

B15 UNITINGWORLD

1. A WATERSHED MOMENT IN HISTORY: THE STATEMENT FROM OUR PARTNERS

At the Fourteenth Assembly in Perth 35 leaders from our partner churches took a spontaneous and unprecedented step and penned a statement which was read out on the floor of the Assembly. This statement committed them to offering their resources to the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) to enhance our mission in the world; and committed themselves to each other to 'break down the boundaries of denominations' and share their strengths and challenges to partner in God's transformation of the world.

2. MOVING UNITINGWORLD INTO A NEW WAY OF WORKING

Historically, UnitingWorld has worked independently with each of our partners in a series of bilateral collaborations. Following the landmark Statement from the Partners at the Fourteenth Assembly, we recognised our true value to our partners as a facilitator of multilateral collaborations.

Subsequently, our regional strategy has been to create opportunities to bring together our church partners. We have hosted 11 regional conferences since July 2015, each one aimed at creating a community of shared learning, cultivating connections and relationships and encouraging collaboration between our partners.

These conferences covered subjects of strong common interest, chosen by our partners. They ranged from the profound (the theology of community development), through the urgent (the protection of children and vulnerable people in ministry) to the prosaic (tools for managing finances).

3. DOING MISSION WITH THE WORLD

The fruits of the new paradigm are already apparent. For example, the Methodist Church in Fiji sent two teachers to Tuvalu to address a desperate need there. The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga made their expert on climate impact disaster risk assessment available to travel to UnitingWorld partners and run training for their community leaders. Regional conferences resulted in partners sharing their policies and management tools on key topics with each other. And the UCA benefited when a long vacant placement in Far North Queensland was filled by a Minister from Fiji. We are thrilled to be involved in growing a network of theologians across our partners, who are engaged in crucial contextual dialogue on community development, gender equality and climate justice.

4. MISSION THAT IS TANGIBLE GOOD NEWS FOR ALL PEOPLE

We continue to work energetically with our church partners on programs that have profound impact in their communities.

Our programs in poverty alleviation address a range of structural barriers that prevent human flourishing. Depending on country and context, these barriers include access to education, health, capital or human rights.

- In Bali, Zimbabwe and Papua New Guinea (PNG) remote communities access improved water and sanitation and training in hygiene and health. In South Sudan women are trained to be midwives. In Vanuatu remote communities accessed dental and eye health services.
- In India, girls and boys from poor literacy backgrounds received tutoring that increased their participation in formal education. In Sri Lanka and Tonga, children with disabilities gained access to schools. In Vanuatu teachers, principals and librarians received

- professional development training.
- In Indonesia women and people living with a disability received microfinance loans for income-generating activities. In Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and Fiji people (mostly women) gained access to financial services, financial literacy training and/or small business/income generating activity support
- In Indonesia, the Philippines, Zimbabwe, India, Sri Lanka and all Pacific partners groups such as ethnic minorities, poor families, women and people with disabilities engaged with local issues, including conflict, family violence, institutional inequality and local corruption to understand their rights and responsibilities.
- Across the Pacific region, partner churches are engaging in theological reflection and practical action that addresses the major issues of gender inequality and climate change impact.
- In Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Tonga, disaster response work has seen the rebuilding and recovery of communities and the restoration of food supplies. We also extended support for the famine in South Sudan, the refugees from the Syrian conflict and the Rohingya people in Bangladesh through ACT Alliance.

We estimate that more than 250,000 people across 13 countries have experienced a tangible blessing in their lives through the work of their local church, supported by UnitingWorld and the people of the Uniting Church.

5. MISSION THAT STRENGTHENS THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The second key aspect of UnitingWorld programs is the strengthening of leaders and institutional capacity across our partner churches.

- In India, we helped train church leaders in mission planning, child protection and theology.
- In China, we supported the training of ministers from rural churches, Australian theologians visited and taught at Nanjing Seminary, and we funded a Chinese student to undertake a PhD program in Australia. In collaboration with UnitingCare, we also supported the training of aged care service providers.
- In South Sudan we supported church leaders in peace building and reconciliation work. In Zimbabwe we enabled youth and young adults to access key life education. In Timor Leste we helped in the training of Sunday School teachers.
- Across the Pacific region we supported women to access theological education as preparation for church leadership.
- We have also made a deliberate choice to create a coherent theological framework for our work. Based on partner feedback in regional conferences, and through the success of our gender equality work in the Pacific, we have identified as crucial the need to articulate how the programs are the outworkings of the Church's teachings. This is deliberate step, incorporated into our Strategic Plan and welcomed by our partners, because it bridges the common gulf between faith/action or evangelism/social justice.

6. MISSION THAT CONNECTS AND TRANSFORMS THE UCA

Our programs strive to enrich the life of the Uniting Church by nurturing meaningful connections between people. Over the triennium:

- We sent over 70 volunteers to work alongside 16 partner churches
- We helped over 160 members of the UCA make group visits to partner churches
- We arranged for more than 100 church leaders to visit each other internationally, including the UCA President, President-elect and Moderators of Synods.
- We mobilised over 1000 members of the UCA to participate in the Climate march in support of our Pacific Island partners

- We brought global church voices to UCA events such as UnitingWomen, Wisdom's Feast (Vic/Tas), WonTok (UCA Schools), UCA Deacons Conference, Jesus 12:24 and the Domestic & Family Violence Working Group
- We hosted a conference on West Papua and Post-Colonial Theology in Sydney
- We regularly engaged with several UCA National Conferences (Fiji, Tonga, Middle East, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and others)
- We helped staff in Synods and Presbyteries support immigrant faith communities in Australia
- Over 200 congregations and church groups participated in Lent Event
- Over 300 congregations participated in Everything in Common

The list above does not include the large number of individuals and congregations who have committed to regularly pray, fundraise and advocate for collaborative projects with our partners. This commitment is often a transformative missional experience for all involved.

Without exception, every person we connect to our partners overseas reports back on the significance of the experience. Each encounter is a window through which we see a glimpse of the Kingdom. The resourcefulness and resilience of our partners, the strength of their faith and hope, often in circumstances of hardship beyond our experience, and above all the joyful welcome, the generous hospitality and open friendship they offer us, cannot but change the way we see ourselves and our world.

Of particular importance to the Uniting Church is the connections between our leaders and our partner churches. To this end, we connect our leaders not just to individual partner churches, but also into regional ecumenical bodies such as the Pacific Conference of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia. We believe that the lessons that our partners can teach us, for example about how to be a minority church, how to live in a multi-faith context, and how to practice ministry in the absence of wealth and influence are invaluable for us in the UCA.

7. WORKING WITH THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

Despite a significant reduction in the Australian overseas aid budget, and a challenging attitude to international development in Australian government circles, UnitingWorld has maintained our level of funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) over the past three years.

In December 2017, UnitingWorld succeeded in being reaccredited by DFAT to be eligible for grant funding for the next five years. The reaccreditation review process involved UnitingWorld staff, National Committees, policies, records and documentation being examined in significant detail in order to satisfy stringent requirements regarding program quality, effectiveness, transparency, accountability and governance.

Also significant is the dialogue that we have initiated with DFAT regarding our approach to programming in the Pacific. While DFAT remains wary of anything that looks like religious activity, we have successfully demonstrated to them that, given the central role of the Christian faith in Pacific communities, genuine transformation in the region needs to be communicated through the lens of faith. Our work in promoting gender equality through engaging the Church in theological dialogue now not only attracts a small amount of DFAT funding, but is often cited by DFAT as an innovation to be admired.

We have now extended this learning from our work in gender, and have also successfully introduced a theological framework for working on disaster preparation and climate change impact in the Pacific. This too has passed the scrutiny of DFAT.

We also continue to grow strong relationships through our involvement in the Papua New Guinea Church Partnership Program, where DFAT supports seven Christian denominations to collaborate in delivering crucial services in PNG, as well as to advocate for strong accountable government in PNG.

8. WORKING WITH CHURCH AGENCIES

We maintain strong connections with other Christian international agencies through the Church Agencies Network (CAN). This network has resulted in the formation of a special purpose consortium – the CAN Disaster Operations (CAN-DO) which made a successful bid to be recognised as an Australian Humanitarian Partner, eligible for disaster relief and disaster preparation funding from DFAT.

We also maintain our membership of the ACT Alliance, a global network of church Agencies under the auspices of the World Council of Churches. This membership enabled us to receive support during the emergency response to Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, and allowed us to channel support towards the South Sudan famine, the Syrian refugee crisis and the Rohingya refugee crisis.

9. MAINTAINING OUR STANDARDS

We are members of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and signatories to and compliant with their Code of Conduct. This is an independent benchmark for the quality and methodology of our work.

As members of the Fundraising Institute of Australia, (FIA) we are committed to all of their requirements for ethical fundraising and privacy, transparency and accountability in our relationships with donors. We report back to donors through our website, our regular communications, and our annual reports and audited accounts.

We have also assessed our volunteer placement processes against the Australian Standard to ensure compliance.

10. MAINTAINING AN EFFECTIVE ORGANISATION

Over the last three years, we have seen some significant changes in staff, particularly in senior management. In particular, we farewelled Rob Floyd, who moved to the role of Assembly Associate General Secretary and Dr Sureka Goringe was appointed as the new National Director. Matthew Tyne and Marnie Frost left the Agency and we welcomed Alison Cooke and Rick Carpenter.

There has been significant reshaping of the structure of the Agency. In the past we had some staff who were dedicated solely to Relief and Development and others to Church Connections. Now we have established teams that have a geographical focus and carry out both types of activity.

Recent years have also seen significant changes to our organisational infrastructure, seeking to use technology to improve efficiency and save time and money. Our Finance, IT and Human Resources services have transitioned to new technology as well as new support providers as we collaborate with the NSW/ACT Synod. We have also invested in new relationship management software to improve donor support and processing, and also launched a new website.

11. GOVERNANCE

The governance of UnitingWorld has been performed by two National Committees. This structure was born of our legacy as two organisations, one focused on international aid and the other on international mission. The two National Committees believed that this was an unnecessarily cumbersome and costly arrangement and determined to move to a single Board.

Over the past three years, these two Committees, and their International Program and Governance and Compliance Subcommittees, have increased their level of coordination and collaboration. In the last twelve months, they have started meeting together. This has been the culmination of a long process of bringing together the work of the Agency, in order to maximise impact and efficiency, while still strictly maintaining the distinction between Relief and Development activity and Church Connections activity. As a result of this experience the National Committees gained a much more

complete understanding of the Agency and experienced no hindrances to creating a single governing body for UnitingWorld. In November 2017 the Standing Committee approved a new mandate for the governance of the Agency.

Under the oversight of the National Committees, UnitingWorld now has clear policies, procedures and systems that allow the staff to operate as a coherent team, while being able to maintain important distinctions that apply to programs regarding eligibility for tax-deductibility and government aid funding.

12. STRATEGY

In June 2017, following a consultative process with partners and supported by external facilitators, UnitingWorld adopted a new Strategic Plan for the triennium from July 2017 to June 2020. The plan identifies UnitingWorld's vision, mission and goals as below:

Vision: Honouring God through global relationships which bring justice and hope.

Mission: UnitingWorld works through relationships with churches in the Pacific, Asia and Africa to call and connect the Uniting Church in Australia to active participation in mission, discipleship and the training of leaders and enabling communities to address the causes and consequences of poverty, injustice and violence through effective relief and development programs.

Goal 1: UnitingWorld will nurture church relationships in the Pacific, Asia and Africa on behalf of the Uniting Church to build creative space for engagement, mutual learning and advocacy in line with our Mission.

Goal 2: UnitingWorld will implement programs that have a strong theological and contextual focus which bring life and transformation to both partner communities and the Uniting Church in Australia.

Goal 3: UnitingWorld will engage and inspire the Uniting Church and community to partner with us as active and committed supporters of our work through learning, praying, advocating and donating to our programs and Mission.

Goal 4: UnitingWorld will be a responsible and effective organisation, characterised by effective leadership, learning and continuous improvement.

13. WE'RE A CHURCH NOT A CHARITY

Strong effective programs need to be built on the basis of strong resilient relationships – this is the way of UnitingWorld and the UCA. Nurturing relationships requires spending time with each other, listening attentively, sharing honestly and with vulnerability, being willing to change our minds and our hearts.

We do not act as a donor, handing out grants in return for timely reporting. We seek to create meaningful connections between people, so all recognise our equal place as children of God, learning from each others' strengths and caring for each others' needs. We seek to bring the wisdom and experience of our partners to speak into the discernment of the leadership of the Uniting Church, so we may be better citizens of the God's kingdom. We do not just seek to carry out God's mission – we intend that our missiology itself be transformed by our connections.

Because UnitingWorld has always taken this relational approach to working with church partners, our efforts have required much more in terms of people, time and money than the mere management of projects.

14. OUR RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE BRIDGE ACROSS WHICH WE COLLABORATE

The strong, vibrant, mutually respectful relationships with our partner churches is the bridge on which our collaborative programs travel. It determines the nature of our collaborations and travel is in both directions - we give and we receive, we teach and we learn.

Historically the UCA has been able to invest significant resources into maintaining this bridge. Funds have been available to enable staff to travel, to support the exchange of leaders, the placement of volunteers and the connections between communities. Funds have been available to sustain the theological and experiential dialogue that fuels mutual transformation.

15. WE ARE STRUGGLING FOR THE RESOURCES NEEDED TO MAINTAIN THE BRIDGE

However, as the membership and resources of the various Synods has diminished, so has their capacity to fund the Assembly and its Agencies like UnitingWorld. So, now, less than 4% of UnitingWorld's budget is provided by the Assembly through the Synods. Thus, UnitingWorld has become more and more reliant on fundraising income, which by its nature tends to be tied to programs. We cannot legally divert funds donated to support projects towards church-to-church relational work.

Even though we are driving more effective and exciting programs with our partners than ever before, we are struggling to maintain the depth and diversity of our connections with our partners.

In the past year, we have had to significantly reduce the number of leadership exchanges, volunteer placements and group visits (InSolidarity) between the UCA and our partners. We have reduced our staff time dedicated to our Church Connections work. We anticipate that significantly smaller numbers of our partners can be supported to attend the Fifteenth Assembly.

16. WE ARE STILL BEING ASKED TO BUILD MORE BRIDGES

The desire, nay the need, for the Uniting Church to connect to churches overseas is still growing. As more immigrant communities in Australia want to call the UCA home, and also to maintain a link to their ethnic heritage and overseas church of their origins, UnitingWorld is regularly asked to initiate and support more international church partnerships and collaborations.

Further, as the UCA grows into its full multicultural destiny, UnitingWorld's relationships and expertise become even more valuable to staff in Synods and Presbyteries who are wrestling with the challenges of culturally diverse faith communities.

17. CONNECTING TO THE GLOBAL CHURCH IS THE HEART-WORK OF UNITINGWORLD, BUT HOW SHALL WE RESOURCE IT?

This is a dilemma for the whole of the Uniting Church, not just UnitingWorld.

The staff of UnitingWorld is committed to engaging with every Council of the Church, to cast the vision of the revival and renewal that comes from living our calling as members of the global church.

We call on the members of the Fifteenth Assembly to reflect deeply on the best use of the resources of the Uniting Church, so that we may invest in what is required to respond to the call of our partner churches, God's people in our region.

We affirm that the Uniting Church is called by God, and our partners to:

“Break through the boundaries of our denomination, in order to partner as God’s agents of transformation in the world” and to “Commit to develop, nurture and strengthen multilateral mission relationships by making our God-given resources available to one another, sharing our needs, joys, sorrows, achievements and challenges with openness and joyfully participating in the life of partners in a fruitful and effective manner.” (Statement from the Partners, Fourteenth Assembly).

Dr Sureka Goringe - National Director

Andrew Glenn – Chair, Church Connections National Committee

John Ruhle – Chair, Relief & Development National Committee