

Proposal 5

Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

Please note:

This proposal addresses domestic, family and sexual violence¹. This topic may be distressing or triggering. When reading and considering this proposal, if you need assistance, please connect with a Synod Chaplain or support services, such as 1800RESPECT.

That the Synod of SA resolves to:

1. **ACKNOWLEDGE AND LAMENT** all occurrences of domestic, family and sexual violence, including those times that the church, or members of the church, may be complicit in such acts.
2. **REQUEST** the Moderator write to the Minister for Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence to **AFFIRM** the work of the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence and **AFFIRM** the government engagement with faith-based organisations, in particular, the Uniting Church.
3. **REQUEST** the Moderator and Justice Mission and Theology **COMMIT** to engaging in the response to the Royal Commission through working ecumenically, and in partnership with the public, not-for-profit and private sectors in prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence.
4. **REQUEST** Mission Resourcing, with Justice, Mission and Theology, **RESOURCE** congregations, members and leaders to increase visibility of services and accessibility of information and support through sharing of information, highlighting referral services, Break the Silence Sunday and other worship resources.
5. **REQUEST** Mission Resourcing, with Justice, Mission and Theology, **EQUIP** leaders and members to be aware of governance structures, theologies, texts, and pastoral practices that perpetuate and normalise domestic, family and sexual violence.
6. **COMMIT** the South Australian Synod to including prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence in education for ministers, church leaders and members by including DFSV as a topic

¹ Helpful understanding and definitions of domestic, family and sexual violence are available on the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence website [available here](#)

in a Formation Days, Code of Ethics refresher, Ministers' Day and training forums accessible to the wider church and community.

7. **COMMEND AND PROMOTE** the ongoing work of organisations in association with the Uniting Church in provision of prevention, crisis and support services for victim-survivors and people who use violence and the recent and ongoing work of the Uniting Church Assembly and Synod of SA by drawing upon existing resources and programs for referral, prevention, education and training.

Proposers: Rev Jenni Hughes

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1. Background

In November 2023, an horrific week in South Australia galvanised the government and public alike to act to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence. Four women's lives were taken in acts of violence by people known to them. The government established the Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. In August 2025, the Royal Commissioner Natasha-Stott Despoja, delivered an almost 700-page report: *'With Courage: South Australia's vision beyond violence'*. The report is comprehensive in both approach and recommendations. The Royal Commission consulted with diverse groups of people, geographically spread across South Australia. There were 381 written submissions, 1147 consultations, 64 witnesses, 173 listening sessions and 5000 people engaged. The Royal Commission consulted "survivors, workers, academics, advocates, police, public servants, service providers and national and state commissioners." It is an impressive and comprehensive report that is commended to you for deeper understanding. It is accessible here - [With Courage: South Australia's vision beyond violence | Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence](#)

Importantly, the Royal Commission made 136 recommendations. These recommendations cover:

- Creating a cohesive and effective system
- Making domestic, family and sexual violence visible
- Safe and effective help seeking and crisis response
- The use of violence
- Supporting victim-survivors
- Prevention

The recommendations cover every sector in the goal to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence in South Australia. This includes faith communities – which includes *us*.

2. Every statistic tells a story

Numbers on a page represent lived-experience. In this proposal, it is impossible to recount the personal stories of loss, grief, survival, courage, strength, hope or recovery. However, it is important

to pause and recognise that it is experiences such as these, that are represented in the sobering figures.²

- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 8 men has ever experienced physical violence by a partner or family member since the age of 15.
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men has ever experienced physical violence, emotional abuse or economic abuse since the age of 15 by a cohabiting partner.
- 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men has ever experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.
- 3 in 5 Australians have experienced at least one form of childhood maltreatment.
- 1 in 30 children experience domestic, family and/or sexual violence each year in South Australia.

The experience of abuse is widespread and its effects are devastating. Domestic, family and sexual violence impacts our homes, our families, our workplaces and our churches.

The Commission's recommendations invite the church to join together across all communities and sectors in South Australia to act in the prevention of abuse.

The Uniting Church's participation in the prevention of abuse stands in a long history of advocacy, action, compassion and support services. From its inception, in the inaugural Assembly's *Statement to the Nation*³, the Uniting Church has affirmed the value of every human being and expressed concern for the well-being of the whole community. In 2006, the Uniting Church proclaimed the dignity of all people and the importance of honouring and respecting one another in the seminal statement, *Dignity in Humanity: Recognising Christ in Every Person*.⁴

This commitment has been expressed in the life of the South Australian Synod through a range of pastoral and educational initiatives. During 2013–2016, as part of a Moderator's campaign for the Synod of South Australia, the "Beyond Violence" campaign was created to educate and raise awareness of domestic and family violence among members of the Uniting Church and the wider South Australian community. The campaign was particularly focused on helping women and men to live compassionately and hopefully in their relationships with one another, emphasising respect, dignity, and shared responsibility in preventing violence.

In 2018, the Assembly adopted a Statement on Domestic and Family Violence. This statement made strong theological statements denouncing domestic and family violence and pathways for the Uniting Church to act. It is accessible here – [09-Domestic-and-Family-Violence-15th-Assembly-Resolution.pdf](#)

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² South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Report, 2025, *With Courage: South Australia's vision beyond violence*.

⁴ Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Resolution, 2006, *Dignity in Humanity, A UCA Statement on Human Rights* - [Dignity in humanity : recognising Christ in every person \(Eleventh Assembly\) | UCA Assembly](#)

⁵ Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Statement on Domestic and Family Violence, 15th Triennial Assembly – [09-Domestic-and-Family-Violence-15th-Assembly-Resolution.pdf](#)

This developing commitment was given formal and ongoing expression in 2019, when the South Australian Synod, at a Special Synod meeting, agreed by consensus to adopt Break the Silence Sunday, setting aside the fourth Sunday in April (or another suitable Sunday) to open dialogue within the Church about rape and sexual assault. Through this resolution, the Synod committed to acknowledging the reality of sexual violence, supporting survivors through compassionate and safe spaces, and committing itself to the work of cultural and systemic change.

Our Vision for a Just Australia (2025) highlighted the significance of violence in the home and called for action, including Closing the Gap targets for First Nations women and children, sustainable funding for services and housing, and implementation and resourcing of National programs.⁶

The Uniting Church's efforts in the prevention of domestic, family, and sexual abuse also include the development of Safe Church policies and practices, supporting the creation of safer spaces within congregations, organisations, and schools. This commitment is expressed concretely through the work of organisations associated with the Uniting Church, including Uniting Communities' Domestic and Family Violence Service and Uniting SA's Family Counselling program. From 2023–2025, UnitingCare Australia led the Ending Violence Program, supporting victim-survivors seeking to leave unsafe homes.

As part of the National Council of Churches in Australia and the World Council of Churches, the Uniting Church, together with our ecumenical partners in ministry, also participates in the global campaign 'Thursdays in Black,' which emerged from the *Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988–1998)* and highlights the global impact of gender-based violence. Similarly, the Uniting Church, along with the National Council of Churches in Australia and the World Council of Churches, observes the United Nations 16 Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence.

3. Rationale

The prevalence of domestic, family and sexual violence means that it is within our communities and within our churches. First, we confess and lament all experiences of abuse. We stand beside those who are victim-survivors. We seek hope and healing for people who use violence. We strive to transform systems and cycles that perpetuate abuse.

The Assembly and the Synod has offered significant worship, pastoral and theological resources as the response to the 15th triennium statement. This proposal seeks to build upon and make accessible these resources. Similarly, ecumenical, interfaith and service providers have created resources, training and referral pathways. This proposal seeks to enhance, utilise and collaborate with others to collectively prevent domestic, family and sexual violence.

The role of ordained ministers, within the wider community and within our churches, means that offering continuing education and Code of Ethics training focused on domestic, family and sexual

⁶ Uniting Church in Australia, 2025, *Our Vision for a Just Australia* – [Our-Vision-For-a-Just-Australia-2025_FINAL-1.pdf](#)

violence is essential in equipping ministers to respond appropriately. Pastoral care, including responding to crises and offering appropriate referrals, is essential in these roles.

Having resources more broadly available for all church leaders is also essential in our collective role in sharing good news with all people. This includes support for victim-survivors and accessing services for persons using violence. It means learning to create spaces for “being tellable”, that is, creating spaces of openness where people are safe to share their experiences.

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence has roots in imbalanced gender roles and the exertion of power of one person over another. It is timely to reconsider the role of women in the UCA and to be attentive to practices that do not encourage and build up all people.

There is a need for recognising that texts of all kinds can be interpreted as harmful. Also, it is important to be mindful of how churches may inadvertently contribute to systems of power and control where one person may dominate another. This includes creating an awareness in preaching, worship, and governance structures that allow for the flourishing of all people. This builds on the significant work of the Safe Church team.

We are called to respond to the need for prevention within our community and beyond it. The Royal Commission urges the Uniting Church to be part of a statewide prevention movement. This invites us to work ecumenically and in partnership with the public, not-for-profit and private sectors. It encourages the church to work collaboratively to enhance the visibility of well-resourced and equipped services. This includes making services accessible, encouraging referrals, increasing visibility and awareness through church communities.

4. Consultation and Consideration

This proposal is one of the key justice and advocacy issues considered by the Justice, Mission and Theology (JMT) Subcommittee of the Mission and Leadership Development Board (MLDB). As the response to the Royal Commission was considered, the JMT’s conversation has engaged the Moderator, Associate General Secretary, Placements and Safe Church and the Mission Resourcing Team. There has been awareness and affirmation for the Synod’s ongoing engagement in this space, and the need for continued expressions as we seek avenues of prevention.

Affirmation of this proposal recognises that the attention and resources of the Justice, Mission and Theology Subcommittee, Synod staff and the contributions of members of the UCA will be directed towards the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence. These expenses are incorporated into the existing Ministry Centre budgets.



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia