

# Working in and with whole of Church

## Participant resources

### Preparation

The Ethical Ministry Refresher is an opportunity to gather ministry agents to engage with the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice to:

Exercise professional awareness,

Encourage reflection on best ministry practice

Promote collegiality, to build frameworks of support for future growth and change

... and a good excuse for a cuppa together.

Ministers, Candidates, Pastors, Chaplains and Lay People engaged in ministry in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania are required to attend two Code of Ethics workshops each year.

#### BEFORE THE SESSION

Read through this document. It begins with the preparation work you will need to complete to attend this Code of Ethics session and is followed by the session outline.

Ensure you have a current copy of the relevant Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice and bring it to the refresher session. You can find a copy of the Codes of Ethics here: [UCA Code of Ethics \(Updated 2025\) | UCA Assembly](#)

Review the 'Ground rules for Workshop discussions' and 'Safe shared pairing' (below) and be ready to participate.

Complete the preparation outlined in the next section.

#### PREPARE

Please read all of this document before the start of the session. The document includes: Guidelines for Group discussion; Paired Sharing Guidelines; Extracts the from the code of ethics and ministry practice; and a set of case studies. Please also read the resource paper, which has been provided separately.

Please bring a full copy of your code of ethics and ministry practice to the session.

Please reflect on and prepare reflections on at least four of the case studies and ensure that you read all of them to be able to participate in group discussions well.

## INTEGRITY – RESPECT – CONFIDENTIALITY

### **Guidelines for Group Discussion**

Arrive on time, remain for the entire session, and do not wander in and out of the session.

Unless you're expecting an emergency call, please turn mobile phones off. If you must take a call, please leave the room before doing so to minimise the interruption.

Practice active listening. Hear what the other person is saying. Let them finish talking. Think before you respond. Try to ask a question for clarification rather than making an assumption.

Talk about yourself and your own experience. You may ask questions of others, but do not challenge the validity of another's personal experience or point of view. Code of Ethics case studies are intended as tools for reflecting on how the Code applies to our own ministry practice. Sometimes discussions may need to hold a wide range of views, and the facilitators may need to ensure the spirit and intention of the Code of Ethics is being upheld in the discourse.

Keep your comments brief and to the point, so everyone has a chance to speak.

Do not generalise the experience and feelings of others based on your experience. Let people speak for themselves.

Do not attack, or try to hurt, or pass judgment on anyone, whether they are present or not.

Treat this group session as confidential conversation; do not repeat elsewhere what is said during this session.

Stay on topic.

Please be discerning about what is appropriate for you to share in the wider group, what may be better suited to the 'paired sharing' and what should be shared only with your Supervisor.

### **Safe Paired Sharing**

This is an opportunity to engage with the topic on a more personal level, and to integrate your experience as it relates to the Code of Ethics. Please keep discussions confidential and remember that paired sharing is in no way to take the place of a conversation with your Supervisor. We are all vulnerable people. Collegial respect and care for one another is essential for ministry.

Sharing an example from your ministry could include:

An actual (de-identified) situation that you feel comfortable to discuss in this setting;

A 'hypothetical' situation that could possibly happen to you or someone else – what steps would you take to resolve it, or how might you prevent a breach of the Code of Ethics? What choices might you make in this situation?

A situation when you were concerned about another person's ethical engagement with you (de-identified). Reflect on what might the other person in the situation have done differently so they would not have acted unethically towards you, or how in your ministry practice you seek to avoid such violations and develop healthy practice.

The suggested format for the paired sharing time is as follows:

Paired Sharing: (45 minutes)

Share for 15 minutes each: Think of an example from your ministry that relates to the topic. How did you frame it? What did you learn? How are you practicing ministry differently as a result?

Together discuss: What insights have we gained about prevention of ethical breaches in ministry practice?

End with (10-15 minutes): – What would you like to bring to the group about your own experience, or about this discussion?

**These are the parts of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice that are included in this session:**

1.2,1.3

3.2 Relationships with Councils of the Church

7 Working within Institutions, Organisations, wider church or other professions

2 The Pastoral Relationship

Please ensure that you have a current copy of the Code of Ethics, and refer to this in preparing for this session. If you need help to find the code, please see the link in the note at the end of this document.

Reading: The Basis of Union (1992 Edition)

## 15. GOVERNMENT IN THE CHURCH

The Uniting Church recognises that responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them. The Uniting Church therefore so organises its life that locally, regionally and nationally government will be entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of the Church. The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the Church and the world.

The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to it through any of its councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight. Each council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel.

To this end the Uniting Church makes provision in its constitution for the following:

The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ. Its members meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world. The congregation will recognise the need for a diversity of agencies for the better ordering of its life in such matters as education, administration and finance.

The Elders' or Leaders' Meeting (the council within a congregation or group of congregations) consists of the minister and those who are called to share with the minister in oversight. It is 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.

The Presbytery (the district council) consists of such ministers, elders/leaders and other Church members as are appointed thereto, the majority of elders/ leaders and Church members being appointed by Elders'/Leaders' Meetings and/or congregations, on a basis determined by the Synod. Its function is to perform all the acts of oversight necessary to the life and mission of the Church in the area for which it is responsible, except for those agencies which are directly responsible to the Synod or Assembly. It will in particular exercise oversight over the congregations within its bounds, encouraging them to strengthen one another's faith, to bear one another's burdens, and exhorting them to fulfil

their high calling in Christ Jesus. It will promote those wider aspects of the work of the Church committed to it by the Synod or Assembly.

The Synod (the regional council) consists of such ministers, elders/leaders and other Church members as are appointed thereto, the majority being appointed by Presbyteries, Elders'/Leaders' Meetings or congregations, on a basis determined by the Assembly. It has responsibility for the general oversight, direction and administration of the Church's worship, witness and service in the region allotted to it, with such powers and authorities as may from time to time be determined by the Assembly.

The Assembly (the national council) consists of such ministers, elders/leaders and other Church members as are appointed thereto, the majority being appointed by the Presbyteries and Synods. It has determining responsibility for matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline, including the promotion of the Church's mission, the establishment of standards of theological training and reception of ministers from other communions, and the taking of further measures towards the wider union of the Church. It makes the guiding decisions on the tasks and authority to be exercised by other councils. It is obligatory for it to seek the concurrence of other councils, and on occasion of the congregations of the Church, on matters of vital importance to the life of the Church

The first Assembly, however, will consist of members of the uniting Churches, appointed in equal numbers by them in such manner as they may determine, and is vested with such powers as may be necessary to establish the Uniting Church according to the provisions of the Basis of Union.

Until such time as councils other than the Assembly can be established, the Uniting Church recognises and accepts the various agencies for the discharge of responsibility which are in existence in the uniting Churches. It invites any such continuing bodies immediately to enter a period of self-examination in which members are asked to consider afresh their common commitment to the Church's mission and their demonstration of its unity. The Uniting Church prays that God will enable them to order their lives for these purposes.

## 16. PARTICULAR FUNCTIONS

The Uniting Church recognises the responsibility and freedom which belong to councils to acknowledge gifts among members for the fulfilment of particular functions. The Uniting Church sees in pastoral care exercised personally on behalf of the Church an expression of the fact that God always deals personally with people, would have God's loving care known among people, and would have individual members take upon themselves the form of a servant

## **Reflection on the Basis of Union:**

The provided reading is a separate pdf file. It is an extract from chapter 10 of “Disturbing much, disturbing many” by Geoff Thompson.

Choose one or more of these for personal reflection and group discussion

Why do you think that participation in the councils of the Church – Church Council, the Presbytery and the wider work of the church – is a part of the ethical practice of ministry?

On p.259 of the provided reading, Geoff Thompson says: “But why should we not think of the church’s organization as one of the ways God does not let the church lose its way? This is not to say that any one organization has the task of keeping the church on track. Rather, the church can receive the reality of being organized as a gift which helps it keep on course.”

What gifts do you see coming to those in ministry from the way that we are organized as a church? What gifts do (or can) this organizational structure provide for all of our thinking about the ethical practice of ministry – regardless of the ministry.

What do you see as the risks or difficulties for ethical ministry if we were without any institutional structure, or if we had a radically different institutional structure? (e.g. a strict hierarchical structure, or being a collection of entirely independent self-governed congregations?)

Paragraph 16 of the Basis of Union talks about the responsibility and freedom that belongs to the councils of the church then links that to pastoral care and how God acts with people. How might this link shape:

How we individually participate in the councils of the church?

How we collectively act as the councils of the church?

## **Case Studies for Section 7: Working within Institutions, Organisations, wider church or other professions**

### **Case Study 1**

Life in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) runs on structure: hierarchy, discipline, and clear lines of communication. But chaplains occupy a unique space. They're not part of the direct chain of command, and their role is built on trust, confidentiality, and pastoral care. That can create tension, especially when personal struggles might affect the wider unit.

Jordan, a Defence Chaplain, is approached by Sam, a young soldier feeling overwhelmed by training and conflict within his team. To cope, Sam has been drinking heavily at night. He confides in Jordan, pleading for discretion. He's afraid that if word gets out, it could jeopardize his chances of promotion or damage his reputation with his Commanding Officer.

Jordan understands that confidentiality is central to chaplaincy, and ADF policy supports that. But he also knows that welfare concerns can ripple outward. Sam's drinking isn't an immediate safety threat, but it could become one. Jordan is left with a difficult decision: should he honour Sam's trust and keep the conversation private, encourage Sam to speak up himself, or quietly seek guidance from a trusted colleague before taking any steps?

#### Questions for Reflection

What does the Code of Ethics advise in navigating the tension between confidentiality and the Defence Force's emphasis on transparency and safety?

How might Jordan's decision shape the way soldiers view chaplains, as safe spaces or as part of the system?

Who could Jordan approach for confidential advice, such as a supervisor, ministry peer, or presbytery leader, without breaching trust? How would you advise Jordan if asked?

Sam's Commanding Officer confronts Jordan after hearing rumours. How can Jordan respond with integrity while protecting Sam's confidence?

Defense force Chaplaincy is a particular type of ministry. How might these issues vary in relation to different institutions (schools, aged care, hospitals etc)

## Case Study 2

It's towards the end of Term 3 at a Uniting Church School. Georgia, the School Chaplain, has been running the chapel services and other activities on the theme of Climate Justice. The theme has been well received within the school, it aligns with the school's own focus on climate action as well as the interest and passion of the students across the age groups. A group of year 11 students, inspired by the content, take the faith in action messages to heart. Georgia is able to support the students and enjoys the wrestling with the tough questions students have about issues of climate justice and how they might use their privilege to amplify the voices of those who are not as often heard. The students make placards with care for creation messages during weekly lunchtime fellowship gathering, storing them in a nearby common area. One Tuesday afternoon, unnoticed by Georgia, the students take the placards.

On Wednesday, the students are "off sick" with parental support, and attend a peaceful protest with the placards.

That evening the protest is covered in the news, with the students, in their school uniforms, thanking Georgia and the school for making their protest possible. The Principal of the school immediately calls Georgia, demanding to know how this happened, as this is well outside the remit of the school.

### Questions

1/ Where is the tipping point in this case study between supporting the students in applying their faith in action, and obligations to the school? To what extent should a perceived breach of the Code of Ethics be considered compared to an identified breach?

2/ Over the following days it becomes clear that the students and parents assumed the support of the school based on Georgia's preaching and allowances for placard making. For students involved, and their parents, there is a disillusionment with the school, and by extension, the church. What steps might be needed to reestablish trust in the various Pastoral Relationships the Chaplain has? With the Students? Principal? Parents?

### **Case Study 3**

Rev Beverly is Chaplain at Uniting Wollemi, a recently redeveloped Residential Aged Care Facility in an increasingly high-density suburban setting. Recently, Ron, a congregation member and stalwart of a nearby Uniting Church, moved into the facility, no longer able to be supported to age in place at home. Rev Tony is Ron's congregation minister. Tony, after initially checking in with Beverly to ensure he wasn't overstepping, began visiting Ron to provide support during the transition. Beverly informed Tony that he was not required to sign on as a volunteer, as he was an invited private visitor of Ron.

On one of his visits, Tony, noticing the isolation of other residents and without consulting Beverly, began knocking on other residents' doors and asking if they would like a chat, then during discussions offering prayers and sharing religious counsel. Beverly discovered this was happening when a family member of a resident visited her office to complain about their parent being proselytized without consent or respect for their beliefs.

In defending his actions, Tony pointed out that he only proceeded when invited in and that most had welcomed his company. Beverly acknowledged that it was likely true of most, nevertheless Tony's actions were in breach of organisation policies which exist to protect vulnerable residents. He was to immediately stop visiting residents other than Ron. If he wished to visit other residents he must register as a Pastoral Volunteer, receive the appropriate training, orientation, and supervision. After which, only visiting those whom he is assigned.

#### **Questions**

What are the various power relationships at play here, how might they be attended to?

To what extent does section 7 of the Code of Ethics apply to Rev Tony in these circumstances?

At the next regular lunch gathering ministers within the region, conversation turns to this situation. Beverly is asked to explain the policies and is challenged on why they are in place. After a heated discussion, the other ministers, including Tony, agree and understand. Nevertheless, Beverly feels exhausted and targeted. To what extent should Beverly be expected to explain or defend organizational policies beyond complying and upholding them?

### **Case Studies for Section 3.2: Relationships with Councils of the Church**

#### **Case Study 4**

Rev Peter is a retired minister in 40% long-supply at the small suburban congregation of Kable Hills Uniting Church. It is a fulfilling ministry and Peter would love to continue. The congregation is an older low stress congregation that loves and supports each other, worships each Sunday, and helps those who need it with canned food drives and donating a significant portion of their rental income to overseas aid organizations.

The most contentious matter in the last few months has been the Presbytery's Life and Witness Consultation with the congregation, led by Michael (Presbytery Minister – Mission). Many in the congregation expressed to Peter they were concerned that the Presbytery would meddle. The Congregation Chairperson summed it up well, “our church just wants to get on with loving Jesus and each other”. Agreeing, Peter picked up this phrase and used it in his sermons over the remaining weeks of the Consultation.

Following the Consultation the Presbytery Chairperson, on the recommendation of the Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee calls a meeting with the Congregation regarding the Consultation recommendations. Peter's understanding is that Presbytery has determined that the Congregation should either merge with another local congregation as part of a pattern of regional ministries, or should become a faith community. The discussion includes consideration of what alternate missional uses might be for congregation properties, carefully stewarded by the congregation over many years. The stated reason for the meeting is that Presbytery seeks congregational input on its preferences within the parameters of this decision.

On the day of the meeting Michael and the Presbytery Chairperson arrive 10 minutes before the 11am meeting. Peter, in a quiet aside, notes to the Congregation Chairperson that Presbytery didn't even have the courage to join for worship beforehand. The Congregation Chairperson opens the meeting and, as planned, asks Peter to pray for them. Peter prays for the wonderful work of the congregation, listing all their ministry activities concluding with “may the Presbytery see the error of its ways, seek forgiveness, and let the congregation get on with its ministry of loving Jesus and loving each other. Amen”

### Questions

Considering 3.2(c) of the Code of Ethics. How might have Peter better supported the congregation in advocating for itself, whilst not inflaming conflict? What is Peter's responsibility to the Congregation, to the Presbytery?

In this case study where would you place the boundaries and accept overlap of pastoral obligations to the congregation with the ethical obligation “to be aware and respect the guidance and of decisions Councils of the Church” (3.2a)?

Do your previous answers change if the case study remains the same except Peter is the minister in Placement with the Congregation, rather than retired and in supply? Why? Why Not?

### **Case Study 5**

Gemma was recently commissioned into the Ministry of Pastor with a work focus on youth as part of a team at Halewood Uniting Church where she works part-time (19 hours per week). It's still early days, but Gemma finds the ministry fulfilling and feels well-supported by the others in the ministry team. At the weekly team meeting Gemma raises the upcoming in-person Saturday Presbytery meeting being held at a church two hour's drive away and asks if they will be car-pooling.

Rev Julie, Team Lead minister, asks Gemma not to go to the meeting, as Gemma is only part-time and the meeting, including travel, will take up a significant amount of her hours and that there is more important work Gemma to focus on. Julie states she will report back anything relevant.

At this point Rev Adam, the congregation's Community Engagement Minister, chips in support of Julie, thanking her. Adam has found the arrangement of Julie attending Presbytery meetings on behalf of the team helpful as he finds Presbytery meetings a poor use of his time, he only attended when he needed to for the Admission of Ministers Process.

Gemma reiterates that she would like to go, that as a Pastor she is a member of presbytery, and that she has received the papers. At this Julie more firmly says if Gemma attends it will not be part of her work hours, it is Julie's role in the team, not Gemma's.

### **Possible Questions**

Identify and consider key power dynamics influencing events of this case study.

Gemma is concerned that she would be breaching the Code of Ethics (3.2b) if she doesn't regularly attend Presbytery meetings. However, she doesn't want to cause conflict in her new job, particularly when this appears to be the accepted practice. How would you advise Gemma to proceed?

Would you consider the actions of Julie and/or Adam constitute an instance of having "deliberately encouraged another to breach the terms of the Code." (8.1)? Why/Why Not?

### **Case Study 6**

Rev Chris several years into their final placement before retirement at Banksia Springs Uniting Church, a suburban church that is struggling financially to pay for property upkeep

and a stipend. What finances they have are propped up by hall rental income, predominantly from a local community centre. Unless something changes Chris will be the last full-time minister.

The Presbytery approaches the congregation, with a proposal for the congregation; their church site has been identified as having potential for development, the local suburb's population is expected to grow rapidly over the next ten years with a significant expansion of apartments in the area. Given the size of the church land, and as a part of developing Coordinated Ministries, and new communities of faith, there is an opportunity to create a community hub, including a new worship space, that can serve the local community and the church across the region. The proposal includes an influx of resources from the wider church that would enable the congregation to both grow and serve the region in ways that are well beyond their current capacity.

The Banksia Springs Church Council meeting where this is discussed is the most heated Chris has seen. Pros and Cons are heavily debated, but it is clear to Chris that the discussion's undercurrent is about distrust between the Congregation and Presbytery, for perceived long past wrongs, and that many congregation members are still carrying hurt. Most members of Church Council are outright against further exploring this opportunity. Chris argues strongly against this position, that it should be at least considered. Chris abstains from the decision, Church Council decides by Consensus that it will not proceed with any discussions on the matter, it will go its own way. The Church Council asks Chris to convey this decision to the Presbytery.

Chris believes that this is the last real opportunity for the Congregation. When meeting with Presbytery staff, Chris instead reports that the Church Council is unsure, asking Presbytery, in the short term, to keep the conversation open for a year. In the meantime Chris will work on the Church Council to become more open to the possibilities.

### Questions

(Consider 3.2a) What are the pastoral implications of reporting the decision of Church Council in this way? Between Chris and the Congregation? Between the Congregation and Presbytery?

Chris sees enabling this opportunity as a way to fulfil the duties of a minister as stating Regulation "2.2.1(a)(xii) pioneering new expressions of the gospel and encouraging effective ways of fulfilling the mission of the Church." How should Chris proceed where he sees his calling as a minister and the decision of Church Council do not align? How might 3.2(a) and (b) of the Code suggest about this?

### **Case Study 7**

Rev Shane serves in a Placement within the life of the Uniting Church that has a structured work environment. The Position Description attached to the Terms of Placement makes clear that whilst the Regulations governing placements always apply, Shane also reports to the Kim, the Team Leader who is responsible for overseeing productivity and day-to-day management. The Team Leader is not a ministry role, though Kim, as a lay person, is very active in the life of her local Uniting Church.

Shane consistently avoids monthly check-ins which are required by Policy. Check-ins are designed to keep track of what each person is doing, where they are visiting and what progress is being made. When Shane was confronted with his avoidant behaviour, he replied “I am an independent ministry agent, and my call should be respected”. Kim has been receiving complaints from other team members that Shane is not progressing any of his tasks and is making their work harder as he won’t engage. Kim wants to support Shane but can’t defend her team if she doesn’t have a clear understanding of what they are each doing. Shane continues to maintain that only Church processes apply to his placement, and that Kim’s requests do not apply to ordained Ministers.

Shane is irritated with the repeated demands for monitoring and reporting. So, with the intention of truth-telling and transparency, Shane posts his irritation online in a friends-only social media post. What follows is a flurry of online discussion with strong views of support, some recounting their own negative experience, and others providing reminders about the setting of the placement and how it differs from Congregational life. One of Shane’s friends attends the same church as Kim. In offering sympathy about the conflict, this friend informs Kim of the post. Because of the workplace social media policies, as an employee Kim feels unable to respond. Kim feels disregarded as a Team Leader, and powerless to have her voice heard in the forum Shane has chosen.

### Questions

This placement is in a structured work environment as described in 7.2 of the Code of Ethics. In what ways does 7.2 apply in this case and where might the limits be?

What various power dynamics are at play here (e.g. minister, Team Leader, wider Church community)? Is one more ‘binding’ than another? How might they work together?

If the scenario placed the social media post as a public post, rather than privately to friends, would this change how the Code of Ethics is applied? Why? Why not?

PLEASE NOTE:

As of July 2025 there is an update to the Code of Ethics. The update is not part of this refresher, however it is included for your reference. The up to date Code of Ethics can be found on the Synod website here (also referred to in the introduction):

[www.nswact.uca.org.au/media/ydwb5qhj/2025-constitution-and-regulations-combined-package.pdf](http://www.nswact.uca.org.au/media/ydwb5qhj/2025-constitution-and-regulations-combined-package.pdf)

UPDATED MATERIAL:

3.1 (h) Retired Ministers and Ministers in non-congregational placements:

(i) shall not normally worship in a congregation where they have previously served in a ministry placement; but

(ii) if they wish to worship in such a congregation, they shall first consult with the Presbytery and any Minister in placement in the congregation.

3.1 (i) Subject to (h), Retired Ministers and Ministers in non-congregational placements may express leadership within the congregation where they worship when invited to do so by the Minister in placement or upon approval by the Presbytery.

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