

Synod '24



Placements and Safe Church Team

We gather as a Synod with a shared commitment: to empower our congregations and presbyteries in fulfilling their mission. As the Placements and Safe Church Team, our goal is to provide the resources, knowledge, and support necessary to build safe communities that align with legislation, regulations, and best practices. By doing so, we enable the councils and members of the Uniting Church in South Australia to fully participate in the Mission of God. This report highlights the efforts of the Placements and Safe Church Team in assisting the Synod, presbyteries, congregations, and local members to engage in mission in a safe and informed manner.

It has been a privilege to serve as the Associate General Secretary and to be a part of the Placements and Safe Church Team since January of this year. I deeply value each team member and the broader Synod office team. As I navigate this role, I am on a steep learning curve, and I will continue to lean into the sense of call and the affirmation of the Joint Nominating Committee and the Synod Standing Committee.

1. Placements

Placements is a place of great discussion and wondering and seeking to discern God's will. Each time Placements meet we hear the needs and hopes of individual congregations, and we hear of the strengths, gifts and graces of those called to serve the church in placement. It is a joy to see that God is present and active, and is calling men and women, from diverse backgrounds into ministry. We have many challenges in the Placements space; filling our regional placements, the number of ordained ministers and ensuring lay people who are prepared to take on placements as Ministry of Pastor are achieving a suitable level of competency. Understanding the financial and missional context of each congregation looking to fill a placement is a critical point of discernment and understanding for us.

The Placements Committee is made up of people from all three presbyteries, a representative, from Uniting College, people with an Understanding of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities and important administrative support. Rev Barry Littleford has been the Chair of the Placements Committee, and he leads this committee with a genuine sense of prayer and purpose which is valued by all members of the committee.

There are always placements to fill, and it can seem unending, so it is important to stop and see the movements and ministry that has taken place, to wonder and invite people to discern with the Holy

Spirit leading us to fill ministry positions. Please stop and take a moment to pray for the positions that have been filled since our last Synod gathering. APPENDIX 1 Placement Statistics

2. Safe Church

The Acronym S.T.A.R has continued to be an effective tool in summarising the work of the Safe Church Team: Screening, Training, Audit and Review.

Screenings:

This continues to be an important role in the Safe Church Team. We have seen a significant increase in the numbers of screenings this year as the 5 year renewal cycle for Working with Children Checks (3 year renewals for Vulnerable and General Probity) screenings has commenced and as result of new initiatives to ensure understanding and participation in this important safeguarding practice. Assistance with completion of the online application process is being delivered with monthly “in office” days and congregational based visits. The team are always looking for ways to assist in this key compliance process.

Training:

In the past 12 months training for “Called to Care” and “Through their Eyes” has been delivered around the state and we are trying to book new opportunities as often as possible. We see the need for on-demand/online training which will enable sustainable and consistent delivery of our training needs as required and as your congregation circumstances change.

Number of People requesting Screenings (as at 31 August)	1524
Through Their Eyes Training - 2024 attendance	94 people
Called to Care Training attendance - 2024 attendance	92 people

2.1 Beyond Compliance Webinar

On the 27th August we hosted an online webinar with Sarah Lim, the National Director of the Uniting Church Redress, and CEO of BBSafe. Sarah brought a wealth of experience to the topic of compliance and a passion to see us move as a church beyond a mere tick box approach and integrating safeguarding practices into the way we gather and share life together in the life of the church.

With over 40 people attending this webinar, the strong interest in a topic that you may consider unhelpful, dry or legislative was remarkable. Understanding the core principles of safeguarding makes every activity, program, gathering an opportunity to create safe, welcoming and wonderful spaces for the ministry of the church to be transformative.

Audit:

Last year (2023), the Safe Church Team conducted an audit to evaluate the compliance levels across the Uniting Church in South Australia. There was a concerning lack of engagement with the Audit, prompting the initiation of several projects aimed at driving meaningful change. Our goal is to move beyond mere compliance and cultivate a culture where Safe Church principles are consistently prioritised. These efforts are also focused on equipping churches for more active participation in the upcoming audit as an important part of our S.T.A.R strategy.

Strategy for the 2024 Audit

The 2024 Safe Church survey audit will launch in October, with all congregations expected to participate. Alongside assessing compliance with legal requirements, we aim to understand how our faith communities are fostering a safeguarding culture in their ministry and mission.

3. Safeguarding Policy new for 2024

The "Safeguarding All: Children and Young People" policy reflects the Uniting Church in Australia's strong commitment to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people in our care. Grounded in the belief that every person is made in the image of God, this policy reinforces our dedication to creating a safe, nurturing environment where individuals can grow in faith and community.

The policy applies to all ministry staff, volunteers, and leaders, emphasising our shared responsibility to protect the emotional, physical, and spiritual safety of every child and young person. Key measures include comprehensive screening, clear codes of conduct, ongoing training for those in leadership roles, and a thorough approach to managing any concerns or allegations of harm.

The Church also recognises the importance of fostering an inclusive, respectful, and diverse environment. We work in partnership with families and communities to ensure all children feel valued and safe.

Formerly known as the Child Safe Policy, this updated document reflects significant changes to align with legislative obligations as a Child Safe Organisation. It remains a key component of our compliance with state government requirements.

The policy now includes expanded reporting procedures for instances where a child or young person is, or may be, at risk of harm. Additionally, it outlines our responsibilities under the Criminal Law Consolidation Act, specifically regarding:

- Failure to report known or suspected child sexual abuse (Section 64A)
- Failure to protect a child from sexual abuse (Section 65)

This policy aligns with national and state legislation, reaffirming our steadfast commitment to safety in all church activities. For more information, please refer to the full "Safeguarding All" policy, which outlines our approach to ensuring a safe and supportive environment for everyone.

SAFEGUARDING POLICY - [Microsoft Word - Safeguarding All Children and Young People SC270324.docx \(uca.org.au\)](#)

4. Chaplaincy & Supervision

Rev Wendy Prior is currently the Chaplaincy and Supervision Manager for the Synod as part of the Placements and Safe Church Team. It is with mixed emotions that we announce Wendy Prior will be preparing for her well-deserved retirement and will be leaving us at the end of September to take long service leave and will conclude her placement at the end of that time.

Wendy has been an integral part of our Placements and Safe Church Team since 2012, demonstrating dedication, professionalism, and care in her role. Her contributions as the Chaplaincy and Supervision manager have made a lasting impact, building strong relationships with all our chaplaincy partners in Hospitals, Schools, Correction Services, and Aged Care and all the chaplains as well.

As Wendy embarks on this new adventure, we extend our gratitude for her service and commitment. While we will miss her presence, we wish her all the best in her retirement and hope she enjoys the many adventures that lie ahead.

We are also excited to share the appointment of Rev Mark Dickens as the next Chaplaincy and Supervision Manager, commencing in 2025.

Wendys Final report to Synod:

I want to thank all our chaplains for the dedicated spiritual care they offer at significant moments in the lives of the students, patients, residents, prisoners and the defence force members they serve. While we may be past the more challenging era of peak Covid I know there are chaplains who continue doing RATs every two days before they go to work. When I meet with aged care chaplains it is common to hear “our XYZ wing has Covid at the moment”. Their ongoing dedication and commitment in a continuing changing landscape has been inspiring.

The last twelve months have been a time of consolidation across all chaplaincy areas. New chaplains have settled into their roles, and many have found themselves called on more and more by staff as their care and support of others is witnessed.

We have chaplains working in aged care, hospitals, schools, university, and correctional services. Of these, only five chaplains work in full time roles – two in schools, two in aged care and one in a private hospital. Most chaplains are working in either fractional placements or short-term supply roles, some as little as 0.2 FTE (one day a week).

At the time of preparing this report the Synod has oversight of 32 chaplains, the number varying due to changes in part-time and supply arrangements. Our chaplains currently work in the following areas:

- o Tertiary Chaplaincy at Flinders University
- o Hospital Chaplaincy in three local area health networks (Southern, Central and Northern)

- o Correctional Services or Prison Chaplaincy (two chaplains share the Senior Coordinating Chaplaincy role)
- o School Chaplaincy (Westminster School, Prince Alfred College, Annesley Junior School)
- o Hospital Chaplaincy at private hospitals (St Andrew's and 3 ACHA affiliated hospitals – Ashford, Memorial and Flinders Private)
- o Aged Care Chaplaincy at Eldercare, Helping Hand and Resthaven

Funding Source	Chaplaincy Area	Number of Chaplains	Total FTE
SA Synod funded	Flinders University	1	0.5
Largely SA Synod funded (eg. From Red Dove) with small amounts from SA Health Networks	SA Health Hospitals	7	3.4
Dept Correctional Services	Corrections	2	1.0
Organisation Fully funded	Private Hospitals	5	3.1
Organisation Fully funded	Aged Care	13	6.352
Organisation Fully funded	Schools	4	3.2
	Total	32 Chaplains	17.552 FTE

5. Redress

UCA REDRESS for institutional child sexual abuse in the church

The issue of Redress for institutional child sexual abuse is one that none of us wish to confront, yet it is crucial to acknowledge its extensive impact. The scope of Redress reaches across all facets of our church, including schools, congregations, care facilities, and other service areas, as well as associated organisations. It is important to recognise that the Synod has taken the responsibility for these claims, including financial implications, shielding individual congregations from the potentially devastating costs, both financial and reputational. This is a pastoral responsibility of the Synod as people connected with these Redress claims can still be connected to the life of the church. The maximum compensation is capped at \$150,000, even so, the financial burden could be overwhelming for any single congregation.

As you review the statistics related to Redress claims in South Australia since the inception of the National Redress Scheme in July 2018, please remember that each figure represents a deeply painful story—each number signifies a person and a family who have suffered greatly.

At end of financial year 23/2024 the national Uniting Church numbers are:

- Over 1100 applications
- 600 offers of redress
- 300 findings of non liability or non eligibility

In the Uniting Church in South Australia at the end of the financial year 23/2024

- 85 applications
- 25 offers of Redress accepted
- 7 findings of non-liability
- Average payment: \$77,116.46

I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that we must not dismiss these numbers, or the people they represent, as issues to be handled by others. Compliance is not a mere inconvenience; **it is the absolute minimum standard, and failing to uphold it has, and continues to, result in harm.** Simply having a Working with Children Check, completing Called to Care training, or displaying a safeguarding poster or policy is a good beginning but we need to continue to drive a culture of safeguarding. Our approach must be practical, context-driven, and actively integrated into our daily practices. The Placements and Safe Church Team are driven by the idea of moving beyond compliance.

REDRESS Scheme timelines

- Completed 6 years of this operation REDRESS model
- New applications must be lodged by 30 June 2027*
- Administration time Closed 30 June 2028

*Only for claims of abuse that occurred before 1 July 2018

6. Bush Chaplaincy & Frontier Services

We have two active bush chaplains in South Australia Rev Sunny K (Parkin Sturt) and Pastor Julia Lennon (Oodnadatta). Both Chaplains do incredible work with teams of volunteers and support from local congregations around our state to support and care for people in remote communities. The relationship the UCA has with Frontier services is an incredible picture of the possibilities we have, to develop partnerships and fulfill ministry together.

The National Director of Frontier services (Rob Floyd) and I visited Rev Sunny K, in Hawker to celebrate 10 years of his ministry as a bush chaplain in the Parkin Sturt area, and to participate with the working group of volunteers. This was a celebration of local people and volunteers from all over the state. It was an opportunity to see how the church with its partners can be, and are there for people who are isolated, and that we may consider out of reach. I was so encouraged by this practical expression of the mission of God being played out in places I would not normally see, so let me thank every congregation who supports frontier services financially and practically, and I challenge you to speak to Sunny or Julia who would love to share their stories with you.

7. Ministers Day (Supporting Ministers)

On August 15th, we hosted our first Ministers Day since the onset of COVID-19, which significantly altered the way we gather. The event brought together 96 ordained ministers at Burnside City Uniting Church for a day focused on fostering friendship, strengthening peer support networks, and reflecting on our Code of Ethics. Dr. Dan Pronk provided valuable insights on building resilience, a topic that resonated deeply with our attendees. The day also saw the participation of many of our regional ministers.

The Placements and Safe Church Team were particularly encouraged by the evident sense of unity and renewed energy within the gathering. This event underscored the importance of returning to face-to-face meetings, as it highlighted the vital role such gatherings play in maintaining and enhancing our community's cohesion and support. It was an opportunity to thank ministers for their response to call and for the ongoing work they do to assist each of us participate in the ministry of Christ.

8. Church Planting

There has been some movement in the Church Planting space, we have now seen the First Church plant in South Australia to build a culture and start a new church plant, Encounter Grange. Ongoing church plants.

Name	Launched	Name	Launched
Encounter Church Adelaide	2018	Seeds Kurralta Park	2023
Mitcham Hills Uniting	2018	Encounter Henley	2024
Outpost Uniting	2018		
The Journey Adelaide	2020		
City View Uniting	2019		
Waypoint Paralowie	2022		

9. UPCOMING PRIORITIES for the Placements and Safe Church Team

As we continue to navigate the challenges surrounding the Placements and Safe Church Team, it is essential to emphasise that our approach is not solely reactive. We are committed to taking proactive steps to strengthen our culture of safeguarding within the Uniting Church in South Australia. The following outlines a couple of initiatives, aimed at fostering a more engaged and proactive Placements and Safe Church Team.

9.1 Online Learning Platforms

There has been significant interest in developing on-demand training opportunities for presbyteries and local churches to ensure compliance and safeguarding. The Safe Church Team have commenced the scoping of this project, and we hope to see some online training opportunities in early 2025.

9.2 Integrating safeguarding into the activities and processes of the church

One of our key initiatives moving forward is the integration of safeguarding considerations into all aspects of the church's activities and processes. This includes embedding safeguarding expectations into applications for building projects, insurance applications and grant funding, ensuring that safety and compliance are always front of mind. By doing so, we are proactively fostering a culture of accountability and responsibility, where safeguarding is not an afterthought but an essential element of all our decision-making processes. This approach reflects our commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment across every facet of the church's operations.

9.3 How are we going to be prepared for shifts in ministry

From various places in the church, we are hearing about the challenges ahead of us that we need to prepare for. One of those that impacts the placements processes is where will the ministers come from to meet the needs of the church in the future. Rev Steph Tai has gathered the data to forecast the needs of the church, and it identifies our need to proactively address the challenges posed by an aging cohort of ministers and the anticipated increase in retirements. This was recently presented to the Placements Committee and will be a valuable reflection for many areas across the life of the church. This reality compels us to closely examine the current numbers of those candidates for ministry within the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) and to explore strategies for encouraging more individuals to enter this vital calling, and enable effective care strategies for ministers in placements. Additionally, we need to consider alternative pathways to ministry to ensure that we can effectively meet the future demands for ministry. Our work will involve asking critical questions about the sustainability of our ministry agents and implementing targeted initiatives to prepare for and adapt to these impending changes.

9.4 Collaboration with the Safe Church Units across Australian Synods

The National Safe Church Unit (NSCU) was established in response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse and has played a crucial role in laying a strong foundation for safe church practices. As the scope and work of the NSCU has undergone review, collaboration between the state based Safe Church Units will become even more essential. This collaboration will allow us to share resources, develop effective responses to emerging legislation, and strengthen our collective efforts. It is important to acknowledge that each state operates under unique legislative requirements, and understanding these differences is critical as we shape our policies and actions. While we remain committed to national collaboration, our distinctive local contexts will continue to inform our approach.

9.5 Regulations Review

At the time of writing this paper the Assembly Standing Committee are meeting and one of the key conversations and points of decision is changes to the Discipline Regulations. Placements and Safe Church will work with our committee members to inform them of the new regulations, and provide professional development as required.

Rev Andrew Robertson

Associate General Secretary: Placements and Safe Church

30 September 2024



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia

Appendix 1

As at 30 September 2024

Placements/Appointments Made (since May 2023) and not previously reported to Synod		
Congregational Placements/Appointments (Note titles are listed as at the time the placement/appointment was made)		
Generate Presbytery		
Clare UC	Travis Turner (MOP)	1 June 2024
County Jervois	Darian Jones (MOP)	1 November 2024
Encounter (Henley) (0.4)	Rev Tim Littleford	1 September 2024
Murraylands Minister UAICC	Rev Hohaia Matthews	1 November 2023
Sunset Rock UC (0.5)	Elissa Inglis (MOP)	12 February 2024
Seeds UC (Associate Pastor) (0.8)	Rev Naomi Duke	12 February 2024
Seeds UC Generation Pastor (0.8)	Rev Matt Carratt	1 October 2024
Western Eyre Parish	Rev Barry Luke	1 January 2025
Presbytery of Southern SA		
Blackwood UC	Rev Anne Hewitt	1 January 2025
Church of the Trinity UC	Rev Richard Telfer	1 July 2024
Glengowrie UC (0.5)	Rev Leanne Osborn	1 July 2024
St Andrews by the Sea UC (Glenelg)	Rev Geoff Hurst	1 March 2024
The Corner UC	Rev Bob Hutchinson	1 November 2023
Wimala Presbytery		
Athelstone UC (0.8)	Rev Do Young Kim	1 April 2024
Barossa Congregations (0.9)	Rev Amel Manyon	1 August 2024
Dernancourt UC (0.6)	Rev Montaz Ali (Evangelical Churches of Wales)	1 August 2024
Kimba (0.4)	Gary Ferguson, Specified Lay Pastor	1 July 2024
Lefevre UC (0.4)	Rev Craig Bossie (0.2)	1 August 2023
Payneham Road UC (0.5)	Rev Geoff Tiller	1 October 2024
Woodville UC Community Connection Minister (0.4)	Rev Rob Cartridge	21 September 2024
Presbytery Placements/Appointments		
Generate Presbytery		
PRC Chairperson (0.4)	Martyn Smith (MOP)	1 June 2024
Presbytery of Southern SA		
Wimala Presbytery		
Chair of Wimala Presbytery	Rev Diane Holden (0.4FTE)	13 April 2024
PRC Chairperson (0.2)	Rev Rebecca Purling.	1 April 2024

Synod Placements/Appointments		
AGS, Placements and Safe Church	Rev Andrew Robertson	1 January 2024
Chaplain to CALHN (RAH)	Lynton Willcocks (MOP) (0.6) Rebecca Brown (MOP) (0.4)	1 July 2023
Chaplaincy & Supervision Manager	Rev Mark Dickens	1 January 2025
Director in Leadership and Formation (0.5FTE)	Rev Dr Tim Hein	1 March 2024
Executive Officer, Missioning Resourcing, MLD	Rev Jenni Hughes	1 August 2024
General Secretary	Rev Philip Gardner	1 September 2023
Helping Hand (0.4)	Rev Samuel Davis (Lutheran)	1 July .2023
Lecturer of Theology & Church History (0.8)	Dr Toar Hutagalung	1 July 2023
Lecturer in Biblical Studies	Prof Bart Bruehler	15 January 2024
Mission Activators	Rev Cyrus Kung (0.5) Rev Scott Litchfield (0.5) Rev Tim Littleford (0.5) Melissa Neuman (MOP) (0.5) Rev Nick Patselis (0.5)	14 October 2024 1 January 2025 1 September 2024 1 September 2024 1 September 2024
Murrayland Ministry (0.5) UAICC	Rev Hohaia Matthews	1 November 2023
Professional Standards Officer (0.5)	Rev Mark Dickens	1 October 2024
State Development and Outreach Officer, UAICC	Rev Ken Sumner	1 July 2024
Yorke Peninsula Regional Mission Minister (YPRMM)	Brenton Smith (MOP)	1.03.24
Intentional Interim Ministry		
New Approved Placements		
POSSA Pool Ministry Project (Up to 3 placements)		
POSSA Presbytery Project Officer: Pool Trial		
Murrayland Ministry (0.5) UAICC		
Wimala PRC Chairperson (0.2)		
Woodville UC Community Connection Minister (0.4)		
Encounter (Henley) (0.4)		
Leave of Absence		

Active Service

Rev Shelley Alexander - seconded to the Presbytery Central and the Pathways Presbyterian Church in Palmerston North New Zealand from 1 October 2023 [Reg. 2.6.1(b) ii]

Rev Christine Gilbert – Pastoral Supervision, Spiritual Director from 1 July 2024 [Reg. 2.6.1(b) ii]

Minister Retiring/Retired 2023/2024 (to be recognised by Synod)

Rev Cliff Birch	30/11/23	Rev Gary Stuckey	31/07/24
Rev Dean Whittaker	06/12/23	Rev Owen Roberts	21/12/24
Rev Michael Dowling	31/03/24	Rev Casey Lau	31/12/24
Rev Peter Sorenson	21/05/24		