



mylathina takila-ti Le:wun tunk-ungai tuldangk tunk-ungai  
Ola ma tumau i le alofa' 사랑 안에서 살기 Tinggal di dalam Kasih  
Nofoma'u i he Ofa 愛中合居



## B18 UNITINGCARE AUSTRALIA

### 1. ABOUT UNITINGCARE AUSTRALIA

UnitingCare Australia's Mission is to express God's love for all people through the Uniting Church's commitment to supporting individuals, families and communities through advocacy and the enhancement of community service provision.

#### 1.1. The Role of the Agency

Acting within guidelines set by the Assembly or the Assembly Standing Committee, and grounded in the experience of the Uniting Church's community service providers, UnitingCare Australia:

1. Encourages theological reflection on the Church's community services work.
2. Advocates to Government and within the Church and community those policies and practices which enhance the dignity of people, especially those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised.
3. Enables exchange of information across Synods and Uniting Church service providers.
4. Seeks to enhance the quality of community service provision by the Uniting Church.
5. Represents the views of Uniting Church service providers to governments.
6. Works as appropriate with other churches and peak organisations in the community services field.
7. Acts on requests and referrals from Synods and the Assembly.

This paper reports on that activity according to the following four broadly defined areas:

- Theological reflection
- Advocacy
- Strategic Priorities
- Communication and collaboration

UnitingCare Australia contributes to the life of the Church by:

1. Focusing the activities of the agency on the vision of the Assembly as a whole.
2. Advising the Assembly and/or the Assembly Standing Committee on policy matters within their areas of responsibility.
3. Making policy decisions where the Assembly or the Assembly Standing Committee has delegated authority, either through UnitingCare Australia's Mandate or by resolution.

#### 1.2. Agency Principles and Scope

UnitingCare Australia's work is grounded in its Mission: *to give voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision.*

Propelled by our values and a theologically grounded understanding of hope and vision for a good society, we seek to make a practical difference in the world. The work of UnitingCare Australia is informed by: the daily experience of the countless Australians (estimated to be 1.4 million) who are supported by our community services agencies each year; the expertise of the UnitingCare network; and the ongoing life of the Church. It is the coming together of values, vision and experience that gives strength and integrity to our activity.

Together with other agencies of the Church, UnitingCare Australia works to promote a just and participatory society, a united humanity, respect for all, and investment in the common good.

For us, this is expressed particularly in relation to policy and practice associated with the provision of community services. Our task is to make explicit the connections between faith, social policy, and outcomes on the ground; to government, to the Church, and into the public domain.

UnitingCare Australia plays a significant role in promoting the Uniting Church's perspectives to government and the wider community; developing national positions; gathering and disseminating information; networking with other church and community bodies; and advocating our position to the Australian Parliament and relevant Australian Government departments.

The community services of the Uniting Church in Australia are extensive and diverse. The UnitingCare Network employs approximately 50,000 staff and is supported by the work of over 30,000 volunteers. We have more than 1,600 sites throughout the country. UnitingCare, as the network of community services and activities within the Uniting Church, gives concrete expression to God's love for the world.

UnitingCare Australia enables collaboration between agencies, institutions, missions and Synods, and is a powerful vehicle for providing a unified public voice and collective action and activity. The work of UnitingCare Australia is embedded in the life and witness of the Uniting Church.

### **1.3. Agency Governance**

This triennium has been one of significant governance change for UnitingCare Australia with a new Charter and Mandate (Appendix A) which were approved by the Assembly Standing Committee in November 2018. This has meant the governance structure has changed with a Board replacing the previous National Committee. Remuneration of UnitingCare Australia Board members not employed by the Uniting Church was agreed by the Assembly Standing Committee in March 2020. The rationale was to attract people to the roles and recognise the time commitment required.

The Hon. Bronwyn Pike stepped down from her role as Chair of the UnitingCare Australia Board in November 2019 and took up the role of Synod nomination. Paul Linossier was appointed Interim Chair for a 12-month period by the Assembly Standing Committee pending the recruitment and appointment of a new Chair.

A Nominations Committee from the Board undertook a comprehensive recruitment process and Geoff Batkin was appointed to the role of Chair by the Assembly Standing Committee in November 2020. To diversify the skills of the Board and provide more independence, the Assembly Standing Committee encouraged the recruitment of the three appointed Board members from outside the UnitingCare network of service providers. As a result, again through a process led by the Nominations Committee, the following appointments have now been approved by the Assembly Standing Committee:

- Alison Overeem - Alison is a proud Palawa woman from the South East of Tasmania, a member of the Executive of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and has extensive experience in the community services sector including service on boards such as SNAICC.
- Mark Dingle – Mark brings specialist expertise in governance, risk and strategy across government, private and not-for-profit sectors. He is a partner with Deloitte and national pro-bono leader for risk, with extensive board experience and a strong commitment to the Uniting Church and social justice.
- Adam Connolly – Adam has extensive experience in communications, media and government relations with a background in journalism. He has advised Boards in the aged care sector and is a Uniting Church member.

The Assembly has delegated governance and functional responsibilities for UnitingCare Australia to its Board. The agency's governance arrangements are set out in UnitingCare Charter.

The Board function includes:

- strategic leadership in accordance with the UCA mission;
- monitoring the implementation of strategy and decisions of the Board;
- oversight of the management of the finances and resources;
- monitoring risk and compliance; and
- oversight of performance.

The Board comprises:

- the Chair appointed by the Assembly;
- the National Director of UnitingCare Australia appointed by Assembly Standing Committee;
- the General Secretary of the Assembly;
- one board member appointed by Assembly Standing Committee on recommendation from each Synod of the Uniting Church using such process as each Synod may determine; and
- up to three board members, appointed by Assembly Standing Committee on recommendation by the Board upon such terms and conditions as the Board determines.

Chair	Geoff Batkin
National Director of UnitingCare Australia	Claerwen Little
General Secretary of the Assembly	Colleen Geyer
<i>Synod Representatives</i>	
Queensland Synod	Craig Barke, Chief Executive Officer UnitingCare QLD
New South Wales and ACT	Tracey Burton, Executive Director, Uniting in NSW.ACT
Northern Synod	Lawson Broad, CEO Somerville Community Services
Western Australia	Amanda Hunt, CEO UnitingWA
South Australia	Rev Tim Hodgson, Executive Officer UnitingCare SA
Victoria and Tasmania	Hon. Bronwyn Pike, Chief Executive Officer, Uniting Victoria and Tasmania
<i>Appointed Members</i>	
	Alison Overeem
	Mark Dingle
	Adam Connolly

#### 1.4. Agency Mandate and Priorities

UnitingCare Australia's Mandate is to take up community service issues within the theological framework of the Uniting Church, particularly the Church's social justice perspectives; to develop and reflect on the policies and practices of the Uniting Church in community services; and to pursue appropriate issues within the Uniting Church, with Government and the community sector, with the Australian community and with other parts of the Church.

In 2019 the Board developed a new set of strategic priorities to guide the work of the agency and priorities of National Office staff time (Appendix B). The four focus priority areas are:

1. Justice for First Peoples
2. Ageing to our Full Potential including Responding to the Aged Care Royal Commission
3. Addressing Economic Inequality
4. Responding to the Disability Royal Commissions

These priority areas are framed by the following key factors for success:

- Impact – make an impact by focusing on significant policy change

- Identify – build profile and brand in order to exert influence
- Relationships – nurture critical relationships with key national decision -makers and influencers
- Resources – mobilise the soft asset base of the network and the wider church as champions and advocates
- Capability – build internal capability both within staff and by harnessing the wider network workforce to become a high impact peak body

## 1.5. Agency Funding

UnitingCare Australia is funded by contributions from the UnitingCare network. This funding is occasionally supplemented by grants for specific purposes.

## 1.6. Agency Operation

UnitingCare Australia has nine full-time staff and two part time staff members and is located in Canberra, in close proximity to Parliament House.

UnitingCare Australia works with the UnitingCare network through a range of ways including national networks, forums and working groups around service and policy areas. The networks and working groups assist in identifying issues and enable the network to work across organisational boundaries to pursue common goals. Members of these networks are drawn from across the UnitingCare network.

The role of these networks and working groups is to develop, review and reflect upon the policies and practices of the Uniting Church in its community services ministry with people, and to contribute to the advocacy of UnitingCare Australia.

The networks and groups that have operated over the triennium are:

UnitingCare Australia's Aged Care Network  
 Aged Care CEO Network  
 Addressing Economic Inequality Network  
 First Peoples Working Group  
 Uniting First Peoples Gathering group  
 UnitingCare Australia's Children Young People and Families Network  
 Disability Working Group  
 Emergency Relief and Financial Counselling Working Group  
 Leadership Forums

## 2. REPORTING AGAINST UNITINGCARE AUSTRALIA'S MANDATE

### 2.1. Theological reflection

The Mandate affirms that UnitingCare Australia will take up community service issues within the theological framework of the Uniting Church. The Agency's *Faith Foundations* document provides the theological framework for the activities of UnitingCare Australia.

Rev Dr Ji Zhang, our Theologian-in-Residence has led a project to revise the Faith Foundations. The first stage of this work is entitled "Service as Mission - A theological reflection on the Uniting Church's community services ministry and the work of UnitingCare Australia". The document outlines four theological principles:

1. Love God and love our neighbour,
2. God's mission in the margins,
3. Being a Fellowship of Reconciliation,
4. The Church and Services work together in God's Mission.

The theological reflection was approved by the UnitingCare Australia Board in 2020 and subsequently received by the Assembly Standing Committee (Appendix C). To continue this major project, Ji engages regularly with various church councils and our community services agencies.

Through our theological work, UnitingCare Australia continues to strengthen ecumenical connections with international research agencies and the World Council of Churches. In 2019 the theology of social service was presented to the Christian Conference of Asia and in 2020, at the international conference jointly organised by the World Council of Churches and the International Society of Diakonia and Social Practice. The Service as Mission was included in the International Handbook on Ecumenical Diakonia published by Regnum Books at Oxford in early 2021.

Our theological reflection grounds community service within the theological framework of the Uniting Church. It included the development of a theological rationale for our response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety and the Disability Royal Commission in 2020.

Through our Theologian-in-Residence, the Agency supports the Chaplaincy Ministry Task Group established by the Assembly Standards for Ministry Committee and relates to the Sovereignty Affirmation Task Group in developing Advocacy Protocols that gives voices to the First Peoples.

During the last triennium, UnitingCare Australia has continued its work with UnitingWorld to build a partnership between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Protestant Church in China (China Christian Council/Three Self Patriotic Movement). In 2019, the Vice President Rev Sun Xuebing visited the Uniting Church and shared the Chinese church's experience in social service at our Leaders Forum in Canberra and visited agencies in Sydney and Melbourne.

In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, we received donations of face masks from the China Christian Councils and distributed them throughout our agencies. UnitingCare Australia has also supported the Chinese church in develop a theology of social service grounded in the Chinese culture and social context.

## **2.2. The Work of UnitingCare Australia**

Using our size, scope and diversity as a national network, we continue to advocate for policies and positions that build opportunity for all people to live hope-filled lives in an environment that promotes wellbeing.

All of UnitingCare Australia's advocacy work is focused on the well-being of vulnerable people and ensuring that all people can flourish. This advocacy is not driven by self-preservation, but by achieving the best outcomes for vulnerable people. Sometimes this means that UnitingCare Australia argues for policies and practices that make the community services work of the church more challenging, but this is consistent with the mandate which tasks UnitingCare Australia to "give expression to the Church's commitment to social justice."

UnitingCare Australia has continued to make an impact through advocacy and strengthening community provision service over the past three years. This has been a particularly challenging period as we have all experienced a world that has changed dramatically and undergone a series of severe weather events, bushfires and a worldwide pandemic. Despite the challenges, it has been an opportunity to work closely with government on shaping policies and responses to ensure the most vulnerable were looked after, and the community sector better supported in its important role on the front line.

We have continued to work collaboratively both internally and externally with the Church's network of service providers, other major church providers, the community sector, government and politicians.

Given our work is grounded in the experiences of our services and those who use them, we have continued to hold a considerable number of consultations and meetings across the network, utilising videoconferencing technology in the past year. The focus of these meetings has aligned with our strategic priority areas.

At a strategic level we continue to feed into the Federal Budget process through pre-Budget submissions focused on our priority areas and provide the church and its services with a summary of the key implications of the Budget on the night it is handed down.

UnitingCare Australia's strategic priorities direct its activities across government, the Church, the wider Australian community and within the UnitingCare network:

- Justice for First Peoples
- Ageing to our Full Potential including responding to the Aged Care Royal Commission
- Addressing Economic Inequality
- Responding to the Disability Royal Commissions

There are also a number of other initiatives that fall into UnitingCare Australia's scope including the Target Christmas Appeal and Aged Care Remote Workforce Accord.

### **2.2.1 Justice for First Peoples**

A gathering of First Peoples from across the church and its services was held in Canberra in September 2019 to meet with a number of Federal politicians, discuss areas of mutual concern and interest and identify ways of working together to meet priorities and focus areas. From this Gathering a First Peoples Working Group was formed comprising members of the UAICC and First Peoples from across the UnitingCare network.

We have continued to work closely with the UAICC and the Working Group to build on our relationship and inform advocacy in this priority area. A number of joint media releases have been published across topics such as the expansion of the Cashless Debit Card and Closing the Gap. The Group also contributed significantly to several submissions including the response to the Disability Royal Commission's issues paper on First Nations People with Disability.

### **2.2.2 Ageing to our Full Potential and Responding to the Aged Care Royal Commission**

UnitingCare Australia has played a key role in shaping aged care reforms with the aim of ensuring those most in need are not disadvantaged. For example, during the pandemic UnitingCare Australia contributed to a number of successful advocacy outcomes including:

- \$203M funding for aged care - \$900 per residential bed in metropolitan, \$1350 per residential bed in rural and remote
- \$1 million for community organisations to provide digital devices to older people
- Aged Care Royal Commission ceased all public hearings and workshops

The Aged Care Royal Commission has been a significant focus for this area of advocacy. Claerwen Little appeared as a witness at the commencement of the Royal Commission in February 2019 and her witness statement formed the basis for a number of submissions that have been lodged with the Commission during its course. Submissions were informed by research commissioned by UnitingCare Australia as well as significant consultation and collaboration with the UnitingCare network.

We have been a key stakeholder in the Aged Care Campaign "It's time to care for aged care" which is calling for a world-class, rights-based aged care system that meets the needs of older Australians now and into the future. Claerwen Little has chaired the Campaign governance group and the Campaign Manager has been employed by UnitingCare Australia. The aim is to engage our broader church and network in the Campaign to mobilise our grass roots support and raise awareness of our issues into our church.

To further support the Aged Care Campaign and create good governance, a new body has been set up – The Australian Aged Care Collaboration Ltd, comprising membership from the six national bodies: UnitingCare Australia, Anglicare Australia, Baptist Care Australia, Catholic Health Australia, Leading Age Services Australia (LASA) and Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA). Again, UnitingCare Australia has taken a lead role in this initiative.

### **2.2.3 Addressing Economic Inequality**

Addressing Economic Inequality covers a broad scope of issues but has been a very busy area of advocacy during the pandemic in particular. As a result of sustained advocacy efforts UnitingCare Australia was able to leverage existing political relationships to present the unique voice of the Uniting Church's community service network and make the case for urgent relief in key areas. Below is a summary of many of the successful initiatives we contributed to:

- Temporary doubling of some income support and additional one-off supplement
- Eligibility for JobKeeper for not for profits reduced to 15% downturn in turnover
- JobKeeper to exclude government grants for not-for-profits
- \$200 million additional funding for emergency and food relief
- Chair of National Coordination Group for Emergency Relief
- International students already working for a registered disability service provider temporarily exempt from the work limit
- \$150 million package to support low-income households access the NBN
- Scaling-up of National Debt Helpline, additional support to train new financial counsellors, and an expansion of NILS
- Telstra announced suspension of penalty/ late fees; Optus, Vodafone and several other providers promptly followed suit

We have continued to advocate strongly in relation to a permanent, adequate increase to JobSeeker, against the changes to the responsible lending laws and the expansion of the Cashless Debit Card.

### **2.2.4 Responding to the Disability Royal Commission**

UnitingCare Australia provides the secretariat lead for the Disability Royal Commission (DRC) National Task Group. The Task Group meets at least five times per year with the purpose of guiding the Church's response to the Royal Commission, supported by UnitingCare Australia. The Task Group comprises representatives from each Synod who report to their respective Synod Task Group.

To date, the key outputs from the Task Group and UnitingCare Australia have been:

- Values statement from the Church including an Easy English version
- Weekly network update
- Communications Strategy
- Communiqués to General Secretaries and Synod Task Group Chairs
- Protocol on engaging with the DRC
- Letter to the DRC indicating the Church's commitment to the DRC and contact details
- Pastoral letter to congregations and faith communities around sharing stories with the DRC
- Response to the DRC on the following issues papers:
  - the Emergency planning
    - First Nations people with disability in Australia
    - Rights and Attitudes
    - Promoting inclusion
- A survey to obtain information about the size and scope of disability services and activities across the life of the Church
- Engagement Strategy

### **2.2.5 Remote Workforce Accord**

UnitingCare Australia provides secretariat and project management support for the Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord, funded for three years by the Department of Health. The Accord is an industry led initiative with the objective to achieving an adequate, robust and appropriately skilled and supported workforce in remote and very more Australia.

### **2.2.6 Target Christmas Appeal**

The Target Christmas Appeal has continued each year. Over 29 years it has raised more than \$4 million to support those most in need at Christmas and donated more than 2 million gifts.

## **2.3. Communication and Collaboration**

UnitingCare Australia works at the interface between government policy, funding, and regulation of service provision; the UnitingCare network; the lived experience of those who use our services; and the wider life of the Uniting Church.

Over the triennium period UnitingCare Australia has hosted two Leaders Forum for leaders across the Church and its agencies. The purpose of these forums is to engage together in conversations of national significance, find common ground and actions on which we can progress together.

UnitingCare Australia works cooperatively with other Uniting Church agencies, the National Council of Churches, and also with community services agencies from other denominations. Through the past triennium the Major Church Providers group has grown and strengthened. The Major Church Providers meet regularly in Canberra, release joint statements and reports, advocate together and collaborate where possible on areas of mutual concern. Collectively these agencies represent the vast majority of social services in Australia. When the churches speak with a unified voice the impact is significant.

UnitingCare Australia also continues to work constructively with national community sector bodies such as NACA (the National Aged Care Alliance), ACSA (Aged and Community Services Australia) and ACOSS (the Australian Council of Social Services).

## **3. ACTIONS FROM FIFTEENTH ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS**

*Action 18.18.02: to request the Standing Committee to develop disability access guidelines for use at all events and activities overseen by the Assembly, and to encourage each Synod to develop similar disability access guidelines for use at Synod events and meetings;*

UnitingCare Australia led the development of the disability access guidelines for use at all Assembly events and activities through a consultative process. The Guidelines were released in April 2020 and are available on the Church's website (Appendix D).

## **4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

UnitingCare Australia, like the rest of the Uniting Church in Australia, is continually adapting to changing political, social and ecclesiastical contexts. The dynamic context in which UnitingCare Australia operates poses numerous challenges and opportunities as the agency seeks to live out a Christian vision of transformation and reconciliation.

UnitingCare Australia will continue to cast a vision of a society in which the common good is upheld and in which all people are cared for. The agency is committed to strengthening the brand and reputation of UnitingCare; creating avenues for working together across state boundaries; and helping agencies collect and maintain useful data and provide clear evidence of their efficacy.



UnitingCare Australia has continued to develop a deeper relationship with the Uniting and Aboriginal Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) to see how we can work together and what might be possible for the future. We are committed to continue working closely with the Congress to advocate on the issues affecting our First Peoples.

In order to maintain and strengthen the life of UnitingCare, the national office will continue working to build closer ties between the activity of the Uniting Church's social services and the worshipping life of congregations. The social services of the Uniting Church are inextricably tied to the witness and worship of the church. These two particular expressions of the missio dei (congregational life and social services) offer enormous strength to one another. A strong focus will be engaging congregations and presbyteries in the aged care campaign to mobilise the wider church as champions and advocates towards a vision of a world-class, sustainable aged care system that enables all older Australians to have access to the supports they need, when they need them.

UnitingCare Australia will work closely with UnitingWorld to build a deeper and richer engagement with the global Church.

UnitingCare Australia will continue to work practically with agencies and government to collaborate on new solutions for intractable social challenges with a focus on our strategic priorities.

UnitingCare Australia aims to focus on issues of environmental sustainability and climate action through monitoring and improving our own footprint as part of the Assembly's targets, promoting the best practice of its agencies and advocating to government as part of our wider Church on issues of climate change.

UnitingCare Australia strives to lead a strong, unified, and creative national network that works toward better quality of life outcomes for the most disadvantaged and delivers social services that make a positive difference. As we speak with one voice nationally, our capacity to influence and interface with government, business and the wider Australian community is powerful. UnitingCare Australia will continue to adopt a strongly ecumenical approach and will continue to deepen partnerships. In doing so, UnitingCare Australia will give expression to God's love as part of the Uniting Church in Australia.

## 5. AGENCY CONTACTS

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<b>National Director</b>	Claerwen Little
<b>Director - Policy and Advocacy</b>	Fay Mound
<b>Director - Communications &amp; Public Affairs</b>	Anna Minson
<b>Senior Analyst</b>	Corinne Dobson
<b>Senior Analyst/Disability Royal Commission</b>	Tenille Fricker
<b>Senior Analyst</b>	Kate Gainer
<b>Project Officer, Remote Accord</b>	Mary Quinlan
<b>Receptionist/Administration Officer</b>	Alannah Prout
<b>National Campaign Manager – Aged Care</b>	Kyle Cox
<b>Theologian in Residence</b>	Rev Dr Ji Zhang

**Clærwen Little**  
**National Director**

**Geoff Batkin**  
**Chair**

## APPENDIX A – UnitingCare Australia Mandate

Revised October 2018

Approved Assembly Standing Committee 10/11/2018

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**Responsible to:** The Assembly

**Reporting Arrangements:** The Assembly, the Assembly Standing Committee

**Mission:** To give voice to the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision.

**Mandate:**

*UnitingCare Australia will:*

- Take up community service issues within the theological framework of the Uniting Church, particularly the Church's social justice imperatives.
- Develop and reflect on the policies and practices of the Uniting Church in community services.
- Pursue appropriate issues within the Uniting Church, with Government and the community sector, with the Australian community and with other parts of the church.

In particular,

- Encourage theological reflection on the Church's community services work.
- Advocate to Government and within the Church and community those policies and practices which enhance the dignity of people, especially those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised.
- Enable exchange of information across Synods and Uniting Church service providers.
- Seek to enhance the quality of community service provision by the Uniting Church.
- Represent the views of the Uniting Church and its service providers to governments.
- Work as appropriate with other churches and peak organisations in the community services field.
- Act on requests and referrals from Synods and the Assembly.

UnitingCare Australia will bring to all aspects of its work and ministry the theological framework that God's love is extended to all people, with no discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, sexuality, ability, class colour, creed or cultural origin.

The work of UnitingCare Australia will be guided by its strategic priority areas as articulated from time to time.

*As an Agency of the National Assembly, UnitingCare Australia will also:*

1. Ensure that the activities of the Agency are consistent with the vision and current strategic priorities of the Assembly.
2. Advise the Assembly/Assembly Standing Committee on policy matters within its area of responsibility and expertise.
3. Make decisions where the Assembly/Assembly Standing Committee has delegated authority for certain policy areas, either through the Mandate, or by resolution.
4. Implement policies determined by the Assembly/Assembly Standing Committee when relevant to its mandate and operations.
5. Manage its finances, risk and reporting in an effective, transparent and timely manner.
6. Work collaboratively with other Assembly agencies.

**National Director:**

The National Director will be appointed by the Assembly Standing Committee, guided by a selection panel that will include both the General Secretary of the Assembly and the Chairperson of the Board.

The selection process will consider the skills and expertise required to undertake the work of the Agency. The National Director will participate in annual performance management that involves the Assembly General Secretary and the Chairperson of the Board.

**Governance of UnitingCare Australia:**

To maintain good governance of UnitingCare Australia the Assembly/Assembly Standing Committee will appoint a Board for UnitingCare Australia and delegate to that Board responsibility for the oversight of UnitingCare Australia.

The governance of UnitingCare Australia is outlined in the Charter adopted by Assembly Standing Committee on 10/11/018

## **APPENDIX B – UnitingCare Australia Strategic Priorities**

### **Strategic Priorities 2019-2021**

1. Justice for First Peoples
  - That the unique place of our First Peoples in the life of our nation is acknowledge and upheld
2. Ageing to our Full Potential including Responding to the Aged Care Royal Commission
  - That all people experience compassion and dignity as they age and exercise their rights as full members of society
3. Addressing Economic Inequality
  - That all people are able to full participate as citizens across all domains of life
4. Responding to the Disability Royal Commissions
  - That the Uniting Church embraces the opportunity that Royal Commissions bring to create a society where all people are valued and honoured

### **Key factors for success:**

- Impact – make an impact by focusing on significant policy change
- Identify – build profile and brand in order to exert influence
- Relationships – nurture critical relationships with key national decision -makers and influencers
- Resources – mobilise the soft asset base of the network and the wider church as champions and advocates
- Capability – build internal capability both within staff and by harnessing the wider network workforce to become a high impact peak body

## **APPENDIX C – Service is Mission** – A theological reflection on the Uniting Church in Australia’s community services ministry and the work of UnitingCare Australia

Rev Dr Ji Zhang, Assembly Theologian-in-Residence

### **Overview**

As an Agency of the Assembly, UnitingCare Australia exists to give voice to the Uniting Church in Australia’s commitment to social justice and the enhancement of community services provision. This paper brings to light the life-giving connection between faith-based Church identity and values-based service delivery: “Love God and love your neighbour”.

This biblical teaching reclaims a core value underpinning the work of community services over many decades. While it gives expression to our changing context about how the Spirit of God is moving our attention into the margins, it also articulates where community services and Church identity are called to mutual affirmation, and how to go forward into the world with hope, as partners within the life of the Uniting Church, to embody the vocation of service and participate in God’s mission in the world.

This paper envisions the network of community services organisations as a web of human relationships through which the Uniting Church is connected to the land and its diverse peoples. Professional skills, lived experience, and operational innovation within community services are a collective gift to the Church. These skills and lived experiences enhance the Church’s capacity to work in many areas of social discourse, including social justice, multiculturalism, sovereignty of our First Peoples, community development, and climate change.

Social service is a relational bridge into God’s mission, and the paper recognises the reservoir that is the community services ministry of the Uniting Church.

UnitingCare Australia belongs to the universal Church through the Church’s ecumenical relations. Social service is a pathway for the Uniting Church to participate in, and contribute to, ecumenical dialogues.

*We pledge ourselves to hope and work for a nation whose goals are not guided by self-interest alone, but by concern for the welfare of all persons everywhere — the family of the One God — the God made known in Jesus of Nazareth the One who gave His life for others.<sup>1</sup>*

We, too, as the Church’s community services ministry, give our life for others.

Over forty years ago, the Uniting Church declared to the whole nation that by partaking in the spirit of God’s self-giving love, “we seek to go forward into the world”. Today, we reclaim that same spirit: The Church is in and for the world, or it is not Church.

### **About UnitingCare Australia**

UnitingCare Australia is an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia and the national body for the Uniting Church’s community services ministry. This ministry includes a network delivering services in over 1,600 sites, with 50,000 staff and supported by the work of over 30,000 volunteers. UnitingCare Australia’s purpose is to give voice to the Uniting Church’s commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision. Our vision is that all people can thrive in a healed and reconciled world.

The work of UnitingCare Australia is grounded in the faith, values and vision of the Uniting Church, the expertise in our network of service providers, and the experience of those people who use our services.

The following theological reflection is informed by Biblical witness and historical teachings making known the Christian tradition, which lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic

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<sup>1</sup> *Statement to the Nation, 1977.*

and Apostolic Church. It connects the work of the Church's community services ministry with the prophetic teachings of Christ and the Word of God.

The work was undertaken as part of our evolving and enriching development of identity as a whole Church together – being one with Christ.

## Introduction

“God is love...We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4: 8; 19). The primary motivation for the Uniting Church in Australia in providing social services is our Christian response to the universal and self-giving love of God. Love is the foundation of compassionate service to the world.

Community services ministry was an essential part of the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia. The Uniting Church's response to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in Australian society and beyond; social engagement is fundamental to the mission of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

The history of the Uniting Church's community services ministry and our reputation for quality service delivery has contributed to our Church's identity, and serves as a renewable resource in God's mission.

During the forty-plus year journey of the Uniting Church, Australian society has experienced significant social, cultural, demographic, economic and environmental change. In this time, we have begun to understand more clearly God's preferential love for the poor and that God's mission calls from and compels us to the margins. In a spirit of solidarity with those who experience marginalisation, and informed by their experience and aspirations, the Church is better able to give voice to the social and political centre for the welfare of all people.

These changing contexts become a source of theology for reshaping our identity as a faith-based and skill-based organisation. Our experience will continue to inform our tradition.

## 1. Love God and Love Your Neighbour

“Love God and love your neighbour” (Mark 12: 30-31) underpins the Uniting Church's social response to “God is love” and “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4: 8;19). Our shared mission as the Uniting Church, which includes UnitingCare Australia and the community services ministry, is to embody God's love for all people and exemplify the Church's commitment to supporting individuals, families and communities through advocacy and the enhancement of service provision.

The Uniting Church, in accordance with the *Basis of Union*, believes God guides the Church into union,<sup>3</sup> and is calling people of the Church to continually seek a renewal of its life as a community of First Peoples and of Second Peoples from many lands. Acknowledging the postcolonial context of our faith and action, the Church's Preamble to the Constitution recognises that the land has been created and sustained by the Triune God before churches arrived as part of the colonisation process<sup>4</sup>:

*Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning 'sovereign' in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.<sup>5</sup>*

The Uniting Church is located within this cultural and geographical context. It is informed by its history, is committed to ecumenism, and understands itself as a pilgrim people on a journey.<sup>6</sup> The 14th Assembly repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, and its theological foundations as a relic of colonialism, feudalism and religious, cultural, and racial biases that have no place in the treatment of First Peoples. The 15th Assembly, in 2018, expanded the definition of sovereignty. The whole Church affirms that the First Peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Islander Peoples, are sovereign peoples in Australia.

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<sup>2</sup> *Statement to the Nation*, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Preamble to the Constitution*, Paragraph 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Preamble to the Constitution*, Paragraph 2.

<sup>6</sup> Colleen Geyer, “Transforming Mission in Faith-Based Community Services” in *Uniting Theology and Church*, Issue 3, October 2010.

The Uniting Church's community services ministry is part of this journey, working with the wider Church, communities, and government to extend services to our First Peoples. By faith and action, the Uniting Church celebrates its Covenantal relationship with the First Peoples as a foretaste of that future reconciliation with God, which is the purpose for the whole creation.<sup>7</sup>

The Uniting Church and its community services ministry are not separate entities, but one in Christ. Many witnesses of the Church and community services are inwardly connected through the unfolding life of the Triune God gathering people into the household of God. This unity is not dependent upon human aspiration, "but upon the will of God made effective through Jesus Christ".<sup>8</sup> The Spirit of God permeates the boundary between the sacred, the secular, the Church and the world by creating life through the whole of creation. The Church's community services ministry further broadens the horizon of God's mission by building relationships with multiple stakeholders, including within the Church, people, government and communities. Our compassion for people's lives seeks to incarnate God's love for the world (1 John 4: 8-10), so that the people may have life abundantly (John 10:10).

UnitingCare Australia's engagement with social justice exists in the DNA of our tradition. At the time of formation, the Uniting Church's Inaugural Statement to the Nation declared:

*A Christian responsibility to society has always been regarded as fundamental to the mission of the Church. In the Uniting Church our response to the Christian gospel will continue to involve us in social and national affairs.*

*We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race. We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur.<sup>9</sup>*

Our forty-plus year journey has manifested this commitment and given birth to a diverse range of services reaching out to all aspects of life. God's love in Christ is bound neither by time nor space (Ephesians 3: 18-19), love never ends (1 Cor 13:8). Loving God is made visible in loving our neighbour, and God's peace is found in service – "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with the Lord" (Micah 6:8).

God's love is universal – everyone has the right to receive care. This equality extends to all people, with no discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, cultural origin, ability, sexuality, class, colour, or creed. The Church's commitment to equality will continue to draw many skilled people into service, to involve diverse members of the Church and many others from society to build the whole mission of God in the world.

## **2. God's Mission in the Margins**

The large footprint of the Uniting Church's community services ministry enables us to reflect broadly on where God's mission is in Australia. Together with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), we learn that our experience with the Land and ancient cultures is a source of theology. The self-emptying God, vulnerable yet magnificently human, has broken unbreakable boundaries and become the suffering servant and risen friend.<sup>10</sup> Living in a post-Christendom world, we affirm, with the World Council of Churches, a paradigm shift in mission: from "Church's mission to the margins" to "God's mission in the margins".<sup>11</sup>

"The Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). Incarnation is the marginalisation of God. God the Creator participates in the world and lives among the people, who are God's radical "other". In Jesus' ministry, we come face-to-face with the humble, non-violent, self-giving God, among humble

<sup>7</sup> *Preamble to the Constitution*, Concluding paragraph.

<sup>8</sup> Davis McCaughey, *Commentary on the Basis of Union*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Statement to the Nation*, 1977.

<sup>10</sup> Faith Statement from UAICC Tasmania, a paraphrase of the Apostles Creed by Rev Tim Matton-Johnson.

<sup>11</sup> *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, World Council of Churches, 2012, pages 6-9.



people in difficult circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Through service to the disadvantaged, the passion narrative of Jesus continues to unfold in communities, while our staff gather the suffering into hope. Many people of faith, such as lay leaders, chaplains, pastoral care and other workers, have collectively exercised servanthood ministry and witness to the Risen Lord, who pardons sin, restores life and awakens faith: so, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It is through the self-emptying love of God moving into the world that UnitingCare Australia gives voice to the most disadvantaged and marginalised. Our advocacy of social justice is matched with daily service to all people in Australia through a vast workforce of employees and volunteers across the Church's ministry. The Spirit of Life, indeed the totality of all life, is most visible in the margins. Through our presence of community services, we see the Spirit upholding the dignity of the 'other' by our compassion and care, and through our social justice advocacy, we strive to set the people free with access to care and healing.

Christian belief in the Triune God. This belief invites us to see God as a divine community whose inner life is fundamentally about love-abiding relationships among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This inner community of God is constantly moving outwards by the virtue of self-giving love (John 3: 16), forming diverse communities of life through the Spirit that give witness to the risen life of Christ.

God is in all our communities through the Spirit. God has always been present in this land, and what has changed is that we are discovering and naming God through community services ministry. In serving all people, especially the marginalised, the Spirit of Life continues to move us from the centre to the margins of society. This same Spirit calls the Uniting Church to be part of society, including in the margins of social service. This is a calling of God "to loose the bonds of injustice, undo the thongs of the yoke, let the oppressed go free" and "share food with the hungry and open homes to the homeless poor" (Isaiah 58: 6-7). In so doing, the marginalised may come to the centre of social attention as they are already at the centre of Christ's attention.

We are accountable to God's mission at the margins. God's mission affirms the brokenness of Christ's Body in humble places where God's mercy touches upon the lives of the lonely, the jobless, the homeless, the abused and the dying. The future of social service is in God's becoming – in the likeness of the incarnation, forming a life-giving relationship with the 'other' and gathering communities into the unbounded love of God for the world.

For this purpose, UnitingCare Australia and the Church's broader community services ministry seek partnership with congregations so that together we can be better connected to God's mission in the margins. In daily service, we seek to remove the social divide, deliver best practice services, and enhance the quality of people's lives. We honour the Uniting Church's openness to the world and continue to journey with those in our community seeking support. Together, we nurture love-inspired communities, where people live in dignity, enjoy full lives, and have their needs met. There is a mutuality in our relationship with those who engage with our services – our connection to them leads to our shared discovery of the mystery of God's love as a beloved person.<sup>13</sup> This image of Christ - the crucified and risen One who lives in the "other" - is to be named and embraced.

The whole of the Uniting Church in Australia partakes in ecological justice. Social service seeks to connect people both in community and with the land that gives life to all existence, for the ecological world has sustained the whole circle of life with many interrelated blessings. We have learned from the First Peoples: Life is inwardly connected.

Therefore, we affirm mutual relationships in all dimensions of the world so that in the future humanity and the natural world will transform each other.

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<sup>12</sup> Parts of speech by Randall Prior and Sally Douglas at the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania 2017, later adopted by Uniting VicTas.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart McMillian, the 14<sup>th</sup> President of Uniting Church, points out the mutuality of living in relationship in his reflection on Henri Nouwen's book *Adam – God's Beloved*. Adam could not speak nor move, but it was in the caring for Adam that the scholar Nouwen learnt a new and deeper understanding of faith – what it means to be God's beloved.

### 3. A Fellowship of Reconciliation

The Uniting Church was formed in response to God's mission in Australia; to be a fellowship of reconciliation. Before this calling, the churches – the Congregational Union in Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia - did not have separate missions of their own, but the Uniting Church was called into existence to partake in God's mission: "reconciliation and renewal...for the whole creation".<sup>14</sup>

The mission of the Uniting Church and its community services ministry is one. This unity is a relational wholeness that accepts operational differences and follows God's mission in Australia. It affirms that God's reconciliation is radically open to the world. Our engagement with people, cultures, and religions through service provides us with the opportunity to live out a vision of hope in God's ultimate renewal in New Creation. This vision is inclusive, all encompassing, and restores the covenanting relationship with the Creator, as well as renewing the whole creation.<sup>15</sup>

The mission of God is larger than the mission to the Gentiles by the early church. In mission with the Gentiles, the horizon of God's mission begins to open, bringing the common good of life into focus beyond the duality of the secular and the sacred. This outward unfolding of God's Self is the Incarnation of God's own life in the world, regardless of the Church's capacity to conceptualise its fullness in theology and practice.

As we look deeply into all services and reflect truthfully on this, we see one thing in common: suffering. Again, suffering unites us. On the cross, Jesus's suffering draws the world's attention to the irreducible problem of human suffering. The Uniting Church proclaims this risen crucified one:

*Christ calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.*<sup>16</sup>

Our discipleship in service is a pathway that draws the whole Church into the fellowship of Christ's suffering. In all types of service provision, we see that people are gathered daily from all walks of life into communities celebrating lives. Through the establishment of the Australian Regional & Remote Community Services, we rediscover that "in his own strange way, Christ constitutes, rules and renews" us all as his Church.<sup>17</sup> By engaging with the National Disability Insurance Scheme, we relearn a biblical teaching: "Faith alone without action is dead" (James 2: 17).

"The Son of Man does not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Our services came into existence to serve. The ministry of the laity has been expanded over many decades as part of the Church's vocation. Today many leaders, managers, and staff come from all faiths and walks of life to give a significant part of their own lives for the overall mission. In order to achieve the best outcomes for the people we serve, service providers work with partners and multiple stakeholders, including other organisations, congregations, communities and government. This collaborative work seeks outcomes where the restoration of a person's life and the reconciliation of the world are akin.

The Uniting Church is a pilgrim people on a journey. The Uniting Church's community services ministry participates in, and contributes towards, God's ever-broadening circle of reconciliation in the world. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord.<sup>18</sup>

As a Church, our unity is not fixed, but still in the making. On the way, God constantly corrects that which is erroneous in its life – this includes the removal of false tension between faith tradition and service tradition. Social service belongs to the very nature of the Church. It calls the whole Church to be in communion with Christ through the daily action of loving one's neighbour and walking the

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<sup>14</sup> *Basis of Union*, paragraph 3.

<sup>15</sup> UnitingCare Australia Mandate, approved by Assembly Standing Committee July 2008.

<sup>16</sup> *Basis of Union*, paragraph 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Basis of Union*, paragraph 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Basis of Union*, paragraph 18.

journey with the sick and afflicted. Social service is not a mere expression of ethical goodness by citizens but emerges from Christian discipleship to Christ's renewal of the world. By serving the world, the Uniting Church becomes one with Christ and, at the same time, brings Christ to the world, not by proclamation but with action.

To achieve this common good, ecumenical relationships are nurtured to influence government policies that enhance the dignity of people. Collaboration with other Assembly agencies further enables UnitingCare Australia in the exchange of information across Synods and service providers and in providing leadership in community matters. Ministry formation is encouraged to include the theology of service in the training of future ministers. Theological reflection is used in the continuing education of mission directors, chaplains, and pastoral care workers. All these activities point towards a purpose the Uniting Church articulated in its Statement to the Nation: "We pledge ourselves to hope and work for a nation whose goals are not guided by self-interest alone, but by concern for the welfare of all persons everywhere".<sup>19</sup> Forty plus years on, we, as the Church, still embrace policy changes to enhance people's dignity and capacity, even if those changes require our own organisational transformation.

#### **4. Mission with God**

The Greek word *diakonia* is often narrowly translated as "service" to others. In ancient Greek, *diakonia* has a connotation of charity, but primarily means an assignment - like a messenger who goes in-between, who both instructs and delivers. Paul uses the term *diakonia* when he affirms his relationship to the Triune God (Acts 20:24; 2 Corinthians 3:8), and to Christ who has authorised him to be his *diakonos* (1 Corinthians 3:5; Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:25).<sup>20</sup> The notion of "service", therefore, denotes God's mission through a messenger like Paul to embody the relationship between God and the purpose of God for the world.

Based on biblical reflection, it is the Church's affirmation that social service is not a secondary order of the Church but rather embodies the primary order of God's mission.

The Uniting Church's community services ministry is part of Christ's presence in Australia: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20). By participating in Christ's service to the world, the ministry becomes a partner with God's mission in gathering diverse people before God, who loved us first (1 John 4: 19). The identity of faith-based service also grows by including values-based professionals and action-based service-delivering staff. All of them are called into Christ's mission in the world; their collective status also transforms from being agents delivering the Church's services and, in some cases, providing government programs, to being contributors informing the uniting identity of the Church.

Being a partner of God's mission also means bearing witness to the inclusive unity of the Uniting Church. From the personal experience of salvation to the delivery of social services, the community of care has broadened the scope of the community of faith, turning the outsider of the Church into the insider of social transformation. God has been calling into existence a new way of being for the Church, that is a Church for the "other" in the margins of faith and at the peripheries of society. There the commandment of loving God is like salt dissolved into community actions of loving our neighbour, so the light of God shines in people's renewed hope for life. "The Church of God is committed to service in the world for which Christ died".<sup>21</sup> Like the Kingdom of God, social service is the yeast which permeates every part of the dough of society (Matthew 13:33). The Church is a part of, not apart from, society.

The Uniting Church's community services ministry intentionally supports mutual engagement between congregations and community services in all forms. This priority of mission rests upon the understanding of God's people as a fellowship of God's abundant life, in which the Spirit of God draws

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<sup>19</sup> *Statement to the Nation*, final paragraph.

<sup>20</sup> Called to Transformative Action: Ecumenical Diakonia, Central Committee, World Council of Churches, (revised draft), 2018, 31-33.

<sup>21</sup> *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 1.

diverse people to share in God's transforming Spirit. It is through the people who we serve that the ministry rediscovers the ancient promise, "God will dwell with people" (Ezekiel 37:17; Revelation 21:37). Through this service, we reclaim the Good News for us today – God with us (Matthew 1: 23) – and renew the mission in partnership with Christ who takes away sins of the world (John 1:29). Mission with God will enlarge the scope of our faith tradition. The Spirit demands our attention to Jesus's passion and the aching love of God for the world, which always touches first upon the suffering people. God's Church is called into existence to bear witness to the cross of forgiveness and salvation. The Spirit also leads us to see the rising of the fallen and recalls the resurrection of Jesus underpinning our deepest faith. This mission with God awakens hope, empowers the poor in spirit, supports the meek, and takes away social injustice and sin, so that people may live to their full potential as the image of God.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6: 10). The Uniting Church's community services ministry is part of God's vision for how life should be lived. It actively discerns what God is doing in creation and history in the power of Spirit.

## APPENDIX D – Uniting Church Guidelines for disability access

(note: accessible version is available on the Church’s website)



**Uniting Church in Australia**  
**ASSEMBLY**

# Guidelines for disability access

## Theological statement

The Uniting Church in Australia believes everyone is created equal in the image of God. The Church embodies a movement of Christ’s reconciliation among all people, in which “the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole” (Basis of Union para 3).

The reconciliation given by God through Christ, enables and calls us to be an open community of God’s Grace and love and to remove divisions within the Body of Christ, which is the Church.

In the World Council of Churches’ document **Gift of Being – Called to be a Church of all and for all**, a powerful image is Paul’s message to the Ephesians that Christ has come to tear down the walls that separate us (Ephesians 2:14). Although people living with impairment are today less likely to be segregated behind walls, the walls of fear and prejudice remain, including within the Church.<sup>22</sup>

In light of this, in 2018 the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia affirmed that:

1. Christ is most fully present when all people in the Body are unconditionally accepted as people of worth. All people are created in the image of God, including people with disability;
2. along with all members, the faith, gifts, hopes and dreams of people with disability are to be valued and honoured; and
3. God is a God of justice and peace, who seeks reconciliation amongst all people.

In seeking to be a community of reconciliation, the Uniting Church acknowledges that for many people with disability its life and faith has not always borne witness to this vision.

The Uniting Church seeks:

1. to embody a community life that in its theology and practice is accessible to all people;
2. to ensure that within its own life people with disability are treated justly and have their hopes and rights realised; and
3. to advocate for justice and equality for people with disability in the wider community.

### Disability access guidelines

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* makes disability discrimination unlawful in Australia. It covers areas such as employment, education and access to public spaces and protects against direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and harassment. The Act can be accessed here:

<https://www.legislation.gov.au>

The disability access guidelines (guidelines) are for the use of the Assembly and Assembly Agencies.

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<sup>22</sup> World Council of Churches, Para 37, Document No. GEN PRO 06 rev, 2016.

The guidelines outline how to make an event or activity accessible to people with disability. It is not a complete checklist covering everything you will need to do for every type of event you host. If you'd like to refer to a checklist, you can find one here: <https://www.and.org.au/pages/event-checklist.html>

The guidelines have been created from information from Rev. Dr Trevor Whitney and Rev. (Deacon) Andy Calder and from conversations with other people, including many people with disability. You can provide feedback on the guidelines to [ucaremail@nat.unitingcare.org.au](mailto:ucaremail@nat.unitingcare.org.au) or 02 6249 6717. Your feedback will inform future updates to the guidelines.

The guidelines are listed under four headings: *Attitudinal, Physical, Sensory & Communication*. There is some overlap between the points under each heading.

Content warning: These guidelines contain language that some people may find offensive.

## **Attitudinal**

*People have attitudes, values and beliefs about different issues. It is important to identify these attitudes, values and beliefs. They can guide a person's planning of an event. They can also guide their participation in an event.*

### **1. Planning events**

When planning an event, it is important to discuss who will be involved in the event. The agenda for the event should suit everyone attending the event. It should consider the needs of those who speak slowly, need to be listened to carefully, or who take longer to get from one place to another. This may mean the tempo of the event is slower. This may make the event or activity more accessible to others as well.

Has consideration been given to inviting people with disability into leadership roles?

Involving people with disability in the planning of the event will help you to have an event that is as accessible as possible. Local disability networks or organisations and national Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) may also be able to assist. This includes [Disabled People's Organisations Australia](#) and [Australian Federation of Disability Organisations](#).

### **2. Appropriate language**

Language is important. The words used can include or exclude groups of people. The written and spoken language used should be positive and inclusive of people with disability. The words used in acts of worship should also be positive and inclusive of people with disability.

Examples of language or attitudes that exclude are:

- "The church is *crippled* by its lack of vision."
- "To think that way is plain *dumb*."

People with Disability Australia have a very useful *Language Guide* you can refer to. It outlines what language to use when referring to people with disability and outlines other examples of language not to use. It can be accessed here:

<https://pwd.org.au/resources/disability-info/language-guide/>

Any belief that only thinks of people with disability as people who are simply there to have things done to them or to be served (for example healed, spoken at or marginalised) is exclusionary. Any belief that implies that people with disability are to be feared or pitied because of their impairment is exclusionary. Make a conscious effort to be inclusive by thinking and speaking of people with disability in terms of mutuality of relationship and contribution.

## **Physical**

## 1. Venue

A venue should only be considered if everyone attending will be able to enter and exit the building and move around the building without obstacle. There must also be accessible toilets available. There is more information on this below.

It is always best to complete an inspection of the potential venue before confirming the booking to check its accessibility.

There are Australian Standards that set out requirements for buildings to meet the access needs of people with disabilities. It is preferable that the venue chosen meets these standards. Sometimes the venue staff may be able to assist with checking this. The Australian Human Rights Commission has a Disability Standards page on its website. It includes links to the Premise Standards 2010 and Guidelines on application of the Premises Standards. The page can be accessed here: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/disability-standards>

### Car parking

Accessible parking spaces should be available close to the entrance(s) of the venue. Additional car parks should also be reserved close to the entrance(s) of the venue for those needing to use them.

People needing to use these car parks should be informed that they are available.

Car parks should be clearly signed.

### Public transport

Select a venue that is close to accessible public transport. Consider providing a map with directions from public transport locations to the venue.

### Access to venue

The paths leading to the venue should be even and free from obstacles.

The main entry to the venue should be barrier and obstacle free. For example, it should be free from all steps or have another option such as a ramp that complies with Australian Standards.

The doorway at the entry and doorways within the venue should be wide enough for people who use mobility aids. Automatic doors are preferred.

### Desks and tables

Any desks or tables to be used during the event need to be at a suitable height for people using wheelchairs. This includes the registration desk(s) and refreshments table(s).

### Accessible toilets

Accessible toilets need to be provided on all levels of the premises. They need to be well signed so that people don't have to ask where they are located.

### Stage access

*This is vital.* It is important people can access the stage and other speaking points. This will ensure they can contribute equally. Portable access ramps which comply with Australian Standards may assist with this issue.

### Upstairs events

Does the venue have lifts for people with disabilities who are required to meet in upstairs rooms? If the venue does not have suitable lifts, then all parts of the event will need to be held downstairs at the venue.

## Seating

It is preferable that the seating layout is inclusive. People with a disability should be seated with everyone else. They may have seating access needs, but they should not be isolated from other attendees. For example, people with visual impairments may need to be seated close to the stage at the event so they can see the speakers, or close to a projection screen.

It is also important to provide enough space between tables and chairs to ensure people who use mobility aids and support animals can move freely around the venue.

## **2. Catering**

If catering is planned, ensure participants can provide dietary requirements before the event. Consider providing food options that are easy to consume and a range of utensil options including flexible straws. Food provided at the event or activity should be clearly labelled.

## **3. Liaison**

Appoint a person on the day of the event to be responsible for any accessibility issues that arise.

## **4. Assistance**

Most people are self-sufficient and bring additional support and aids with them as needed. Be clear about the extent of any additional support that can be provided.

## **5. Accommodation**

If accommodation is needed, check that there are accessible accommodation options available close to the event venue.

## **Sensory**

### **1. Lighting and imagery**

Ensure the venue has good lighting and avoid dimming it. Dimmed lighting may negatively impact on the ability of people with disability to engage with the event.

Avoid flickering images, flash lighting or other special effects that may negatively impact on people attending the event.

### **2. Quiet room**

Provide a separate, quiet area for people with disability to use if they need to take a break from the event or activities.

## **Communication**

### **1. Consultation**

*Consulting people with disability attending the event or activity about their needs is crucial to ensuring accessibility and inclusion.*

Access needs are not the same for every person. The access needs of people with disability will not be met with a 'one-size-fits-all approach' or generalisations. It is crucial to seek input from people with



disability and check with those attending the event concerning their needs. It is very important not to make assumptions.

On registration information and advertising for the event, ask that people get in touch with you to discuss their individual access needs. For example, "Do you have particular needs the organisers need to be aware of?"

Provide a date for this information to be provided by. Use welcoming language to encourage them to contact you and provide multiple contact options.

If the event requires registration, enquire as to whether a support person will be attending with the person with disability and check that they are registered too.

## **2. Large print**

Prepare documents for the event in large, *clear* print to allow everyone to effectively participate. At a minimum, the most important parts of the programme should be prepared like this. For example, the Installation of the President at Assembly, the sermon and other important parts of a worship service.

Arial is the font that vision-impaired people find the clearest to read. Consider developing information in Plain English and Easy English formats to allow the greatest participation.

Are PowerPoint presentations and overhead projector displays easy to read? Do they have good colour contrast?

A short video on colour contrast can be accessed here: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/perspective-videos/contrast/>

Vision Australia's Colour Contrast Determinator can be accessed here: <https://visionaustralia.org/services/digital-access/resources/colour-contrast-determinator>

Are programmes, agendas and other printed documents readable for those with a vision impairment?

Consider providing PowerPoint presentations and other materials to people prior to the event. This will provide them with the chance to read the material before the event and will provide for more equal participation.

Consider providing devices such as iPads to those with a vision impairment so that what is displayed or projected can be seen up close, particularly if seating people with a vision impairment close to the stage or projection screen is not possible.

## **3. Signing**

The best way to organise for an AUSLAN interpreter to be at the event is to book them when you are starting to plan the event. Then once you know who is attending and what their access needs are going to be, you can always cancel the booking if they are not going to be needed.

If there is going to be an AUSLAN interpreter, advertise this in advance so Deaf people and people with a hearing impairment can consider coming to the event.

At a minimum, signing should occur for the most important parts of the Assembly meeting. For example, the opening and the President's sermon.

## **4. Hearing**

Undertake a check of any audio system to be used to ensure that it is clear.

Is a hearing loop available for people who are hard of hearing?

Ensure good lighting of speakers, including those asking questions or contributing to the conversation, to ensure their lips can be seen and read. Encourage the use of microphones for all dialogue.

Brief speakers to speak clearly and not too quickly.

## **5. Advertising**

Promotional material sent out ahead of the event should indicate the ways in which the event is 'disability friendly'. This may encourage some people to attend and participate who may not otherwise do so. It also sends the right message to the wider church about our priorities.

## **6. Signage**

Disability access signs need to be appropriately displayed at the event wherever they are required to enable full participation.

## **7. Captioning**

Can audio-visual material be captioned for Deaf people and people with a hearing impairment?

## **8. Feedback**

When seeking feedback on the event ensure feedback can be given on the accessibility of the event and whether access needs were met. Provide an opportunity for people to make suggestions for improvements for future events. Multiple contact options should be provided.

## **9. Website accessibility**

For information of website accessibility, refer to: <https://guides.service.gov.au/content-guide/accessibility-inclusivity/>