

B25 VIC/TAS SYNOD

1. MAJOR UNDERTAKINGS

1.1 IMPLEMENTATION OF MAJOR STRATEGIC REVIEW

As was reported to the Fourteenth Assembly, the Synod undertook a Major Strategic Review (MSR) which was completed in 2017. This Review resulted in a Strategic Framework for the Synod's worship, witness and service, comprising a Synod Vision, Mission Principles, Statements of Intent, Strategic Priorities, and Areas of Focus. These elements are collectively referred to as the Strategic Framework. A website providing full details on the Review Implementation is located at: <https://ucavictas.org.au/visionandmission/resources/>

The Strategic Framework is being used across the Synod's ministries, operations and governance committees to shape resource allocation, governance development, leadership development, ministry and mission directions (with emphases on coordinated and collaborative approaches for ministry) and mission with other councils and parts of the Church, along with missional and financial sustainability.

Following MSR-related resolutions, the Synod's ministries and operations have been consolidated into three major units: Secretariat; equipping Leadership for Mission; and Mission Resourcing. The emphasis of the new structure is to enhance the Synod's capacity to provide a coordinated response to serving and supporting other councils of the Church, effective responses to relevant compliance, and utilising the wise stewardship of resources.

1.2 PRESBYTERY TRANSITION AND RESOURCING

The 2016 Synod meeting resolved to appoint a Presbytery Transition Team (PTT) to provide proposals to the 2017 Synod meeting regarding Presbyteries' roles, leadership, and resourcing.

Following the PTT's report to the 2017 Synod meeting, resolutions were made which included a commitment between Presbyteries and the Synod to enhance working together in coordinated and collaborative ways, encouraging Presbyteries to consider designated leadership in Presbytery Ministry Teams, consideration of the Presbytery Chairperson role as a placement and/or receiving remuneration, new resourcing arrangements for presbytery ministry and other roles/resourcing. The new resourcing arrangements commence on 1 October 2018. Another initiative resulting from the PTT is the establishment of a Presbyteries-Synod Forum (PSF) (similar to the QLD Synod's Presbytery Synod Interface). At the time of writing this report, the PSF's first meeting is scheduled for June 2018.

Developments regarding Presbyteries' roles, leadership, and resourcing are being implemented through consultative processes between Presbyteries, and between Presbyteries and the Synod. A project worker has been appointed to coordinate the work that is being undertaken. It is anticipated that the bulk of the changes will be completed by October 2018, with bedding down of processes to unfold from there.

1.3 WESLEY PLACE

Wesley Place (previously known as the Wesley Upper Lonsdale Development) is a collaborative project between the Synod, Uniting and the Lonsdale Street Wesley Congregation. These areas of the Church are working with a developer to utilise a section of the Wesley Church site in Lonsdale Street Melbourne, to provide updated facilities for the Congregation, Synod offices, and Uniting Vic.Tas. This is a major undertaking that will include building a commercial tower on the site (funded by the developer) and provide for increased open space in the heart of Melbourne, along with greater opportunities for ministry and mission to be provided by the Congregation, the Synod, and UCA Institutions.

Work has commenced on building Wesley Place. The occupancy date is expected to be in the first quarter of 2020.

2. CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH MINISTRY OF CONGREGATIONS APPEARS TO BE CHANGING

As was reported to the Fourteenth Assembly, the situation continues that across the Synod the number of ministry placements is decreasing and numbers of part-time placements are increasing. This is mainly due to aging and a reduction in membership within some congregations. This trend is occurring in metropolitan, regional, and rural contexts. Exceptions to the trend are congregations comprised largely of people from a non-Anglo background as these are generally growing in number, with membership and participation that reflects a wide spectrum of age groupings.

Notwithstanding smaller and aging congregations (generally), many congregations are introducing new mission programs and 'fresh expressions' for worship and discipleship. These initiatives emerge from a deep and abiding commitment, responding to gospel hope, the desire to share faith, and the continuing development of discipleship. Presbyteries and facets of Synod-based ministries and operations are providing substantial support and assistance for these local initiatives.

3. CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH WORK OF THE SYNOD IS BEING UNDERTAKEN

Synod-based ministries and operations are undertaking their range of responsibilities in a context of complexity with the increasing demands of government and civic regulatory compliance, along with the Church's own regulatory requirements. These developments are particularly prominent in the context of child and vulnerable people safety. There continues to be increased awareness of the need for the Synod to have oversight and/or visibility of activities undertaken in the name of the Church, addressing both risk and compliance issues as the Church seeks to engage in ministry and mission activities. The general decline in congregational membership is having a direct impact on the ability of the various councils and institutions of the Church, including Synod bodies, to fill leadership roles. An increased proportion of Synod staff and members of Boards/Committees do not have a UCA background.

This highlights the importance of orientation processes to assist people who want to contribute to the Church's life and mission but have not been 'formed' in it, to be oriented to the Church's ethos and its particular polity and governance arrangements. Following MSR resolutions, increased resourcing has been provided for governance training of all

Synod-related governance committees, along with greater emphases in orientation to UCA decision-making procedures and understanding of procedures and culture.

4. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT THIS CHANGING CONTEXT IS PRODUCING

There is an ongoing openness to varying expressions of being Church expressed in Councils and institutions of the Church. This has been enhanced from faithful leadership and stewardship over a significant period of time, from the 'climate' developed through the MSR's activities and reporting, and a host of innovative Presbytery-wide and Congregation-based projects and programs. Government and wider-community expectations and compliance requirements that expect all parts of the Church to work together have also contributed to this development. Within these range of expressions there is a challenge to ensure that various parts of the Church express common values and shape 'meaningful' responses as one Church together, rather than competing expressions of being the Church in contemporary contexts. The challenge and opportunity to develop leadership for mission in the 21st century is a significant reality in the life of the Church and is being responded to in various ways. Likewise, governance arrangements for both councils and institutions of the Church that honour the UCA's polity and respond effectively to contemporary compliance and regulation needs, also present both challenges and opportunities.

5. HOPES, PLANS AND MAJOR MATTERS REQUIRING ATTENTION THAT FACE THE SYNOD OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS

The Synod will continue to exercise its "responsibility for the general oversight, direction and administration of the Church's worship, witness and service in the region allotted to it" [*Basis of Union*, para 15 (d)]. The outcomes from the MSR and their implementation will continue to be significant over the next three years in the exercise of the Synod's responsibility. Similarly, it is expected that that the new approaches of coordination and collaboration with presbyteries will assist the Church across Victoria and Tasmania to enhance worship, witness, and service together.

In the changing 'landscape' of government, and legislative and regulatory compliance requirements, the Synod has a continuing role to provide leadership and education for various Councils, boards, and committees of the Church within its bounds in response to such changes.

The Synod will continue to seek to support and work with presbyteries, congregations, agencies, schools and other institutions of the Church in a variety of ways; to assist in and provide leadership for worship, witness and service that reflects the Synod's Vision:

**Following Christ,
walking together
as First and Second Peoples,
seeking community, compassion and justice for all creation**

6. ROYAL COMMISSION RELATED MATTERS

Since the report to the Fourteenth Assembly, there has been a range of legislative and regulatory provisions introduced in Victoria to improve child safety and prevent child abuse. These include the:

- Wrongs Amendment Act (2016);
- Child Safe Standards (2017);
- Reportable Conduct Scheme (2017).

The Victorian Government's introduction of the seven Child Safe Standards in 2017 arose from the recommendations of the *Betrayal of Trust* report resulting from the Victorian Government's Parliamentary Inquiry into child abuse in institutional settings, which preceded the Royal Commission. It is now a legislative requirement that all elements of religious bodies, including Churches, in Victoria conform to these standards. The Child Safe Standards are in line with the Royal Commission's ten key Child Safe Elements. A comparison is in the following table.

Royal Commission's recommended National Child Safe Standards	Victoria's legislated Child Safe Standards
Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture	Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements (Standard 1)
Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously	Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children (Standard 7)
Families and communities are informed and involved	
Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account	
People working with children are suitable and supported	Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel (Standard 4)
Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused	Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse (Standard 5)
Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training	Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel (Standard 4)
Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur	Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse (Standard 6)
Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved	
Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe	A child safe policy or statement of commitment to child safety (Standard 2)
	A code of conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children (Standard 3)

Victoria now also has a Reportable Conduct Scheme which oversees allegations of child abuse and child-related misconduct. From 1 January 2018, the Reportable Conduct Scheme administered by the Victoria's Commission for Children and Young People ('Commission'), became a new legal requirement for all religious bodies, including all Councils of the UCA, within Victoria.

The Victorian legislation requires that the 'head of organisation' is responsible for notifying the Commission of a reportable allegation in line with the Reportable Conduct Scheme, for investigating such allegations, and providing the findings to the Commission. This means that the General Secretary, as 'head of organisation' for the purposes of the Reportable Conduct Scheme (except in the case of incorporated Institutions of the Church which have their own 'head of organisation'), is required to notify the Commission within three business days after becoming aware of a reportable allegation. A report from the organisation on the investigation is due to the Commission within thirty days.

As 'head or organisation', the General Secretary is also responsible for ensuring compliance with the Reportable Conduct Scheme's obligations by the Uniting Church. In particular, the General Secretary must ensure that the Church has in place systems for:

- procedures to respond effectively and record steps in response to Reportable Conduct reports;
- preventing reportable conduct by an employee (employee, contractor, volunteer) of the Uniting Church within the course of his or her employment;
- enabling any person, including an employee of the Uniting Church, to notify the General Secretary of a reportable allegation of which the person becomes aware;
- enabling any person, including an employee of the Uniting Church, to notify the Commission of a reportable allegation involving the General Secretary of which the person becomes aware; and
- investigating and responding to a reportable allegation against an employee of the Uniting Church.

The Victorian legislation and the recommendations of the Royal Commission have provided impetus for the significant changes and new expectations around child safe practices throughout the Synod, across all three state jurisdictions in which it operates (Victoria, Tasmania, and parts of southern NSW). Such regulatory and strategic imperatives present helpful indicators for 'best practice' in pursuit of the continuous calling to keep children safe, as a reflection of God's love for all creation.

The Synod has made progress in implementing the Child Safe Standards across the councils of the Church within the Synod. This includes:

- further development of the Synod's existing Keeping Children Safe Policy and associated policies and resources to reflect the above mentioned regulatory requirements, including a policy requiring Working with Children Checks;
- the appointment of the Program Manager – Child Safe implementation to assess and recommend the resources and staffing arrangements for ongoing effective responses to the Royal Commission's recommendations and various government legislation;
- the appointment of six Child Safe Project Officers (approx. 0.2 FTE) based in Presbyteries. (Their initial three to six-month casual contract has been extended until the end of 2018);
- a significant reworking of the Safe Church Training and the accompanying requirement for this to be completed by all ministers and appointed leaders across the life of the Church;
- all ministry workers for whom the Code of Ethics applies are required to attend two sessions on Safe Church Training and then to 'roll out' the Safe Church Training to their Church Councils as appropriate;
- development and facilitation of child safe training for all Synod staff and volunteers;
- development of a Safe Church Framework and associated policies and resources including a policy requiring Working with Children Checks/Registrations;
- development and refinement of the Working with Children Check/Registration database;
- development and refinement of a Presbytery Progress monitoring process;
- development of a large suite of resources for congregations and improved webpage (with thanks to the QLD Synod for sharing their resources);
- an increased focus on how the *Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Ministers* requirements intersect with Safe Church practices;
- continuing to respond to and support survivors of abuse within the UCA (councils and institutions) or predecessor Churches who make themselves known to the Church;

- improved recruitment/screening procedures for Synod staff and volunteers. There is now a Code of Conduct for Synod staff/volunteers; development of an induction package; including child safe statements in advertisements, position descriptions, interview and referee questions;
- an internal Child Safe Audit undertaken in 2018;
- ministers' engagement in Supervision will be a focus in 2018, noting that this is one of the Royal Commission's recommendations (16.45).

While much work has been achieved, the Victorian child safe-related legislation and the recommendations of the Royal Commission require the whole Synod to undertake continuous improvement with respect to the implementation of child safe practices. More robust governance of such changes and adequate resourcing in this area is now being progressed. Meeting the overarching child safe requirements requires cultural change and a long-term commitment to new practices which create an environment of safety for, and protection of, children.

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