

# B25 QUEENSLAND SYNOD

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Operating in a large decentralised state, the activities of the Queensland Synod require a range of different approaches. Our participation in the Gospel of Christ through Uniting Church activities is varied and complex. They range from small rural town congregations, Indigenous services and remote area ministries, through to large growing congregations, vibrant schools, community services, aged care and hospitals, and local expressions of ministry through word and service. We participate in ecumenical activities across the spectrum, from joint schools, training colleges and project based work, through to the more formal structures of Heads of Churches and Queensland Churches Together.

We delight and thank God for the opportunities to work in First Peoples' ministry in a range of ways across the state, including through the Calvary Presbytery. We are seeing strength and growth in the areas of community service delivery to remote and regional areas as well as supporting Indigenous Congregations.

The challenges for a Church to grow, transition and innovate in these spaces are manifold, but we believe that we can see a Church that is prepared to be led by faithful prayer and discernment into a new way of being. One that is committed to the Covenant with First Peoples, recognises and facilitates the development of Church in strategic locations, adapts and adopts to its future as a multicultural Church and always works together to support and uphold the one body of Christ as manifested in this time and place.

## 2. MAJOR UNDERTAKINGS

### 2.1 RESPONSE TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Like every Synod we have spent significant time and resources in responding to the outcomes and recommendations of the Royal Commission. This has included ensuring all activities of the Church are aware and trained in safe ministry practices with children. This has now become part of the regular training expectation across the Synod.

### 2.2 DEVELOPMENT AND DEPLOYMENT OF THE INTERIM REDRESS SCHEME

The Synod introduced a scheme in late 2016 and has recently received the review of the operations of the scheme. It showed almost universal appreciation of the time and care taken to address the needs of survivors. As the national Church considers its participation in a Federal Redress Scheme, our scheme will be consistently reviewed.

### 2.3 RESTRUCTURE OF SYNOD OFFICE

In order to better provide contemporary resourcing services to the whole of Synod activities, the Synod office was restructured into the areas of Strategic Resourcing, Strategic Risk, Strategic Mission and Shared Services. The General Secretary continues to promote a culture of collaborative and responsive functions within the Synod office.

## **2.4 REVIEW OF SHALOM CHRISTIAN COLLEGE TOWNSVILLE**

In 2013 the Queensland Synod had taken on the responsibility of operating a co-educational boarding and educational facility for Indigenous students from across remote Australia and northern Queensland. A review in 2017 found the educational, social and health needs of the students were not being met and the decision was made to close the school. Students, their families and staff have been supported throughout this process.

## **2.5 NEW PLACEMENTS PROCEDURES**

A new decentralised placements model including direct advertising and Joint Nominating Committee process was introduced as an option for Synod placements at the beginning of 2018. The new process will be evaluated at the beginning of 2019.

## **2.6 NEW FUNDING MODEL FOR PRESBYTERIES**

It has been historically the case that the Synod collected and distributed monies to Presbyteries on application. A new model is being introduced for the 2018/19 financial year, where the Presbyteries will pool their collected funds and jointly agree to distribute those funds across the regions on a needs basis. The Synod will receive a yearly grant from Presbyteries to provide supportive services.

## **2.7 REORGANISATION AND VISIONING OF THE BOARD FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION, LEADING TO CHANGES AT TRINITY COLLEGE QUEENSLAND**

A review of the operations and future of Trinity College Queensland undertaken in 2015, revealed significant transformation was required to continue to provide locally based theological education. The transformation program of work is now complete and we are evaluating the results of a redesigned staffing model, course offering and educational delivery programs.

## **2.8 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

Leadership development has been a major focus for the Synod in the last three years. 2017 saw the production of a leadership framework, developed specifically to assess the type of leadership we hope to see within the Uniting Church Queensland Synod. The framework is being used to evaluate all leadership programs of work that are being used within the Uniting Church context.

In conjunction with Adelaide College of Divinity we have sponsored and delivered three rounds of a Graduate Leadership Program comprising approximately 14 participants each round. The evaluation of the program which has been designed around ministry in a contemporary context has been overwhelmingly positive.

The QLD and SA Synods have worked together to offer the Uniting Leaders program of work, which includes offering courses, conferences and training. This innovative partnership will be evaluated after three years of operation.

We are sponsoring and supporting a new wave of leaders within the young adult multicultural cohort through the Next Gen Arise program. This includes worship services and specific leadership training opportunities.

## **2.9 MODERATOR AND GENERAL SECRETARY APPOINTMENTS**

Rev. David Baker continues as Moderator until 2020 as he was re-elected for a further three-year period.

We gave thanks for the faithful service of Mr Gary Doyle and Mr Robert Packer who both held the General Secretary positions until the election and appointment of Rev. Heather den Houting in 2016.

## **2.10 UNITINGCARE QUEENSLAND**

We gave thanks for the extraordinary contribution of Ms Anne Cross as CEO of UnitingCare Queensland for a period of 14 years and welcomed Mr Craig Barke into that role at the end of 2017.

Over the last three years, UnitingCare Queensland has undergone a deliberate and significant transformation process, consolidating shared activities and preparing itself for market transformation in the health, aged care and disability sectors. The success of the services is underpinned by the success of the Transform program of work, and while difficult, it was essential in order to continue in its work of delivering services that support life in all its fullness through Christ.

## **2.11 WESLEY MISSION QUEENSLAND**

We acknowledged and celebrated Geoff Batkin's 20-year anniversary as CEO of Wesley Mission Queensland. In 2017 the name was changed from Wesley Mission Brisbane to reflect the breadth of services delivered over Queensland.

## **2.12 BY-LAW REVIEW – IMPROVING SYNOD GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES**

In 2016 we undertook a review of Boards, Committees and Commissions within the QLD Synod and as a result have introduced changes to the By-laws to give effect to a consistent, contemporary and adequately supported committee structure, which meets our regulatory responsibility. The By-law review continues during 2018 with some more questions being asked about the manner and cover of our current governance practices.

## **2.13 DIGITAL YOUTH DISCIPLESHIP AND YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT**

In 2016 we introduced an innovative program to explore and develop a digital ministry model which anticipated and adapted ministry experience through digital relationships.

The Bread Fish Two community continues and more work is being done to develop and integrate the learnings from this project into new expressions of youth and children's ministry programs.

### **3. MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.1 KEY CHANGE INITIATIVES**

In 2017 the Presbyteries and the Synod Standing Committee worked together to identify four strategic and ongoing themes that would influence our decisions about where and how to direct our resources as a church over the next three years. We came up with statements around four key change initiatives. These are:

- We will ensure the right forms of Church in each geographic, demographic and virtual context are kingdom-focussed and steadily improving in health and vitality;
- We are confident that we invite, nurture and enable multicultural and cross cultural communities and leaders to full participation across the whole Church;
- We will work together until First Peoples feel fully engaged across the whole Church;
- The community sees one unified Christ-centred identity for the whole Church.

#### **3.2 MEASURING OUTCOMES**

As part of the move toward more accountable use of the resources of the Church, the expectation for all Synod activities is to now report against achievements and outcomes.

As part of this strategy we have introduced a Synod office activity dashboard; a **#realunitingchurch** reporting framework that will report annually against stated priorities and a general maturing in Synod enterprises, institutions and activities to report against risks, compliance and strategy.

#### **3.3 SERVICE AGENCIES**

Our service agencies have inhabited positions of strength in the community. Providing significant and diverse outcomes. We delight particularly in the developing capacity of Australian Regional and Remote Community Services (ARRCS) and our Indigenous Community Services. We anticipate the strengthening of our joint venture with NSW in the Leap In! venture. Designed to allow those accessing services through the National Disability Insurance Scheme to simply and easily link their service needs with service providers.

#### **3.4 CROSS CULTURAL MINISTRY INITIATIVES**

South Moreton Presbytery has strengthened its intentional ministry program in the cross-cultural space. This, in conjunction with the Synod-wide focus on emerging leadership in the second generation community, is assisting us to embed our reality as a cross-cultural Church.

#### **3.5 EMERGING MINISTRY MODELS**

As well as large and thriving Congregations as expressions of Church, we also support smaller church plants. The strategic locations project being delivered across the Synod is designed to evaluate and offer support to a variety of ministry models, including non-congregational ministry endeavours where appropriate.

## **4. WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE MAJOR DISAPPOINTMENTS?**

### **4.1 LAMENT FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY STRATEGIC CHANGE INITIATIVES**

As we have developed and delivered on significant change initiatives across the Synod office, we acknowledge and lament the pain of loss of those whose positions have been made redundant.

### **4.2 SHALOM CHRISTIAN COLLEGE**

The struggle to make a decision on delivering a fundamentally missional project through Shalom Christian College, balanced by an inability to achieve satisfactory education, social and safe outcomes for the students was difficult for all involved. We lament the pain and distress the decision to close the school has caused.

## **5. THE WAY IN WHICH THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH THE MINISTRY OF CONGREGATIONS OCCURS HAS BEEN CHANGING**

### **5.1 NEW ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS**

We have noted that the traditional forms of ecumenism in Queensland have lost some of their salt. In contrast, cross-ecumenical activities such as ecumenical Chaplaincy, Wontulp Bi-Buya College, jointly governed schools, the Grass Tree gathering, Next Gen Arise etc. gain momentum and encouragement from a range of non-traditional ecumenical partners. The Synod intends to explore the nature of this new ecumenism as part of its ongoing work.

## **6. WHAT IS THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH THE WORK OF THE SYNOD MUST BE UNDERTAKEN?**

We believe that among other things, the Royal Commission has enlivened us to the reality of the loss of sense of “social license” for Churches to operate in the community. An increasing negative perception of institutional Church / Christian faith can either drive us to defensiveness (as persecuted people) or to respond joyfully to the challenge to remember who we are, why we are here and whom we serve.

While we are delighted in the strength and growth of our activities across the Synod, we do not ignore the struggle of those who are challenged by changing social and age demographics in their communities. The Presbyteries are acutely aware of the need to be alert and responsive to those who are struggling. With the assistance of an external consultant, the Presbyteries reviewed the number, nature and types of congregations within their jurisdiction. This work is underpinning the new strategic locations project.

The Synod has actively engaged with the development of the Queensland Community Alliance. This work has allowed for greater relationships and joint work in developing a stronger and more resilient community.

## **7. WHAT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES DOES THIS CHANGING CONTEXT PRODUCE?**

### **7.1 SOCIAL CAPITAL**

We must take seriously the call to be the salt and light to our communities. This means all we do should call us into healthier community engagement. Such an approach expects the Church to transform itself in obedience to the stirring of the spirit, and we pray that we are allowing ourselves to do this.

### **7.2 CHANGING FUNDING SOURCES**

We know that we can no longer rely on our traditional funding sources. In Queensland the activities of the Presbyteries are primarily funded through congregational giving, but the Synod and Assembly are funded through treasury and stewardship fees. These resources cannot be relied on for the long-term and as a result we are looking at alternative funding models.

### **7.3 TOGETHER ON THE WAY**

The Queensland Synod took an innovative step through its Together on the Way process to try to develop a whole-of-Synod mission strategy. It is now coming to its end and we will be embarking on a new mission planning process over the next few years.

### **7.4 NEW LEADERSHIP**

Our leadership strategies are designed to resource and power all people in the Uniting Church to take up the baton of thinking about a church for the future. In this space, all conversations about who we are and how we are as church are being encouraged.

### **7.5 GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD / DECENTRALISATION**

The highly decentralised nature of the Synod calls us into continued exploration of new ways of ministry in our context. From hub and spoke service delivery models in our agencies, to non-centralised mission models and the encouragement and oversight of lay leadership, our forms of Church and the oversight capacity of the Church is evolving and adapting. The One Church initiative is designed to allow flexibility for new ways of being.

## **8. WHAT ARE THE HOPES / PLANS / MAJOR MATTERS REQUIRING ATTENTION THAT FACE THE SYNOD OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS?**

- Uniting Women's Conference – to be held in 2018;
- Schools strategy – this will lead the program of work to bring schools into an appropriate governance relationship with the church;
- Women in Leadership strategy – while we encourage women to take up different roles and positions in the church, we are finding that certain roles are still very male-centric. There are a number of programs in place to try to adjust this;
- Embedding discernment of direction in operational structures and programs – by developing a whole of Synod strategic approach, we will better able to inform all the

Committees, Commissions and Boards and the operational activities of the Church to come to a common understanding of the mission of the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod;

- Leadership framework – the ongoing work of growing leadership in the Synod will allow us to address emerging context for the expression of church;
- Discipleship development – we are developing a discipleship framework in the same way. This will help clarify what the Uniting Church expects of disciples within the Church, and provide the resources to support a healthy discipleship program across the Synod;
- Chaplaincy – is a beacon for emerging forms of ministry. We hope to encourage communities and people to imagine what ministry in this context can be;
- Working with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Calvary Presbytery to explore the future of Indigenous ministry in the context of Queensland;
- An examination of our governance structures to assess their capacity to deal with the changing Church.