

Code of Conduct Pastoral Ministry ICF Utrecht



I. Introduction

The church should be a safe place. A shelter that offers love, safety and security for everyone, both young and old. However, this safety is not always guaranteed. Sexual abuse occurs within church relationships; sometimes it is obvious, sometimes much more subtle. In sexual abuse, power and trust are misused to satisfy one's own needs, usually under the pressure of confidentiality. Sexual abuse is a difficult subject. Yet within ICF Utrecht we want to open up this subject for discussion. Therefore we have chosen to draw up a policy on how to be a safe church and to express ourselves clearly: in Christ's congregation there is no place for abuse in any form whatsoever. This Code of Conduct is part of ICF's Safe Church policy and a guide for pastoral ministry.

For ICF's pastoral ministry, certain rules of conduct have always been used. Although these were not written down, most people naturally adhered to it. There is a risk that the recording of lawful and unlawful behavior in a code of conduct can lead to a straitjacket, rendering spontaneous behavior impossible. That is not the intention of this code of conduct. However, it is necessary for us to be constantly aware of the correctness of our actions, to be able to and dare to talk about this with each other and to be accountable to members and visitors in our care during pastoral visits.

As part of the procedures regarding the appointment of new members of the church council (ministers, elders and/or deacons), this code of conduct will be discussed with them on behalf of the church council by the safeguarding advisor.

II. General rules of conduct for pastoral ministry

As pastoral visitor on behalf of the church you are responsible for the safety of the relationships. You provide an environment and atmosphere in which the church member or attendee feels safe and respected. You have a duty to protect the church member or attendee against any form of unequal treatment and / or sexual abuse. Everyone involved in pastoral ministry is constantly in contact with others and is expected to act correctly. A difficult task, especially considering that well-intentioned behavior can have an unintended effect. A number of guidelines to promote responsible behavior:

- *Respect the personal (physical and mental) integrity of the other person.* Be aware of the power inequality that comes with your position. Do not abuse the dependency or vulnerability of those entrusted to your supervision or care. In concrete terms, this means, for example, that you don't give gifts to members of the congregation (this does not include an appropriate token of appreciation).
- *Avoid being alone with a church member in an enclosed space: stay visible and do not make yourself vulnerable.* Leaving a door open or a space with one or more windows can prevent many problems. Since many female single church members visited are living alone, this requires a great deal of responsibility. The member to be visited may perceive this as unsafe. Alternative meeting places in such a situation: at the church council member's home, in church, during a walk or in a public place (such as the library). It is also possible for the church member to request a visit from more than one person. It must be clear to all church members that members of the church council are happy to visit them safely.
- *Discuss and coordinate intensive contact.* If it is necessary for a member of the church council to maintain more than ordinary, intensive pastoral contact for a longer period of time (for example, long-term illness or psychosocial problems of a church member)

then this should be discussed during a meeting of the church council.

- *Avoid situations that can lead to accusations of sexual harassment, discrimination and/or racism.* This concerns verbal, non-verbal and digital expressions, also in the form of jokes. Members of the church council must ensure that such behaviors do not occur between church members themselves. All sexual acts, looks, contacts, relationships between a church council member or pastoral volunteer and a church member are not permitted under any circumstances and are considered to be sexual abuse.
- *Ensure that the content of communications to congregation members cannot give rise to wrong thoughts.* In principle, the content of pastoral or official letters and messages via social media should be able to be read by everyone.
- *Avoid ambiguous, offensive, abusive and intimidating language.*
- *Never promise secrecy.* Always tell that what you discuss with the church member will in principle remain "indoors" unless the safety of others or the person itself is at risk. Respect the privacy of the church member, but engage third parties when necessary for his or her well-being. Agree with the church member that before you tell anything to third parties, you will let him or her know.
- *Be aware of the effect of non-verbal behavior: facial expression, intonation, attitude and clothing have a lot of influence.* Verbal expressions are more tangible than non-verbal expressions. If church members find certain situations unpleasant, it often has to do with non-verbal behavior: looks or gestures with 'double meanings'. These may be done with good intentions, but may create wrong impressions.
- *Be honest and treat each other with respect.*

This code of conduct also applies to other adults who are (incidentally) involved in pastoral ministry.

III. In case of...

In all cases where the code of conduct does not provide (directly), or if you are in doubt about the acceptability of certain behaviors, it is within your responsibility as a member of the church council or pastoral volunteer to act in the spirit of the code of conduct and, if necessary, to contact the safeguarding advisor within the own church, or advisors of the hotline Abuse in Church Relationships (www.meldpuntmisbruik.nl).¹

If you identify behavior that is not in accordance with this code of conduct and you have suspicions of inappropriate (sexually oriented) behavior, you are obliged to report this to the safeguarding advisor or contact point.

Violation of this code of conduct will lead to a formal complaint and the procedure may result in disciplinary action. When a church official is suspected of a criminal offense, a report will be made to the police/judicial authorities as well as to the advisors of the hotline.

¹ 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.