SAFEMINISTRY
with**children**

policy
a culture of shared guardianship

Preface

"Then Jesus took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." Mark 9:36-37

The Christian revelation orients us towards being a community in which we recognise the sacredness of every person amongst us, and the responsibility of the community to ensure that sacredness is honoured and protected.

This policy has been developed to enable us to build practices in our lives that will enhance our capacity to show that sacredness in concrete ways. It will help ensure that in our ministry with children we are strongly aware of what we need to do to keep them safe, and set an environment in which they can experience the love of God toward them.

I encourage you to embrace this policy in the spirit of our call as the church to build communities of faith, hope and love that bear witness to the life of the promised Kingdom of God.

Rev David Baker
Moderator
December 2015

The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

1. Purpose

The Safe Ministry with Children Policy addresses the requirements of the *Working With Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (Qld)* (the Act) and the *Working With Children (Risk Management and Screening) Regulations 2011(Qld)* (the Regulations). The Act and Regulations require that the following elements must be included in the risk management strategy:

1. A statement about commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and the protection of children from harm;

2. A code of conduct for interacting with children;

3. Procedures for recruiting, selecting, training and managing persons engaged or proposed to be engaged, as the procedures relate to the safety and wellbeing of children and the protection of children from harm;

4. Policies and procedures for handling disclosures or suspicions of harm, including reporting guidelines;

5. A plan for managing breaches of the risk management strategy;

6. Policies and procedures for compliance with the Act, chapter 8, including policies and procedures about:

   a. Implementing and reviewing the risk management strategy; and

   b. Keeping a written record of matters under the Act, chapter 8, about each person (engaged person) engaged, for example:

      i. Whether or not the person (engaging) considers the person must apply for a prescribed notice or exemption notice about the engaged person; and

      ii. Whether or not a prescribed notice application or an exemption notice application has been made by the person about the engaged person; and

      iii. If a positive notice has been issued for the engaged person, the date of expiry of the notice.

7. Risk management plans for high-risk activities and special events;

8. Strategies for communication and support, including;

   a. Written information for parents and persons engaged by the person that includes details of the risk management strategy or where the strategy can be accessed; and

   b. Training materials for persons engaged by the person to:

      i. Help identify risks of harm and how to handle disclosures or suspicions of harm; and

      ii. Outline the risk management strategy.

This policy is to be read and implemented in conjunction with the process and tools developed to supplement the work of this policy and to ensure compliance with the Act.

Schedule 7 of the Act addresses harm caused by physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect; or sexual abuse or exploitation. In addition to harm included under Schedule 7 of the Act, this policy covers physical injury, mental damage and moral injury caused by wrongdoing. The framework for this policy and its subsequent resources are informed by the Uniting Church in Australia, National Child Safe Policy Framework (2015), findings from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, literature review examining child sex offenders in institutional settings, and 2015 Queensland Synod Standing Committee audit into congregational compliance with the requirements of the above mentioned legislation. This policy also accommodates the regulations, culture and context of the Uniting Church in

Australia, Queensland Synod (the Church) and assists with meeting insurance requirements for conducting safe activities.

The three core elements which underpin the Church's approach to safe ministry include:

a. **An extended network of guardianship:** a culture in which reasonable adults feel able to raise even small concerns;

b. **Environments that reduce opportunities for abuse:** places that provide good natural surveillance with few out-of-the way places, combined with routine movements of people to increase line-of-sight to all areas; and

c. **A system for handling concerns:** processes that allow for small pieces of relevant information to be joined up.

The policy is fundamental to congregations' maintenance of safe ministry with children by ensuring that we:

1. Provide an open environment;

2. Have clear codes of conduct;

3. Adopt clear procedures;

4. Recruit well;

5. Provide orientation and training;

6. Undertake planning and supervision;

7. Provide support;

8. Support investigation and reporting;

9. Review; and

10. Keep good records.

2. Scope

2.1 **The policy applies** to all people conducting child-related activities as part of the ministries of Uniting Church congregations, for example Sunday School, day camps and other activities where children and parents are separated. The policy and subsequent procedures emphasise our collective responsibilities to provide a culture of shared guardianship, and caring for those who may be vulnerable to the risk of harm, injury or abuse. The policy is to be implemented using the procedures and tools that have been developed to support congregations.

2.2 **Exclusions:** This policy is not intended to apply to the agencies, regulated business, colleges and schools of the Church, including services such as child care centres and outside school hour case services run by congregations. These entities are required to ensure that they comply with their statutory obligations and maintain policy, process and resources relating to child protection and safety which are specific to their context. Regulated business includes (but is not limited to) child care and outside school hours care programs. Congregations conducting these regulated businesses must ensure statutory compliance in addition to compliance with the applicable church policy and process.

3. Roles and relationships

The following relationships assist and promote safe ministry with children in congregations:

3.1 Synod Support Services employ a range of people to assist and promote safe ministry with children in congregations. The Safe Ministry (children) Administrator's role is to inform, review, support and monitor the implementation of safe children's ministry across the Synod. The Risk and Insurance Team provide advice and assistance particular to managing risk, planning and responding to incidents. The Legal and Governance team provides guidance and response to matters with legal consequence and considers the steps necessary to ensure statutory compliance. The Human Resources team provides guidance with screening and engagement of all workers (paid and unpaid). Uniting Communications provides guidance and acts as designated spokesperson to respond to media enquiries.

3.2 Each presbytery is responsible under the regulations of the Church (the regulations) to oversee the conduct of congregations, holding them to account. Presbyteries may employ or engage people to assist and support congregations to conduct safe ministry with children.

3.3 Each congregation, depending on context, may require a range of roles and functions to conduct safe ministry. The church council is responsible for the oversight of all activities with children within the congregation, and will oversee a local structure which is appropriate for the congregation size, taking into account availability of suitable leaders, local need and demographic. **The role of the ministry agent** is to provide pastoral care and guidance. In the event of a suspicion or knowledge of abuse to children, and boundary violations, the ministry agent is the appropriate person to receive reports. In the event that the report relates to the ministry agent, the presbytery chair person is the appropriate person to receive reports.

4. Accountabilities and expectations

4.1 Statement of commitment: Each relevant presbytery committee and church council will annually adopt the Safe Ministry with Children Policy, meeting their statutory obligation to indicate their intention to live out their commitment to safe ministry with children.

4.2 Oversight of child-related activity: each church council will ensure that the approved processes are adhered to in the conduct of all activities and ministries within their jurisdiction. Responsibilities include:

4.2.1 Compliance with Regulating Body requirements for church council members to hold a blue card;

4.2.2 Selecting and supporting leaders and helpers;

4.2.3 Ensuring church property is maintained to a standard acceptable for the conduct of activities;

4.2.4 Ensuring helpers and leaders are aware of the congregation's emergency response plan, and equipped with appropriate first aid supplies and appointed and qualified personnel;

4.2.5 Assessing and approving curriculum, activities and programs (including transportation);

4.2.6 Maintaining registers and records;

4.2.7 Addressing concerns;

4.2.8 Reporting to presbytery and Synod.

Specific guidance relating to the oversight of child-related activity is provided in process document Overseeing safe ministry with children.

4.3 Delegations and documentation: The church council may delegate authority to carry out tasks in relation to these responsibilities but ultimately remains responsible for ensuring accurate and correct documentation. All approvals and delegations of authority are to be minuted including the acknowledgement by the person receiving the delegation.

The church council is responsible to ensure that records of screening, blue cards, training and program approvals are kept. Registers, templates and guidance notes are provided in process documents and tools. These records are to be made available for monitoring, evaluation and practice improvement purposes.

4.4 Faith communities: Each faith community will be made aware of the expectations of policy and process and will be supported by their respective presbytery to adhere to the requirements therein. The presbytery standing committee or church council of the congregation overseeing the Faith Community is deemed to assume the responsibilities of the church council as outlined above. The presbytery council or church council may delegate authority to carry out tasks in relation to these responsibilities. All delegations of authority are to be minuted.

4.5 Accountabilities: All congregations and faith communities will be held directly accountable to the relevant presbytery and ultimately accountable to the Synod Standing Committee for their compliance or otherwise with this policy and associated statutory compliance.

4.5.1 Monitoring of compliance will be achieved via the annual Insurance Renewal Survey and periodic audits to be completed by each congregation and faith community.

4.5.2 Where required, corrective and/or supportive measures will be provided via the presbytery or Synod Support Services.

4.5.3 Individuals will be held accountable for their actions, and in accordance with the outlined processes, issues of concern are to be referred for appropriate corrective or legal action on every occasion.

5. Range of acceptable behaviours

The range of acceptable behaviours shall be maintained by all people regardless of gender, age, cultural background or role. The conduct of all individuals within ministry with children shall be free from abuse including neglect, emotional, psychological and spiritual abuse; grooming behaviour and sexual abuse. The following physical, emotional, behavioural and spiritual boundaries support the maintenance of safe ministry environments:

5.1 Physical boundaries:

5.1.1 Being aware of the imbalance of power that exists in adult-child relationships building appropriate, transparent and accountable relationships with children and their families; and only using appropriate physical contact which is responsive to the child's needs, initiated by the child, in full view and non-sexual;

5.1.2 Refraining from the use of physical restraint unless in circumstances where a participant is in danger and it is deemed reasonable and necessary in order to prevent an accident, or injury, or to stop a fight or bullying behaviour. The application of restraint must be proportionate to the force required to prevent

risk of injury to the participant(s) or leaders. All instances of physical restraint must be immediately recorded as an incident and kept for reference purposes;

5.1.3 Ensuring a minimum of two leaders is present and that the leadership ratio is achieved for all activities with children (including transportation). This allows one leader to deal with any incident that may arise while the other leader can continue supervision of the rest of the group.

5.2 Emotional boundaries:

5.2.1 Respecting the rights, dignity and worth of every person, regardless of the person's abilities, gender, religion or cultural background, without favouritism or prejudice. Conducting themselves in a way that is a positive example, ensuring that their attitude and language affirm dignity and self-worth;

5.2.2 Avoiding activities that may cause embarrassment, show disrespect or cause isolation.

5.3 Behavioural boundaries:

5.3.1 Working under the leadership of others (as appointed), being accountable to leaders within the Church, as set out in regulations, policy and process documentation, and working as part of a team to fulfil the specific roles and tasks given;

5.3.2 Engaging in respectful, transparent and accountable ways in all communication; ensuring others are not subject to inappropriate images/material (including pornographic material) or invasive use of any type of technology; and directing all correspondence (especially electronic or social media) to parents e.g. text messages, emails, Viber, Facebook, Snapchat;

5.3.3 Ensuring personal sobriety, and refraining from consumption of harmful or illicit drugs, alcohol and cigarettes when working with children;

5.3.4 Taking, storing and using images of any child or young person within the dictates of the written permission of the parent or care provider of the child and never for personal use;

5.3.5 Maintaining group behaviour through the use of positive strategies such as re-stating behavioural expectations and consequences, use of diversion techniques, maintaining a safe distance and retaining line-of-sight, supervised time-out, and providing opportunities to discuss issues and problems;

5.3.6 Abiding by the Synod's social media policy and code of conduct (see 9).

5.4 Spiritual boundaries:

5.4.1 Being aware of the stages of spiritual development that children and adolescents pass through and interacting with the child or adolescent in a manner which is appropriate to their stage of development;

5.4.2 Acting to enhance a child's positive relationship with God as a God of grace, love, acceptance, trust and forgiveness; avoiding language and actions which create fear, ongoing guilt, and self-loathing or self-blame;

5.4.3 When involved in a teaching role (e.g. Sunday School) adhering to the use of teaching materials which have been approved by the church council and remaining within the theology of the Church.

6 Raising concerns

In every instance, individuals who have a concern must raise their concern in accordance with church policy and process to allow for issues to be addressed, and for small pieces of relevant information to be gathered and evaluated.

6.1 Boundary violations:

6.1.1 All instances of boundary violation shall be interrupted immediately so that people can interact in a safe way. Any person observing a boundary violation should instruct the boundary violator to 'stop', and ask them not to engage in the behaviour again. There shall be no inference or assumption about the motives of the boundary violator, and the matter shall be reported to the minister of the congregation as soon as practicable after the event. Specific guidance relating to interrupting boundary violations is provided in process document System for handling concerns.

6.2 Complaints and allegations:

6.2.1 In instances where a child or young person intentionally or inadvertently discloses that they are subject to abuse, the disclosure must be acted on immediately. All disclosures of sexual abuse by children should be believed and acted upon immediately. Support for the child or family involved as well as the reporter of such behaviour will be offered.

6.2.2 All knowledge and/or suspicion of child abuse and/or grooming behaviour must be documented and reported to the appropriate authorities immediately, and the general secretary notified.

6.2.3 All information relating to knowledge, suspicion or reports of alleged abuse or neglect must be collected, stored and used in accordance with the provisions of the Church Privacy Policy.

Clear guidelines for reporting, and specific guidance relating to suspicions and/or knowledge of child abuse is provided in process document Complaints and allegations–child.

7 Incidents and accidents

In the event of an incident or accident the coordinator of the activity will ensure that team members:

7.1 Provide for the child or individual's immediate needs; this includes the provision of first aid, contacting emergency services, and remaining with the child;

7.2 Assess the safety of the activity for the whole group and if necessary divert them to a different task or cease activities altogether;

7.3 Activate the congregation's emergency response plan if required;

7.4 Inform church council chair person or their delegate immediately, and arrange for parents to be contacted, if appropriate; and

7.5 Document the event on an incident report form, giving a copy to the church council chair or other appropriate delegate;

7.6 The church council chair or delegate will be responsible to address workplace health and safety requirements, and work with the Risk and Insurance team to resolve ongoing issues related to the incident.

8. Training and support

8.1 Regular mandatory training must be undertaken by church council members, ministry agents and all people conducting or assisting with child-related services or activities as part of the ministries of the congregation. This must be undertaken and completed before commencing duties and repeated no less than every two years.

8.2 Revision of approved training materials: to ensure the commitment to safe ministry is met, the training modules are to be reviewed and updated annually by the Safe Ministry (children) Administrator; re-approved and disseminated via the presbytery-appointed personnel.

8.3 Additional and supplementary training: participation in additional training opportunities which support safe ministry with children is to be encouraged.

8.4 Communication: it is important that every person within the scope of this policy understands their responsibilities relating to the policy. The development of a communication plan will assist Synod support staff and presbytery support staff in making people aware of these. The communication plan will be reviewed annually by the Safe Ministry (children) Administrator, with the assistance of Uniting Communications, in line with the requirements of the Act.

9. Social media, media policy and addressing enquires from the media

9.1 The use of internet, social media and networking sites is to be conducted in a manner consistent with the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (section 2.1, The Pastoral Relationship, Uniting Church in Australia: Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice 2009 updated effective 1.1.10) and the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod Guide to using social media: guidelines for Synod staff, Uniting Church members and volunteers (2014).

9.2 Responding to media: all situations or critical events which may reasonably create media interest must be reported immediately to the general secretary or manager of Uniting Communications. All responses to media enquiries will be provided by a Synod- authorised person. Such events may include accidents causing injury or death, allegations of abuse, or any incident which may cause loss or distress to any member of the public. After the notification and briefing, Synod Support Staff will consult with the relevant church stakeholders regarding an appropriate course of action to ensure appropriate standards of safety, privacy and accountability are maintained within the polity of the Church.

10. Definitions

Abuse Refers to both adult to child abuse and child to child abuse. Abuse and neglect means acts or omissions which put the health, welfare or safety of a child at risk and includes but is not limited to:

- **Physical abuse** – when a person purposely injures or threatens to injure a child or young person.
- **Emotional abuse** – an attack on a child or young person's self-esteem such as bullying, name calling, threatening, ridiculing, harassing, intimidating or isolating the child or young person.
- **Family violence** – when a family member, partner or ex-partner attempts to physically or psychologically dominate the other.
- **Sexual abuse** – any sexual act or sexual threat imposed on a child.
- **Grooming** – predatory conduct undertaken to prepare a child for sexual activity.
- **Neglect** – where a child is harmed by the failure to provide the basic physical and emotional necessities.
- **Spiritual abuse** – where abuse is administered under the guise of religion, including harassment or humiliation, misuse of religion and/or faith for selfish ends or gratification.

Child A child is defined under the *Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)* as an individual under 18 years of age.

Disclosure A child has made a reasonably clear statement of any form of abuse or harm.

Harm In addition to harm caused by physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect, sexual abuse or exploitation (the Act), this policy refers to physical injury, mental damage, moral injury caused by wrongdoing.

Incident An undesired event which resulted or could have resulted in harm, damage or loss.

Ministry agent A person who is determined within the Uniting Church in Australia Regulations (2.2) definition of specified ministries: ministers (of the word and deacons); pastors; lay pastors; lay preachers; youth workers and community ministers. The ministries of Lay Pastor, Youth worker and community minister were closed for entry by Assembly some years ago. Anyone still operating in one of those now closed ministries is covered by this policy.

Parent/guardian Birth mother or father or adoptive parents, someone else having or exercising parental responsibility for the child on a permanent basis, or someone who under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custom is regarded as a parent of the child.

Privacy provisions The requirement that all information be collected, stored and used in accordance with the provisions of the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Privacy Policy ucaqld.com.au.

Regulated business and regulated employment As defined by the *Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act 2000 (Qld).*

Regulations Throughout this policy, where the word 'regulations' is spelled with an upper case 'R', it refers to the Regulations under the Act. Where it is spelled with a lower case 'r', it refers to the regulations of the Church.

Restraint To hold back from action, keep in check or under control.

Staff and volunteers Refers to all relevant persons (according to the context in which it appears), and may include board/council members, employees, volunteers, parents, carers, presbytery members and adherents, church council members, elders, congregation members, people in the specified ministries of the Church, and any other person with responsibility for the care of children.

References and related documents

- Uniting Church in Australia Regulations
- Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice
- Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Policy (Assembly)
- National Child Safe Policy Framework (Assembly)
- Privacy Policy (POL-0001)
- Conflicts Policy (POL-0002)
- Complaints & Allegations Policy (POL-0003)
- Safe Ministry with Children processes and tools.

Document Review History

Version Number	Date	Reason	Author / reviewer	Endorsed	Approved
1	03.12.2015	Created to replace Child Safe Church policy	Child Safe Church administrator General counsel Risk & Insurance manager	Associate general secretary Qld Synod Royal Commission Task Group Presbytery ministers	SSC (#15.184)
Due	03.12.2016	Review cycle – every 1 year			