

# Guidance for a Supervised Participation Plan

## Context

Community of Christ welcomes all into the fellowship of the church. As part of our enduring principles, we believe all are of worth and that in community we can find blessing. We also believe in making responsible choices that uphold the safety and well-being of everyone participating in church activities and that are in line with Christ's mission.

Accepting an individual into the congregation who has committed abuse or been convicted of a sexual offense, especially against children, would be a challenge for many congregations. Congregants come face to face with the spiritual and practical challenges of living together in community. We should not underestimate the emotions that may surface for those with children, those who have suffered abuse as a child and those whose daily work involves responding to abuse. Our urge to live out the redemptive grace of the gospel while still upholding the safety of all participants can be conflicting and exacting.

For some individuals, additional guidance related to heightened oversight and accountability must be in place for them to attend a congregation. Supervised Participation Plans are the means by which we provide an opportunity for sex offenders and those who have committed abuse against children or adults, to share in the fellowship of the church.

## Policy Statement

**A Supervised Participation Plan must be in place and continuously enforced for certain individuals to be allowed to attend church events. Such individuals, include but are not limited to the following:**

- **Registered sex offenders.**
- **Those awaiting trial for alleged sexual crimes against children or adults.**
- **Those who confess to or are convicted of sexual crimes against children or adults, including those who are placed on probation or parole for such offenses.**
- **There may be other offenses or incidents of inappropriate behavior for which modified Supervised Participation Plans would be required. Contact the [Office of General Counsel](#) if you are in any doubt about the scope of this.**

A congregation's pastor or congregational leadership team can make a determination, subject to the approval of appropriate administrative leaders and in consultation with the Office of General Counsel, whether to allow an individual described above to attend their congregation. One of the factors in this determination should be the congregation's capacity to adequately oversee and enforce the supervised participation plan. A signed copy of the plan must be in place and ready to be enforced prior to the

individual attending Community of Christ events. If an individual has already been attending when the local leaders became aware of the issue, the individual must stop attending until a plan is put in place.

For those persons who confess to or are convicted of sexual crimes against children, the supervised participation plan should be in place for the entire duration of their attendance or involvement with Community of Christ and should be reviewed with congregational leadership at regular intervals (at least an annual review is recommended).

A template supervised participation plan is available from the [Office of General Counsel](#).

### **Key principles of the SPP**

- Oversight by designated individual(s)
  - SPP Participant should never be unsupervised on church property or at church activities
  
- Restricted Access
  - SPP Participant is not allowed in high risk areas where children are likely to be
  
- Prohibition on public (or “up front”) ministry or other leadership responsibilities
  - SPP Participant will not be allowed to accept any leadership responsibilities or worship service participation opportunities for at least the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the SPP
  - SPP Participant cannot be registered as a youth worker
  
- Accountability
  - SPP Participant accepts responsibility for self-monitoring and disclosing any difficulty in complying with the SPP, in addition to supervision by designated members of the congregation
  
- Framework for requesting attendance outside of congregation, if applicable
  - SPP Participant must get approval from the Mission Center President or other designated administrative officer to be able to attend mission center events or events outside the congregation
  
- Compliance with any legal obligations, conditions or restrictions
  - Participant must authorize his or her probation or parole officer to speak with church leaders to verify specific legal restrictions currently placed on participant and confirm participant’s attendance of church events will not conflict with such restrictions or be a violation of their probation or parole

- If requested, participant will provide church leaders with a copy of any judgments or statements of the court related to the nature of the offense or ongoing legal obligations, conditions or restrictions
- Periodic review
  - Participant, pastor & person(s) appointed to accompany participant at church events should meet on a regular basis to monitor implementation of SPP
  - Participant & pastor should meet at least annually to review the SPP.

### **Congregational Communication Plan**

One question frequently asked is ‘Do we need to tell the congregation, or is the participant entitled to privacy?’. We understand the concern here and we do want to be sensitive to the individual’s desire for privacy, but generally, members in the congregation will also have a reasonable desire to know about the situation. Congregational members may not need to know all the details, but they should receive appropriate information that allows them to make an informed decision about their children and what precautions are being taken. It may also be worth noting that there is frequently a public record of sex offenders living in the area, including on line databases, such that the conviction is often in the public arena of information.

We advise that the congregation should be made aware that someone subject to a SPP may be attending the congregation. In our experience, it can create problems, now or in the future, if the congregation is not notified that someone subject to a SPP will be attending. In addition to providing notice, it may be appropriate in some situations for members of the congregation to be consulted and involved in the Plan’s formation.

It may be helpful to share with congregants some basic guidelines that will be included in the SPP. For example, mentioning some or all of the key principles listed above that will be in the plan, as well as the leadership team’s commitment to making sure the SPP is being followed. This will help assure congregants that children and vulnerable adults will be safe at all times while allowing the SPP Participant to be included in congregational worship. Education regarding the parameters of the plan’s precautions should serve as reassurance for concerned parents. However, we would also advise designating a person on the leadership team or other leader/priesthood member in the congregation that people can talk to if they have questions or concerns.

The Pastorate should use wisdom and knowledge of their congregation when deciding how to discuss this issue, and when the Plan participant should be present. Although 2 potential options are suggested below, variations on these are acceptable.

#### **Option 1. Congregational meeting(s).**

The congregation is invited to a meeting to discuss the potential invitation to the participant to attend church. Information is shared regarding the allegations, conviction or inappropriate behavior leading to the necessity of a plan (by the participant if volunteer or by the pastorate) and the process of inclusion including the SPP. This is not an opportunity for the participant to make public confession, but rather a concise explanation of the facts. This meeting does not occur during primetime worship or with children present. It is the parents decision how much of, and in what context the information is shared with their children.

The congregation needs adequate time to reflect both intellectually, emotionally and spiritually on the potential participation of someone subject to a SPP. Some will be concerned for their children; some will have strong emotions because of personal abuse experience; others will be keen to offer hospitality no matter what. There should be an open platform for non-judgmental discussion. It may be helpful to have an evangelist present or plan to engage in a listening circle or other consensus-building techniques that allow people to be heard in a respectful manner.

Congregational meetings should at a minimum be held 2 times, more if necessary. It is appropriate to accompany the meeting with prayer, but it is advisable to refrain from scriptural references that appear to support one or other view.

The pastorate will need to be aware of any residual feelings of anger, grief or confusion within the congregation and offer pastoral ministry in an appropriate way.

#### Option 2. Visiting members of the congregation in their homes

Instead of having a general congregational meeting, the pastorate may choose to visit individual congregants or families in their homes to discuss someone participating subject to a SPP. Those individual conversations will likely share information and offer time to respond as described above.

#### **Potential Alternatives to In-person Attendance**

If the congregation and its leadership decides that it is not timely for the participant to attend their congregation, then that is shared with the participant. Other alternatives for church attendance could be explored, if appropriate.

If the pastorate is concerned about the participant's attendance at Sunday morning church, they might consider inviting the participant to an 'adults' event midweek. This could take the form of bible study, seekers group, fellowship or gender specific group, but would be one where children would not be present.

Another alternative would be to see if a couple of priesthood members from the congregation would be willing to provide ministry to the individual in their home or at another location outside of the church.