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## **Introduction**

For over a decade, the NCCA Safe Church Program has been involved in the ecumenical endeavour to safeguard Australian Churches for children and vulnerable people. This work started organically with the collaboration of key church ministry leaders who saw a need to come together on this work from 2004. Through dedication and commitment this work was brought to life through a program managed alongside the NCCA called the Safe Church Training Agreement which encompassed Safe Church Awareness Workshops and Training of Trainers and the Biennial Safer Churches Conference. NCCA oversaw the program via the Safe Church Network. In late 2014 NCCA took over the management of the Safe Church Program with the appointment of a full-time National Coordinator and a part-time Administrative Assistant.

Since the commencement of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the release of the recommendations of the Final Report in December 2017, Australian churches and faith communities have embarked on historic changes. The nature of the Safe Church Program model has shifted and we can no longer apply an 'organic' model of engagement to the work of safeguarding. The Safe Church Program now needs to operate more strategically and position this work in consultation with the National Office for Child Safety, state and territory regulatory bodies, NCCA member churches and non-member churches that have a long association with the NCCA Safe Church Program, eg Baptist, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist and Independent Pentecostal Churches.

This report will provide the Forum with up to date information about current Safe Church Program operations, but more importantly highlight the key strategic decisions that need to be affirmed by the Forum for the future direction of the Safe Church Program. Despite the Royal Commission very clearly naming the role that the NCCA could take in assisting churches to respond to and implement the recommendations, a firm decision needs to be made about the resourcing of the Safe Church Program work into the future.

### **1. Safe Church Network**

The Safe Church Network has continued to provide outstanding support and guidance to the NCCA staff working on the safe church program between the years of 2016-2019.

The Safe Church Network is a gathering of professionals who are involved in the work of Professional Standards and Safeguarding. The experience and expertise they bring allows for emerging issues to be identified and responses shared for the benefit of all churches.

The Safe Church Network is committed to leadership so as to ensure as far as possible that Australian churches are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe for children and vulnerable adults by:

- Facilitating cooperation among Australian churches on safeguarding issues
- Providing guidance to uphold a safe church and responding to requests from the NCCA Executive
- Providing regular professional development and networking opportunities
- Acting as a reference group for NCCA's Safe Church Training Agreement.

The following are current members, or have spent time as members of the Network, during the past three years.

- Mr Garth Blake AM SC (Anglican Church of Australia)
- Mrs Meenal Selvaratnam (Anglican Church of Australia)
- The Reverend Fr Yousef Fanous (Coptic Orthodox Church)

- Mr Tim Ross (Lutheran Church in Australia)
- Ms Ronis Chapman (Religious Society of Friends)
- Mrs Narelle McMahon (Roman Catholic Church) finished 2018
- Mr Daniele Donnini (Catholic Professional Standards Ltd) commenced 2019
- Mr Ross Stewart (Hope Church - Churches of Christ NSW)
- Ms Carol Phillips (Salvation Army) commenced 2019
- Ms Emma Parr (Uniting Church in Australia)
- Observers
  - Mrs Kate Eversteyn (Catholic Church) 2018
- Non Attendance
  - Deacon Dimitri Papaikonomou (Greek Orthodox Church)
  - Mr Sargis Makko (The Holy Assyrian Church of the East)

We would like to thank the outstanding leadership and service of Mrs Narelle McMahon from the Catholic Church who finished serving on the Safe Church Network in December 2018.

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Mr Peter Williams who minuted the Safe Church Network meetings between June 2018 - May 2019 in his capacity of Assistant to the National Coordinator.

## 2. Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission

The final Royal Commission report stated:

“... the National Council of Churches in Australia [is] well positioned to work proactively with the independent oversight bodies to ensure that individual religious institutions are able to comply with the requirements.” ***Volume 16, Religious Institutions (Book 3, page 293)***

For the NCCA Safe Church Program to continue to support Australian churches, it has been recognised by the Australian Government’s National Office for Child Safety, state and territory regulatory bodies and NCCA Safe Church Program members that we must review NCCA’s current safeguarding framework and standards in line with the Royal Commission recommendations. In undertaking this work the Safe Church Program must be clear about the value-add it is offering the church members. The work on reviewing NCCA’s safeguarding framework and standards is already underway and the new framework and standards will reflect the 10 Child Safe Standards of the Royal Commission and the related 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations adopted by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in February 2019.

While an initial draft safeguarding framework with revised training and professional standards has been scoped, further consultation needs to occur as larger NCCA member churches have also commenced this work. It has been strongly suggested that the value add of Safe Church Program is in developing a broader framework to assist churches address **culture change** in consultation with the Australian Government’s National Office for Child Safety, state and territory based regulatory bodies and NCCA’s Safe Church Program members.

## 3. Safe Church Program Update

### 3.1 SCTA Membership

NCCA’s Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA) membership has grown between 2016-2019. Currently, there are 39 member churches and church training organisations across Australia and 18 training partners. For a full list of members and training partners refer to **Appendix 1** at the end of this report.

The total fees paid by SCTA members in 2018-19 will be about \$37,000 and is based on the number of worship sites or congregations a member church may have.

A number of aspects of this membership structure are unsustainable – the membership income does not cover the costs of staffing the program and secondly the smaller churches pay disproportionately more per site than the Dioceses and Synods of the larger member churches. However the Dioceses and Synods belong to national churches that are developing their own safeguarding organisational structures and processes and ongoing engagement with the NCCA Safe Church program is unclear.

### 3.2 Safe Church Training Agreement workshop workbooks

The Safe Church Program produces Safe Church Awareness training workbooks as a basic starting point for churches to commence and run safeguarding training. Since the end of 2017, with the release of the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional responses to Child Sexual Abuse there has been increased demand to adapt the original workbook created for Victoria to reflect the state and territory based changes in standards legislation and in some cases oversight structures. This has been the case particularly in relation to reportable conduct schemes and reporting processes and obligations. The Safe Church Program staff consulted with safe guarding representatives from member churches in each state and territory to assist with editing the workbook given the limited staffing resources of the program.

In addition to the workbooks, the Safe Church Program has a number of training resources available for the use of SCTA members. Most of these policy template documents are requested by churches when they join the SCTA to assist with bringing their churches up to speed with basic safeguarding audits and policy documents. We have many sample documents, guides and fact sheets that are available through our re-developed NCCA website:

[www.safechurches.org.au](http://www.safechurches.org.au)

**Note: Resources will need to be revised again in the near future when the updated NCCA Safeguarding framework and associated training and professional standards are approved. With limited staffing, this will be a significant stretch for the program to undertake.**

In the 11 years since SCTA training commenced in 2008, it is estimated that over 5,000 workshops have been run that are promoted through the NCCA's [www.safechurches.org.au](http://www.safechurches.org.au) website. Participants continue to engage with ecumenically available SCTA workshop or refresher workshops across Australia.

### 3.3 NCCA Safe Church - Training of Trainers

In December 2016, under the leadership of the former National Safe Church Program Coordinator, NCCA received a grant of \$25,000 from the Collier Charitable Fund for rolling out an updated 'Train the Trainer' program for members running workshops under the Safe Church Training Agreement.

Since January 2018, five endorsed presenter training days have taken place across Australia. Locations include Melbourne, Bendigo, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth. During the training, presenters spend time engaging in practical activities to assist with the adult learning principles in presenting the safe church awareness workbook, particularly session 2 on 'safe people'. These activities included indicators of abuse and a discussion around how to identify physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect.

In the follow up to both the Sydney and Bendigo endorsed presenter training days, National Coordinator, Laura Cregan has travelled to Griffith NSW, Grafton NSW, Bathurst NSW, Parramatta NSW, Brisbane and Gold Coast QLD, Wagga Wagga NSW, Coffs Harbour NSW, South West Rocks NSW, Dubbo NSW and various sites in Melbourne and Victoria to observe presenters ready for endorsement.

Special thanks to; Ms Kylie Kendall CofC, Emma Parr UCA NSW, Cindy Gorton UCA WA; Bonnie Seip QLD CofC, Heather Marten Anglican Church, Judy Henderson Baptist Church and Mrs Sue Mercer for their commitment to assisting in each of these locations to run train the trainer courses. These sessions would not have been as successful without the time they spent to work alongside the National Coordinator to plan and implement the training.

**Note:** Since January 2018, 110 people have been through the Safe Church Program Train the Trainer day with demand continuing to be expressed in QLD, SA and NT. There is increasing demand for the Train the Trainers for the churches across Australia that have yet to commence safeguarding training.

With the demand on the National Coordinator role to update the Safe Church Program framework and standards and the continuing need for the ongoing amount of consultation across Australia it must be noted that, if the Safe Church Program is going to continue to run quality Train the Trainer courses along with updating the training manuals and managing all the administration and travel involved, it is highly recommended that a full time trainer be employed in the future.

#### **4. NCCA Safeguarding Framework and related Training and Professional Standards**

Since the release of the recommendations in the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, significant work has been undertaken to revise and develop a new NCCA safeguarding framework and a set of training standards for Australia churches to benchmark against.

It is important to note that the new framework should be flexible enough to be expandable to other safeguarding areas including family and domestic violence, ageing and disability.

Any future work that the Safe Church Program wishes to undertake in relation to a review of its high level framework must be done in consultation with the National Office for Child Safety, state and territory regulatory bodies and NCCA Safe Church members to ensure that the framework is a shared vision by all those working to address culture change.

##### **4.1 Stage One- Task Group Consultation**

In consultation with the Interim General Secretary, the National Coordinator invited key representatives from across different sectors to form a task group. Those individual's represented the Baptist Union Victoria, Ansvr Insurance, Ernst and Young, Anglican Church and Safe Ministry Training. The task group met for one day in Melbourne in December, 2018.

The role of the task group was to assist the National Coordinator develop a draft document for the NCCA Board to start the process of revising the Safe Church Training Agreement standards with the goal of developing a new overarching framework to address the broader Royal Commission recommendations for Australian churches and institutions as well as providing insight into a review of the current NCCA training standards with the goal of bringing them into a framework and aligned with the 10 Child Safe Standards outlined in the Royal Commission recommendations and the COAG-endorsed National Principles. At this meeting a new framework was drafted and all recommendations were mapped to each segment of the framework. The draft was sent to the NCCA Board for comment with the National Coordinator's report in December 2018.

##### **4.2 Stage Two- Drafting of Safeguarding Framework, Training and Professional Standards**

The development of the safeguarding framework and standards was outsourced to Mrs Ann McLean in early 2019 upon recommendation by Mr Garth Blake AM SC representative of the Anglican Church in Australia on the Safe Church Network.

Mrs Ann McLean has extensive experience as a social worker. Ann is a member of the Anglican Church and continues to teach nationally accredited courses with TAFE NSW in community services and other specialist areas. Ann graciously accepted the project and generously insisted that it be on a pro bono basis.

#### 4.3 Engagement with External Consultants

Two consultants were engaged to assist the National Coordinator with strategic planning for the Safe Church Program. Mr Phil Pynor, Director Two Roads Consultation, was engaged in January 2019 on a pro bono basis to assist with the overall strategic thinking of the program. This report was submitted by the National Coordinator to the NCCA Board for discussion and review. The National Coordinator engaged Mr Graeme Fleming, Director of *Audax* consulting to undertake a financial review of the program to assist the Coordinator to gather the relevant information needed to cost out Safe Church program costs for the NCCA Board in March 2019.

Development of a business plan is being undertaken by the Interim General Secretary. As membership fees being charged for access to Safe Church Program training resources are not covering program costs including staff, the NCCA Board wants to explore future financial sustainability for the program.

#### 4.4 Summary of key elements of NCCA Safe Church Program under Review - 2017-2019 and ongoing:

- Responding and incorporating the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse into a revised framework of standards and practices incorporating the final recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse.
- Consultation on the revised Safe Church Program framework with the National Office for Child Safety, state and territory regulators and NCCA's Safe Church Program member churches, particularly those who have already commenced the development of their own frameworks.

#### *BUSINESS PLAN* (Interim General Secretary)

- Revised membership model
- Revised fee structure for membership
- Exploration of new sources of financial support eg financial partnerships with insurance companies; theological colleges for co-branding, promotion, etc

#### *CAPACITY BUILDING*

- Development of capacity building resources for churches to assist with understanding Reportable Conduct Schemes and National principles – not yet scoped

### 5. Biennial Safer Churches Conferences

#### **Safe as Churches? 8 Conference was held on 16 – 17 May 2017 at the Jasper Hotel in Melbourne.**

- Conference presentations are publically available on the NCCA website at <https://www.ncca.org.au/safe-as-churches/conference-2017>

**9<sup>th</sup> Safer Churches Conference 2019** will be held at the Mecure Hotel in Brisbane on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2019. The theme for the conference is Transforming Cultures: *Listening, reflecting, Acting*

- Website: [www.transformingcultures.net.au](http://www.transformingcultures.net.au)
- Facebook: **Transforming Cultures: Listening, Reflecting, Acting**
- Bookings can be made directly on the website
- The full program is available to download on the conference website

- Cost: \$600+GST (before 30 June ,early bird) \$695+GST (after 30<sup>th</sup> June)

## 6. Advocacy and Engagement

In December 2017, the Royal Commission recommendations were released. At the same time, the NCCA appointed Ms Laura Cregan into the role of the National Coordinator of the Safe Church Program and in January 2018 Ms Elizabeth Stone was invited into the role of Interim General Secretary.

The Interim General Secretary has worked closely with the National Coordinator around program effectiveness, advocacy and engagement in responding to the Royal Commission with churches and national, state and territory regulatory bodies. To assist this post-Royal Commission engagement work around the country and with State and Territory Ecumenical Councils, NCCA was successful in receiving a grant of \$39,000 from the Collier Charitable Fund for 2018-2019.

Key highlights include:

- State based ecumenical gatherings in partnership with the Executive Officers in QLD, NSW and WA bringing together government oversight and regulatory bodies and churches
- Invitation to the Interim General Secretary and the National Coordinator to join the NSW Standing Committee meeting for survivors and faith groups
- Invitation to the National Coordinator to sit on the NSW Standing Committee sub group for resources development across faiths sectors
- Invitation to NCCA President and Interim General Secretary to be on the National Office for Child Safety task force on implementation of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
- Continued advocacy work with the Coptic Church and key leaders including Fr Shenouda Mansour and Fr Yousef Fanous in Sydney and Fr Abanoub Attalla in Melbourne
- Continued engagement with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) congregations and churches around Safe Church resources
- Attendance by the Interim General Secretary and National Coordinator at the NSW Government's review discussion about the regulation of Child Safe Standards
- Attendance by the National Coordinator at the review discussion of the Victorian Child Safe Standards with government and other key church stakeholders.

## 7. Safe Church Program- Future Direction

Whilst Australian Churches are challenged to embark on historic change, the NCCA Safe Church Program has a key role to play in assisting Australian churches such as providing a safeguarding framework for facilitating culture change, advocacy, capacity building, community support and much more. Most importantly though, the NCCA Safe Church program can take the lead in working alongside its member churches to change the narrative and lack of trust of the Australian community who have observed the damage and trauma of survivors and victims through the revelations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The next three years 2019-22 will be a most significant time in the Safe Church program's life as churches look to the NCCA for leadership, advocacy and support on safeguarding for the children and vulnerable adults in our communities. The Safe Church Program has a key role to play continue to respond to issues relating to helping churches creating safe places of refuge and care:

- Continued revision of resources to assist member churches to meet their legislative and community responsibilities in ensuring a safe environment for all people, especially children and vulnerable adults

- Continued member engagement around the implementation of recommendations by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- Engagement with member churches to assist with capacity building on the child safe standards/National Principles, particularly in churches with limited resources to keep up with implementation
- Safer Churches 9 Conference, 17-18 September 2019, Mercure Hotel, Brisbane. The conference webpage and Facebook has been launched and registrations are open. The theme is: *Transforming Cultures: Listening Reflecting, Acting*
- Training workbooks based on the new Safe Church Framework and standards translated into different languages to meet the needs of culturally and linguistic diverse communities and congregations
- Consultation with Indigenous communities on the implementation of Child Safe standards and appropriate culturally safe resources to cater for their needs
- Research, consultation and advocacy on the issue of Family Violence, and responding to ways for churches to be able to be active and assist in the prevention of Family Violence. Promotion of family violence resources amongst churches
- Research, consultation and advocacy with key church and external agencies on Safe Church matters in light of the Royal Commission into ageing and disability sectors.

## 9. Recommendations

**9.1** Forum affirms the continued development of the revised Safe Church Program framework and standards. This work includes consultation with the National Office for Child Safety, state and territory regulatory bodies and NCCA Safe Church Program member churches who have already commenced the work of developing safeguarding frameworks.

**9.2** Forum affirms continued roll-out of Train the Trainer events, Safe Church Awareness Workbooks and development of training resources with consideration for the employment of a Trainer

**9.3** Forum affirms the expansion of the Safe Church Program Portfolio to include advocacy and engagement on Family and Domestic Violence and Ageing and Disability.

### Acknowledgements:

- The NCCA would like to thank Mr Cameron Haig for his service while he was employed in the role of National Coordinator from 2014 to September 2017.
- Mrs Vicky Dyer and Mr Peter Williams for their administration support of the Safe Church Program.
- Ms Kylie Kendall, Churches of Christ VIC; Mrs Cindy Gorton UCA WA and Ms Emma Parr UCA NSW for their assistance in reviewing the Safe Church Awareness workbook and providing feedback to the Safe Church Program team for editing.
- Pro bono contributions: Prolegis Lawyers, EY Consulting, Ansvar Insurance, SMT Online, Two Roads Consulting, Mrs Anne Mclean.

The Safe Church Program welcomes Mrs Vera De Vere into the role of Assistant to the National Coordinator on a part time basis.

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**APPENDIX 1**

The full list of NCCA's **Safe Church Training Agreement Members** follows:

- Anglican Diocese of Bendigo
- Anglican Diocese of Rockhampton
- Anglican Diocese of Southern Queensland
- Anglican Diocese of Gippsland
- Anglican Diocese of Grafton
- Anglican Diocese of Newcastle
- Anglican Diocese of Riverina
- Anglican Diocese of Sydney
- Anglican Diocese of Wangaratta
- Baptist Association of NSW & ACT
- Baptist Union of Tasmania
- Baptist Union of Victoria
- Baptist Union of WA
- Chinese Christian Church
- Christian and Missionary Alliance of Australia
- Catholic Diocese of Ballarat
- Catholic Diocese of Bathurst
- Christ Evangelical Centre of Australia
- Churches of Christ NSW (Fresh Hope)
- Churches of Christ Vic/Tas
- Churches of Christ Qld
- Coptic Orthodox Church Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions
- Deo Gloria Family of Churches
- Foursquare Gospel Church
- Fusion Australia
- International Network of Churches
- Life Church International (Australia)
- Lutheran Church of Australia
- Presbyterian Church Australia NSW, SA, NT, WA
- Presbyterian Church Victoria
- Reformed Evangelical Church of Australia Inc. (RECA)
- Riverview Church
- Safe Ministry Training Online
- Southern Districts Alliance Church
- The Salvation Army Australian Eastern Territory
- Uniting Church of Australia Northern Synod
- Uniting Church of Australia NSW & ACT Synod
- Uniting Church of Australia Victoria & Tasmania Synod
- Uniting Church of Australia WA Synod.



***Definition of a SCTA Training Partner:***

Are Members of the SCTA, who conduct Safe Church Awareness workshops and use material that is produced by the SCTA, **OR** using their own material that has been endorsed by the SCTA (i.e. meets the SCTA training standards).

See list next page.

Our current **SCTA Training Partners** are:

- Anglican Diocese of Bendigo
- Anglican Diocese of Gippsland
- Anglican Diocese of Grafton
- Anglican Diocese of Sydney
- Anglican Diocese of Wangaratta
- Baptist Association of NSW & ACT
- Baptist Union of Tasmania
- Baptist Union of Victoria
- Baptist Union of WA
- Catholic Diocese of Bathurst
- Churches of Christ Vic/Tas
- Churches of Christ Qld
- Foursquare Gospel Church
- Life Church International (Australia)
- Lutheran Church of Australia
- Uniting Church of Australia NSW & ACT Synod
- Uniting Church of Australia Victoria & Tasmania Synod
- Uniting Church of Australia WA Synod