

Appendix C: Professional Standards Department

I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.

1 Peter 5: 1-4 (NRSV)

ROLE OF THE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS DEPARTMENT

One of the Church's Objects under its Constitution is to take such action as is necessary for the protection of congregations and of church workers, in the performance of their duties and the maintenance of their rights. The Professional Standards Department (PSD) helps to fulfil this Object.

PSD's responsibilities relate to behaviour and ethical issues in the church. These responsibilities include:

- providing a training program that is consistent churchwide
- providing advice to districts and congregations
- handling some types of complaints
- developing relevant policies and procedures.

ACTIVITIES DURING THE SYNODICAL TERM

TRAINING PROGRAM

In February 2016, Dr Patricia Crennan completed a review of Professional Standards training.

During the same year, Marilyn Wall was appointed as the Professional Standards Training Coordinator and asked to develop a new program that was suited to the needs of congregations.

Marilyn has now developed a comprehensive program, which is based on:

- Scripture
- the church's Constitution
- the church's Standards of Ethical Behaviour
- the church's policies
- the learnings and recommendations of Dr Crennan
- the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA) Standards (the church is a signatory to the SCTA).

The new program is tiered and multi-modal; there are face-to-face and online components. It also provides for recognised prior learning, in relation to previous professional training. The intention is for a churchwide consistency in the training and delivery of the program throughout all congregations and affiliated ministries.

A range of resources, including the production of a short 'Standards of Ethical Behaviour' video, have been created to support the delivery of the new training program.

Importantly, the NCCA carried out a full review of the program and confirmed that it meets the SCTA Standards.

In 2017 training under the program was provided in every district, to a wide audience of participants, from a diverse range of ministry roles in the church. A growing number of individuals have now completed all levels of the training.

In October 2017, the General Church Council resolved that it endorsed:

1. The direction and intent of the program and its consistent implementation across the church
2. PSD's ongoing efforts to improve the current training program, including the tailoring of training for specific focus groups (requesting PSD continue to explore the broadening of recognition of members' prior learning)
3. PSD's ongoing efforts to train more trainers, to strengthen the training delivery team and maintain the integrity of the program.

(Resolution 17/168)

Since the start of 2017 3029 people have attended face-to-face workshops and the response has been encouragingly very positive. When asked to rate the personal value of a workshop, just 1.8% of these participants have given the lowest rating of 'Limited Value'.

The face-to-face workshops are considered to be an important part of the overall training program for the following reasons:

1. The content invites discussion among the participants about their responsibilities as leaders within the context of the Lutheran Church. This helps to develop a collective understanding of why the policies and procedures of the church are necessary, and develops a mutual accountability for their implementation. This shared understanding and commitment is less likely to be achieved in an on-line environment.
2. The content covers a wide range of issues related to the safety and well-being of all who engage in the life of the church. It is not strictly limited to child protection. Face-to-face training is considered to be the most effective way of getting across a wide range of issues.
3. The face-to-face training also demonstrates to the wider community, far more than on-line training can, the church's commitment to being a 'safe place.'

Although the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive toward the face-to-face training, PSD is continuing to review the program to streamline it as much as possible, without compromising the expected outcomes.

PSD will soon commence the writing of a 'refresher' course, which will be undertaken by people three years after they've completed the initial face-to-face training. This refresher course will not be as long as the initial training, and may be delivered in an on-line environment.

The other components of the training course are delivered on-line by webinar. Since the start of 2017 1063 people have taken part in webinars, with the majority of feedback being positive. PSD recognises that access to webinars can be a challenge in areas where internet connectivity is poor, or participants don't have the necessary technology. The PSD has endeavoured to respond to these situations, including by way of delivering the training face-to-face.

We understand that training requires a significant commitment from the participants. Professional Standards Officers in each District are available to work with congregations and other ministries in meeting training requirements and will endeavour to respond as flexibly as is possible to accommodate a local situation.

PSD emphasises that there should be no reason for a congregation or ministry to stop or defer any of its ministry activities because of a training issue. Please do not assume what is and isn't possible.

Congregations and other ministries can find more details at www.lca.org.au/psd-training

REVIEW OF THE KNOWN SEX OFFENDER/PERSON OF CONCERN POLICY

There has been an independent review, of the Prevention of Risk of Harm from a Known Sex Offender Policy and related Procedure, by child protection expert Carl Collins.

Following the recommendations from Mr Collins, the Policy has a new name: the Prevention of Risk of Sexual Offence by a Person of Concern. There is also a completely new Procedure to help PSD and the church to implement the Policy.

PSD acknowledges this is a sensitive and complex area to navigate for all concerned. However, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse reminded the church that it is not immune from the scandal of child abuse. The church must apply policies and practices that protect children and other vulnerable members of our community.

It is important to note that PSD supports the implementation of the policy and procedure, but the final decisions are made by the local District Church Council or other authorised body.

The new Procedure will be reviewed again in 12 months.

OTHER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A Gift Acceptance Policy and a Conflict of Interest Policy have been approved by GCC following consultation. The procedures to accompany the respective policies are in the process of being developed. Once this work has been completed the documents will be made available for use across the church.

PSD continues to liaise with Reconciliation Ministry and the Tribunal Administrator, in relation to the development of a churchwide Complaints Handling Procedure.

It is again important to stress that, in any complaints handling matter, PSD provides support to the process and is not responsible for the final decision-making. This rests with the appropriate person (e.g. District Bishop) or body (e.g. District Church Council).

You can find approved policies and procedures of the church at www.lca.org.au/policies

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In December, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse released its final report. Spanning 17 volumes, the contents are sobering and challenging. The Royal Commission has found there has been gross and sustained misconduct in churches. As a result, there has been an erosion of public trust in churches. The Lutheran Church is, by no means, immune from such trust issues.

Child sexual abuse is not a historical problem. It is still happening. Churches remain particularly susceptible, as culture will not change overnight. Sadly, there is still a trend of scepticism towards complainants and of rallying around accused persons. And we also see a disproportionate focus on proven offenders, together with insufficient consideration regarding the feelings of abuse survivors and potential victims.

PSD is trying to build a healthy level of awareness about persistent child molesters, who can be incredibly patient and cunning; they are currently trying to infiltrate our communities. Let's be vigilant – not alarmed but alert!

REDRESS SCHEME

PSD acted on behalf of the church in negotiating with the Commonwealth government regarding the national redress scheme for survivors of child sexual abuse.

As has already been announced, the church has joined the redress scheme, which officially commenced on 1 July 2018.

The church's engagement with the scheme will be coordinated through the LCA's Churchwide office.

Further information about the scheme and how it will work will be shared with congregations, districts and ministries in the coming months.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS DEPARTMENT STAFF

PSD staff (at the time of this report) are as follows:

Dave Biar, Professional Standards Officer (PSO), South Australia/Northern Territory District

Celia Fielke, Online trainer

Jill Hagen, PSO, Lutheran Church of New Zealand

Carolyn Kiss, PSO, New South Wales District

Elizabeth Kloeden, PSO, Queensland District

Holly Koning, Administration Assistant

Nigel Long, Trainer, South Australia/Northern Territory District

Denise Muschamp, PSO, Victorian District (including Tasmania)

Tim Ross, Manager

Monika Tropiano, PSO, Western Australia District

Kathy Tscharke, Adminstrant Assistant

Marilyn Wall, Training Coordinator

As outlined earlier the PSD staff, and particularly the PSOs in each district, are there to support congregations and ministries. Please do not hesitate to contact them to seek information, clarification on issues, and to discuss matters of concern.