THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA
SAFEGUARDING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP POLICY

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1. PURPOSE

1.1. The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) is committed to maintaining a safe environment for all members, visitors, office bearers, personnel, children and adults at risk. This policy provides clear governance and leadership expectations so that safeguarding is understood, prioritised and applied across CRCA churches.

1.2. This policy supports a leadership and governance culture that protects every person's dignity, well-being and rights within the safeguarding framework of the CRCA.

1.3. This policy is informed by the National Safeguarding Policy, the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, the findings and residual recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and relevant State and Territory child-safe standards as identified in the CRCA policy suite.

2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS

2.1. The call to safeguard and uphold the dignity of every person is grounded in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Christian governance must therefore treat each person as worthy of protection, respect and justice.

2.2. Jesus' words that he came 'to serve, and not to be served' (Matthew 20:28) shape the CRCA's expectation that leadership is exercised for the safety, flourishing and protection of others, not for self-interest or control.

3. SCOPE

3.1. This policy applies to leadership and governance roles within the CRCA, including ministers, elders, deacons, office bearers, members of the Session / Church Council, members of the Safe Church Advisory Committee, the Safe Church Unit, and any person acting on behalf of CRCA leadership.

3.2. Where this policy refers to wider categories of personnel, members, contractors and visitors, those categories have the meaning given in the National Safeguarding Policy. The detailed Code of Conduct, HR / Recruitment Policy and other policies in this suite carry the obligations that apply to each category.

4. VALUES

4.1. The CRCA is committed to the following values so that the safety and well-being of all people remain at the forefront of decisions and actions.

4.1.1. **Scriptural teachings - upholding safety and dignity:** central to the Church's teaching is the call to embody love, mercy and justice. Colossians 3:17 calls all things to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, and Luke 18:16 shows Jesus welcoming children and affirming their place in the kingdom. The responsibilities in this policy are therefore carried out in a way that honours the dignity, voice and safety of each person.

4.1.2. **Zero tolerance:** the CRCA has a zero-tolerance approach to abuse and harmful behaviour. The responsibilities in this policy must never be used to suppress, minimise or ignore concerns about safety, harm or abuse.

4.1.3. **Transparency and accountability:** the CRCA fosters a culture of openness, appropriate information sharing, feedback and accountable action.

4.1.4. **Shared responsibility:** safeguarding is everybody's responsibility and requires the participation of local churches, personnel, members and denominational safeguarding structures.

4.1.5. **Empowerment:** the CRCA supports people to understand their rights, speak up, raise concerns and contribute to the development of safer church environments.

4.1.6. **Integrity:** the CRCA fosters honest, ethical and respectful engagement at all levels of church life.

5. DEFINITIONS

5.1. Terms defined in the National Safeguarding Policy apply to this policy unless this section gives a more specific operational meaning.

5.2. **Session / Church Council** means the local-church governance body responsible for safeguarding oversight, implementation and accountability within the congregation, subject to the CRCA Church Order and the authorised CRCA governance pathway.

5.3. **Safe Church Representative** means the local safeguarding contact who supports safeguarding awareness, assists people to understand reporting and referral pathways, and refers safeguarding concerns through the relevant CRCA safeguarding pathway.

5.4. **Safe Church Administrator** means the role or function that supports safeguarding administration, including approved templates, registers, training records, screening records, reporting tools, central documentation and records-management support.

5.5. **Safe Church Unit** means the denominational safeguarding response-support function that provides triage assistance, safeguarding advice, escalation support and pathway guidance within its authorised scope.

5.6. **Safe Church Advisory Committee** means the denominational governance and oversight body responsible for policy direction, high-risk review, continuous quality improvement and safeguarding governance oversight within its authorised scope.

5.7. **Delegated authority** means authority expressly given to a person, role or body to perform a safeguarding function. Delegated authority does not displace a decision reserved to a Session / Church Council, Classis, Synod, employer, statutory authority, regulator, court or tribunal.

5.8. **Local governance accountability** means the continuing responsibility of the Session / Church Council to ensure safeguarding is understood, implemented, monitored and followed up within the local church.

5.9. **High-risk review** means review of a safeguarding matter that involves serious harm, possible criminal conduct, reportable conduct, conflict of interest, systemic risk, or another matter requiring denominational escalation or external advice.

6. POLICY AND PROCEDURES

6.1. **Ethical and ministry standards:** Office bearers prioritise and model a Christ-centred life, drawing inspiration from the example of Jesus Christ who came 'to serve, and not to be served' (Matthew 20:28). Office bearers are accountable for their conduct under the Code of Conduct.

6.2. **Public safeguarding commitment:** The Session / Church Council and denominational safeguarding bodies affirm the CRCA's commitment to the safety of children and adults at risk, and act consistently with that commitment in all decisions.

6.3. **Complaints and allegations:** Any person may report alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct or other safeguarding policies to the Safe Church Representative, Session / Church Council or Safe Church Unit. Cases believed to be criminal, reportable conduct, mandatory reporting matters or other statutory matters are escalated through the relevant external pathway as required.

6.4. **Reportable Conduct Schemes and Police matters:** Where conduct may meet the threshold for notification under a Reportable Conduct Scheme, the relevant head of entity (or delegate, where allowed) notifies the regulator within the timeframe required in that jurisdiction. This occurs alongside, and does not replace, Police reporting, internal complaints, disciplinary, pastoral or risk-management responses. Internal processes are managed so they do not compromise Police action.

6.5. **Worker screening:** Personnel and volunteers in roles involving direct contact with children must hold the worker-screening clearance required by the jurisdiction in which the role is carried out. The Session / Church Council is responsible for ensuring that required local clearances are obtained,

verified, current and recorded. The Safe Church Administrator may maintain central screening templates, renewal records and registers where required by the CRCA safeguarding framework. An expired, suspended, refused or unverified clearance triggers immediate removal from in-scope duties until the matter is resolved.

6.6. **Personal conduct:** Office bearers must lead by example. Their public and private conduct must not contradict the expectations set out in the Code of Conduct or compromise confidence in CRCA safeguarding practice.

6.7. **Financial integrity:** Office bearers maintain financial integrity, declare conflicts of interest, and avoid any conflict between pastoral duties and financial matters. Financial advice is given only by appropriately qualified persons.

6.8. **Addressing sexuality in ministry:** Office bearers approach discussions on sexuality, trauma and abuse with sensitivity. Sexual relationships with recipients of ministry are not permitted and may lead to sanctions, including removal from office.

6.9. **Personal and pastoral relationships:** Office bearers maintain clear boundaries so that pastoral responsibilities are not confused with, or compromised by, personal relationships.

6.10. **Conflict of interest:** Office bearers declare potential conflicts of interest. Where the Session / Church Council or a head of entity is conflicted, the matter is escalated to the appropriate denominational governance pathway.

6.11. **Confidentiality:** Office bearers uphold privacy and confidentiality subject to the limits of confidentiality. Where information engages a statutory reporting duty, Reportable Conduct Scheme notification, Police direction, mandatory reporting obligation or another lawful information-sharing pathway, the CRCA shares the information that the duty requires and only on a need-to-know basis.

6.12. **Collegiality and professionalism:** Office bearers foster a cooperative and respectful environment, and avoid conduct that damages colleagues, ministry, church governance or safeguarding trust.

6.13. **Training and awareness:** Leaders and office bearers complete safeguarding training appropriate to their role, including training about the Code of Conduct, reporting pathways, confidentiality limits and the practical application of safeguarding policies.

6.14. **Monitoring, evaluation and referral:** The CRCA monitors governance practice, evaluates safeguarding implementation, and maintains referral pathways for specialist counselling, legal, pastoral and practical support where appropriate.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1. Role definitions used in this policy are consistent across the CRCA policy suite.

7.2. **Session / Church Council:** The Session / Church Council is accountable for local-church safeguarding governance and implementation. This includes ensuring that safeguarding requirements are understood and applied locally; appointing, supporting and overseeing the Safe Church Representative; ensuring that local personnel, office bearers, employees and volunteers complete required training, declarations and screening requirements; and taking local action where required. The Session / Church Council remains responsible for local governance decisions, including local precautionary measures, role restrictions, stand-down decisions within its authority, and local follow-up of safeguarding requirements. Where denominational advice, statutory reporting guidance, Reportable Conduct Scheme guidance or high-risk review is required, the Session / Church Council works with the Safe Church Representative, Safe Church Administrator, Safe Church Unit and Safe Church Advisory Committee as appropriate.

7.3. **Safe Church Representative:** The Safe Church Representative is the trained local-church safeguarding contact. The Safe Church Representative supports local safeguarding awareness, assists people to understand safeguarding pathways, supports local follow-up where appropriate, and refers safeguarding concerns through the relevant CRCA safeguarding pathways. The Safe Church

Representative supports, but does not replace, the Session / Church Council's local governance responsibility. The Safe Church Representative may assist with local administration, declarations, training follow-up or record collection where authorised locally, but local accountability remains with the Session / Church Council.

7.4. **Safe Church Administrator:** The Safe Church Administrator supports the administration, coordination, training administration and records-management functions of the CRCA safeguarding system. This includes maintaining approved safeguarding templates, declaration templates, registers, training records, role and screening records, reporting tools, accessible resources and other official safeguarding documentation required by the policy suite. The Safe Church Administrator may maintain central denominational records and restricted safeguarding registers, including records concerning Persons of Concern, restrictions on ministry, safeguarding training, reporting tools and system records. This denominational administration supports, but does not replace, local church responsibility for ensuring that required declarations, clearances, training and role-specific requirements are completed for local personnel and volunteers.

7.5. **Safe Church Unit:** The Safe Church Unit provides safeguarding response support, triage assistance, advice on safeguarding pathways and escalation support where concerns, complaints, statutory reporting, Reportable Conduct Scheme matters, Police matters or other safeguarding risks are referred or identified. The Safe Church Unit supports local churches and the Safe Church Advisory Committee by assisting with response pathways, case coordination, safeguarding advice and statutory or scheme pathway identification. The Safe Church Unit does not replace local church governance responsibility or the oversight role of the Safe Church Advisory Committee.

7.6. **Safe Church Advisory Committee:** The Safe Church Advisory Committee provides denominational safeguarding oversight, advice, high-risk review, policy direction, appeal or review functions where allocated within delegated safeguarding authority, and continuous quality improvement oversight within the CRCA safeguarding framework. The Safe Church Advisory Committee may make safeguarding recommendations to the relevant decision-maker, but does not replace the local governance responsibility of the Session / Church Council, the response-support role of the Safe Church Unit, or any decision reserved to a Session / Church Council, Classis, Synod, employer, statutory authority, regulator, court, tribunal or other legally authorised decision-maker.

7.7. **Office Bearers:** Office Bearers must uphold the Code of Conduct, model safeguarding responsibilities in the exercise of their office, report safeguarding concerns or breaches that they witness or become aware of, and complete safeguarding training appropriate to the authority and responsibilities of their role.

8. BREACHES OF POLICY

8.1. Breaches of this policy are dealt with under the Disciplinary and Breach Response Policy and, where applicable, the CRCA Church Order, including Articles 80, 81, 82 and 83.

8.2. Where a breach may also engage a statutory threshold, including failure to disclose, failure to protect, failure to report, a Reportable Conduct Scheme threshold, mandatory reporting obligation, Police matter or other lawful reporting requirement, the statutory or scheme pathway operates in parallel with any internal disciplinary or governance process.

9. RELATED POLICIES

9.1. National Safeguarding Policy; Code of Conduct; HR / Recruitment Policy; Learning and Development Policy; Disciplinary and Breach Response Policy; Complaints Handling Policy; Information Sharing and Record Keeping Policy; Privacy Policy; Continuous Quality Improvement Policy.

10. MONITORING AND REVIEW

10.1. This policy is reviewed every three years, or earlier where required by legislative change, regulator guidance, audit findings, serious incidents, a substantiated complaint, material safeguarding risk, or a decision of the Safe Church Advisory Committee. Feedback on this policy may be sent to the Safe Church Unit at scu@crca.org.au at any time.

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1.0	16/09/2026	16/09/2026	SCAC (SIC)	Align Safeguarding	First approved issue.