

**Report to 9th Forum of the
National Council of Churches in Australia, June 2016**

Summary – Safe Church Program 2013 – 2016

Highlights:

- Safe as Churches? 6 Conference (September 26 – 27 2013)
- Safe as Churches? 7 Conference (September 8 – 10 2015)
- Safe Church Training Agreement continues to grow, with 35 members impacting and influencing over 6,500 local churches across Australia
- Development as a recognised Peak Body for engagement with government agencies and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- Growth of the Safe Church Program team at NCCA, with a full-time National Coordinator (Melbourne) and a 2 day a week Program Officer (Sydney)
- Development of NCCA produced resources and tools for SCTA members

Future Directions:

- Continued development 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
- Responding to the final report of recommendations by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
- Development of resources and tools to assist member churches respond to Family Violence
- Creating resources that cater for Culturally and/or Linguistically Diverse church communities
- Safe as Churches? 8 Conference, 16-17 May 2017, Jasper Hotel, Melbourne.

Safe Church Network

The Safe Church Network is a gathering of professionals who are involved in the work of Professional Standards. The experience and expertise they bring assists in the Network exploring issues that can be developed for the benefit of all churches. The Network also assists in the development of the Safe as Churches? Conferences, and as a reference group on training and professional development needs and issues relating to child and vulnerable adult safeguarding for churches and Christian ministry.

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.

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Safe Church Network Members 2013-16:

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

- Mr Garth Blake SC (Anglican Church of Australia)
- The Reverend Fr Yousef Fanous (Coptic Orthodox Church)
- Ms Liz Crawford (Lutheran Church in Australia) Chair of the Safe Church Network
- Ms Ronis Chapman (Religious Society of Friends)
- Mrs Narelle McMahon (Roman Catholic Church)
- Mrs Colleen Morton (Salvation Army) to 2015
- Major Ian Henry (Salvation Army) from 2015
- The Reverend Jane Fry (Uniting Church in Australia)
- Observers
 - Ms Tracey Jones (Presbyterian Church of Australia) to 2015
- Non Attendance
 - Fr Daniel Ghabrial (Coptic Orthodox Church)
 - Deacon Dimitri Papaikonomou (Greek Orthodox Church)
 - Mr Sargis Makko (The Holy Assyrian Church of the East)

We would like to acknowledge the work of the Chair of the Safe Church Network, Ms Liz Crawford for her work, dedication and passion for the work of the network. We thank her for her contribution to the life of the network and NCCA, and pray God's blessings as she retires from her role with the Lutheran Church.

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Safe Church Program

Introduction

The past three years have seen incredible growth, development and impact of the NCCA – Safe Church Program across Australia. Within this report you will read of the main activities of the Safe Church Program, including the work of the Safe Church Training Agreement, Safe as Churches? Conference, the advocacy of the program to various government bodies at State/Territory and Federal levels and engagement with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Since the last Forum, the NCCA – Safe Church Program has established itself as a peak body representing the Australian Church in matters that relate to child and vulnerable adult safeguarding and a voice into related issues that are impacting the Australian church and society.

Safe Church Training Agreement

The Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA) has now been an activity of the NCCA since late 2007. From August 2014, the NCCA put renewed focus on this function and employed a dedicated National Coordinator in November 2014 to further develop and renew the important training and culture change focus of the Safe Church Program.



Under the National Coordinator, the SCTA has updated the Training Standards to better reflect current legislative requirements and community expectations in relation to creating a safe church. Alongside the updated Training Standards, we have created a workbook, guide and package of training resources for the optional use of SCTA members. We have created many sample documents, guides and fact sheets that are available through our re-developed NCCA website: www.safechurches.org.au.

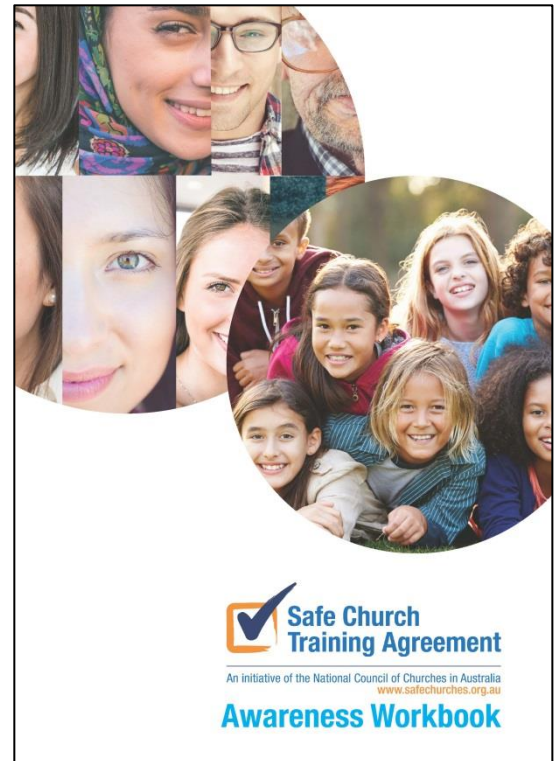
Through 2014 – 2015, over 11,000 participants engaged with an ecumenically available SCTA Workshop or Refresher day throughout Australia. Since the beginning of the SCTA in 2008, over 23,000 people have attended an SCTA Workshop, with the need for workshops steadily increasing every year throughout Australia. From 1 January 2016 to 1 June 2016 over 100 SCTA Workshops have been run that have been promoted through the NCCA's www.safechurches.org.au website.

We have seen the SCTA membership grow in recent years and currently engage with 34 member organisations across Australia that reach and influence over 6,500 local churches. Membership is open to both members of the NCCA as well as churches and Christian organisations that are not. Our current members are:

- Anglican Diocese of Bathurst
- Anglican Diocese of Bendigo

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- Anglican Diocese of Brisbane/Rockhampton/North Queensland/Northern Territory
- Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn
- Anglican Diocese of Gippsland
- Anglican Diocese of Grafton
- Anglican Diocese of The Murray
- Anglican Diocese of Newcastle
- Anglican Diocese of Sydney
- Australian Christian Churches VIC
- Australian Christian Churches WA
- Baptist Churches NSW & ACT
- Tasmanian Baptists
- Baptist Union of Victoria
- Baptist Churches Western Australia
- Boys Brigade Australia
- Catholic Diocese of Bathurst
- Catholic Professional Standards Office Queensland
- Christ Evangelical Church Australia
- Churches of Christ NSW
- EV Church
- 4 Square
- International Network of Churches
- Lutheran Church Australia
- Presbyterian Church Australia NSW, SA, NT, WA
- Presbyterian Church Victoria
- Riverview Church
- Seventh Day Adventist Church Australia
- Salvation Army Australian Eastern Territory
- Safe Ministry Resources Pty Ltd.
- Uniting Church NSW & ACT
- Uniting Church SA
- Uniting Church VIC & TAS
- Uniting Church WA



SCTA Workbook Cover (from Dec 2015)

The NCCA Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA) provides a number of services including:

- Maintaining National Standards for Safe Church training programs and for Training Presenters
- Continuing review and periodic updates as necessary that inform SCTA members of changes relating to legislation and compliance
- Providing an 'SCTA Workbook/Guide'
- National coordination of our Training Partners' workshops via the online SCTA Calendar of workshop and refresher days
- Managing a National register of SCTA co-endorsed Training Presenters
- Maintaining the SCTA website: www.safechurches.org.au with current information, workshop dates, resources, legislative and compliance changes
- Being a voice into the wider Australian community regarding Vulnerable Adult and Children safeguarding matters.

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The current NCCA Safe Church Training Agreement Standards cover:

1. Awareness of the Elements of Safe Culture
2. Understand Child Abuse and Indicators
3. Understand Vulnerable Adults and Abuse
4. Respond to Disclosures and Claims
5. Value and Enable Children and Vulnerable Adults to Participate
6. Understand Power Dynamics and Boundaries
7. Awareness of the Criteria for Safe Leaders
8. Understand the Requirements for Safe Church Environments
9. Understand Legal and Insurance Requirements
10. Understand the Expectations of SCTA Training Programs and Presenters

The NCCA would like to take the opportunity to thank Rev Peter Barnett for the work that he has done as Coordinator of the Safe Church Training Agreement and members of his team from 2008 to June 2014. The training program has grown from an idea in 2005 to commencement in late 2007 with 12 members; to current membership of 35 synods/dioceses/churches and church organisations across Australia; and over 23,000 trained participants.

We would also like to thank the other members of the original working group for the Safe Church Training Agreement: Celia Irving, Colleen Morton, Anne Norman, Linda Vinall and Sr Angela Ryan CSB for their dedication and commitment to an ecumenical and inter-church response to create safer churches and Christian ministries for children and vulnerable adults across Australia.

Safe as Churches? Conference

The NCCA hosted the 7th Safe as Churches? Consultation over the course of three days, 8-10 September 2015, on the theme of “Building Resilience”. The first Safe as Churches? Consultation occurred in 2004, and they have been organised by the Safe Church Network at least biannually since.

The name of these days, ‘Safe as Churches?’ includes the ‘?’ (question mark) as a way of keeping in front of mind that there have been past failures and when we gather we have a shared commitment to keeping our churches safe for all people, in



Keynote Speaker Elizabeth Hall sharing at Safe as Churches? 7

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particular children, at all times, in all our works.

The 7th conference was organised and planned by the NCCA Safe Church Network over the course of 11 months, concluding with a review meeting in November 2015.

The conference's international guest speaker was Elizabeth Hall who since 1981 has been involved with working in the area of child protection in the United Kingdom. Elizabeth was until recently the Safeguarding Adviser for the Church of England and the Methodist Church.

Elizabeth spoke to the theme of the conference 'Building Resilience' and defined resilience as: "Resilience is the capacity for survival following soul-shattering trauma."

On the last day of the conference we were honoured to have the Chair of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Honourable Justice Peter McClellan AM deliver an address and then take questions. Within his address he shared that from the 11,988 confirmed allegations of abuse received by the Royal Commission to September 2015, 7,049 are related to faith based institutions.



Garth Blake SC, Justice Peter McClellan AM, Sr Elizabeth Delaney & Cameron Haig

Justice McClellan spoke about the work of the Royal Commission, and shared about the Working with Children Checks Report and the Redress and Civil Litigation Report that have been produced and published with recommendations. He talked about the work that is now occurring in relation to justice issues and criminal law, and also the importance of the voice of children within an institution and ensuring that they are heard.

Finally Justice McClellan touched on the impact that the Royal Commission is having already within the community, with training of workers and volunteers increasing across Australia to ensure that institutions are safe places for children.

To read his full statement visit <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/media-centre/speeches/national-council-of-churches-in-australia-conferen>

Justice McClellan followed his speech by answering questions that were submitted by participants during the course of the previous days of the Conference and shared further insight into the work of the Royal Commission.

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All resources, PowerPoint slides and various audio recordings of keynote sessions at the 7th Safe as Churches? Consultation are available via NCCA's www.safechurches.org.au.

Over 200 delegates registered for the conference and came from across Church traditions from around Australia, with several delegates from New Zealand and the Pacific Islands attending. Delegates included Church leaders, Professional Standards officers and Safe Church trainers. Church traditions that were represented included:

- Anglican Church
- Baptist Churches
- Salvation Army
- Uniting Church
- Lutheran Church
- Seventh Day Adventist
- Presbyterian Church
- Catholic Church
- Christian Reformed Churches
- Churches of Christ
- Australian Christian Churches
- Methodist Church
- Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
- Coptic Orthodox Church
- Catholic Religious Orders



SAC?7 Conference Delegates in discussion

We have received positive feedback about the days and speakers at the 2015 conference and ideas for the future, with the key highlights being the Panel Discussion and the session with Justice McClellan. The facilities of St Barnabas Anglican Church (Barney's) at Broadway in Sydney were fantastic and suited the conference needs. It was announced at the event that we will hold Safe as Churches? 8 in 2017 and it will be held in Melbourne, the first time a conference has been held in Victoria.

Advocacy and Engagement

We have included some areas where we have engaged with government across Australia and other areas of advocacy in relation to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults.

Through 2015 the NCCA – Safe Church Program regularly engaged with the NSW Ombudsman's office, with particular focus on discussion around the current reach of the NSW Ombudsman's office in child protection and safeguarding. This culminated on 26 February 2016 when the NCCA attended the NSW Ombudsman's 'Reportable Conduct' Forum. Leading up to the forum and a related Special Report to Parliament, we worked with the Deputy Ombudsman's office on consultations with the Safe Church Network and Heads of Churches of NSW Ecumenical Council about the systems in place

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for reporting and responding to child abuse and neglect allegations for government and non-government agencies in NSW.

On the evening of 19 November 2015, the National Coordinator of the NCCA – Safe Church Program was involved in the World Council of Churches seminar with UNICEF on “A stronger voice for Children’s Rights” via videoconferencing. In particular the National Coordinator was invited to contribute to the discussion about developing Principles for Child Friendly Churches. This was a great opportunity to share the work of the NCCA Safe Church Program and the development of the Safe Church Training Agreement in the focus area of Child Safeguarding policies and training in churches to create safe environments for children.

On 1 December 2015, the NCCA Safe Church Program worked together with the Victorian Churches’ Professional Standards Network to hold a seminar in relation to new Child Safe Standards that are being introduced by the Victorian Government. This day event was well attended by a broad range of churches and church agencies, and assisted in the understanding, development of documents and planning for the implementation of the standards. A senior policy officer from the Victorian Office of Department of Health and Human Services participated in the day and spoke with attendees representing 14 churches in Victoria. We will look at holding a follow-up seminar in August 2016 to further assist churches implementing the Victorian Child Safe Standards.

On 22 April 2016, the National Coordinator met with Megan Mitchell, National Children’s Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission to discuss the work of the NCCA – Safe Church Program. Within this discussion we discussed the reach of the program, the training aspect of the SCTA and the training materials and resources we have produced. We handed over our SCTA material, workbook and resources to be reviewed by the Commissioner, to ensure that the NCCA creates the best tools available for our churches to ensure the safety of children. As part of the discussion with the National Children’s Commissioner we also spoke about the Safe Schools Program, and shared thoughts on the training materials and opportunities for future engagement in discussion around training topics and resources.



**National Coordinator Cameron Haig with
National Children's Commissioner Megan Mitchell**

The NCCA and the Safe Church Program have a good relationship with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and have had numerous opportunities for engagement with the commission. In April 2016 the NCCA – Safe Church Program has been specifically asked to assist in sharing information about opportunities for those amongst the Christian community from a culturally and/or linguistically diverse background for engagement with the workings of the Royal Commission. We continue to have dialogue with the Royal Commission, and will continue to do so until the conclusion on 15 December 2017.

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Safe Church Program Looking Forward

As we look forward to the next three years 2016-19 we will continue to respond to issues relating to helping churches create a safe place for children and vulnerable people by

- Developing the Safe Church Training Agreement material so that it can be translated into different languages to meet the needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities and congregations
- Responding and incorporating the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse into safe church standards and practices as it concludes in December 2017
- Researching and consulting 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
- Developing ongoing resources and training for Ministers and Volunteers in response to Safe Church issues.
- **Safe as Churches? 8 Conference will be held on 16 – 17 May 2017 at the Jasper Hotel in Melbourne.** The Conference will look at:
 - Effects of sexual abuse on survivors. and the issue of Forgiveness and Reconciliation
 - Pastoral Care of survivors of sexual abuse and the issue of Forgiveness and Reconciliation
 - Managing offenders within the church community
 - Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse update
 - Safety issues relating to technology including online grooming and cyber-bullying
 - Family Violence and how churches can be involved in prevention and response.

As the NCCA – Safe Church Program approaches the mid-term point of the three year renewal phase that commenced in December 2014 – having developed a professional national profile, advisory service and up to date training resources – strategies for improving the financial sustainability of the program are being researched. One avenue would be to establish a tax-deductible fund under National Council of Churches in Australia Limited for the Safe Church Program as the DGR fund may then be listed on the Australian Government’s Register of Harm Minimisation Charities. Listing on the register will allow greater leverage to receive donations and grants from governments and philanthropic funds for this important NCCA program.

The Safe Church Program team is available and willing to discuss and demonstrate how we can assist church bodies to ensure that they meet their moral, ethical and legal requirements in the ever changing protection and safeguarding landscape.

Please do not hesitate to contact National Coordinator, Cameron Haig via email: chaig@ncca.org.au or call 03 9650 6811.