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## 1. PURPOSE

1.1. The purpose of this policy is to affirm the CRCA's commitment to creating an inclusive, safe and empowering environment in which members, children, young people, adults at risk, families and others connected with CRCA activities are informed, heard and able to participate in matters that affect them, especially safeguarding matters.

## 2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS

2.1. The priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) affirms that every member has dignity and a place in the life and witness of the church.

2.2. The image of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) calls the church to honour each part of the body and to listen to members who may otherwise be less visible or more vulnerable.

2.3. Mutual submission and respect (Ephesians 5:21) shape engagement as a practice of humility, accountability and care for one another.

2.4. Jesus' model of servant leadership (Mark 10:42-45) calls leaders to use authority for service, protection and the building up of others rather than control or exclusion.

## 3. SCOPE

3.1. This policy applies to all members, pastors, elders, staff, volunteers, contractors and any person participating in CRCA activities, events and services.

3.2. This policy applies to engagement with children, young people, adults at risk, families, members, personnel and other relevant stakeholders as participants in their own right. Engagement is conducted in a way that is age-appropriate, accessible, culturally safe and suited to the person or community being engaged.

3.3. This policy is to be read with the National Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct, Complaints Handling Policy, Whistleblower Policy, Privacy Policy, Information Sharing and Record Keeping Policy, Internet Usage Policy, Social Media Policy, Learning and Development Policy and Continuous Quality Improvement Policy.

## 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.** **Engagement** means a deliberate process by which the CRCA seeks, hears, considers and responds to the views, experiences and needs of children, young people, adults at risk, families, carers and local church communities.

**5.3.** **Participation** means meaningful involvement in a decision, activity, review or feedback process, appropriate to a person's age, capacity, communication needs, culture, circumstances and safety.

**5.4.** **Child-friendly communication** means communication that is age-appropriate, clear, respectful, safe, accessible and understandable to children and young people.

**5.5.** **Informed participation** means participation supported by enough information for the person to understand the purpose, limits, possible use of information, available support and any confidentiality or reporting limits.

**5.6.** **Accessibility** means reducing practical, communication, language, disability, cultural, technological, relational or other barriers that may prevent a person from raising concerns, giving feedback or participating safely.

**5.7.** **Feedback** means information, comment, concern, suggestion or experience provided by a person or group about safeguarding practice, policy, culture or implementation.

**5.8.** **Cultural safety** means engagement that recognises culture, language, family, community, identity and lived experience, and avoids practices that silence, shame, exclude or marginalise a person or group.

## 6. POLICY

6.1. The CRCA commits to fostering an environment where every person can constructively engage in church matters, particularly where decisions or practices affect safety, well-being, participation, safeguarding or access to church activities. This is realised through:

6.1.1. **Consultation and collaboration:** the CRCA encourages active participation from members and relevant stakeholders in key decision-making processes, with particular attention to safeguarding, pastoral care, inclusion, theological considerations and the needs of children, adults at risk and people whose voices may otherwise be overlooked.

6.1.2. **Open communication:** the CRCA supports timely, clear, respectful and accessible exchange of information and feedback across the church community.

6.1.3. **Feedback mechanisms:** the CRCA establishes appropriate avenues for receiving, considering and responding to feedback, concerns and suggestions in order to strengthen safeguarding practice and continuous improvement.

6.1.4. **Active participation:** the CRCA seeks to ensure that people are informed, equipped and supported to participate meaningfully in church matters that affect them.

6.1.5. **Rights-based and age-appropriate engagement:** children, young people and adults at risk have the right to be informed about safety, to be heard, to participate in decisions that affect them, and to use accessible complaint and feedback pathways.

6.1.6. **Cultural safety and accessibility:** engagement methods are designed to be culturally safe and accessible, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disability, neurodiverse people and people for whom English is not a first language.

6.1.7. **No retaliation:** a person who gives feedback, raises a concern or participates in engagement in good faith must not be subject to retaliation, victimisation or adverse treatment. Where a concern amounts to a complaint, disclosure or reportable matter, the relevant safeguarding pathway applies.

## 7. PROCEDURES

7.1. **Consultation and Collaboration Procedures:**

7.1.1. Consultation and collaboration are foundational to the CRCA's safeguarding culture. Local churches are encouraged to include diverse voices in engagement processes so that decisions reflect the wisdom, needs and lived experience of the church community.

7.1.2. **Engagement forums:** local churches may organise open forums for members and relevant stakeholders to discuss church matters, including theological perspectives, safeguarding practices, community initiatives and issues affecting safety, participation and belonging. Where matters affect children or young people, age-appropriate engagement methods are used.

7.1.3. **Specialised groups:** local churches may form or use existing groups to address areas such as theology, safeguarding, youth, disability, cultural safety, community outreach and participation. Where possible, these groups include people with relevant lived experience and appropriate representation.

7.1.4. **Collaborative decision making:** for significant matters, local churches may use surveys, focus groups, consultation meetings, interviews or other engagement tools to gather broader perspectives before decisions are finalised. Tools used with children, young people or adults at risk must be age-appropriate, accessible and safe.

7.2. Open Communication Procedures

7.2.1. Open communication deepens trust and understanding within the CRCA. Communication should be clear, timely, respectful and accessible, and should support two-way engagement rather than one-way information sharing only.

7.2.2. **Communication channels:** local churches may use newsletters, church websites, official social media accounts, community meetings, information sessions and other suitable channels to share information. Online engagement involving children or young people must be consistent with the Internet Usage Policy, Social Media Policy and Code of Conduct.

7.2.3. **Feedback loop:** communications should provide a way for people to ask questions, seek clarification, provide feedback or raise concerns. Feedback must be received respectfully and directed to the appropriate pathway where safeguarding concerns arise.

7.2.4. **Transparency:** where appropriate, key decisions, reasons and actions should be communicated in a way that promotes trust, protects confidentiality and avoids compromising safeguarding, privacy, complaints, disciplinary or statutory processes.

7.3. Feedback Mechanisms Procedures

7.3.1. Feedback is central to the CRCA's continuous improvement. Feedback pathways should be accessible, safe and clear, and must not replace formal complaint, disclosure or reporting pathways where those pathways are required.

7.3.2. **Feedback options:** local churches may provide physical, digital, named and anonymous feedback options where suitable. Feedback options must be accessible to children, adults at risk and people with communication, language or disability-related needs.

7.3.3. **Response and review:** feedback should be acknowledged and considered. Where feedback identifies a safeguarding concern, complaint, risk, harm or disclosure, it must be referred through the relevant CRCA safeguarding pathway, including to the Safe Church Representative, Safe Church Unit or another appropriate pathway where required.

7.3.4. **Feedback review:** local churches are encouraged to review feedback trends, identify improvement opportunities and report relevant safeguarding themes through the appropriate safeguarding and governance pathways.

7.4. Active Participation Procedures

7.4.1. Active participation strengthens the church community and supports safer practice. People need access to clear information, suitable engagement opportunities and practical resources in order to participate meaningfully.

7.4.2. **Information sessions:** local churches may hold information sessions on important church, safeguarding and community matters so that members and relevant stakeholders can understand issues, ask questions and provide input.

7.4.3. **Engagement workshops:** local churches may organise workshops on effective engagement, respectful communication, conflict resolution, safeguarding responsibilities and CRCA's theological and safeguarding commitments.

7.4.4. **Resource availability:** church doctrines, safeguarding practices, engagement guidelines and relevant policy information should be available in accessible formats through digital and physical means where reasonably practicable. Accessible formats may include plain-English material, easy-read summaries, translated information where reasonably practicable, support persons or interpreters on request.

7.4.5. **Cultural safety and accessibility:** local churches should consider cultural safety and accessibility when planning engagement, particularly where matters affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disability, neurodiverse people, children, young people and adults at risk.

## 8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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

8.2. **Session / Church Council:** The Session / Church Council is responsible for communicating this policy to local stakeholders and ensuring that engagement practices are appropriately supported within the local church. This includes allocating reasonable resources for consultation, participation, accessible communication and engagement with children, adults at risk, families, personnel, members and other relevant stakeholders.

8.3. **Safe Church Representative:** The Safe Church Representative supports local engagement by assisting the Session / Church Council to facilitate consultation, communication and collaboration on safeguarding matters. This includes helping people understand local safeguarding pathways, supporting accessible participation where appropriate, and assisting with referral of safeguarding concerns through the relevant CRCA pathways.

8.4. **Safe Church Administrator:** The Safe Church Administrator supports the administrative, coordination, training and records-management functions that enable consistent engagement practice across the CRCA safeguarding system. This includes maintaining approved engagement templates, accessible-format resources, training records, consultation tools, registers and other safeguarding documentation required to support engagement. The Safe Church Administrator supports local churches, Safe Church Representatives, the Safe Church Unit and the Safe Church Advisory Committee by ensuring that engagement materials, forms, communication resources and records are available, current and appropriately managed.

8.5. **Safe Church Unit:** The Safe Church Unit provides safeguarding response advice, triage assistance and escalation support where engagement raises a safeguarding concern, complaint, disclosure, risk of harm, statutory reporting issue, Reportable Conduct Scheme matter, Police matter or other issue requiring safeguarding response. The Safe Church Unit may support local churches and Safe Church Representatives by providing advice on safeguarding pathways and response options. It does not replace the Session / Church Council's responsibility for local engagement or local governance.

8.6. **Safe Church Advisory Committee:** The Safe Church Advisory Committee oversees engagement effectiveness through the Continuous Quality Improvement Policy. This includes considering engagement trends, high-risk or systemic issues, policy effectiveness, feedback from local churches

and stakeholders, and opportunities to improve participation, accessibility and safeguarding responsiveness.

8.7. **Members:** Members uphold the principles of this policy by engaging constructively, respectfully and in good faith. Members are encouraged to raise concerns, provide feedback, participate in consultation where appropriate and support engagement that is inclusive, accessible and attentive to the safety and dignity of all people.

## 9. BREACHES

9.1. A breach of this policy, including suppression of voice, retaliation against feedback, misuse of engagement processes or failure to refer safeguarding concerns through the appropriate pathway, is dealt with under the Disciplinary and Breach Response Policy. Where a matter amounts to a complaint, disclosure, whistleblower disclosure, statutory reporting matter or other safeguarding concern, the relevant CRCA safeguarding pathway applies.

## 10. RELATED POLICIES

10.1. National Safeguarding Policy. Code of Conduct. Whistleblower Policy. Complaints Handling Policy. Disciplinary and Breach Response Policy. Learning and Development Policy. Internet Usage Policy. Social Media Policy. Privacy Policy. Information Sharing and Record Keeping Policy. Continuous Quality Improvement Policy.

## 11. MONITORING AND REVIEW

11.1. 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.

External framework reference: National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

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