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**Safe Leaders Policy**



Safe Church in the Northern Synod

Creating a Safe place for all

Safe Leaders Policy

Version 202001

Review frequency: 12 monthly

Next review scheduled for 31/01/2021

Approved at the Annual Synod Meeting held in June 2016

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Introduction

For anyone working with children or vulnerable adults, issues of care, protection and safety have always been complex, but are increasingly so. More than ever, we are aware of issues of safety, our duty of care, the vulnerability of children and adults and the possibility of abuse.

In addition, standards of care now expected as a matter of law and of community practice are higher than they were in the past. The Church must enforce these standards of care.

The Northern Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia (the Synod) has developed a policy on the prevention of abuse because it has a moral and legal responsibility to ensure that all people are safe.

This Safe Leaders Guide should be read in conjunction with the following Policies: -

Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse including Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Abuse and Harassment

Disclosure Policy

Member or Adherent Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Policy

Privacy Policy

Lay Leaders Code of Conduct

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Lay Preachers

UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice

which can be downloaded at <http://nsuca.org.au/safechurch> or obtained in hard copy from Northern Synod Safe Church Coordinator.

Our policy for keeping children safe in our church

The Northern Synod is committed to providing safe places where people are cared for, nurtured and sustained. The Synod commits itself to the care, protection and safety of all people relating with it or its agencies.

We seek to provide a safe environment for people to encounter God, to develop relationships as part of a community, and to grow in faith (A Safe Place for Children, Uniting Church Press, 1999).

We commit to being a community which:

* provides and maintains a welcoming and safe environment
* offers suitable and well-equipped leadership
* provides a level of resourcing that reflects the value of all people, in particular children
* provides clear and appropriate guidelines for managing the safety of people, in particular children and vulnerable adults, and its programs.

Keeping people safe in our Church through our leadership

Having opportunities to use God-given gifts through leadership can be one of the most satisfying and growing experiences for a person in the life of the Church.

When considering someone for a leadership role, it is important to value and support them by making sure:

* the task uses their gifts and talents
* they are able to work as a part of team, and are well supported
* the position has clearly defined expectations
* the person is able to work in a safe way with all people, particularly children and vulnerable adults.

In order to achieve the goal of keeping everyone safe through leadership in the Church, we commit to:

Who is a Leader

The Uniting Church in Australia defines a leader as:-

A leadership position or role includes but is not limited to:

Standing for or accepting nomination for any leadership position in the congregation, Presbytery or Synod including membership of Church Council, Presbytery Standing Committee, or Synod Standing Committee, any committees or task groups of the Congregation, Presbytery or Synod

Membership of any Congregation/faith community task groups/portfolio working groups

Leading worship in any capacity including but not limited to saying grace, prayers, singing as an individual or member of a band/group/choir, , providing music as an individual or member of a band/group, bible reading, lighting candles, offering votes of thanks, carrying Communion elements or the Bible into the Church, serving Communion elements, addressing the congregation in any way, standing in the sanctuary space

Leader or helper role of any children or youth activities including but not limited to creche, Sunday School, Kids Group, youth group, days camps, fun days

Greeter, welcomer, pastoral care visitor

Key access to any Church property, afterhours access to any Church property, access to any Church computer equipment or technology

Leading bible studies, home/life/fellowship groups, organizing or hosting any Church events, activities or programs, involvement in religious education programs

Any other activity which a reasonable person might identify as acting in a leadership role/position with the Uniting Church

Safe recruitment of leaders

* We will screen all prospective leaders in our ministries before they are appointed.
* We will recruit using the guide lines in:
* Working with Children Act 2004. WA
* Care and Protection of Children Act 2007 NT
* Children’s Protection Act 1993 SA
* We have a minimum church attendance policy for all prospective leaders, i.e. that they attend on a regular basis for six months before being able to be offered the opportunity to serve in a leadership role.
* We require all those working in leadership roles to obtain a Working with Children Clearance and a National Police Check.

Adequate training for leaders

* We require that all leaders attend Synod endorsed Safe Church Awareness training within the first year of their holding a leadership role and subsequently attend refresher workshops every 3 years.
* We require all leaders to attend additional ministry-specific training as endorsed by our church leadership.

Continued supervision of leaders

We commit to ongoing leadership training, supervision and support for leaders.

All leaders will agree to follow the Synod Policies:- Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse Including Bullying, Harassment, Sexual Abuse and Harassment Policy

Disclosure Policy

Member or Adherent Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Policy

Privacy Policy

Lay Leaders Code of Conduct

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Lay Preachers

UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice

which can be downloaded at <http://ns.uca.org.au/Safechurch> or obtained in hard copy from Northern Synod Safe Church Coordinator

All leaders will sign a Safe Leaders & Volunteers Agreement

Responding to all allegations of risk of harm (abuse) and serious ministry misconduct

All leaders will report disclosures or suspicions of child abuse according to state legislation.

Where a leader has an allegation of ministry misconduct made against them the Synod Discipline Process will be followed and they may be stepped aside

Potential leaders

Congregations through their Church Councils should not accept leadership offers without question no matter how well intentioned. Congregations **must** exercise care when inviting individuals to fulfil leadership positions within programs particularly for their children and young people.

A leader will be 18 years or older to be part of a leadership team with significant responsibility. A young person under 18 years of age can be a ‘helper’ or ‘junior leader’ if they work under the direct supervision of an adult leader.

Recruiting the right type of people

Recruitment and selection of team leaders and members is an important task since leaders are representatives of the Church. They are entrusted with the responsibility of caring for others, often with little direct supervision from the Minister and/or other key leaders.

We need safe leaders - leaders who respect other people’s boundaries, receive regular supervision, have other people’s best interests at heart, who are led by God and who are in accountable and transparent teams.

The right type of leaders and legal due diligence

Due diligence is a legal term referring to the care that must be taken when:

Appointing leaders:This includes properly screening, interviewing, checking a potential leader’s background and contacting a potential leader’s referees.

Supervising leaders:

This includes setting clear roles and expectations, providing support for leaders, practising the implementation of the appropriate Code of Conduct and having a commitment to team leadership. For example, a church may exercise sufficient care in the hiring of an individual but still be legally accountable for acts of abuse on the basis of negligent supervision**.** Negligent supervision is a failure to exercise sufficient care in the ongoing supervision of a leader.

Pre-recruitment

Identify the role and length of time the role is to be filled. Leaders should be appointed to clearly defined roles with clearly defined start and end dates.

Form recruitment teams

It is good practice for the recruitment team to include representatives of both genders. The team needs to be no more than 2-3 people including the team leader.

Minimum attendance policy

If a person is not known to the congregation, and has had no previous leadership experience that can be substantiated, it is advisable that they are part of a congregation for at least 6 months before being considered for a leadership position within that congregation.

Recommended recruitment process:

Position information and suitability interview

The applicant meets with team leaders to find out more about the role and explore whether the applicant is suited for the role. An application form Part A is completed.

This process is intended to assist in further identifying the applicant’s skills, gifts and talents and how these can best be used to further the Church’s mission.

Selection of leaders should consider the applicant’s:

* relevant leadership skills and experience
* personal standards and character
* ability to develop appropriate relationships
* maturity in faith
* awareness of and willingness to work within the Uniting Church Ethos, Ethics, Polity and the Church’s policies to ensure the safety of all people especially children and young people
* Working with Children Clearance status (Western Australia)
* Ochre Card Status (Northern Territory)
* Working with Children status (South Australia)
* National Police Check in Northern Territory, South Australia, and Western Australia.
* reference checks
* guidance provided in the Synod’s HR documents.

Working with Children Checks

Every person who works or volunteers as a leader must undergo a Working with Children Check.

Who needs a Working with Children Check?

* All ministers
* Paid employees, volunteers and students or trainees who participate in leadership roles.

See Who is a Leader pg. 4

Each congregation/faith community/ Patrol **must** maintain a register to keep track of each person involved in leadership activities, their Working with Children Check/Ochre card numbers and expiry dates (Synod policy Working with Children Check) and retain a copy of the card..

This data be forwarded to the Synod’s Safe Church Coordinator

Congregations also needs to confirm the validity of a Working with Children Check/Ochre Card held by individuals who have transferred from another congregation o0r denomination.

Download application forms for Working with Children Checks from:

South Australia:

<http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/services/screening>.

Western Australia:

<http://www.checkwwc.wa.gov.au/checkwwc/Publications+and+Forms/Application+Forms.htm>

Northern Territory

<http://www.workingwithchildren.nt.gov.au/forms.html>

Police Checks

Every person who works or volunteers as a leader in the Northern Synod **MUST** undergo a National Police Check.

Formalising the appointment

Once an individual is selected for a position and a confirmation of a positive Working with Children Check/Ochre card and National Police check are obtained the appointment needs to be formally recognised as approved by the Church Council in its meeting minutes. Recognising this person’s leadership role through commissioning or other act in a service of worship may also be appropriate.

Leaders will also be asked to sign a Safe Leaders & Volunteers Policy Agreement and comply with all Synod policies and procedures including policies for the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Appointment with orientation

Ensure all leaders have received appropriate training and information to enable them to successfully share in their ministry, and they are an endorsed leader has been communicated to people.

Unsuccessful applicants

If an applicant is considered unsuitable for leadership, it may be helpful to attempt to identify other roles for them within the congregation. The decision to deem an applicant unsuitable for a leadership role should be communicated in a sensitive way and the person should be followed up pastorally.

It may be appropriate to find other ways they can be of service in the congregation.

Probation Review

After the leader or volunteer has completed a probationary period Section B of the Leaders Application Form is to be completed

Ministry reviews

Appointments will be reviewed periodically. As part of the review process, the Church Council and/or leadership team may consider whether any further training is needed.

Working with Children Checks/Ochre Cards must be renewed every 3 years. It is up to the individual to apply for a new card and to inform the appropriate member of their congregation when they receive their renewed card. The details of the WWCC/Ochre Card should also be registered with the Synod Safe Church Coordinator

The designated person in the congregation responsible for maintaining an updated list of valid Working with Children Checks/Ochre Card should regularly check the expiry dates on the register and follow up leaders whose cards are due to expire to ensure they are in the process of applying for a new card.

A person may continue into a second term as a leader but this expectation should not be implied at the initial appointment.

Supervision for leaders

Although thorough recruitment is essential, it is equally important that leaders are supported through ministry supervision.

The Church Council has responsibilities not only to those involved in church activities but also to those who help with programs or offer leadership. A vital part of this involves providing adequate supervision of leaders to minimise any potential physical risk or damage to their reputations.

Leaders should be provided with adequate supervision to ensure that certain situations do not arise. This can be done by ensuring that two leaders are present at all activities so that the possibility of inappropriate behaviour, or allegation of such behaviour, is minimised. Plans should be in place to ensure appropriate resources and support is available during all activities.

The components of healthy ministry supervision are: clear expectations, adequate ministry support for leaders, a commitment to develop leaders, a clear set of boundaries (see the Codes of Conduct) for leaders, and a well communicated process for conflict resolution and complaints handling (see the Bullying and Harassments Policy).

Supervision will also help to identify areas where future training is required.

Clear boundaries

The Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Abuse including Bullying, Harassment, Sexual Abuse or Harassment is helpful for ensuring that leaders understand appropriate boundaries, given the position of power they have as those who may spiritually influence others.

Expectations

Supervision cannot take place unless there are clearly understood expectations in both directions.

As a **ministry leader** you are expected to:

* commit to the aims of your ministry
* support other ministry team leaders
* fulfil your ministry role as described to you by your ministry coordinator
* undergo any training required for your ministry position
* attend ministry team meetings as required
* embrace the appropriate Code of Ethics or Code of Conduct .

As a **ministry coordinator** you are expected to:

* commit to the aims of ministry
* support ministry team leaders and supervise them in their role
* fulfil your ministry role as described to you by your senior church leader
* undergo any training required for your ministry position
* embrace the appropriate Code of Ethics or Code of Conduct
* ensure that all leaders are screened, appointed and inducted effectively into ministry roles
* ensure that your ministry program has been approved by your Church Council
* ensure that your ministry program meets the requirements for Safe Leaders and Safe Church in the Northern Synod Programs.

As a person in a **ministry role** with the Church you could expect that your Church Council will:

* provide mechanisms to support and supervise all leaders and ministry coordinators in their roles
* ensure resources (people, financial, administrative access and equipment) are available for approved ministry programs
* provide opportunities to access approved ministry training.

Support for leaders

It is important that the Church ensures that formal or informal support is provided for all leaders. It is important that all leaders and team members have a clear understanding of lines of responsibility, to whom they can go for support and how to address conflicts and concerns.

Commitment to leadership development and training

Developing leaders is another way to ensure healthy teams. This development can include things like regular team meetings, praying together and planning together. It is also advisable to invest in leadership development both through in-house services and external training events.

Regular training should be offered to assist leaders in their role. This is also a way in which congregations can fulfil their duty of care responsibilities to leaders. To best equip leaders for their task in caring for all people especially children, young people and vulnerable adults

training needs to be undertaken in areas such as:

* the Synod’s policies on keeping all people safe
* First aid
* Age specific leadership training
* Leading bible studies and devotions.

Spiritual Formation of leaders

Being an effective leader is not just about what a person does and the programs they run. It is also about the leader being in a healthy relationship with God. Strategies for helping leaders keep a balance between nurturing their own spiritual life and the demands of being in ministry may include meeting regularly with a mentor or spiritual director, retreats and regular devotional reading and reflection.

Leaders should also be encouraged to regularly attend a worship service within a congregation. A mentoring relationship can support spiritual formation and should be encouraged for all leaders.

Recognition of leaders

An important part of caring for and affirming leaders is to provide opportunities for recognition by the congregation. Recognition at the beginning and end of a period of service and at significant stages along the way demonstrates a clear commitment from the congregation to prayerful and consistent support and affirmation.

Responsibilities of leaders

Leaders are required to keep the Church Council informed of the activities planned in the ministry calendar. All activities are to be approved and minuted by the Church Council

Leaders should report regularly on activities of the group including risk management processes that have been documented.

The Church Council needs to be made particularly aware of any planned activities which have a high-risk factor. These activities must be assessed prior to the activity being run.

Leadership ratios

There should always be a minimum of two leaders at any event organised for children and young people. There should also be an appropriate gender balance in a leadership team especially when the event or activity involves people of both genders.

An appropriate ratio of leaders to participants will vary from one activity to another. The Synod recommends where possible a ratio of 1 leader for every 6 children/young people in the activity for participants aged 5 and over, and 1 leader for every 4 children under 5, with a minimum of two leaders at any given activity.

This ratio not only assists in keeping children and young people physically safe, but aids in the pastoral care of all individuals.

Managing behaviour

Leaders working with children, young people and vulnerable adults are responsible for developing and implementing warm, inclusive and supportive group dynamics. All leaders must seek to provide a safe place for children, young people and vulnerable adults to encounter God, to develop relationships as part of a community and to grow in faith.

It is essential for all groups to have clear expectations about behaviour standards. It is helpful to ask the group to assist in establishing behaviour guidelines and committing to them.

Some areas to be particularly sensitive to and aware of include, but may not necessarily be limited to:

* Cultural and language diversity, attitudes and expectations.
* The wide variety of family structures.
* Use of inclusive/non-sexist or racist language or humour.
* Appropriate, equitable inclusion of those with disabilities and special needs.
* Appropriate, equitable inclusion of all participants regardless of gender, culture or appearance.
* Warmth, empathy and appropriate teaching, guidance, care and nature.
* Positive, empowering and encouraging uses of power and authority.
* Appropriate use of all forms of electronic contact/communication with participants.

Children and young people learn as much from what adults do as what they say. Leaders must be aware of this and act accordingly.

Behaviour, attitudes and language are as important as what is taught during an activity or program. It is vital to use appropriate language and ways of relating that affirm the worth, dignity and significance of team leaders, members and participants.

Behaviour management strategies

These should include ways to deal with bullying, offensive language and attitudes. The following strategies may have a positive influence on group behaviour:

* Strong, suitably trained, well prepared leadership.
* Clarity of expectations for behaviours in a particular situation.
* Consistency.
* Appropriate, interactive and well-planned activities.
* Clear explanations and answering of questions.
* Setting appropriate boundaries which are understood and accepted.
* Close supervision and consistent monitoring of behaviour.
* Early intervention strategies and established consequences for inappropriate behaviour.

Exit interviews - An opportunity to reflect

Exiting leaders should, in supervision, be afforded the opportunity to reflect on their experience of holding that leadership role and invited to comment on the role’s further development/improvement. This information may lead to modifying the role.

A copy of this document is available in the Members’ Section of the Northern Synod website at [www.ns.uca.org.au](http://www.ns.uca.org.au).

Note: this guide has been compiled using material from the Safe Church Training Manual 2012, Safe Ministry Training Manual 2012 and the Child Safe Church UCA Queensland synod.

Document sourced from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.