
Royal Commission Synod Task Group

Chairperson
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Members

Robert Watson
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Resource People

While the genesis of this Task Group was born out of the establishment of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, it also has very much

embraced the need to ensure the Uniting Church is a safe church for children and other vulnerable people.

I. NATIONAL TASK GROUP

On 1 February 2016, the Rev Allan Thompson, retired from the position of Executive Officer of the National Task Group and the Rev John Cox replaced him in the role.

The National Committee meets every two months and occasionally has a Redress Implementation Group meet in between. As the Chairperson of the Synod Task Group, Robert Watson represents the WA Synod on both groups.

Since the last Synod Report in 2015, the Assembly has made two major decisions in this area:

1. The creation of a National Framework for Interim Redress Measures (NFIRM) to provide its institutions with guidance in adopting the final recommendations of the Royal Commission's 'Redress and Civil Litigation Report'. It envisaged that it would provide a process which ensured provision of equal access and equal treatment for survivors, regardless of the location, operator, type, continued existence or assets of the Church and its institution in which they were abused.

At the July 2016 ASC meeting, they recognised the difficulties being faced by Synods with different structures, different forms of incorporation and different state laws. The ASC agreed to having a disclaimer placed at the front of NFIRM

policy document. It reads as follows:

This document represents our commitment to redress as identified by Royal Commission in its Redress and Civil Litigation report, August 2015. We identify and acknowledge that circumstances are constantly changing and implementation of a redress scheme, in the form it was proposed by the Royal Commission, is looking unlikely. In this changing environment the Uniting Church remains committed to making redress possible within the environment in which we exist. Where that environment requires us to respond differently to this framework, our response will continue to be governed by our commitment to being survivor focussed; open and accessible; individualised; and personal (where that is appropriate).

This has been of great assistance to our Synod Task Group.

2. The adoption of a National Child Safe Policy Framework for the whole church. This has been circulated to congregations, agencies and schools. Congregations are being offered Safe Church training and all are very much encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities.



2. SYNOD TASK GROUP

The Synod Task Group meets every two months, or more frequently when required. Work is also carried out external of the formal

meetings by sub-groups and the great work of Cindy Gorton and Maree Kemp.

3. ENGAGEMENT WITH GROUPS

Being very aware of cultural sensitivities, the Task Group is seeking tailored approaches to:

- Agencies including Congregational Community Service Commission
- Congregations

- Congress
- The different cultural congregations
- Schools

It is clear no group is exempt from this work and must find ways of addressing the issues raised.

4. NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTERIM REDRESS MEASURES

The NFIRM policy document was fully adopted by the General Council at its June 2016 meeting. Decisions are still to made around:

- how we ensure there is no 'wrong' door for survivors and training of personnel
- finalise a process for each section of our church (ie. agencies, schools, congregations etc)

- establishing an independent panel
- determining a matrix for redress and a number of other important factors.

The WA Synod has a number of jurisdictional factors, including our own Act, that impacts on our response.

5. ACTUARIAL ANALYSIS

Work has commenced between the Resources Board and the Task Group on carrying out an actuarial analysis based on potential cases of

redress, bearing in mind what may occur if the Statutes of Limitation legislation changes in WA as it has in some other states.

6. AUDIT AND COMPLIANCE

All Synods are required by the Assembly to regularly complete an Audit & Compliance Report.

Last year we commenced developing an annual compliance reporting scheme for all the entities that are part of the Uniting Church in WA. This will continue.

7. RECENT AREAS OF CONSIDERATION

The Task Group members have recently met with representatives of the Directorate responsible for Working With Children checks and cards. This was to ensure the WA Synod is meeting the requirements of the local legislation and in tune with the processes.

Consideration is commencing on determining how and post 2017 structures may look for the Uniting Church once the Royal Commission submits its final report.

Work is also being undertaken to try to align our entities information and record sharing in this area.

Robert Watson
Chairperson

