Uniting Church in Australia

National Person of Concern
Policy Framework 2020

September 2020: Continued additional measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

National Safe Church Unit

Contents

Purpose

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Church moved rapidly to online platforms and digital technologies to deliver worship and ministry to people who cannot be in the same physical space. This guidance is supplementary to the *National Person of Concern Policy Framework* and has been developed to support continued management of Safety Agreements (SA) for a Person of Concern (POC) in response to the changed environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way in which Synods, Church Councils, Presbyteries and Ministry Agents can engage with congregations and members of the Church. The environment is changing daily, and the Church's response will continue to change as new advice is provided by governments and healthcare providers.

While the Church continues to recognise that a POC may participate in the life of the Church in accordance with the terms of a SA, the changing circumstances prompt the need for all SAs to be regularly reviewed as the changes occur.

Scope

These additional measures apply to all Uniting Church in Australia Church Congregations, Presbyteries and Synods.

Safety Agreement Review

Where a Safety Agreement (SA) is in place the Synod should continue to review the management and application of it in response to the changing circumstances. This review should be undertaken in consultation with the appropriate Church Council, Presbytery and Ministry Agent(s) and in conversation with the POC.

The Person of Concern Risk Assessment Criteria (*National Person of Concern Policy Framework p.15*) should be applied to the current operating environment and appropriate (interim) changes made to each SA.

Additional issues to consider may include, but are not limited to:

- How the Church environment has changed with regard to the settings of the original or revised SA and what future changes may occur
- If the Synod/Church Council/ Presbytery/Ministry Agent(s) have the continued capacity and resources to manage the SA within the changing environment
- If continuation of the existing SA poses new or emerging risks than those identified in the original or revised SA

- If new SA arrangements can or cannot be put in place to manage existing and new or emerging risks
- If the SA should be ended or suspended and how this will be managed in accordance with the *National Person of Concern Policy Framework*

New and emerging risks

The ability to connect and stay in touch with colleagues, congregations, students, clients, families and friends is hugely beneficial and the Church's commitment to be a safe church for all people extends to the different online and remote platforms that are available to do this.

In reviewing an existing SA key consideration must be given to online and remote communication and engagement with a POC.

Across Australia, social distancing and restrictions on the number of individuals who can gather in the same physical space continues to be mechanisms put in place by governments across Australia in response COVID-19.

These restrictions are changing over time and will continue to affect the way in which the Church can support POCs and manage SAs.

Examples:

If church services are streamed online can a POC participate? What risk does their participation pose to other participants, how will their engagement be monitored?

Do appointed POC monitors have sufficient expertise and the ability to appropriately monitor the online engagement of a POC?

Is the POC identified as a perpetrator of unlawful online activities or considered to have conducted grooming of children and/or adults online?

If a POC is permitted to use church owned facilities for specific purpose can appropriate monitoring continue to be adequately undertaken at those facilities in accordance with social distancing requirements?

Does continuation of an existing or revised SA pose a health risk to others or to the POC?

Are increased resources required to maintain access and monitoring for a POC than would usually be required? Is the increased resource requirement acceptable within existing budgets? Will the increased resource requirement impact negatively on the delivery of supports or service to other members of the Church?

Safety Agreement ended or suspended

In the event that a SA can no longer be offered to a POC the Synod will communicate the decision to all relevant parties. The steps outlined in the *National Person of Concern Policy Framework (Safety Agreement not offered p.10)* should be followed.

In the event that a SA is suspended the POC should be notified when that suspension will be reviewed. Synods are best placed to agree that timeframe locally with the appropriate Church Council, Presbytery and Ministry Agent(s).

Given that circumstances are changing rapidly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic it is likely that SAs will need to be reviewed continuously in response to those changes. This may be a resource intensive activity. Therefore, suspension may be the appropriate course of action in the current climate to uphold the safety of all members of the Church.

Where SAs are suspended it should not be expected that they will automatically be re-instated in future. It is most probable that new SAs will be considered at the appropriate time and these will best respond to the environment at that time and the ability of the Church to mitigate or managed identified risks to uphold the safety of all members of the Church.

New Safety Agreements

In the event that a council of the Church receives a new notification of a POC the *National Person of Concern Policy Framework* applies with the additional measures outlined in this document.

It is possible that a new SA may not be able to be considered in the current environment because of resource limitations.

Version control

Version No.	Written by	Approved by	Date Approved	Review Date
1	National Safe Church Unit	National Safe Church Unit	March 2020	September 2020
2.	National Safe Church Unit *branding update	National Safe Church Unit	August 2020	September 2020
3.	National Safe Church Unit	National Safe Church Unit	September 2020	February 2021