



**Uniting Church in
Australia**

Pastoral Statement

1 March 2017



Uniting Church in Australia at the Royal Commission

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On Friday 10 March 2017 the Uniting Church in Australia will appear at a public hearing for Case Study 56 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse.

Assembly General Secretary Colleen Geyer, General Secretary of the Queensland Synod Rev. Heather den Houting and I will answer questions about the policies and procedures of our Church in relation to child-protection and child-safety standards, including how we have responded to allegations of child sexual abuse.

We will be asked about factors that may have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse at Uniting Church institutions; factors that may have affected our institutional response to child sexual abuse; as well as our responses to previous case study reports and other Royal Commission reports.

I would ask first and foremost for your prayers for all those who have suffered abuse while in our care, for whom some this hearing may re-open past traumas.

Prayers for those who have suffered abuse and for others involved in the Royal Commission are attached to this letter and I ask that you share them in worship with your congregation or faith community and in your personal prayers.

At the beginning of the Royal Commission we stated the values we would bring to bear in our engagement, that:

The Uniting Church believes that God has given us the gift of the Spirit to "constantly correct that which is erroneous" in our life (Basis of Union, Paragraph 18). Therefore, we will not hide from the truth, however painful that may be, and we will seek, with compassion and humility, to address whatever issues and challenges may emerge for us.

We also said, that:

"...we will say 'sorry' to anyone who was sexually abused when in our care and, in consultation with those affected, actively seek for ways to make amends for what happened in the past and identify how we can best offer support into the future.

In the five years since we proclaimed these values, many faithful people across our Church, our agencies and affiliated schools have worked to address the many issues raised by the Royal Commission.

Our governance, our care and the quality of justice we have offered to those who have suffered abuse have all come under close scrutiny in several case studies.

We have been confronted with our failures to live up to our Christian commitment to healing, justice and reconciliation.

When the Chief Commissioner Justice Peter McClellan addressed the 14th Assembly meeting in Perth on July 2015, he told us that the Commission had received 399 allegations of abuse in 132 institutions which were either Uniting or predecessor churches. That number has since increased.

In Case Study 56, on 10 March we will be called on to explain what we have learned and reflect publicly on how much we have left to do to ensure our Church and our institutions are the safest places they can be for all children in our care.

To live up to this pledge will require the diligence and vigilance of every Church member.

Be under no illusion – this is not someone else's problem.

Child sexual abuse is an insidious crime to which the Royal Commission has proved that faith-based institutions are particularly vulnerable.

May God grant us the strength of character and unity of purpose to follow through with the hard work required to honour our pledge of a safe church for children in the years ahead.

Discussing these issues can raise difficult emotions and past memories.

1800 RESPECT (1 800 737 732) is a national counselling helpline to support people who've suffered sexual assault, domestic or family violence, their friends and family or co-workers. Their website: www.1800respect.org.au is listed in on the Royal Commission's website, along with a number of other support services.

If you or someone you know need immediate help, please call:

Lifeline on 13 11 14

Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800

MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978

Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467

Mägayamirri Rom

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart McMillan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stuart McMillan
President, Uniting Church in Australia

Mägayamirri Rom means "the way of peace and tranquility, harmony with the whole of creation, be with and within you." in the Yolngu languages of North East Arnhem Land.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Prayers for personal use or corporate worship

For those who have experienced abuse

Gracious and healing God,
we thank you for the many ways that you enrich our lives - giving us hope in the
midst of despair; comfort and strength to live,
when we are at our most vulnerable.
Be with all those today who are suffering - living with brokenness and pain.

We particularly think of people who were sexually abused as children.
May your Spirit be a comforting and healing presence in their lives.
May they find peace and nurture within relationships and communities of safety and
trust.

Open our eyes and give us wisdom to see where we can bring your healing and
hope in our relationships, neighbourhoods and communities as your hopeful and
compassionate people.

Give us courage, insight, power and passion that we might work with you for justice
and liberation of all those who are abused and oppressed.

Lord, hear us

Lord, hear our prayer

For the Royal Commission

God of wisdom, we pray for all those who serve the Royal Commission,
that they will deal graciously and fairly with all who appear before them.

Grant to them the insight and discernment they will need to properly fulfil their
responsibilities and ensure the best possible outcomes from the work they do.

We ask that the conclusions they reach and the recommendations they make will
help those who have been victims of sexual abuse in the past to feel that justice has
been done and hope restored.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer

For those who will appear before the Royal Commission

Gracious God, we pray for all those who will appear before the Commission, whether to give evidence or to be questioned regarding policies and practices.

Give them humility and help them to speak openly and honestly about the issues they must address.

We pray for a commitment from everyone involved to work together to create safe and nurturing communities of care for the children who need them.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer

For the perpetrators of abuse

God of grace and forgiveness, we pray for those who have been responsible for the sexual abuse of children.

By your Spirit, convict them of the wrong they have done and the pain and grief they have inflicted on their victims.

Bring them to such a place of sorrow and regret for what they have done that they will repent of their sins, admit their guilt, and seek to live a new life in the strength of your Spirit.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer

For the church

Holy God, through Jesus your Son, in the power of the Spirit, you brought your church into being.

Imbue it in these challenging days with a willingness to courageously and honestly face the mistakes of the past.

Help us all to confront and confess our failures that we may continue with integrity to speak out for truth and justice in our nation and boldly declare the salvation promised to all who repent and believe in the good news revealed in Jesus your Son.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear our prayer