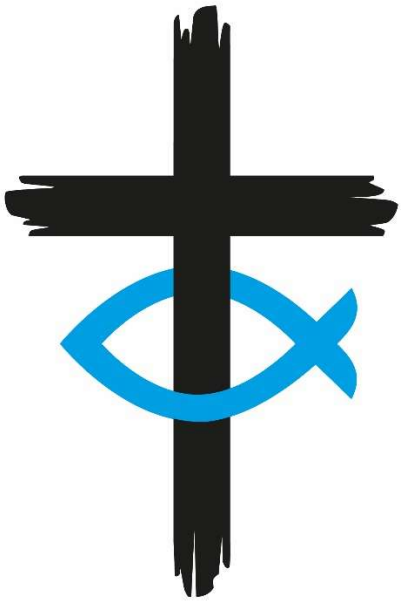


The United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland

Synod and Synod Trust Safeguarding policy

National Synod of Scotland (SC011907)
The United Reformed Church (Synod of Scotland) Nominees Ltd. (SC014889)

Safeguarding policy

1. Aims and purpose of this policy

The aim of this policy is to promote and highlight safeguarding, prevent abuse, provide support to the survivors of abuse and protect all vulnerable people (both children and adults) at Synod level, and in the work the Synod carries out for local churches. This ensures that we have clear procedures for taking appropriate action following the raising of safeguarding concerns involving children or adults within our Synod, or those who attend our activities and events. It also ensures that there is an understanding within the Synod and its local churches of safeguarding issues and to seek assurance that appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place within its local churches.

Safeguarding is integral to the mission of the United Reformed Church and a part of its response and witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ. Safeguarding is underpinned by Jesus' command to his followers to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34-35). Because Jesus' ministry is continued in and through the Church, it is our call to 'to live out, in joyful and sacrificial service to all … that ministry of caring, forgiving and healing love which Jesus Christ brought to all whom he met' (The Manual A11). As such, we, the National Synod of Scotland of the URC, aspire to be a loving community, offering a welcoming environment in which people can flourish, safe from harm.

The policy should be read in line with the URC's Good Practice Guidance and resources which can be found at https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/649d47579472557ec9fdcf6d/6aeb46fd9ad626d27df2143a_Good%20Practice%206%20-%20Scotland.pdf

2. Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to both the National Synod of Scotland (SC011907) and to The United Reformed Church (Synod of Scotland) Nominees Ltd. (SC014889) Trust Ltd. Where the term ' National Synod of Scotland' is used within this policy, it refers also to the Synod Trust. It is therefore relevant to Synod trustees, paid Synod staff, volunteers and those who supervise them. It is also helpful as guidance to local churches within the Synod, as it clarifies the relationship between churches and the Synod relating to safeguarding, as well as the responsibility that the Synod has to both support and monitor the safeguarding practice within local churches.

3. Definitions

The National Synod of Scotland is the regional administrative grouping of United Reformed Churches across Scotland. There are 36 churches in this grouping. A small team of staff support the functioning and ministry of these churches. The United Reformed Church (Synod of Scotland) Nominees Ltd. is a Charitable Trust and accountable Synod body. It oversees financial governance and probity of the Synod, employs Synod staff and ensures that the Synod is complying with Charity Law and carrying out its responsibilities appropriately and in the public interest. Safeguarding is an important aspect of these responsibilities.

Children includes anyone aged under 18 years. The Children Act 2004 (section 11) places a duty on a range of organisations to have in place arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Details of the arrangements required are set out in Chapter 2 of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children' (HM Government 2023) and this includes specific reference to the need for faith-based organisations to have procedures in place.

Adults at risk means any person aged 16 or over who meets all of the following criteria,

- they are unable to safeguard their own well-being, property, rights or other interests;
- they are at risk of harm; **and**
- because they are affected by disability, mental disorder, illness or physical or mental infirmity they are more vulnerable to being harmed than adults who are not so affected.

(Adult support protection Scotland Act 2007 Section 3.1)

4. Statement of safeguarding principles

Safeguarding is taken seriously by the National Synod of Scotland and Nominees. We believe that children and adults have a right to live in a way that does not cause them harm or impede their human rights and we support the URC's denominational Safeguarding Statement which can be found at https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Paper-T4-SAG-Safeguarding-Policy-Statement.pdf

We therefore acknowledge their right to protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs. We will follow legislation, statutory guidance and recognised good practice. We believe that domestic abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and inconsistent with a Christian way of living.

Within the Synod we will:

- encourage good practice in safeguarding in local churches within the Synod.
- seek to establish a caring environment in which there is an informed vigilance about the dangers of abuse.
- Enter into a SLA with the Church of Scotland to advise churches and Synod on issues of safeguarding, whilst recognising that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- organise Synod activities in such a way as to promote a safe environment and minimise the risk of harm to children and adults.
- follow a safer recruitment process for the selection and appointment of people to work with children or adults at risk, whether voluntary or paid, lay or ordained.
- provide appropriate support and supervision, resources and training, to those who work with children and adults.
- use rigorous and careful supervision to protect people from the risks associated with known offenders within the Synod.

All concerns and allegations of abuse will be responded to appropriately, including referring to the Police and Social Work if necessary, either Adult or Children's. We will co-operate with the Police, Children's and Adult's Services in any investigation, will follow multi agency decisions and will maintain confidentiality of any investigations to those directly involved.

All concerns or allegations concerning Synod activities, staff or volunteers should be addressed to The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service. (tel 0131 240 2256)

5. Duty of care and confidentiality

We have a duty of care to beneficiaries of the Synod, either adults or children. We will maintain confidentiality except in circumstances where to do so would place the individual or another individual at risk of harm.

6. Promoting and monitoring safeguarding in local churches

General Assembly 2021 passed resolutions to make additions to the structure which included:

Functions of Synod:

a) to appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer or equivalent.
b) to have oversight of, and to support, monitor and report safeguarding related activities and issues within local churches, and amongst ministers, officers and staff of the Synod.
c) to take all necessary powers and actions positively to promote implementation of good practice in accordance with the safeguarding policy statement adopted by the General Assembly.
d) to adopt best safeguarding practice for all its own activities and events.

Addition to rules of procedure for Synod:

a) to appoint a Synod Safeguarding Officer or equivalent with the necessary experience, qualifications and current knowledge.
b) to arrange for safeguarding training as appropriate.
c) to collate church safeguarding returns and forward them to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will be available to offer advice and support to local churches on safeguarding concerns. The Synod Safeguarding Administrator will be able to offer support and advice on accessing training, processing criminal record checks and completing annual safeguarding returns.

Where those who may present a risk to others are identified within local churches, the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will work with the church to draw up an appropriate agreement with all relevant parties.

The National Synod of Scotland will encourage all local churches to adopt and implement good practice policies for safeguarding children and adults, in line with the latest edition of the United Reformed Church's good practice guidelines. The rationale for encouraging all churches to do this is as follows:

- Churches actively working with children or adults should do this in order to safeguard the vulnerable, reassure parents / carers and partner organisations, and protect leaders from false allegations.
- Churches not currently working with children should still be prepared with a policy so that they are ready as and when children get involved in the church.
- In order to keep up the reputation of the National Synod of Scotland and United Reformed Church as a whole, and therefore its member churches, the National Synod of Scotland is a body which takes safeguarding seriously and is seen to do so.
- To implement relevant General Assembly Resolutions.

The National Synod of Scotland will publicise safeguarding training opportunities, offered through the Church of Scotland, to those in local churches who work with children or adults around the Synod, encouraging them to undertake safeguarding training every three years. Ministers will complete safeguarding training every three years to at least Leadership level. All training will be in line with URC training matrix adopted at General Assembly July 2025.

Safeguarding good practice in local churches and the Synod will be monitored. This will be carried out by the Synod Safeguarding Administrator and overseen by the Synod Moderator and reported to the Synod Executive and Synod Trust meetings. Churches will be asked to complete an Annual Church Safeguarding Return.
Once the returns have been collated, a report will be provided to the Nominees and Synod Executive to consider the findings and agree what action needs to be taken.

7. Preventing abuse and harm in Synod events and activities

Activities will be organised in accordance with URC good practice guidelines so as to promote a safe environment and healthy relationships whilst minimising opportunities for harm and misunderstanding or false accusation. For each event, risk assessments will be carried out, appropriate consent forms will be used for activities with children and young people, appropriate records will be kept (see URC Record Keeping policy for further details, available from Synod office), and adequate insurance will be in place for each event.

We are committed to safer recruitment and appointment of all paid staff and volunteers and will ensure that these procedures are followed, which include:

- asking applicants to complete an application form
- providing workers with role/job descriptions and person specifications
- obtaining criminal record checks where legally entitled to do so
- taking up two references (not family) and
- interviewing candidates.

Training in safeguarding will be provided and volunteers and paid staff will be given support related to safeguarding in their role by the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service.

All trustees, paid staff and volunteers will agree to work within a Code of Conduct (see *Good Practice 6*) and understand that there may be action taken if this code is not followed, possibly involving suspension or termination of working/volunteering with us.

Synod staff and volunteers communicating with children and young people online (eg through social media or use of video calls) as part of Synod initiatives (such as Synod Youth Exec) should comply with the guidelines set out in *Good Practice 6*.

8. Recognising and responding to concerns of abuse

What are we protecting from?
The definitions of abuse differ between children and adults. A copy of the definitions relating to children and adults can be found in *Good Practice 6*.

How to recognise abuse
It is important to be aware of possible signs and symptoms of abuse. A list of such possible signs and symptoms in relation to children and in adults can be found in *Good Practice 6*. Some signs could be indicators of a number of different categories.

It is essential to note that these are only indicators of possible abuse. There may be other, innocent, reasons for any of these signs and/or behaviour. They will, however, be a guide to assist in assessing whether abuse of one form or another is a possible explanation for a child or adult's behaviour or appearance.

What to do if a worker notices indicators of possible abuse?
If indicators of possible abuse give cause for concern, then the worker should inform the person

responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service directly. **Do not discuss with anybody else.**

Make a **written** record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and **sign and date** this record and pass this onto the person responsible for safeguarding at the event, who will liaise with the Church of Scotland personnel to decide what action needs to be taken. Resource F1 from *Good Practice 6* provides a template for recording concerns

If any of the Synod personnel are implicated in the allegation, refer to the Synod Moderator in addition to the Church of Scotland safeguarding service. In the case of the Synod Moderator being implicated, refer to the General Secretary of the URC at the Offices of the General Assembly.

What to do if there is a disclosure or allegation of abuse
If a child or an adult makes a disclosure that they are being abused and/or an allegation of abuse against someone, it is important that the person being told:

- stays calm and listens carefully
- reassures them that they have done the right thing in telling you
- does not investigate or ask leading questions
- does not promise to keep secret what they have been told
- explains that they will need to tell someone else.

Inform the person responsible for safeguarding at the event as soon as possible. This is often the leader in charge of an event. Alternatively inform the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service directly. **Do not discuss with anybody else.**

Make a **written** record of the allegation, disclosure or incident and **sign and date** this record and pass this onto the person responsible for safeguarding at the event, who will liaise with the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service to decide what action needs to be taken. Resource F1 from *Good Practice 6* provides a template for recording concerns.

If any of the Synod personnel are implicated in the allegation, refer to the Synod Moderator in addition to the Church of Scotland safeguarding service. In the case of the Synod Moderator being implicated, refer to the General Secretary of the URC at the Offices of the General Assembly.

Procedure in the event of a concern
If there is an immediate threat of harm, the police should be contacted.

Where it is judged that there is no immediate threat of harm the following will occur:

- The concern will be discussed with the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service and a decision made as to whether the concern warrants a referral to statutory agencies.
- A confidential record will be made of the observations and/or conversation and the surrounding circumstances. This record will be kept securely by the Church of Scotland and be made available to the Synod Safeguarding Administrative Assistant for logging to the URC case management system. A copy will be passed to statutory agencies if a referral is made.
- The person about whom the allegation has been made must not be informed by anyone in the Synod if it is judged that to do so would place a child or adult at increased risk of further harm.

Who to contact in the case of a concern
Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service Tel. 0131 240 2256

If someone working on behalf of the Synod (paid or volunteer) is alleged or known to have harmed children or adults
The matter should be referred to the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service. The Safeguarding Service will advise about when to inform the member of staff or volunteer. The timing and method will be discussed and agreed with the Church of Safeguarding Service and the Synod should follow this decision.

The Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service will inform the Moderator, who will then contact relevant Synod staff and the safeguarding coordinator of the local church to which that person belongs and advise on the implications for that person's involvement with children or adults at risk in the local church and in Synod activities, both during any investigation and following the outcome of any investigation. Information will be shared on a strictly 'need to know' basis.

In accordance with the law, a referral will be made to Disclosure Scotland if the church withdraws permission for an individual to engage in a Regulated Role, or would have done so had that individual not resigned, retired, been made redundant or been transferred to a position which did not involve a regulated role because the employer believes that the individual has engaged in relevant conduct or satisfied the harm test or has committed an offence that would lead to automatic inclusion on a barred list.

As a registered charity, the Synod is required to notify OSCR of any safeguarding serious incidents.

Sources of advice, guidance, and support to Synod
United Reformed Church Safeguarding Team:
Tel. 0207 520 2729
Email: **safeguarding@urc.org.uk**

9. Complaints

Should anyone have any concerns or complaints about safeguarding in the Synod, please contact the Synod Moderator:

Name: Revd Lindsey Sanderson

Synod Office: 3/2 Atlantic Chambers, 45 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 6AE

Telephone: 0141 248 5382 / 07960 453734

Email: moderator@urcscotland.org.uk

It would be preferable to have complaints in writing, as this avoids any possible misunderstanding about what the issue is. However, whether verbal or in writing, complaints will be acted upon.

If your complaint concerns the Synod Moderator then please contact the General Secretary

Name: Revd Dr John Bradbury

Offices of General Assembly: 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT

Tel 0209 716 2020

Email: john.bradbury@urc.org.uk

10. Review

This policy should be reviewed annually by the Synod and the Nominees amending and updating it as required in the light of such changes as: Synod safeguarding personnel and contact details; changes to URC Good Practice guidance; changes to statutory safeguarding requirements; changes to procedure arising from review of safeguarding cases.

Date of most recent review: November 2026

Date of next review: November 2027

Signed: *Susan Henderson* (on behalf of Synod)

Role: Convener of Synod Executive

Signed: *Robert Christie* *(on behalf of the Nominees)*

Role: Chair of Trustees

Safeguarding Office, The United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT