



**Uniting Church in Australia**  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA



**Creating a safe environment for  
children and vulnerable adults in  
our Church: Policy and intervention  
for Persons of Concern**



**Culture of Safety**

<http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>



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The Church strives to be a safe place for all people and, in light of community expectations that have resulted in the national Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Synod Standing Committee has adopted a range of Safe Church policies.

These provide a framework for the Church to uphold its duty of care to those who participate in all aspects of its life, so it remains a safe and open community.

One of these is the *Policy and intervention for Persons of Concern*, which deals with managing the risk posed by a known sex offender in a congregation. This policy has not been widely distributed, as it requires extra care with its implementation due to the sensitive nature of the issue. It was created in the same spirit as the *Creating a safe environment for children and vulnerable adults* policy, so there is crossover between them.

The full policy document is available on request from Josh Woollett, the Safe Church Educator.

## Who is a Person of Concern (POC)?

This is anyone who has been convicted of, has pending charges relating to, or has been imprisoned due to sexual offences and wishes to be involved with the life of a congregation or faith community in the Synod. The definition also includes a person about whom there are reasonable concerns they may be behaving or have behaved in a sexually abusive or inappropriate manner.

## How does the policy work?

The intention of the policy is to include the POC in the conversation about how the Synod, Presbytery and Church Council can work together, placing clear boundaries and expectations on their participation. This manages the risk their presence poses to children and vulnerable adults.

This process may result in a Safety Agreement, which outlines the way the POC may participate. It nominates specific people who are willing and able to act as monitors of the agreement.

A Safety Agreement is not a substitute for criminal proceedings or a tool to conceal inappropriate behaviour. Nor is it intended to exclude the POC from the life of the congregation. It works with them, taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the invitation for all people to encounter Christ's call to love and forgiveness can be offered with integrity.

This framework is consistent with the current practice and expectations of our ecumenical partners in the National Council of Churches in Australia's Safe Church Training Agreement.

## What is a Safety Agreement?

This is an arrangement establishing the terms and conditions for a POC's participation in the life of the congregation. Under the terms of a Safety Agreement, a POC is unable to take ANY leadership role in the congregation or wider Church. Signatories to the agreement are the POC, Presbytery Minister and the Synod General Secretary, with the support of the Minister, or the Chairperson of the Church Council if there is no Minister in Placement.

## Who can form a Safety Agreement?

Reaching agreement occurs after consultations between the relevant parties, ensuring the Church's conditions are met and adhered to for the long term. It is the responsibility of the Presbytery Minister and General Secretary to enter into a Safety Agreement. If the Presbytery is either unwilling or unable to negotiate the conditions of the agreement, or if there is a conflict of interest, then the General Secretary may act on behalf of the Presbytery and congregation.

## What is a Monitor and what do they do?

This is someone tasked with ensuring compliance with the conditions of the Safety Agreement. People who serve in this role need to be able to exercise compassion without losing the gravity of purpose.

Characteristics of a potential Monitor would include:

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- **Ability to prioritise**

Someone who supports compliance of the agreement's conditions, taking into account the need to prioritise the interests of the Church community over any relationship with the POC

- **Assertiveness, resilience and alertness to actual and potential boundary violations**

Someone with a level of mental and physical agility confident enough to report any breaches, since a POC may attempt to test the boundaries of the agreement

- **Ability to report the facts without judgment**

Someone who neither minimises nor exaggerates the seriousness of the POC's offence, and who respects the need for an agreement

- **Commitment to participating in the life of the congregation**

Someone who regularly attends Church services and is involved in the Ministry or activity where the POC has expressed an interest in participating

- **Commitment**

Someone willing to be accountable to the Church Council about their performance in the role

- **Confidentiality**

Someone who realises the magnitude of the role and who is able to maintain strict and appropriate confidentiality

- **Ability to maintain appropriate boundaries**

Someone who understands that their role is not to befriend the POC, nor to offer pastoral care

- **Realistic expectations**

Someone who is committed to the demands of the role as a medium-to-long-term undertaking

## We acknowledge:

- There are survivors of abuse in congregations and we seek to care for them effectively
- The high level of community concern about sexual abuse
- The duty of care to provide a safe environment for all people in our Synod
- That there is no 'typical POC,' and so we require an individually tailored Safety Agreement rather than a generic one
- The issues of forgiveness and the POC's right to privacy
- The risk management and liability issues around a POC's reoffending
- The need for denominational support, training, monitoring and oversight in this process

## Is this a Christian response?

A Christian congregation can be one of the few places where a POC, as a recipient of God's love and grace, can find a place of welcome.

However, participation in the life of a congregation is not a guarantee against recidivism. A Safety Agreement offers clear expectations and firm boundaries with transparency and accountability. It is a way of including the POC in the life of the congregation while maintaining the Synod's commitment to providing a safe place for everyone to grow in their discipleship of Jesus, and in their relationships with one another.

## More information

For advice and requests for the full policy, please contact: Josh Woollett, Safe Church Educator  
(03) 9340 8810 or [josh.woollett@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:josh.woollett@victas.uca.org.au)

It works in conjunction with the *Creating a safe environment for children and vulnerable adults* policy, available from <http://victas.uca.org.au/culture-of-safety>