



muylathina 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



## B20 QUEENSLAND SYNOD

The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod stretches from the islands of Torres Strait to Goondiwindi on the New South Wales border, from Coolangatta on the eastern coast to Mt Isa in the heartland of the Queensland outback.

We come together in rural congregations, Indigenous services, and remote area ministries, as well as in large and small urban congregations. We work together in vibrant schools, in a wide range of community services, in aged care, childcare and hospitals, and in local expressions of ministry through word and service.

As we look back on the last three years, of challenge and change, we can see clearly that our shared life is complex but filled with possibilities. The Uniting Church in Australia's decision to recognise two statements of belief on marriage in 2018 brought a sense of relief and joy to many in the Queensland Synod, and for some it brought a sense of challenge and loss. We now seek wholeheartedly to walk, and work, together in the Spirit and to face division and difference with grace. Through (project) Plenty, our intentional Synod-wide engagement process, we were reminded that God has richly blessed the Uniting Church right across Queensland, as participants worked together to discern and prioritise the way forward for the next five years. COVID-19 changed everything but reminded us that community and connection were essential. Over the past three years, in every part of the Synod, people worked to keep others safe, to give voices to those who were silent, to care for people in need, to advocate for necessary change, to strengthen relationships and to find sustainable and innovative solutions.

We are one church, uniting and Christ centred. We are also one church made up of many voices. In recognition of this blessing we have asked people from all over the Queensland Synod to speak of their experiences, priorities, and perspectives in this report so that we might better understand, not only what has been happening but, who we are and where we are travelling together.

Our deepest thanks to all those who have shared their work, their thoughts and their hopes for the future.

### 1. PLENTY

Every so often in the life of the church, just as in other organisations, it's valuable to take a moment to reflect on who we are, where we're headed and what is important to us. The last two years have provided such an opportunity for the Queensland Synod under the banner of Plenty.

Commencing with the 34th Synod in Session in May 2019, the church shared, listened, and reflected prayerfully around the question of where the Spirit is calling us. Conversations began with that reminder of plenty – that we are a church richly blessed in relationship, history, presence, skills and more.

The outcome of this work is a five-year vision to be a church present in every part of Queensland, bearing Christ's offer of life in all its fullness. This vision is being pursued through a set of four mission priorities and directions to: foster a renewed culture of **discipleship**, be active partners in **transforming community**, ensure our systems, governance and activities are **fit for purpose** and work to ensure whole and healthy **life together** in our relationships across the church.

Agreed to at the 35th Synod in Session, this set of priorities is accompanied by a wider set of initiatives that are being further discerned, shaped, and planned throughout 2021. Some of the work of Plenty will be visible in intentional, shared initiatives that influence the whole church. Other Plentiful work will be visible more locally – through the lives of schools, colleges, agencies, and congregations, which we will acknowledge, celebrate, share and learn from.

**Scott Guyatt – Director Mission Strategy, Queensland Synod Office**

## **2. CARPENTARIA – THE CHALLENGES AND LESSONS OF COVID-19**

On 29 February 2020, the presbytery of Carpentaria came into being. This was not the start of something new but the next step in the rich history of the presbyteries of Calvary and North Queensland. The first Federal announcement of COVID-19 was less than a month later.

Since then, we have celebrated many milestones including the ordination of Rev Roberta Stanley, long-term member of Calvary Presbytery and Blue Care Chaplain and the first ordination to take place in the new Presbytery. A new manse was built in the community of Aurukun and full-time ministry begun, as well as growing community connections in the Indigenous communities across the Cape through the Kennedy Patrol.

The last few years have been incredibly difficult for many of our remote communities. The landscape of North Queensland has rapidly changed on every front. Communities built around mining have struggled and the impacts of both drought and flooding are serious and long lasting.

The isolation that is very much part of our life became so much worse during COVID-19 with many communities completely cut off. The Cape was closed to all unnecessary visitors which meant offering support and resources to these communities was almost impossible. While there were a few cases of Coronavirus, the effects of lockdown and closing of borders were greater. Unemployment hit coastal communities hard due to their reliance on tourism and related services.

Congregations, communities and ministry agents sought new ways to do worship and gatherings. They were committed to keeping in touch by phone, online and meeting at front gates of people's homes. Lots of new relationships began and congregations reached new people particularly through online worship.

As we look towards the future, we should keep these challenges in mind. We will continue to strive for new missional opportunities to enrich lives and make disciples. We are committed to raising up new leaders across all of our communities with particular focus in Indigenous communities. We have so much to be thankful for and we give thanks to God who encourages and challenges us to look to the future with hope.

*Rev Christy Allen*

## **3. SOCIAL ACTION AND JUSTICE ADVOCACY**

Over the recent years, the Queensland Synod has sought to develop a relevant and impactful way to respond to issues of social action and justice advocacy. At the heart of our work we have aimed to make a difference in local communities, develop and deliver advocacy that is evidence-based and informed by practice, and work collaboratively throughout the Synod and the community.

Our work began with the Moderator's reference group on Social Action and Justice Advocacy (SAJA) and has evolved under the influence of Plenty into the reference group for the Transforming Communities Mission Priority.

We have developed whole-of-Synod responses and submissions to key issues such as voluntary assisted dying and youth justice. Each response and submission has been co-signed by the CEO of UnitingCare Queensland, Wesley Mission Queensland and the Moderator.

A strong driver of our work in the next years is to focus on transforming communities locally. We are developing tools and resources for collaborative responses and are currently working on a range of initiatives focused around localised and collaborative social action.

*Rev Dr Adam McIntosh – Convener, Transforming Communities*

## **4. COVENANTING BETWEEN QUEENSLAND SYNOD AND CONGRESS QUEENSLAND**

The exciting part of our journey in the covenanting space across the Synod in the last 3 years, is that it has generated important conversations about what covenanting actually means. Is our relationship true to what had been lamented back in 1994?

We have come to understand more clearly, that what we thought about our relationships with First Peoples, does not necessarily equate to meeting our expectations for time frames and outcomes. We acknowledge that true equality and genuine invested interest in this relationship will take time and true humility from the wider church.

Along the way we have travelled to other countries, to hear and listen to stories that are celebrating the lives of Indigenous Christian leaders. Travelling to Broken Hill, Coober Pedy, Alice Springs and Port Augusta was incredibly humbling, as we connected with the heartfelt story from the peoples of those countries. We also witnessed and were educated about how colonisation and missionaries had affected the way of life for the custodial people of the lands, the Quandamooka People (Stradbroke Island).

There is an active movement of hope that is rising from the past and is now in the present, looking at the future - that Queensland Synod and the Congress peoples are working towards a common vision. The youth of tomorrow's First and Second Peoples need us to work to pave the way. They will be the keepers of the fire burning in our hearts and spirits.

*Natalie Lewis – Mission Resourcing, Queensland Synod Office*

## **5. COMMITMENT TO MISSION – UNITINGCARE QUEENSLAND**

UnitingCare in Queensland has a rich legacy story for over 100 years that has grown out of the many expressions of the witness and service of people who stepped out in faith in response to the needs that they identified in their local communities. In the last three years during these unprecedented times of disruption, challenges, and uncertainty, we see perhaps even more clearly, the fundamental reason we exist as an organisation. The core purpose of UnitingCare arises out of the words of Jesus Christ to have “life in all its fullness” (John 10:10).

We are called to be an agent of “God’s healing power to the whole person” thereby enabling each individual to play his or her important role in God’s plan for all of humanity. As stewards of the resources entrusted to us, we owe it to our forebears to honour and protect their legacy by maintaining a sustainable footing so we can invest and grow over the years ahead to support the increasing needs of the people and communities that we serve.

Through UnitingCare’s ongoing response to the COVID-19 crisis, our people have demonstrated the heart of service that differentiates us from other providers, and they have proved they will go above and beyond to keep delivering services and supporting those who need us most. We walk forward together seeking to live out our covenant relationship with our First Peoples in the spirit of reconciliation and we continue to seek to be responsible stewards of the earth through environmental sustainable practices and new initiatives.

The preamble of the Constitution of UnitingCare in Queensland calls for “justice, equity in access to social services and fairness of opportunity, particularly for those who are in need of a stronger voice in Australian society”. May we continue to do what is just, show extravagant love and humbly serve in the communities and lives of those who place deep trust in us as we faithfully live out our mission.

*Rev Bruce Moore – Director of Mission, UnitingCare Queensland*

## **6. SERVING AND CONNECTING – WESLEY MISSION QUEENSLAND**

In December 2020 Wesley Mission Queensland farewelled long serving Chief Executive Officer Geoff Batkin after 23 years of service and welcomed new CEO Jude Emmer. Jude has over twenty years’ experience at senior executive level, including nine years’ experience as a CEO in hospitals. Jude has been warmly welcomed and Wesley Mission Queensland has commenced a journey of transformational change under Jude’s leadership.

Since February 2020 our energy and focus has been adapting and building new ways of supporting people in need whilst having an intense focus on doing all we can to keep our people safe from Coronavirus. This has not been easy; it remains a significant challenge for us all.

We continue the journey to support one of our most vulnerable groups of people in our community. People living with disability deserve to live a life of “choice and freedom” and Wesley Mission Queensland has a targeted growth strategy to address the needs of appropriate accommodation and service provision for this client group. Over the last few years Wesley Mission Queensland has also been expanding and diversifying our range of support services in mental health and suicide prevention.

We are committed to journeying with our First Nation brothers and sisters on a path to reconciliation. During National Reconciliation in 2020, Wesley Mission Queensland further cemented its reconciliation journey intention by formally launching its Reconciliation Australia endorsed Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The Cooperative, our new centre for public theology and community collaboration, has been launched. It is bringing unexpected conversation partners together and working toward real social outcomes – across different faith traditions, across community groups and services and across professional and academic disciplines. This innovative missional activity is committed to finding new ways to host otherwise impossible conversations – and for the sake of the Gospel, to develop the necessary partnerships and networks needed to promote the common good.

***Rev Dr Peter Hobson – Superintendent Minister, Wesley Mission Queensland, Albert Street Church***

## **7. WORK IN RESPONSE TO ROYAL COMMISSIONS**

The last three years have seen the impacts of Royal Commissions. This year the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety established in 2018 released its final report with recommendations for a new aged care system, and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability continued its work. The evidence presented at both Royal Commissions has highlighted the failure of “market” approaches to delivering care to society’s vulnerable people.

The Queensland Synod’s Disability Royal Commission Project has established a focus within the church and its agencies on issues affecting people with a disability across their lifespan. We have contributed to advocacy to uphold the human rights of people with disability, by providing input to public consultations by the Commission, through the Uniting Church in Australia’s National Task Group on the Disability Royal Commission. We have also identified emerging learnings that apply to the Uniting Church in Queensland’s agencies.

We have worked to identify areas across the church where best practice in upholding the human rights of people with a disability is occurring, and we formed a working group under the Uniting Church in Queensland’s Safe Church Network to look at issues and opportunities arising from the Disability Royal Commission’s work. The proposed deinstitutionalisation of aged care from large facilities to small homes, as well as self-direction of care by consumers are just some of the changes that will uphold the rights and dignity of all people.

We intend to continue our commitment to this work, with a focus on the moral and ethical obligations to others in society. We need to identify opportunities for innovation in service delivery and practice across the Uniting Church in Queensland’s agencies. We aim to advocate and facilitate practice based on the value of relationships and the recognition that care is integral to everyone at any life stage.

***Natalie Clements – Disability Royal Commission Project Officer and Social Action and Justice Advocacy Strategy, Queensland Synod Office***

## **8. CREATING SAFE SCHOOLS**

In 2017 the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse set the standards for all organisations whose operations in any way involve or impact upon children. They stated that ensuring an organisation is child safe is not only about making sure children are protected and supported; it is also about ensuring those working with children are protected and supported too.

Faith-based schools have been challenged to avoid ambiguity and to clarify where boundaries exist between adults and children while maintaining their core values. Staff are in transition from a ‘familial’ responsibility for children to a more professional and accountable form of care.

Enabling student voices and opportunities to report and share concerns are best practice and much work continues to be done in this space. There is a non-delegable responsibility to report sexual and physical harm of a student, which places staff on alert as each manages their accountability. Staff are trained annually to understand potential harm and how to report harm. There are practical changes to manage but we know that we are called to transparency and should embrace accountability as best practice.

The Lakes College strives to promote a community where both staff and young people embody Uniting Church values. We are committed to creating opportunities for students to be truly heard and truly safe.

*Nicole Gregory and Gary Adsett – The Lakes College*

## **9. HOLDING THE SPACE OF THE SAME-GENDER MARRIAGE DECISION**

My observation on the aftermath of the Assembly's decision on the same-gender-marriage is that the councils of the church quickly entered a pastoral mode to enable conversations with congregations and members of the Uniting Church in Australia. In particular, the culturally and linguistically diverse congregations that I had a connection with sought clarification, naming their theological concerns and questioning the future identity of the denomination as whole. Of them, one has decided to transfer its membership to Baptist, one to the Korean Presbyterian and one has become an independent church.

What had an impact on me personally was a feeling that the church was losing a part of the cultural diversity and inclusiveness that was a valuable asset in terms of the mission of the church in the globalising and ethnically diversifying Australian society. Since the decision I, as a congregational ministry agent, have come across people (both progressive and conservative) who have pre-conceptions of what the Uniting Church is like based on the same-gender marriage decision, which discouraged them from participating in the full life of the church.

The challenge for our shared future is to make sure that the conversations continue to elaborate the decision so that the church at the grassroots level has clarity around the decision and confidence in terms of its mission.

*Rev Noah Kim*

## **10. PLENTIFUL LEADERSHIP**

The Plentiful Leadership Program is a 12-month course coordinated by Synod Office staff, that involves participants from across the whole life of the Queensland Synod, including congregations, agencies, presbyteries, schools and the Synod Office. As I reflect on my journey in this program I can't help but associate it to, "I will open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be enough room to store it." As part of this program I have certainly experienced a lot of plenties: plenty of opportunity to build my skill and capacity through deep practical application, enough individual challenges to make sure I am growing and holding myself accountable to do more, and be more, whilst being provided with just enough support to know that I am not alone.

As I participated and listened to church leaders I experienced plenty of gratitude to have the opportunity to be a part of, and not only part of, but an opportunity to contribute and to have a voice in, the wider collaboration that will serve us well as we journey towards being courageous, strategic and adaptive leaders now and into the future.

In the Uniting Church we have many rooms (agencies) but we do work towards a common goal. I wonder what it will look like to be a leader within the Uniting Church and not just a leader in my room (Wesley Mission Queensland); a leader unmistakably characterised by what we all stand for: to walk alongside people and participate in the Mission of God.

*Anneline Kinnear – Organisational Development Manager, People and Culture, Wesley Mission Queensland*

## **11. SUSTAINABILITY**

The Uniting Church in Queensland has adopted a "whole of church" approach to renewable energy use and sustainability. A solar initiative has been coordinated through the Synod Office's Business Development Unit, resulting in using less power from the grid as well as cost reduction and income creation for the Synod network. We have worked with congregations and other entities, installing

approximately 400kW of solar panels, with an additional 280kW being installed in July 2021. Changes to LED lighting and monitoring of air conditioning timing has also allowed us to reduce our energy usage. We also encourage sustainable building design as can be seen in our schools such as The Lakes College.

The Synod Office offers Power Purchase Agreements (PPA) to assist congregations, presbyteries and entities with converting to renewable energy. Under this agreement the Synod office pays for the solar infrastructure and the entity will pay the Synod Office for the solar power used. This is a win win situation enabling people to migrate immediately to a cheaper, sustainable energy source with no initial outlay whilst generating an ongoing income stream to the Synod office.

At other times, congregations have paid for their panels in full, through local fundraising efforts such as donations and grants. A growing number of congregations are considering solar as their preferred energy source particularly those in North Queensland who have support and encouragement from their Presbytery Minister.

This environmental and financial initiative brings us together as we focus on good stewardship of resources into a shared future.

***Kylie Sessa – Manager Business Innovation, Queensland Synod Office***

While there have been challenges, there is much to be excited about in the life of the Uniting Church throughout Queensland over the past three years. Along with the stories already shared in this report, Newlife has planted congregations in Brisbane and at Coolangatta, Southside Uniting Church is reinvigorating its life and witness in Brisbane's inner southside community, while exciting new faith communities in Mareeba, far north Queensland, and Bargara Surf Church in central Queensland bring fresh expressions of faith to life for their communities.

In rural, remote, regional, and urban communities, Uniting Church congregations, agencies, schools and colleges are following the Spirit to grow a fresh culture of discipleship, transform local communities and share in a vibrant life together. There is much to look forward to as the journey continues over the next three years.