Approved by the Assembly Standing Committee - November 2015

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LAY LEADERS

Values Statement

The Uniting Church is committed to providing a safe environment for all people to encounter God, to deepen relationships and grow in faith. We believe that every person is precious to God and that in following Jesus' example we are called to care for all people, especially those who are vulnerable.

The Church is sustained by Christ through baptism, the Eucharist and preaching of the Word. Its life and fellowship is derived from the fact that the Church is the Body of Christ, the presence of Christ in the world. We are united in a fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy through our shared faith in Christ. We worship, pray, give our witness, study Scripture and other sources of faith, offer pastoral care to each other, develop deep friendships, and seek to be mutually accountable. We are, for this reason, a deeply intimate community.

As the leaders of this church we acknowledge that everyone who attends our churches needs to be confident that they will be cared for, nurtured and encouraged as they grow and, at the same time, protected from spiritual, physical, and emotional harm. Therefore we commit to the following ministry standards. Just as the wider community expects transgressions of community standards to be addressed (not ignored or moved on), so too does the Church community expect consequences for anyone behaving against the Code of Conduct.

1. Introduction:

1.1 The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to providing safe places where people are cared for, nurtured and sustained. In order to fulfil this commitment, the church needs to have accountability and consistency, across Presbyteries and Synods, in all our services and activities.

1.2 A Code of Conduct is an important document for communicating the kinds of behaviours expected from people in the life of the Church. The existence of a Code of Conduct, when it is known and applied, gives confidence to the wider community and assists the witness of the Christian community. It is an instrument to raise awareness within the Church of what is expected and what kinds of behaviour it does not condone.

1.3 This Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders (Code of Conduct) outlines the behaviours expected of persons who participate in the life of the Uniting Church in Australia as leaders. It applies to all the Church's lay leaders, including but not exclusively Church Councillors, elders, worship leaders, chairs of committees, team / activity leaders. That is, any lay person who accepts a leadership role within a Congregation, Presbytery, Synod or Assembly. It does not apply to those holding paid positions as it is expected that employment contracts will bind employees to the organisation's code of conduct.

1.4 Lay leaders within a Congregation, Presbytery, Synod or Assembly should be recognised in that role through a short commissioning service, to be held within the normal worshipping life of that Council of the Church. This is so that everyone, including the leader, understands that they have formally taken on a leadership role and are subject to the discipline of this Code of Conduct.

1.5 Ministers of the Word, Deacons and lay people serving in an approved Ministry of Pastor role are bound by the national Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Ministers of the Uniting Church in Australia.

2. Leadership within the Church

2.1 Lay leaders are called to minister out of a relationship with God by:

- joining regularly in the life and ministry of the Church
- studying the Scriptures in private and in groups
- praying regularly in private and in fellowship with and for the people and ministry of the Church

2.2 Conduct:

- treat all people of the Church, including those engaged in Church activities and programs, with respect, courtesy, honesty and fairness, and have proper regard for their interests, rights, safety and welfare
- act according to the legislative requirements, policies and ethical codes that apply to their areas of leadership
- make decisions fairly, impartially and promptly, considering all available information, legislation, policies and procedures
- be aware of and careful not to abuse any social or professional power that comes with any personal attribute, or role or position held in the Church or professionally or in the community
- show others what healthy relationships look like by modelling them
- avoid behaviours that could be experienced as bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical abuse, spiritual abuse, sexual abuse or any kind of sexual misconduct
- be sensitive to the particular needs and vulnerability of children and young people

2.3 Confidentiality:

- treat as confidential any personal or sensitive information acquired through their work or other involvement in the Church, other than as required by law or where proper authorisation is given
- adhere to legal requirements, policies and all other lawful directives regarding the use of personal or sensitive information
- use personal information only for the purpose stated or understood when the information is gathered

2.4 Relationship with the Law:

- Obey Australian laws while recognising that the long standing Christian tradition of political resistance and civil disobedience may lead to exceptions.
- Not act violently or intentionally provoke violence when engaging in civil disobedience
- Not take property belonging to others, including intellectual property (copyright)
- Not knowingly make false, misleading, deceptive or defamatory statements
- Disclose to the Church leadership if they are or have been investigated for any criminal

offences or have any knowledge of serious criminal activity

- act with financial integrity, including having accountable and transparent systems in place in financial matters
- be responsible in their use of addictive substances and services (for example, medications / alcohol)

2.5 Conflict of interest:

- ensure personal or financial interests do not conflict with Church related roles and responsibilities to be undertaken or in which a leader is involved
- manage and declare any conflict between personal interests and Church duty.
- where conflicts of interest do arise, seek the support of the relevant Council (Congregation, Presbytery, Synod or Assembly) to ensure they are managed in the public interest, according to community standards of the highest order.

3. When the code is breached

This code will only be effective if it is widely known and available throughout the Church, practised consistently and implemented justly. All lay leaders have a responsibility to ensure that personal behaviour and practices that are not consistent with this code are neither tolerated nor covered up.

- If there is knowledge or reason to believe that another lay leader of the Church has not followed this code, then that person should be approached and the concern identified
- If the lay leader can be considered as persisting in disregarding the code without good reason and a person has suffered or is at risk of suffering harm, then the behaviour should be reported to the council of the Church with responsibility for the member
- If in doubt, seek advice from a colleague or Minister

The ASC has also produced a Guide to implementing the Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders, especially when there are breaches of the Code of Conduct.