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Synod of NSW & ACT

Parish Mission Person of Concern Protocol

Appendix to Person of Concern Policy

For the Uniting Church, Synod of NSW and ACT

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| Title: | Parish Mission Person of Concern Protocol |
| Creation Date: | February 2021 |
| Version: | 1.0 |
| Last Revised: | March 2021 |
| Approved by: | Synod Standing Committee |
| Approval date: | 5 March 2021 31/21SC |

Appendix to the Persons of Concern (POC) Policy: Parish Mission POC Protocol

Under the Persons of Concern (POC) Policy, some flexibility exists for how a Parish Mission (PM) might put in place arrangements for POCs. This flexibility has been included in recognition that some PMs may disproportionately attract more POCs, and that it is more difficult to identify who is a POC amongst a more transient congregation.

The POC Policy applies for all PMs, with the following provisos where needed:

Provision for relevant Parish Missions: *In the case of specific ministries (e.g. Parish Missions) where a majority of members may be Persons of Concern, the Synod recognise that individual Safety Agreements may not be the most effective safety strategy. The Synod in partnership with the organisation will set up an agreement which documents the procedures they have in place to ensure that the safety of children and young persons is paramount and that appropriate processes are implemented.*

Specific Agreements: *the process will be different for Parish Missions and agencies or congregations with particular ministries where the majority of members may be persons of concern. Instead of an individual Safety Agreement, a Memorandum of Agreement will be drawn up between the Parish Mission and Synod with Presbytery input which outlines the specific practices for managing those who connect with that ministry.*

Where a PM identifies that it is impractical to develop a Safety Agreement (SA) for each POC (or potential POC), they should liaise with the Safe Church Unit to develop an alternative plan (a 'POC Memorandum of Agreement'). It should be noted that until the Memorandum of Agreement arrangements have been put in place, the usual Safety Agreements process should be used.

These provisions apply to the congregational life of a PM, and not to the service-provision arm. When providing a service such as soup kitchen or shelter, staff and workers must have comprehensive safety plans in place regarding client/visitor behaviour, and specific management plans for some guests, as appropriate. These are separate from arrangements from those applying to congregational life and worship.

Rationale

PM's often operate differently from other congregations where membership and attendance are more regular. The challenge with PM's is that:

- Attendees at worship services may be transient.
- It is difficult to identify who is a POC because of this transience.
- Transience limits the opportunity and appropriateness of a SA as a risk management strategy:
 - SAs recognise a person's intention for ongoing worship with a particular congregation.
 - It isn't relevant to enter an ongoing agreement with someone who is transient.
 - The transient person may have no wish to enter this process.
 - SAs take time to develop and implement, so it may not be possible to establish one in this situation.
 - Safety Agreements require the identification of specific monitors and conditions which would be impractical to implement effectively where several POC are attending the congregation or attending sporadically.

Further to the practical concerns, a SA places a barrier to the transient person participating in worship in a way which contradicts the purpose of the mission, without improving safety in a reasonably practical way.

PM Membership and Participation

The life and witness of a parish mission is supported by the congregation members and adherents who attend and serve. Church Council should determine who are considered members and adherents for the purpose of this protocol. This determination reflects a person's wish to commit to serving the congregation, and be people who are known to the church, and who show suitability in faith, character and conduct.

Members and adherents can be considered for roles and tasks which require additional levels of trust such as coordinating activities, access to facilities, resources and less overlooked areas, or to work with vulnerable people. Selection for roles will be done according to usual congregational practice and relevant Synod policy.

Also vital to the congregation are the participants who attend services. Participants include anyone who attends a worship service, who has not been identified as a member or adherent, or who is a minister or staff member.

Principles for Memoranda of Agreement

PMs who wish to operate under a POC Memorandum of Agreement can apply to the Safe Church Unit. Approval will be based on the following principles:

- Whatever arrangement is in place needs to be at least as safe as individual safety agreements would be.
- The POC Memorandum of Agreement must include a comprehensive risk assessment, and identification of strategies which apply as standing arrangements (applying to all participants and used at all times). This approach will be used where it can be demonstrated that having standing and universal measures makes implementation of the strategies clearer (and so more effective) than having several varying individual agreements.
- Arrangements need to provide for the unknown POCs, and an option to have a SA when appropriate.
- A system for review of the agreement must be documented.

Parish missions where there is not a transient population (or otherwise increased risk of unidentified POCs) may not fulfil these criteria as Safety Agreements are then likely to be the safer management strategy. If another type of congregation has an increased risk of unidentified POCs attending due to high transience, the Safe Church Unit should be contacted for advice.

Risk Assessment and Memorandum of Agreement

- Specific alternative arrangements are to be:
 - Identified through conducting a risk assessment.
 - The risk assessment must be documented and submitted to the SCU as part of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) application (risk assessment form and guidance will be provided by the Safe Church Unit).
 - The MOA should be developed in consultation with and approved by the Safe Church Unit (SCU).
- The risk assessment must form the basis of the POC Memorandum of Agreement.
- PM congregations will put in place specific rules and practices which apply to all participants, specific to their activities and facilities, and documented in their POC Memorandum of Agreement. For example:
 - Out-of-bounds areas for all congregation participants.
 - A plan to manage less overlooked areas e.g. physically lock doors, designate separate toilets for children/families (where possible).

- Agreed entrances and exits.
- Toilets and facilities which may be used, and how this will be monitored.
- Agreed boundaries and opportunities for service (taking care where this implies leadership or gives access to otherwise restricted areas).
- Define allowed additional access to some areas based on role e.g. access to kitchen only by those rostered on, access to creche only when supervised by 2 appointed volunteers (in addition to parents/carers). These should be determined in the risk assessment, specific to the particular PM.
- PM's are to keep their POC strategies under review, at least every 6 months (as would be the case for an individual SA). SAs must remain in place at least until an MOA is established.
- SA's are still to be developed under some circumstances (see below).

Service by participants

In general participants should not be in roles which imply leadership or trust. However, some participants will have roles to serve in the church. Tasks and service which is appropriate for participants should be determined by risk assessment, according to the following considerations:

- Known POCs are precluded from any tasks which could imply leadership (as per the POC Policy).
- The risk assessment should identify specific suitable service activities for participants and specify which are precluded. Participants should not:
 - have authority over or coordinate others.
 - relate to vulnerable people.
 - relate to a small group or subset of the congregation.
 - require access to other parts of the church where others don't go such as the vestry or sanctuary.
 - Serve out of hours; the times that participants can be on church property should be specified and should be in line with when adequate supervision is in place and when the context is appropriate considering the characteristics of who else is onsite e.g. if a group for young people is operating.
- Only participants who are regular or known to the ministry leaders should be included on rosters or given any regular job.
- Participation in tasks should be shared so different people do the activity (so leadership or a greater level of trust is not implied).
- Participants should generally not lead worship or corporate prayer, dispense communion, be on welcoming or collect offertory and so on.

Safety Agreements in Memoranda of Agreement

A PM may have an identified POC, who wishes to join the congregation. Where the person is committed to the congregation and to ongoing attendance, a SA should be entered into, as per the POC Policy. It will be adapted to the specifics of the situation, including recognition of the broad safety strategies already in place and applicable to the PM.

Definitions

Adherent means a person not being a member or a member-in-association but recognised as sharing in the life of the Congregation and within the pastoral responsibility of the Church. Whose name is recorded on a roll of the congregation.

Member is a baptised person recognised by the Church Council as being within the pastoral responsibility of the Church. Whose name is recorded on a roll of the congregation.

Participant is a person who attends worship services of the Parish Mission whose name is not included on a roll of the congregation.