



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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Dear Friends,

Re: Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

Greetings in the name of Christ.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and all the anxiety that is creating, I want to bring attention to our Church's response to the Disability Royal Commission. In the midst of a crisis, it is often the most vulnerable who are most affected. Sadly, the virus and our response to it, threatens to increase the risk factors for people with disabilities.

President Dr Deidre Palmer, in her President's Pastoral Letter of 14 May, 2020, says:

"The Uniting Church welcomed the establishment of the Disability Royal Commission and expressed hope that it would shine a light on inappropriate treatment of people with disability and lay out a path to help prevent violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against people with disability.

The 15th Assembly of the Uniting Church affirmed that all people are created in the image of God and along with all members, the faith, gifts, hopes and dreams of people with disability are to be valued and honoured. The Uniting Church seeks to ensure that people with disability have their hopes and rights realised."

UnitingCare Australia has also welcomed the Royal Commission. National Director Claerwen Little said: "This long-awaited Royal Commission is an opportunity for us to work together to create a society that is inclusive, respectful of difference and for everyone to have the life they aspire to."

The Assembly has established a national Task Group to coordinate our Church's response, requesting Synods to also establish Task Groups. The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Task Group includes representatives from congregations, Uniting VicTas, schools liaison and relevant Synod staff.

Following its inaugural meeting a few weeks ago, the Task Group has been producing resources and information about how we can best respond to the Commission. In the days ahead, this information will be circulated throughout the Synod. In the first instance, even though the Commission has temporarily suspended its Hearings, I encourage you to inform any person with disability who has experienced violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation, either within the Uniting Church or beyond, to tell their story to the Royal Commission <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/share-your-story>

There is a very real possibility that raising this issue will create distress. Please be mindful of the need for sensitivity, attentive listening and pastoral care: this includes ministry agents and pastoral care teams in our congregations and outreach services. People may also consider confidential contact with the Chairperson of the Synod's Task Group, Rev (Deacon) Andy Calder at andy.calder@victas.uca.org.au or 03 9380 8844.

As the work of the Task Group continues, may we all continue to grow in the embodiment of community life to which we are called in Christ: to be a community of reconciliation, justice and peace, where all members are valued and honoured.

In the grace and hope we have in Christ.

Rev Denise Liersch
Moderator