



Placements and Safe Church Report

Placements and Safe Church Team Members

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1. Introduction

It has been a complex year for everyone. I have been astounded by the creativity, flexibility and resilience of many of our leaders, ministers and congregations. Although I also detect, I think, even among the most resilient, a great weariness as 2020 draws to an end. It has been a hard year for everyone.

The difficulties for us began with the restructure in 2019, which has brought for many, new possibilities and opportunities. It also marked the end of the Pastoral Relations and Mission Planning Team. This has meant a narrowing of both our focus and the number of team members. Although we continue as the Placements and Safe Church Team and are committed to these important areas of the Uniting Church in South Australia's mission and ministry there is some grief. It is like the band is breaking up.

This year was also about the transition from a centralised Pastoral Relations Committee to three separate ones located in each of the presbyteries. The formation of the new Pastoral Relations Committees has been enormous work for the presbyteries and they have made considerable progress. The new structure has the potential to increase the number of people in leadership and strengthen the ties between the congregations and the presbyteries. It also makes the work of Placements and Safe Church more complex as we negotiate additional relationships and ensure that we maintain lines of communication.

And of course, like everyone else, we had to negotiate these new relationships in the middle of a pandemic. Still it made for a memorable year.

2. Mapping Exercise

The General Secretary invited me to "map" the work of Placements and Safe Church at an Executive Officers Meeting. What became clear preparing for the exercise is that we cover a range of areas and almost everything we do requires collaboration with others, often several "others". It was gratifying after only sharing the Placements part of our work to hear the exclamation from another EO about how complex the map was.

I am grateful to the General Secretary for the idea of mapping our work and for the invitation to share it with the other Executive Officers. In one of the stages of the process we had a team meeting which was our first face to face meeting since lockdown, to map our work. This helped us understand each other's work better

and also has provided a good basis on which to do planning for the next couple of years. In particular it highlighted the need to review and revise our communication strategy and methods.

3. Placements

The new Placements Committee had only met a couple of times before we went into lockdown. We continued to hold on-line meetings which, while an immense improvement on either not meeting or phone hook-ups, was still limiting given the nature of the work that we do. (I am sure that many of you have had similar experiences this year.) It was a relief to have a face to face meeting at the end of July.

Luckily we had no active placement processes when we went into lockdown, nor did we have many congregations ready to enter the placements process. We checked with those who had submitted their profiles and decided to pause the placing of ministers until we were free for small groups to meet together.¹ We began placements processes again in May. It is probably fair to say that it has been a slower year than normal, even once we resumed. My thoughts on why this is so are merely opinions but I would note that there appeared to be in a number of places a new or renewed depth of relationship between ministers and their congregations. Further I think for genuine pastoral reasons people were reluctant to move while we navigate the pandemic.

4. Ministry of Pastor

One of the areas that has become more complex with the restructure of the Synod is the Ministry of Pastor because synods and presbyteries share responsibilities for the oversight of this ministry. For example, the Synod will continue to oversee the training in Core Competencies. That is, Polity and Ethos of the Uniting Church and the Code of Ethics Foundations course. Andrew Dutney has done nine podcasts as an introduction to Polity and Ethos. I have written some material to help people reflect on Andrew's material and take them deeper, hopefully with a supervisor or mentor. These will be available soon on our new Placements and Safe Church Webpage, in the meantime I am mailing the material to interested folk on USB's.² People entering the Ministry of Pastor should complete the Core competencies within three months according the regulations, this is not always easy to fulfil if no courses are available. An on-line version of Polity and Ethos, while not adequate for people in placement, is a good stand-by while people wait for the full course and is perfectly adequate for some of the Ministry of Pastor positions.

Soon after the introduction of the Ministry of Pastor the then Pastoral Relations Team and Uniting College formed a committee called the Pastor Appointment and Competency Assessment Team (PACAT). This

¹ Our concerns were that given the relational nature of ministry, on-line meetings were inadequate for Joint Nominating Committees to discern the suitability of a minister for a placement (of course it could be part of the process). As well, there were concerns with the Congregational Meeting where the decision recommending a minister for placement is shared and a vote is taken. When congregations were unable to meet this would take some thought and discipline by a congregation to resolve. A major concern in this part of the process was confidentiality. Other synods had thought about ways to conduct congregational meetings for placements as they had active processes in place when lockdown occurred.

² The story about why we are using the USB's and why it has taken so long to get it on the website is a comedy of errors and a bit of procrastination on my part, but I will try not to get distracted by telling you the story.

committee helped in the oversight of the ministry, including the availability of Core Competency Training, ensuring completion of these in a timely fashion, developing training and facilitating ongoing formation for ministry. The Synod Standing Committee have passed by-laws for this committee to continue with presbytery representation.

5. Chaplaincy

This year has been a particularly complex one in Chaplaincy with Covid 19 being a significant disrupter, as it has been elsewhere. There have been considerable restrictions to the ways in which chaplains are able to conduct their ministries. Volunteer chaplains and pastoral assistants have been disallowed from participating in hospitals, correctional services and aged care homes. Given the context all this is understandable and necessary but it has increased the workload for those who are allowed to visit these sites. Furthermore Covid has also increased the anxiety of the staff where chaplains serve.

There continues to be conversation about models of chaplaincy and the theology that underlies them. This has an influence on how our understanding of chaplaincy is communicated and how Position Descriptions are written. It also has an impact on relationships and how work is undertaken in ecumenical settings. All areas that have to be navigated by Wendy Prior as our Chaplaincy Manager.

The State Government has decentralised the way it supports chaplaincy in hospitals. Rather than a single payment from the government we now negotiate with Local Health Networks. There are advantages in this model, it certainly increases the level of engagement we have the bodies providing the funding. It has also increased the workload and the complexity of the work for the Chaplaincy Manager and Peter Hollister our administrator.

Chaplaincy continues to be an important ministry in a variety of settings. Chaplains are frequently engaging in pastoral conversations about meaning, purpose and dignity with people who unlikely to participate in the life of one of our congregations.

6. Safe Church

6.1 National Collaboration

There has been growing collaboration at a national level around Safe Church. This is in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse. One of the recommendations from the Commission to the Uniting Church was that we act more as a national organisation and less as a federation of synods.³ The Assembly formed the National Safe Church Unit, headed by John Cox, to help lead the UCA nationwide to develop a thriving church culture where people are safe from exploitation and abuse. There are two particular strands in national collaboration currently. One is in developing a national curriculum for Child Safe Training, and Linda Vinall represents us on that team. It appears that this will be an online curriculum, with different levels of training. The intention is to use the Assembly's learning platform, which

³ That of course would be easier to do if state governments enacted the same policies.

means that there will be some cost to us to register as a user.⁴ This project has been an immense amount of work for the team involved, especially ensuring the units in the curriculum fit with the legislative framework of each state.

The second group is the Collaboration and Advisory Group (CAG) and I am our representative on that committee. The CAG works with the National Safe Church Unit (NSCU) to help them embed the ten principles from the Royal Commission into the life of the Uniting Church. The ten principles are listed below.

Ten Principles

1. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.
2. Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
3. Families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
4. Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
5. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.
6. Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.
7. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.
8. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
9. Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved.
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

The NSCU promoted a set of voluntary principles to counter child sexual exploitation online developed between online service providers and the “Five Country” Ministers (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States). This can be found at:

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/3210-principles-an-important-step-to-counter-online-exploitation-and-abuse>

As Nina McKenzie from the NSCU wrote, “the voluntary principles are closely aligned with the UCA Child Safe Principles and further support our collective work to identify, address and mitigate risks to children in the Church’s online spaces”. You may find this helpful; feel free to share more widely in your networks. A recorded webinar was also produced reflecting on on-line safety for congregations.

<http://safechurch.uca.org.au/>

⁴ If we were registered users of the platform we could use it to develop our own online learning modules.

6.2 Audit

Each year the Uniting Church is required to report to the National Office for Child Safety about the progress the church has made in implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Response to Child Sexual Abuse. To help facilitate this process the National Safe Church Unit of the Uniting Church asks each synod to complete an audit. It helps us respond more accurately to the National Safe Church Unit if we update our information on the congregations in the synod with our own audit. Each year we conduct a survey to help us gather information to complete the audit. This year this was a joint project with the Intergen team. Thank you to the many congregations who responded.

6.3 Redress

As many of you will recall another response to the Royal Commission was the development of the National Redress Scheme. The Uniting Church set up a national body called UC Redress to oversee the Redress processes and appointed Sarah Lim as the Director. The UC Redress team of Sarah and Annette Fuller have been immensely helpful to us as we have responded to the requests for information (RFI). Resources Board is regularly updated on the number and status of RFI's.

Part of the Redress Process is called a Direct Personal Response where an applicant has a chance to share their story and receive an apology from the organisation that was responsible for their care. This can be done in person or through a letter. The National Redress Scheme has been running training courses in Direct Personal Response and late last year a group from the Synod did this training. This year a couple more of us participated in the seminar online. It is a good introduction to "trauma informed" approaches to people. Trauma informed uses insights from Trauma Studies, a growing area of research, to approach working with people who have suffered various forms of trauma with wisdom and compassion.⁵

6.4 Presbytery Collaboration

A good deal of the work that was once part of the Pastoral Relations and Mission Planning Team is now the responsibility of the presbyteries. Placements and Safe Church as we are now known, is an accurate description of our new foci. In all our work though we are required to collaborate with the presbyteries. This continues to be a work in progress as the presbyteries develop their own ways of working. Made more complicated by Covid 19 and the lack of face to face meetings this year.

6.5 Complaints

One particular area of collaboration that is complex is the complaints process. In the initial thinking in the Synod Restructure, and reflected in the MOU's, the Synod retained primary responsibility for complaints matters. Our experience, legal advice and the regulations suggest that this is also a collaborative space with the presbyteries having a more active role. It is though one of those areas where the regulations are ripe for revision to reflect more helpfully actual practice. The Safe Church Committee earlier this year asked me to

⁵ Trauma studies is also having an impact in theology and Biblical Studies. To take an obvious example the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile is a significant trauma for the people of Judah. The final collecting and shaping of the Pentateuch is a result of this trauma as well as many of the key prophets.

request that the Synod Standing Committee ask Assembly to review the regulations around Committees for Discipline. There were two particular areas of concern one was the possible perceived gap in the processes described in the regulations and what might be considered best practice. For example, there is a three step process between the chairperson of a presbytery and complaint coming to the Committee for Counselling. It seemed to the Safe Church Committee that in cases where matters clearly need to go to that committee the Chairperson could make that recommendation. We also are asking that a review of the Discipline Regulations might consider a simpler process for disciplining ministers in less serious breaches of the Code of Ethics. The Standing Committee agreed to the proposal.

6.6 Training

A key part of our role is training. There are three key areas:

- Code of Ethics. The two day foundations course for Code of Ethics is conducted by Sean Gilbert at Uniting College, we aim to do this twice a year. Sean conducted the course in July. The next course is 15-16 February at Uniting College.

Previously the expectation was that a ministry agent would attend a Code of Ethics Refresher every three years. This was clearly out of step with other synods and so in 2018 we moved to annual refreshers. Currently we are working on the financial year (July to June) A bit trickier this year. We held a face to face session in November and have two further dates in 2021. We are also working towards having some of the training online and conducting sessions via Zoom.

Work is taking place to develop national collaboration for the refreshers. This process has been complicated by the discovery that there are significant differences in how each synod (or presbytery in some states) delivers the foundations course. This in turn has an impact on what needs to be included in refresher courses. No foundations course or a minimalist one increases the content needed in refreshers.

- Child Safe. As reported earlier there is work being undertaken to develop a National Child Safe curriculum for the Uniting Church. Unlike some of the other states we also have the Mandatory Reporting training in South Australia, currently called “Through Their Eyes”. To learn more, enquire about the possibility of a course in your area or check where the next courses are contact Linda Vinall or check our website. <https://sa.uca.org.au/safechurch/training-courses>
- Called to Care. Called to Care is our general Safe Church training course and covers a wide variety of topics that helps us reflect on what it means to be a “safe church”. Again Linda is the key contact for this.

7. Conclusion

In some ways I am ambivalent about the phrase “safe church” and I note that the phrase “safeguarding” and “culture of safety” are now popular in some circles, and I am not sure if that is any better. My concern is that

there is a sense in which the gospel and the life of discipleship is a risky venture. It would be sad if our concern with “safety” made the community of disciples a pallid reflection on who God call us to be. On the other hand, I do not believe we can be a thriving person or community if members are abused, suffer persistent unwanted behaviour or are demeaned because of age, race or gender. Furthermore, Jesus is very clear that a sign of genuine community is the way we treat the vulnerable in our midst and he had some of his harshest words for those that abuse the little ones in our midst. (Matthew 18:1-20, Mark 9:42-28) I know this can seem a frustrating area which is all about compliance, insurance and legal matters but it is about following Jesus who called us to form thriving communities where all people are treated with dignity and the vulnerable are treated with genuine respect. Thinking and planning about keeping them safe is part of God’s call on the church.

Appendix 1

As at 7 December 2020

Placements/Appointments Made (since November 2019)		
Congregational Placements/Appointments (Note titles are listed as at the time the placement/appointment was made)		
Bridgewater (0.5) (S)	Rev Scott Litchfield (Deacon)	1 September 2020
Flinders Congregations (0.6) G	Brenton Smith (MOP)	1 November 2020
Lighthouse Port Pirie (0.8) G	Rev Barry Luke (Anglican)	1 January 2020
Loxton UC, Renmark UC and Renmark West	Rev Linda Forsyth	2 May 2020
Plains Community Church (Joint UCA / Church of Christ) W	Leanne Davis (MOP)	1 November 2020
Seaford Uniting/CoC (0.4)	Rev Anne Butler	1 December 2020
South West Fleurieu (0.6)	Shelley Alexander (MOP)	1 February 2021
Summertown UC (0.3) G	Rev Lesley Vince (Baptist)	1 July 2020
Tea Tree Gully UC G	Rev Roger Brook	1 October 2020
Presbytery Placements/Appointments		
Generate Presbytery, Chairperson PRC (0.2)	Rev Barry Littleford	1 November 2020
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2)	Errol Meaney (MOP)	1 February 2020
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2)	Katie Iles (MOP)	1 February 2020
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2)	Rev Andrew Everson	1 February 2020
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2)	Rev Simon Dent	1 February 2020
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2)	Rev Nathan Whillas	1 February 2020
Generate Presbytery, Secretary (0.4)	Rev Stephanie Tai	1 January 2020
Presbytery of Southern SA, Chairperson (0.2)	Rev Diane Bury	1 June 2020
Wimala Presbytery Chairperson (0.4)	Trevor Philips (MOP)	1 November 2020
Synod Placements/Appointments		
Academic Dean, Adelaide College of Divinity (ACD and Lecturer, UCLT)	Rev Assoc. Professor Matthew Anstey (Anglican)	1 May 2020
Chaplain, Memorial Hospital (0.6)	Rev Leanne Jenski	1 October 2020
Chaplain, Eldercare, The Lodge (0.6)	Rev Stephen Blacket (CoC)	6 July 2020
Staff Chaplain, NALHN (0.5)	Matthew Halman (MOP)	1 January 2021
Intentional Interim Ministry		
Ministers Transferring to and from other Synods		
From the Presbytery and Synod of South Australia - Nil		
To the Presbytery and Synod of South Australia - Nil		
New Approved Placements		
Aboriginal Theologian in Residence within the faculty of UCLT		
Academic Dean, Adelaide College of Divinity (ACD and Lecturer, UCLT) from 1 January 2020		
Chaplain, Disaster and Recovery Ministry 0.5 initially January 2020		
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Disaster Recovery Worker 12 month (0.5)			
Generate Presbytery, Chairperson PRC (0.2) from 1 November 2020			
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2) from 1 February 2020			
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2) from 1 February 2020			
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2) from 1 February 2020			
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2) from 1 February 2020			
Generate Presbytery, Regional Hub Leader (0.2) from 1 February 2020			
Generate Presbytery, Secretary, from 1 January 2020			
Presbytery of Southern SA, Chairperson (0.2)			
Wimala Presbytery Chairperson (0.4)			
Leave of Absence			
Active Service			
Minister Retiring/Retired			
Rev Coralie Evans	16/04/20	Rev Ernest Sorensen	31/07/20
Rev Martin Rosenberg	30/04/20	Rev Andrew Prior	17/09/20
Rev Naomi Rosenberg	30/04/20	Rev Ashley Davis	31/12/20
Rev John Boundy (Deacon)	30/04/20	Rev Jane McDonald	23/02/21
Rev Richard Banham	5/07/20		

Contracts, Supply Agreements and Placements Support

Contracts, Supply Agreements and Placements Support has been provided for JNCs and congregations to call Ministers and appoint lay people to positions within the church. In addition to these appointments, during the past 12 months, 243 contracts or agreements have been prepared by the Placements and Safe Church Team as follows.

2020	
Supply Agreements and Variations*	60
Synod Calls to a Placement*	2
Presbytery Calls to a Placement*	5
Congregation Calls to a Placement*	8
Extensions and Variations to a Placement*	72
Ministry of Pastor Contracts, Extensions and Variations (Placement – 71; non-Placement 25)	96
Total	243

Footnote: * Non Ministry of Pastor

21 Ministers have taken Long Service Leave or cashed out some Long Service Leave entitlement. The Removals Fund has supported the relocation of 8 Ministers.

Placement position PT, FT, Ordained, Lay at September 2020*Information is available on request for all years from 2012*

SA Placements @ Sept 2020	Jan 1999	Oct 2012	June 2016	June 2019	Sept 2020
Total number of Placement positions	213	221	205	213 (147.75 FTE)	214 (147.70 FTE)
Total Number of people in Placement positions	198	193	182	167 (131.35 FTE)	170 (136.40 FTE)
Vacant Placement positions [^]	15	8	16	26 (16.4 FTE)	22 (11.30 FTE)
Full Time Positions	199	134	106	95	82
Vacant F/T Positions [^]	15	5	6	9	4
Ordained*	175	118	90	78	70
Lay+	9	11	10	8	8
Total	184	129	100	86	78
Part Time Positions ^{^^}	14	87	99	118 (52.75FTE)	132 (65.70 FTE)
Vacant P/T Positions [^]	0	3	10	17 (7.4 FTE)	18 (7.30 FTE)
Ordained*	14	41	62	61 (34.25 FTE)	63 (41.55 FTE)
Lay+	0	23	20	20 (11.1 FTE)	29 (16.85 FTE)
Total	14	64	82	81 (45.35 FTE)	92 (58.40 FTE)

Notes:

(+) From "Listing of Pastoral Charges"

([^]) Vacant positions: this definition is based on Placement Committee Minutes and is subject to determining whether any "supply" is longer term or shorter term i.e. excludes medium – longer term supply from definition of being "vacant"; (Listing of Pastoral Charges August 2020 as a base)

(^{^^}) There exist more P/T positions than P/T people (18 ordained +4 lay P/T people in more than 1 position)