

## **1. Why do we need a Code of Conduct?**

A Code of Conduct serves both ministry leaders and congregations by clearly identifying expectations for Christlike behavior. It allows churches to be proactive in educating staff and volunteers about expectations rather than reactive when unspoken expectations are not met. Additionally, a Code of Conduct, when implemented well, helps to shape the culture of a congregation, particularly with respect to how people are treated, fostering a culture in our churches where the value of every person is protected and where everyone is free to worship God and grow in faith free from harm.

## **2. But we have the Bible and the confessions. Why do we also need a Code of Conduct?**

The Bible is our guide for faith and life. The confessions are systematic summaries and interpretations of the Bible around which we are united as a denomination and which we confess to be faithful and true to the teachings of Scripture. The Code of Conduct is a document that outlines, in a succinct and accessible way, what the teachings of Scripture mean for specific aspects of ministry leadership today. As such, it establishes standards of behavior and practices in addressing contemporary realities related to mandatory reporting, interpersonal relationships, confidentiality, financial integrity, and pastoral leadership in one short document. One way to think of it is as a summary of Christian standards for contemporary ministry leadership. It clarifies for ministry leaders what is required for healthy and safe ministry, and it communicates to parishioners what they can expect from a pastor or from ministry staff in the practice of ministry.

## **3. Haven't ministry leaders already shown themselves to be people of character and integrity? Why do they need a Code of Conduct?**

Ministry leaders have a significant amount of authority and emotional and spiritual influence over the people who participate in the ministries of the church. People extend a great deal of trust to ministry leaders, inviting them into their lives at times and on occasions of significant vulnerability—birth, death, sickness, times of fear, doubt, joy, and suffering. It is a rare privilege to come alongside and support someone in their faith journey, being the presence of Christ to them. But the stewardship of such power is a great responsibility—responsibility to use this power in ways that lead to the shalom and flourishing of others.

Typically, ministry leaders are mature Christians who exemplify good character and integrity, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Still, like all human beings, they are prone to sin, and they make mistakes. Stress, anxiety, burnout, and disappointment may lead them to act out of their worst selves rather than their life in Christ. As a result, they may fail at times to use their authority in a way that is good and instead use it in a way that brings about harm. When ministry leaders use their authority and influence in ways that bring harm, the whole congregation and the integrity of the church's witness to the gospel are affected. For this reason, it is crucial that the church put in place tools and measures of accountability that help ministry leaders use their authority and influence responsibly in order to build up the people to whom they are ministering. The Code of Conduct is one such tool.

#### **4. Who is a ministry leader?**

- All officebearers (ordained ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, and deacons).
- All CRCNA staff members and members of the Council of Delegates.
- Local church councils are also encouraged to require assent to the Code of Conduct by all church staff (whether or not they are ordained) and volunteers who are providing leadership in the church.

#### **5. Who oversees the implementation of the Code of Conduct?**

The implementation of the Code of Conduct is the responsibility of the local council that holds the membership or credentials of the ministry leader. A classis has responsibility to implement the Code of Conduct for its ministry leaders and employees. For CRCNA staff members, this oversight is shared with the Human Resource departments for denominational staff.

#### **6. How is the Code of Conduct enforced?**

The assembly that implements the Code of Conduct is also responsible for determining how to enforce the Code of Conduct and the ramifications for people who violate it based on the gravity of the offense and the harm done. For instance, a one-time minor offense may be made right through a heartfelt apology and acknowledgment of wrongdoing to the person or people who have been harmed. A pattern of behavior that brings harm to others may be addressed by calling the offender to repentance, establishing a plan to make amends for the harm done, requiring the offender to take “The Power to Do Good” course offered through Safe Church or other training, requiring the offender to attend counseling, and establishing greater measures of accountability for the offender. Should it be determined that the violation of the Code of Conduct rises to the level of ungodly behavior, ordained ministry staff will be subject to special discipline as outlined in Church Order Article 83, and unordained staff or volunteers who are members of a church may be subject to general discipline per Church Order Article 81. Should the violation of the Code of Conduct include a criminal act, the council will report the incident to law enforcement.

#### **7. Who defines what constitutes an abuse of power or a violation of the Code of Conduct?**

Discerning the gravity of a violation is dependent on assessing the harm done. While ordinarily it is up to the local council to enforce the Code of Conduct and determine consequences for violation, Safe Church coordinators, denominational Safe Church staff, and the Dignity Team are available for consultation and advice. If in doubt, councils are encouraged to email [safechurchministry@crcna.org](mailto:safechurchministry@crcna.org).

## **8. How do we prevent the Code of Conduct from being weaponized against people?**

Key to cultivating a culture of dignity and respect in the church is creating safe and receptive avenues for reporting abuse or misconduct. Those who have been harmed need to be heard and cared for by the church. This posture, however, does not assume the guilt of the accused. Allegations of violations should be examined and assessed through a fair process. The local church council is responsible for deciding the best way to follow up on the allegations (see “Guidelines to Handling Abuse Allegations against a Church Leader” at [crcna.org/SafeChurch/abuse-response](http://crcna.org/SafeChurch/abuse-response)). Denominational Safe Church staff are available to provide counsel and support.

## **9. How will we make modifications to the Code of Conduct? Will this need to be approved by synod?**

Because approval by synod is required for modifications to the Church Order, modifications to the Code of Conduct would need to come before synod if the Code of Conduct is incorporated into the Supplement for Church Order Article 5-b.

## **10. How does the Code of Conduct relate to other documents, policies, and practices?**

- While the Covenant for Officebearers identifies our shared beliefs, the Code of Conduct is an invitation for ministry leaders to covenant around a shared standard of behavior. These two documents address different aspects of Christian discipleship.
- Some churches may choose to incorporate the Code of Conduct into their Safe Church policies so that it becomes part of the annual training for all church staff and volunteers.
- Furthermore, the Code of Conduct can be a helpful educational and self-assessment tool for councils in the practice of mutual censure.

## **11. Will the church be more liable for allegations of misconduct if it adopts a Code of Conduct?**

The church is already legally responsible for providing a reasonable standard of safety, care, and commitment to the well-being of the people who participate in its ministry while they are involved in ministry programs and events. The church’s legal liability increases when it fails to attend to its fiduciary duty of care, regardless of whether the church implements a Code of Conduct. The implementation of a Code of Conduct does not make the church more liable. Instead, it helps ministry leaders take greater heed of their legal responsibility toward those involved in the church’s ministry.

## **12. How can the Code of Conduct be used effectively in annual reviews of ministry staff?**

**Suggested questions for annual review**

*Questions related to the employee's use of power*

1. How are you stewarding the trust and authority that have been given to you in your work?
2. What are some of the key ways that you have been able to use your position, authority, and influence to build others up over the past year?
3. In what ways might you need to grow in how you fulfill your commitment to elements of the Code of Conduct? How might we help you to do that?

*Questions related to the employee's experience of the power of those in supervision*

1. In what ways are you experiencing your supervisor(s) as being faithful in the ways they steward trust and authority over you?
2. In what ways have you experienced the positions, authority, and influence of those who supervise your work in ways that have helped you to flourish?
3. Are there any ways in which you have felt marginalized or mistreated by those who supervise you? Please describe.
4. In what ways might we need to grow in how we fulfill our commitment to elements of the Code of Conduct? How might you help us to do that?