parts following the pattern of the book of Romans. The three themes of these parts are: the misery of man, man's deliverance from sin, and man's gratitude towards God for this deliverance. The doctrine is presented in an experiential, practical manner that is more subjective than objective, more spiritual than dogmatic. For this reason, the Heidelberg Catechism has been called "the book of comfort" for true believers (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 26). The Heidelberg Catechism "remains the most widely used and warmly praised catechism of the Reformation period" (p. 27).

It soon became apparent that the questions and answers of the Heidelberg Catechism were too lengthy and difficult for young children to understand and memorize, so an easier, shortened version of the Heidelberg Catechism was formed, known as the Compendium. The Compendium was first printed in 1611, and was officially approved

by the Synod of Dort for the purpose of instructing young people (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 89).

Canons of Dort

The last of the Three Forms of Unity is the Canons of Dort. This document was written in the Netherlands during a time of religious controversy. The Canons of Dort explain the five main points that were in dispute as a result of different teachings by Jacob Arminius in the early 1600s. Arminius rejected the Reformed faith based on five specific points still held by his followers known as Arminians or the Remonstrants. The conflict between the Arminian and Calvinism doctrines almost caused a civil war in the Netherlands. Finally, in 1617, a national synod was held to address the points opposed by the Remonstrants. The synod officially convened 154 times over a period of 7 months during 1618–1619 and developed the Canons of Dort. The five points of conflict are also known as the five points of Calvinism. These five points can be summarized as follows: (a) unconditional election and faith are sovereign gifts of God, (b) the saving grace of the death of Christ is limited to the elect, (c) man is totally depraved and corrupted by sin, (d) God irresistibly calls and regenerates the elect to new life, and (e) the perseverance of true believers (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 96).

The Canons of Dort examined these five specific religious beliefs founded directly on the Bible. The original purpose of this document was to provide a judicial decision on the doctrine that was in dispute during the Arminian controversy. As a result, the Canons of Dort are not a comprehensive explanation of the whole range of the Netherlands Reformed doctrine, but rather focus on the five points in dispute during the early 1600s

when this manuscript was created. This creed addresses the differences between what the Arminians believe and what the NRC hold to be true. The NRC also holds fast to the doctrine containing two covenants.

Covenant of Works

With the creation of Adam, God placed His law in the heart of Adam, so Adam knew right from wrong. From the NRC belief, God made an agreement with Adam, called the Covenant of Works, promising that if Adam would obey the law he would receive eternal life; however, disobedience would result in eternal death. As the head of the human race through the Covenant of Works, Adam had the “free-will” to do right or wrong based on the law given to him. When Adam disobeyed God, we believe then that all humanity sinned through Adam and thereby lost the free will given to him. Through this fall of humanity, man is taught that he lost the ability to do good; thereby without God’s grace, all of humankind is destined to suffer and eventually die a physical, spiritual, and eternal death. With the fall of humanity, the covenant of works was abolished; however, God also provided the Covenant of Grace.

Covenant of Grace

This agreement was made between God the Father, representing the Triune God and Jesus Christ as Head of the elect. This agreement demanded that Christ pay for the sins of His elect through His death on the cross, to which Christ willingly gave Himself (Psalm 40, King James Version). As part of the Covenant of Grace, God demanded perfect satisfaction from Christ, Who alone was able to completely obey the law of God since the fall of man. Christ was promised the elect for His own if He would fulfill these conditions perfectly. Salvation is only possible for those who have been forgiven by God

through Christ's death. Christ satisfied the demands of the law for His people, the elect, since they were unable to obey the law given by God. Although we are unable to obey the Ten Commandments (the law given in Exodus 20, King James Version), it is the desire of the elect to honour God by obeying His law. The NRC believe a Christian does not serve God because he is afraid to anger Him or to lose his salvation, but because he has experienced God's blessing and, therefore, does not want to grieve Him.

Sacraments

The term sacrament is not used in the Bible, but rather is referred to as a "token" (Genesis 17:11, King James Version), a "sign and a seal" (Romans 4:11, King James Version) or a "covenant" (Genesis 17:13, King James Version). Through the use of sacraments, the Lord "binds Himself to His elect church" (Kersten, 1983, p. 490). A sacrament consists of an external, visible sign confirming God's faithfulness, serving to strengthen the faith of true believers. Sacraments are not only signs, but also a seal promising that God's grace will be extended to true believers. According to the Reformed doctrine, the sacraments may only be administered when accompanied by God's Word. They may not be removed from the preaching.

The two sacraments observed by the NRC are Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Holy Baptism is introduced in the New Testament as a replacement of the Old Testament sacrament of circumcision (Colossians 2:11, 12, King James Version). John was sent to baptize (John 1:33, King James Version) in accordance to a Divine command from Heaven (Matthew 21:25, King James Version). The Lord's Supper was instituted to replace the Passover, since the Passover symbolism was fulfilled in Christ's death on the cross. Both of these sacraments are integral components of the NRC religion.

Baptism

Baptism is a sacrament instituted in the New Testament (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16, King James Version). Baptism reflects the acknowledgment that children are conceived and born in sin, and as such cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Through the dipping in, or sprinkling of water, the impurity of the soul is signified, pointing to the necessity that the soul needs to be cleansed by the washing away of sins through the blood of the Lord Jesus. In the NRC church, baptism is administered to infants of parents, at least one of which, must be a confessing member of the church. Children are baptized in the Name of the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Baptism is a sign and a seal of God's covenant, but in and of itself does not imply the child is automatically saved. Children who are baptized in the church become baptized members of the congregation.

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper was ordained and instituted by the Lord Jesus, and Paul (1 Corinthians 11:23-29, King James Version) explained how the church should remember the sacrifice of Jesus for the salvation of His people. Only those who can testify of the work of true saving faith in the soul can partake of the Lord's Supper. The communicants, those who attend this sacrament, must humble themselves, considering how their sins were so great that God had to punish "His beloved Son Jesus Christ with the bitter and shameful death of the cross" (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 136).

All church members are instructed to examine themselves whether they believe that their sins are forgiven and whether they will show true thankfulness to God in daily

life, to walk uprightly before Him. The NRC believe this is a humanly impossible undertaking as a result of the fall of humanity. However, since God created man perfect and holy, all people will be held accountable for all of their sins and shortcomings if they are not forgiven by Christ. This forgiveness must be experienced by the individual before a church member may attend the Lord's Supper, which is set up on a table in the front of the church. Anyone attending the sacrament without true knowledge of this will "eat and drink judgment to themselves" (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 136). The majority of the congregation does not believe to be saved and do not attend the Lord's Supper. Communicants must be able to testify of the work of salvation in their souls.

Order of Salvation

Although the Lord will lead His people in different ways having different experiences in life, all three of these steps, misery, deliverance, and gratitude, need to be sequentially experienced. A person must go through an understanding of his or her deep misery as a result of the fall in Paradise. Adam, the head of all humanity had sinned in the partaking of the forbidden fruit. As a result his posterity, the entire human race, is born sinful and depraved. In the work of salvation, a person comes to experience this depraved condition and learns to acknowledge the inability and unwillingness of his or her heart to worship the Lord in truth. Mankind is spiritually dead. Once this has been felt and experienced, a need for deliverance arises. Realizing that deliverance cannot be obtained by self, this deliverance is sought in another, namely in the saving work of the Lord Jesus. This saving work is applied by the Holy Ghost, bringing the individual into a stage of true gratitude. In this stage of the life of the true Christian, the individual attempts to

live his or her life to God's honour, completing good works based on true thankfulness and gratitude to the Lord for His saving work in his or her heart. The individual strives to live life as a testimony of God's goodness, desiring others to turn to the Lord and also share in heartfelt gratitude.

These steps must be sequentially experienced, since without a true understanding of the total depravity of man, an individual will never seek for salvation. It is only through the realization that one cannot save oneself that room is made in the individual's heart for the work of the Saviour. Likewise, true thankfulness cannot be experienced without an in-depth understanding of the work of God's election and one's subsequent deliverance from the punishment due to sin. It is truly humbling to know that one was saved not due to anything he or she did, but rather through the elective work of God the Father. Having said this, it should be realized that true believers have never "mastered" these three steps in the life of grace. They will learn these matters over and over again, and ever deeper. The NRC doctrine has a certain uniqueness which distinguishes it from other Christian doctrines that do not adhere to the Reformed theology of John Calvin. Although many Christian churches profess to base their doctrine on the Holy Bible, a distinction must be made between the theological underpinnings.

The Framework of the NRC Church

The church is set up according to God's Word. The church entity is divided into two parts: the *visible* church, consisting of the people who are churchgoers and members of the church, and the *invisible* Church, consisting of all true believers, those who have been saved and cleansed by the blood of Jesus. The invisible Church further consists of the *church militant* who are still on earth and fighting against Satan, the world, and sin,

while the *church triumphant* are all those whose souls have entered eternal glory in Heaven after a physical death, which brings about an end to the conflict experienced here on earth. Members belonging to the church triumphant are those elected by God from eternity, a “multitude no man can number, out of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9, King James Version). The Lord shall maintain this Church from generation to generation, and preserve this Church until the end of time. The existence and continuation of this Church is not fallible as a result of man’s work or doing, since “the Church of God does not have a separate head on earth . . . [however] Christ is the only Head of His Church” (Kersten, 1983, p. 461).

The visible church is a “voluntary association of believers” (Kersten, 1983, p. 467). This assembly of believers does not need to contain a determined number of persons, but needs to consist of enough male members that a consistory of elders and deacons can be formed out of them to perform the duties required of these offices. While women are also members of the church, they may not speak in public meetings or vote when elections are held for office bearers. God’s Word states, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (I Cor. 14:34, King James Version). Although women and children do not play an active role in the church governance, their important task consists of prayer to God, seeking for His wisdom and guidance so He will be present at these meetings and guide it according to His divine decree (Kersten, 1983, p. 468). In addition, women are often active in specific church functions such as visiting of the sick, elderly, and others who need help. Furthermore, the

mother generally plays a more important role in the religious instruction of the children than the father (C. Sonneveld, personal communication, October 17, 2013).

Election into the Consistory

According to the Belgic Confession of Faith, ministers, elders, and deacons are “chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election of the Church” (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 20). In the case of electing elders and deacons to form the church council, known as the consistory, the existing consistory members select names of suitable candidates from male members within the church, and once a duo have been chosen, a meeting is held to allow the male church members to vote between the two candidates. An elder or deacon has a 2-year term; however, once the term has ended their name stands on the ballot as one of the two candidates unless they request to withdraw, resign from their office, or their fellow office bearers do not deem it wise to allow one to continue. Being chosen into office is not a light matter, as it is seen as directed by God’s hand and providence. Men are given a few days to consider this weighty responsibility before giving the final answer to the consistory of whether or not they accept the office.

Calling to the Ministry

If a man feels called to the ministry, they approach their local consistory who prepare a meeting with a minister present and the man is then provided with the opportunity to express his calling. Once the consistory has heard about how this calling took place, they discuss this matter without the man present, and then have the responsibility to write a “yes” or “no” on paper regarding whether they feel this is a legitimate calling. If the majority of the consistory accepts this calling as being divine

and sincere in nature, the man receives an attestation stating the consistory felt his calling to be true, and he is scheduled to appear before the curatorium.

The curatorium consists of selected ministers and appointed elders from specific churches who meet annually to discuss church matters. The curatorium determines if the man's calling is sincere and lawful based on his account of the calling experience. If there is any doubt about whether this call is from God and it is suspected that the desire originates from the individual himself, he will not be granted permission to attend the theological school to train for the ministry. In these instances, the individual is encouraged to seek further enlightenment or guidance from the Lord before appearing again with his request. Once an individual is accepted into the ministry, a 4-year theological study is provided to help the man prepare for the ministry. Upon the completion of his studies, the curatorium decides if the man is eligible to be called by one of the vacant churches in the denomination. Once he accepts a call from a congregation, he needs to pass an examination provided by the classis to which that congregation belongs.

A minister must solely work in the labours of the congregation. An NRC minister may not have another job, but receives a salary for his ministerial work. The minister signs a contract with the consistory of the congregation, outlining the tasks he is expected to do, such as perform weddings to members of the church, conduct funeral services for church members, preach twice on the Sunday, provide weekday services for special days belonging to the liturgical calendar, and so forth. The minister also receives a certain number of "free Sundays," during which he may travel and preach elsewhere in other vacant congregations.

Governing Bodies: Role of the Classis and Synod

With differing opinions on church matters, social, technological, or medical advances, local consistories have the opportunity to bring unresolved questions or concerns to the annual classis meetings. There are three classes in North America, consisting of selected members from different NRC consistories within that jurisdiction. If there are unresolved challenges, the classis can pass on the disputes to the synod for a final decision.

The synod meets every 2 years. All of the NRC churches must adhere to any decisions made by the synod. For example, in the past, synod decisions have been made regarding divorce, use of technological filters regarding Internet safety, and most recently, the medical advancement of invitro-fertilization. Local churches are responsible for ensuring their members live in accordance with the synod decisions and are required to pass on to the classis meetings any problems or questions they are unable to solve. Decisions by the synod are final and override all other opinions or perspectives, and members of the church are called to be obedient and submissive to the lawful decisions made by the synod, unless the decision clearly contradicts the Holy Scriptures (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 21).

Offices Within the Consistory

The local consistory of office bearers (elders and deacons) have a serving, rather than a ruling, power over the congregation (Kersten, 1983, p. 484). These offices are responsible for different tasks or roles within the church framework. The ministers or pastors preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments. Ministers of God's Word have "equally the same power and authority wheresoever they are" (The Psalter, 2008,

The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 21). The elders have the “oversight of the church . . . to look whether every one properly deports himself in his confession and conversation; to admonish [members] who behave disorderly, . . . to prevent the sacraments from being profaned . . . ; and [to ensure] that no strange doctrine [is being] taught” (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 146). The deacons are responsible for collecting and distributing alms or financial gifts and are encouraged through “cheerfulness and simplicity to assist the poor with compassion and hearty affection” (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 146) with gifts and comfortable words from the Scripture. Together, the men belonging to these three offices form the “council of the church that by these means the true religion may be preserved . . . transgressors punished . . . the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted” (The Psalter, 2008, The Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, and Church Order, p. 20).

Summary

This appendix provides some of the historical facts upon which the NRC church was founded. The origin of the name of the church was explained as well as the foundation of the NRC doctrine as it is based on the five points of Calvinism. The preaching is both scriptural and experiential. This appendix also explained the belief in four kinds of faith. Due to these four kinds of beliefs, NRC members are often very hesitant in assuming they are saved. An NRC member does not generally profess to be saved, but rather it should become visible in the life the individual lives. The NRC also adheres to the belief that there is One, Triune God, and based on the attributes provided in God’s Word we are given to know God through His revelations in His Word. Three

creeds are accepted by the NRC churches. The NRC hold there to be only two covenants made between God and humanity, and two sacraments. There is a specific order of salvation, and it is all a work of God. The NRC does not believe people can contribute anything towards their own salvation. The framework of the NRC was also explained, including the roles of men within the governance of the church.

I hope that this appendix has provided a more in-depth understanding of the NRC worldview and religious beliefs. I also hope that this appendix will be a beneficial document for (a) NRC members who seek to explain their faith to others, (b) non-NRC Christian counsellors who may be confused to the differences found between their beliefs and those belonging to the NRC, as well as (c) secular therapists who are not familiar with the Christian faith.

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