

Dear Friend,

Thank you for being willing to have this uncomfortable, but necessary conversation. If you are reading this policy, it is likely because you carry Registered Sex Offender (RSO) status, or are presently under investigation. As a church, we want to be a safe place for everyone to learn about and grow in following Jesus.

The pages that follow explain policies we have in place to balance three priorities we have:

1. Safety of children and all vulnerable persons
2. Peace of mind for parents
3. Creating a beloved community where everyone can worship and fellowship, including those under RSO status

We give thanks that those under RSO status have a lower rate of recidivism when they are actively involved in a faith community. We want to be a part of God's shalom and restorative work, by providing a safe way for all to experience the richness of community. We also acknowledge that there are significantly variable rates of recidivism, based on the type of offense, with higher rates among those convicted of pedophilia versus those under RSO status due to other offenses.

Our policy is intended to provide everyone with clarity and direction when we learn of someone under RSO status, that wishes to worship with us at RMC.

We recognize that wrestling with the consequences of past actions can be emotionally difficult. We want to reiterate throughout this process that you are offered full forgiveness in Christ; as Christ's body, we will work at reflecting this whole-hearted forgiveness. We do not want you to live with a sense of shame. Simultaneously, forgiveness does not mean the removal of all implications of past failures. That is what this document discusses.

In the event any allegation, investigation, or conviction of harm against individuals *within* our congregation have occurred, we ask that you find another congregation with which to worship. We will always prioritize, above all else, the safety and healing of the most vulnerable, including children and individuals that have been sexually harmed. In the event you move or choose to worship elsewhere, we have a duty and obligation to share your RSO status with other congregations (if we learn that you are worshipping there) so that they can ensure the safety and wellbeing of their faith community.

If you need time to process this document and its implications, we want to grant that, but ask that you refrain from attending services or events until you agree to adhere to these guidelines and the church has had an opportunity to make the necessary arrangements. During the intervening time, we welcome you to attend our worship services via Zoom, and to stay in contact with our pastoral staff for support and any needed pastoral care.

**Summary of Approach:** There are three basic things we ask of you to fulfill our holistic pastoral care responsibilities to you and our congregation.

1. We ask that you sign a release of information with each person in your rehabilitative care or legal accountability team, giving them permission to speak with us about your progress. We value their insight on how to best care for you. We want them to have the freedom to contact us if there are any concerns or new developments within the scope of their care and supervision.

FAQ: How do I do this? We have included a form for you to complete, that authorizes two-way communication between the Roanoke Mennonite Church pastoral team, and the legal or mental health professionals on your team. If agencies require use of their own Release-of-Information form, please complete and sign, and provide that to us as quickly as possible. We need to know that this step has been completed before we contact them. We ask that you also provide these professionals with a copy of this letter and policy.

2. Second, we ask that you commit to an Individual Attendance and Participation Agreement (IAPA). This agreement will be developed specifically and uniquely for any individual under RSO status, to allow for the nuances of each situation. It will be created with your involvement, if you choose, with all final decisions left to the pastoral and leadership team. The plan, at a minimum, will address:
  - a. Supervision during church events
  - b. Access to different parts of RMC facilities, including classrooms and restrooms.
  - c. Notification of RSO status within the RMC congregation
  - d. Naming persons that will partner with you for accountability and support
3. Third, we need you to permanently refrain from any presence or involvement in Roanoke Mennonite Church's children or student ministries. You can attend services or other activities, under the terms of your IAPA.

Your IAPA offers protection both to you and all members of our faith community. It offers protection to you, as you will have someone that can attest to your whereabouts and activities at all times in the event of any allegations against you. It also offers peace of mind and assurance to parents, families, and vulnerable individuals, that they will be safe at all times, while worshipping together.

Our policy and your IAPA asks everyone to make sacrifices. We are asking you to accept a limitation on your freedom. We are asking families to sacrifice the peace of mind that would be present if we prohibited persons under RSO status from attending. We believe affording this protection to everyone, even with the sacrifices it entails, is the best way to fulfill our responsibility to shepherd and care for everyone in our congregation.

## **Policy Regarding the Attendance and Participation of Individuals under Registered Sex Offender (RSO) Status**

The purpose of this policy is to maximize the safety, protection, and restoration of all that desire to worship and build community at Roanoke Mennonite Church. We acknowledge the capacity that each of us has, both to cause harm, and to be transformed. We have no desire to be punitive or unnecessarily restrictive, and instead seek paths that facilitate the thriving of all persons.

We acknowledge the imperfections of our justice system, especially surrounding sexual violence. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, only about 30% of sexual assaults are reported to law enforcement. Of those reported, only 1 out of 6 cases results in an arrest. Of those arrested, only about half are successfully prosecuted and convicted. That calculates out to 97.5 % of sexual violence perpetrators never held legally accountable for their actions. Consequently, this policy may also be implemented for individuals not legally charged or convicted, but for whom the leadership at RMC discerns there is strong evidence that sexual harm has occurred, and steps are necessary to ensure the safety of everyone. This policy may also be applied for individuals that have committed physical, emotional, or psychological abuse, whether against adults or children.

Crisis intervention and follow-up care for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence is locally available at the Center for Prevention of Abuse, serving Peoria, Tazewell, and Woodford Counties: 1-800-559-SAFE (7233) [www.centerforpreventionofabuse.org](http://www.centerforpreventionofabuse.org)

Roanoke Mennonite Church places a high value both on confidentiality and transparency. These two values are often in tension, especially so in conversations around sexual violence. We have chosen to follow the leading and instruction of victim advocates, in prioritizing disclosure. As such, if an individual under RSO status chooses to worship with us, all active members of the congregation will be notified by postal mail of the individual's status. The individual under RSO status will be invited to contribute to this letter, but all final decisions on wording and content will lie with the pastoral and leadership teams.

### **Action Steps of this policy:**

1. All congregational members are asked to immediately notify a pastoral team member, upon learning of an individual under RSO status that is attending (or desiring to attend) RMC. The same is true for any individual presently under investigation for sexual abuse or assault, or with a history of allegations of sexual abuse that warrant further exploration.
2. Pastors will take the following steps within 48 hours of notification of an individual attending RMC that is under RSO status or presently under investigation:
  - Inform all other members of the pastoral team and the board chair (unless one of them is the named individual).
  - Create a physical and/or digital file of all further actions, to be maintained in the church office.
  - Check the Federal and State Sex Offender Registries for the individual named, for verification of RSO status.
3. Unless it would compromise a current investigation or other law enforcement activity, a pastoral team member will contact the named individual before the next worship service, to request further conversation and an in-person meeting. If not already communicated, the pastoral team member will inform the individual of the need to wait until a plan is in place, before further attendance and participation at RMC.
4. Pastoral meeting(s) with the individual under RSO status will include the following:
  - Share this policy, including the letter from the beginning of this policy.
  - Inquire if the individual is willing to explore, pursue, and abide by the terms of an Individual Attendance and Participation Agreement (IAPA).
  - Explore, to the extent possible, whether the individual has taken responsibility for their harmful actions, if remorse and repentance is present, steps they are taking to heal and recover, and the commitment to growth and transformation.
  - Determine if the individual is presently under state or legal supervision, and if so, initiate the signing of Releases of Information with those agencies/entities to facilitate further communication.
  - RMC leadership reserves the right to decline access to worship services and activities (and not work towards an IAPA), for reasons including but not limited to:
    - Indicators that the individual continues to be at a very high risk of recidivism
    - Safety recommendations of law enforcement or other professionals
    - Supervision needs are above what RMC can reasonably provide on a consistent basis
5. Prior to the individual under RSO status attending worship or participating in other RMC activities, the following must happen, with records of these actions kept in the church office:

- Develop a customized IAPA that has been signed by the individual and all members of the accountability and support group, and approved by the church board.
  - Share the IAPA with RMC ushers, as they are most often the first point of contact when an individual arrives for worship.
  - Write and distribute a letter to all active RMC attendees, notifying them of the individual's RSO status, or the circumstances that have prompted the implementation of this policy. The letter will provide instruction of who to contact with reports of any problematic interactions, as well as encouragement for parents to discern what to share with their children, in age-appropriate ways. Letters will be sent annually thereafter.
  - Notify the Church Life Team and/or Conference Minister of Illinois Mennonite Conference of this process.
6. If the individual communicates the desire to work towards an IAPA, and there are no contraindications, the pastoral team will notify the rest of the church board and all commission chairs of the process, and through collaboration of the board, an accountability and support group for the individual will be formed to lead the IAPP process.
- At a minimum, this team will include one pastoral team member, one board member, and 2 members at large, with at least 50% of the committee being the same gender as the individual under RSO status. It will not include any family members or close friends of the individual. The support group is encouraged to collaborate with a professional from outside the congregation, that has experience in dealing with sexual abuse.
7. The IAPA will include the following:
- Name the RMC members that have committed to provide supervision whenever this individual is present at RMC worship or activities, and how many supervising individuals are needed per event. Specify the physical proximity and type of supervision that must be maintained, address proximity for monitoring conversations, as well identifying the part of the sanctuary where the individual will sit. Named RMC members will have received child safety training prior to implementation.
  - Describe the way(s) that regular accountability and support will be provided to the individual, outside of RMC worship and activities.
  - Describe the process for the individual to communicate with the RMC members that will provide supervision, to verify that supervision is available on a specific day, prior to attending.
  - Describe process for safe and supervised access to restrooms.
  - Name the building locations that are prohibited, which at a minimum will be all areas of children's ministry, including the basement, nursery, and classrooms.

- If the individual has young children, describe procedures for having his/her children dropped off and picked up from classrooms/nursery to ensure age-appropriate care and safety of the individual's child(ren), while still abiding by the terms of the IAPA.
  - An agreement that current Releases of Information will be maintained on an ongoing basis with all law enforcement, outside agencies, and/or treatment professionals that are providing monitoring and care for the individual, and list what those agencies are.
  - Create a log for when the individual attends that includes the date and times of arrival/departure, with the individual(s) providing supervision documenting whether supervision was maintained in accordance with the IAPA, and noting any anomalies.
8. Any actions to intentionally evade supervision, or that violate the terms of the IAPA will result in immediate revocation of the IAPA, and also prohibition from further participation or attendance at all RMC activities and worship. Law enforcement and any other partnering agencies will also be notified.
9. Action steps if individual shows up to worship or other activities without the completion of an IAPA, or failing to abide by terms of their IAPA:
- The individual will respectfully be asked to leave, with information on what will be required to attend in the future.
  - If the individual does not comply, law enforcement will be called immediately, and visual supervision maintained until they have left the building and property.