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uniting church in Australia, Synod of NSW & ACT

Safe Church Policy for Congregations Synod of NSW & ACT

This policy applies to all Synod entities other than those which require a specific tailored policy. In particular, it is for Ministers, Ministry of Pastor, Lay Leaders, Employees, Volunteers and Members of Councils in a Congregation, Parish Mission or Presbytery of the Uniting Church, Synod of NSW and the ACT.

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Engadine Uniting Church

Safe Church Policy

Context

The Uniting Church in Australia believes that all people, including children, are made in the image of God. As a community of faith, the Uniting Church is committed to providing safe environments for all people including children and vulnerable adults, so that they may live life in all its fullness

This Safe Church Policy enables the Engadine *Uniting Church* to live out its mission in ways that keep people safe, especially in ministries with children and vulnerable adults. Implementation of this policy, along with accompanying procedures, ensures *Engadine Uniting Church* meets its responsibilities as part of the Uniting Church in Australia to be compliant with Australian legislation and the various safeguarding policies and guidelines of the Synod. It ensures that a framework of practices exist to minimise harm to children and vulnerable adults, that programs are organised so they are accessible to all, that any concerns are reported appropriately, and remain compliant with legislative requirements.

Engadine Uniting Church is committed to implementing the Child Safe Principles (as outlined in the UCA National Child Safe Framework) and commits to a continual improvement process which ensures compliance with this policy and that it is amended in response to changes in legislative requirements.

Application of this Policy

This Safe Church Policy applies to all ministers, staff members, elders, church councillors, leaders and volunteers associated with the ministry in *Engadine Uniting Church*.

This Safe Church Policy aims to:

- Minimise the risk of abuse, ministry misconduct and the misuse of power
- Ensure that all cases of suspected abuse and ministry misconduct are handled in compliance with Synod policies and Australian legislation
- Ensure that leaders and our church programs are safe, with particular attention to background screening, skills and experience of people during the recruitment process.
- Ensure that all people are respected and valued and have a voice in our community
- Ensure that a culture of Safe Church is developed and nurtured within this church
- Ensure compliance with current Synod policies that relate to Safe Church practices

This church commits to:

Best practice leadership

As a Church Council, we acknowledge that good governance underpins a safe church culture and practice. In our church:

- Leaders work actively to develop a culture of safety, demonstrate safe behaviours, and do everything they can to ensure the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of others
- Leaders work collaboratively in teams and are accountable for their ministry
- Leaders give a voice to children and vulnerable adults in decisions that affect them
- All activities are approached with a lens of safety and risk management.
- Church Council appoint safe church contact people to support compliance with safe church practices
- Safe Church is on the agenda at each council meeting

- Church Council ensures compliance with relevant legislation relating to child protection and WHS
- Church Council is committed to developing a plan to implement the Child Safe Principles identified in the UCA National Child Safe Framework

Safe recruitment of staff and volunteers

The Church Council commits to ensuring robust recruitment and screening processes exist for staff and volunteers to ensure that the right people are placed in roles appropriate to their gifts and skills and to prevent unsuitable people from gaining contact with vulnerable groups. These practices include:

- The creation of role descriptions to enable the matching of the gifts and skills of potential leaders and volunteers with each role and ensure a common understanding of expectations. Where a role has contact with children or vulnerable people, additional safeguards are included within the role description.
- The church should discern the appropriateness of a person for a role via an in-person interview process, screening questions specific to safeguarding children with structured questions for reference checks and by gathering relevant information from others.
- All leaders participate regularly in the life of the church for six months before being appointed to a leadership role
- All staff and volunteers undergo appropriate screening checks before being appointed (e.g. Working With Children Checks (NSW), Working with Vulnerable People Check (ACT), Police Checks (where appropriate), reference checks (where appropriate).
- In the case of SRE teacher applications, two referees are required. Reference checks should be carried out wherever possible for other volunteer roles, especially where the volunteer will be working with children and/or vulnerable people. (E.g. ask questions of any agency the person has volunteered with before and ask specific questions about their work with children)
- All staff and volunteers are given an induction into their role which includes both the requirements of their role and the code of conduct that applies to their role.
- All church councillors, elders and program leaders will agree to follow the UCA Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders
- All ministers must abide by the UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice
- The Congregation adopts the Synod Volunteer Policy, Synod Child Safe Policy and Statement of Commitment to Child Safety.

Training of staff and volunteers

The Church Council acknowledges that training is a key component to ensuring the safety and welfare of all vulnerable people. Therefore:

- Orientation training is required by all church councillors, elders, leaders and volunteers to understand their responsibility to uphold the congregation's Safety Church policy and procedures
- All church councillors, elders and leaders are required to complete Safe Church Awareness Training within six months and attend a refresher workshop every 3 years. For those who work with children, they must undergo Safe Church Awareness Training before commencing their role
- All staff, leaders and volunteers are required to attend additional ministry-specific training as necessary e.g. Monitors of persons of concern must undergo specific training

Supervision of staff and volunteers

The Church Council acknowledges that it has responsibility for the well-being of staff and volunteers and for ensuring that they are supported in their role and for ensuring that they are undertaking their role with appropriate skill and diligence and are compliant with policies and codes of conduct.

The Church Council

- Commits to ongoing leadership training, supervision and support for church councillors, elders, program leaders and volunteers as appropriate.
- Commits to performing periodic reviews (at least annually) with our staff, leaders and volunteers and provide and receive feedback on their performance and any areas of concern.

Responding to concerns of harm, abuse, or misconduct

- The Church Council acknowledges that churches have not always dealt appropriately with allegations and instances of abuse and have prioritised the concerns of institutions above the needs of victims. The Church Council commits to ensuring that this is not repeated.
- All church councillors, elders, leaders, and volunteers will report disclosures or suspicions of child abuse, according to the Synod policies and guidelines for Mandatory Reporting and Reportable Conduct. External agencies such as the police will be immediately informed where a child is in immediate danger.
- All church councillors, elders, leaders, and volunteers will respond quickly to concerns or disclosures of abuse towards a vulnerable adult or to reports of inappropriate behaviour of one adult towards another.
- Where a church councillor, elder, program leader or helper has an allegation of ministry misconduct made against them support will be provided to alleged victims and perpetrators with the guidance of Synod.
- Church councillors will ensure that all staff who are subject to the Reportable Conduct Scheme and Mandatory/Mandated Reporting laws understand their responsibilities under the legislation.

Safe environments

- Everything in our ability will be done to keep all those in our care safe from spiritual, physical, sexual, emotional abuse (including bullying) or neglect.
- Expect all leaders, as servants of Christ to serve our people and the community, sharing the good news of Jesus and leading in spiritually, physically and emotionally non-abusive ways.
- All participants, including children, will be given an opportunity to be consulted about the programs and the activities in which they participate.
- All programs will be accessible to all people by ensuring as much as is practical that any adjustments are made to cater for diverse needs of participants. (Including cultural, physical, emotional, mental as well as sexual orientation).
- Appropriate administration relating to safe church will be undertaken. This involves the use of forms, templates, registers, other tools developed by Synod to record appropriate information and permissions, as well as compliance with required screening checks and training obligations.
- Program leaders will be required to complete a written ministry approval process including a detailed risk analysis, for approval by the Church Council, at the start of new ministry programs/activities which take place in the church's name. These programs/activities will be reviewed on an annual basis.
- Church Council, elders and program leaders shall have a complete understanding of online safety measures when providing online events and services and that they provide participants with an online code of conduct prior to the event.
- Church Council is responsible for periodic audit of the church site, programs and administrative compliance with legislation, to ensure any safety concerns and non-compliances are identified and dealt with. As a guide audits should be undertaken at least annually unless there are significant safety concerns or risks which require greater frequency.

Persons of Concern

- It is acknowledged that there may be persons with a background of allegations or convictions of child abuse or who display difficult behaviours towards children or adults, who may be engaging or wish to engage with this church.
- The Uniting Church believes that God created all people, and commits to respecting all people, with the paramount obligation of protecting children and vulnerable people.
- In cases where it is suspected that a person of concern wishes to engage with our church, the Synod Person of Concern policy will be followed, and the Church Council and Synod shall work collaboratively in identifying a solution.
- The terms of any Safety Agreement made with a person of concern will be upheld in the spirit in which it was set. Appropriate reviews will be undertaken, and the Church Council will work with the Synod Safe Church Unit should concerns become apparent.
- The Church Council will put appropriate codes of conduct and safeguarding measures in place to help people identify the grooming behaviours of persons of concern.

Definitions

Child	Generally, this refers to a person who is under the age of 18 years but for Mandatory reporting purposes a child is under the age of 16 in NSW.
Elders	Share with the minister in spiritual oversight of the congregation. They are responsible for building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.
Church councillors	Members of the church council elected by the congregation, who have oversight of the total life and mission of the congregation.
Leaders	Are people responsible for a ministry program or set of programs.
Minister:	Refers to Candidates, Community Ministers, Deacons, Deaconesses, Interns, Lay Pastors, Ministers of the Word, Pastors, Youth Workers and Ministers from another denomination serving in an approved placement.
Staff	Paid employees of the congregation.
Synod	Refers to the UCA Synod of NSW and the ACT.
Volunteers	Are people who assist or help with ministry activities without payment.

Related Policies and Documents

National Safe Church Unit Policy Framework

Policy	Web Location
National Child Safe Policy Framework	https://safechurch.uca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/nscu-national-child-safe-policy-framework-2019.pdf
Person of Concern Policy Framework	https://safechurch.uca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/nscu-person-of-concern-policy-framework-2020.pdf

Child Safe Screening National Policy Framework	https://safechurch.uca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/nscu-child-safe-screening-national-policy-framework-2020.pdf

National Assembly Documents

UCA Basis of Union, Constitution and Regulations (2018)	https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/307?keywords=&type=all
UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice	https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/301?keywords=&type=all
Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders	https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/298?keywords=&type=all
Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Lay Preachers	https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/302?keywords=&type=all

Synod Policies and Guidelines

Policy	**Web Location**
Synod Child Safe Policy	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9665/policy-child-safe-synod-nsw-and-act.pdf
Statement of Commitment to Child Safety	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9982/safe-church-commitment-statement.pdf
Synod Persons of Concern Policy	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9667/policy-persons-of-concern-synod-nsw-and-act.pdf
Parish Missions Protocol for Persons of Concern	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9981/parish-mission-poc-protocol-appendix-to-the-persons-of-concern-policy.pdf
• Safety Agreement	Contact the Synod Safe Church Unit (02) 8267-4351 for assistance.
Synod Volunteers Policy	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/6858/volunteer-policy.pdf
Mandatory Reporting Policy	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9666/policy-mandatory-reporting-synod-nsw-and-act.pdf
• Mandatory Reporting Guidelines in NSW	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9670/guideline-mandatory-reporting-nsw.pdf
• Mandatory Reporting Guidelines in the ACT	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9669/guideline-mandatory-reporting-act.pdf
Reportable Conduct Policy	
• Reportable Conduct Guidelines in NSW	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9672/guideline-reportable-conduct-nsw.pdf
• Reportable Conduct Guidelines in the ACT	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9671/guideline-reportable-conduct-act.pdf
Background Check Policy and Procedure	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/10060/safe-church-background-check-policy.pdf
Working with Children Check (NSW) – Guideline	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9673/guideline-working-with-children-check-nsw.pdf

Working with Vulnerable People Check (ACT) - Guideline	https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/9664/guideline-working-with-vulnerable-people-check-act.pdf

Useful Websites

Resources	Website
Safe Church Resources and Templates for Church Councils	https://nswact.uca.org.au/safe-church-unit/safe-church-leadership-for-church-councils/
Safe Church Training Information	https://nswact.uca.org.au/safe-church-unit/safe-church-training/
SRE Information	https://nswact.uca.org.au/safe-church-unit/special-religious-education/
Office of the Children's Guardian - Child Safe Scheme NSW	https://ocg.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-scheme
Child and Youth Protection Services - Australian Capital Territory	https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocyfs