

A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT AND RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In responding to the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse in institutions the Assembly has sought to encourage and give shape to a national response from the Uniting Church in Australia. While recognizing that Synods, Agencies, schools and the Assembly in their own way will need to engage with the Commission and prepare according to their specific circumstances, the value of high levels of coherence and capacity across the church has been recognized as essential. Accordingly the Assembly appointed Task Group in this area has sought to establish a national framework within which the UCA will operate.

The "National Framework" is a collection of agreed processes and approaches which will shape the more concrete activities of each part of the church. There are several elements to the framework which includes:

1. A statement of Uniting Church values which are relevant to the issues before the Royal Commission. This set of values articulates the Uniting Church's commitment to recognize wrongs done, to apologize and accept responsibility for its actions and to engage with humility and positively with the people and processes which will be encountered through the Royal Commission.
2. Synods, etc being willing to receive high level advice on what material will be required by the Commission and how to prepare for participation in it. All Agencies and Councils of the church agreeing to share information with the National Engagement and Response Task Group.
3. Agreeing across the Synods and Assembly to operate under one set of terms of reference for the respective Synod based task groups.
4. Working collaboratively on gathering information and developing responses where there are issues that are relevant across the whole church. This particularly relates to matters that affect the whole church, for example understanding the history of the church's practice in relation to complaints of sexual misconduct by Ministers and others.
5. Acceptance, promotion and compliance with the national media protocols. These media protocols relate to external media relations and not to internal communications strategies and requirements. The value of a national alignment of practice on who will speak in certain contexts on matters related to the Royal Commission and the key messages (eg based on the Values Statement) is that it increases the possibility of a consistent and coherent message. This enhances the likelihood that the public and the Royal Commission will have confidence that they know the position of the Uniting Church. The basic principle is: "Only persons who carry the risk for the consequences of what is said should speak." Therefore apart from specialist spokespersons, for example school principals, only the Moderator or President should speak; or their nominated alternate.

*Terence Corkin
Assembly General Secretary
March 2013*