



**uniting
church**
in Australia,
Synod of NSW & ACT

Congregation Volunteer Policy and Procedures

This policy and procedures apply to all congregations of the Uniting Church, Synod of NSW and the ACT.

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Congregation Volunteer Policy

The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is a welcome part of confessing faith in Christ crucified, and in being his faithful servant. We acknowledge that the members of the church have a diversity of gifts. Some may be equipped to contribute practically to the logistics of a gathering or activity, or to use their abilities for leadership, organisation, encouragement, teaching or other ways of serving. All gifts can play a part in the work of the church, and all ministry activities have a part in the ministry of Christ.

The Synod places trust in our volunteers as they work; recognising our responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of volunteers, and acknowledging our responsibility to support volunteers to fulfil their roles as we work together for the protection of everyone and for the Gospel.

1. Purpose

The primary purpose of the Congregation Volunteer Management Policy is to give congregations tools to assist them to protect the health and safety of volunteers and anyone who may be affected by their acts or omissions.

By following this policy, procedures and supporting documents, volunteers will be selected prudently, provided support to do their roles well and safely, and supervised to ensure they are able to thrive in their service to the church. The formality and rigor of these processes should be in proportion to the responsibility and risks of each role.

2. Congregation Responsibilities

- 2.1 The church council should follow the Congregation Volunteer Procedures (provided below) to assist them in the appropriate selection, instruction, training and monitoring of the work and conduct of volunteers. Volunteers should be supported and supervised to ensure they are carrying out their role appropriately in terms of their conduct, capability and safety.
- 2.2 Volunteers should be made aware of how to raise concerns, and what to do if they have a concern about anything which arises as part of their role.
- 2.3 Each congregation should appoint a member of church council (a 'Volunteer Contact Person') to oversee and take responsibility for volunteers including creating and maintaining the Volunteer Register. Other tasks associated with managing volunteers can be delegated to other members of the congregation, as appropriate.
- 2.4 All volunteers should be included on the Volunteer Register. The register is to be kept securely and confidentially, with the Church Council minutes. The register will include details which assist with the management of volunteers, as per the template at Appendix 1.
- 2.5 The Volunteer Register should be reviewed by Church Council and updated at least annually.

3. Volunteer Responsibilities

All volunteers are to;

- Do their best to serve well, and to keep themselves and others safe.

- Read, sign, and abide by the Volunteer Code of Conduct
- Attend any required training
- Fulfil their WHS responsibilities including by reporting hazards and incidents, and informing the appropriate person of any concerns.

Some volunteers will also be required to read the Volunteer Manual (see section 5 high-trust volunteers).

4. Who is a Volunteer?

When congregations and other groups gather, each person contributes in their own way and according to their gifts. While each person plays a part, not all contributions are made by people in the capacity of volunteer roles.

A **volunteer** is a person who is recognised and appointed to a role, contributing to the work of the church, ministry or service activity without being paid. A person is a volunteer when they perform a specific identified role, needed by the entity, and they are selected to perform that role. There are two types of volunteer roles, including 'high-trust' and 'other' volunteer roles.

High-trust volunteer roles are those with responsibility for others, including ministry leaders, elders, Church Council members and all those who work with children or vulnerable people (see section 5).

Participant helpers are those who are willing and able to perform tasks or meet operational needs when they attend a service, event or activity. This may be just through seeing a need and providing help. It may also be at the request of a leader or another participant. Such participation is an important contribution, but is not recognised as a volunteer role.

The following is a guide to help distinguish between a volunteer role and that of a participant helper. A volunteer role satisfies any one of the following criteria;

- The role serves regularly, intentionally and in addition to normal participation;
 - Serving at an event or service the person wouldn't usually attend as a participant, or performing tasks outside the usual service or attendance times in order to help
 - Regular and routine service, usually not ad hoc
 - There are specific and articulated expectations for the role. The role may have a title, and has specific tasks and expectations.
- The role should be identified as a volunteer role when it has a duty of care for others related to the person's leadership or authority;
 - The role supervises or coordinates the work of other people
 - The role works with children or vulnerable adults.
- The role has or could have significant responsibility such as to oversee or coordinate a ministry or ministry area, deliver core functions, or additional responsibility for resources. This would include all members of Church Council and will include elders and other leaders such as managers and supervisors.

For more detailed information and examples to help congregations in determining if someone is a volunteer, and what type, refer to Appendix 2. Participant helper roles do not need to be included in the volunteer management processes, such as being added to the volunteer register.

5. High-trust volunteer roles

All volunteers have responsibilities to fulfil the requirements of their role to their best ability. This includes abiding by the Volunteer Code of Conduct, being reliable, caring for others and letting someone know when they need help themselves.

High Trust Volunteers in congregations are those with additional responsibilities. These may be;

- Responsibility for, or leadership of others and so having an additional duty of care
- Work with vulnerable people, including children
- Responsibility for a critical service or an area of worship
- Responsibility for significant resources, or in a position where there are significant safety or other implications from the performance of the role.

Volunteers in high-trust roles in congregations must confirm they have read the Volunteer Manual, in addition to signing the Volunteer Code of Conduct. The purpose of the Volunteer Manual is to;

- Give recognition to the significance of volunteer service in leadership and/or service to vulnerable people
- To support volunteers to care for others and be cared for in their roles, in particular through facilitating access to Safe Church policies and other Synod resources.
- To assist leaders to train and orient volunteers. The Volunteer Manual can be used as the basis for orientation for any new volunteers or for regular training for current volunteers. The Volunteer Manual should be tailored to reflect local contact details or procedures.

Confirmation that high-trust volunteers have read the Volunteer Manual must be recorded in the Volunteer Register.

6. Relevant Legislation

[Children's Guardian Act 2019](#) (NSW)

[Children and Young People Act 2008](#) (ACT)

[WHS Act 2011](#) (NSW)

[WHS Act 2011](#) (ACT)

7. Related documents

Synod Volunteer Policy

[Child Safe Screening: pre-appointment screening for staff and volunteers National Policy Framework 2020](#)

Volunteer Code of Conduct

Volunteer Manual

Congregation WHS and Safe Church Statements

8. Policy Review

This guideline is to be reviewed every 3 years by Synod Risk & Compliance and amendments approved by the Synod Board.

Congregation Volunteer Procedures

The following procedures have been developed to assist congregations in the effective management of volunteers.

Selection of volunteers

Policy and procedures for the selection of volunteers should be followed. The process should be in proportion to the responsibility and risk associated with the role. This includes both discernment about the suitability of the person for the role (consideration about a person's character, abilities and behaviour) and any relevant background checks needed for the specific role. See the [Background Checks Policy](#) for more guidance.

Resources to support the selection of volunteers in direct contact with children and vulnerable people can be accessed on the [Safe Church Unit](#) webpages.

Managing, Supporting and Training Volunteers

Volunteers should be supported in their roles through supervision, being given instruction, and for some roles, formalised training. The person responsible for an activity involving volunteers should provide enough supervision and feedback so volunteers are supported. The person responsible should provide oversight so they can be sure that the activity is being performed well, and safely.

The Volunteer Register is a record of all authorised congregation volunteers. It should be accepted and recorded as being received within the minutes of the church council at least every six-months or more frequently depending on the level of change or frequency of new rosters being published. A copy of the register should be kept with the records of the church council meeting. This process is supported by the Volunteer Contact Person.

Volunteer Contact Person

Each congregation should identify a member of Church Council who is responsible for the oversight of volunteers. This Volunteer Contact Person should;

- Keep the Volunteer Register (as per section 2) which identifies the volunteer roles in the congregation, and who is filling them
- Identify the roles which work with children or vulnerable adults, and any other high-trust roles
- Ensure there is a system in place to verify working with children/vulnerable people checks, and keep them up to date
- Be a contact person for volunteers if they have concerns
- Ensure that a Volunteer Code of Conduct is signed by all volunteers and that high trust volunteers have also read the Volunteer Manual
- Monitor attendance and provision of training, and keep records.

The person in this role is a high-trust volunteer and must have a working with children/vulnerable people check and attend safe church awareness training. Their details on the register should be counter-signed by another member of Church Council. The Volunteer Contact Person can be the same person as the Safe Church Contact Person, or the two roles can work collaboratively.

Protection and Expectations

Volunteer Safety

Each congregation is to have systems in place to protect the health, safety and welfare of volunteers.

This system is to include measures for;

- Managing any risks to the health and safety of volunteers
- Training, instruction and supervision of volunteers in the interests of their safety
- Including volunteers in consultation arrangements
- Having systems in place for volunteers to report hazards or incidents, and assisting and supporting volunteers if they are injured or become ill in the course of their work
- Keeping any such measures under review.

The work of volunteers is to be overseen and monitored to ensure compliance with safe work procedures, codes of conduct and so that any specific expectation is met in the interests of the safety of everyone.

Volunteer Code of Conduct

It is important that there is a shared understanding of appropriate conduct, behaviour and attitude so that we can care for each other well and function with peace, mutual respect and care.

Every volunteer must read and sign the Volunteer Code of Conduct and abide by it. If the Code of Conduct is not signed, the volunteer should not perform the functions of a volunteer, and should not be placed on the congregation Volunteer Register.

The Volunteer Code of Conduct includes the expectations of the UCA Lay Leaders Code of Conduct, so signing also satisfies this requirement for volunteers in leadership roles.

Safe Church

There are additional expectations and protections in place in relation to volunteers who work with children and vulnerable adults. The key structures in place include;

- Volunteers who work with children are mandatory reporters of child protection concerns
- Volunteers are employees for the purposes of the reportable conduct scheme
- Volunteers who work with children and vulnerable people need a WWCC or WWVP
- All volunteers who work with children and vulnerable adults or who are in a trusted leadership role must undertake regular Safe Church Awareness training.

See section 9 for Safe Church references for further information.

Volunteering by Children and Young People

Consideration should be given to safety arrangements specifically for children and young people who volunteer. A risk assessment should be conducted which includes;

- Supervision arrangements such as requiring parents/carers to be present, or supervision by another suitable adult
- Any risks to health and safety, including psychological risks, or those associated with people's behaviour
- Any specific competencies or informal suitability screening needed, such as for working with children
- The capacity, skills and maturity of the potential volunteer.

Parental consent and duty of care requirements for these volunteers is to follow the processes for their engagement in other programs where the child or young person is cared for away from their parents/carers ie. written consent from parents/carers, and collection of any needed health or contact information.

Wellbeing

Managers of volunteers are encouraged to consider the wellbeing of volunteers through:

- Pastoral encouragement individually, and through congregation recognition of the value of volunteers
- Not over-loading individuals
- Having systems in place to provide emotional supports in times of stress, and for recognised volunteers to access to the Synod Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Encouraging openness, transparency and mutual support amongst volunteers.

Privacy and Data

Personal data about volunteers will be collected, stored and disclosed according to the Synod Privacy Policy. Volunteers should also keep all confidential information private and secure.

Expenses and payments

Volunteers are unpaid, meaning there is no monetary reward, or payment in-kind, however, expenses of volunteers can be reimbursed when the purchase was approved, and a receipt provided.

Honorariums and allowances

Honorarium means a one off or ad hoc reward or payment made to a person for voluntary service; or a fee for professional services voluntarily performed, paid as a gesture of thanks or goodwill.

Honorariums cannot be paid to a person on a regular and/or systematic basis and should be a token amount compared to the cost of the equivalent services. For example, no more than 10% of the usual cost of the services.

Allowances are payments of a fixed predetermined amount to cover a volunteer's expenses.

See Appendix 4 for more information, including arrangements for casual preaching.

Insurance

Volunteer Insurance cover is in place to protect volunteers when they are performing their duties. All volunteers in congregations are covered by Synod Insurance when they are performing their volunteer tasks and are injured or become unwell as a result of their voluntary work (within any insurance policy limits or conditions). A participant helper who is injured in the course of performing tasks for the congregation, can also be covered by volunteer insurance if the congregation can vouch that the person was performing volunteer tasks relevant to the injury.

If injured, a volunteer should inform the Volunteer Contact Person or ministry agent and access a claim form for reimbursement if needed.

Congregation Volunteer Policy and Procedures - Appendices

Appendix 1: Volunteer Register Template

The following information provides guidance to congregations in the effective management of volunteers.

Volunteer Register

Each congregation should keep a Volunteer Register which includes the following details:

- Each role and the category of the role (see policy section 4) including a brief description of the duties.
- Identification of background checking the role requires (formal and informal) including screening, licensing or qualifications to be checked (as relevant to the role).
- Name of the person and their contact details.
- Dates of service (when they start/ed the role and when they finish).
- Date they signed the Volunteer Code of Conduct.
- Date they confirmed they have read the Volunteer Manual (for 'high trust volunteer' roles – see section 9).
- Working with Children Check/Working with Vulnerable People number (if required), date it is verified, due date for renewal, and the person's date of birth for confirmation purposes.
- Required training for the role (such as Safe Church Awareness Training), dates attended, and date renewal is due (where relevant).

The following Volunteer Register template and example is provided as a guide to assist congregations. Where it is more practical to do so, separate registers can be maintained for different ministry or rostered areas. These should be routinely provided to the Volunteer Contact Person for noting in the Church Council minutes, such as on a quarterly basis, if practical.

Role title and description	High trust role?	Volunteer's name	Phone and email	Start/finish dates	Confirmation: signed Code of Conduct (date)	Confirmation: read Volunteer Manual – for high trust volunteers (date)	WWCC/WWVP number and verification (as required)	Training required	Training completed (dates)

Kid's Church Coordinator – organises children's ministry and coordinates a team of volunteers to lead children's ministry activities during Sunday morning services.	Yes – works with children	xxxxxxx	xxxxxxx	1 February 2021	30 January 2021	30 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Number</i> • <i>Date of birth</i> • <i>Verification</i> • <i>Renewal due date</i> 	Safe Church Awareness Training	30 January 2021 (refresher due Jan 2024)
Gardener / Lawn Mower	No	xxxxx	xxxxx	99/99/99	99/99/99	Y	N	N	-

Appendix 2: Volunteer Types – Congregational Examples

Each Church Council should determine the volunteer roles relevant to their congregation, and the type of volunteer each role represents (as opposed to tasks which are performed by participant helpers). The following examples can be used to inform this decision, but the circumstances of each congregation means that there will be variability. This is expected, and congregations have the ability to make this determination. The Synod [Risk and Compliance Team](#) can be contacted for further guidance.

Type of Service Role	Definition and requirements	Examples of activities
High-trust volunteer roles	<p>These volunteer roles have significant responsibility because they are leadership roles, coordinate/oversee the work of others and/or work with vulnerable people including children. They must;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be selected and screened for the role to ensure their suitability, including the appropriate clearance for working with children/vulnerable people (where relevant) • Be included in the Volunteer Register • Sign the Volunteer Code of Conduct • Confirm they have read the Volunteer Manual. 	<p>Working with vulnerable people across all ages including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people (people under 18 years of age), including as a teacher of Special Religious Education (SRE) • the aged • People experiencing homelessness • People with disability • Refugees and asylum seekers. <p>And may include such congregation/entity led activities as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playgroup, Sunday School, youth activities and camps • Counselling services • Taking vulnerable people to attend appointments/go shopping etc • Volunteering in a client centred role eg a soup kitchen or other food supply activity • Volunteering in a client-centred role in an Op Shop • Assisting in recreational activities such as craft groups for vulnerable people, youth group etc • Assisting with classes such as English as a second language etc <p>Volunteering in a role with significant responsibility such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervising other volunteers • Managing/coordinating all volunteers for a congregation/entity

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having access to sensitive information through their voluntary role.
Other Volunteer Roles	<p>These volunteers are selected and appointed to a specific role but do not have the leadership or other responsibilities of a high-trust volunteer role. They must;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be selected and screened for the role to ensure their suitability • Be included in the Volunteer Register • Sign the Volunteer Code of Conduct. 	<p>Within the sanctioned activities of the Church/entity and may include roles such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating a congregation newsletter • Being the craft group (or similar) leader • Bible study leader • Book club leader • Part of the team participating in seasonal décor responsibilities • Organising or coordinating fundraising events or fetes • Customer service at regular markets • Cleaning tasks (rostered, at times the church would otherwise be closed) • Gardening or maintenance tasks on a regular basis (note that additional safety measures will need to be in place with higher risk activities such as those using power tools) • Organising or supervising working bees • Driving the church/entity bus • Organist or other musician (especially where they attend rehearsals, are at church early to practice, are rostered on regularly. Not all musicians will be classified as a volunteer). <p>Volunteers in this category may also include those that have highly specialised (trade) skills and certification, that are used in a voluntary capacity such as;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plumber • Electrician • Builder • Tiler • Painter

		<p>Note that any payment to a trades person with an operating business may have tax and other implications. See Appendix 4.</p>
<p>Participant Helper</p>	<p>A participant helper is not classified as a volunteer.</p> <p>Participant helper tasks can be done without formal selection or screening being completed.</p>	<p>A participant helper contributes in various kinds of service and tasks, often ad hoc and at the time they would usually attend the service or activity. These tasks may include the following, when un-rostered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set-up, packing away and cleaning up • Morning tea servers • Participating in the band (especially if done from time to time – see above) • Participating in the service eg Bible reading, leading prayer • Flower arranging • Distributing and collecting hymn books • Participating as a sound/technology assistant.

Appendix 3: Volunteer Manual

The following Volunteer Manual has been developed to assist congregations and other entities to guide and orient volunteers. It should be tailored through adding contact details and other local information where indicated.

Volunteer Manual

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We thank you so much for volunteering with us! Every volunteer plays an important part in our vision to be a fellowship of reconciliation, living God’s love and acting for the common good to build a just and compassionate community.

We recognise the very important role that volunteers play in the life of the Church, they are vital to success in achieving our mission. Volunteers give their time freely and receive no tangible rewards. Without volunteers, many of the activities and programs run by the Church would not be able to happen. Our hope is that our volunteers will experience joy, satisfaction and personal growth as they participate in service with us.

The Synod values and places trust in our volunteers who are placed in special roles of authority, leadership and service to the children and other vulnerable people. Our commitment is to support, guide and assist volunteers in these roles.

Why the need for a Volunteer Manual?

Our volunteers come from a broad range of backgrounds and experience. Many of our volunteers have experience in workplaces and will be aware of the responsibilities that employers have to their employees and vice versa. It is the same with volunteering.

The Church has a responsibility to protect our volunteers, the people they come into contact with, and the Church itself. This responsibility is reciprocated by each volunteer; to protect themselves, others and the Church. We are in this together!

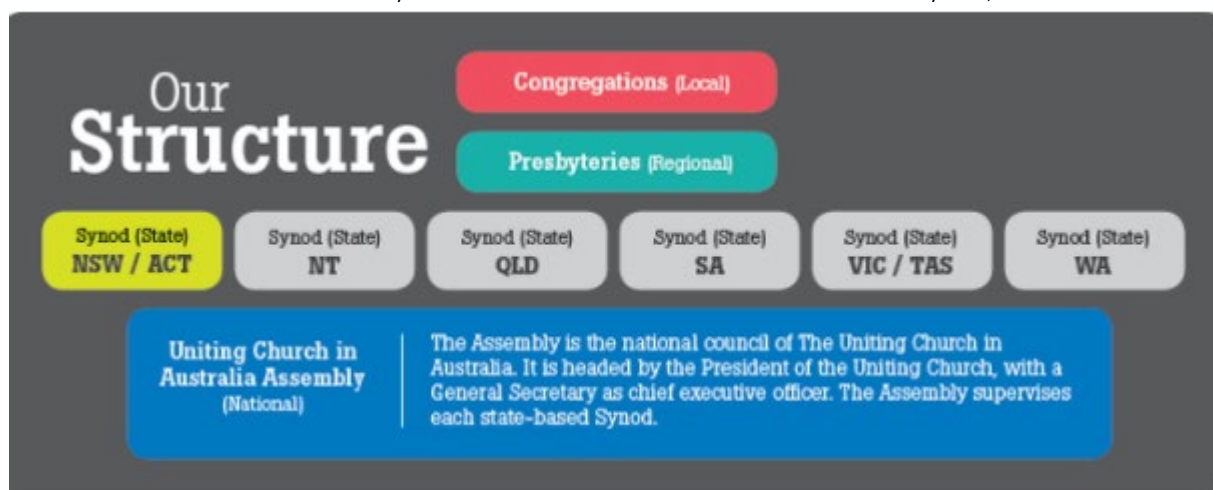
This volunteer manual is intended to provide new volunteers with useful information and continue to be a valuable resource throughout the volunteering journey. The Synod website is also an excellent source of information www.nswact.uca.org.au. For other questions or concerns, the first port of call will often be your Volunteer Contact Person, Ministry Agent or other person in leadership.

Synod overview

The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) is one of the largest not for profit and religious organisations in Australia. The Church is made up of a series of interrelated non-hierarchical councils. Broadly, each 'state' is called a Synod and has a governing council with its own boards to support and resource the church in their area. The Synods are drawn together through a National Assembly.

There are six Synods across Australia. In their various locations, the Synods are responsible for overall support of community services, mission planning, theological education and other educational services. Each Synod is also responsible for administrating for their Ministers, property, finance, insurance and other shared services.

The Synod of NSW and the ACT supports approximately 400 Congregations, 50,000 members, 13 Presbyteries, 8 schools and several Parish Missions. The Synod of NSW and the ACT is led by the Moderator and General Secretary who are within the Executive Office of the Synod, the Secretariat.



Our Congregations and members are diverse in many ways and so are our volunteers! In many situations, congregations and entities will seek volunteers to help fulfill the needs of the community.

Recruitment, induction and support of volunteers

Just as there are systems for the recruitment, induction and support of employees, there are similar systems for selecting and supporting volunteers.

The volunteer recruitment process is vital as it ensures that volunteering roles are a good fit based on each person's experience, personal qualities, time commitments and a number of other factors.

Many volunteering roles within the Uniting Church have contact with vulnerable people including children, young people, people experiencing homelessness, those with disability, the aged and many others. We have a duty of care for each volunteer, and all those our volunteers serve.

Depending on the volunteering role there may also be legislative requirements to be fulfilled before being able to volunteer. You may need to undertake a [Working with Children Check](#) (in NSW) or [Working with Vulnerable People Check](#) (in the ACT) in addition to formalised screening processes where these have been established. Synod also requires all volunteers who hold a WWCC or WWVP to complete Safe Church Awareness training. Once the legislative requirements have been successfully fulfilled and the required documentation provided, the onboarding process can progress.

Helpful info about your congregation/entity	
Volunteer Contact Person	<i>Insert name and contact details</i>
Safe Church Contact Person	<i>Insert name and contact details</i>
Safe Church Commitment – Congregation Statement	<i>Insert details of where this can be found if it is in place</i>
Congregation WHS Statement	<i>Insert details of where this can be found if it is in place</i>
First aid kit	<i>Insert details of where this can be found</i>
Emergency equipment, evacuation plans, emergency procedures	<i>Insert details of where these can be found</i>

Volunteers also undergo a process of orientation. Each congregation or entity should set aside time to help their volunteers feel welcome and learn about how their role fits into the entity/congregation, as part of the Presbytery and the wider Synod. Having a dedicated person to guide new volunteers (including through using this manual) is helpful to the volunteering process.

Congregations may also provide volunteers with a document describing the tasks associated with the volunteer role. This can be a useful reference for both the volunteer and the congregation to identify and arrange any training required for success in the volunteering role.

Each entity/congregation should have a **support** network in place for their volunteers. Each volunteer should have someone they can go to ask questions, voice concerns, seek clarification in relation to their volunteering experience. This may be the Volunteer Contact Person, or the person organising the activity they are involved in.

Respect and Kindness

Our volunteers should consistently be treated with respect and kindness, and in turn behave in a way that upholds the core values and integrity of the Uniting Church in Australia, including showing integrity, respect, collaboration and compassion.

We are a diverse organisation and we work with individuals from diverse backgrounds, capacities and vulnerabilities. We should always seek to be kind and empathetic to others. A willingness to listen and to learn from the perspectives of others is a good way to honour and care for them. Our role is to treat everyone with courtesy and consideration and respecting the opinions of others.

A few guiding rules for success as a volunteer; always be respectful, act lawfully, work in the best interests of those you are helping, follow reasonable instructions and set a good example to others. Remember, if you are not sure what is expected, ask the person supervising your role.

Everyone has a right to be in a safe and secure environment free from fear and harassment. If you find yourself in a situation where the views and behaviour of those around you make you feel uncomfortable, you should speak with your Volunteer Contact person or Ministry Agent to consider strategies for dealing with this or finding other volunteering roles within your congregation.

Online environment

Volunteers may need to use electronic resources such as computers as part of their role. The words and actions used online are as important as what is said and done face to face. Online activities must at all times be safe, legal, non-exploitative and considerate. Church computers, systems or accounts must not be used without permission.

Great resources for online safety are available from the [eSafety Commissioner](#).

Communications

For many, the volunteering experience will include contact with vulnerable people and people with a wide range of life experiences and capacities. Effective communication is tailored to the audience. This includes the use of appropriate words, vocal tone and body language.

Being able to "read the audience" is a very important skill when it comes to interacting with those encountered during the volunteering experience. This helps to find the balance between being engaging while maintaining appropriate conduct.

Communication method and style can have a profound effect on these interactions, so it is vital to be very aware of the 'messages' we are sending. It may mean that words that are appropriate for one group may be totally inappropriate for another. At all times you should be mindful of the language you use to ensure it is non-discriminatory, respectful and non-judgmental.

In written communications it is necessary to be careful about the message we are sending. Because we don't have vocal intonation or body language to add context to our message there is always a danger that the meaning intended from our written words could be misunderstood. If you are ever in doubt, ask someone else to read your written communication before you send or distribute it. Be aware of whether there are requirements for approvals for particular communications, or delegations for some sensitive correspondence or public comment.

Some volunteer roles have access to confidential information. The congregation should have systems in place to limit access to some types of information. Where a volunteer has access to confidential information, they must maintain the confidentiality and security of the information, especially personal data (the information by which someone can be identified).

A Safe Environment for Everyone

The locations where you volunteer are your 'workplace' and we have a responsibility to provide you with a safe secure workplace, and you have a responsibility to do everything you can to look after your safety, and that of others.

Part of our responsibility to volunteers is to provide training in the tasks that will be undertaken as part of the volunteering role. If a volunteer is not sure how to complete a task, they are encouraged to get help before trying to do it. Activity organisers should be approached for training and assistance.

All volunteers and employees alike have a responsibility to work safely, follow all reasonable instructions and to report any safety hazard, unsafe practices or safety incidents that they become aware of. The Volunteer Contact Person, or the person organising an activity is responsible for ensuring all staff and volunteers know how to recognise and report safety incidents.

We also ask our volunteers to be involved in assessing risks. This is particularly important where spaces are being used for activities by children or vulnerable people. Everyone should always be proactive in making spaces safer and making sure they are fit-for-purpose. For example, an area which is suitable for teenagers might not be safe for pre-schoolers. It is all part of us working together for safety.

Physical and Psychological Safety

It is important to remember that safety is about more than just physical hazards like a spill on the floor or lifting a heavy box. Psychological safety is just as important, but can be less clear cut.

Everyone contributes to the creation of a positive and protective culture. In particular, words and actions, and the way they reflect a person's attitude can have a major influence on other people's wellbeing.

Responsibility for safety goes both ways; if you find yourself in a situation where the views and behaviour of those around you make you feel uncomfortable, you should speak with your Volunteer Contact Person, supervisor or Ministry Agent to consider strategies for dealing with the situation.

Helpful safety info	
A helpful guide to appropriate language relating to disability	People with Disability Australia Language Guide
Reporting safety issues	<i>Insert details</i>
Access to the COVID-19 Safety Plan	<i>Insert details</i>
Risk Assessment Form	<i>Insert details</i>
Incident Report Form	<i>Insert details</i>

What clothing is appropriate for volunteering?

Many volunteering roles just require practical, clean and tidy dress, but some roles have more specific requirements. The person organising the activity can give guidance on this.

The clothing worn should be considered from a safety point of view. For example, a volunteer in an Op Shop or Food Bank should wear comfortable flat non-slip shoes. Volunteers working outside should wear long sleeves, long trousers, covered shoes, hat, sunglasses, sunblock etc

Any protective equipment that is needed for the role should be worn.

It is also worth considering the sensibilities and views of co-workers and people being served in the course of volunteering duties, when making clothing choices.

Safe Church

The Synod believes 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.

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.

The full [Safe Church Commitment Statement](#) can be found on the Safe Church webpage and we encourage everyone to read it.

All volunteers who hold a working with children check in NSW or Working with Vulnerable People check in the ACT, must complete Safe Church Awareness Training. Information is available on the Synod Website [UCA - Safe Church Training](#).

Personal and Relational Boundaries

As people who care for the welfare of others, we seek to develop genuine relationships with those we serve, and those we serve alongside. In these situations it is possible for inappropriate relationships and attachments to form, or for our intentions to be misunderstood. This may be in relation to peers or co-workers, or in relation to vulnerable people where there is an actual or perceived duty of care.

Each volunteer should personally monitor their own conduct, and watch out for;

- Misunderstandings; is someone understanding your care for them as being romantic, or in some way abusive? Raise this immediately with someone who can help to manage the situation, such as your ministry agent.
- A personal attachment forming where it should not; if this is the case seek counsel as soon as possible.
- Any behaviours or conduct which might give rise to problems, such as being construed as grooming. Be open to feedback, follow procedures, and seek the wisdom of others.

Transparency is important. Make sure others are aware of what you are doing and how you are doing it. Be quick to seek help and to report concerns. Gently raise with others if you notice their actions could be misunderstood. These are some of the best ways we can love our neighbour, remembering that love always protects (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Prohibited conduct

Even when we are behaving legally, ethically or from good intentions, it is possible to be inappropriate, or to unintentionally cause harm to others. There are policies, procedures and practices in place so that together we can avoid such situations.

Some key things to remember;

- You should never be alone with a child (unless you are their parent or carer),
- Avoid physical contact with others except when it is a specific requirement of your role, or if you are protecting someone from danger.
- Don't take photographs of children without the consent of their supervising adult.
- Follow the safe church rules for contact with children and young people which differ depending on the age of the child or young person.

Smoking, consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs must be avoided when participating volunteering activities. You should never administer medications unless you are authorised to do so as part of your volunteer role. For example, a nurse may administer medications in their paid work but have no authority to do this in their volunteering role.

If you observe behaviours that cause you concern, talk with your ministry agent or the Safe Church contact person in your congregation. Bringing concerns 'into the light' in this way is protective to everyone involved (see required reporting below).

Most of the time, problems can be worked out. Feedback can be given to volunteers to help them to avoid conduct that is unhelpful, or on other ways to perform their role well. Volunteers can be asked to stop doing a volunteer role if their performance or conduct may cause others to be unsafe, or compromise the mission or ministry.

Reporting and raising concerns

It may be that during the course of your service to the church, you become aware of something that needs to be reported, or there's a concern which you need to raise. These matters might be;

- A concern for a child or vulnerable adult such as becoming aware that someone is being mistreated, inside or outside the church
- A conflict or problem you are affected by
- A matter of other concern such as poor conduct by someone else at church.

The following information is provided to assist volunteers to report or resolve concerns.

Conflict

You are encouraged to seek help to resolve any conflict you can't resolve yourself. Doing this early in the process helps to minimise the relational impact and can mean unity and peace is restored sooner. Ministry agents or other leaders can advise and support this process.

Required Reporting

One of the kindest and most protective things you can do is raise concerns. You have an obligation to report any actual or apparent breaches of law, policy or the Volunteers Code of Conduct. This includes reporting any allegations of inappropriate conduct towards vulnerable people or indicators of abuse according to the relevant guideline (see table below). In general, the reporting relates to the following types of concern or conduct

- **Mandatory Reporting:** suspected child abuse and neglect (anywhere in the community).
- **[Reportable Conduct:](#)** allegations, offences or convictions of child abuse or misconduct towards children by a Uniting Church worker (including volunteers).
- **Other conduct concerns:** raise with the ministry agent (congregations) or senior leader.

You are also required to notify your ministry agent or the Safe Church Unit if you become the subject of an Apprehended Violence Order (AVO) or of a reportable child offence allegation or conviction. This reporting should occur as soon as possible after the event or disclosure.

Reportable Conduct

Misconduct towards children (and vulnerable adults in the ACT) must be reported to the Synod (see table below). Misconduct may be of a sexual, physical or psychological nature. All allegations of reportable conduct will be investigated and reports on the investigation made to the Ombudsman in the ACT or to the Office of the Children’s Guardian in NSW.

When considering making a report see our [Guideline for Reportable Conduct NSW](#) and [Guideline for Reportable Conduct ACT](#) for more information as the legislation and definitions differ between NSW and the ACT.

Mandatory reporting – child protection

Volunteers are workers and are recognised as having similar expectations and responsibilities as paid workers, especially in regard to child protection and safety. Mandatory reporting laws aim to identify children who are being abused or neglected so they can be protected.

If you have been required to have a Working with Children Check or Working with Vulnerable People Check as part of your Volunteering recruitment you have mandatory reporting responsibilities.

The requirements for mandatory reporting differ between NSW and the ACT so all mandatory reporters should read the relevant Synod Guideline (see links below) to ensure they understand their responsibilities. This will also be covered in Safe Church Awareness Training.

Helpful info about reporting	
Your Ministry agent contact	Name: Contact details:
Safe Church Contact Person	Name: Contact details:
Safe Church Unit	safechurch@nswact.uca.org.au Website
Synod Child Safe Policies	Child Safe Policy
	Safe Church Commitment Statement
Mandatory Reporting	Mandatory Reporting Guideline NSW
	Mandatory Reporting Guideline ACT
Reportable Conduct	Reportable Conduct Policy
	Reportable Conduct Guideline NSW
	Reportable Conduct Guideline ACT
General Secretary (for all Reportable Conduct matters, and mandatory reports in some circumstances)	Rev. Jane Fry Email: generalsecretary@nswact.uca.org.au Mail: Addressed as “Confidential” to: General Secretary, Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT, PO Box A2178, Sydney South NSW 1235.

Confidential reporting of concerns

Most of the time, issues, incidents and concerns are best raised with the relevant person at church. However, there are times when you might feel the need to report a matter in confidence. Should these circumstances ever arise, you are encouraged to contact the independent complaints service 'Speak Out' as soon as possible. Any type of concern can be raised through the [Speak Out](#) service.

Confidential reporting	
Confidential reporting of any concern – 'Speak Out' service	1800 951 145 or the Speak Out website

Leadership

Volunteers in leadership positions are expected to show proper care for the people they lead. The example of Jesus is one of servant-leadership; putting the needs of others first, seeking their protection and showing love. Similarly, our leaders are expected to set an example of integrity, respect and compassion for all they serve.

Some leadership positions also have responsibility for the care or use of church assets and resources. Where this is the case, you should;

- Find out what policies, procedures or guidance is available; can the last person in the role provide a starting point?
- Ask for assistance from the Presbytery and/or the Synod Office, such as the [People and Culture](#), [Finance](#) or [Risk and Compliance](#) Teams
- Put transparency measures in place; is there a person who could partner in an accountability arrangement with, such as counter signing?

The Synod Office is also here to help and can be contacted via e-mail at any time, including about the following areas;

Synod Office team	
Risk and Compliance	risk@nswact.uca.org.au
Safe Church reporting and training	safechurch@nswact.uca.org.au
Insurance and claims	insurance@nswact.uca.org.au

Additional help for volunteers

Recognised volunteers who are included on the Volunteer Register are covered by Synod Insurance when they are performing their volunteer tasks and are injured or become unwell as a result of their voluntary work (within the insurance policy limits and conditions). If injured, a volunteer should inform the Volunteer Contact Person, leader or ministry agent and access a [claim form for reimbursement](#) if needed.

Any reimbursement for expenses relating to volunteering, must be approved before the expense is incurred and a receipt provided.

Personal support

If a volunteer feels over-burdened by their role, or experiences distress in relation to their volunteer duties, they should contact the ministry agent or leader as soon as possible. They can help by providing:

- Pastoral encouragement

- Considering the workload and the person’s contribution
- Access to counselling through the [Employee Assistance Program](#) or other emotional supports in times of stress.

What now?

Please let your Volunteer Contact Person (or leader who gave it to you) know that you have read this manual. Each congregation keeps a Volunteer Register which records that volunteers have been provided with and read the Volunteer Manual, and signed the Volunteer Code of Conduct.

Thank you for reading this manual. We hope that it has been informative and encouraging. If you have any suggestions for how the manual can be improved, please email the Synod Office at risk@nswact.uca.org.au.

For your own records

Date Volunteer Manual read		
Date Volunteer Code of Conduct signed		
Date Working with Children/Vulnerable People check submitted (if required)		N/A
Date of entry to Volunteer Register		

Appendix 4: Volunteer Payments – Guide for Treasurers

Payments to volunteers

Although volunteer work is unpaid, volunteers can be given gifts or token payments to recognise their service. The following information is provided to guide regarding the range of payments available to volunteers, and how they can be managed by the congregation and the volunteer.

There are some potential pitfalls when making payments to volunteers. They are that;

- Regular payments can make the volunteer arrangement unclear, and cause the congregation to inadvertently establish an employment relationship
- The payments may need to be considered by the volunteer as part of their assessable income for tax purposes, and may need to be paid through the payroll system.

Implied Employment Relationship

Congregations should take care to avoid practices which may inadvertently establish an employment relationship with a volunteer. If an employment relationship becomes established it creates a risk of liability associated with failure to fulfil employment obligations and protections, such as the requirements of the National Employment Standards including payment, entitlements and protections against dismissal.

Entities should ensure the volunteer arrangement fits the following criteria provided by the Fair Work Ombudsman;

- a volunteer is someone who does work for the main purpose of benefiting someone else
- the organisation and individual did not intend to create a legally binding employment relationship
- a volunteer is under no obligation to attend the workplace or perform work, and the arrangement can end at any time
- a volunteer doesn't expect to be paid for their work.

Honorariums

Honorarium means a one off or ad hoc reward or payment made to a person for voluntary service; or a fee for professional services voluntarily performed, paid as a gesture of thanks or goodwill.

Honorariums cannot be paid to a person on a regular and/or systematic basis and should be a token amount compared to the cost of the equivalent services. For example, no more than 10% of the usual cost of the services.

Volunteers do not have to pay tax on payments or benefits they receive in their capacity as volunteers, as long as the situation fits the criteria for being considered volunteer arrangement. Honorary rewards for voluntary services are not assessable income, but fees received for professional services (in connection with the volunteer's income producing work) voluntarily provided, are assessable income of the volunteer. In this situation, they may also be entitled to a deduction for expenses incurred in performing these professional services.

Benefits provided to volunteers do not attract fringe benefits tax (FBT). As a general rule, congregations are not liable for pay as you go (PAYG) withholding and fringe benefits tax (FBT) on payments they make, or benefits they provide, to volunteers.

For more information, see [ATO Honorariums](#).

Allowances

Allowances are payments of a fixed predetermined amount to cover a volunteer's estimated expense. It is paid even if the volunteer does not spend the full amount.

These amounts may be income tax assessable; especially where the amount is paid without regard to the actual expense, and there is no requirement to repay unspent money.

Volunteers can also receive non-cash benefits as an allowance, such as free use of facilities or free/discounted entry into an event, but this is different from a 'legally enforceable right' to receive these things.

For more information, see [ATO Allowances](#)

Reimbursements

A reimbursement is a payment which is a precise compensation, in part or full, for an expense already incurred, even if the expense has not yet been paid. In general, congregations reimburse volunteers when they have incurred expenditure on behalf of the congregation. The volunteer may be reimbursed for all or part of the expense.

To make payments clear as reimbursements, it is a good idea to ask your volunteer:

- to provide a receipt or otherwise substantiate expenses
- refund unspent amounts.

If you reimburse a volunteer for using their own assets (such as their car) or paying for something on behalf of the congregation, the reimbursement will not be assessable income of the volunteer, provided the payment:

- does no more than reimburse the volunteer for expenses actually incurred
- is not for a supply made in the course of an enterprise of the volunteer.

For more information, see [ATO Reimbursements](#)

Volunteer Payments and GST

If your congregation is registered for GST it may be entitled to claim GST credits for purchases it makes for its volunteers. Generally, you cannot claim GST credits when you reimburse a volunteer for expenses they have incurred in carrying out their activities for the organisation.

See [ATO: Claiming GST credits on purchases for volunteers](#)

If the purchase or expense is more than ATO threshold amount (which is \$82.50 (GST inclusive) at the time of writing) you need a tax invoice to claim a GST credit. You can still claim the GST credits even if the tax invoice is in the name of the volunteer.

An organisation does not need a tax invoice to claim a credit if an expense is \$82.50 (GST inclusive) or less. You only need some documentary evidence of the expense, such as a cash receipt, cheque butt or bank statement.

Income tax and volunteer payments - summary

A payment to a volunteer that is not income tax assessable will have many of the following characteristics:

- The payment is to meet expenses incurred or expected to be incurred
- The payment has no connection to the recipient's income-producing activities or services rendered. I.e. An electrician who receives an honorarium for electrical services done voluntarily is required to declare this payment as assessable income, even if it was done for a token or nominal fee
- The payment is not received as remuneration or as a consequence of employment
- The payment is not relied upon or expected by the recipient for day to day living
- The payment is not legally required or expected
- There is no obligation on the part of the payer to make the payment.

Casual Preaching – Honorariums and Payment

Ordained ministers and lay persons may express their faith by offering to preach either in their own congregation or in other congregations. This might be done on a volunteer basis and be unpaid, or be paid the casual preaching fee.

The payment of a casual preaching fee may constitute assessable income. It may also be construed as creating an employment relationship in the case of lay persons, if they are being paid at the usual rate for the services they provide. Both these instances need to be managed by the congregation so ATO requirements are met.

The following has been developed to assist congregations to determine where preaching is considered volunteer service, when preaching should be paid, and where it should be treated as casual employment.

1. Volunteering to preach

Ordained ministers and lay persons who offer to preach on a volunteer basis (at their own congregation, or another) won't be paid for their preaching services.

It is unusual for ordained ministers (who are retired or not currently in placement) or lay people to receive payment for ad hoc preaching at their own church. They can however be reimbursed for any out-of-pocket expenses they incur in the course of volunteering their services up to the value of the casual preaching fee. Reimbursements should be processed through the congregation's accounts payable system and will require the casual preacher to complete the appropriate claim form.

If an honorarium is given to recognise the service, it needs to be a token amount, compared to the usual casual preaching fee. It also needs to be ad hoc and not a regular payment, so it remains a gift, and not related to employment.

2. Paid preaching engagements

Lay Persons Casual Preaching Fee

A lay person who preaches **more than 2 services** per quarter at a single congregation, is to be paid the casual preaching fee as per the Stipend and Allowances Table.

The preacher is then a deemed employee, who is in receipt of assessable income that must be disclosed.

Ordained Ministers Casual Preaching Fee

A minister who preaches **more than 2 services** per quarter at a single congregation, is to be paid the casual preaching fee as per the Stipend and Allowances Table.

Any ordained Ministers who are paid the casual preaching fee for the preaching services they provide, will be viewed as a locum preacher. This payment is assessable income for the minister.

Note that there are no tax withholding obligations in situations where the ordained Minister provides **fewer than three locum services** in a quarter.

If a congregation requires assistance with the processing of these payments, please contact the [Synod Payroll Bureau Service](#).