



Anniversary of apology to survivors of institutional child sexual abuse

A Joint statement from UCA President Rev Sharon Hollis, National Director UCA Redress Ltd Sarah Lim and National Safe Church Unit Director Rev John Cox.

October 22 marks the third anniversary of the National Apology to Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse.

On this date, the Uniting Church in Australia remembers and acknowledges the harm done, the terrible breach of trust and laments its role in causing the harm.

“We reaffirm our apology and say sorry to survivors of Child Sexual Abuse and their families”, said UCA President Rev Sharon Hollis.

“The Uniting Church remains firm in its commitment to learn from the past, to restore relationships and to work to make our Church a safe place for all people into the future.”

“We welcome and invite survivors of sexual abuse to come to us to tell us their stories,” said Rev Hollis.

“We need to honour those who tell us their stories of abuse by ensuring that we truly hear and learn from every single survivor,” said Rev Hollis. “As a Church, we must openly and transparently face up to our failings and aim every day to be better and do better, for people who have been harmed in the past, and for every child who we serve today.”

The Uniting Church in Australia is an active participant in the National Redress Scheme, established in July 2018 following recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Scheme offers a monetary payment, access to counselling and a Direct Personal Response with the institution if the survivor wishes.

National Director of UCA Redress Ltd Sarah Lim said there were 11,000 applications to the National Redress Scheme since the scheme was established. The Uniting Church has received more than 600. However, the take up of Direct Personal Response is low. “The Direct Personal Response is the opportunity for survivors to meet with a senior representative of the Church, tell their story, and hear directly how sorry we are for the abuse. While we know that some people do not want to have any contact with the institution, we think there are others who are hesitant because they are unsure of what to expect. To those people, we say, we want to hear from you and warmly invite you to contact us when you are ready. You will be treated with courtesy and respect. Our people are trained and will work with you to ensure the Direct Personal Response is appropriate for you and your situation.”

The Uniting Church in Australia established the National Safe Church Unit to support its work to implement the Royal Commission’s recommendations and to ensure the Church is a safe place for all people.

“The NSCU works to ensure every adult across the Church understands their part in keeping children and young people safe. Children and young people have a right to feel and be safe, and it is vital that children and young people know who they can go to should they feel unsafe,” said Rev John Cox, Director of the NSCU.

“Our work includes awareness, education and communication, quality assurance, policy and reporting to help the Church clearly see how child safe activity is being lived and where we need to

work harder. Education includes online training available to everyone across the Church, and mandatory for some roles such as congregational ministers and leaders. It highlights child safety and issues such as grooming. We all are responsible for the safety of children in our church.”

Uniting Church Congregations are invited to mark the anniversary in their worship. A resource to support a liturgy of acknowledgement and lament is available [here](#). It may be used in part, full or adapted to suit the context.