

WILLOUGHBY AND NORTHBRIDGE UNITING CHURCH

SAFETY AND PROTECTION POLICY

We affirm that all people have the right to be emotionally and physically safe, respected, and have their views and opinions valued at all times.

Our Safety and Protection Policy has been developed to help us live out our mission, especially in our ministries with vulnerable people and in acknowledgment of our own vulnerabilities, as well as to meet our responsibilities as part of the Uniting Church in Australia and under Australian legislation.

This Safety and Protection Policy applies to all staff members, church councillors, elders, ministry team leaders and helpers associated with the ministry in our church. This policy guides workers (paid and volunteer) on how to behave when interacting and engaging with vulnerable people in our organisation. The policy focuses on how we can build and maintain a safe environment which is inclusive, transparent and promotes the participation of vulnerable people.

OUR POLICY AIMS TO:

- minimise the risk of abuse, ministry misconduct and the misuse of power.
- ensure that all cases of suspected abuse and ministry misconduct are handled thoroughly.
- ensure that leaders and programs are safe.
- ensure that all people are respected and valued.

WE COMMIT TO:

a) Safe recruitment of leaders

- We require all church councillors, elders and ministry team leaders to participate regularly in the communal life of the church.
- We will screen all prospective church councillors, elders, ministry team leaders and helpers in our ministries, before they are appointed, as appropriate.
- We require all leaders to have relevant working with children's check (NSW) / vulnerable people (ACT) / National police check and for a record to be kept in the office.
- We require all prospective church councillors, elders and ministry team leaders to have participated in the communal life of the church for at least 12 months prior to their appointment.

b) Safe recruitment of staff

- We will maintain a rigorous and consistent recruitment, screening and selection process for employed staff in accordance with Synod guidelines.
- We will screen all prospective employed staff before they are appointed through interviews, references, and Working with Children Checks/ National Police Checks.

c) Adequate training of leaders

- We will ensure that all church councillors, elders, employed staff, ministry team leaders and helpers understand their responsibilities under this Safety and Protection Policy.

- We require that all church councillors, elders, employed staff and ministry team leaders attend a Safe Ministry Induction (or Safe Church Training Agreement endorsed) workshop within their first year of ministry and attend a refresher workshop every 3 years.

- We require all ministry team leaders and helpers to attend additional ministry-specific training as required.

d) Continued supervision of leaders

- We commit to ongoing leadership training, supervision and support for church councillors, employed staff, elders, ministry team leaders and helpers as appropriate.

- All new church councillors, employed staff, elders and ministry team leaders will receive a copy of all policies and procedures relating to the safety of all (especially children, the elderly and people with a disability). Opportunity will be made for them to meet with a member of the Safe Church Team to ask questions and clarify their understanding.

- All church councillors, elders and ministry team leaders will agree to follow our Leader's Code of Conduct / Covenant.

e) Responding to allegations of risk of harm (abuse) or serious ministry misconduct

- We acknowledge that churches have not always dealt appropriately with allegations and instances of abuse, and have prioritised the concerns of institutions above the needs of victims. We commit ourselves to ensuring that this is not repeated.

- All church councillors, elders, employed staff, ministry team leaders and helpers will report disclosures or suspicions of child abuse, according to our procedure. We will not hesitate to involve external agencies such as the police, Department of Family and Community Services, NSW Ombudsman, Office of the Children's Guardian, Aging and Disability Commission.

- Where a church councillor, elder, ministry team leader or helper has an allegation of ministry misconduct made against them we will provide support to alleged victims and perpetrators and seek appropriate denominational help for a just and fair resolution.

f) Safe environments in our ministry programs

- We will take steps to keep all those in our care safe, including from e.g. spiritual, physical, sexual, emotional abuse (including bullying) or neglect.

- As servants of Christ we will serve our people and the community, commit to the good news of Jesus and lead in spiritually non-abusive ways.

- We will afford participants, including children, a say in the programs and the activities in which they participate.

- We will obtain appropriate information relating to the program participants, including children's health and family situation, to ensure as far as possible that we are able to care for their physical and emotional needs.

- All church councillors, employed staff, elders and ministry team leaders will discharge their duty of care through the use of forms, checklists and templates for establishment and maintenance of safe environments in our church.

- A Safe Church Team will be appointed to establish and maintain: *this Safety and Protection Policy and supporting documentation and processes: *workplace health and safety: * fire safety: *building safety: *first aid: *food safety: *safe transport: *incident and emergency procedures.

- Two Safe Church contact people have been appointed to manage all complaints relating to safety.

Review

- Ministry team leaders will complete a written ministry approval process, for approval by the church council, at the start of new ministry programs/activities which take place in the church's name. These programs/activities will be reviewed on an annual basis.

- The Safety and Protection Policy will be reviewed every two years.

DEFINITIONS

Child: a person who is under the age of 18 years.

Church Councillors / Elders: Members of the congregation elected to oversee the total life and mission of the congregation. They are responsible for building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.

Ministry Team Leaders: Are people responsible for a ministry program or set of programs.

Employed workers : Are people paid by the church to fulfil a ministry or administrative role within the organisation.

Helpers: Are people who assist or help with ministry activities.

Vulnerable person: A vulnerable person is someone who is aged under 18 or is an individual who may be unable to take care of themselves or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation. They can include:

- Children and seniors
- People with impaired intellectual or physical functioning
- People who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders
- People who are not native speakers of the local language
- People with low levels of literacy or education
- People subject to modern slavery

Adopted by WUChurch Mission Council 30th April 2019

Revised July 2021