

Guidelines for Congregations Regarding Participation by Registered Sex Offenders

All who wish to follow Christ in a community of faith are welcome in the church. On occasion, a person comes through our door who needs both extra care and extra boundaries. When a registered sex offender seeks to become a member of a congregation or attend worship on a regular basis, the head of congregation should contact the Canon for Wellness and Care/Safeguarding Minister for guidance. Each situation is unique and will be handled on a case-by-case basis. (Heads of schools with parents who are registered sex offenders should contact the Safeguarding Minister for guidance.)

Suggested procedure for Head of Congregation:

1. Upon learning of a person's registered sex offender status, initiate a pastoral conversation with the individual, encouraging the individual to discuss the nature of the conviction and what restrictions, if any, have been imposed as a condition of parole or probation. Use this discussion to determine the interest and needs of the individual with respect to participation in the life of the church. For example, does the person want to join the choir or a Bible study group, or simply attend services? Because sex offender status is a matter of public record, it is not appropriate to promise confidentiality. However, the information regarding sex offender status should be communicated only to those in the church who have a need to know. Depending on the circumstances, these persons may include the Senior Warden, staff members, or other congregational leaders.
2. After having the pastoral conversation with the registered sex offender and before communicating the status of the offender to others, contact the Safeguarding Minister for guidance on how to tailor an agreement with the individual that best fits the needs of the individual and of the congregation. Work with the Safeguarding Minister to determine appropriate parameters that will allow the individual to benefit from the grace and redemption that a community of faith has to offer, while upholding both the terms of the individual's parole or probation and our commitment to provide a safe environment for all God's people. The Safeguarding Minister can also be helpful in deciding who in the organization should be informed of the status of the offender by the head of congregation.
3. The agreement should be put in writing so that the terms are clear and can be reviewed or amended, if necessary, as the individual becomes a part of the congregation. The sample letter of agreement contains a possible format and some suggested terms to be considered. Any agreement should be reviewed by the Safeguarding Minister before it is finalized and presented to the registered sex offender for signature. The signed letter of agreement should be kept on file with the organization and a copy sent to the Safeguarding Minister.

Sample Letter of Agreement:

Dear _____,

Christ's Church is open to all who wish to follow Christ as part of a community of faith. You are welcome to worship with us at _____ as we all continue to grow, heal, and serve together. This letter sets forth our agreement regarding the terms of your participation in our congregational life.

Sample inclusions, depending on nature of the offense and conviction:

You may attend worship services (or a particular worship service), sing in the choir, serve on the _____ committee(s) and participate in other adult ministries, but you may not volunteer for or be a part of any ministry that works with or around children or youth.

You may not initiate or have contact with any child or youth in the congregation who is not a relative, either in person, by phone, email, or social media. This restriction applies both at church and away from church and is intended to protect both you and the church.

You must never be alone with a child or youth. Should a young person approach you, redirect the young person to another adult. While you need not be rude, you must maintain clear distance and not engage children or youth.

Faithfully yours,

Rector/Vicar/Lay Head of Congregation/Senior Warden/Bishop's Warden Date

I understand and agree to these terms and conditions and further understand that violation of this agreement may result in the forfeiture of my ability to attend worship or participate in other activities of the congregation or to be a member of the congregation.

(Print name of individual)

Date