



Persons of Concern Policy

Adopted by Southern Illawarra Church of Christ Board on 20.8.2022.

Southern Illawarra Church of Christ (SICoC) is committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people, particularly within the Church community.

Whilst SICoC affirms the unconditional saving grace of God in Christ Jesus, the Person of Concern (POC) Policy recognises that forgiveness is not unconditional. God's forgiveness comes with the need for repentance and the need to not forget past destructive behaviour. The POC Policy places conditions to restrict the person of concern's behaviours so that they might more safely be part of the community of faith. Interpersonal forgiveness comes with the willingness to be transformed, through the Power of the Holy Spirit.

Scope

This process describes the unique aspects involved in providing safe ministry to Persons of Concern and the establishment of Safety Agreements, including where appropriate support (e.g. monitoring persons / accountability groups).

A Person of Concern ('POC') is:

- a person who has pleaded guilty to, has been convicted of, or has admitted to having committed, a sexual criminal offence; or
- a person who is currently charged with a sexual criminal offence; or
- a person who is currently under investigation for sexual abuse; or
- a person who has been the subject of a prior allegation of sexual abuse which has not been appropriately investigated; or
- a person who has been disciplined as a pastor (credential holder) or a church worker within the Church because of sexual misconduct, or who has been refused ordination, employment or appointment in the Church because of an adverse risk assessment arising from sexual misconduct; or
- a person who has been disciplined by another organisation for sexual misconduct; or
- a church worker against whom allegations of sexual misconduct are currently being dealt with under Church disciplinary procedures; or
- a person who is receiving, or has received, treatment for disordered sexual behaviour; or

- a person who is considered to be a risk to the safety of children and/or vulnerable adults because of an adverse risk assessment relating to sexual misconduct; or
- a person who has exhibited persistent sexual boundary wandering; or
- a person who is deemed to be a risk in terms of physical or emotional harm to the church community.

Note: Sexual Abuse for the purposes of this document is defined as: any assault or abuse of a sexual nature, any type of molestation, indecent exposure, sexual harassment or intimidation, whether such act is the subject of criminal investigation or not.

Committed to Safe Ministry in our Church.

We are committed to life-giving ministry that is free from abuse and harm. We understand that we have pastoral, duty of care, legal and insurance obligations. Our goal is that all our ministries are spiritually, emotionally and physically safe.

We acknowledge that from time to time a situation may arise where a person of concern has been worshipping and been involved, or wishes to worship and be involved, in our church.

Working towards a permanent individual Safety Agreement is one method of addressing the pastoral, organisation, duty of care and other safety issues that arise where there is a person of concern who is or wishes to attend services and activities at our church.

Prior to working towards any formal Safety Agreement, the Church Leadership Board and the person of concern must acknowledge:

- The Church Leadership Board has the common law duty of care for the safety of all people involved at church, including Work Health and Safety legislation which necessitates safe physical and emotional work places for workers and persons on site;
- Church Leadership Board and pastors share the responsibility of duty of care, i.e. to provide safe environments for all people in the church;
- that there is no one type of Person of Concern, therefore we will use individual Safety Agreements;
- that there is a high level of community feeling and fear about sexual abuse;
- that there are survivors of abuse in congregations, and we seek to care for them effectively;
- the issues of forgiveness and a Person of Concern's right to privacy;
- the personal responsibility the Person of Concern will need to continue to take that this is a permanent arrangement, the need for annual renewal and review;

- this process does not indemnify the church if a known sexual offender were to reoffend in the church (against a person at church) and a resulting legal suit took place;
- and the need for support, training, establishment, and oversight in this process.

This approach to ministry with person of concerns has as its heart the church's mission and commitment to provide a safe place for all people, including children, to grow and shine. At the same time, Christian communities can be one of the few places where past abusers (sexual and violent) can be the recipients of God's forgiveness.

We acknowledge, that forgiveness does not mean immunity from temptation to reoffend or the removal of all barriers to the exercise of ministry. The forgiveness and grace of God, mediated with supervision and clear guidelines through a local church, can be a vital part of a healing journey. It must be acknowledged that a Safety Agreement is not a form of punishment or judgement upon the person of concern. Instead, a Safety Agreement should be viewed as a strategy to help keep the person of concern above reproach and directed away from temptation.

A person of concern, or the church goers may not appreciate that the person may pose a risk to the safety of children and vulnerable adults. While demonstrating genuine compassion and justice, we must take steps to protect all people at church from the risk of harm.

With all these complex issues to consider in safe ministry to Persons of Concern, experienced professionals play an oversight, supervision and monitoring role in ministry with all Persons of Concern.

Guiding Principles Associated with this Procedure

The principles used to implement safe ministry to Persons of Concern includes:

Rigour – we require that all Persons of Concern wanting to be part of a worshipping community embrace the process outlined in this protocol.

Life-long accountability – we need to be able to show that we have done all we can to ensure that Persons of Concern are ministered to appropriately and children and vulnerable adults are protected from harm.

Responsibility – the Person of Concern is responsible to engage safely in community. This included taking full responsibility for past actions including past offending, and to commit fully to upholding all standards put in place as part of this process.

Assisted – Our church acknowledges we may not have the expertise to manage this process alone, and as such, is ready to call in external expertise where needed. The church will seek assistance in providing education and support for those who will be providing accountability

for the person, and may need to work with external professionals, such as those in the criminal justice system and forensic psychologists to ensure proper risk management of the person.

Steps in the Process

Step 1: Identification

It is important to exercise care in the identification of Persons of Concern. Information can be derived from many different sources: the person; friends or relatives of the person; victims or their friends and family; the media; government authorities such as the police or parole board; members of the church; anonymous sources. It is essential that accurate information is obtained. The identification of a person must not be based on rumour or innuendo.

Step 2: Notification to Churches of Christ NSW / ACT

In all such circumstances the Church Leadership Board will notify the Safe Ministry Practices Leader at the Churches of Christ NSW / ACT office who will be referred to as the Case Manager. A formal engagement between the Case manager and our church will be required.

Step 3: Interim Safety Agreement

As soon as practicable an interim Safety Agreement shall be offered to the Person of Concern to ensure the safety of all parties during the establishment of an Individual Safety Agreement.

These measures are particularly relevant in cases where the Person of Concern is currently under investigation, which may be ongoing for a period of months or years.

Step 4: Decision to proceed (Meetings to help decision making)

A series of meetings are conducted between the Case Manager, Church Leadership Board, and also with the Person of Concern.

These meetings have an educational, and fact-finding purpose. The decision to proceed is to be made by the Church Leadership Board.

Step 5: Assessment Phase for both Person of Concern and the church

Both the church and the person will be assessed for risks and readiness to enter into safe ministry with the person.

Step 6: Establishment Phase for the Safety Agreement

The Case Manager will develop an Individual Safety Agreement with input and approval of the Church Leadership Board. In cases where the Individual Safety Agreement states there is to be a Monitoring or Support (Accountability) Group, the Case Manager will establish and provide induction training for the Support Group.

The Safety Agreement may include, but is not limited to:

- Time frames where the Person of Concern may be in attendance, and where they may go;
- The demographic of people/individuals whom they may engage with;
- The other events/programs they may attend;
- Areas within the ministry where they can participate or volunteer (keeping in mind that some volunteer roles will be considered as a position of trust amongst attendees, and should therefore be allowed with much caution);
- Physical spaces where the Person of Concern may never go;
- The individual leaders who confidentially hold the Person of Concern accountable to the Safety Agreement;
- Guidelines of social media usage as a gesture of good intent by the Person of Concern.

The Individual Safety Agreement must be signed by a representative of the Church Leadership Board, the Person of Concern and the Case Manager.

Step 7: Notify Insurer

Inform your insurer of the Safety Agreement that is in place.

Step 8: Ongoing Support and Review

An annual review of each Person of Concern's Individual Safety Agreement will be carried out. The Case Manager may provide support where necessary.