

**SRYG (Rock of Life & Unity CRC)  
SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

August 2019

## Preface and Statement of Purpose

SRYG (Solid Rock Youth Group) recognizes that we live in a fallen world. Abuse of children, vulnerable adults and others is, sadly, a part of that fallen world. SRYG, in concert with Rock of Life CRC and Unity CRC, has adopted the following policies and procedures in an effort to prevent abuse and to guide leadership in addressing any reports of abuse that may occur despite the preventive efforts.

In this, SRYG strives to establish a responsible Christ-like approach to a difficult reality of our times.

## Policy and Procedures

### 1) **Definitions:**

- a) **Abuse** – The physical or emotional injury of a person by any parent or any other person who has permanent or temporary care, custody or responsibility for supervision of a child or person, or by any household or family member, under circumstances that indicate that the child or person’s health or welfare is significantly harmed or at risk of being significantly harmed; or sexual abuse of a child or person, whether physical injuries are sustained or not. Any sexual contact between a person in a supervisory role and another person is abuse, even if the victim gives consent.
  - i) For purposes of this policy “Abuse” would also include unwelcome touch, activity or verbal or non-verbal interaction of a sexual nature between or among church leaders, volunteers and between or among such leaders or volunteers and the person(s) under their care or supervision.
- b) **Accused** – A person against whom an allegation of abuse has been made.
- c) **Child** – Anyone under the age of 18 years. As used in this Policy “Child” shall include Vulnerable Adults (as defined below) in appropriate context.
- d) **Employee** - Any paid staff member.
- e) **Perpetrator** - A person who commits an act of abuse.
- f) **Policy** - A rule that describes or structures the proper working behavior of a church staff member or volunteer.
- g) **Pastoral Staff** . Pastoral Staff includes the Pastor, assistant pastor(s), if any and youth pastor(s).
- h) **Reporter** - One who reports the suspected incident.

- i) **Vulnerable Adult** - Any adult over the age of 18 years who is physically and/or mentally disabled and participates in a situation where he/she could be taken advantage of physically or sexually.
- j) **Volunteer** - A non-paid person whose activities include, but are not limited to, teaching, supervising, or assisting children and youth in programs and activities.
- k) **Leadership** – Any person in authority such as pastors, elders, deacons, teachers, youth leaders, child care volunteers and others.
- l) **Safe Church Team**- the Safe Church Team (“SCT”) shall be comprised of the ROL Executive Committee and Unity Admin Team such persons as the committee may from time to time designate in writing.
- m) **Lobby Monitor/Hall Monitor** – A person from ROL/Unity Council or the SCT, or their designees, that will make rounds of the church building on Sunday mornings when nursery, children and youth ministry is in session.

## 2) Child Care Supervision Guidelines

- a) At least two adults (preferably not family members), or one adult and 1 youth, will be assigned for each childcare event including nursery and Children’s Church.
- b) Children will be released from nursery only to a parent, guardian, older sibling, or an adult designated by the parent or guardian.
- c) A Lobby Monitor/Hall Monitor from Council or the SCT will be present on Sundays to periodically check all rooms in the church.
- d) All volunteers must read and sign the Code of Ethics and the Volunteer Safe Church Awareness agreement.
- e) Volunteers shall not ordinarily, without the permission of parents, participate in any meeting or activity on ROL/Unity grounds or otherwise except in compliance with II(A) above.

## 3) Employee Screening Procedures

- a) All applicants for paid positions involving more than 16 hours of work per month must submit a resume, which will be carefully reviewed. Qualified applicants will receive a copy of the Safe Church Policy, an Employee Application Form and the Code of Ethics and Employee Safe Church Awareness agreement.
- b) The church Council, or its representative(s), will schedule and conduct interviews with all applicants who are selected for the interview process.

- c) The interview will include a discussion of the Safe Church Policy to ensure that the applicant has an understanding of the information.
- d) The Council, SCT or office administrator or other designees shall contact references for each applicant using the Employee Reference Questionnaire.
- e) The office administrator shall file all forms.
- f) The Council or SCT shall obtain a criminal background check on the applicant of choice. This shall not occur until after an initial interview or after a conditional offer of employment has been made.

#### **4) Employee Hiring Procedure**

- a) When all references have been checked and the background check completed, the applicant of choice will be notified.
- b) All newly hired employees will be informed that any and all accusations of abuse will be taken seriously and investigated by the proper authorities, both within and outside the church.
- c) Program Supervision Guidelines contained in this policy will be reviewed with the new employee.

#### **5) Volunteer Selection Guidelines**

- a) Prior to consideration for volunteering, the applicant should be an active worshipping participant of the ROL, Unity, or other area congregation.
- b) A copy of the Safe Church Policy will be shared with all prospective volunteers and the Volunteer Safe Church Awareness agreement read, signed and dated.
- c) The Code of Ethics agreement will be read, signed, and dated by program Volunteers.
- d) Other adult volunteers will also follow the Safe Church Policy and sign the Code of Ethics and Safe Church Awareness agreements. Designated leaders can collect the form signatures.
- e) SRYG Youth Council reserves the right to decline a request to volunteer.

#### **6) Employee and Volunteer Safeguards**

- a) All information gathered on applications, interviews and through references will remain confidential to the fullest extent possible. Information will be destroyed after use or stored in a closed file cabinet located in the church office.

- b) Any suspected charges of abuse will be shared only with the proper authorities, legal counsel and the Safe Church Team and such persons with whom the information must be shared in the course of prudent investigation of a report.
- c) The reporter's identity will be kept in strict confidence by the SRYG Director and Safe Church Team members to the fullest extent possible.

## **7) Education Opportunities**

- a) SRYG is dedicated to the educational process concerning abuse awareness and will provide the following:
- b) Copies of this Safe Church Policy will be readily available to everyone associated with SRYG.
- c) Reminders of the Safe Church Policy will be made in the fall when children and youth programs begin. At this time all new teachers and volunteers will be asked to sign the Code of Ethics and Safe Church Awareness agreements. Heads of programs shall also make efforts reasonable under the circumstances to inform volunteers or teachers who become involved "mid-stream" (i.e. after seasonal kick off) of the Safe Church Policy.
- d) The SCT will attempt to arrange for Safe Church Awareness Training for all employees and volunteers at suitable intervals through Classical resources or other means.

## **8) Employees and Volunteers Reporting Child Abuse**

- a) If a volunteer is aware that a child or young person that they are ministering to is being abused, it must be reported to the Safe Church Team. We have a responsibility to contact the Kandiyohi County Family Services if we know that a child or young person has been or is being subjected to abuse. Every precaution must be taken to avoid both cover-ups of abuse and unfounded accusations. Volunteers are to seek the assistance of a member of the Pastoral Staff or of the Safe Church Team if they suspect abuse but are less than certain about it or if they desire assistance in this emotionally difficult task.
- b) We ask that an oral report(s) to the authorities be made as soon as possible and that a written report be made to the local department within forty-eight hours.
- c) Unless the volunteer suspects that abuse has occurred on church property or during a church sponsored activity, it is not mandatory to report their concerns to anyone within the church's congregation. However, consultation with a Pastoral Staff member, a Safe Church Team member, or some other independent licensed professional is strongly encouraged to ensure that the proper steps have been taken and that the matter has been handled properly.

- d) If a volunteer suspects that abuse has occurred on church property or during a church sponsored activity, it is mandatory that they also contact a member of the Pastoral Staff, an elder, or any member of the Safe Church Team. Because of the highly sensitive nature of the allegations of abuse, we ask that volunteers cooperate fully with the investigation by the authorities. They must not discuss their suspicions with others within the church except as provided for in this policy.
- e) We strongly encourage anyone who has a concern about whether his or her own actions may be inappropriate or abusive to seek pastoral counsel. Clergy/laity confidentiality is assumed but the pastor has the discretion to report concerns to authorities if life or health issues are at stake.
- f) Any person who, in good faith, makes or participates in making a report regarding another person's abuse or neglect or participates in an investigation or a resulting judicial proceeding is entitled to such immunity from civil liability as may exist under Minnesota law.

## **9) Responding to Allegations of Abuse**

- a) SRYG recognizes that all allegations of abuse must be taken seriously. At the same time, we are aware that situations must be handled forthrightly, with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.
- b) When SRYG, or connected churches, is notified by Kandiyohi County Family Services or local law enforcement officials that they have received a report of abuse by an SRYG staff member or volunteer in the course of their sponsored or sanctioned ministry, the following steps will be taken:
  - i) The Council (ROL or Unity) will contact the insurance carrier immediately and request that the carrier make a determination whether it will provide legal representation. If no legal representation is provided, a determination must be made by the Church Council whether to obtain the services of an attorney on behalf of the congregation.
  - ii) Full cooperation will be given to the state and local authorities. In-depth investigation should be left to professionals who are familiar with such cases.
  - iii) ROL/Unity Council will consult the investigating authorities about whether any other persons within the church, such as parents of the children, should be notified of the allegations of the abuse.
  - iv) If appropriate, ROL/Unity Council will contact classical and denominational officials and seek their assistance. During the course of the investigation and after the allegations have been resolved, ROL/Unity Council may bring in professional assistance to help the congregation address any lingering effects of the incident.

- v) ROL/Unity Council will offer pastoral support and counseling if the parents or the victim desire that assistance. ROL/Unity is committed to do all that is in its power to foster wholeness and healing from the abuse.
  - vi) The accused person will be treated with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, he/she will be relieved immediately of all duties until the authorities have completed the investigation. If the person is a paid employee, he/she will be placed on administrative leave until the allegations are resolved.
  - vii) If the allegations turn out to be unfounded, ROL/Unity stands ready to do all that is in its power to restore the reputation and dignity of the accused and his/her family. If the allegations are found to be true, ROL/Unity will offer help as may be appropriate to the perpetrator and his/her family if they seek restoration and healing.
- c) Contacts with the media will only be made by such person or persons as may be designated as the spokesperson for the church on the matter. If appropriate, a spokesperson will be selected by ROL/Unity Council and will handle all contacts with the media and the congregation concerning the matter in a discrete, informed and diplomatic way. The designated spokesperson will also be responsible for preparing and releasing a statement as necessary or appropriate which includes the information that ROL and Unity has a Safe Church Policy in place and takes every reasonable precaution to prevent any abuse from occurring. In light of the sensitive and serious nature of any allegations of abuse, all media contacts will be referred to the designated spokesperson.
- i) ROL/Unity members or attendees, staff and volunteers shall not comment or discuss any allegations on Facebook or any other social media.
  - ii) The SCT will document all the steps that are taken in response to the incident. A written record will be prepared promptly recording the date, times, participants and content of any meetings, discussions and telephone contacts concerning the investigation.
- d) Any employee or volunteer in the church will inform the SCT as soon as any allegation is made against them pertaining to physical or sexual abuse. When the issue is resolved, the individual will supply a copy of the letter from the appropriate agency stating the findings of their investigation. Upon receipt of the letter, the SCT with assistance from the ROL/Unity Council will decide whether that individual will resume working with children or youth in the church.
- e) Anyone currently under investigation for abuse will immediately be suspended from directly working with children or youth until the issue is resolved.

**10) Suggestions For Ministerial Personnel: Pastors, Elders, Deacons, Youth Leaders, Other Paid Staff**

- a) All pastoral personnel should exercise good and cautious judgment when visiting alone with anyone.
- b) *All (Pastors, Elders, Deacons, Youth Leaders, Other Paid Staff) will be encouraged to attend an in-service every 3 years to review ROL's/Unity's policies regarding safety and abuse prevention.*
- c) It is wise to use public places such as restaurants for meeting places.
- d) Be cautious with touch. Limit the display of physical affection to a brief hug or a pat on the back or forearm. Avoid misinterpretation of affection by choosing not to give gifts to counselees or parishioners.
- e) Consider requesting another person to accompany you on visits.
- f) Meet with a minor child or adolescent once or twice and thereafter only with the consent and knowledge of the minor's parent or guardian. Avoid transporting a minor alone, except with written permission.
- g) Be accountable to a colleague, spouse, or peer to ensure that you are maintaining proper boundaries in your interpersonal relationships. Openly discuss the threats to those boundaries with a colleague, spouse, or peer.
- h) Give adequate attention to your spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. Maintain a healthy attitude toward your ministry. Be alert to the dangers of negative attitudes in ministry and the potential for temptation and self-destructive behavior. Listen earnestly to the feedback and counsel of others who supervise you or to whom you report when they express concern about your behaviors or attitudes.
- i) Be careful and honest with the expression of your sexuality and its needs. Discuss those needs in a discreet manner.
- j) *Pastoral Staff will keep a log of visits in a confidential, password protected computer file. On a regular basis the total number and types of visits are reported to the Council Administrative Team.*
- k) Meetings in the pastor's office should ordinarily be during office hours when others are present in the building. When this is not feasible the office administrator or person on the Executive Committee should be informed by phone prior to the meeting. Pastoral offices should have transparent glass in the window.



## **11) Implementation**

- a) The SRYG Safe Church Policy is subject to revision by the Council of ROL/Unity CRC in consultation with the SCT at any time, provided such changes are fully disclosed to the ROL/Unity congregation.
- b) The Safe Church Policy will be made available from the office upon request.
- c) The Safe Church Policy will be made available through the SRYG website.

## **12) Closing**

- a) It is the sincere desire of SRYG that no abuse ever occurs at or in connection with the ministry. The guidelines and procedures set forth in this policy are intended to help the church both prevent abuse and respond to it in an authentically Christ-like manner.