



## NATIONAL SAFE CHURCH UNIT

### 1. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In the spirit of reconciliation, the National Safe Church Unit acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The National Safe Church Unit acknowledges both the Jagera people and Turrbul people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Unit is located and we pay our respects to them and their Elders past, present and emerging.

### 2. ABOUT THE NATIONAL SAFE CHURCH UNIT

The National Safe Church Unit (NSCU) was established in April 2019 as part of the UCA's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It is an expression of the whole of Church commitment to ensuring that all parts of the UCA are places where all people are safe and supported. It is also to be a place of reconciliation and healing for those who may have experienced harm within our walls or in their broader life.

### 3. ALIGNMENT WITH ASSEMBLY AND UCA: MISSION, VALUES AND PRIORITIES

The Uniting Church's commitment to being *a safe place for all people* is grounded in the identity as the body of Christ. As paragraph 3 of the Basis of Union states: "The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself". This is a community of Safety. It is a community in which each person has opportunity, in and through the Spirit of Christ, to grow into the fullness to life in Christ. If the body of Christ is not a safe place, then its ability to be community in which 'life in its fulness' flourishes, is negated.

Hearing the call of the Basis of Union to always consider our life afresh, and remaining a Church that continually seeks the leading of the Spirit, drove the NSCU's recent 3 Year Review in a similar way to the Act 2 Project. The NSCU continues to engage with the Act 2 process, sharing our experiences, learnings and opportunities to better support the church and its mission. The UCA's sustained history in social justice, working with marginalised groups and vulnerable people further ignites the NSCU's work in ensuring we are able to do this in an effective, safe and sustainable way. Standing alongside the agencies, National Assembly and each Synod, we have explored how God is calling us into the future, who we need to be, what do we need to do and how to best achieve this. Together we stand, leveraging our strengths, acknowledging challenges and directing change.

This work is not, and has never been, simply about compliance with the law of the land. Primarily, the work of safety is about the people of God responding to the call of God, bearing witness to God's love in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The National Safe Unit is the practical outworkings of our collective commitment, resourcing and growth by all synods, presbyteries and the assembly in connection with our agencies. While this may have grown out of the public commitment the Church made to remediate issues identified in the royal commission, its role has developed into so much more. The [NSCU's theological foundations](#) drive the way we work and connect with all people.

### 4. NSCU GOVERNANCE AND SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

The governance of the NSCU is a reflection of this structured partnership and collaboration model. The Governance Committee members represent a collection of mission and expertise, including that needed under a risk and compliance approach. The longstanding practice of synod nominated appointees ensures local connection. There is opportunity for external sector experts to complement our future work. The Governance Committee therefore operates as an independent body to oversee



and approve the national priorities and operational work of the NSCU. Our stakeholders form part of the critical development, review and delivery process. Administratively, the NSCU is responsible for development and proposal of national resources, accompanied by briefs, that summarise key issues, outline engagement methodology, give assessment of anomalies and proposed harmonisation, and finally impacts for approving or redirecting the work in its current format. As a national unit, our role is to build consensus, provide specialist advice, drive best practice and foster implementation of national resources. Pending governance approval, delivery of the work is transitioned to synods with implementation authority and accountability remaining with the relevant General Secretary.

The NSCU provides progressive reports to the General Secretaries and Standing Committees as relevant. The NSCU provides an administrative and secretariate function to the Governance Committee and therefore undertakes strategic, advisory or research tasks as directed by the committee. The NSCU is also responsible for fulfilling the regulatory reporting duties on behalf of the national church including the [Annual Report](#) to the National Office of Child Safety. An update to this reporting framework is expected to introduce the requirement of data and assurance across all areas of the church.

The NSCU's multi-year work plan resources the church's evolving work and shapes direct support for synod safe church teams and church leadership. Funding rationale for planned delivery is presented by the Governance Committee for Assembly, Synod General Secretary and Standing Committee endorsement.

The NSCU and Governance Committee have driven the strategic national leadership in safe church governance and practice. Increasingly, this has extended to evidence-based assurance that enables delivery of our *safe* church commitment. The NSCU has evolved to fulfill its leadership role, providing expert assessment of trends, issues, success stories and comparative best practice at synod and national levels. The NSCU targets improvements that can be made at a systemic level, to improve critical governance. The Unit's initial scope focussed on child safeguarding however the NSCU and its stakeholders have identified opportunity for improved governance and resourcing, by expanding its work to all vulnerable people.

Furthermore, the NSCU's role in external sector engagement and reform advocacy provides governance and strategic insights that support forward thinking and direction for the future safe church. This reduces waste attributed to the exhaustion of rework and reactivity of responding to compliance issues in isolation. What's more, the expertise of NSCU creates efficiencies by resourcing the work (once) centrally and alleviates synod burden 6 times over.

The NSCU's role in monitoring and harmonising safe church practices is central for early preparation and ultimately church compliance. The delivery of associated work must then be managed in accordance with the NSCU's Terms of Reference and in recognition of church governance under the Basis of Union, Constitution and Regulations.

## 5. CREATING THE FOUNDATIONS OF A SAFE CHURCH

The NSCU's work is an expression of the whole of church commitment, to ensuring that all parts of the UCA are places where people are safe and supported. This commitment spans ministry and mission contexts, including congregations, agencies, hospitals and schools.

The work of the unit has grown and matured since its establishment. As per our previous report, our first year (2019) focussed on the establishment of the unit, connection with stakeholders and putting structures in place to support collaborative work. In 2020 – 2021, the unit led the successful collaboration of key church leaders and safe church leads to foster a safe church culture. This evolved into the delivery of the UCA National Safe Church principles.

The NSCU is supported in its work by several advisory and support groups, the memberships of which include representatives from each of the Synods and the Assembly. This means that the NSCU's work is informed by the experience, thinking and needs of each of the synods. In working collaboratively with the synods and other stakeholders across the UCA, the NSCU can ensure that



the resources it develops help to provide for national consistency and have the necessary flexibility to meet local synod circumstances.

## 6. EVOLUTION OF THE NSCU WORK

Since inception, the unit has worked to increase its delivery and support across the life of the church. It has engaged with collaborative networks to support the mutual resourcing of the church; provided development opportunities to the networks through PD opportunities; represented the church in various forums, and maintained a strategic future view of the Australian landscape to address trends in legislative change.

Since the effective delivery of these foundations, we have collectively identified the need to move into the space of systemic impact. This will enable the church to effectively resource the design and development of practice and systems at a national level and provide greater assurance that all people will be safe, no matter which part of the church they identify or engage with. A critical component to effective safeguarding is to embed the systemic processes, responsibilities and accountabilities for the broad range of roles that ensure effective safeguarding. This approach continues to provide synod safe church leads targeted support through a range of resources that can effectively keep all people safe.

Over the reporting period, the day to day work of the NSCU has included:

- Providing strategic leadership about issues and practices related to governance for vulnerable people
- Delivery of resources and tools to grow and strengthen the UCA's culture of safety
- Providing the necessary functions for the ongoing work of the NSCU and secretariate to the Governance Committee
- Raising awareness through social media and a web presence
- Engaging with ecumenical and non-government sectors exploring best practice delivery of safety in religious organisations
- Provide sector leadership and advocacy with government to harmonise and streamline regulatory standards and practices
- Development of multiple national policy frameworks and guidance resources
- Delivery of nationally consistent child safe training across the UCA (National curriculum, Hard copy and eLearning modules)
- Development and delivery of a comprehensive regulatory and compliance scan mapping all state, territory and federal regulation effecting each synod and their efforts to be a safe church for all people
- Development of regular sector scanning updates that explore government inquiries, royal commissions, regulatory reform and legal precedent claims that effect Church safeguarding standards and practices
- Development of resources and registers to support synod management of risks, issues, incidents and complaints
- Development of mapping tools allowing the correlation of Principles of a Child Safe UCA, previous principle-based policy frameworks and state/federal Child Safe ???
- Development of a National Safeguarding Framework for the UCA
- Development and piloting of new Assurance Reporting Framework and template, using the Principles of a Child Safe UCA, to support Synod reporting on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people across the life of the Church
- Development and piloting of National (system) Standards that harmonise required practice to effectively safeguard in key areas of shared and cross-functional impact e.g. concerns, complaints and allegations, effective recruitment, screening and onboard, trauma informed theology and safe ministry practices. Embed best practice and oversight authorities to better support internal synod compliance and implementation
- Conducting a review of the work of the NSCU and identifying opportunities to pivot and provide further value. Drafting a revised approach to the work of the NSCU promoting National Consistency in the UCA.



The NSCU was established as a three FTE work unit. Foundationally, the staffing comprised a National Director and National Policy Adviser who were supported in their work by the Assembly Resourcing Unit and Assembly Services Unit. As you will see below, the NSCU was tasked with an exploratory project to assure the church of its safeguarding implementation and determine the effectiveness of its practices.

A National Safeguarding Quality Assurance Lead formally joined the team, to lead the development of an integrated Safeguarding Model and Quality Assurance reporting framework. The NSCU also contracts specialist services as required to deliver specific pieces of work.

We also acknowledge that the NSCU's approved scope has targeted child safety to date. As noted below, consideration to expand this work to all vulnerable people is under consideration. We recognise that safety for the community whether they be children or vulnerable adults is crucial to having a *safe church for all people*. We further recognise that our commitment to safety needs to effectively support our leaders, staff, ministers and volunteers to ensure their wellbeing when delivering critical ministry and pastoral support for vulnerable people.

The NSCU Governance Committee, in partnership with General Secretaries, is using the NSCU's 3 Year Review alongside the Act 2 project, to reflect and inform how success can best be achieved into the future. This has provided a vehicle through which the diversification and expansion of support required across the church, can be assessed in a targeted and sustainable manner. The NSCU has carried two recent vacancies and anticipates the review outcomes will enable benchmarked recruitment of future aligned roles. It is also anticipated that recruitment of further governance committee members will energize and inform the specialist delivery required in this continued work.

The work reported hereunder is offered in that context, and its ongoing imperative. The following sections identify some of the NSCU's successful delivery of key priorities, achieved since our previous report.

## **7. KEY DELIVERABLE: STRENGTHENING OUR CULTURE OF SAFETY**

As identified above, the underpinning of the Church's work towards being a *Safe place for all people* is grounded in its being the body of Christ. To support that culture, the NSCU has regularly delivered communication resources to promote child safety and wellbeing across the different communication platforms used by the Church and its entities.

Practical communication and awareness resource sought to keep safe church matters on the agenda across the life of the Church. The NSCU also participated in a range of presentations and leadership meetings resulting in increased use of the growing suite of resources available to help strengthen our culture of safety. The unit also engaged independent sector experts to outline and support church leadership and Governance Committee members to set future safeguarding priorities. While there were pressing compliance issues, it remains the ethical and moral duty we hold, that drives our evolving safety culture.

This integrated approach is helping to increase the collective capacity of our people to achieve safeguarding outcomes. Congregations are increasingly identifying potential risks to children and young people in our UCA environments and to have the ability to take action to mitigate these risks. Greater engagement with synod specialists leading their risk, insurance, human resource and work health and safety functions has created opportunities to strengthen our shared outcomes.

## **8. KEY DELIVERABLE: POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF A CHILD SAFE UCA**

The [National Child Safe Policy Framework](#) and the [Principles of a Child Safe Uniting Church in Australia](#) have since grown the UCA's culture of safety foundations. They provide for a nationally consistent approach to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people across the life of the Church. Having a conceptual language for understanding what it looks and feels like to be a safe



church for children and young people means that we can identify and develop the resources the UCA needs to achieve and sustain this.

Both the framework and the principles are consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Principles for a Child Safe UCA align with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations which have been developed by the Australian Human Rights Commission. Being able to talk about and report on our work to be a safe church for children and young people, within the context of the recommendations of the Royal Commission, continues to be an important factor in how the Church is viewed both internally and externally.

The Principles of a Child Safe UCA are available in Chinese, English, Fijian, Indonesian, Korean, Niuean, Portuguese, Samoan, Spanish and Tongan. The NSCU has made posters and presentations available to synods in formats that allow for local or Synod branding.

During the reporting period, the NSCU continued to collaborate with stakeholders to review previous National Policy Frameworks including the [Persons of Concern National Policy Framework](#) (including a specific revision to support [COVID-19 conditions](#)). The earlier work on our [Child Safe Screening National Policy Framework](#) will be reviewed in context to the proposed National Standards and in response to notable legislative changes coming in 2024. Similarly, the Child Safe Complaints Handling National Policy Framework will be reviewed pending legislation that may introduce a regulatory body to oversee this process for organisations including churches and community groups.

The NSCU has also commenced review of its founding Child Safe [Collaboration National Policy Framework](#) in light of the units 3 Year Review. Upon ratification of the NSCU's function and scope, growing stakeholder networks and shifting needs, we will create the necessary governance resources to reflect our work .

## 9. KEY DELIVERABLE: NATIONAL CURRICULUM AND CHILD SAFE TRAINING

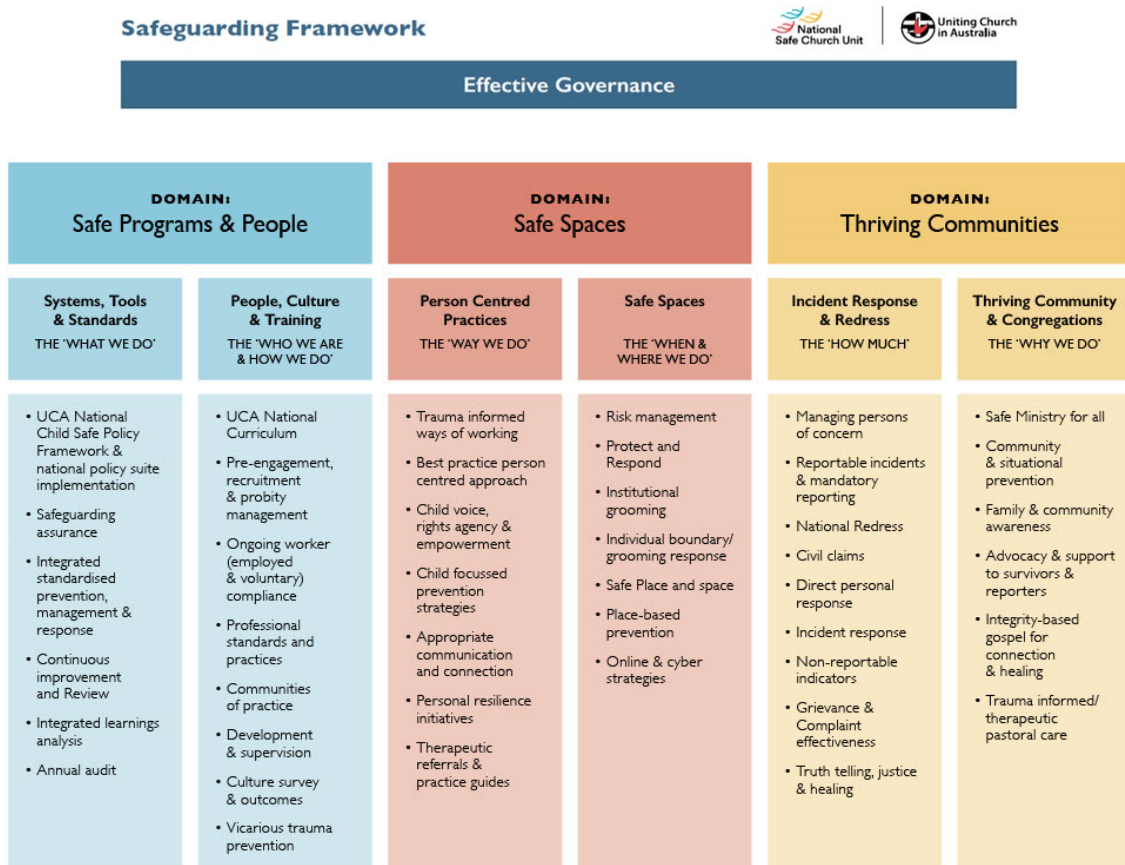
The successful development of the Principles of a Child Safe UCA and our National Child Safe Policy Framework, created a timely opportunity to support implementation through a National Training Curriculum.

The NSCU successfully led the collaborative development of both a national training curriculum and an online learning course. The course is comprised of multiple modules that cover key topics such as identifying potential harm, grooming in congregational and church settings, safety in physical and online environments and mandatory reporting obligations. This remains one of the unit's primary outcomes since our previous report. The NSCU worked with dedicated stakeholders from synod safe church teams, agency specialists and youth leader nominees, learning and development practitioners, trainers, facilitators and specialists in online content delivery. The NSCU consulted and collaborated with stakeholders to identify state and federal compliance requirements, review existing training materials, identify shared content, harmonise approaches to meet diverse needs and determine value adds beyond that delivered in both government and commercial training products.

Through the collaboration and support of broader church and synod stakeholders, the NSCU is happy to report the recent completion of the National Curriculum and online National Child Safe [training](#). The technical eLearning modules were subsequently built in partnership with external eLearning specialists to ensure effective adult educational outcomes. Both hard copies and online SCORM training versions were delivered to the synods in early 2024. The synods are subsequently uploading this training into their nominated Learning Management System and/or adapting this delivery as part of their local onboarding, annual training or other in person training programs. To ensure the integrity of attestation in a manner that will meet emerging compliance standards, the option to complete the training, free of charge, is available online for volunteers, ministers and staff. Those attending synod in-person training options will be tracked through relevant attendance lists or synod portals. We are excited to see the imminent release of this training across the country to further embed our safe church culture.

## 10. PIVOT DELIVERABLE: HOW CAN OUR CHURCH AND FAITH COMMUNITIES BE ASSURED WE ARE A SAFE PLACE FOR ALL PEOPLE?

As noted above, the NSCU has been engaged in a strategic development process to reflect on and mature its own work. With the successful delivery of our national principles, policy frameworks and training; we sought ways to test the effectiveness and impact of our collective work. Given the collaborative nature in which the church organises and achieves safety – often across different levels, we understood that an integrative approach that gives recognition to this, was needed. As such we created a model that outlined what all aspects of our safe church would look like. Requirements were grouped by common themes including Mission and Governance, Safe Programs and People, Safe Spaces and Thriving Communities. This culminated into the below Safeguarding Framework and was central to our pivot from principles into systems and outcomes. This approach not only recognizes the critical interrelated safeguarding practices via a common language and approach, but enables the effective resourcing of a nationally consistent approach to safeguarding.



Through this milestone, the NSCU collaborated with stakeholders to approach the work under two key streams. The first identified what existing national resources were already in place that provided consistent practice standards for the above elements and could thus be equitably measured. A series of workshops explored what qualitative and quantitative measures would define success for each. An assurance reporting template was developed and utilised by the synods over a 12 month period. During this time refinement to measures and definitions were made and a phased approach to broaden future measures. This signalled the first time in which synods could see core measures on a dashboard alongside each other's synods. Not only did it provide an opportunity to explore and collaborate between synods but it provided both the Governance Committee and the broader Church with a national view of safeguarding issues, trends and a collective risk profile.



The second stream of work ran in parallel and identified what safeguarding elements required further resourcing in order to have a common baseline practice and reportable outcomes. As a result, this work shaped into the likely delivery of a suite of national (system) standards. These standards would leverage common synod and presbytery practice and scaffold shared requirements embedded both in state and federal legislation plus best practice. These resources provide both governance and direction for continuous improvement.

A proof of concept activity was undertaken in partnership with synod stakeholders, to develop a template and then practically draft a national standard, assurance measures as identified above we also embedded to support future implementation. Fundamentally, this work demonstrated the need and value of having system standards that regulate practice beyond the limitations of a framework but in a way that supports synod lead policy and practice. The draft standards were then circulated with other synod stakeholders who require specific safeguarding outcomes including risk, insurance, audit and compliance functions. The resource was positively received as a way that the Church and each synod, could better connect these related processes and strengthen compliance within their own function. This coincided with annual insurance renewals in which brokers were requesting greater levels of risk mitigation and management controls as well as oversight mechanisms to test the effectiveness of our management systems. During this time the Church navigated a difficult and costly insurance renewal period that was impacted by the closure of a large Australian insurer and significant exodus of providers willing to insure community and religious organisations. Shifts in coverage and increases in premiums has been felt sector wide. Respectively, we are partnering with synods who will use national standards as mechanism to reduce their risk profile, evidence maturity, retain coverage and attract more competitive premiums.

## **11. PIVOT DELIVERABLE: STRATEGIC NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVISORY**

Through the appointment of specialists into the NSCU, the unit has able to pivot from a generalist function into a specialist advisory body. Increasingly, staff of the unit are providing standing updates across a range of synod leadership, safeguarding and audit committees. NSCU staff have been appointed as standing members to some committees. This is in addition to other national collaboration groups including the Risk and Insurance Network, facilitated by the Assembly. Brokers and Insurers have also engaged with the NSCU to explore how management systems can reduce the Church's risk profile, build confidence and evidence maturity and assurance. The future work of the NSCU will not only continue to drive national consistency, but seek to align with synod sustainability and governance initiatives that target improved quality outcomes, robust insurance coverage opportunities, reduced incident response and claim outlays as well as other cost saving outcomes. While these quantitative are a driver for many, the unit remains steadfast in its commitment to ensure that all work provides improved outcomes for our staff, ministers, volunteers as well as congregation and community members.

NSCU engagement with synod management committees has further enabled the unit to effectively resource both summative and 'deep dive' discussions that support the specific management, decision-making and governance practice affecting individual synods.

With our expanding consultation networks, we also anticipate that our national leadership role and subsequent work, will not only benefit 'safe church' teams but other synod and assembly corporate functions such as insurance and risk, human resources, work health and safety, quality and compliance, financial management and internal audit.

The NSCU has also introduced an industry and regulatory scanning function that provides both review and analysis of shifting legal precedent and regulatory reform at the national level. We also provide strategic advice regarding key environmental shifts including government inquiries, royal commissions, regulatory reform, redress schemes and legal precedent claims. This provides synods with expertise and resources to remain current with increasing regulation and community expectation of how the church ensures it's a safe place for all people. In practice, these publications identify indirect and direct practice impacts for the church, nominate remedial action and determine how such requirements can be met through safe church systems and practices.

## 12. THE UNLIKELY UNION BETWEEN COMPLIANCE AND OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH

There has been significant regulatory reform taking place at both state and federal levels since our previous report. Such reform is often resisted as a 'compliance' approach to the way we work, when it should be our moral and ethical calling. Both require the courage to fully embrace 'truth-telling' and reflect equally upon challenges, failings and successes. As a church founded on social justice, these values shape not just what we do but the way we work together for the benefit of ourselves and our community.

As identified in numerous royal commissions, community expectation and government policy are frequently replaced by new minimum standards that surpass historical 'best practice'. This is true for the sector and also the Uniting Church. Despite the technical nature of compliance, these standards ensure that where cultural efforts tire, compliance will provide quality standards regulated in law.

Recent laws have shifted the historical baseline focus on 'abuse' toward a raised threshold of 'potential harm'. Further movement is evident (even beyond preventative approaches) toward individual and collective accountability leading to wellbeing and empowerment to thrive. What's more, these practices were historically focussed on those who could be considered 'vulnerable', however now extend to all people. This social movement can be attributed to the way in which our community and government/s expect better outcomes for all Australians. Our longstanding fellowship of reconciliation, and a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole remains strong. A renewed integrated approach has never been more critical, to achieving our shared vision of a *Safe Church for all People* (now and in the future).

This national drive to provide accessible positive outcomes and conditions in which people are supported to thrive, can be seen across a range of legislative reform. There is growing ethical accountability for individuals and organisations, that can result in civil and criminal proceedings against both. Our provision of pastoral care, ministerial service and activities for communities of faith, now are subject to more than 300 legislative regulations across state/territory and national levels. Some impact the way we structure ourselves, make decisions or work with the community including: standards for duty of care or negligence, corporate and social responsibility, civil and vicarious liability, due diligence and other obligations. There are requirements for how we engage staff, ministers and volunteers through: fair work conditions, worker screening, training and supervision, health and wellbeing plus appropriate safeguards for all. Emerging regulation defines how we must work from evidenced based and trauma informed practice as we walk alongside people experiencing adversity with practices that prevent further harm. Our connection with community drives how we: identify and report welfare concerns to regulators, manage complaints and offer natural justice.

The inclusive way we welcome everyone into our congregations and the structured ways we walk beside and support people from LGBTIQ+ communities, those experiencing physical or mental health conditions or those living with disability is crucial. There are growing ways in which we can honour and embrace members from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and honour our first nations people. Beyond this, safeguarding practice continues to evolve. Outside of these technicalities – it's the way we support all individuals to effectively engage and participate as valued members of our church community and foster their relationship with God. It is through their connection with the UCA that we support people to thrive and become the person God calls them to be!

## 13. NSCU EXTERNAL ADVOCACY AND SECTOR LEADERSHIP

The NSCU engages with a range of external stakeholders to both promote the UCA's culture of safety and to ensure that what we do aligns with contemporary best practice and thinking. The NSCU leadership is also privileged to hold membership and advocacy roles in a number of key sector groups creating opportunities to influence reform and improvement at a national level.



These engagements include, but are not limited to:

- The National Office for Child Safety
- Child Safety Regulators and the Federal Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services
- Independent statutory offices including the eSafety Commissioner
- Industry specialists such as the Blue Knot Foundation
- Government based National Child Safe Sectors Leadership Group
- The Queensland Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Taskforce
- The National Council of Churches in Australia
- The Queensland Joint Churches Child Safety Group and Interfaith Professional Standards Networks *and*
- The Child Safeguarding Podcast

#### 14. HONOURING OUR SHARED SUCCESS

The NSCU would like to formally acknowledge and thank the commitment of the Assembly, Synods, Presbyteries, Standing Committees, Church Councils, Safe Church Leads and Officers who are central to the NSCU's achievements and impact. We also acknowledge the powerful value of sharing our continued commitment through dedicated church leaders including the Presidents child safe [video message](#) and [prayer](#). We continue to honour marked occasions such as Child Safe Sunday with UCA [Child Safe Sunday Resources for Ministers and worship](#) as well as [activities](#) for children. Last year marked the fifth anniversary for both the marked 5 years since the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission) and the federal governments the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse. Last year the church gave recognition of the harm that individuals had suffered and the way this was compounded when individuals were not honoured through truth telling. In a joint statement the UCA President, National Director UCA Redress Ltd and Director National Safe Church Unit united in renewed commitment to safe church and reiterated the important role our [UCA Liturgy Of Acknowledgement and Lament](#) in our congregations today.

Unfortunately, since that time, we continue to identify further harms and failings for children and individuals living with disability, first nations people affected by stolen generation policies, harms to our aging community including elder abuse, and even community members continuing to be effected by forced adoption through missions, hospitals and welfare agencies. This clearly shows that our safeguarding work is far from over.

As the requirements of safeguarding continue to expand and increase for the church – so too will the work of the NSCU. Together, the recommendations from royal commissions, shifts in contemporary safeguarding requirements, insights from survivors and experience of our synods, presbyteries, congregations and community shape – will drive our continued work. What's more, we recognise that safeguarding is not confined those identifying as vulnerable. We must address the impact of living and working with people who've suffered harm. Our safeguarding practices need to ensure the wellbeing of our community, congregational members, staff, volunteers and ministers. A genuine and deep-felt commitment to our collective mission is required to ensure the UCA continues to be a place where all people can *thrive into the people God calls them to be*.

#### 15. LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD: WHAT DOES A SAFE CHURCH LOOK LIKE NOW?

The NSCU will continue to make wellbeing and safeguarding an everyday consideration and conversation across the life of the Church. We recognise this must include a resourced approach that integrates and supports how we walk along-side all vulnerable people. Despite a cultural reluctance to a compliance-based approach – there is benefit in embracing it, given the elevation this requires of some historic church practice. It also guides our desire for continuous improvement for the benefit of our collective community. Our recognition that these requirements are not reserved for agencies and



services only strengthens the NSCU focus on church mission and congregational activities. This shift drive the way in which religious and faith based organisations must engage, support and respond, not just to vulnerable members but all people in our faith communities.

The UCA recognises the diverse nature and demographics of its collective faith communities will inform future practice. There are safeguarding considerations applicable to our aging congregations, those with mental health or disability, those isolated and lonely including our regional outreach work, the commitment we have to our first nations people and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC). This coupled with our heavy reliance on volunteerism to do our work and meet community need shapes how we provide formal or informal supports, as we walk along-side of all of God's people.

We further recognise that to effectively achieve robust safeguarding and positive outcomes for the community, this can not be a 'set and forget activity'. Nor can it be confined to a policy matter. We need to genuinely embrace the church's commitment to truth telling and healing so that we can honestly acknowledge our current limitations, explore continuous improvement opportunities and foster improved healing and wellbeing outcomes that enable all people to *thrive and become the people God calls them to be*.

The changing nature of our communities and social issues, likely plague current and future generations which require a renewed and iterative approach to effectively meet these challenges. It is now reported that 75% of all Australians will experience trauma at some point in their lives. Given this statistic, it is also surmised that those in the minority, who don't experience harm, will be connected to friends and family who do. The way in which we experience difficulties and challenges in our life are compounded by the extent to which we have comfort or shame attached to our experiences. This is why so many people go through life without ever disclosing current difficulties or past harms. Our faith and commitment to social justice can attract a higher proportion of people seeking meaning, safety and healing through a connection to God. As a result, historical trauma informed safeguarding practices previously directed towards specific minorities is now a recognized baseline for the way we work with everybody. Those in pastoral roles often report the profound impacts it has, not just on their practice, but their relationships and connection with themselves and others. The practice and resources we make common place now, will not only improve the lives of this generation, but also future generations to come.

## 16. SUPPORTING THE FUTURE CHURCH

As indicated above, the 3 Year Review of the NSCU was undertaken with feedback from the Assembly, General Secretaries, Synods, Safe Church Leads and other stakeholders. This aimed to determine if/how the NSCU had effectively delivered value against its terms of reference and what improvements could be made. We have since continued to explore how the NSCU's expertise can best support the church and its faith communities.

The NSCU is unwavering in its sustained efforts to ensure that implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse are fully realised and do not diminish over time. The findings and recommendations identified since then, drive how we engage and support other members of our community. The NSCU in collaboration with stakeholders across the Church is ensuring that the Uniting Church continues to deliver on its public commitments to be *a safe church for all people*.

Being *a safe church for all people* requires us to take continuous action beyond reporting and compliance, to lift our collective capability, to empower all people to thrive and become the people God calls them to be. Members of the Assembly play an important role in ensuring the tools and resources developed by the NSCU are implemented, understood and used in their areas of the church. The NSCU is grateful for the support of the whole Church.

We welcome further discussion and questions about the National Safe Church Unit's report and its continuing work.



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