



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Appendix to the UCA Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Persons of Concern (POC) Policy:

Safety Arrangements for outreach activities with groups of transient people and known and unknown Persons of Concern

1. Introduction

Under the UCA Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Persons of Concern (POC) Policy, some flexibility exists for how a Church Council might put in place arrangements for known POCs. The agreed arrangements are outlined in a formal 'Safety Agreement' between the Church and the POC. Such arrangements are only possible where a person has been identified and confirmed as a POC, regularly engages with the congregation and agrees to the specific conditions, and where the congregation can effectively monitor and support the arrangements. This is not suitable for all circumstances where members of a congregation may be offering ministry to possible POCs, so the below Appendix to the POC Policy has been established.

2. Rationale

The ministry and missional outreach of some congregations operates in such a way that attendance at activities is ad hoc and sporadic. This results in several challenges in relation to applying the POC Policy and individual Safety Agreements:

- In some instances, a congregation's ministry and missional outreach activities and programs may disproportionately attract more POCs than the typical number of POCs involved in other congregation activities such as worship;
- Attendees of such outreach will often not also participate in the worship of the congregation;
- Sometimes, due to transience, it is difficult to identify and confirm a person as being a POC and there is an increased risk of unknown POCs;
- Transience limits the opportunity to establish a Safety Agreement with an individual and the effectiveness of this as a risk management strategy as individual Safety Agreements are based on a person's intention for an ongoing relationship with a congregation, including worship;
- An individual Safety Agreement places a barrier to the participation of a transient person in missional programs in a way which contradicts the purpose of the mission, without improving safety in a reasonably practical way.

At times, in these missional activities, there are concerns about the participation of people who may pose a risk to others, particularly children and vulnerable adults. Other times, a congregation might learn of a concern through:

- A participant or their peers disclosing prior criminal activity;
- Concerns raised by another ministry participant or congregational Appointed Leader;
- Concerns raised about "odd behaviour";

- Information being shared by ecumenical partners;
- Information shared for the protection of children, including information shared by statutory authorities;
- Relevant information gained from media or from the community in general;
- Concerns raised with the Presbytery or the Synod's Culture of Safety Team.

In this specific set of circumstances providing for a Safety Arrangement may be more appropriate than attempting to form individual Safety Agreements.

3. Provision for use of a Safety Arrangement instead of individual Safety Agreements

Where the Synod recognises that individual Safety Agreements are not possible or may not be the most effective safety strategy and where there is a belief that attendees may be Persons of Concern, a Church Council may seek to establish a 'Safety Arrangement' instead of an individual Safety Agreement(s). Such an arrangement would be established between the Synod, the Church Council and the relevant Presbytery, not involving a specific Person of Concern and would establish agreed arrangements to manage POC risks in the given context. This arrangement will determine and document the procedures and controls required to mitigate the risk and ensure that the safety of children, young persons and all vulnerable people is paramount and that appropriate processes are implemented.

Individual Safety Agreements are still required if the Church Council becomes aware of an individual who, is a POC, and who either more regularly engages in Church worship activities or wishes to join the congregation.

4. Process for establishing Safety Arrangements for Transient and Unconfirmed POCs

Where a Church Council identifies that it is impractical to develop and manage individual Safety Agreement for each POC (or potential POC), they should liaise with the Culture of Safety Team to determine if a Safety Arrangement may be established instead. Until such an arrangement has been established, the usual interim Safety Agreements process should be used.

The Culture of Safety Team will work with the Church Council and Presbytery to consider the request with reference to the rationale and principles provided within this appendix. If considered appropriate, the Culture of Safety Team will work with the Church Council to undertake a risk assessment and develop a POC risk management plan. Fulfilling the procedures and controls within this plan shall form part of the requirements of the arrangement.

These provisions apply specifically to missional outreach activities of a congregation, and not to worship. When providing a missional outreach, 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 that generally apply to congregational life and worship.

The proposed arrangement and related risk management plan shall be referred to the General Secretary for review and, if appropriate, approval.

Once approved, the arrangement shall be subject to periodic review processes as is standard for individual Safety Agreements. This shall include consideration of whether required controls and procedures are being consistently followed and maintained.

5. Principles for a Safety Arrangement

Approval of a Safety Arrangement 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 Church Council must include a comprehensive risk assessment and identification of strategies which apply as standing arrangements (applying to all participants and always used);
- Arrangements need to provide for the risk of unknown POCs;
- Arrangements must include provision for establishment of individual Safety Agreements where appropriate;
- A system for review of the Safety Arrangement must be documented;
- The application has the support of the responsible Church Council and Presbytery.

6. Risk Assessment and Management under a Safety Arrangement

Any Safety Arrangement will be based on a POC risk assessment and agreed risk management plan.

- The risk assessment must form the basis of the Safety Arrangement
- Specific arrangements for the management of POCs, as an alternative to individual Safety Agreements, are to be:
 - Identified through the risk assessment in the template developed by the Culture of Safety Team.
 - The risk assessment must be documented and submitted to the General Secretary as part of the process.
 - The Safety Arrangement should be developed in consultation with and supported by the Culture of Safety Team
- As part of the risk management plan and the Safety Arrangement, Church Councils must put in place the agreed rules and practices, which apply to all participants, specific to their activities and facilities, and documented in their Safety Arrangement. For example, these may include:
 - Out-of-bounds areas for all participants;
 - A plan to manage less supervised areas e.g., physically lock doors to such areas, 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 two appointed volunteers (in addition to parents/carers). These should be determined in the risk assessment, specific to the particular missional outreach;
- Church Councils are to keep their Safety Arrangement and underlying risk assessment and management plan under review, at least every six (6) months (as would be the case for an individual Safety Agreement).
- Individual Safety Agreements are still to be developed under some circumstances (see below).

7. Transition to an individual Safety Agreement

A congregation operating under a Safety Arrangement may have an identified POC who wishes to join the congregation. Where the person is committed to the congregation and to ongoing attendance, an individual Safety Agreement should be entered into, as per the POC Policy.

8. Definition of key terms

The below definitions are provided in addition to those provided within the POC Policy.

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. (As defined in the Constitution Division 1 (Membership) 8, and by Reg 1.8.1)

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. This includes baptised members, confirmed members and members-in-association (see Reg 1.1.2).

Missional outreach is a community facing, Church Council approved activity that is open to the public for a social benefit or good including but not limited to a soup kitchen, community meal, food bank, mental health support service, and any other activity with direct engagement with vulnerable groups.

Participant / attendee is a person who attends worship services or other activities and programs of the congregation but whose name is not included on a roll of the congregation.

Person of Concern is any person who fits in the definition as defined by the Synod’s Person of Concern Policy

Individual Safety Agreement refers to the standard Safety Agreement for POCs as per the definition and processes provided in the POC Policy.

Safety Arrangement for Transient and Unconfirmed POCs (Safety Arrangement) means a written signed arrangement that specifies the ways in which a congregation may provide ministry and mission to the community where there is a belief that some attendees, who may be transient in nature, are Person of Concern, or where there is a recognised increased risk of unknown Persons of Concern attending. It provides safeguards for the risk of known, potential, and unknown Person of Concerns, where individual Safety Agreements are not appropriate. Such arrangements provide practical plans for management of POCs while ensuring that the safety of children and vulnerable people remains paramount for Church community events, activities and programs. The Safety Arrangement is established between the Synod and the relevant Church Council with explicit approval of the General Secretary.

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1	Aug 2024	Updates to include outreach groups of transient people	Culture of Safety	General Secretary