

# Professional supervision and Uniting Church in Australia ministers



A resource for professional supervisors

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The Uniting Church in Australia  
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

# Professional supervision and Uniting Church in Australia ministers



The Uniting Church in Australia requires all those in specified ministry (whether in approved placement or not) to participate in regular professional supervision. In the context of the Uniting Church, professional supervision is defined as the relationship the minister has with another professional whereby the minister is assisted to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of their ministry<sup>1</sup>. A minister's commitment to conscious and critical reflection on their ministry and ministry experiences is recognised as being important for the wellbeing of the minister, the people with whom they exercise ministry, the wider church and the community<sup>2</sup>. The mandate for professional supervision is found in the Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice<sup>3</sup>, and is monitored through the fulfilment of regulatory responsibility<sup>4</sup> by the presbytery.

Ministers (supervisees) are encouraged to understand the purpose and focus of professional supervision and to actively participate in professional supervision. Ministers are expected<sup>5</sup> to engage in professional supervision with appropriately trained supervisors who will respect and honour their call to ministry and assist them to grow, develop and learn from their ministry and ministry experience.

Professional supervisors of Uniting Church ministers are encouraged to develop their knowledge of how the Uniting Church is structured and governed, the expectations of ministers (such as responsibilities, duties, roles and commitments), and how ministers are supported in their ministry and held accountable for their ministry practice.

This resource is designed to assist professional supervisors to grow in their capacity to supervise ministers of the Uniting Church in Australia.

It is presented under the following headings:

- Background to the Uniting Church in Australia
- Documents of the Uniting church in Australia
- Accountability and professional supervision
- The Code of Ethics and professional supervision
- Resources on professional supervision and Uniting Church ministers
- A final note

## Background to the Uniting Church in Australia

The Uniting Church in Australia came into being on 22 June 1977 after three denominations – the Congregational Union in Australia, the Methodist Church in Australasia, and the Presbyterian Church of Australia – joined together. In uniting, the members of those bodies testified to 'that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church'<sup>6</sup>. The foundational document of the Uniting Church in Australia is the *Basis of Union*.

The structure of the Uniting Church in Australia is a series of interrelated councils. The Uniting Church does not have a hierarchical structure and is committed to consensus decision making. There are no bishops in the Uniting Church in Australia. At a national level (Assembly) there is an elected President and at a state level (synod) there is an elected Moderator. General Secretaries are appointed at both Assembly and synod level. Different synods have differing internal structures.

The Councils of the church include church council, presbytery, synod and the Assembly each of which has distinct tasks and responsibilities. Each council recognises the limits of its responsibilities in relation to other councils. There are six synods of the Uniting Church in Australia: Queensland, New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory, Victoria/Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Synod. There is also the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Ministers in the Uniting Church who are required to participate in professional supervision are those persons ordained or lay who are candidates<sup>7</sup>, ministers of the word, deacons, deaconesses, pastors or ministers from another denomination serving in an approved placement. Ordained ministers can be placed in congregation or non-congregation contexts. Non-congregation contexts would include agencies and institutions (such as schools, prisons, hospitals, community service organisations, presbytery, synod or Assembly roles). Pastors (lay people) can be appointed to a ministry location designated as appropriate for the exercise of ministry, or if they have discerned that they are to serve in an approved placement (congregation or non-congregation context) they are appointed as pastors to fulfil an approved placement. The process of placement involves many people (including via joint nominating committees, placement committee, boards, commissions, presbyteries, synod standing committee) and includes a series of conversations. Discerning the placement of ministers is a highly confidential process in the life of the church.

1 Section 3.9c of the Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (approved 2009) updated effective 1.1.10

2 Uniting Church in Australia Ministerial Education Commission 2011 Seeking a heart of wisdom Available Assembly website

3 Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (approved 2009) updated effective 1.1.10

4 Regulation 3.1.3a ii responsibilities of the presbytery, oversight of ministers

5 Uniting Church in Australia Support Document to the Interim Code of Ethics 1997

6 *Basis of Union*, paragraph 1

7 Candidates are those persons who are going through the formation process to become ministers of the word

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In the life of the Uniting Church ministers<sup>8</sup> are accountable and responsible in matters of faith and discipline to the presbytery in which their name is listed on the presbytery roll<sup>9</sup>. Pastors<sup>10</sup> are accountable to the presbytery which has oversight of the pastor in matters of faith and discipline and to the appointing body for their exercise of their ministry. Concerns about the behaviour and actions of ministers are addressed through the discipline processes of the Church. There are a number of councils, committees and designated roles that address church discipline matters. These include church council, presbytery pastoral relations committee, committee for counselling, sexual misconduct complaints committee, advisors, committee for discipline, synod standing committee, agency boards, commissions, the Assembly, presbytery chairperson, General Secretary and Moderator. The processes for addressing discipline matters are outlined in the regulations<sup>11</sup>. Legislated or mandatory requirements of ministers differ across synods and depending on placement context.

## Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia

There are documents of the Uniting Church in Australia which detail how the church is to be governed and operate including the *Basis of Union*, the Constitution, the Regulations and the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice<sup>12</sup>. Each synod has by-laws for that synod. The accountability, responsibility and duties of ministers are outlined through these documents. The commitment of ministers to ministry within the Uniting Church in Australia is affirmed and re-affirmed at ordination, induction and commissioning services which involve the community of the church gathering together to affirm the call of the minister to a placement.

There are numerous policies and procedures which deal with a range of external and internal matters including a manual for meetings<sup>13</sup>, continuing education for ministry<sup>14</sup>, being a multicultural church, right relationships, relationships of responsibility, child safe church, working with children checks, police checks, conflict, complaints, privacy, copyright, workplace health and safety and social media. Various synods have developed policy for use within their own synod. Documents can be sourced from the websites of the Assembly and various synods. Supervisees would be able to assist a professional supervisor locate these documents. A number of documents have been translated into languages such as Tongan, Korean and Chinese.

To grow in knowledge and understanding about the role and function of the various councils and committees of the Uniting Church in Australia professional supervisors are encouraged to peruse the foundational documents of the church and to talk with their supervisee<sup>15</sup>.

## Accountability and professional supervision

Within the structure of the Uniting Church in Australia presbyteries have the responsibility of ensuring that ministers are receiving professional supervision<sup>16</sup>. In some synods it is the presbytery that has the responsibility for approving persons as professional supervisors of ministers, in other synods that responsibility is fulfilled by the synod. Different presbyteries have developed guidelines for professional supervision within their presbytery.

In professional supervision, the professional supervisor is accountable to the supervisee for good, effective, appropriate and ethical professional supervision practice. It would be expected that the professional supervisor would encourage the supervisee to reflect on and give feedback to them on their experience of the supervisor's practice and how effectively the supervisor is working with them.

While the supervisee and the supervisor will develop mutually agreed expectations, tasks and processes including through the development of the professional supervision covenant/contract/agreement and within sessions via mini-contracting, this is not accountability. It would be expected that a professional supervisor would encourage a supervisee to discuss with them how they have used material arising from a session or completed 'homework tasks'. This could be described as a process of reporting back or informing the supervisor.

The supervisee and the supervisor will need to ensure that within the professional supervision lines of accountability in the life of the church are clearly understood and adhered to – that the supervisee (minister) is accountable to the presbytery<sup>17</sup> not to the professional supervisor. The accountability of the supervisee (minister) to the presbytery is demonstrated when a supervisor recognises that a supervisee needs to inform the presbytery about a situation they (the supervisee) have been involved in. A further example of the accountability of the supervisee (minister) to the presbytery is seen when a presbytery asks a minister to explore specific issues in the context of professional supervision. It would be expected that a presbytery would seek feedback from a minister on their experience of professional supervision and the practice of the professional supervisor.

Recognising the accountability of ministers to presbytery, it is important that the supervisee (minister) and the professional supervisor discuss how the presbytery will be informed by the supervisee of the professional supervision arrangement, under what circumstances the professional supervisor and the presbytery will connect, and how this would be done<sup>18</sup>. The Ministerial Education Commission<sup>19</sup> has offered an outline of a supervision covenant with the expectation that the supervisee (minister) and the professional supervisor will complete the covenant and then the minister will forward it to the presbytery via the pastoral relations committee.

8 Regulation 2.9.1

9 There are other accountabilities in the life of the Church that are not referred to here

10 Regulation 2.9.2a

11 Church discipline matters involving lay people (members, adherents, members in association) are also addressed through the regulations of the church

12 Copies of these documents are available via synod and Assembly websites.

13 The Uniting Church has processes for consensus decision making – see the Manual For Meetings Available via Assembly website

14 Uniting Church in Australia Ministerial Education Commission 2011 *Seeking a heart of wisdom* Available Assembly website

15 The Assembly has produced workbooks on the *Basis of Union* and the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice available via MediaCom.

16 Regulation 3.1.3a(ii)

17 As per previous reference to Reg 2.9.1 and 2.9.2a

18 This discussion would include reference to the previously discussed supervision covenant from the 2011 UCA MEC document *Professional supervision: a process of reflection on ministry experience*. Negotiating a professional supervision arrangement provides an opportunity to explore these questions. Available Assembly web site

19 Uniting Church in Australia Ministerial Education Commission 2011 *Professional Supervision: a process of reflection on ministry experience*

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## The Code of Ethics and professional supervision

The Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice contains a number of references to professional supervision. These are detailed in the table below. The Code of Ethics discusses behaviours expected of ministers. It is essential for a professional supervisor to understand the church's expectations of ministers if they are to work with the supervisee (minister) to fulfil the purpose of professional supervision in the context of ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia—that is to assist a minister to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of ministry<sup>20</sup>. Topics explored in the Code of Ethics include the church as intimate community, accountability, relationships with councils of the church, boundaries, pastoral relationship, particular relationship, relationships with colleagues, teaching, self-care, family, conflict, critical incidents, confidentiality and limitations of confidentiality, power, competence, referral, responding to gifts and fees, working within institutions, relationship with the law, documentation and breach of the Code. It is expected that a supervisee and a supervisor will discuss what would happen in the context of professional supervision if there is a breach of the Code by the ministers<sup>21</sup>. It is expected that the whole of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice would be referred to across time in professional supervision<sup>22</sup>.

Ministers who are in a non-congregation placement may have codes of conduct and other policies of that placement to which they need to adhere. Professional supervisors would be expected to ensure they are aware of such requirements for a supervisee.

Section of the Code of Ethics	Detail from the Code of Ethics
Code of Ethics Section 1.9	It is recognised that rural and isolated communities present particular difficulties in term of professional/ personal relationship; availability of supervision and access to support. This intensifies the responsibilities of presbyteries for care of such persons, and in assisting ministers to fulfil the Code of Ethics.
Code of Ethics Section 3.4 Competence (d)	Where ministers are forced by circumstances to provide care beyond their normal level of competence they shall: (i) discuss this with their supervisor
Code of Ethics Section 3.5 Professionalism (c)	Ministers have a responsibility to provide unbiased pastoral care to those with whom they disagree, and to consult their supervisor in relation to the situation.
Code of Ethics Section 3.8 Self care	Ministers shall take responsibility to:(b) participate in supervision
Code of Ethics Section 3.9 Supervision	(a) Ministers have a responsibility to recognise that they are also vulnerable, requiring them to maintain their professionalism in difficult circumstances. (b) Ministers shall keep appropriate pastoral records (e.g. details of appointments and referrals and a journal of critical incidents). (c) Professional supervision means the relationship ministers have with another professional whereby the minister is assisted to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of ministry (as per the definition at the commencement of the Regulations) including competencies, time management, priorities and any difficulties arising in ministry. (d) Ministers have a responsibility to ensure that they receive regular professional supervision. Such supervision is intended to assist ministers to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationships and quality of ministry. (e) Ministers shall discuss with their supervisor any ongoing situations of conflict in which they are involved in the course of their work. (f) Where applicable, ministers shall maintain membership requirements of any relevant professional association (e.g. psychologists or counsellors.)

20 3.9 c The Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice approved 2009 effective 1.1.10

21 Uniting Church in Australia Ministerial Education Commission 2011 *Professional Supervision: a process of reflection on ministry experience*

22 The Queensland Synod has developed some resources around the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice: (1) *Exploring the Code of Ethics* (2) *Discussing the Code of Ethics* (3) *Reflecting on the Code of Ethics*. Available Queensland Synod website

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Section of the Code of Ethics	Detail from the Code of Ethics
Code of Ethics Section 4.4 Particular relationships	In some circumstances it will be appropriate for a minister to cease a pastoral relationship in order to enter a particular relationship. In the event that a minister and a person with whom they have been in a pastoral relationship identify a potential particular relationship, the minister shall:  (b) seek advice on the appropriateness of such a particular relationship, preferably through supervision

## Resources on professional supervision and Uniting Church ministers

The Ministerial Education Commission of the Assembly has developed a resource titled *Professional supervision: a process of reflection on ministry experience*<sup>23</sup> to assist supervisees and professional supervisors. The table of contents of this resource is outlined below.

### Professional supervision: a process of reflection on ministry experience

- How to get the best out of professional supervision
- The theological basis of supervision
- Mandate for supervision
- Modes of supervision
- The focus of professional supervision
- Marks of an effective supervisor
- Preparing for supervision
- Professional supervision: a healthy environment for adult learning
- Supervision and continuing education for ministry
- Supervision covenants – Why have them?
- Investing in supervision
- Questions to think about
- Supervision Covenant

### This resource identifies that professional supervision:

- honours the call to a ministry of authenticity and integrity that is open to the formative power of God's presence and purpose in oneself, in the church and in the wider society
- advocates wholeness in affirming strengths and addressing and/or accepting weaknesses
- respects the boundaries of the particular call to ministry and of the particular ministry placement
- requires theological reflection on the practice of ministry, leading to increased intentionality, creativity and quality of ministry
- points to God's restoring grace which enables ministers to take responsibility for times of failure and in times of brokenness
- trusts the God of hope for the future, sustained by one's call to ministry and encouraged by the signs of God's activity in the ministry context.

It uses the language of covenant when referring to the contract/agreement made between the supervisee (minister) and the professional supervisor as they agree to commence a professional supervision relationship and arrangement. The word covenant suggests human grace, compassion, patience and openness to the claims of wisdom, truth, faith and love. A covenanting relationship is characterised by a relationship between the supervisee and supervisor which is rooted in God's covenant relationship with his people and with the "Word made flesh", and exhibits an essential openness, flexibility and creativity regarding the expected outcomes of the relationship<sup>24</sup>.

It would be expected that professional supervisors can affirm that their practice of professional supervision will be consistent with the expectations outlined in this document, as well as with any professional supervision guidelines and procedures of individual presbyteries.

## A final note

In the life of the Uniting Church in Australia ministers are encouraged to participate in and receive professional supervision. Professional supervision is recognised as an intentional support and resource for ministry that focuses on the minister and their ministry experiences, assisting the minister to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of their ministry<sup>25</sup>. It is an investment in ministry that seeks to assist a minister to serve faithfully and effectively<sup>26</sup>.

Professional supervisors who make themselves available as professional supervisors of Uniting Church in Australia ministers are encouraged to grow and develop their

- knowledge of the Uniting Church in Australia
- understanding of the duties, responsibilities and commitments of ministers
- awareness of the accountability of ministers in the life of the church
- capacity to effectively and appropriately supervise those who have been called to ministry.

23 Uniting Church in Australia Ministerial Education Commission 2011 *Professional supervision: a process of reflection on ministry experience*

24 Uniting Church in Australia Ministerial Education Commission 2002 Pastoral Supervision training resource material of Robyn Pryor

25 Section 3.9c of the Uniting Church in Australia Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (approved 2009) updated effective 1.1.10

26 Uniting Church in Australia Ministerial Education Commission 2011 *Professional supervision: a process of reflection on ministry experience*