

Synod '24



Proposal 9

Cutting of Pastoral Ties

That the **Synod of SA** resolves to:

1. **NOTE** that within our own tradition and other denominations, there is a normal practice that a Minister on concluding a placement does not continue to worship in that congregation.
2. **REQUEST** the presbyteries to consider this norm seriously in their oversight of Ministers and congregations and invite them to explore ways in which these matters could be helpfully raised with retired ministers and ministers in non-congregational placements for whom they have oversight.
3. **REQUEST** AGS Placements & Safe Church to investigate how this matter is pastorally dealt with in other Synods and report to Synod Standing Committee.
4. **REQUEST** the Placements and Safe Church Team in its next cycle of Code of Ethics training to raise these issues.
5. **REQUEST** the General Secretary to raise the matter with the Assembly in relation to revising the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice.

Proposers: Rev Professor Vicky Balabanski
Rev Dr Sean Gilbert

Rationale:

That it is understood as the 'norm' that ministers, retired or otherwise, who have served in a congregation either as their minister or in supply, when that placement concludes, will cut the pastoral ties not only liturgically, but also seek to worship and serve in a different congregational setting. This is the practice in most other Christian denominations.

The Code of Ethics (CoE) sets out the importance of respecting the 'rights and responsibilities of those who share leadership in the Uniting Church, both lay and ordained.' (CoE 3.1 a) In particular, it emphasizes that Ministers shall respect the call and placement of other Ministers' (CoE3.1 b).

There is inherent power that persists with ministers who have served in a congregation (CoE 3.1 g). The power reflects a pastoral relationship forged over years. It comes in the form of authority, sway,

influence, familiarity and many other subtle factors. Cumulatively, and through no direct fault of the retired minister, this can often mean that the incoming ministry agent is not able to minister effectively or freely in that setting, if the retired minister continues as part of the worshipping community.

The retired minister may seek to comply with the CoE injunctions and express leadership when 'invited to do so by the minister' (CoE 3.1.g iv). Yet in practice, the congregational members may 'prefer' the familiar ways, practices, style or person, so that the incoming ministry agent finds themselves facing resistance, or even side-lined.

This reflects an inadequate cutting of the pastoral ties. We propose that the norm should be that those who have formerly been ministers in placement or supply in a congregation should intentionally seek another worshipping community of which to be a part.

We recognise that in country towns, this may not always be possible.



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia