

# B4 STANDING COMMITTEE

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Standing Committee held nine face-to-face meetings and three teleconferences during the last triennium. One teleconference was required to appoint the Associate General Secretary, Assembly Resourcing Unit in a timely manner, and another to approve changes to the Regulations on recommendation from the Royal Commission National Task Group. Meetings commence with dinner on Friday evening and conclude at 4.00pm on Sunday. The exceptions in this triennium were the November 2016 meeting which added an extra day to participate in a conversation regarding sovereignty and treaty with members of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) National Executive, Moderators, some members of the Multicultural and Cross Cultural National Reference Committee and others; and the March 2018 meeting which added an extra day in order to address the significant amount of preparation for the Fifteenth Assembly and to meet with a delegation from the United Church of Canada. The Standing Committee begins each of its meetings with worship which includes Holy Communion. Throughout, worship and prayer provided by members are an important foundation for the Committee's work. Over the last triennium Standing Committee members have been very conscious, and grateful, for the support and prayers of many members of the Church. This support has been reflected in the spirit with which Committee members have undertaken their work and the outcomes of their deliberations.
- 1.2 The venue for seven meetings was the Chevalier Resource Centre at Kensington in suburban Sydney. In November 2017, the Committee moved to Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney, which is envisaged to be the meeting venue for the foreseeable future.
- 1.3 There have been several changes to the membership of the Standing Committee since the Fourteenth Assembly. Rev. Terence Corkin finished in his role as General Secretary at the end of 2015, and so attended two meetings; Rev. John Cox resigned in January 2017 following his appointment as Executive Officer, Royal Commission National Task Group; Rev. Lindsay Cullen resigned in September 2017 following his appointment as Assembly National Consultant; and Ms Alison Atkinson-Phillips resigned in January 2018 due to her appointment to an academic position in the United Kingdom. Rev. Steve Francis was appointed to the Standing Committee according to the Regulations following the resignation of Rev. John Cox. The Standing Committee made three cooptions to augment the skill mix of members. The participation of individual members of the Standing Committee is presented in the table below.

1.4

| <b>Member</b>                     | <b>Regular Meetings (9) Attendance</b> | <b>Extraordinary Meetings (3) (teleconference) Attendance</b> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stuart McMillan                   | 9                                      | 3                                                             |
| Terence Corkin                    | 2 (from 2 meetings)                    | N/A                                                           |
| Colleen Geyer (from January 2016) | 7 (from 7 meetings)                    | 2                                                             |
| Deidre Palmer                     | 9                                      | 3                                                             |
| Andrew Dutney                     | 7                                      | 2                                                             |
| Dennis Corowa                     | 9                                      | 2                                                             |
| Garry Dronfield                   | 9                                      | 3                                                             |
| Felicity Amery                    | 8                                      | 3                                                             |
| Alison Atkinson Phillips          | 7 (from 8 meetings)                    | 1 (from 2 meetings)                                           |
| Bethany Broadstock                | 7                                      | 1                                                             |
| John Cox                          | 4 (from 5 meetings)                    | N/A                                                           |
| Lindsay Cullen                    | 7 (from 7 meetings)                    | N/A                                                           |
| Steve Francis                     | 3 (from 4 meetings)                    | 2                                                             |

|                                  |                     |   |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Hayden Charles                   | 8                   | 3 |
| Geoffrey Grinton                 | 9                   | 2 |
| Zac Hatfield Dodds               | 8                   | 3 |
| Haloti Kailahi                   | 9                   | 2 |
| Amelia Koh-Butler                | 9                   | 2 |
| Denise Liersch                   | 8                   | 2 |
| Ian Price                        | 8                   | 2 |
| Akesa Racava                     | 9                   | 0 |
| Elaine Rae                       | 9                   | 3 |
| Ian Tozer                        | 9                   | 3 |
| Isabel Thomas Dobson             | 9                   | 3 |
| Jacki Watts                      | 5                   | 3 |
| Wendie Wilkie                    | 8                   | 0 |
| <b>Coopted members</b>           |                     |   |
| Peter Andrews (from March 2016)  | 6 (from 7 meetings) | 3 |
| Warwick van Ede (from July 2016) | 4 (from 6 meetings) | 2 |
| Catherine Pepper (from Nov 2016) | 4 (from 5 meetings) | 2 |

- 1.5 As provided for in the Regulations the Synod General Secretaries participate in the meeting, although they are not voting members of the Standing Committee. Similarly, the Associate General Secretary and National Consultant for Theology and Discipleship attend. All make a significant contribution to the life and decision-making processes of the Standing Committee.
- 1.6 Business for the Standing Committee is generated by developing issues in the life of the church and society as well as referrals from the Assembly, Assembly Agencies, Synods, Presbyteries, and from Standing Committee members. In addition, the Standing Committee exercises oversight of the work of the Agencies, in particular, monitoring performance of Boards and National Committees to which it has delegated significant authority. The Standing Committee also takes responsibility for ensuring the responsible management of finance and risks in the Assembly.
- 1.7 Two major areas of business for the Standing Committee in this triennium have been an understanding of sovereignty and treaty for First Peoples and how this might affect the Uniting Church's practices and processes; and the church's conversation on marriage and same-gender marriage. These areas will be discussed in more detail later in this report.
- 1.8 As in the last triennium, a major focus across the life of the church over the last two-and-a-half years has been to review and improve the church's practices that will serve to protect children from abuse. In order to respond as required by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Royal Commission National Task Group appointed a full-time Executive Officer in November 2015 to work in support of its National Task Group; and moved from a full-time Policy Officer to a part-time Research Officer. These positions are jointly funded by the Assembly and Synods as an additional piece of work on an agreed formula. It is also important to acknowledge the resources offered to this national response from Synods and Agencies in the form of expert staff over the triennium to resource the response of the Uniting Church to the work and findings of the Commission. Further information on the Assembly's engagement with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is provided later in this report and in the report from the Royal Commission National Task Group.
- 1.8 In addition to these major calls on its time the Standing Committee has also addressed itself to the referrals from the Fourteenth Assembly and other matters brought to it from within the life of the church.
- 1.9 Standing Committee minutes are circulated to all Presbyteries, Synods, Assembly Agencies and Standing Committee members, and are available on the Assembly website (<https://assembly.uca.org.au/about/assembly-standing-committee>).

## 2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF THE FOURTEENTH ASSEMBLY

- 2.1 Of the significant amount of work passed to the Standing Committee from the Fourteenth Assembly, most was attended to and completed. Some outstanding items relating to the Uniting Church's Covenant with the UAICC are as follows:
- 2.2 **Indigenous recognition in the Australian Constitution and the need for treaty** (Assembly minute 15.22.02). During the triennium the UAICC endorsed the *Statement from the Heart*; and the President's Conference in Darwin in 2017 on sovereignty and treaty provided an opportunity for the 100 participants to be educated about the need for treaties. However more can be done to support First Peoples in their call for justice in this regard.
- 2.3 **Memorial for Rev. Charles Harris** (Assembly minute 15.22.06). A memorial has not yet been established for Rev. Charles Harris as UAICC consider the most appropriate way to establish the memorial.
- 2.4 **Living out the Covenant** (Assembly minute 15.22.07). Certain actions were taken to highlight the issues faced by First Peoples, e.g. joint public statements by the President and UAICC Chairperson, and President and UAICC President, ongoing conversations and representations at state and national levels, and within the National Christian Leaders group. In many parts of the nation "walking on country" opportunities (e.g. Bundjalung country in NSW and Adnyamathanha country in SA) are enhancing relationships and are becoming a very significant way the Covenant is lived out. This important work is ongoing.

## 3. ARISING FROM THE FOURTEENTH ASSEMBLY

- 3.1 All resolutions of the Fourteenth Assembly where the Assembly resolved to undertake certain action were put into effect, apart from those identified in Section 2 of this report. Those matters that were referred to the Standing Committee for implementation are reported in the following section of the report, apart from marriage (Section 5), sovereignty and treaty (Section 4), and membership (Section 8).
- 3.2 **Amendments to Regulations.** There were many decisions by the Fourteenth Assembly approving amendments to the Regulations (see Section 10 of this report). The Legal Reference Committee supported the Standing Committee with expertise and wisdom in drafting the Regulations that were approved by the Standing Committee. In addition, there were two Presidential Rulings plus several other requests that did not lead to a Ruling.
- 3.3 **Mapoon Appeal.** (Assembly minute 15.22.04) The Standing Committee in response to this proposal requested the Assembly Secretariat to work with Calvary Presbytery to coordinate and manage the Mapoon Church Building Appeal. The Appeal was launched through a website appeal, a media release and the production of a publicity video and publicity materials.  
(<http://uaicc.org.au/mapoon/>)
- 3.4 **Remote Area Ministry.** (Assembly minute 15.12) In response to the proposal to establish a national mechanism to communicate and collaborate in the development and delivery of appropriate, effective, and sustainable remote area ministry a Task Group developed Terms of Reference and membership of the Remote Area Ministry Working Group. This Working Group was established, and brings together representatives from Synods and Presbyteries involved in remote area ministry, UAICC, UnitingCare Australia and Frontier Services. The Working Group seeks to achieve a national remote areas outcome through cooperative, collaborative and sustainable ministry approaches, including the development of new models of ministry and approaches across Synod boundaries.

- 3.5 **Eldership.** (Assembly minute 15.09) A Task Group was established by the Standing Committee to consider proposal 49 'Eldership in the Uniting Church'. It consulted with the proposers of the Proposal 49 and identified issues for the Standing Committee to consider. Following its deliberations members of the Task Group believed that the regulations currently cover the diversity and range of lay leadership required in congregations, and that no further change to the Regulations in this matter should be attempted at this time.
- 3.6 **Palestine** (Assembly minute 15.35). In response to this referral the Standing Committee appointed a Working Group to identify strategies to support an awareness-raising campaign throughout the Church on the plight of Palestinian Christians and the Palestinian people, including the promotion of the boycott of goods from the illegal settlements in the West Bank as part of the campaign. The Working Group also worked in partnership with other parts of the Church including the Relations with Other Faiths Working Group and the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network. Educational materials were developed and made available on the website, Living Stones: The Uniting Church and Palestine (<https://assembly.uca.org.au/palestine>). The resolutions from the Fourteenth Assembly were also conveyed to the National Council of Churches in Australia.
- 3.7 **Armenian Genocide.** (Assembly minute 15.23.01) This proposal acknowledged that the Armenian massacres and forced deportations of 1915-1923 constituted a genocide. Letters were sent by the General Secretary to Government Ministers regarding acknowledgement of the Armenian Genocide, to which various responses were received. A prayer was also written by the National Consultant Christian Unity, Doctrine and Worship to use on or near the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide (<https://assembly.uca.org.au/cudw/resources/item/1841-remembering-the-armenian-genocide>). In November 2016 the Uniting Church was awarded the Armenian National Committee of Australia's Freedom Award in recognition for steadfast support toward recognition of the Armenian Genocide and for outstanding public service and leadership on issues of importance to the Armenian-Australian community.

#### 4. **LIVING OUT THE COVENANT: SOVEREIGNTY AND TREATY** (Assembly minute 15.08)

- 4.1 A significant commitment of the Standing Committee over the triennium was in relation to Assembly Resolution 15.08 that determined a significant priority for the life of the Assembly during the triennium was to explore with UAICC what it would mean for the practices of the Church to recognise and affirm that First Peoples are sovereign peoples. This was both a privilege and a challenge. At its meeting in November 2016, the Standing Committee met with members of the UAICC National Executive, Moderators, some members of the Multicultural and Cross Cultural National Reference Committee and others for an evening and a day, in a facilitated conversation "Honouring First Peoples – Sovereignty and Treaty".
- 4.2 In this conversation, some reflections were expressed about what this conversation is about and what needs to be considered:
- When we start a journey, we do not know where it will take us. Many of us lack the experience needed, so this conversation will really stretch us. But we must stay together. We need to live with hope that we can change some of the stuff along the way.
  - There are good things, and there are bad things. This is history. We need to talk about it, and bring it into the open. The Church needs to help this happen. This is how we understand each other. This is how we learn to forgive each other. This is how we learn to live together as brothers and sisters. One of the issues is how this happens without burning out the UAICC leaders.
  - This sort of conversation is important because it helps stir up our imagination, and it challenges people to relinquish power. Colonisation is still a lived reality for many people. The conversation also challenges people to find ways to re-envision the 'white' worldview, and find ways to deeply listen to Aboriginal worldviews, to God who was here in the beginning, and to story. Too often we assume that people will/should become like 'us'. This

is like the Covenant conversation, but now it is about our identity and fundamental beliefs.

- We are seeking to be one family in the Church – making real space, not just brief hospitality. Relationships really are important, but so are structures and the way we organise our lives. And our conversation about practices has underneath it assumptions about deep cultural underpinnings. We need education about what it means to be the people of God.
- Need to remember that the Assembly resolution asked for practical guidelines. How do we actually live out the commitment to sovereignty? Need examples more than resolutions. Need to plan the next intentional steps to take.
- In planning and having the conversations there are some things we should ask: how do people who are not born here get into this conversation? How do we give more weight to the Spirit (including in us), so that we do not rely just on mental processes but all our senses? How do we ensure that younger people have a voice in this conversation? How should this conversation impact on the formation of Ministers, and how is it integrated into theological education and reflection?
- We need to recognise: That some people found the language of ‘sovereignty’ difficult because of their particular history. There is a need for an ‘s’ on all the conversations – i.e. to see that there are contexts and theologies (plural). It is important to recognise what we have, and build on the positives. We often deal with these issues better in the national church than we do locally. The diversity within UAICC, and different expressions of what it means to be an Indigenous person today.

4.3 Out of the conversation three priorities were identified:

1. Supporting Treaty – in order to develop respectful, enriching relationships and practices, including an exploration of restoration, beginning with fostering and enabling respectful conversations
2. Developing Indigenous theology – where resources and opportunities could be provided in which First Peoples could develop Indigenous Theologies that would strengthen identity for First Peoples, restore the dignity of the gospel, enrich the whole of the Church’s theology, give permission/models for other theologies (languages, cultures and customs), and enrich ecumenical and interfaith discussions and practices.
3. Giving priority to history telling – where a better understanding and ownership of the real nature of relationships can occur in local areas, and how the Church/Christians have contributed to how things are.

4.4 This formative conversation influenced further discussions by the Standing Committee, as well as the request it made to all Synods to use the resource, “Sovereignty and Treaty: A Discussion Guide” by Chris Budden (<https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/item/2654-sovereignty-and-treaty-a-discussion-guide>) in their Synod meetings and other meetings where this important issue was discussed.

4.5 The Standing Committee also wrote to Synod Ministerial Education Boards drawing their attention to s.4viii of the new Standards for Theological Education for Formation Phase 2 for Ordained Ministries, and reminding them that the ordination charge and the induction and commissioning vows of Ministers and Pastors commit Ministers to work within the Covenant between the Uniting Church and the UAICC. It encouraged them to ensure that the formation and education syllabus for which they have responsibilities reflects the Church’s commitment to the Covenant and requested a progress report on the way the syllabus reflected this.

4.6 The President’s Conference in Darwin in June 2017, where UAICC leaders provided their expertise and wisdom on issues related to sovereignty and treaty was a significant event in the Church’s journey in this important area.

## 5. MARRIAGE (Assembly minute 15.15)

- 5.1 The Fourteenth Assembly requested the Standing Committee, in consultation with UAICC and the Multicultural Cross Cultural Ministry National Reference Committee to explore how the Church can engage in further discussions about marriage and same-gender relationships in culturally appropriate ways, including engaging with the continuing work of the Working Group on Doctrine in this area, and with members of the LGBTIQ community and the wider Church. The Standing Committee was also requested to consult with our ecumenical partners, and where appropriate to investigate the implications of changing the Church's current relationship with the Commonwealth Government with respect to the conduct of marriages. A report from the Standing Committee was to be brought to the Fifteenth Assembly which it does.
- 5.2 Two other requests were made by the Fourteenth Assembly. The President was requested to issue a pastoral letter to the Church affirming that the Uniting Church seeks to be an inclusive Church that embraces LGBTIQ people as full members of our Church community and is committed to active and culturally appropriate discussion about marriage. The President issued the pastoral letter on 12 August 2015. The other request was for the General Secretary, in the event that the Commonwealth Marriage Act or other relevant legislation was changed, to write to all Uniting Church marriage celebrants advising them of their freedom and constraints under that legislation and as celebrants authorised by the Uniting Church. Following the change to the Commonwealth Marriage Act in December 2017, the General Secretary wrote to Uniting Church authorised marriage celebrants with the requested advice.
- 5.3 Over the course of the triennium the President and members of the Working Group on Doctrine participated in conversations with various networks and groups within the life of the Uniting Church representing the broad diversity of views on this and related matters, including Congregations and Presbyteries, national Presbytery Ministers and national educators meetings, Uniting Network, Assembly of Confessing Congregations, UAICC, the Multicultural Cross Cultural Ministry National Reference Committee and various national conferences, and with ecumenical partners in Australia and overseas.
- 5.4 The Standing Committee requested the President to host two national consultations of approximately 30 people using the Space for Grace process to enable intercultural conversations and consider related issues. Synods were requested to identify four participants for each conversation representative of the cultural, theological and personal diversity of the Uniting Church. Additionally, UAICC was invited to provide four participants for each conversation, and a representative of the Assembly's Working Group on Doctrine was in attendance at each conversation. Along with the facilitator, the President and President-elect were in attendance at both conversations. These consultations took place in Brisbane in May 2017 and Sydney in June 2017; and themes and outcomes from these were provided to the Standing Committee.
- 5.5 Building on these national conversations, the Standing Committee requested that Synods make time in their meeting agenda in 2017 to focus on three questions relating to marriage and same-gender marriage. These questions were:
- What are your hopes and concerns for the marriage conversations at Assembly next year?
  - In what mutually respectful ways could we move together as a church that reflects the breadth of who we are as the UCA?
  - What matters would you like the Standing Committee to consider as it prepares for a discussion on this matter at the Fifteenth Assembly?

All Synods except the Northern Synod who met prior to this request from the Standing Committee, participated in these conversations. Feedback was provided back to the Standing Committee. It was also shared with the Working Group on Doctrine to help shape the final form and content of their report.

- 5.6 During the triennium the President made three Pastoral Statements on the issue of marriage, calling for conversations from the heart that show respect for each other (<https://assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine/item/2499-conversations-from-the-heart>), with the Moderators and the Chairperson of UAICC on the occasion of the marriage postal survey (<https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/2743-australian-marriage-law-postal-survey>), and when changes were made to the Australian marriage law (<https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/2762-changes-to-australian-marriage-laws>).
- 5.7 Resources for respectful conversations were also provided to the Church including a resource regarding the Space for Grace process and all past documents relating to marriage that have been considered by the Uniting Church and a history of the decisions and deliberations of the Uniting Church to date. (<https://assembly.uca.org.au/marriage>)
- 5.8 The Standing Committee consulted with the Chair of the Working Group on Doctrine on three occasions as their report was being developed. Pastoral implications for the Church as these conversations took place and the report for the Fifteenth Assembly was developed were always considered.

## **6. FRONTIER SERVICES**

- 6.1 Following the significant challenges attended to by the previous Standing Committee relating to Frontier Services and its change in focus from an organisation that delivered services in remote Australia, this triennium the Standing Committee continued to exercise its governance responsibilities of Frontier Services as it completed the withdrawal of Frontier Services from all remaining community services as per Standing Committee instructions; completed the transition of Patrol Ministry oversight from 1 January 2016, ensuring that the transition to oversight and management of same was accomplished in an effective, efficient and pastorally-sensitive manner with all relevant Synods and Presbyteries; and continued with the provision of fundraising and promotions for Patrol Ministry, as well as both fundraising for and development/delivery of community support/volunteer programs for regional and remote Australia.
- 6.2 In this triennium, Frontier Services moved through a period of rebuilding with a new strategic focus through a new Strategic Plan. The focus is that Frontier Services is with people and within communities in remote Australia to build and support connections that contribute to wellbeing and quality of life. This is done through funding chaplaincy, advocating for people and communities, and mobilising volunteers and resources where they are needed most.
- 6.3 The Standing Committee approved a new Constitution for Frontier Services in March 2016 which provided clarification for the ongoing operations of the Agency and its Board. A new National Director, appointed in 2017, and a renewed Board has given the Standing Committee confidence in the future direction which Frontier Services is taking.

## **7. NEW WAYS OF WORKING**

- 7.1 In response to a resolution of the previous Standing Committee to affirm project-based budgeting reflecting Assembly priorities, as the preferred framework for the future ways of fulfilling the work of the Assembly, and the subsequent report from an appointed Task Group, the General Secretary worked to further develop this scenario as requested.
- 7.2 In July 2016 the Standing Committee endorsed the move toward a collaborative, project-based framework for the Assembly's work. The way the Assembly worked was reframed so it can be flexible and respond to the tasks and projects it is asked to undertake, and use the resources it has wisely. A Working Group was established to work with the General Secretary to develop implementation strategies and consider consequences for Assembly staff and the work of the

Assembly during the transition phase, as well as budgetary implications.

- 7.3 The reorganised Assembly has four major areas apart from the Secretariat – the Assembly Resourcing Unit, the Assembly Services Unit, Remote Area Ministry and Assembly Agencies which include UnitingCare Australia, UnitingWorld and Frontier Services.
- 7.4 Important foundations were also established and approved by the Standing Committee in a three-year Strategic Plan 2017-2020 and a three-year funding model for the Assembly. The Strategic Plan is used as a basis for reporting to the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee approved the appointment of the new role of Associate General Secretary, Assembly Resourcing Unit, while also holding in its work and prayers those Assembly staff who were no longer able to work at the Assembly due to the changes.

## **8. AFFIRMED MEMBER** (Assembly minute 15.69)

- 8.1 The August 2015 Standing Committee established a Task Group to write a definitive paper in response to the Assembly feedback on membership in the Uniting Church following the many reports, documents and papers written on this subject. The Task Group carried out its task, acknowledging that baptism is the basis of membership in the Christian Church and thereby the Uniting Church in Australia. They proposed that a new category of membership, Affirmed Member, be established which recognises those who are able to participate in decision-making and offer leadership at a functional level within the local congregation or faith community.
- 8.2 In March 2017 the Standing Committee asked the Assembly Legal Reference Committee to advise it of any amendment to the Constitution and Regulations necessary to implement the category of Affirmed Member of a Congregation, and approved the amended liturgy and notes on Affirmed Membership for use in Uniting Churches following commencement of new Regulations.
- 8.3 The Assembly Legal Reference Committee advised the Standing Committee of changes to be made to the Constitution which will be brought to the Fifteenth Assembly for approval and appropriate process prior to new Regulations being written to establish this new category of membership.

## **9. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR LAY LEADERS**

- 9.1 In November 2015 the Standing Committee adopted the Code of Conduct for Lay Leaders following redrafting from work begun by the previous Standing Committee to be implemented throughout the Uniting Church in Australia from 1 April 2016 ([https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/resources/Regulations\\_Policies/POLICY\\_Code\\_of\\_Conduct\\_for\\_Lay\\_Leaders.pdf](https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/resources/Regulations_Policies/POLICY_Code_of_Conduct_for_Lay_Leaders.pdf)).
- 9.2 All Councils of the Church were encouraged to adopt the practice of formally commissioning all people who take on leadership roles, either through a simple act of prayer or by using the Uniting in Worship 2 Commissioning Service liturgy in an annual worship service.

## **10. EXERCISING OVERSIGHT OF ASSEMBLY AGENCIES AND COMMITTEES**

- 10.1 The Standing Committee has invested significant effort in the preparation for, and conduct of, regular meetings with Board/National Committee Chairs and National Directors ensuring that greater and more rigorous attention is given to the oversight of delegated Boards and Committees. During this triennium the Standing Committee established a schedule for reporting to it by Assembly Agencies and Committees according to a common reporting framework. Included in this framework is governance documentation, risk, governance and compliance, financial status, policy, public profile and operational matters.

- 10.2 The Standing Committee approved a set of delegations from it to the Assembly and associated entities as another important plank in its governance oversight and responsibilities.
- 10.3 There is more detailed and regular oversight of the finances and risks in individual areas of operation via the work of the Assembly Audit, Finance and Risk Committee. The Standing Committee has established a risk register for its own areas of responsibility and it is provided at each meeting of the Standing Committee. During the triennium the Standing Committee has used a process at most meetings to review the register, as well as considering its strategic risks.
- 10.4 The task of improving governance capacity in the Standing Committee is continuing and some of the steps on the way to further improvement are reflected in the information provided to potential nominees for election to the Standing Committee; an enhanced induction process and a stronger emphasis on the skills mix required by the Standing Committee and its Committees and Working Groups. The Standing Committee has also moved in the direction of expanding the source of people who can be identified for serving on Assembly bodies in an attempt to add diversity and deepen the skill mix available for the work of these groups. This approach is reflected in the opportunity for any member of the Assembly to use an Expression of Interest Form to indicate interest in serving on Assembly governance committees.
- 10.5 The Standing Committee Governance Reference Committee has continued to regularly meet prior to each meeting of the Standing Committee, which has been beneficial for the work of the Standing Committee.

## **11. PRESIDENTIAL RULINGS**

- 11.1 Presidential Ruling #32 addressed the question of whether the actions of an Appeal Panel conformed to the Constitution and Regulations in dealing with an appeal which was considered to be “out of time”. The President ruled that the action of the Appeal Panel did conform to the Constitution and Regulations regarding the time for instituting an appeal. The Presidential Ruling was confirmed by the Standing Committee in November 2015. (ASC minute 15.93)
- 11.2 Presidential Ruling #33 addressed the question of whether Regulation 3.6.3.1(c) regarding the term that the Moderator of a Synod is elected for conforms to the Constitution of the Church. The President ruled that Regulation 3.6.3.1(c) does not conform to the Constitution. This is because paragraph 34 of the Constitution explicitly empowers the Synod to determine the term of a Moderator, whilst Regulation 3.6.3.1(c) purports to limit that term. Therefore, the express authority for the Synod to determine the term of the Moderator granted by paragraph 34 of the Constitution overrides the inconsistent provision in Regulation 3.6.1(c) and the Synod is able to exercise the authority granted by paragraph 34 of the Constitution. The Presidential Ruling was confirmed by the Standing Committee in November 2017. (ASC minute 17.55)

## **12. ASSEMBLY FINANCE**

- 12.1 Following on from the previous triennium, the Assembly has continued to attend to robust budget and cost controls in order to move to a more financially sustainable future. It is important to acknowledge that this is possible because of the significant work done by the previous Standing Committee in response to the financial impact on the Assembly of the failure of the services of Frontier Services. The oversight, advice and wisdom of members of the Assembly Finance Audit and Risk Committee, and the Assembly Investment Committee; as well as the commitment of Assembly executive leaders have contributed to building the foundations for this important goal. The detailed report regarding Assembly Finances is provided as Report B4A.
- 12.2 Standing Committee appreciates the generous financial contributions from the Synods towards the

Assembly budget for each of the three years of 2015-2018. This support continues to be given when resources across the Church are under stress and have to be wisely managed and distributed.

- 12.3 During this triennium the Assembly and the Synods have worked together to develop a three-year funding model for the Synod contributions to the Assembly (July 2017 to June 2020). This collaborative endeavour involves a commitment of greater transparency of Assembly operations and the implementation of the three-year Assembly Strategic Plan. The new model holds Assembly costs at their current state with CPI increases over the three years. An evaluation of the model will be undertaken in the third year prior to a new agreement.
- 12.4 In November 2016, the Standing Committee approved a restructure for part of the Assembly. Financial resources to implement this new way of working were considered within the financial resources available to the Assembly. This is discussed more fully in Section 7.
- 12.5 Synods and the Assembly continue to cooperate to jointly fund particular national activities such as the work in response to the Royal Commission. Together a national cooperation agenda was developed during this triennium, including a National Insurance Procurement project. If this way of working is continued, a reconsideration of a national funding model for the wider work of the Uniting Church may need to be developed.

### **13. EXEMPTIONS FROM THE OPERATION OF REGULATIONS**

- 13.1 From time to time the Standing Committee is asked to exercise its authority under Regulation 3.10.1 to approve alternate Regulations and/or exemptions from Regulations for particular bodies.
- 13.2 During the last triennium there were four requests for exemption to the operation of the Regulations. Exemptions from Regulations 3.6.3.1 (c) and 3.6.3.1 (d) were granted to the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania to enable the term of the current Moderator to be extended for a short period; and to the Queensland Synod and the Synod of Western Australia to enable their current Moderators to be renominated for a second consecutive term.
- 13.3 An exemption from Regulation 3.7.4.1 (a) (iii) and (iv) was granted to the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, and the provision of an alternative regulation in place of these in order to make it possible for the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania to elect the members of its Synod Standing Committee for a term of two ordinary meetings of the Synod.

### **14. AMENDMENTS TO THE REGULATIONS**

- 14.1 The Fourteenth Assembly authorised the Standing Committee on advice from the Assembly Legal Reference Committee to amend the following parts of the Regulations when the Standing Committee deems it necessary:
  - UAICC membership of Assembly and Assembly Standing Committee (Assembly minute 15.22.01)
  - The withdrawal of recognition of a Minister (Assembly minute 15.25)
  - Who exercises discipline in the Church (Assembly minute 15.29)
  - Cooptions to Synod Standing Committees (Assembly minute 15.26)
  - Property transactions (Assembly minute 15.28)
  - The responsible bodies for ministerial education
  - Ministerial Education Board
  - Duties of Synod Secretaries (Assembly minute 15.26)
  - The process for the selection of a Pastor (Assembly minute 15.10)
  - Changes to Regulations to any extent necessary to implement effective policies and practices in response to any recommendations of the Royal Commission (Assembly minute 15.13)

- Admission of Ministers from another denomination and Admission of former Ministers of the Church (Assembly minute 15.18)
- 14.2 Regulations 3.3.8 (a) (i), 3.7.5.1 (a) (ii) and 3.7.5.1 (i) (i) were amended regarding the UAICC ex-officio membership of the Assembly and the Standing Committee
  - 14.3 Regulation 2.10.3 (a) (ii), the withdrawal of recognition of a Minister, was amended to include the situation when the Minister is not available for placement for more than two years.
  - 14.4 Regulation 5.1.3 was amended to clarify which council of the Church exercises discipline in which circumstances.
  - 14.5 The Standing Committee amended 3.7.4.1 (a) (iv) regarding cooptions to the membership of Synod Standing Committees.
  - 14.6 Regulation 4.6.3 was deleted and replaced with a new Regulation which provided more clarity regarding property transactions, in particular when special circumstances are declared in regard to property transactions, the process under which this occurs and when the declaration can be withdrawn.
  - 14.7 Regulation 3.1.6 (j) (iv) and (vii) was amended to replace 'faculty' with 'Ministerial Education Board' as the oversight body that reports to the Assembly re: standards being met and candidates achieving requirements.
  - 14.8 Regulation 3.7.4.3 (c) (ii) 1 was amended for an omission and wording clarity.
  - 14.9 The Standing Committee amended Regulation 3.6.3.4, duties of Synod Secretaries to provide consistency with Regulation 3.6.4.4, duties of the General Secretary of the Assembly, acknowledging the executive leadership, pastoral and advisory parts of the role.
  - 14.10 The Standing Committee on the advice of a Task Group it established, amended Regulation 2.4.6 to remove the time that an applicant for the specified ministry of Pastor has to be a confirmed member or a member-in-association of the Church.
  - 14.11 The Standing Committee on advice from the Royal Commission National Task Group amended Regulation 2.10.3, the withdrawal of recognition of a minister to add clause (b) that "The recognition of a Minister shall be automatically withdrawn if the Minister is convicted of a criminal offence of a sexual nature in relation to a minor."
  - 14.12 The numbering, naming and setting out of the Regulations regarding the admission of ministers from another denomination (Regulations 2.5.1-2.5.3) and the admission of former ministers of the Church (Regulations 2.5.3.1-2.5.3.4) were amended on advice from the Admission of Ministers Committee.

## **15. THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

- 15.1 Throughout the triennium the Standing Committee has received reports from the Executive Officer for the Royal Commission National Task Group at each of its meetings. This reporting has been crucial as the Commission moved through its work to its conclusion in December 2017 with the production of its final report. The national response of the Uniting Church through the Assembly and the Synods has enabled the Church to respond to issues raised by the Commission, to learn from research produced by it, and to continue to put policies and processes in place as we work towards a safe Church for all.

- 15.2 Following consideration of the risk register of the Royal Commission National Task Group, risks that were pertinent to the governance role of the Standing Committee were integrated into the Standing Committee risk register.
- 15.3 In November 2015 the Standing Committee adopted the National Framework for Interim Redress Measures for the Uniting Church. This has enabled Synods to consider an interim approach to redress for survivors of abuse in Uniting Church institutions, and the establishment of interim schemes in some Synods. In July 2016 the Standing Committee, noting that the Assembly currently has no Interim Redress Scheme aligned with the National Framework for Interim Redress Measures agreed that any claims for redress in institutions associated with the Assembly would be considered within the Interim Redress Scheme of the Synod where the institution is/was situated geographically.
- 15.4 In March 2017 the Standing Committee approved the revised “National Child Safe Policy Framework” as replacing the version approved in August 2015, aligning it with research from the Royal Commission regarding elements of child safe institutions.
- 15.5 As stated in section 14, the Standing Committee on advice from the Royal Commission National Task Group amended Regulation 2.10.3, the withdrawal of recognition of a Minister to add clause (b) that “The recognition of a Minister shall be automatically withdrawn if the Minister is convicted of a criminal offence of a sexual nature in relation to a minor.”
- 15.6 In March 2017 the President, the Assembly General Secretary and the Qld Synod General Secretary appeared for the Uniting Church before the Commission in Case Study 56. National policies and processes, and the responses of the Church during the life of the Commission were interrogated.
- 15.7 Following the conclusion of the Royal Commission’s work and the handing down of its report to the Government, the important work of analysing its recommendations for the Uniting Church and its institutions and Agencies has begun. The National Task Group and the Standing Committee have also begun to consider how to embed frameworks and policies into the practices of the Church to ensure the safety of children in our care and activities. The response of the Uniting Church to providing redress to survivors of abuse in our institutions is being developed as a matter of import and urgency. The Assembly Resourcing Unit provided a resource of lament for the Church to use in worship on the 25 February 2018 or at a subsequent time in response to the Royal Commission final report.

## **16. LEGAL IDENTITY AND STRUCTURES OF GOVERNANCE**

- 16.1 The report from the previous Standing Committee to the Fourteenth Assembly stated that one of the major concerns of the Royal Commission is that any entity that has dealings with children must have access to insurance and assets sufficient to make good any claims for damages. The goal of this is to ensure that the bodies responsible for persons who abuse children have assets with which to meet the claims that arise from such abuse. Like many churches the Uniting Church is, for the most part, a collection of unincorporated associations of people who do not have what the law calls “legal personality.” Such associations cannot be sued or hold assets. The “legal identity” of the Uniting Church is in the Synod Property Trusts and the Assembly’s Corporations Act company, UCA Assembly Ltd. The Property Trusts of churches do not direct the ministry of the Church. This remains the case.
- 16.2 During this triennium the Standing Committee has received reports from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania as it explored whether it would be required to consider incorporation from a state government perspective. A national incorporation conversation was held between the Assembly

and the Synods in July 2016. The meeting agreed that it is important for the Uniting Church to continue to consider the structure and legal identity of the Church for the future. The Royal Commission is one of the catalysts for considering this.

- 16.3 The Standing Committee following deliberations of the Assembly Legal Reference Committee including with the Chair of the Incorporation Task Group from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, referred the matter to the Church Polity Reference Committee to provide advice re: incorporation and its effect on the polity of the Church. The advice was brought to the March 2018 meeting of the Standing Committee.

## **17. STAFF MATTERS**

17.1 The Standing Committee appointed the following senior staff for the periods indicated:

- Ms Claerwen Little as National Director of UnitingCare Australia from 6 February 2017
- Mr Rob Floyd as Associate General Secretary, Assembly Resourcing Unit from 1 July 2017
- Dr Sureka Goringe as National Director of UnitingWorld from 17 July 2017

17.2 Rev. Elenie Poulos concluded her placement as National Director for UnitingJustice Australia on 30 June 2017.

17.3 Mr Craig Mitchell concluded his placement as National Director for Formation, Education and Discipleship on 30 June 2017.

17.4 Rev. Dr Chris Walker concluded his placement as National Consultant, Christian Unity Doctrine and Worship on 30 June 2017

17.5 Rev. Tom Kerr concluded his placement as National Faith Development Consultant (Youth & Young Adults) on 30 June 2017.

17.6 Mr Rob Floyd concluded his term as National Director of UnitingWorld on 30 June 2017.

17.7 Rev. Dr Apwee Ting concluded his placement as National Director Multicultural Cross Cultural Ministry on 30 June 2017

17.8 Mr Grahame Ryan concluded his term as Acting National Director of Frontier Services on 11 April 2017.

17.9 Ms Lin Hatfield Dodds concluded her appointment as National Director, UnitingCare Australia on 15 July 2016.

## **18. BUSINESS PASSED TO THE NEXT STANDING COMMITTEE**

18.1 The outgoing Standing Committee has provided several suggestions for attention and action by the incoming Standing Committee arising from its work on governance and other matters.

## **19. FUTURE MEETING DATES**

19.1 The incoming Standing Committee elected by the Fifteenth Assembly will hold its first two meetings in Sydney on August 24-26 and November 9-11.