



# The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

## Compliments, Concerns and Complaints (3Cs) Guidelines

**A guide for people with disability and those  
who receive feedback in our church  
community.**

**This document has three parts:**

**PART A** | Shared Foundation – applies to everyone.

**PART B** | For People with Disability – your rights and how to give feedback.

**PART C** | For Feedback Receivers – how to provide inclusive and accessible feedback and complaint handling.

### Table of Contents

Navigation instructions:

Mouse: Ctrl + Click on any entry to jump to that section.

Keyboard users: Press Tab or arrow keys to move to a table of content entry, then press Enter to jump to that heading.

<b>PART A Shared Foundation</b> .....	2
<b>1. Purpose</b> .....	2
<b>2. Scope</b> .....	3
<b>3. Core Values</b> .....	3
<b>4. Key Terms</b> .....	4
<b>PART B For People with Disability</b> .....	5
<b>5. Your Rights</b> .....	6



- 6. What Can You Tell Us? ..... 6
- 7. How to Share Your Feedback ..... 6
- 8. Communication Supports and Adjustments ..... 7
- 9. What Happens After You Share Feedback? ..... 7
- 10. Confidentiality and Anonymous feedback ..... 8
- 11. External agencies ..... 9
- PART C For Feedback Receivers..... 10**
- 12. Roles and responsibilities ..... 10
- 13. Escalation Pathway ..... 11
- 14. Before you Begin ..... 11
- 15. Step-by-step process ..... 13
- 16. Meeting and Communication Tips ..... 15
- 17. Confidentiality ..... 16
- 18. Continuous Improvement..... 16
- 19. Related Documents ..... 17
- Attachment 1: Feedback and Complaint Form ..... 18**

# PART A Shared Foundation

This section applies to everyone.

## 1. Purpose

The Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania is committed to making sure everyone can take part safely in worship, events, activities, and services.

We want our church to be a place where all people feel welcome, heard, and included, including people with disability.

These guidelines explain how to share a *compliment*, raise a *concern*, or make a *complaint*. They also guide how the Church responds.



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

This document puts into action the second Overarching Principle approved by the Assembly in July 2024, **Access to adequate complaints resolution process and institutional safety**, which helped guide [the Uniting Church's response to the Disability Royal Commission](#). It also follows the Assembly Statement of Access and Welcome, which was adopted at the Church's 15th Assembly in 2018 [Statement of Access and Welcome – Uniting Church Australia](#).

## 2. Scope

**These guidelines apply to:**

All people within the bounds of the Synod conducting activities as part of the ministries of Uniting Church Congregations and Faith Communities, Presbyteries, Synod Meeting and the Synod Ministries and Operations. This includes ministry agents, leaders, staff, volunteers, congregation members, visitors, and participants in activities hosted by the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

**These guidelines do NOT apply to** reportable conduct. Visit the Synod Safe Church website for guidance and reporting resources.

[Safe Church – Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania](#)

If you are unsure whether a particular situation falls within the scope of these guidelines, please contact the Synod Safe Church team at [cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au](mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au) or call (03) 9116 1400.

## 3. Core Values

### **Inclusive feedback and complaints process**

The Church aims to ensure everyone can have their feedback or complaint heard and find fair solutions that consider the different needs of both the person making the complaint and the person responding. The Church commits to timely responses and regular updates on progress.

### **Culturally safe and respectful engagement**

The Church recognises and respects the diverse cultural backgrounds of people with disability, including intersections of faith, identity, values, and traditions. First Peoples perspectives and different cultural voices are actively invited and heard.



People's dignity and privacy will be respected, and personal experiences and past trauma handled with care.

## Accessibility

These guidelines will be available in Easy English, with a feedback and complaint form (Attachment 1) and a Factsheet for people with disability.

## Rights and person-centred approach

The Church promotes and protects everyone's rights, safety, and wellbeing. A person-centred approach means genuinely seeking to understand and meet the individual needs of each person with disability, so that their perspective is heard and considered in how every matter is resolved.

## 4. Key Terms

Term	Definition
<b>Adjustments</b>	Changes or supports put in place to make sure people with disability can give feedback, raise concerns, or make complaints in a fair and accessible way. Examples include large print, Braille, interpreters, communication boards or allowing extra time.
<b>Feedback</b>	When people share their thoughts, opinions, ideas, or worries. It can be a suggestion, a comment, or a concern about how things are done. Everyone who gives feedback will receive a response.
<b>Compliment</b>	Feedback about something that was done well. For example, feeling welcomed and included in Sunday worship. Compliments can relate to a person, group, activity, event, or the church's work generally. This kind of feedback is encouraged because it supports a welcoming environment and encourages continued good practice.
<b>Concern / Issue</b>	Feedback about a situation, action or attitude that makes it harder for someone to take part because of how their disability is seen or treated. Concerns give a chance to improve how the Church responds so it does not grow to become a formal Complaint.

Term	Definition
<b>Complaint</b>	If a Concern is not adequately resolved, or to the person's satisfaction, or is a significant matter, our formal complaints process is followed.
<b>Complainant</b>	The person who has made a complaint.
<b>Respondent</b>	The person or group the complaint is about.
<b>Support Person</b>	A family member, friend, carer, advocate, or other trusted person who helps someone give feedback, raise a concern, or make a complaint. A support person can attend meetings, assist with communication, and help throughout the process. Both the person making the complaint and the person the complaint is about may bring a support person to any meeting or discussion.
<b>Communication Support</b>	Assistance that helps a person communicate in their preferred way. Examples include Auslan interpreters, communication boards, Easy English documents, AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) devices, and support persons.
<b>Leader</b>	A person formally authorised by a council of the Church to hold a position of trust, responsibility, or spiritual oversight.
<b>Safe Church Person</b>	A person in the congregation who helps make sure the church is a safe place for everyone. They are the main contact for safety concerns and complaints.
<b>Complaints Officer</b>	A designated person in the Synod responsible for receiving, managing, and coordinating the investigation of complaints, and for ensuring complainants are kept informed throughout the process.
<b>Councils of the Church</b>	The groups responsible for making decisions and running the Church at different levels: the Church Council (local congregation), the Presbytery (regional group of congregations) and the Synod (state level).

## PART B For People with Disability

This section is written for you, a person with disability, or someone supporting a person with disability. It tells you about your rights and how to share a compliment, concern, or complaint.

## 5. Your Rights

You have the right to:

- Share a compliment, raise a concern, or make a complaint in a way that works for you.
- Have someone support you or speak on your behalf. They could be a representative, family member, friend, or advocate.
- Bring a support person to any meeting or discussion about your feedback or complaint.
- Use your preferred way of communicating.
- Receive responses in your preferred format and language.
- Have your privacy and confidentiality respected.
- Be treated with dignity and respect at all times.
- Have adjustments and communication supports arranged throughout the process.
- Know what is happening with your feedback and receive regular updates.
- Not be treated badly or disadvantaged for raising a concern or making a complaint.

## 6. What Can You Tell Us?

**Compliment** Something went well and you want to let us know - maybe you felt welcomed at a service or event. We love hearing this and it encourages everyone involved.

**Concern** Something made it harder for you to take part because of how your disability was seen or treated. Raising it early gives us a chance to fix things. A concern can be about how an event or activity was run, someone's behaviour, or a problem with another church member.

**Complaint** This is when your concern has not been fixed the way you expected, or something serious has happened. We will use a complaints process.

## 7. How to Share Your Feedback

There is no wrong way to get in touch. You can share your feedback in a method that best suits you:

1. In person – speak to a leader at a worship or activity.
2. In writing – send a letter.
3. By email – send an email.
4. By phone
5. By filling in the Feedback and Complaint Form (Attachment 1).
6. By scanning the QR Code displayed in the church for feedback (if available).

Your first point of contact is the Safe Church Person or designated contact at your local congregation. If you do not know who that is, or if you prefer to speak to someone else, any church leader can receive your feedback and ensure it is passed on.

If you need help putting your concern into words or filling in a form, please ask. We can write it down for you and read it back to make sure we have got it right.

## 8. Communication Supports and Adjustments

We know that people communicate in different ways. Tell us what works best for you. You may also have NDIS supports or equipment that can help. Please let us know and we will work with you.

If you use an interpreter or have a support person assist you, they are welcome to be involved throughout the process. We will make sure they understand their confidentiality responsibilities so that your personal information stays protected.

## 9. What Happens After You Share Feedback?

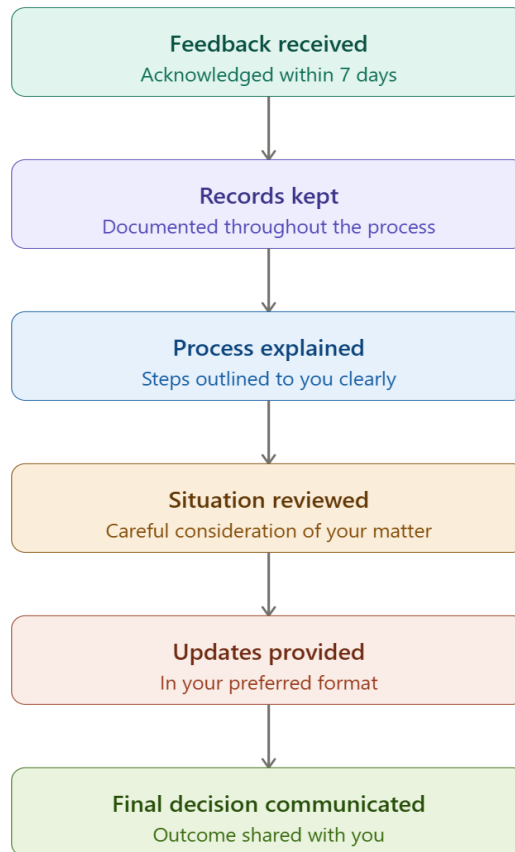
1. Your feedback will be acknowledged within 7 days where possible. We recognise that response times may vary depending on the size and location of your congregation, but you will always hear from us.
2. Records will be kept throughout the process.

If this is a concern or complaint

3. The steps involved will be explained to you.
4. The situation will be reviewed carefully.

5. Updates will be provided in your preferred format.
6. You will be informed of the final decision once it is made.

Figure 1. Steps flowchart.



Some matters can be resolved quickly and informally. Others may need more discussion or information. We will always keep you informed and will not make decisions without involving you.

## 10. Confidentiality and Anonymous feedback

### Confidentiality

Information you share may need to be passed to other people to investigate, take action or make a decision and we will inform you. Your information will be recorded and stored.



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SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Your personal information is kept private and safe.

We only use the information you share with us to help resolve your feedback or complaint. We only share it with people who need to know.

## Anonymous feedback

If you prefer not to give your name, we will respect your choice. Please know that staying anonymous may make it harder for us to investigate fully. It is also possible that details in your feedback could identify you even without your name.

We will record your concern and take every reasonable step to take action on it.

## 11. External agencies

We encourage people to try resolving concerns locally first or within the church, as many matters can be worked through with good communication and support.

If you are not satisfied with how your feedback or complaint has been handled, you can contact an external agency.

### National

**The Australian Human Rights Commission** handles complaints related to disability discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and helping resolve them through conciliation.

Web: [Australian Human Rights Commission](https://www.humanrights.gov.au)

Email: [infoservice@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:infoservice@humanrights.gov.au)

Phone: 1300 656 419

### Victoria

**Victoria Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission** handles issues under state law, specifically the Equal Opportunity Act 2010.

Web: [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission](https://www.veohrc.vic.gov.au)

Email: [complaints@veohrc.vic.gov.au](mailto:complaints@veohrc.vic.gov.au)

Phone: 1300 292 153

### Tasmania

**Anti-Discrimination Commissioner** manages complaints under state law for incidents within Tasmania.

Web: [Anti-Discrimination Commissioner](https://www.antidiscrimination.com.au)



## PART C For Feedback Receivers

This section is for Safe Church contact people, Church Council members, Presbytery leaders, Synod staff, and any other authorised Church leader responsible for receiving and responding to feedback and complaints.

Part C includes a step-by-step process for handling feedback and complaints.

### 12. Roles and responsibilities

All Councils of the Church share responsibility for receiving and responding to concerns and complaints. Feedback should be lodged with the body that has the appropriate governance responsibility and authority to address the matter. There is no 'wrong door.' Any Church representative can receive feedback and pass it to the Safe Church Person or designated contact.

Type	Lead Responsibility	Action
Compliment	Safe Church Person / designated contact	Share with Church Council (and the group or person involved); relay to Disability Inclusion Advocate as appropriate
Concern	Safe Church Person/ designated contact + Church Council	Work with person to resolve; notify Presbytery of concern and outcome
Complaint	Church Council + Presbytery + Synod Culture of Safety Unit	Formal investigation; pastoral support considered; in collaboration with Synod Culture of Safety Unit and Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committee involved. all affected parties will work towards the best outcome.

## 13. Escalation Pathway

If a **concern** or **complaint** is not resolved at one level, or if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, it should be escalated to the next level. The three levels are:

### Level 1 — Local (Congregation)

The Safe Church Person or designated contact at the local congregation is the first point of contact. They work with the Church Council to address concerns and complaints where possible and notify the Presbytery of any concerns and their outcomes.

### Level 2 — Presbytery

If the matter cannot be resolved at the local level, if the individual does not feel comfortable addressing it within the congregation, or if the issue falls outside the congregation's authority, it is referred to the Presbytery.

### Level 3 — Synod Safe Church Unit

If the matter is not resolved at Presbytery level, or involves a serious or systemic concern, it is referred to the Synod Safe Church Unit. This includes the **Safe Church Manager**, **Complaints Officer** who receives, manages, and coordinates the formal investigation process and the **Disability Inclusion Advocate** who provides advice to ensure that any individual access needs are appropriately supported.

At every level, the complainant is to be kept informed of progress, and the process explained clearly.

## 14. Before you Begin

### Identify communication needs.

Before anything else, ask the person how they prefer to communicate. Do not assume. Some people with disability use communication supports such as communication boards, AAC devices, Auslan interpreters, Easy English documents, or a support person. Their NDIS plan may also include communication supports or equipment – ask them if this applies.

Ask the following:

- How would you like to communicate with us? (phone, email, in person, video call, written)
- Would you like to bring a support person or advocate to any meetings?

- Do you need documents in a different format, such as large print, Easy English, or audio?
- Is there a particular time of day that works best for you?
- Do you need an interpreter or communication support?

Both the person making the feedback or complaint and the person the complaint is about may bring a support person to meetings. Make this clear to all parties from the beginning.

Always speak to the person, not to their support person.

If in doubt of anything – ask. It is always better to ask than to assume.

## **Be prepared – know your resources.**

As a feedback receiver, make sure you know how to:

- Arrange an Auslan interpreter.
- Use the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National – 131 450)
- Accept a complaint from a support person or third party on someone's behalf.
- Locate the Easy English version of these guidelines and the feedback form.
- Take a feedback or complaint via video call (Zoom, Teams or similar)
- Be prepared to receive calls and communicate through the National Relay Service (NRS), which supports people who are Deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment.
- Document a concern or complaint on someone's behalf and read it back to confirm accuracy.

## **Support Organisations & Services**

### **Braille Translation & Print Disability Services**

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[Vision Australia | Vision Australia. Blindness and low vision services](#)

### **Easy English & Easy Read**

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[Easy Read Service - Easy English Training by Scope Australia](#)

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[Easy Read - The Information Access Group | The Information Access Group](#)

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## Augmentative & Alternative Communication (AAC)

[Augmentative and Alternative Communication \(AAC\) \(speechpathologyaustralia.org.au\)](http://speechpathologyaustralia.org.au)

[Communication Boards – Access Ability Australia](#)

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## Auslan Interpreting

[Interpreting | Deaf Connect](#)

[Interpreting and captioning | Expression Australia](#)

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## For People Who Are Deaf or Have a Hearing or Speech Impairment

[The National Relay Service \(NRS\) | Access Hub](#)

[Help people who are d/Deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech communication difficulty contact my organisation | Access Hub](#)

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## Translating & Interpreting Service

[Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS National\)](#)

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# 15. Step-by-step process

## Step 1 Receive and acknowledge the feedback or complaint.

- Clarify why the complainant is concerned or dissatisfied.
- Find out what outcome they want.
- Let the complainant know that you have received their concern or complaint as soon as possible, and no later than seven (7) days after receiving the feedback.
- Explain what will happen next and the timeframe for resolution if possible.
- Ask how the person would like to receive updates.
- Confirm whether they need a support person and whether any adjustments are needed.

## Step 2 Keep records.

- Record the feedback or complaint and provide a simple reference so it can be easily tracked.
- Make sure the concern or complaint is recorded clearly and accurately. Sometimes this means writing down the person's exact words, so the issue is not changed, softened, or misunderstood.
- Keep all records in a safe and confidential place.

## Step 3 Explain the process.

Ensure the complainant understands the process that will be followed, including:

- Who will be handling their complaint.
- What steps will be taken and in what order.
- Expected timeframes for each stage.
- How they can contact you if they have questions or new information.

## Step 4 Review.

Determine what the feedback or complaint is about and clarify its complexity, severity, and urgency. Ask for help if you need it.

- Are there any risks you need to consider?
- Talk to the complainant to assist your assessment and gather more information if needed.

## Step 5 Provide updates.

- Keep the complainant informed throughout the process.
- Provide regular updates.
- Contact them in their preferred communication format.
- Advise them promptly if there are any delays or changes to the expected timeframe.

## Step 6 Notify the decision.

- Advise the complainant about the outcome, actions taken, reasons for the decision, and options for appeal.
- Make sure to record the outcome and any actions taken.
- Acknowledge when things go wrong and apologise to the complainant sincerely.

## 16. Meeting and Communication Tips

### Meeting accessibility

- Ensure the venue is physically accessible – check wheelchair access, accessible bathrooms, and clear pathways.
- Choose a quiet space with minimal distractions.
- Always speak directly to the person with disability, not to their support person or interpreter.
- Provide breaks if the conversation is long or emotionally difficult.
- Position yourself at eye level if the person uses a wheelchair.

### Communicating effectively

- If the person has a hearing impairment, face them directly, facial expressions and gestures help. Keep your hands away from your mouth when you speak.
- Use plain, simple language and short sentences, especially when speaking with someone with an intellectual or cognitive disability.
- Use your normal speaking volume (do not speak loudly)
- Break information into small, manageable steps.
- Offer to write things down or summarise key points.
- Visual information, pictures, and gestures can support understanding. Always use age-appropriate materials.
- Be patient. Do not rush or finish sentences for the person.
- If the person uses a communication board or AAC device, allow enough time for them to form and share their response.
- If you are unsure you have understood, repeat back what you think you heard and ask the person to confirm.
- Make sure interpreters or support people understand confidentiality requirements.
- Ensure the person feels safe and respected throughout the process.

## Language and attitude

- Use person-first language. For example, say 'person with disability' rather than 'disabled person.'
- Use inclusive language. For example, say 'accessible toilets' instead of 'disabled toilets;' 'accessible car park' instead of 'disabled car park.'
- Focus on the person, not their condition.
- Be welcoming, make it clear that feedback is valued and that people will not be disadvantaged for raising a concern or complaint.
- Listen for hints that someone has a concern, even if they have not formally raised one. People with disability may be reluctant to complain due to past negative experiences or fear of consequences.
- Avoid assumptions about what a person can or cannot do based on their disability.

## 17. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is essential. Confidentiality means protecting the person's privacy and handling their information with care. Only share details with people who need the information to look into the concern or make a decision. Let the person know how their information will be used, recorded, and stored.

Handle all personal information with discretion and respect. When a person chooses to remain anonymous, respect that choice and take whatever steps are possible and appropriate to respond.

## 18. Continuous Improvement

The Councils of the Church should regularly review feedback and complaints, for example, quarterly or at least once a year, and more often if there is a higher number of concerns or emerging issues.

Regular review helps identify common problems, gaps, and opportunities for improvement. It also supports the Church's ongoing accountability to the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations.

## 19. Related Documents

- Attachment 1: Feedback and Complaint Form (see page 18)
- Factsheet for people with disability
- Easy English version of these guidelines

### Document control

<b>Document Owner:</b>	Synod Disability Inclusion Advocate			
<b>Review cycle:</b>	This document will be subject to formal review every <b>3 years</b> .		<b>Next review date:</b>	<b>May 2029</b>
<b>Endorsers:</b>	Review and endorsement is required from the following bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manager Culture of Safety Unit</li> <li>• Director Discipleship and Advocacy - eLM</li> </ul>		<b>Approver:</b>	Synod Standing Committee
<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Update by</b>	<b>Summary of changes</b>	<b>Approval date</b>
1.0	April 2026	Synod Disability Inclusion Advocate	Initial version	18/04/2026



## Attachment 1: Feedback and Complaint Form

Date feedback is received: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you wish to remain anonymous? Yes  No

Full Name of person making the feedback:

\_\_\_\_\_

Address and Post Code:

\_\_\_\_\_

Email address:

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number:

\_\_\_\_\_

Preferred method of contact:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Are you providing feedback or making a complaint on behalf of someone else? Yes  / No**

**If yes, please complete the following details:**

Name of Person	
What is your relationship to the person	

**Do you require any supports to enable you to communicate with us? e.g., interpreter, National Relay, accessible documents, communication support: Yes  No**

If yes, please provide details

**Type of feedback/ comment**

- 1. Compliment
- 2. Concern
- 3. Complaint

The Respondent (Who the concern or complaint is against e.g., the person or group of people – providing a name is optional. You may or may not know the name of the person.)

Name:

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**Please describe what happened? Give us as much information as you can.**

**When did this happen? You can also give an approximate date.**



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**Tell us if you have any information, such as emails, documents or a witness that might help us review your concern or complaint? If possible, attach any documents you may have.**

**What do you think should happen to fix this issue?**