



Lutheran Church  
of Australia

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# SAFE PLACE

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## Policy

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Responding to sexual abuse  
and sexual harassment by paid  
and voluntary Church Workers

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## THE LCA SAFE PLACE POLICY

### WHAT THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA (LCA) SAYS ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT

When we are participating with our Church family we would like to think that our physical, emotional and spiritual safety is assured because of the very nature of our beliefs. In a perfect world this would be the case, but history has demonstrated that the Church is a place of grace and not of perfect morality. Although we emphasise worship, healing and love, we are also aware that we are part of a society where sexual abuse and sexual harassment do occur. In this respect the very nature of our Church may make it a target for predators.

The term *A Safe Place* has been adopted to cover the LCA District and National Committees, Policies and Procedures. The name reflects the Church's aspiration that we should be a safe place for all, where the grace of God is active and where healing can occur when a wrong has been committed.

### **THE LCA CLEARLY STATES THAT SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT ARE UNACCEPTABLE.**

#### POLICY STATEMENT

Sexual abuse or sexual harassment by people in positions of trust has a destructive impact on other people's lives. Such abuse and harassment is totally unacceptable to the LCA.

In observing Christ's command to love one another we are to treat each other with respect and dignity. In honouring people, we are fulfilling our responsibility under the law of the land. The LCA is committed to implementing processes to ensure the Church is a safe place.

The LCA is committed to hearing and responding to people who feel that they have been subjected to sexual abuse and sexual harassment in any form.

Those who hold positions of trust in the Church are called to guard with great care the trust placed in them. They have an absolute responsibility to avoid all forms of sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

#### THE INTENTION OF THIS POLICY

In observing Christ's command to love one another we treat our community with respect and dignity. In honouring people, we fulfil our responsibility under the law of the land.

The LCA is committed to ensuring the Church is a safe place. For this reason it wants to hear and respond to those who feel that they may have been subjected to sexual abuse or sexual harassment. It recognises that this can be an area where mandatory reporting to government authorities may be required, as in Schools or Aged Care Facilities. It is important that we work together as Christian sisters and brothers to settle our differences and resolve issues on the basis of Biblical principles.

It should be noted that even where legislation around mandatory reporting exists the Church can play a role in the reconciliation of those affected by sexual abuse or sexual harassment.

The LCA framework is in three parts; to require mandatory Police or criminal checks for those in leadership positions, to develop an educational awareness program and to establish a process for the notification and management of complaints. It is anticipated that these processes will assist Church members to respond with justice, compassion, and awareness to the needs of all parties involved.

The LCA expects that its Safe Place Policy will be known throughout the Church because it provides a blueprint for creating a safe place for our community and an avenue for notification and redress for wrongs that may be perpetrated. For this reason every Pastor and Congregational office must have copies of all the necessary documentation, and must ensure the availability of brochures and materials for Church members. It is the responsibility of Pastors and Congregational leaders to ensure that the Policy and Procedures are known, understood and utilised in all cases where allegations of sexual abuse or sexual harassment are made.

Church members are encouraged to report if they believe sexual abuse or sexual harassment has occurred, recognising that confidentiality will always be respected.

### **WHAT AREAS ARE COVERED**

This Policy and Procedures only covers the areas of sexual abuse and sexual harassment related to adults. However there are similar policies that cover children (*Child Safe*) and the LCA is developing a process for the reporting of general bullying, harassment and professional misconduct involving Leaders of the Church.

### **A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

For Lutherans, the Safe Place Policy is based on the understanding that we are part of the fellowship of God's baptised people in Jesus Christ. As part of the Body of Christ, we are a community which we know is loved and forgiven. In this community we commit to serve each other in love, and to serve in particular, in relation to this Safe Place Policy, those who have been abused by others within the family of God and who as a result of this abuse are fragile, vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed. In essence we witness to God's provision for peace and wholeness in the world.

The Safe Place Policy recognises that within our Christian community every person is at the same time *saint* and *sinner*. This means that our community includes those who may violate and oppress others through an abusive use of power, as well as those who have been sinned against, hurt and violated.

It is important that we, as God's people take sin seriously and properly use Law and Gospel to deal with it. This means that through the Law we name and condemn sin, but through the Gospel we encourage a sincere desire for forgiveness and reconciliation. By naming and condemning the sin, we also recognise the seriousness of the abuse and its impact on the Victim. It is our hope and desire that the application of law and gospel will result in the healing of hurt and the restoration of broken relationships.

Pastoral care is fundamental to the Safe Place Policy because the person who is sinned against (the Victim) must be offered acknowledgement of their hurt and the injustice which they have experienced and support, understanding, care and counselling to allow for healing and reconciliation. On the other hand the sinner (the Perpetrator) needs to be cared for in a way that provides for truthful confrontation, support, counselling and mercy, with a view to achieving repentant change, healing and reconciliation.

This process challenges society's normal notions of justice, which are framed in the language of punishment, retribution, vengeance, and which we as Christian people may be tempted to pursue. However it is imperative that the way we practice justice recognises justice under the cross of Jesus Christ, and is based instead in the concepts of mercy and restorative justice.

As Lutherans we understand that under God's so-called 'left hand' through which God maintains peace and good order in society, we are all subject to the laws of the land and face the likelihood of prosecution, arrest and conviction for abuse perpetrated against others. If the sins committed are of such significance that one of our members faces the full force of the law we must, never the less, be committed to provide Pastoral care and support with the hope of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The *Safe Place Policy* is not a legal document, nor a moral prescriptive. It is a way of providing mechanisms and procedures, based on the Word of God, by which we can work through painful and serious matters. It provides for the care and support of the Victim and the attempt to address the hurt and injustice which they may have experienced and to reach reconciliation within the family of God. Ultimately, all such matters are encapsulated in our worship life especially within the practice of confession and absolution.

#### **EXTENT OF THE POLICY**

It is intended for Congregations, businesses related to, and auxiliaries of the Church. This includes Pastors, committee members, other staff and volunteers. The Safe Place Policy and Procedures cover predominately adult to adult abuse. They apply within the LCA and the Lutheran Church of New Zealand.

#### **DEFINITIONS**

##### **Police or criminal checks:**

Means a Police Check or in those States where these are not able to be obtained a criminal check approved by the LCA

##### **Church Leaders:**

Are people who guide or lead others, and who hold a position of trust within the LCA.