



**CHRISTIAN REFORMED
CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA**

**GUIDELINES FOR DEALING
WITH PERSONS OF CONCERN**



Revised and adopted by Synod 2021

Introduction

The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) are ‘reforming to reach the lost for Christ’. As such the CRCA welcomes everyone and anyone to receive the grace of God and experience the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ. At the same time the CRCA recognises the vital importance of protecting the vulnerable within its congregations. To that end these guidelines have been written to assist church councils, who are responsible for safe ministry within the local congregation, to address the safety issues that arise when there is a person whose presence constitutes a risk of sexual abuse to others within the congregation. In these guidelines such a person is called the **Person of Concern (POC)**.

A Person of Concern is a person who has been convicted of or is alleged (pending charges) to have committed, a sexual offence or has been released into the community after a period of imprisonment for sexual offences. The definition may also include a person where there are reasonable concerns that the person is behaving or has behaved in a sexually abusive or inappropriate way.

From time to time the church council will face the situation where the POC has been worshipping and been involved in the local congregation or wishes to worship and be involved in the local church. They may not understand or appreciate that they pose a risk to the safety of children and vulnerable adults. While demonstrating genuine compassion and pastoral care towards the POC the church council must take steps to protect the congregation from the risk of harm.

The CRCA Synod at its meeting in Perth, May 2015, adopted these guidelines to support and manage persons considered to be of concern. They have been revised to note the introduction of the Safe Church Unit/Safe Church Advisory Committee (SCU). And readopted at Synod 2021. The effective implementation of these guidelines requires that church councils understand both sexual abuse and the theological issues raised by the involvement of the POC in the life of the congregation. These issues are dealt with in Appendices 1,2,3,4.

The local church council will need to adapt these guidelines to the local congregation and to comply with any applicable State or Territory legislation. Failure to implement a system designed to keep children and vulnerable adults safe from the risk of harm may constitute a breach of the church council’s duty of care in undertaking church activities.

Establishing boundaries

The church council should give consideration to the issues that would arise if a person of concern wants to become involved in the church. Church councils are encouraged to discuss with the leaders of the children’s and youth ministries the issues that would be raised by the possible involvement of a POC in the congregation before the situation arises.

Clear boundaries are required where a POC is seeking new or continued involvement in the congregation, both to protect children and vulnerable adults, and also to reduce the possibility of the POC being wrongly accused of abuse or being tempted to abuse. To establish clear boundaries it will be necessary for the church council to address the following questions:

- How will the church council know when someone is a POC?
- When will the congregation be ready to receive the POC?
- How will appropriate boundaries be established?
- How will information be communicated to the church?
- What support will be provided for the POC?

a. *How will the church council know that someone is a POC?*

New people regularly come to worship at CRCA congregations. Normally their backgrounds are not known at first. Sometimes the church council will become aware that a new person to the congregation could be a POC. A Person of Concern is:

(those known)

- a person who has pleaded guilty to, has been convicted of, or has admitted to having committed, a sexual criminal offence;
- a person who has been disciplined as a minister, office bearer or church worker by a church because of sexual misconduct, or who has been refused ordination, employment or appointment by a church because of an adverse risk assessment arising from sexual misconduct;
- a person who has been disciplined by another organisation for sexual misconduct;

(those suspected)

- a person who is currently charged with a sexual criminal offence;
- a minister, office bearer or church worker against whom allegations of sexual misconduct are currently being dealt with by the SCU or under church discipline procedures
- a person who is receiving, or has received, treatment for disordered sexual behaviour;
- a person who is considered to be a risk to the safety of children and/or vulnerable adults because of an adverse risk assessment relating to sexual misconduct

The church council can derive information about a POC from many different sources: the person concerned; friends or relatives of the person; victims or their friends and family; the media; government authorities such as the police or parole board; church members and the SCU. Church council should exercise care in the identification of persons of concern. It is essential that accurate information is obtained as the identity of the person and the sexual criminal offences and/or sexual misconduct that the person has, or is alleged to have committed. The identification of the person must not be based on rumour or innuendo.

In the case of a minister, office bearer or church worker who has been disciplined for, or who is alleged to have committed, sexual misconduct, the church council should seek information from SCU. An assessment of the risk of a person sexually abusing children and/or vulnerable adults requires an investigation of all relevant circumstances and should be undertaken in consultation with SCU. The risk assessment, once completed, should be documented. Regardless of their role a POC in church leadership must be stood aside. This is to preserve the integrity of the office or role they held and because behaviour that requires a risk assessment poses too great a risk to the congregation.

Church Council may be uneasy about a person's behaviour but have no information that they are a POC. Church Council must always act to ensure the safety of the children and vulnerable adults in the congregation. If in doubt it may be helpful to consult with the SCU.

b. *When will the local congregation be ready to receive a POC?*

Where the person is seeking new or continued involvement in the church the church council will need to ascertain the attitude of their congregation for the person's involvement. (Involvement by the POC is always at the determination of the church council and congregation as opposed to the POC's expressed wish to remain or return as a part of the congregation.) The issue should be discussed by the church council with the leaders of the children's and youth ministry and members of the congregation.

Addressing this issue will be more complex where more than one person of concern is seeking new or continued involvement in the local congregation. If the Church Council faces such a situation it should involve the SCU in their deliberations.

The local congregation should not agree to the involvement of the POC if they have abused, or are alleged to have abused, a member of that local congregation.

Whatever the circumstances of the POC the church should not feel bound to agree to their involvement. This will be especially so where there is a history of ministers, office bearers or church workers of the local congregation having engaged in sexual abuse, or where members of the church community have experienced sexual abuse and who may be retraumatized as a result.

Where the local congregation does not agree to the involvement of a person of concern, the SCU should be approached to assist in finding a suitable church for the involvement of that person. If possible the involvement of the POC should be limited to a congregation which has few or no children or vulnerable adults. This will be difficult in some situations such as where there is only one CRCA congregation within reasonable distance of the person's home.

c. How will appropriate boundaries be established?

If the local congregation is willing to be involved with a person of concern, church council will first need to undertake a risk assessment of the person.

The purpose of the risk assessment is to determine whether the POC, if they were to be involved in the congregation poses a risk of harm to children and/or other vulnerable people. Relevant factors in assessing the risk of harm will include the type of abuse, the length of time since the abuse occurred, the absence of any repetition of abuse, and the person's acceptance of culpability for the abuse. Discussion with the POC will need to reach a consensus on the terms of their involvement.

Church Council, together with SCU will need to undertake the process of risk assessment and reaching a consensus as to the terms the person's involvement in the local congregation with sensitivity. If applicable, with the permission of the POC, discussions should be had with their probation or parole officer. If the POC does not agree to discussions with the probation or parole officer, Church Council should not enter into an agreement with the POC until the POC agrees and provides consent to enable discussion with the probation or parole officer. The church council will need to consider the church building, property and activities to identify potential risks that will need to be raised in the meeting with the POC.

The initial meeting with the POC should include the Classis representative or chairperson of Safe Church Advisory Committee. At this meeting it is important that the church council:

- obtain the following acknowledgements from the person:
 - that they are committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people involved in the church;
 - that they will voluntarily limit their involvement in the congregation so as to ensure they are not a risk to the welfare and safety of others, and are not subjected to the temptation to abuse;
- give the following acknowledgements to the person:
 - that the church council is committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people involved in the church
 - that church council is committed to provide pastoral supervision and support to the person.

After obtaining and giving these acknowledgments, the church council will need to discuss with the person, and the person will need to accept, terms for involvement in the church which may include:

- to only attend specified worship services and other authorised activities;
- to sit apart from children and designated adults at specified worship services and other authorised activities;
- to stay away from areas of the church property where children and designated adults meet;
- to decline offers of hospitality where there are children and designated adults;
- to never be alone with children and designated adults in specified worship services and other authorised activities;
- to never work with children and designated adults in authorised activities;
- to not be part of a church activity that includes children and designated adults;
- to not attend any church activity or camp where children and designated adults may be present, and which requires participants to stay overnight;
- to not accept nomination for election to any leadership role in the local congregation or wider church;
- to meet regularly with designated support persons;
- to enter and leave the church property by a designated route;
- to only use the toilet facilities on the church property when accompanied by a designated support person;
- to accept directions from designated church representatives when attending specified worship services and other authorised activities;
- if an ordained minister not to use a title used by ministers;
- to agree that certain people will need to be informed of their history;
- to agree that if they move to another church, the leaders of that church may be informed; and
- to agree that if there is failure to comply with the terms of their involvement they may be banned from attending worship services and other church activities, and that in such circumstances the church council may inform specified persons such as the probation or parole officer and people involved in the church.

It is important to note that under the terms for involvement the church council ensures that the POC is not to take any leadership role in the congregation or wider church. Allowing a POC to stand for or accept nomination to a leadership role is misleading to the POC and more importantly to the congregation. Preventing a POC from holding a leadership role should be consistent not only in their home congregation but also in the wider church.

Where a consensus is reached with the person, it should be formalised by entry into an agreement which is signed by the person, the church council representatives and the Classis SCU representative. A template of an agreement can be found in **Appendix 6**. The terms of this agreement will need to be adapted to take into account the particular circumstances.

Where a consensus is not reached, or the person refuses to cooperate, the church council may face the situation that the person will seek to attend worship services and other church activities. To prepare for this situation, the church council should, following consultation with the SCU, send a letter to the person setting out the terms for their involvement in the church, and the consequences if they fail to abide by these terms. The POC should be informed that by not accepting the terms of their involvement in the congregation such will be communicated to the wider church to ensure the safety of the members of those churches. Depending on the circumstances if the POC is a member of the congregation the church council may need to determine if they should retain their membership. Depending on the POC's response the church council may need to consider the legal

action of trespass to ensure the protection of the congregation. In less severe circumstances participation of the person in the life of the church will be restricted to attending public worship and the members of the church will be informed. A copy of the letter should be sent to the SCU.

d. How will information be communicated to the local church?

Those within the church to whom information about the person should be communicated will depend upon whether the person has or has not been found to have committed sexual abuse. That is, is the information about the person of concern in the public domain (available on the public record, in the media etc) or not. Before communicating any information Church Council should consult with the SCU as to the nature and wording of a communication. The SCU may have a template for a communication to a church community. The church council must avoid emotive communications so as to minimise the risk that the person may be hounded out of the local church (to the detriment of the person and the greater danger of other children and vulnerable adults in the community and neighbouring churches).

Before any communication to the church, the church council should show the text to the person and, where possible, obtain their agreement to the text and its communication. The person may not veto the text or its communication.

Where there has been a finding that the person has committed sexual abuse, the church council should communicate details about the person and their involvement in the local church to the church members. Communicating information to the members of the church is important because parents are entitled to make an informed choice as to whether they wish to withdraw their children from the worship service or church activities which the person is authorised to attend. Where practicable the communication of information should take place at a congregational meeting. Children should not be present at that meeting. The information shared at this meeting will be distressing for some. The church council needs to develop an after care pastoral strategy to be offered for those who need it after the meeting. It is recommended that a statement be read to the meeting. The statement should focus on the legal facts and the general terms of the POC's involvement in the congregation. The church council will need to take great care when answering questions. It will be helpful to have the Chair or state representative of the SCU present so that the members of the church can be provided with accurate information and be reassured that proper steps have been taken to protect children and vulnerable adults from the risk of harm from the person. After the initial communication, the church council should communicate details about the person and of their involvement in the local church to new church members. Depending on the numbers involved this may be able to be done on a one-to-one basis.

Where there has not been a finding that the person has committed sexual abuse there will need to be a careful balance between the POC's right to privacy, their presumption of innocence and the need to protect the congregation and the need to inform certain segments of the congregation of an agreement with the POC. The church council should communicate details about the person and of their involvement in the church on a 'need to know' basis with the church council and those in leadership roles in children's, young people's and mixed aged activities. Communication of information to the members of the church is inappropriate as there will have been no finding of sexual abuse made against the person. The church council will need to take great care when answering questions. There should be no gossiping or breaching of agreed boundaries of confidentiality.

After the initial communication, the church council should communicate details about the person of concern and of their involvement in the church where there are changes in the church council and those in leadership roles in children's, young people's and mixed aged activities.

Communications must not be notified by mail or posted on a notice board. It is recommended that the church council keeps a list of who has been notified and when they were notified.

If there is a variation to the terms of involvement in the church of the POC, or the person ceases to be involved in the local church, the church council should communicate these details to the people who previously received information about the person.

e. What support will be provided for the person of concern?

Many persons who have been found to have committed sexual abuse are lonely and isolated before offending and leave prison or treatment having lost whatever small circle of social contacts they had before. The provision of pastoral supervision and support of the person within the local church:

- will help them to reintegrate into the community; and
- will reduce the risk of them re-offending, and thereby increase protection for the community.

The church council should set up a small group, consisting of four to six persons, for an initial term of one year to provide pastoral supervision and support of the POC. The membership of the group will probably need to change regularly. It will be helpful for each member to have an agreed term for their involvement. Members of the group, and the group as a whole, will need to meet regularly with the person. Initially, meetings should be held at least monthly. It is inappropriate for the following people to be part of a small group to support the POC:

- the person's spouse, own adult children (or step children) or other relatives
- the person's co-defendant or co-accused
- anyone new to the congregation or new in their faith

Consideration should also be given to the appropriateness of the group member's gender, or if the person is from a family with young children, as they may not be suitable due to the nature of the POC's behaviour.

It is not necessary that the volunteers for the small group have had any previous experience in dealing with a person of concern. However, it is essential that the group members satisfy the SCU and local church criteria for the selection of volunteers and receive training which should consist of the following elements:

- overview of the criminal justice system in relation to sexual abuse;
- understanding sexuality and sexual deviation;
- sexual abuse from the victim, abuser and community perspectives;
- the needs of sexual abusers and their supporters;
- risk factors and relapse prevention strategies;
- group dynamics and the functions of the group; and
- self-care of the members of the group.

This training should be provided by people who are experienced in dealing with a person of concern. In regard to this training the church council should approach the SCU for assistance.

When the group first meets with the person they should make a contract, including commitments to openness within the group, confidentiality beyond it and consensus decision making.

At meetings members should check how the person is going, and whether the person has particular issues as to their involvement in the local church. The group should evaluate whether the person has complied with each of the terms of the agreement for the person's involvement in the church.

Where a breach of the terms is suspected or known to have occurred Church Council should arrange a pastoral visit where the terms of the agreement and the breach are discussed. The POC should be invited to explain their understanding of the alleged breach. It is crucial that the group knows at what point to inform the police, or the probation or parole officer, about a problem. If an offence has occurred the police must be contacted immediately.

The church council will need to ensure that the church's insurance not only covers the church for having a person of concern in their congregation but also extends to group members in carrying out their pastoral supervision and support of the person.

The church council should ensure that formal and informal support is provided to the members of the small group. Formal support might extend to group supervision by a counsellor or similarly qualified professional, especially in the event of any difficulty arising. Informal support should include the church council making regular enquiries and supporting and praying with the group members.

Where the church council is considering the establishment of a group to provide pastoral supervision and support of a person of concern, it should consult with the SCU.

If it is not possible to establish a pastoral supervision and support group, the church council should remember that whatever pastoral care it is able to provide to the person will to some extent fulfil its function.

Appendices.
APPENDIX 1
SEXUAL ABUSE

(a) What is sexual abuse?

The victims of sexual abuse can be adults and children.

Sexual abuse of an adult means sexual assault, sexual exploitation or sexual harassment of an adult. **Sexual assault** means any intentional or reckless act, use of force or threat to use force involving some form of sexual activity against an adult without their consent. **Sexual exploitation** refers to any form of sexual contact or invitation to sexual contact with an adult, with whom there is a pastoral or supervisory relationship, whether or not there is consent and regardless of who initiated the contact or invitation. **Sexual harassment** means unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, whether intended or not, in relation to an adult where the person reasonably feels in all circumstances offended, belittled or threatened. **Sexual abuse of a child** means the use of a child by another person for his or her own sexual stimulation or gratification or for that of others.

Sexual abuse includes serious criminal offences such as sexual intercourse without consent (rape), indecent assault and possession of child pornography.

(b) Who are sexual abusers?

Sexual abusers come from every social group, irrespective of profession, level of intelligence, educational background, ability, sexual orientation, nationality, religion or race. Most, but not all sexual abusers are male. Many sexual abusers committed their first offence as an adolescent, but not all adolescent abusers go on to become adult abusers. A common stereotype of sexual abusers as outsiders with no connections to families or communities is misleading. The majority of sexual offences against children are committed by individuals known to the child and often to the family.

Current research offers some useful insights into sexual abuse. It indicates that:

- 90% of sexual abusers have experienced or witnessed physical abuse in childhood;
- only 20% of people sexually abused in childhood go on to become sexual abusers as adults;
- there is no higher rate of mental illness recorded among those who commit sexual offences than amongst the general population;
- sexual abusers commonly engage in a number of disordered sexual behaviours (paraphilias). Paedophilia is one of these.

Paedophilia (or pedophilia) is a psychosexual disorder, known as a paraphilia (an unusual sexual arousal or behaviour). Not all sexual crimes committed against children are perpetrated by people who, upon investigation, would warrant the diagnosis of paedophilia. As a result, some people prefer to discuss such behaviours as child sex offences. In the management of such a person, the issue of whether or not the person warrants the diagnosis of paedophilia is important. In the media and within society in general, people who commit child sex offences are typically referred to as paedophiles. Some child advocates argue against the use of the term paedophilia as it means “love of a child” and they argue child sex offences can never be considered loving.

A summary of evidence about sex offending is contained in **Appendix 2**.

(c) What are the characteristics of sexual abusers?

Sexual abusers commonly follow the following steps leading up to the commission of a sexual offence:

- wanting to offend;
- giving themselves permission;
- creating the opportunity to offend;
- overcoming the victim's resistance.

Wanting to offend

A sexual abuser will have a desire to fulfil an emotional or physical need through some form of sexual misconduct. Some abusers will have a very clear mental image of what it is they want to do and the type of (or actual) person to whom they want to do it. For others it will be much more vague.

Giving themselves permission

Most sexual abusers know that what they want to do is wrong. To proceed they put in place a way of thinking which overcomes their inhibitions and gives permission to carry out the desired act. This distorted cognitive process falls into the following three main categories:

- *Making reprehensible conduct acceptable:* There may be moral justifications ('it's sex education'; 'it will be better for her to learn from me than from a stranger'; 'she's my step daughter not my natural daughter'; 'it was a proper relationship'; 'I was showing him the affection he didn't get at home'); psychological justifications ('it happened because my wife and I weren't getting on'; 'I was drunk at the time'; 'it's because of my own abuse – I can't help it'); mitigating comparisons ('I only touched her, I didn't penetrate her'; 'at least it's not a boy'; 'it won't hurt her'); or euphemistic labelling ('I was only fooling around – it just happened'; 'we were only playing');
- *Misconstruing the consequences of the behaviour:* This may involve minimizing the consequences ('the child didn't suffer'; 'I won't do any harm'; 'he didn't say anything so he must have been enjoying it'; 'I only intend it to be a bit of fun'); or ignoring the consequences ('I don't care').
- *Devaluing or attributing blame to the victim:* This may involve dehumanisation of the victim ('she was a slut') or attribution of blame ('she was asking for it the way she was dressed'; 'she came on to me').

For many sexual abusers this distorted thinking will be accompanied by denial. Through such distorted thinking and the associated denial, sexual abusers overcome their sense of culpability and guilt about past and potential offences and their impact on their victims.

In the case of adult victims (and some child victims) some of those who are ministers and church leaders/workers will have a split internally between their sexuality, morality and spirituality. In such cases, the minister or church leader/worker will project their erotic impulse onto the victim and blame the victim for seducing them.

Creating the opportunity to offend

Sexual abusers get into positions which give access to a particular potential victim or range of potential victims. Grooming is one of the means used to create opportunities. **Grooming** is the manipulative cultivation of a relationship in order to initiate or hide sexual abuse of an adult or a

child. In the case of child sexual abuse, an offender may groom not only the child, but also the child's parents or guardians, and church leaders and church workers. Grooming can take many months or even years, during which the abuser builds a relationship and develops opportunities. Rarely do sexual abusers when creating the opportunity to offend draw attention to themselves through anti-social behaviour.

Grooming can be undertaken in a variety of ways. It may involve deliberately engaging in activities in which potential victims are participating (such as scouts, youth ministry or sporting teams); entering specific employment giving access to children (such as teaching or the Christian ministry); targeting vulnerable children and their families (by developing trust through purchasing gifts or providing babysitting; by undermining parents' trust in their child through accusations of lying).

Grooming also occurs through increasing sexualisation of apparently innocent activities. Over time physical contact, cuddles and kisses of the victim, photographs and videos taken of the victim, and material on the internet shown to the victim, will become increasingly sexual.

Some church leaders and church workers may gain trust and access into a family home or one-on-one access to the child because of the family's (and parent's) sense of safety and the expectation of moral conduct within the church. Parents may assume that the person as an ordained minister or church worker will hold those values to a very high degree. Such church leaders may voyeuristically encourage children (and especially teenagers) to discuss their sexual activities (such as masturbation and other sexual behaviours) under the guise of 'spiritual counselling'.

Overcoming the victim's resistance

Physical strength and size, violence and the threat of violence, and grooming are used by sexual abusers in overcoming their victim's resistance. In many cases sexual abusers use much more subtle techniques. For example, a child may learn to accept sexual touching and eventually penetration as 'normal'; children may be told that they will be responsible for the break-up of the family if they report their abuse; the standing of the abuser may suggest that no-one would believe the victim if the abuse was disclosed. For an adult victim emotional as well as physical conditioning by the abuser may create a willingness for the victim to participate in the abuse for the fear of losing the 'relationship' or 'friendship'.

Some church leaders and church workers may use their spiritual or pastoral authority as a representative of the church or God. They may encourage a child or vulnerable adult to be trusting, to share secret thoughts or worries. They can exploit this relationship to talk about sexual matters. After the abuse, they will often invoke religious values to maintain secrecy around the abuse. They will intimidate the child into believing that the wrong act was the child's responsibility and initiative and would be a cause of great shame if revealed to their parents.

(d) What is the risk of sexual abusers re-offending?

Evidence about re-offending is mixed. It suggests that treatment reduces the likelihood of re-offending for some, but for many it does not. Factors that reduce the risk of re-offending include the establishment of a social network and the avoidance of situations involving contact with children. A summary of factors which have been identified in professional literature as increasing the risk of both general and child sexual offences being committed is contained in **Appendix 3**.

APPENDIX 2

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE ABOUT SEX OFFENDING

Studies to date on sex offenders have reached a number of consistent conclusions:

- sexual offences that come to the attention of police represent only a small proportion of all sexual offences that occur in the community;
- sex offenders who are imprisoned represent only a small proportion of all sex offenders who enter the criminal justice system;
- most victims of sexual offences are victimised by someone known to them, most commonly a family member;
- the overwhelming majority of sex offenders are men;
- only a small minority of sex offenders report having been sexually abused in childhood;
- most sex offenders are not mentally ill;
- the risk of reoffending is greatest for those offenders who started offending at an early age, have stable deviant sexual preferences, have multiple convictions for sexual offending, have committed diverse sexual offences and who target male child victims;
- sex offenders tend to have versatile criminal careers, with their sexual offending embedded in more general offending behaviour;
- sex offenders are not a homogeneous group, with different types of sex offender exhibiting different patterns and precursors of offending;
- sex offender treatment programs, especially those delivered in the community, have a small but significant effect on reducing sexual offence recidivism.¹

¹ These studies are referred to on page vii of the Research Paper *Recidivism of Sex Offenders* listed in Appendix 5 below.

APPENDIX 3

FACTORS INCREASING THE RISK OF SEX OFFENDING

(a) Factors increasing the risk of general sex offending²

The following factors have been identified in professional literature as increasing the risk of sexual offences being committed:

- **previous offences:** sexual abusers with a previous history of sexual offending are more likely to be recidivists. The greater the number of previous offences an individual has committed, the greater the likelihood that they will re-offend;
- **gender:** most sexual abusers are male;
- **age:** sexual abusers who commit their first offence at a young age are more likely to become recidivist offenders;
- **marital status:** sexual abusers who are unmarried are more likely to re-offend;
- **employment:** sexual abusers who are unemployed are more likely to re-offend than those who are in employment;
- **substance abuse:** substance abuse is related to recidivism among sexual abusers;
- **choice of victim and type of crime:** sexual abusers whose victims are strangers are more likely to become recidivist offenders. Child sexual abusers who select victims outside their own family are more likely to re-offend. Indecent exposer are more likely to re-offend than other types of sexual abusers;
- **victim empathy:** low victim empathy is linked to sexual re-offending;
- **personality disorder:** sexual abuse is commonly associated with the presence of a personality disorder, including high levels of anger and low self-esteem;
- **sexual arousal and use of pornography:** sexual deviancy including sexual interest in children is a strong indicator of re-offending;
- **treatment completion:** sexual abusers who drop out of treatment early are more likely to re-offend.

(b) Factors increasing the risk of child sex offending³

The following factors have been identified in professional literature as increasing the risk of child sexual offences being committed:

- **previous offences:** child sexual abusers who have a history of child sex abuse are the most likely to re-offend;
- **marital status:** unmarried child sexual abusers are more likely to re-offend than those who are married;
- **employment:** child sexual abusers who are unemployed are more likely to re-offend than those who are in employment;
- **childhood experiences:** the relationship between being abused as a child and subsequent adult sexual abuse against children is complex, with conflicting evidence for the assertion that those who have been abused themselves in childhood will go on to abuse children as an adult;
- **choice of victim:** child sexual abusers who select victims outside their own family are more likely to re-offend, as are those who select boy victims or both sex victims;
- **sexual preferences:** child sexual abusers who are only aroused by children are more likely to re-offend than those who are aroused by adults and children;

² These factors are listed on pages 21-24 in the Occasional Paper *Offenders' risk of serious harm: a literature review* listed in Appendix 5 below.

³ These factors are listed on pages 27-29 in the Occasional Paper *Offenders' risk of serious harm: a literature review* listed in Appendix 5 below.

- **social isolation:** male child sexual abusers tend to have a lack of intimacy with adults and high levels of emotional loneliness, and therefore experience difficulties in maintaining normal relationships with adults and gain emotional intimacy from children;
- **personality traits and disorders:** child sexual abusers have poor social skills, lack assertiveness and have low self-esteem;
- **victim empathy:** low levels of victim empathy is linked to sexual re-offending by child sexual abusers.

APPENDIX 4

THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

(a) Sexual abusers and sin

Sexual abusers are commonly referred to in the community by pejorative labels: ‘child molester’; ‘creep’; ‘deviant’; ‘monster’; ‘pervert’; ‘predator’; ‘rock spider’. No sexual abuser, regardless of what they have done, can be wholly described by one of these labels. Sexual abuse is not to be regarded as a worse sin than any other in terms of a person’s standing before God. As the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 3:22-24 *“There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”* However sexual abuse needs to be taken seriously because the consequences are devastating for victims and for the church. The very strong words of Jesus in Matthew 18 towards those who cause the ‘little ones’ to sin make it clear the church should take great care to protect its vulnerable members. For the Church to provide pastoral supervision and support of sexual abusers it is essential that, without minimising their abuse and its effects, they are seen and treated as human beings made in God’s image and deserving of God’s love.

(b) Conversion and forgiveness

“At a theological level, it must be recognised that Christian conversion does not cure the propensity or the temptation to abuse. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting what the abuser has done, treating the abuser as wholly reformed and cancelling the abuser’s obligations. Rather forgiveness should encourage the abuser to take responsibility for the damage caused and to make reparation where possible. Participation in the life of the church does not confer any right to hold office.”⁴

It needs to be emphasised that a sexual abuser, who is involved in a church and seeking to follow Jesus Christ, should be accepted as the recipient of God’s forgiveness. However, that forgiveness does not mean immunity from temptation to re-offend or the removal of all barriers to the exercise of ministry. As the Canons make clear *“The power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is more than a match for the flesh. Yet those converted are not always so activated and motivated by God that in certain specific actions they cannot by their own fault depart from the leading of grace, be led astray by the desires of the flesh, and give in to them.”⁵*

A local congregation can be one of the few places where a sexual abuser can mix with a welcoming community. The abuser’s journey to rebuild their lives and restore relationships (with their family, friends and neighbours) will be long and hard. The forgiveness and grace of God, mediated with strict supervision and clear guidelines through a local church, can be a vital part of that journey.

⁴ Making Our Church Safe: A Programme For Action, Anglican Church of Australia

⁵ *Canons of Dordt*, Fifth Main Point of Doctrine, Article 4, Book of Forms

APPENDIX 5

RESOURCES

Sexual abuse and related theological issues are thoroughly considered in Patrick Parkinson (2003) *Child Sexual Abuse and the Churches*, 2nd ed., (Sydney: Aquila Press).

Dale Tolliday of the New South Wales Health Department delivered the keynote address *Where to for Abusers?* at Safe as Churches? II, a national ecumenical consultation on Sexual Misconduct and Abuse in Australian Churches at Canberra on 8-10 September 2005. A copy of this address in print or audio form can be ordered from the National Council of Churches in Australia whose contact details can be found on its website at <http://www.ncca.org.au/>

Chaplains who serve in any correctional institution in the diocese may be able to provide assistance in the establishment of pastoral supervision and support of a person of concern in the parish. Contact details for any such chaplains can be obtained through the Registrar or the Director of Professional Standards of the diocese.

Kairos Prison Ministry Australia, which is an interdenominational Christian prison ministry, may also be able to provide assistance in the establishment of pastoral supervision and support of a person who has been found to have committed sexual abuse. Contact details can be found on its website at http://members.optusnet.com.au/~kairospm/contact_new.htm

Prison Fellowship Australia, which is an interdenominational Christian prison ministry, may also be able to provide assistance in the establishment of pastoral supervision and support of a person who has been found to have committed sexual abuse. Contact details can be found on its website at <http://www.pfi.org.au/pfa/contact/>

The Supervision and Pastoral Care of Offenders is a distance learning programme containing five hours of DVD material produced by the interdenominational English organisation Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service. The programme examines issues related to sex offending and includes understanding patterns of sex offending behaviour, risk assessment and written contracts, and the treatment, pastoral care and support of sex offenders in a church setting. It can be purchased from Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service, PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7UQ, United Kingdom. The CCPAS email address is info@ccpas.co.uk

Factors increasing the risk of general sexual offences and child sexual offences being committed are considered in Beverly Powis (April 2002) *Offenders' risk of serious harm: a literature review*, RDS Occasional Paper No 81 which may be found on the website of the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the United Kingdom Home Office at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/occ81risk.pdf>

Recidivism of sex offenders is considered in Dr Karen Gelb (January 2007) *Recidivism of Sex Offenders* Research Paper which may be found on the website of the Sentencing Advisory Council of Victoria at www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au
http://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/Sentencing+Council/resources/file/eb4d1a466597fe8/Recidivism_Sex_Offenders_Research_Paper.pdf

APPENDIX 6
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA
Accountability and Safety Agreement

Regarding the involvement of

..... (full name)

in the

..... (name of church)

has sought to be involved in the above church. This agreement states the conditions under which he/she may be involved in the church. All parties acknowledge the need to ensure the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all members of the church

..... (name of person)

- has made admissions concerning sexual misconduct
- has been charged with, but not convicted of an offence involving sexual misconduct
- has pleaded guilty to a sexual criminal offence
- has been convicted of a sexual criminal offence
(choose one of the above)

Commitment by the person

..... (name) agrees to

- Only attend the worship service at

.....
(name of church)

at.....(day and time)

unless agreed to by the designated representatives of Church Council. *(This is on the condition that there are no parole conditions which preclude attendance at any meeting where children or vulnerable adults are present)*

- Decline offers of hospitality from church families where children or vulnerable adults might be present, and the parents are unaware of the circumstances leading to this agreement.

- Not attend any church activity where children and vulnerable adults might be present without prior agreement and specific conditions established by the designated representatives of Church Council
- Not accept nomination for any leadership role within the church
- Accept that any complaints against him/her will be taken seriously and acted upon by t Church Council
- Meet regularly with(accountability and support person/s) as established by the Church Council
- Will enter and leave by the designated route and stay away from areas where children are present
- Will sit where directed by one of the accountability team
- Will only use the toilet facilities when accompanied by an accountability team member
- Will agree to an assessment of risk and the creation of a risk management plan by an external expert if deemed necessary by Church Council and SCU to help ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults

Commitment of the church to (name)

The church commits itself to providing pastoral care, support and accountability to..... (name) and not to place him/her in any situation where he/she may be alone with children or vulnerable adults

.....names) are appointed by Church Council to provide pastoral care. Any additional appointments will be made known to the above person.

Disclosure

This agreement will be kept confidential except as follows:-

..... (name) understands that the details will be disclosed to:

- The members of Church Council
- Any person undertaking his/her pastoral care
- To other persons responsible for the welfare and safety of children and/or vulnerable adults in the local church (The Designated Contact Person/s or the Safety Work Group)
- The Chair of the Safe Church Unit/Safe Church Advisory Committee

..... (name) understands that Church Council or the Chair of SCU may disclose the details of this agreement to any person, whether or not a member of the local church, where they reasonably consider it is necessary to ensure the welfare and safety of any person and;
to the leadership of another church where the member/adherent wishes to be involved or becomes involved in that other church.

The person understands that if he/she breaches any part of this agreement the Church Council may disclose the agreement and its breach to any member of the local church, the Chair of SCU and/or any other relevant organisation or person if it is deemed advisable, in order to ensure the welfare and safety of any person.

If the person breaches any part of this agreement he/she will not participate in any church activity until another agreement is in place.

Review

This agreement will be reviewed after (length of time) and at least every 12 months.

An agreement or variation to this agreement must be recorded in writing, dated and signed by all parties, and a copy sent to the Chair of SCU.

Date.....

Name of person..... (printed)

Signature.....

Chairman of Church Council

Name.....(printed)

Signature.....

Support and Accountability persons

Name..... (printed)

Signature.....

Name..... (printed)

Signature.....

Classis Representative/Chair SCU

Name (printed)

Signature

Distribution

- Person of concern
- Minister
- Chairman of Church Council
- Chair of SCU
- Support and Accountability person/s