



Training in the *Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders*

Canberra Region Presbytery
Synod of NSW and the ACT
2021

The Code of Conduct can be accessed at

<https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/15.11Minutes - Attachment B - Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders - corrections approved by the March 2016 ASC.pdf>

What is included in the *Code of Conduct*?

- An Introduction
- Expectations of leaders
- Conduct of leaders
- Confidentiality
- Relationship with the Law
- Conflict of Interest
- What to do if the Code is breached

What is ethical?

Case Study

You are in charge of a church's mission efforts in a developing nation. Your church has assembled a large and expensive shipment of medical supplies for a Christian medical clinic in this developing country. But the shipment is stuck on the dock because a government official has insisted on a bribe before releasing the cargo. All attempts to pull strings in order to release the cargo have failed.

Do you pay the bribe?

In ministry

When you minister to the people in your ministry context:

How do you enter into relationships with them ?

How do you nurture them ?

How do you receive ministry from them ?

Church as a Safe Place

When you think about the vulnerable people in your community(ies):

*How do you identify the **vulnerable** people **in our churches and communities**?*

*How do you ensure that they are **safe** as you minister amongst them?*

Uniting Church Safe Church Commitment Statement

We believe that all people, including children and vulnerable adults, are made in the image of God, and that our relationships with each other should express love, integrity, compassion and respect.

We recognise everyone who is involved in any of the Synod's activities, services, events or programs has a right to feel and be safe. We therefore acknowledge our moral and legal responsibility to ensure the safety of children and young people involved with any Synod organisation.

As a church, we are committed to providing environments which are physically, emotionally and spiritually safe for all people including children, so that they may live life in all its fullness.

We have zero tolerance of any form of child abuse and will do all in our power to keep children and vulnerable adults safe from abuse. Protecting children and vulnerable adults is both an individual and a collective responsibility of the Uniting Church, and all who engage with it.

This commitment will be central to our decision-making and guide our practice. We will seek to understand our risk areas and develop strategies which aim to prevent and minimise risks to children and young people as far as possible, taking an approach of continuous improvement.

We are committed to implementing the Synod Safe Church Policy Framework, and to the ongoing development of a child safe organisation, in particular through implementation of the UCA Child Safe Principles.

We welcome feedback from anyone with an interest in this commitment, including children.

[Safe Church Commitment Statement \(uca.org.au\)](https://uca.org.au)

See also UCA resources at

[uca-national-child-safe-principles-poster-english.pdf](#)

[uca-a-safe-church-for-all-people.pdf](#)

Being Ethical

Being ethical gives no guarantee that you will get on with others!
Their agendas may be different. Difference of opinion and some conflict is natural. What counts is working towards resolutions.

Being ethical does not mean confidentiality at all costs.
While discretion is important, responsibility is a must, especially when dealing with children and sex offences, for example.

Being ethical does not mean you will be free of stress.
Wayne Oates, an American Pastoral theologian, feels "to be ethical means to be able to hang together as a whole person with integrity in the face of stressful decision making." It is not freedom from stress; it is strength during stress.

Being ethical does mean keeping your word.
Wayne Oates says in his book, *Convictions That Give You Confidence*, "The promises we make and keep endear the heart, the promises we make and break, break us apart."

Identity in ministry

The *Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice* describes the identity of Ministers in a way that applies to Lay Leaders also:

Ministers have a particular place within Christian community. They touch people's lives at many points of joy, pain, celebration, grief, and vulnerability. They minister within a pastoral relationship in which they seek to enable other people to focus on God as the source of healing, restoration, wholeness.

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice 1.2

Myself in Ministry

- *Who do I say that I am, in ministry?*
- *How do I describe my role?*
- *What do I set as the limits in my ministry?*

What is Power?

- Ability to act; capability of doing; authority to influence
- Forcefulness of ability to exercise control or authority
- Effectiveness or ability or capacity to act or perform effectively

Take a little time to identify one or two situations in which you have power.

- *What is the source of this power?*
- Discuss this with others in your small group.

Case Study on Power

Adapted from UCA *Ethical Ministry Resource Book* on Power (2018)

Cherie, the Manager of Habourside Uniting Church Op Shop, has alienated many of the shop's volunteer team through constant criticism, taking people off rosters without explanation, and silent treatments of those who dare to step outside of her operation plan. Members of the Church Council are concerned about how to deal with complaints from both the Manager and the Volunteer Team. Cherie and her husband are generous givers and are close friends with the Chair of the Church Council. Many of the volunteers are new to the church, or are members of the wider community. Church Council talks about possible ways forward.

- What ethical issues around Power does this case study present: for the Manager? for the Church Council? for the Volunteers?
- *How might the Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders relate to this situation?*
- Whose voices are not heard in this case study?
- *What might be some appropriate ways to respond in the situation?*
- What could go well? What could go badly?

Case Study on Confidentiality

Adapted from UCA *Ethical Ministry Refresher* resources on Confidentiality (2021)

You use a tablet and desk top computer for most things you need in your ministry role. You are glad the days of hand-written notes are mostly over for you. You have a password on both devices. While you are the main user of the computer your children occasionally use it when they need to. Mostly this happens when you are around but occasionally one of your children uses the computer while you are out. Your children don't have much trouble guessing the password, you use the same one or two for nearly everything. One day when one of your children uses your computer, they find notes you have made after a pastoral care conversation with another person in your Congregation.

When you come home your child want to know about why you had never told them that this person has an untreatable cancer?

- What do you say to your child? How much more of the situation can you share with your child?
- *What is your ethical responsibility to the person in your Congregation?*
- What will you do if child tells others what they have learnt?
- *What could you do in the future to better secure your electronic records?*
- What guidance does the *Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders* provide you?

Case Study on Boundaries Adapted from UCA *Ethical Ministry* resources (2012)

The congregation at Watson's Street had a well deserved reputation for friendliness and warmth. You were pleased to move there and pleased also that they accepted your offer to lead worship after a few months. However, whenever you led worship, you found it disconcerting at first that many of the older members of the congregation hugged you, or kissed you on the cheek at church gatherings and often after the service. Yet it seemed natural and unremarkable since they greeted each other in the same way.

When Penny Sales, a widow, joined the church she soon felt at home and took up the practice of greeting customary within the congregation. You became even more dis comforted. Her hug was a little too warm, her kiss on the cheek a little too intentional.

You felt uneasy and shared your uneasiness with your partner. 'This greeting each other with a holy kiss is getting out of hand'. Your partner was both amused and concerned. 'It is up to you to set the boundaries. You should make it clear what is acceptable.' 'But how,' you replied, 'when it is difficult to give tangible evidence of what is after all an interpretation of an intent? Besides, it has to be said that if it applies to one it must apply to all. Imagine the hurt if I had to speak publicly about setting such a boundary.' Your partner nodded. 'So what are you going to do?'

- What are the key issues of ministry practice here that are related to the theme of boundaries?
- *What challenges to your integrity as worship leader are involved?*
- What are appropriate ways of responding to the situation?
- *Who else would you take into your confidence about this matter, at least initially?*
- How might the *Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders* relate to this situation?

To conclude:

*What are the **key things** that you have learnt in these sessions?*

*What are the **three main commitments** that you will make as a result of these training sessions?*

Keeping your ministry safe

- Recognise that you and your role can have a great *impact* on others.
- A high level of self awareness will assist in understanding the issues of *power* and *boundaries* which are present in the placement.
- Understand the full scope of *the pastoral relationship* is essential to safe ministry.
- Knowing the Code and *adhering to its guidelines* is essential for the support of ministry and personal well-being.

To report a Child at Risk of Significant Harm

ACT call 1300 556 729 or email childprotection@act.gov.au

<https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/ocyfs/children/child-and-youth-protection-services/report-child-abuse-and-neglect>

NSW call the Protection Helpline 13 2111

<https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids/reporting-child-at-risk>

GUIDELINES FOR COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH, WHEN IMPLEMENTING THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LAY LEADERS

The following guidelines are offered to Councils of the Church with oversight of lay leaders.

Types of breaches

i) Minor:

Everyone is capable of sin but can repent and be forgiven (1 John 1:8-9). It stands to reason then, that the code can be breached. When this happens in an area that is not a breach of civil or criminal law, leaders should be approached by a member of the Council responsible for their oversight. This behaviour should be explained to the leader, who will be expected to simply cease the conduct. In some cases it may be necessary to stand a person aside from their duties whilst this takes place. It is crucial to deal with such matters confidentially and sensitively.

ii) Unknowing violations:

Not all leaders will understand 'unacceptable' behaviours. Even after explaining the code some may be unaware they are exhibiting unacceptable behaviours. Leaders need to be open to correction and humble enough to modify behaviours so as to not discredit the gospel. As above, standing a person aside from their duties may be necessary.

iii) Constant or consistent violations:

There are breaches that are not a breach of civil or criminal law, but still unacceptable behaviour. Where a leader has been made aware of their behaviour and yet refuses to change:

- a) the Chair of the council responsible for the leader's oversight meets with the person for behaviour review meetings and communicates required behaviour change, up to a maximum of 3 meetings.
- b) If behaviour continues, a small group of Church leaders are to arrange a meeting to address the behaviour. Standing aside is appropriate at this point.
- c) If the behaviour(s) continues beyond this meeting, then respectfully, and upholding confidentiality, the person will be stood down for a set period. They will be offered help in changing their behaviour via counselling if they are willing. (ref Reg 5.2.1 and 5.3.1 for implementing)

NOTE: Written notes of all meetings to be carefully taken and a copy given to all parties.

iv) Breaches of the law or allegations of abuse:

Are to be referred to the appropriate government authorities, in line with Uniting Church processes. The General Secretary of the Synod must be contacted at this point.

prepared by John Squires and Andrew Smith, September 2021