



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 SYNOD OF NSW AND THE ACT

### 1. OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

The NSW/ACT Synod covers approximately 811,802 km<sup>2</sup> currently supporting 13 Presbyteries and more than 400 Congregations, Faith Communities and Parish Missions. There are over 250 Ministers, Deacons, Chaplains and Pastors in active service across the Synod. The NSW/ACT Synod is culturally and linguistically diverse, and covers both rural, regional and metropolitan environments responding to a variety of ministry and mission opportunities across NSW and the ACT.

Many, if not most, English speaking Congregations and some ethnic Congregations are smaller and older with fewer people and resources available for ministry and mission in their local communities.

We are not, and have not been for some time, reproducing ourselves – it is very hard to attract and keep new members. An enormous amount of energy is absorbed by a conciliar governance structure that was created in another time to respond to different circumstances. This reality probably means that there is less energy available for innovative mission engagement.

Feedback from the Synod's Pathways project (2016-17) indicated that congregational members are committed to the future of the Church and looking for direction and insight which can lead to renewal, health and vitality.

### 2. LEADERSHIP AND SYNOD STANDING COMMITTEE (SSC) COMPOSITION

At the Synod meeting in 2019 the term of the Moderator, Rev. Simon Hansford, was extended for a further three-year term. His ministry will conclude in 2023 and a Moderator-elect will be appointed by Synod 2021. Rev. Jane Fry continues as the Synod General Secretary. Synod meetings were held:

2019 *Living Church* (Moderator Rev. Simon Hansford)

2021 *Where the Wild God Is* (Moderator Rev. Simon Hansford)

The Synod Standing Committee includes

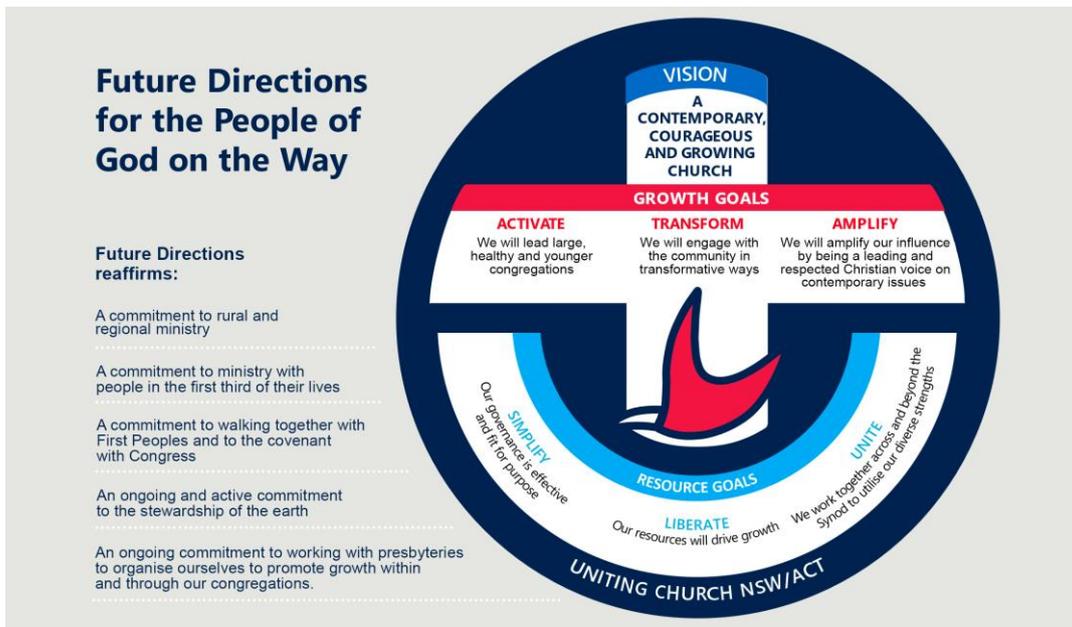
- Moderator
- General Secretary
- Ex Moderator
- 12 Synod elected representatives
- 4 Board Chairs

The Synod Leadership Team also attends in an advisory capacity.

The current Synod meeting will conclude in August 2021.

### 3. WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE MAJOR UNDERTAKINGS / ACHIEVEMENTS / DISAPPOINTMENTS / CHANGES WITHIN THE LIFE OF YOUR SYNOD OVER THE LAST TRIENNIUM?

Among a number of other decisions, Synod 2019 invited all of the Councils within the Synod to re-organise for growth in discipleship, relationship, number and impact. Accordingly, the Synod Standing Committee and the Synod Leadership Team worked together throughout 2020 to develop **Future Directions for the People of God on the Way**, a strategic framework to guide the commitments and operations of the Synod for the next five years. Future Directions was approved at the first session of Synod 2021.



To state the obvious, 2020 was a year unlike any other. Lots of goals and plans went out of the window as the church across the Synod reorganised to respond to **COVID 19**. The long term impact of the pandemic for the church will continue to unfold in the years ahead.

If we learn nothing else from 2020, we have demonstrated conclusively that success in any endeavour in the church depends on intentional, early and effective communication and collaboration. Regular (fortnightly) meetings with Presbytery leaders built on work done originally through the Synod/Presbytery gathering, Conversations that Matter, which provided a forum for sharing information and ideas with each other and with Synod leadership, enabled live issues to be dealt with immediately and collectively and generally strengthened inter-conciliar relationships. These gatherings continue beyond COVID with the meetings having identified Leadership, Direction and Re-organisation as key topics for discussion in 2021.

Similarly, a regular fortnightly meeting with leaders of Parish Missions proved to be an equally fruitful and constructive conversation. There is a general enthusiasm for continuing to meet in 2021 and to start to think together about the opportunities for 'parish mission' ministry into the future.

Uncertainty about the course of the pandemic lead the SSC to make the decision to conduct an online Synod meeting. Synod 2021 has been organised using an online platform and will gather in 3 separate sessions in April, June and August. Between Synod sessions there is an intensive effort to engage the broader church in the discussions and decisions of the Synod meeting. Feedback from this process has so far been extremely positive.

In 2019 the Synod office embarked on a **Culture and Values** project which is now in the process of becoming operational in the Synod. The project effectively engaged all the ministry areas and all the staff within the Synod office – an incredibly diverse community that includes many different cultures and many different religious traditions (including no tradition at all) working together in the interests of the church. The Culture and Values process was a very inclusive, grass-roots process that received thoughtful contributions from across the breadth of the organisation. The very surprising purpose statement that emerged from the consultation process commits the Synod office to 'serve the church to make a Jesus-shaped difference in the world' based on the values of Integrity, Respect, Compassion and Collaboration. The work of the embedding the new values in staff appraisal, staff development and recognition processes is well underway. This project also had to adapt very quickly to the COVID reality. It did so very effectively and the resultant processes contributed significantly to building relationships, strengthening resilience and generally sustaining staff morale over a difficult year.

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

In NSW-ACT we have access to the 2016 NCLS results and also a single respondent Census of Congregations (2019) which included an estimate of average worship attendance and an actual headcount.

The 2019 Congregational Census reported that the NSW-ACT Synod has 23570 worship attenders each week, including 2896 children under 15 and 2556 youth and young adults aged 15-30. There are 533 local churches oversighted by 375 church councils and 85% of congregations participated in the census.

80% of our churches were monocultural (more than 80% one group), 14% multicultural with one group making up 50-80% and there were 6% of churches where the largest ethnic group made up less than 50% of the population.

In 2019, just 14% of congregations had direct relationship with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, although we know from the 2016 NCLS that 26% of churches conduct an acknowledgement of country in worship.

Just 12 churches had a weekly average of more than 150 people in worship.

31% of churches had no children, 34% had less than 5 children, but there were also 29 congregations had more than 20 children involved in congregational life, 6 of which had more than 50.

40% of churches had no young adults, 30% had less than 5, but 36 congregations had more than 20 young adults and 3 had more than 50.

As reported to the previous Assembly, the 2016 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) surveyed 10,183 adults and 392 children (8 to 14) from 275 local Churches across the Synod. The 2021 NCLS will be conducted in August-September this year.

The average age of UCA members was 66, compared to the average age 38 for the Australian population at the same time.

In 2016 70% of NSW-ACT UCA attenders were over 60, compared to 21% of the wider population. 63% of NSW-ACT UCA attenders were women and 37% were men.

Presbytery effectiveness and viability remains a major concern in this Synod. The 1996 Assembly Discussion paper, *Roles, Relationships and Resourcing of Church Councils*, makes the following statement in relation to the minimum requirement to sustain a functioning presbytery:

*...It is recognised that a uniform size of presbyteries is neither possible nor desirable given the diversity of the context for mission in Australia, but it is proposed that the UCA move towards recognising, as a rule of thumb, that for a presbytery to be able to faithfully and adequately fulfil its core functions, there should be a minimum of, say 20 placements and / or a regular worshipping attendance of approximately, say, 4,000 persons within the area...*

Twenty plus years later, very few presbyteries in this Synod achieve the 'minimum' standard proposed in 1996 and it is clear that presbyteries variously struggle to cover their responsibilities in relation to the life and witness of Congregations and the oversight of Ministers. This has serious consequences for the faith and unity of the Church and the oversight of ministers and pastors, especially in rural areas. The Synod is actively working with a number of vulnerable presbyteries to respond to increasingly challenging circumstances and find alternative ways of working with congregations. While there are currently thirteen presbyteries within the Synod, it is likely that this landscape will change over the course of the next triennium. Addressing capacity issues within presbyteries is an increasingly pressing but challenging priority for the Synod to address noting that these issues have been raised within the Synod on a number of occasions and have resulted in no constructive decisions to enable change.

## **5. WHAT IS THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH THE WORK OF THE SYNOD HAS TO BE UNDERTAKEN?**

As the Church contracts, so does the capacity of the Synod to sustain the service and resource level needed to support the worship, witness and service of Congregations and Presbyteries. Over the last few years there has been a concerted endeavour to identify additional revenue streams to address the deteriorating budget position. Synod 2021 will consider Future Directions: Synod Resourcing Framework in the June session. Reflecting the 2019 commitment to growth, this framework seeks to 're-organise' the assets of the Synod to properly resource both Future Directions and the responsibilities of Synod and Presbytery within UCA polity.

Over the last few years there has been a growing commitment to collaboration across Boards, Presbyteries and other entities across the Synod. This commitment has been particularly evident in the development of Future Directions which has deliberately worked with a whole-of-church perspective to discern and achieve shared missional outcomes.

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

The Church is not the only institution facing challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The social landscape has changed and is continuing to change faster than organisations can keep up – the pandemic experience has only intensified this process. The level of complexity and the increasing burden of compliance makes it harder and harder to function effectively. Communities, clubs and societies are having to reimagine the ways in which they relate to the world around them and engage with the particular realities and needs of human beings. The church is an organisation with millennia of history and tradition and has weathered many storms of change over that time, but not always happily or peacefully. While it appears obvious to many people that traditional forms of church have less and less to offer, it is very hard for faithful people to let go of the known and familiar and respond to opportunities when the future is so hard to see or imagine.

The opportunity for the UCA lies in its commitment to the ongoing reconciling work of Christ - disciples are called and gathered into the Jesus story and then sent - individually and collectively - to work for the common good and to make a difference in the world. The fundamental task of the church (UCA style) is to participate in the reconciling work of Christ and to be a 'fellowship of reconciliation' through which Christ may work and witness.

In an increasingly polarised and polarising world, this is the call to create community across difference, and it has been reflected in many of the decisions and commitments made by the UCA over the last 40 or so years.

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

The Synod will be seeking to continue and build on the collaborative whole-of-church approach to mission and ministry in addressing the resourcing and capacity issues that are in front of it. In focusing the work of the Synod around clear priorities, and letting go of some unproductive activities, the hope is that Congregations across the Synod will be supported working for the common good in their particular contexts.