



Safe Church Report

Points of prayer

- Pray for perseverance to fulfil the Safe Church requirements.
- Pray that the current review and refinement process delivers simpler, clearer requirements and procedures for congregations, etc. to use.
- Pray that we can strike the right balance between satisfying the law and acting with genuine care for our church communities.

Report

Safety requirements (in one form or another) have been practiced by our denomination for many years. Safety and risk are considered for church working bees, designing new car parks, running children's groups, appointing a church treasurer, distributing the bread and wine for Holy Communion, and many other things. Safety is a factor in virtually everything we do as a Church.

Out of love for the people entrusted to our care, we aim to provide an environment in which people don't get hurt. And the state government has legislated that organisations provide safe environments for employees, volunteers and guests. Hence we have two incentives for Safe Church practices.

Over the past few years, the emphasis has been on "Safe Ministry with Children", i.e. policies and practices that sought to protect children from various forms of harm. The Synod executive is now directing us to widen the scope of protection to all vulnerable people including the elderly and disabled. Hence the terminology has changed from "Safe Ministry with Children" to "Safe Church". The emphasis is no longer just on children; the emphasis is safety for all.

The Presbytery has performed well in the recent safety audit requested by the Synod General Secretary. Some congregations are keeping up with the requirements while others are struggling. However, the people of the Downs Presbytery have responded well to the audit. About 90% of the "places" in our presbytery district have submitted at least some of the requested documentation and the remainder are currently working on it. Safe church compliance across the district is not perfect but it is favourable and shows that our people are making an effort in this area. I have found that despite high levels of frustration and misgivings with the requirements, there is an equally high level of willingness to get this right and to be compliant. Lynde Davy, Safe Church Assurance and Support Officer, reckons our presbytery is doing really well. So take a bow Downs Presbytery.

The audit has shown that we do pretty well at:

- annual adoption of the Safe Church policy by church/parish councils
- maintaining current Blue Cards
- basic training

The areas of improvement need to be:

- ❖ screening interviews
- ❖ Registers of Volunteers
- ❖ Annual Wellbeing Check-ins

Lynde Davy has acknowledged that congregations and parishes will need more time to “get into the habit” of these newer practices. Therefore we are encouraged to keep working towards 100% compliance. I suggest that each congregation/parish maintain their current practices and then choose to work on/introduce one new practice over the next six months. For example, a congregation may already have adopted the Safe Church policy and have gone online with the Blue Card portal. In the next six months that congregation may start a Register of Volunteers.

Lots of training will be required this year. It seems that many completed training in 2021 and so the two year renewal falls due again this year. Getting everyone through the “next batch of training” may be the obvious goal for a congregation/parish to achieve in the next six months.

Frustration with all this “stuff” is widespread. Complaints and concerns include:

- Unclear, confusing requirements.
- Complexity of the system.
- Unnecessary repetition in documentation.
- Frequent changes to policies.
- High workload.
- Impersonal approach and practices.
- Requirements deterring people from volunteering.
- Poor performing platforms.

These concerns have been communicated to the folk in our Synod offices. They are very aware of these complaints and they are working to improve the whole lot from reviewing requirements to consolidating policies to making edUCate more user-friendly. We hope to see improvements later this year.

Safe Church policies and practices can be overwhelming and confusing. But in the end, Safe Church comes back to the foundational principle of due diligence. Whilst we are being asked to fill in many forms and follow many processes, what really counts is due diligence and proof thereof. The authorities will ask, “Did you think about this? Did you take steps to manage that? And can you show me the documented evidence?” It’s important to remember that the forms and processes are tools that help us attain the principle. There is a risk that when confronted with the overwhelming

requirements of safe church policy, our focus will be on filling out the correct form rather than on the greater need of taking due care of the people in our congregations and parishes.

I remain available to help individuals, congregations and parishes to navigate Safe Church requirements.

Recommendations

1. That the report be received.
2. That all presbytery delegates communicate the following message to their home churches:
 - a. Safe Church practises are necessary and important.
 - b. Across our district, we are doing well; our efforts are recognised and appreciated.
 - c. We all need to keep progressing towards 100% compliance.
 - d. The Synod offices know about the difficulties of the system and they are working to improve all of it.

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If you have questions, please email before the meeting.