

POLICY FOR PARISH PROTOCOLS FOR INCLUSION OF
REGISTERED SEX OFFENDERS
ADOPTED BY THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL DECEMBER 2023

This policy consists of three components that are intended to be read and used together:

- A. Statement of Purpose
- B. Protocols
- C. Behavioral Covenant Template

This policy applies to all parishes and worshipping communities in the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts.

A. Statement of Purpose

The Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts (DioWMA) seeks to create a welcoming and safe environment for all of God's people, including those who have committed criminal acts. God makes no distinction between sins or sinners. As we seek to follow The Great Commandment, we welcome all sinners into DioWMA who sincerely seek worship, discipleship, ministry and an opportunity to experience the love of Christ through this church.

We also recognize our responsibility to create and maintain a safe church environment for all. This means we must accept our responsibility to bring people together who have conflicting and diverse life experiences. We aspire to be a place where conversations about accountability, amendment of life, restorative justice, wholeness and healing are engaged, as we deepen our lives of faith.

Both the members of a parish and an offender have responsibilities in this process. It is the responsibility of the leaders and members of the parish to set healthy behavioral boundaries for the offender and to work to support the terms of the Behavioral Covenant (Covenant), thereby reasonably promoting the safety of all persons in a parish including the offender. It is the responsibility of an offender to disclose to parish/worshipping community leaders their inclusion on a sex offender registry and comply with all terms set out in the Covenant. (See below for the Behavioral Covenant Template.)

With that in mind, these protocols are to be followed by all parishes and worshipping communities in DioWMA whenever anyone on any sex offender registry seeks to engage, to any degree, in the life of a parish. Parish leaders may also apply these protocols to those among us who have a criminal conviction history of victimizing others and are not on a sex offender registry.

While it is desired and expected that all registered offenders will self-disclose their status to the clergy or lay leadership, 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 ministries or certain leadership capacities covered by DioWMA policies regarding the Protection of Vulnerable Adults or the Protection of Children and Youth, the requisite public

record background checks should reveal their status on the registry and any other criminal convictions.

B. Protocols

The following protocols apply whenever parish clergy, staff or lay leaders learn of a registered sex offender seeking to worship or otherwise participate in the life of the parish. The diocesan Safe Church Officer should be contacted as soon as possible, so the diocesan leadership knows a process is underway, and to help and support this process.

1. Interview the offender. The interview is conducted by an ordained leader of the parish who may invite a warden to be present during the interview. In the absence of an ordained leader, the wardens are to conduct the interview. During the interview:
 - a. Ask about the offender's desires regarding participation in the parish.
 - b. Review the behavioral boundaries and seek their cooperation as a means of making worship services available to them while maintaining a safe church environment. If an offender does not agree to cooperate with the terms of the Covenant as set out below, preclude that person from attending any parish functions and immediately notify the Safe Church Officer.
 - c. Explain how information concerning their status will be shared with people in the parish (as set out in #6 below). Do not promise confidentiality; inclusion on a sex offender registry is public information.
 - d. Obtain the offender's residence address and telephone contact information, name and contact information for their parole or probation officer to verify terms and conditions or parole/probation and the offender's criminal record, name and contact information for their therapist, if any. Seek permission to speak with both the parole/probation officer and therapist.
2. Call the parole/probation officer to verify the terms of parole/probation and criminal history. Explore whether attending worship services or participating in any parish activities, with or without a monitor/chaperone, would violate the terms of parole/probation.
3. Identify appropriate monitors/chaperones 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. Friends and family members of the offender are not eligible to serve as monitors/chaperones with the exception of those who are vetted and approved to serve in this capacity by a probation officer. The probation officer's written verification of such approval must be attached to the Covenant. All monitors/chaperones should sign and receive a copy of the Covenant.
4. Consider talking to the offender's therapist to explore if there are certain behavioral tools the therapist might want the monitors/chaperones or others to know about that would protect the offender from becoming vulnerable.

5. Create a Covenant with the offender using the template provided. The Covenant affirms the mutual desire to make it possible for the offender to attend worship services or other events within these protocols. Any violations of the Covenant will be grounds to deny the offender further access to the parish or its activities. The Covenant should be reviewed periodically (at least every six months).
6. Inform parish clergy, staff, wardens, vestry and ministry leaders (ECW, DRE, etc.) of the content of the Covenant. In small parishes it might be preferable to inform all members of the worshipping community. The information disclosed should focus on the content of the Covenant, not the facts of the underlying conviction or identity of victim(s).
7. Provide copies of the Covenant to the offender, wardens, clergy and all those who have consented to serve as monitors/chaperones.
8. Identify a means by which this information will be preserved and shared with all new clergy, staff and lay leaders as changes in personnel occur.

C. Behavioral Covenant Template Attached

[print on parish letterhead]

BEHAVIORAL COVENANT

between

_____ (Covenantor)

and

_____ Episcopal Church,

_____ (Rector, Clergy-in-charge and/or warden)

Authority and Purpose

The purpose of this Behavioral Covenant is to promote reasonable safety of all persons in the parish, while maintaining a welcoming place of worship for _____.
(Covenantor).

This covenant is written in compliance with the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts' Policy for Parish Protocols for Inclusion of Registered Sex Offenders ("Policy"). The terms are as prescribed by the Policy.

Background

_____ (Covenantor) has met with the Rev. _____.
During this meeting, Policy was reviewed with _____ (Covenantor) who acknowledges awareness of the policy and understands its provisions.

_____ (Covenantor) has clearly expressed their desired to comply with the policy to help ensure that _____ (Name of parish) is a safe place for all who attend.

The Rev. _____ has clearly stated their desire and intention that _____ (Name of parish) be a place of worship and continued healing for _____ (Covenantor) and that _____ (Rector/Clergy-in-Charge) can and will be _____'s (Covenantor) pastor, subject to _____'s (Covenantor) compliance with this covenant.

Information and Confidentiality

_____ (Covenantor) is aware that the Rev. _____ (Rector/
Clergy-in-Charge) is obligated to notify certain members of the parish of
_____'s (Covenantor) status as a Registered Sex Offender, per the Policy.
_____(Covenantor) is aware that, while efforts may be made to keep their
status on a need-to-know basis, confidentiality is not promised beyond the sacrament of
confession.

Agreement and Covenant

_____ (Covenantor) agrees to the following:

1. _____ (Covenantor) will always attend worship services and parish activities with _____, (Names of identified monitors/chaperones) who will remain at Covenantor's side at all times (outside of bathrooms).
2. _____ (Covenantor) will attend worship services on only the following days and times. These are services when children and youth are least likely to be present.

3. _____ (Covenantor) will not initiate contact with anyone under 18 years of age and will actively avoid such contact, including moving to other parts of the building as necessary.
4. If anyone under 18 years of age initiates contact with _____ (Covenantor), _____ (Covenantor) will excuse themselves, and move away as quickly as possible.
5. _____ (Covenantor) will disclose to adult church members their status on the registry before meeting and/or visiting with adults in any setting, if those adults have minors in their households or as frequent guests in their households.
6. _____ (Covenantor) will not attend events outside of the church building where persons under 18 years of age are invited.
7. If _____ (Covenantor) needs to use bathroom facilities at the church, _____ (Covenantor) will request that a monitor/ chaperone ensure no minors are in the bathroom with _____ (Covenantor).

8. If _____ (Covenantor) decides to attend a different church,
_____ (Covenantor) will notify the Rev. _____.

Terms

This covenant is in effect immediately upon signature. It will be reviewed every six months by the Rev. _____ and wardens.

Violations of the Covenant

By signing, _____ (Covenantor) agrees, understands and accepts that violation of any of the provisions of this agreement may result in _____ (Covenantor) being asked to leave _____ (Name of parish) Church by the Rev. _____ (Rector/ Clergy-in-charge, etc.). [If required by the terms of probation, a violation of this covenant may also be reported to Covenantor's probation officer.] The decisions of the Rev. _____ in this regard are to be made in consultation with the Canon for Mission Integrity and Training.

Signatures:

_____ Covenantor

Date: _____

_____ Rector/Clergy-in-charge

Date: _____

_____ Senior Warden

Date: _____

_____ Diocesan Safe Church Officer

Date: _____

Monitors/chaperones names, phone numbers and signatures:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.