

## Safe Church Policy

### ICF Rotterdam-Noord

Policy on preventing and dealing with abuse

Date of policy: August 2024

#### I. Introduction

The church should be a safe place, a shelter that provides love, safety and security to everyone. Unfortunately this safety cannot be taken for granted, sexual and other kinds of abuse takes place within churches worldwide; sometimes this is obvious, sometimes it is more subtle. At ICF-Noord we take this issue seriously and believe in Christ's Church there is no place for abuse in any form. As a result we have drawn up a policy on how to be a safe church.

The church leadership team is responsible for safety in the congregation. It is responsible for the appointment of committed staff and volunteers, including their methods/ways of working. However, it is not solely the responsibility of the church leadership team; it is everyone's responsibility to help create a safe church.

*Definitions of volunteers: Within ICF-Noord, every member can be a volunteer at any time, even if it is only to deliver flowers or pray with a sick member of the community. This policy therefore makes a distinction between volunteers with incidental and structural tasks.*

*Structural tasks (structural volunteers): Children's ministry, pastoral visits, serving at the Wijk restaurant, church leaders, prayer ministry*

*All other volunteer activities are classed as incidental and individuals carrying out these activities will be classified as general volunteers for the purposes of this policy.*

#### II. Raising awareness

Raising awareness within the congregation forms the basis for this policy. This includes the awareness of inequalities in power or authority amongst church members, and the effects of this. Differences in power between the people in authority and members of the congregation, such as supervisors and volunteers of the children's ministry, elders and members who need pastoral care. The effect may be that someone in a position of power displays inappropriate behavior towards someone with less authority, thereby jeopardising the safe and secure environment. Consequently, as ICF-Noord we:

- recognise that this type of inappropriate behavior can also occur in our own congregation
- are aware that every member of the congregation has a right to safety in church
- regularly put 'safe children's ministry' and 'safe church' on the agenda at policy level, e.g. what are we doing, is it going well and what can improve?
- must ensure that in all activities, an awareness of safe church is considered, e.g. missional communities, Bible studies, children's ministry, celebrations.

This will be ensured through regular communication with all those involved, such as the church leadership, task leaders, volunteers and the wider congregation. People in positions of power in the church are responsible for maintaining pure relationships with the members of the congregation with whom they deal. We therefore will put the subject of safety in church annually on the leadership agenda.

### III. Prevention

The church should be a safe place. In fact, if one should feel safe anywhere, then it is in the church, amongst your own congregation. Prevention of sexual abuse is therefore our highest commitment. Prevention serves the church and thus the Lord of the church.

#### Prevention measures

Safety in the church is created by interacting safely and openly. ICF-Noord wants to be such a safe church, and to commit itself to corresponding measures. The main prevention measures in the ICF-Noord are:

1. Appointment of a *Safe Church Advisor* who is identifiable to church members who are easily approachable and functioning as an 'ambassador' for a safe church as well as a confidential counsellor.
2. As a member of the Protestant Church (PKN) Rotterdam-Centrum, church members can contact external confidential counsellors. This is a committee of at least four people, of which there is at least one woman and one man, who are not affiliated with ICF-Noord and can also be contacted if a church member wishes to discuss a concern. The national church also has a [Reporting Center for Sexual Abuse in Pastoral and Authority Relationships](#) (SMPR) which can also be approached. It is not necessary to first approach a confidential counselor before contacting the SMPR.
3. Establishing codes of conduct for volunteers in general, alongside specific codes of conduct for children's work and pastoral visits
4. Careful selection of volunteers, especially structural volunteers. This means specifically:
  - Names of structural volunteers are presented to the church leadership team and a record is kept
  - Each person in these roles commit to relevant codes of conduct
  - Application for Certificate of Good Conduct (VOG) and references as per the *ICF-Noord pre-appointment check guidelines*
  - Official training is provided to structural volunteer leads e.g. Church leaders, on a regular basis.

NB. For pastors there is a Code of Conduct established by the Synod for ministers which already applies to them. This can be found at: <https://protestantsekerk.nl/veilige-gemeente/gedragscode-omgangsregels/>

### IV. Intervention

For ICF-Noord, it is important that if something goes wrong or seems to go wrong between people in power and congregation members, or between people with official positions in church, it is reported. A complicated situation can arise in which all kinds of interests and loyalties can get mixed up. It is precisely then that it is important to make good choices, in which justice is done, as much as possible, to all parties involved and care is taken to ensure that no further damage is caused.

In the event of (sexual) abuse by volunteers or professionals, or in case of suspicion, we follow the SMPR [Protocol for municipalities confronted with \(sexual\) abuse in pastoral and authority relationships](#). Sexual abuse is defined as: any form of transgressive behavior, abuse of power or trust, where there is a power difference or a relationship of dependency between the injured party and the accused, where 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.

## V. (After)care

When an incident occurs and goes to arbitration after a decision by the complaints committee is made, it is important to take into account the consequences for the victim, the perpetrator, and the church, in order to ensure proper (after) care. The [Guide for Church Councils](#) with appendices, drawn up by the SMPR, calls on the church to:

1. Consider that victims of abuse do not suffer further damage in the church service (choice of words in prayers, choice of songs)
2. Provide aftercare and pastoral care to victims of inappropriate behavior in the church
3. Provide aftercare and pastoral care to perpetrators of inappropriate behavior in the church. He/she must not be the same person assigned to the victim.

Some members of the church may also be previous victims or perpetrators of incest, domestic violence, abuse of power and threatening situations at work (ambulance personnel, military personnel, police, workers in health care, social and welfare services) or elsewhere. We want them to also feel safe in the congregation. These people also need to be heard, seen and recognised.

## VI. Communication

The contents of this policy should normally be communicated during the Sunday services, during church meetings, during the meetings of the supervisors of the children's ministry and during the church's meetings with the various task leaders. The flyer "The Church, a safe place!" will be distributed for this purpose in Dutch, English and Arabic.

Information about the role of the Safe Church Advisor will be included in the members' guide of the church and be placed on display in the church premises. The information on the website will be kept up to date. This concerns, for example, the name and contact details of the Safe Church advisor. In addition, the present policy document will be available on the website.

## VII. Policy retention

It is very important to keep to the policy, which we do through the above mentioned activities. The policy would be evaluated and adjusted where necessary, on at least an annual basis.

The hotline *Sexual Abuse in Church Relationships* ([www.meldpuntmisbruik.nl](http://www.meldpuntmisbruik.nl))<sup>1</sup> informs safe church advisors and offers regular training. This helps to keep the policy on the agenda and reinforce it.

Anyone with a complaint or signs of inappropriate behavior or sexual abuse by a church official can also contact this hotline (if necessary anonymously) for advice and guidance in any further steps.

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<sup>1</sup> The hotline Sexual Abuse in Church Relationships (Seksueel Misbruik in Kerkelijke Relaties) is an initiative of the Christian Reformed Churches, the Netherlands Reformed Churches, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) and the Restored Reformed Church.

## **Annex 1      Definitions**

### *Definition Sexual abuse*

The Hotline for Abuse defines abuse as any expression of verbal, non-verbal or physical behavior, whether intentional or unintentional, desirable or undesirable, in the form of sexual acts and/or sexually orientated allusions by a church official.

### *Structural Volunteer*

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