

## **Decision Safe Reformed Church Rotterdam Center**

*The General Church Council of the Reformed Church Rotterdam Center, meeting on September 13, 2023*

Taking into account that

- It is important to have a consistent policy within the church in the area of social safety for employees, volunteers, church members and other stakeholders
- At its meetings of February 1 and April 12, the principles were discussed in the presence of representatives of local OR neighborhood churches and diaconal projects

Decision:

- To adopt the policy as laid down in the memorandum 'Safe Reformed Church Rotterdam Center'
- To request the local communities and diaconal projects to implement this policy by December 31, 2023 at the latest and to at least:
  - o appoint confidential counselors
  - o communicate the code of conduct and the confidential counselors clearly, by including a page on the website and possibly organising an information meeting

## **Safe Reformed Church Rotterdam Center**

The Reformed Church Rotterdam Center (HGRC) must be a safe place for everyone. There is no place for undesirable behavior. The emphasis on preventing this lies in actively cultivating open human relationships in which there is no barrier to addressing negative feelings, supported by a network of confidential counselors. Formal instruments of trust play a secondary role, such as signatures under codes of conduct and declarations of conduct.

In addition to a number of local OR neighborhood churches, the HGRC also includes several diaconal projects. In all cases, a limited number of professional staff are supported by a not always clearly defined group of volunteers. Certainly, in a local OR neighborhood church, every member can be a volunteer at any time, even if it is only to deliver flowers to a sick member of the congregation. For the policy, a distinction is therefore made between volunteers with incidental and structural tasks. Because the division of roles differs per local OR neighborhood church or diaconal project, it is up to those individual local OR neighborhood churches/projects to record (in writing) which voluntary functions they consider to be structural. The structural volunteers include at least the members of church councils, boards and foundation boards appointed by the AK (the General Church Council). The General Church Council is responsible for determining and implementing policy but leaves as much room as possible to the individual local OR neighborhood churches /projects. After all, the church is supported from the bottom up. Another important principle is that the Safe Church policy, for example through rigid implementation, should not itself become a source of feelings of insecurity.

### **Code of conduct and awareness**

The HGRC endorses the code of conduct for volunteers of the PKN (see appendix 1). All local OR neighborhood churches/projects actively bring this to the attention of their supporters, at least by prominently placing it on the website. All members of the community are expected to adhere to it. Professionals and structural volunteers are expected to be actively familiar with the code of conduct. The code of conduct is discussed in the initial meeting before the work begins.

In the initial meeting, local OR neighborhood churches/projects also discuss the experience of the person concerned with the topics from the code of conduct. If there is a need for this, local OR neighborhood churches/projects facilitate training for professionals and volunteers, for example by having them follow a training course offered by the national church.

An integral part of the awareness surrounding the code of conduct is communicating confidential counselors to whom people can turn if they want to know more about the code of conduct or report a possible violation.

### **Confidential counselors**

The HGRC organises the confidential counselors in three layers. Each layer ensures that the confidential counselors are equipped for the role they take on, for example by offering training. Confidential counselors report annually on their activities within the layer in which they are active.

1. local OR neighborhood churches/projects provide at least one confidential counselor, so that people can easily turn to questions about the code of conduct and, if necessary, be referred to confidential counselors at the HGRC level. local OR neighborhood churches/projects are free to set up a more extensive structure of confidential counselors. However, the possibility of bringing an issue to the attention of the HGRC level must always be communicated. local OR neighborhood

churches/projects are also free to appoint only a contact person who can explain how to raise the subject at the HGRC level.

2. The HGRC sets up a confidential committee of at least four people. This is composed in such a way that there is always at least one man and one woman available who are not affiliated with the local OR neighborhood church/project in which the person involved is involved.

3. The national church has a Reporting Point for Sexual Abuse in Pastoral and Authority Relationships (SMPR). This operates outside the responsibility of the HGRC. The HGRC communicates to its supporters the existence of the SMPR and that it is not necessary to first approach your own confidants before contacting the SMPR.

### **Certificate of Conduct**

It is increasingly common to require volunteers to provide a Certificate of Conduct (VOG, see appendix 2). This instrument is at odds with the Biblical mandate to grant forgiveness for past misdeeds. At the same time, the AK is aware that this mandate should not be a reason to remain blind to the impact that past behavior can have on the present – both in the behaviour of the person concerned and in the perception of third parties.

All in all, there is reason to be cautious with the VOG as an instrument to assess someone's suitability for a particular role. In any case, the absence of a VOG can never be the only reason to exclude someone from a role.

The HGRC requests a VOG for all professionals in the organisation. The HGRC requests a VOG for structural volunteers who have contact with vulnerable groups, if the relevant district council/project requests this. The HGRC requests a VOG for financial managers at CvK, CvD and asset foundations. If requested by local OR neighborhood churches and projects, the HGRC requests a VOG for financial managers at the relevant decentralised level.

## **Appendix 1: Code of Conduct for PKN volunteers**

### **1. Safe environment**

We work together to create an environment and atmosphere in which everyone feels safe and respected and can freely practice their faith.

### **2. Respect**

We respect each other. We do not approach others in a way that affects their dignity and integrity. This applies in particular to minors and other vulnerable people. We are extra careful in pastoral and diaconal contacts, because we know that power differences can play a role here.

### **3. Confidentiality**

We handle confidential (including personal) information or data of others with care, including everything to which our duty of confidentiality relates.

### **4. Personal integrity**

We respect the rights of others. We do not harm others. We do not use physical or mental violence.

### **5. Physical integrity**

We respect each other's physical integrity. We are reserved in physical contact.

### **6. Privacy**

We respect the privacy of others.

### **7. Use of language**

Our use of language is respectful. We do not ask inappropriate questions and do not make unwanted (sexually suggestive) comments about the personal life or appearance of others. We talk about others with respect, also via social media. Even when the other person is not present. We do not gossip and do not make damaging jokes or comments about others.

### **8. Financial interests**

We avoid any form of conflict of interest, especially in the financial field. We handle gifts with care, both when accepting and when passing them on.

### **9. Sexual abuse**

In the event of (sexual) abuse by volunteers or professionals, or when suspected of such, we follow the Protocol for churches confronted with (sexual) abuse in pastoral and authority relationships. Sexual abuse is understood to mean: any form of transgressive behavior, abuse of power or trust, in which there is a power difference or a relationship of dependency between the victim and the accused, in which the accused is a volunteer or professional within the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. All sexual acts, contacts and relationships between a volunteer and a minor are not permitted under any circumstances and are considered sexual abuse.

### **10. A culture of openness**

We are committed to working together in a culture of openness. This contributes to the municipality being a safe environment. We are alert and speak to each other when we pick up signals or

experience situations of undesirable behavior. When we have doubts about the acceptability of our own behavior or that of someone else, we can contact one of the confidential counselors.

## Appendix 2: Factsheet Certificate of Good Conduct (VOG)

- The VOG is issued by the Ministry of Justice and Security for people who perform certain high-risk (volunteer) functions. For this purpose, the ministry looks at incriminating data in its files. For example, if you have been convicted of a sexual offence, you will never receive a VOG for working with children. Other offences remain grounds for refusal for at least four years.
- In the past, a VOG could only be refused if you had been convicted by a judge.
- Since 2011, a VOG can also be refused if you have a criminal record and did not successfully protest against it (for example because you did not understand the official letter properly). For example, the tax authorities can issue you a penalty notice because they believe you have committed fraud. You think you are done once you have paid the fine, but it can still haunt you for a long time.
- Since 2020, a VOG can also be refused on the basis of police data. Anyone who is registered as 'suspect' by the police runs the risk of not receiving a VOG.
- The *Data Processing by Collaborative Associations Act* is currently being discussed in the Senate, which makes it possible to include other government data in the VOG. Even if the law is passed, it is not certain whether it will actually be used for the VOG.
- Officially, a reasonableness test is also carried out by a civil servant in all cases. The Council of State is currently evaluating whether the VOG does not disproportionately affect innocent citizens.
- Someone receives a VOG or not. If he does not get it, it is impossible to determine why not: a history of serious criminal offences or a note from a police officer. For example, a group of victims of the benefits scandal (the "toeslagenaffaire") has currently started legal proceedings to obtain a new Citizen Service Number, because they feel that they will have more difficulty obtaining a Certificate of Good Conduct (VOG) since they are registered as fraudsters in all kinds of systems.
- Anyone who does not have a Citizen Service Number at all, for example because they are staying in the Netherlands illegally, will not receive a Certificate of Good Conduct (VOG) anyway.

### **Appendix 3: Confidential advisors**

The following persons have been appointed by the General Church Council as central confidential advisors for the Reformed Church of Rotterdam Centre:

The names will be added here soon.