

# Considering the Code of Ethics



## in a multicultural context

Material developed by Sue Crittall and David Busch  
and produced with assistance from Uniting  
Communications 2015



The Uniting Church in Australia  
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

# Considering the Code of Ethics in a multicultural context

## Introduction

The Uniting Church in Australia is a multicultural church. This means it includes many different people of many different cultures and languages.<sup>1</sup>

Different cultures have different cultural customs which need to be recognised. The Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice<sup>2</sup> recognises that each culture has its own unique expression of community and relationships.

In ministry with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, these unique expressions form an important part of the church community. They influence how ministers express their ministry.

The Code of Ethics says that culture needs to be kept in mind when overseeing the conduct of ministers.<sup>3</sup> Conduct includes how we behave towards each other, how we speak to each other, our appearance (dress code, personal hygiene) and our mannerisms. What can be appropriate in one culture can be offensive in another.

Overseeing is not about comparison or judgement. Overseeing is about helping ministers to fulfil their call to ministry. This overseeing is fulfilled by councils and officers of the church. It is also done by ministers themselves as they reflect on their ministry practice within the faith and unity of the Uniting Church.

All Uniting Church ministers need to carry out their ministry in a professional and accountable manner. This needs to be in ways that are consistent with the requirements of the church as set out in the foundational documents of the church, including the Basis of Union, the Constitution and Regulations, and the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice.<sup>4</sup>

All ministers and pastors need to be aware of their own inherent cultural background and the way this influences their ministry.<sup>5</sup> They also need to try to help those whom they serve to understand the church's expectations of the conduct of a minister.

This resource paper aims to acknowledge, respect and honour the diverse cultural backgrounds of ministers and of the people of God. It is designed as a workbook that ministers might use on their own or with others.

It aims to provide an opportunity for ministers to reflect on the Code of Ethics alongside their cultural customs, traditions and practices, and the cultural background of the people they have been called to serve.

It encourages ministers to reflect on how, when they are aware of their cultural background and the cultural background of others, they will abide by the Code of Ethics as required by the church.

Lay preachers<sup>6</sup> also may find this a valuable resource as they reflect on their ministry in the light of the Code of Ethics which applies to them.

This resource is presented under the following headings:

1. A code of ethics
2. Christian community
3. The pastoral relationship
4. Boundaries and power
5. Confidentiality
6. Gifts
7. Misuse of ministry
8. Self-care
9. Professional supervision

## Questions for reflection:

1. How does your cultural background influence the way you exercise your ministry?
2. What are the key values of your culture of origin?
3. What does it mean for you that the Uniting Church in Australia is a multicultural church?

1 The Uniting Church in Australia national Assembly has endorsed three significant statements of commitment to being a multicultural church: "We are a Multicultural Church" (1985), "A Church For All God's People" (2006) and "One Body, Many Members: Living Faith and Life Cross-Culturally" (2012). The 2012 statement identifies some significant issues and challenges for the church in exercising ministry in culturally diverse contexts and from culturally diverse backgrounds.

2 The Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (approved 12th Assembly, July 2009, updated effective 1 January 2010). Hereafter this will be referred to as the Code of Ethics.

3 Refer section 1.8 of the Code of Ethics

4 See beginning and section 1.7 of the Code of Ethics

5 Refer section 3.5a(vii) of the Code of Ethics

6 Lay Preachers are encouraged to refer to the Lay Preachers' Code Of Ethics as they use this resource.

# Considering the Code of Ethics in a multicultural context

## A Code of Ethics

Ethics has to do with morals and with deciding what is right and wrong, good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate<sup>7</sup>. It is reflection about what we should think, say and do. Ethics is concerned with considering what we ought to do, or not do, and the kinds of people and communities we ought to be, or seek to become<sup>8</sup>.

A “code of ethics” is a document that outlines the way in which a person is expected to behave in a particular profession. It might be described as a set of guidelines that details what conduct is considered right or wrong. Many professions and organisations have codes of ethics, sometimes called codes of conduct.

The people who come under the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice<sup>9</sup> are:

- Candidates (people who are training to be ministers)
- Community ministers
- Deacons
- Deaconesses
- Ministers of the Word
- Pastors
- Youth workers
- Presbytery ministers, moderator, Synod secretary, president, Assembly general secretary
- Lay pastors
- Ministers from other denominations working with the Uniting Church, whether they are in an approved placement or not
- Chaplains who engage in ministry on behalf of the Uniting Church in Australia.

The Code of Ethics outlines the conduct that the church and the ministers themselves accept as necessary for those who fulfil a ministry in the church. This means that the church wants to be clear, for its members and for those people who have contact with the church, about what conduct they can expect from a minister.

The Code of Ethics provides guidelines for how ministers are expected to relate to people in their care. It does not mean that ministers are not already fulfilling these expectations. Rather, the Code of Ethics should support existing good practice and encourage everyone to act in that way<sup>10</sup>.

The Code of Ethics is essential for those engaged in ministry, because it sets out the basic principles for effective and acceptable ministry practice.

It is a guide for ministers about what is appropriate conduct—both towards people within and beyond the church, and towards oneself as a minister or pastor<sup>11</sup>.

When it is understood clearly and followed, the Code of Ethics is also a tool for enabling ministers to be accountable for their practice in any setting: congregation, institution, or community<sup>12</sup>.

## Questions for reflection

4. Why is it important for church members to know that the Uniting Church has a Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice?
5. What will you say to members of your community to explain why the Uniting Church has a Code of Ethics for its ministry agents?
6. How might you help members of your community to learn about and understand what the Uniting Church requires of ministers, as outlined in the Code of Ethics?

7 Plain English paraphrase of the Code of Ethics for ministers and pastors of the Northern Regional Council of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (hereafter referred to as “Plain English paraphrase”), written by Tim Bose while at Nungalinya College (Draft dated 2010, page 7).

8 Making up our mind: Moral discernment in the UCA (Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, National Working Group on Doctrine, 2013)

9 Refer start of the Code of Ethics and Regulation 5.1.1

10 Support document for the Interim Code of Ethics 1997 (Uniting Church in Australia), p2

11 Plain English paraphrase, p8

12 Refer to Orientation to the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice in the Uniting Church in Australia: a resource for pastors and other ministers (2008: MediaCom & Associates Inc., Adelaide), p11

# Considering the Code of Ethics in a multicultural context

## Christian community

The Christian community is called into being by God through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit<sup>13</sup>.

The Christian community includes all Christians—whatever denomination, whatever ethnicity and language, whatever tribe and clan nation, whatever country around the world<sup>14</sup>.

As people of God, we gather together. The Code of Ethics says the following:

*We are united in a fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy through our shared faith in Christ. We worship, pray, give our witness, study Scripture and other sources of faith, offer pastoral care to each other, develop deep friendships, and seek to be mutually accountable. We are, for this reason, a deeply intimate community.*<sup>15</sup>

In this context intimacy does not mean physical or sexual closeness. It means the deep sharing of our lives together including in times of vulnerability.

Ministers have a special role or place within the Christian faith family. This role is both a privilege and a responsibility<sup>16</sup>.

Ministers are called by God and placed by the church in communities where they have responsibility to serve the people of God and the wider community. For example, ministers may serve with congregations, hospitals, schools, prisons, and in roles within the presbytery, Synod or Assembly. Ministers may be in rural and urban communities. Ministers in rural and isolated communities can face particular difficulties<sup>17</sup> because of the nature of social relationships in small communities. Ministers in some cultural contexts can face specific challenges because of the nature of communal relationships.

Ministers are given significant and unique opportunities to connect and gather with people. Ministers are invited into people's lives at times of particular vulnerability—times of immense joy and of great suffering; times of birth, marriage, personal difficulty, illness, death and grief.

In these circumstances, ministers must seek to enable people to focus on God as the source of healing, restoration and wholeness<sup>18</sup>.

Ministers help the people of God to explore and understand God. They are responsible for providing leadership to the community's task of worshipping, proclaiming the good news of Jesus, providing pastoral care, standing with those who suffer, and working for justice and peace<sup>19</sup>.

Ministers are servant leaders. They serve the Gospel and the community.

Ministers need to recognise that they have power because they are the minister. People highly respect them because they are the minister. People give a minister permission to lead and give direction and advice. Ministers must not betray the respect and trust that comes from people, nor can they use their influence in an abusive way.

Ministers need to be aware of how they can affect people by their words and actions, their moods, mannerisms and attitudes<sup>20</sup>.

## Questions for reflection

7. What power and authority is traditionally given to the minister in your community?
8. How is that traditional understanding different from the Uniting Church's understanding of power and authority in ministry?
9. What challenges does this create for you?
10. How would you explain to others the power and authority of a minister in the Uniting Church?

13 Refer section 1.1 of the Code of Ethics

14 Plain English paraphrase, p13

15 Refer section 1.2 of the Code of Ethics

16 Plain English paraphrase, p13

17 Refer section 1.9 of the Code of Ethics

18 Refer section 1.2 of the Code of Ethics

19 Refer section 1.2 of the Code of Ethics

20 Refer Plain English paraphrase, p16

# Considering the Code of Ethics in a multicultural context

## The pastoral relationship<sup>21</sup>

The pastoral relationship is the relationship that ministers have with the people to whom they provide spiritual care, guidance, protection or care, and to those who have made contact with them in their responsibility or function as a minister<sup>22</sup>.

The Code of Ethics identifies that the pastoral relationship occurs within a faith community, whose life and relationships are established by Jesus Christ<sup>23</sup>. Pastoral care is the ministry of Jesus which the minister offers to people inside and beyond the church to bring them wholeness of life<sup>24</sup>.

Ministers are to provide considered, unbiased pastoral care while working compassionately with individual people, families and groups<sup>25</sup>.

The pastoral relationship could be described as the special relationship that a minister has with their Christian faith family as well as others in the community. This pastoral relationship is different from any other relationships, just as the relationship between wife and husband is different from any other kinship relationship, and the relationship between mother-in-law and son-in-law is different from any other kinship relationship. It is a special relationship that has responsibilities and privileges<sup>26</sup>.

The Code of Ethics uses the language of a “particular relationship”<sup>27</sup> as a way of distinguishing the relationships that ministers have with their family and friends, from those relationships that are established as a part of the exercise of ministry.

Members of a local Christian faith community develop close connections to each other. Because of this, friendships will develop between the minister and some members of the faith community<sup>28</sup>.

This can be challenging for ministers. Friendships may become so strong that the minister is no longer able to properly fulfil their pastoral relationship to other people in the community. A close friendship might also mean that the minister’s influence is so strong that another person may feel they have to ignore a situation where the minister is doing the wrong thing.

In some cultural settings the minister can be received as a member of the family. Ministers have to make sure that they are still able to be the minister and provide appropriate pastoral care. They must ensure that personal friendships and family relationships do not stop them from properly and fairly giving pastoral care where it is needed<sup>29</sup>.

The Code of Ethics acknowledges that, at times, ministers may have to refer a person to other people for care<sup>30</sup> and that pastoral relationships may need to end<sup>31</sup>.

## Questions for reflection

11. Who are you in pastoral relationship with?
12. What would you say to members of your community to explain the nature of a pastoral relationship?
13. How does kinship in your community impact upon friendships and the pastoral relationship?
14. What difficulties do you face in your community in keeping clear boundaries between pastoral relationships and particular relationships?
15. What challenges might you face if you felt you needed to end a pastoral relationship?

21 Refer section 2 of the Code of Ethics

22 Refer section 2.1 of the Code of Ethics

23 Refer section 1.3 of the Code of Ethics

24 Plain English paraphrase, p13

25 Refer section 1.5 and 3.5c of the Code of Ethics

26 Plain English paraphrase, p14

27 Refer section 4 of the Code of Ethics

28 Plain English paraphrase, p16

29 Plain English paraphrase, p17

30 Refer section 3.4c of the Code of Ethics

31 Refer sections 3.4 e and 4.4 of the Code of Ethics

# Considering the Code of Ethics in a multicultural context

## Boundaries and power

Boundaries help us to understand the nature and limits of relationships.

It is the responsibility of the minister to ensure that they have appropriate boundaries in place so that they are able to exercise their professional pastoral care<sup>32</sup>. The Code of Ethics says that ministers are to have professional relationships with the people they are called to serve<sup>33</sup>.

Ministers must take responsibility for their own conduct. A minister's personal needs are not to be met by the people whom they are called to serve.

The Code of Ethics encourages ministers to recognise their own personal needs and their vulnerability<sup>34</sup> and to seek the help they need to be healthy and effective in ministry<sup>35</sup>. It encourages ministers to take care of themselves and their family<sup>36</sup>.

Ministers need to be aware of the way they are relating to others and the way others are relating to them.

For example, people from different cultural backgrounds behave differently in the way they greet people, bringing with them expectations of themselves and of others. Touching someone can demonstrate compassion. However, touch also can cause distress if used inappropriately. Ministers should exercise extreme care in deciding if any physical contact is appropriate.

Ministers must not engage in sexual relationships with people in their professional pastoral care<sup>37</sup>. Some ministers are married and some are single. A single minister may start to develop romantic feelings for someone they have met through their ministry. They need to be open and honest with their community and their church council about this. They may seek advice and support from their presbytery minister or professional supervisor<sup>38</sup>. If a minister is starting to develop a romantic relationship with someone, then they need to arrange alternate pastoral care for that person<sup>39</sup>. That way the boundaries of the pastoral relationship are maintained and not blurred. Ministers who fail to maintain appropriate boundaries cause harm to others.

In all situations, ministers need to recognise the power that is inherent in their role, and not use this power in ways that are abusive or unprofessional. Their focus should be on empowering people, helping them to understand the power that they have and to use it in appropriate ways<sup>40</sup>.

## Questions for reflection

16. Is the concept of boundaries familiar or unfamiliar in your cultural background? What about for the people in the community in which you serve?
17. In what situations in your community or ministry might it be particularly difficult to explain and maintain appropriate boundaries with your people?
18. How important is touch to your community?
19. What touch is not acceptable within your community?
20. How is a kiss or hug of welcome different from a kiss or hug that invites sexual intimacy?
21. If the ministry agent in your community was unmarried, what challenges would arise for the minister and the community in terms of the possibility of a romantic relationship?
22. What does it mean for you, as a minister in your community, to exercise your power for the empowerment of others?

32 Refer section 1.5 of the Code of Ethics

33 Refer sections 1.7 and 2.4e of the Code of Ethics

34 Refer section 3.9a of the Code of Ethics

35 Refer sections 1.9, 3.1f, 3.4, 3.5c, 3.6d, 3.8a, 4.4, 5.2 of the Code of Ethics

36 Refer section 3.8c of the Code of Ethics

37 Refer section 3.5b of the Code of Ethics

38 Refer section 4.4b of the Code of Ethics

39 Refer section 4.4a of the Code of Ethics

40 Refer sections 3.6a and 3.6b of the Code of Ethics

# Considering the Code of Ethics in a multicultural context

## Confidentiality<sup>41</sup>

Ministers have a responsibility to maintain confidentiality.

The Code of Ethics says that confidentiality is not about secrecy. Confidentiality is an assurance that ministers will not share written or spoken information about an individual to other people, or use it for a purpose other than the purpose for which it was obtained<sup>42</sup>.

Confidentiality is about protecting information that you are responsible for. This includes not telling others about what is not their business<sup>43</sup>.

There are times when ministers must share information, because not to share it might cause another person to be harmed or shamed. These times are referred to as “limitations of confidentiality”<sup>44</sup>.

An example would be when a decision not to share information could lead to someone being hurt, abused or harmed; or if you are required by law to reveal certain information; or when not sharing information could cause financial loss or harm to another. The law places certain obligations on ministers in relation to the safety and welfare of young people.

A minister must tell someone in authority inside and outside the church (such as the presbytery minister and the police) if they know, or believe, that a person has harmed another person, or intends to do so.

Information given in the context of the pastoral relationship is confidential. Ministers need to know in which situations the requirement for confidentiality cannot be maintained. In those situations, the minister needs to discern how to discuss with the other person the obligation which the minister has to share the information which has been given<sup>45</sup>.

## Questions for reflection

23. What challenges might you face in maintaining confidentiality because of kinship ties or other relationships in your community?
24. How might your cultural background challenge your ability to have private meetings with another person?
25. What challenges does this raise for the minister around the pastoral relationship and confidentiality?

<sup>41</sup> Refer section 3.7 of the Code of Ethics

<sup>42</sup> Refer section 3.7a of the Code of Ethics

<sup>43</sup> Plain English paraphrase, p36

<sup>44</sup> Refer section 3.7d of the Code of Ethics

<sup>45</sup> Refer sections 3.7c and 3.7d of the Code of Ethics

# Considering the Code of Ethics in a multicultural context

## Gifts<sup>46</sup>

The Code of Ethics recognises that there are times when people will want to offer gifts to a minister.

Ministers are not to seek gifts<sup>47</sup>.

The Code of Ethics encourages ministers to consider whether to accept a gift which is offered to them. Ministers should reflect on such questions as:

- Why am I being offered this gift?
- How might accepting this gift affect my ministry with this person?
- Can they afford to give me this gift?
- What might it mean if I do not accept this gift?
- Is this a gift for me and my family, or is this gift to be offered to the church community?<sup>48</sup>

A minister who receives a gift to satisfy cultural traditions should be sensitive and gracious, while still considering whether it is appropriate for them to accept the gift<sup>49</sup>.

When ministers do accept a gift, they should look at the appropriate use of the gift to benefit the community of faith instead of themselves<sup>50</sup>. In some communities there is an expectation that a minister will help a person financially or materially when members face financial difficulty. So, gifts received by a minister could be used in these situations.

The Code of Ethics warns against ministers using “cultural traditions” as a reason to accept what would otherwise be an inappropriate gift<sup>51</sup>.

Ministers are not to seek financial gain for themselves or for their family members<sup>52</sup>.

Ministers in Australia must obey the law<sup>53</sup> and this includes working within the Australian taxation system (for example, declaring financial or similar gifts which they may receive).

## Questions for reflection

26. How important is gift giving to your culture? What about for the people in the community in which you serve?
27. What types of gifts do members of your community give to ministers?
28. What might you say to members of your community to help them understand the Uniting Church's requirements in relation to gifts?
29. What questions will you ask when you are offered a gift?

46 Refer section 5 of the Code of Ethics

47 Refer section 5.1 of the Code of Ethics

48 Refer section 5.2 of the Code of Ethics

49 Refer section 5.3 of the Code of Ethics

50 Refer section 5.3 of the Code of Ethics

51 Refer section 5.3 of the Code of Ethics

52 Refer section 3.6a(i) of the Code of Ethics

53 Refer section 6 of the Code of Ethics

## Misuse of ministry<sup>54</sup>

When a minister's conduct does not reflect the Code of Ethics, it is called a “breach of the Code”<sup>55</sup>.

It is important for a minister to be aware of the content of the Code of Ethics so that they can ensure their conduct reflects their intention and commitment to fulfil their call from God and the church. This awareness assists ministers to exercise their ministry in a professional and accountable manner.

If a minister does breach the Code of Ethics they will be called to account for their conduct within the discipline of the church<sup>56</sup>.

The Code of Ethics says that ministers shall:

- respect the call and placement of other colleagues<sup>57</sup>
- accept the theological validity of the ordination of women and men for ministry<sup>58</sup>
- recognise colleagues as equal in standing<sup>59</sup> and
- be open to challenge and correction from colleagues<sup>60</sup>.

If a minister is concerned that a ministry colleague may have breached the Code of Ethics, they are to try to raise their concern with that minister. If that is not possible, or does not resolve things, then they are to go to an appropriate officer of the church (such as the presbytery minister, associate general secretary, general secretary or moderator)<sup>61</sup>. Ministers also can raise their concerns with their professional supervisor<sup>62</sup>.

If the concern is about sexual behaviour, then such behaviour is to be reported to the chair of the Synod Sexual Misconduct Complaints Committee<sup>63</sup>.

## Questions for reflection

30. What difficulties might you face because of your cultural traditions and practices if you were concerned about the conduct of a ministry colleague?
31. What would help you raise your concerns about a colleague's conduct?
32. What challenges might you face in being open to correction from a colleague?
33. What challenges might members of your community face if they want to report misconduct by a minister?
34. How might you help members of your community recognise and report inappropriate conduct by a minister?

54 Refer section 8 of the Code of Ethics

55 Refer section 8.1 of the Code of Ethics

56 Refer sections 2.3k, 3.1a, 8 of the Code of Ethics

57 Refer section 3.1b of the Code of Ethics

58 Refer section 3.1e(i) of the Code of Ethics

59 Refer section 3.1b of the Code of Ethics

60 Refer section 3.3g of the Code of Ethics

61 Refer section 8.2 of the Code of Ethics

62 Refer section 3.9c of the Code of Ethics

63 Refer section 8.3 of the Code of Ethics

# Considering the Code of Ethics in a multicultural context

## Self-care

Ministry can be an all-consuming vocation.

Not only might a minister immerse themselves completely in the tasks of ministry out of a sense of call and duty, but feeling the obligation to respond to the needs and expectations of the people they serve can lead to a minister carrying an unsustainable burden. Expectations of the minister's availability may be particularly high in certain cultural settings.

The Code of Ethics says that ministers are to take responsibility for their own self-care—including their physical, spiritual, mental and emotional health needs<sup>64</sup>.

Ministers are encouraged to give adequate priority to themselves, their family<sup>65</sup>, to nurture personal relationships which will assist their wholeness<sup>66</sup>, and to take regular and appropriate leave<sup>67</sup>.

## Questions for reflection

35. Are there times when you must be available as the minister for your community?
36. What challenges do you face with your community's understanding of a minister being available to the community?
37. How will you explain to others the importance of time away from ministry?
38. What practical arrangements can you put in place to help ensure that you can have adequate time away from ministry?

<sup>64</sup> Refer section 3.8a of the Code of Ethics  
<sup>65</sup> Refer section 3.8c of the Code of Ethics  
<sup>66</sup> Refer section 3.8d of the Code of Ethics  
<sup>67</sup> Refer section 3.8 c of the Code of Ethics

## Professional supervision<sup>68</sup>

Ministers are required by the Code of Ethics to receive professional supervision<sup>69</sup>.

“Professional supervision” is defined as the relationship the minister has with another professional, whereby the minister is assisted to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of their ministry<sup>70</sup>.

Supervision means that the minister has someone outside their local Christian faith family to talk to about their personal life and ministry—someone who can help the minister see clearly<sup>71</sup>.

Professional supervision is an intentional support and resource for ministry that encourages a minister to reflect on their ministry and ministry experiences. Professional supervisors also encourage ministers to develop their competence for ministry and to participate in continuing education for ministry (CEM).

Professional supervision can be with an individual supervisor or can be experienced in a group or with a peer. Ministers should consult with their presbytery minister about the appropriate ways for them to receive professional supervision. Ministers need to ensure that professional supervision is culturally sensitive, respectful and appropriate.

Your presbytery will have a list of authorised supervisors. If that list does not include someone whom you believe is appropriate or helpful for your needs, discuss this with your presbytery minister or the presbytery's supervision coordinator.

## Questions for reflection

39. What cultural issues might you need to consider in choosing a professional supervisor?
40. What should your professional supervisor know about your cultural traditions and practices which would help them to work effectively with you?

<sup>68</sup> Refer section 3.8b and 3.9 of the Code of Ethics  
<sup>69</sup> Refer to section 3.8b and 3.9d of the Code of Ethics  
<sup>70</sup> Refer section 3.9c of the Code of Ethics  
<sup>71</sup> Plain English paraphrase, p19



The Uniting Church in Australia  
QUEENSLAND SYNOD