

Policy and Covenant for Congregations:  
Safe Church Practices for Welcoming Registered Sex Offenders

*Reviewed by the Executive Board of The Diocese of Virginia*

**PURPOSE**

These guidelines are intended to reasonably provide for the safety of all persons in a parish or ministry while maintaining a welcoming place for registered sex offenders in congregations and ministries in the Diocese of Virginia. It is acknowledged that some registered sex offenders may attend our churches without our knowledge of their status. Should any of those persons seek to participate in volunteer activities or certain leadership capacities covered by our Safeguarding God's People Policy requirements for background checks, their registry status will usually be determined. It is hoped that all such registered offenders will self-disclose their status to the clergy or lay leadership.

**DEFINITION**

Registered Sex Offender: Person required by any court of record to register as a sex offender.

**PROCEDURES**

The following procedures apply in each case when the parish or ministry clergy, staff or lay leadership learns of a registered offender seeking to worship in the parish or otherwise participate in the life of the parish or ministry.

**Interview the offender. Obtain residence address and telephone and email contact information.**

Ask about the offender's intentions regarding contact with the church or ministry. Review these guidelines with the person and seek his/her cooperation as a means of making church services and activities available to him/her while keeping the people of the church or ministry and our guests safe. Talk about how information concerning his/her status will be shared with people needing to know, but do not promise confidentiality. Obtain information described in these guidelines from the offender and the offender's permission to talk to his/her parole or probation officer to verify terms and conditions or parole/probation and the offender's criminal record.

**Call the parole/probation officer to verify the terms of parole/probation and criminal history.** Talk about whether attending church or participating in any church or ministry activities, with or without a monitor, would violate the terms of parole/probation.

**Persons to be informed.** In the parish: clergy, wardens and, as appropriate for the activities the offender may be involved with, ministry leaders (ECW, choir leader, etc.). At the Diocese: the Bishop, the Chancellor and the Canon to the Ordinary. A signed copy of any covenant established under this policy will be filed at the Bishop's office.

**Consider asking the offender for permission to talk to the offender's therapist, depending on other circumstances.** This would be helpful if there are certain behavioral tools the therapist might want the monitors or others to know about that would protect the offender from becoming more vulnerable.

**Identify appropriate monitors and provide them with explicit training and instructions.** This includes having the offender in line of sight at all times, deflecting contact with children and watching for any social invitation by unsuspecting parishioners.

**Develop a covenant with the offender,** affirming the mutual desire to make it possible for the offender to attend services and participate on church or ministry activities within these guidelines and other reasonable efforts to make the church or ministry a safe place. The covenant should include a description of how the information will be handled by the parish, but not promise confidentiality beyond the sacrament of confession. It should state that any violations of the covenant will be grounds to deny the offender further access to the church or ministry or their activities. The offender should agree to notify the church clergy or ministry leader if s/he decides to attend a different church. The covenant should also be reviewed periodically (every six months). The parish needs to identify a means by which this information will be preserved and shared with all new clergy and lay leaders as changes in personnel occur. See a sample covenant below.

## COVENANT

between

\_\_\_\_\_ (the "Covenanter")

and \_\_\_\_\_ Episcopal Church, (the "Church")

### Authority and Purpose

This covenant is written in compliance with Church and the Diocese of Virginia Guidelines for welcoming Registered Sex Offenders (the "Guidelines"). The purpose of this covenant is to reasonably promote the safety of all persons in the parish or ministry, while maintaining a welcoming place of worship for the Covenanter.

### Background

The Covenanter has met with the clergy of the Church. During this meeting, the Guidelines were reviewed with the Covenanter, who acknowledges that s/he is aware of the Guidelines and understands their provisions. The Covenanter has clearly expressed his/her desire to comply with the Guidelines to help ensure that the Church or ministry is a safe place for all who attend. The clergy of the Church has clearly stated his/her desire and intention that the Church or ministry be a place of worship and continued healing for Covenanter and that clergy of the Church can and will be the Covenanter's pastor, subject to the Covenanter's compliance with this covenant.

### Information and Confidentiality

The Covenanter is aware that the clergy is obligated to notify certain members of the parish and of the Diocese of Virginia staff of the Covenanter's status as a Registered Sex Offender. The Covenanter is aware that, while efforts will be made to keep his/her status on a need-to-know basis, confidentiality is not promised beyond the sacrament of confession.

### Covenant

The Covenanter agrees to the following:

1. The Covenanter will always attend church and church activities with \_\_\_\_\_, ("the Monitor") who will remain at his/her side at all times (outside of bathrooms).
2. The Covenanter will not initiate contact with anyone under 18 years of age at the church or at church activities.
3. The Covenanter will actively avoid contact with anyone under the age of 18, including moving to other parts of the building as necessary.
4. If anyone under 18 years of age initiates contact with the Covenanter, the Covenanter will excuse himself/herself, and move away as quickly as possible.
5. The Covenanter will not attend events outside of the church building where persons under 18 years of age are invited without express permission of the clergy, and, if attendance is approved, this covenant will apply to such events

6. If the Covenanter needs to use bathroom facilities at the church, the Covenanter will request that another adult ensure no minors are in the bathroom with Covenanter.

7. If Covenanter decides to attend a different church, the Covenanter will notify the clergy of the Church.

**Terms**

This covenant is in effect immediately upon signature. It will be reviewed every six months at the discretion of the Church.

**Violations of the Covenant**

By signing this covenant, the Covenanter agrees that he/she understands and accepts that violation of any of the provisions of this covenant may result in the Covenanter being asked to leave the Church by the clergy or a warden. [If required by his/her terms of probation, a violation of this covenant may also be reported to his/her probation officer.] The decisions of the clergy in this regard are absolute and final, completely at the clergy's discretion, and not subject to any appeal by the Covenanter.

**Signatures:**

\_\_\_\_\_Covenanter

\_\_\_\_\_, the Church

\_\_\_\_\_Clergy

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(Senior Warden)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_