



PROPOSAL 7

PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION

Proposal:

That the Synod:

- 1) Remind all “ministers” (as defined by the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, July 2009) that the Code requires them to have regular professional supervision;
- 2) Recognise recommendation 16.45 from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse as a guiding principle for professional supervision;
- 3) Encourage each “minister” to develop a covenant (see appendix) with their professional supervisor;
- 4) Require that all “ministers” inform their presbytery, school, and/or agency of their professional supervision arrangements with a supervisor who:
 - a) is accredited through an appropriate professional association;
 - b) is covered by professional indemnity insurance; and
 - c) is not in active ministry within their same presbytery, school, or agency;
- 5) Strongly encourage each presbytery, congregation, agency, and school to assist their “ministers” with the financial burden of professional supervision, and acknowledge its own responsibility for “ministers” working directly for the Synod;
- 6) Require that each presbytery, agency, and school annually inform the Synod Culture of Safety Unit of the professional supervision arrangements of their “ministers”;
- 7) Set the meeting of Synod, 2024 as the date by which the Synod expects compliance to these requirements by each presbytery, school, and agency and its “ministers”;
- 8) Authorise the General Secretary to make allowances for exceptional circumstances to these requirements;

- 9) Request that the Presbytery of WA determine a process to offer information to any “minister” within the Synod in seeking a suitable professional supervisor; and
- 10) Bring a proposal to the UCA Assembly meeting in 2024 to provide a national standard for professional supervision to meet the standards from Recommendation 16.45 from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

11) Review the criteria for the classification of “active retired” ministers in light of the demands of professional compliance of those in active ministry

Rationale

Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice (Para 3.9(d)): *Ministers have a responsibility to ensure that they receive regular professional supervision.*

Recommendation 16.45 from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: *Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should ensure that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, have professional supervision with a trained professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of independence from the institution within which the person is in ministry.*

For over twenty years, the UCA Assembly has encouraged its ordained ministers to have supervision, and for over ten years, the Assembly has decreed that ordained ministers and pastors are required to have professional supervision. The Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice defines professional supervision in quite broad terms as “*the relationship Ministers have with another professional whereby the Minister is assisted to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of ministry, including competencies, time management, priorities and any difficulties arising in ministry.*” (Para 3.9). The Assembly also offers guidelines for what makes for good supervision as well as offering a template for the covenant between minister and supervisor (see appendix).

However, since the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the recommendations around professional supervision for those in “religious or pastoral ministry” have become more stringent. In this proposal, we have used the term “minister” as a catch-all phrase as defined by the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice: *In this Code, “Minister” refers to Candidates, Community Ministers, Deacons, Deaconesses,*

Interns, Lay Pastors, Ministers of the Word, Pastors, Youth Workers, and Ministers from another denomination serving in an approved placement.

This proposal seeks to meet three distinct demands from Recommendation 16.45 from the Royal Commission, highlighted in bold. *Consistent with Child Safe Standard 5, each religious institution should **ensure** that all people in religious or pastoral ministry, including religious leaders, have professional supervision with a **trained** professional or pastoral supervisor who has a degree of **independence** from the institution within which the person is in ministry.*

ensure

Currently, the UCA Synod of WA has no structure for ensuring that its “ministers” have professional supervision. We believe that the best way for this to happen is for the Synod Culture of Safety Unit to be informed of all supervision arrangements by the Presbytery for each active ordained minister and pastor within the Presbytery which includes all active UCA ministers within WA; and likewise by the agencies and schools for each “minister” within their oversight.

There will obviously be some overlap for some ministers. For example, an ordained UCA minister working as a chaplain at a Uniting Church school is a “minister” within the Presbytery and within the school at the same time. In that situation, the “minister” should report their supervision arrangements to both the school and the Presbytery, and both the Presbytery and the school would be obliged to report that minister’s supervision arrangements to the Culture of Safety Unit.

How this information is collected by each presbytery, school, or agency is best decided by that particular body. Therefore, we expect that there will need to be some work done by each of these bodies to ensure that this information is able to be collected and conveyed accordingly. In this, we also recognise the personal responsibility taken by each “minister” within the WA Synod to report this arrangement to their overseeing body.

trained

Currently there is no national standard for what makes a professional supervisor. Different synods and different denominations have different standards and, in some synods, this involves one synod staff member making case by case decisions.

Many professional supervisors have membership to a professional association, such as The Australasian Association of Supervision. Each of these associations has their own standards for professional supervisors.

For this proposal, we have decided not to dictate what constitutes “an appropriate professional association”, or to list particular associations. We believe that those operational fine details are best determined by the General Secretary through the Synod Standing Committee.

More importantly, it is essential for the sake of independence that it is not the UCA who is accrediting UCA supervisors for UCA ministers. By relying on accreditation from external associations, it gives UCA WA greater transparency and avoids any perceived conflict of interest.

independent

When there is a synod with only one presbytery, attaining a level of independence is difficult. However, the need for independence is clearly called for in Recommendation 16.45 and we should not shy away from it simply because it is difficult.

There are intrinsic problems with having a colleague as a supervisor. The potential for conflict of interest is immense. It puts minister and supervisor in a difficult situation when, for example, that minister wants to voice frustration about a mutual colleague within the confidentiality of supervision. Examples of this and other conflicts of interest have already occurred within the Presbytery when a minister has had a colleague as a supervisor.

However, we are also aware that there are already “ministers” who have supervisors who are interstate or even overseas with whom they connect via Zoom, and we have “ministers” in UCA WA who have supervisors from other denominations. We know that this is possible.

There are various associations where a “minister” can look for a supervisor who is not a colleague. Additionally, we believe that the Presbytery of WA (through the Presbytery Minister, Pastoral) is best placed to offer information to “ministers” seeking a new supervisor.

Some Questions

- **Who pays for my supervision?**

Each stipended minister and pastor has a special allowance within the stipend for personal resources and development, and many ministers pay for their supervision with this. Others have negotiated a shared payment arrangement with their placement. However, some “ministers” do not receive a stipend. For schools or

agencies with “ministers”, we would encourage including financial assistance for supervision as part of the employment package. We recognise that there are “ministers” within the Presbytery working in a voluntary capacity, especially active retired ministers. The Presbytery will have to determine how those retired ministers and other volunteer “ministers” are supported as they seek to continue to serve the church.

- **What if I’ve already trained to be a supervisor for other ministers?**

More and more, other synods and other denominations are looking beyond their own boundaries for supervisors. If a minister is keen to continue to be recognised and accredited as a professional supervisor through an external association, we believe that there will be demand for their services from other denominations of the church.

- **What about the person I’ve had as a supervisor for the last few years?**

We recognise that a level of trust has already been developed in covenantal supervision relationships, and that for those who are being asked to break those relationships to find a new supervisor, this will be difficult. However, there is no reason why this has to be an either/or situation. There is good reason to encourage pastoral networks and/or mentoring between ministerial colleagues. This is not the same as supervision, but it still of benefit. Rather than breaking these relationships, it might be that they could be reframed and redefined, while also obtaining an appropriate professional supervisor.

- **What about agency pastoral care coordinators?**

Recommendation 16.45 refers to *all people in religious or pastoral ministry*. While this proposal doesn’t specifically address people employed by agencies as chaplains or pastoral care coordinators, we believe that they do reasonably fall under this definition. In the past, professional supervision has been an issue mostly dealt with by the Presbytery, however this is an issue which affects the whole Synod: presbytery, schools, and agencies.

- **Why do we need a proposal to Assembly?**

In researching supervision across the country, we have discovered that there is little uniformity around the requirements, standards, and accreditation for supervision. It is also clear that many related documents are now out of date. One small example is the definition of “minister” including some ministries which no longer exist. This whole process is being addressed in each synod with little guidance from the Assembly.

Mover: Ivan Clark, Professional Supervision Working Group
Seconder: Cindy Gorton, Executive Officer - Culture of Safety