



muylothina 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 VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

1. INTRODUCTION

This report should be read in the context of the Church's great and profound calling to participate in God's mission through Christ. As a council of the Uniting Church in Australia, the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (VicTas) both welcomes and embraces the challenge to be a pilgrim people and a fellowship of reconciliation, in the faith and hope that through this, Christ may bear witness to himself. The Synod's responsibilities are undertaken in many ways, and shaped by the Synod vision:

Following Christ,

walking together

as First and Second Peoples,

seeking community, compassion and justice for all creation

2. MAJOR UNDERTAKINGS

2.1 Strategic Framework

Further to its report to the 15th Assembly, the Synod continues undertake its activities in light of the responsibilities set for it through the UCA's Basis of Union, Constitution, and Regulations; along with its Strategic Framework (see Attachment 1) to guide the implementation of these responsibilities. The deepening engagement by Synod committees and units with the Strategic Framework has been heartening as it provides a shared context for the governance and operations that are undertaken by the Synod.

A review of the Strategic Framework was to be done during 2020 as its initial time-span concluded at the end of 2021. The Synod Standing Committee (SSC) considered this during 2020 and resolved to recommend to the next Synod meeting that this review be deferred. Therefore, due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the February 2021 Synod meeting resolved that the current Synod Strategic Framework will continue to guide the Synod's ministry, mission, and resourcing priorities until 31 December 2023, and that a review of the Strategic Framework will take place in the lead up to the 2023 Synod meeting.

There is still much of the Strategic Framework to plumb as the Synod undertakes its responsibilities.

2.2 Building on governance, ministries, and operations changes from the Major Strategic Review

The Synod's governance, ministries, and operations changes that were introduced three-four years ago in light of the Major Strategic Review have consolidated, and matured in their life and practices. The essential work of coordination and collaboration across the councils and institutions of the Church has been a key focus in this development. This continues to be a positively evolving, and generative, undertaking as the Synod shares with other parts of the Church in being a pilgrim people, and for the building up of the whole through which Christ may bear witness to himself.

2.3 Financial Sustainability

In light of its commitment to stewardship of resources for today's and tomorrow's Church, in June 2019 the SSC resolved to achieve a balanced budget by 2023. This commitment continues, despite the impact of COVID 19. Note: as well as allocating resources to Synod committees and units, the Synod budget also includes substantial resourcing for presbyteries, other councils of the Church, and ecumenical and interfaith partners.

The SSC has adopted a set of Financial Sustainability Principles to guide its resourcing commitments. These Principles will be a resource for the Synod as it addresses the significant negative financial impacts resulting from COVID-19 and achieving a balanced budget by 2023.

In light of the commitment to achieve a balanced budget, and to address negative financial impacts of COVID-19, the SSC established a financial sustainability project team, now known as the Here For Good Working Group (HFG Group) to support the mission of the Church. The HFG Group is comprised of Synod staff and representatives from some presbyteries. Its purpose to oversee and coordinate the Synod's strategic response to its current financial status.

The HFG Group is in active engagement with various parts of the Church in VicTas, particularly presbyteries and institutions of the Church, in this whole of Church response to financial sustainability. The HFG Group will continue its work until the end of 2022.

2.3 Money For Mission Program

The Money For Mission (MFM) Program was established following very enthusiastic discussion in working groups at the 2019 Synod meeting. This is a collaborative program between the Synod and presbyteries. MFM provides for Responsible Bodies to opt in to sell properties that are surplus to mission and to invest the proceeds into a high yielding fund to resource both local and wider Church ministry and mission. All capital is invested in the MFM Fund, with the interest being used to enhance worship, witness, and service, within congregation and wider Church contexts.

The role of presbyteries, through their responsibilities for strategic missional leadership and oversight of congregations, is crucial in MFM's development and implementation across the Church in VicTas. The Synod resources presbyteries and congregations with missional, theological, and property expertise in their discernment regarding engaging with MFM as a contextually appropriate way to utilise resources for ministry and mission in the current realities of the Church and society.

Wider Church income from MFM is being factored into budget arrangements related to the HFG Project. However, MFM commenced prior to HFG, and it is anticipated that MFM will have a long-term future and benefit, well beyond the limited HFG timeframe.

2.4 Wesley Place

The Synod's Secretariat, Mission Resourcing Unit (MRU), and some parts of equipping Leadership for Mission (eLM) offices, along with the corporate offices of Uniting, Uniting AgeWell, Uniting Housing, and U Ethical moved to their 'new home' at Wesley Place (130 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne) in July 2020. The move to this new place of work and 'inhabiting' the space was severely disrupted due to COVID-19 restrictions. Nevertheless, this very contemporary and fit-for-purpose space is providing to be a wonderful co-location for work and collaboration as people gradually return to the workplace.

The location is a wonderful symbol of the 'Church family' being located on one site, as the Synod, institutions of the Church, and the Wesley Melbourne and Gospel Hall congregations share the same site. The presence of many expressions of the Church in the one centrally located site is also a notable symbol within the wider community. The concentration of UCA entities on one site, has reinvigorated opportunities for collaboration and strategic work, leading to further shared projects between the Synod and institutions of the Church.

The UCA's presence at Wesley Place is within an office tower along with other tenants. The developer has renovated the Wesley Church building and other historic buildings on the site, and established a new 'green space' in the particular precinct of Melbourne. Overall, the Wesley Place development has become a very notable contribution to the CBD's life and activities.

As COVID-19 restrictions reduce, the Synod and institutions look forward to welcoming the wider Church to Wesley Place, to share in the various activities of the Church that will occur there.

2.5 Learnings from the COVID-19 restrictions experience

In many ways, the state of Victoria was the 'hardest hit' of all the states in relation to the level and duration of COVID-19 related restrictions. Of course, Tasmania also endured significant restrictions. Taking account of both the opportunities and challenges of being the Church in new ways that emerged due to COVID-19 restrictions, many parts of the Church have found new ways to authentically undertake worship, worship, and service.

There is an opportunity to blend these learnings with existing patterns and practices, to build on contextually appropriate ways to express ministry and mission. The Synod looks forward to building on

these learnings, along with other parts of the Church. This reflects the Church's commitment to sharpen its understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought.

Like some other Synods, the most recent VicTas Synod meeting (February 2021, deferred from November 2020) was conducted as an entirely online meeting. This online experience was overwhelmingly very well received by Synod members. The Synod is deeply grateful to the many staff and volunteers who 'went above and beyond' to ensure that it was a meeting that reflected both the breadth and depth of the Synod's life, and the UCA's commitment to discernment processes in our decision making. There were a number of elements from conducting the online Synod meeting that may continue to be used for future in-person Synod meetings. These include: presentation of reports via video prior to the meeting; introduction to meeting practicalities prior to the meeting, online balloting; and some community building amongst working groups. Undertaking these processes prior to the actual meeting may provide for shorter and more-focussed in-person Synod meetings.

3. CONTEXT IN WHICH MINISTRY AND MISSION IS BEING UNDERTAKEN

As has been reported to recent Assemblies, this Synod continues to address general structural decline in congregations' membership and resourcing. There are a number of exceptions to this trend, but overall, the Church in Victoria and Tasmania is much smaller numerically and has a very different resource base (people and finances) than it did, say, 20 years ago. This change in congregation capacity has a flow-on effect to the challenge of developing leadership for other councils of the Church, its institutions, and ecumenical and inter-faith partners.

Notwithstanding these challenges, there appears to be an emerging confidence (in the best sense of the word) across the UCA in VicTas that we are sharing in an appropriate expression of God's mission in Christ that reflects the gospel values of justice, inclusion, compassion and the building up of Christ's body, and that reflects the nature of the UCA as envisioned in the Basis of Union. In this, there is an understanding that we are unlikely to have again the large congregations and the community-wide influence that we once had. This is coupled with the prayerful hope that, as occasion demands, we will be faithful and thoughtful with the resources we have, to share the experience of the transforming experience of the gospel to confess Christ in fresh words and deeds. Factors such as deep and faithful theological reflection on the nature of being church in a post-Christendom and pluralistic society, realistic projections of Church membership and resourcing trends, and honest consideration by members about the sort of Church they want to pass onto future generations has led to this understanding of being church. This understanding is coupled with future hopes and visions for how we may continue to be faithful in response to our calling. As change continues to unfold in the Church's life and practices within the VicTas Synod we understand some of the potential challenges that are ahead, and the need we have as Christ's body to call upon the foundational role of the fruits and gifts of the Spirit for this journey.

This burgeoning confidence has resulted from many and varied collaboration opportunities across councils and institutions of the Church. Of course, this journey has had, and will continue to have, great times of celebration and challenging periods of soul-searching as we seek to be faithful in response to Christ's calling (as it has been ever thus for the Church through the ages). However, it is a journey that as an inter-conciliar Church we are called to travel on together, in response to Christ reaching out to command people's attention and awaken faith, and in his own strange way constituting, ruling, and renewing us as his church.

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

The Synod will continue to exercise its responsibility for the general oversight, direction and administration of the Church's worship, witness and service in the region allotted to it. The Strategic Framework will continue to be an essential lens for this. Likewise, the Synod's commitment to collaboration and coordination within its committees and units, along with other councils and institutions of the Church will be crucial to this work.

The Synod's commitment to its Financial Sustainability Principles and achieving a balanced budget by 2023 will be a strong influence on the commitments and resource allocations that are made over the next three years. This commitment will be approached with due discernment practices, as consideration is given to resourcing for today's and tomorrow's Church to ensure adequate future resources. It may have challenging impacts on the various elements of the Synod budget: Synod committees and units; presbyteries; other councils of the Church; and ecumenical and interfaith partners.

It is anticipated that as the Money For Mission Program gathers momentum, along with other initiatives, the Church's profile/footprint in VicTas will change. This will be guided by faithful and thoughtful discernment for contextually appropriate expressions of ministry and mission, for today and for the future. These expressions will be guided by insights gained through collaboration between councils and institutions of Church.

The Synod will continue its commitment to respond positively and appropriately to the regulatory and compliance requirements, both within and beyond the Church, that are inherent within its responsibilities. Fulfilling these requirements are essential elements of shaping the Church's readiness to engage in ministry and mission within the Church's and contemporary society's expectations and requirements, and are part of the Synod's commitment to demonstrating and expressing values such as justice, inclusion, and building community.

The Synod's commitment to walk together as First and Second Peoples and its Strategic Framework will contribute significantly to the emphases and resource allocation that is undertaken over the next three years.

5. MATTERS RELATED TO ROYAL COMMISSIONS

The following brief accounts of responses to both current Royal Commissions (Commissions) are limited snapshots of the breadth and depth of work by the Synod, Uniting, Uniting AgeWell, and other parts of the Church in VicTas in ensuring that open, transparent, and cooperative responses to both Commissions. The SSC has received regular reports on activities in response to both Commissions, and has supported governance and management arrangements in responding to the significant, and sometimes challenging media and other interest in the work of each Commission.

5.1 Disability Royal Commission

Along with other Synods and the Assembly, the VicTas Synod established a Synod Disability Royal Commission Task Group. This Task Group is comprised of Synod and Uniting Vic.Tas staff, along with members of the Church who have lived-experience and/or professional expertise in the areas of Disability Services delivery. The task group has provided significant leadership for the Synod in the development of papers and resources for use in the wider Church, and contributed with other Synod Task Groups to the work of the Church's National Disability Royal Commission Task Group.

5.2 Aged Care Royal Commission

The Church's response in VicTas to the Aged Care Royal Commission has been undertaken by the Synod's institution: Uniting AgeWell (UA). UA has contributed to some case studies of the Commission and the national UCA response to the Commission. UA is also preparing for potential developments in the Aged Care resourcing and regulatory 'landscape' that will emerge from the Commonwealth Government's response to the Aged Care Royal Commission's recommendations.

Rev Dr Mark Lawrence
General Secretary

6. SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Vision

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

Mission Principles

God in Christ is at mission in the world and sends the Church in the Spirit to:

1. share the Good News of Jesus Christ
2. nurture followers of Christ in life-giving in communities of reconciliation
3. respond in compassion to human need
4. live justly and seek justice for all
5. care for creation
6. listen to each generation and culture so as to live out the Gospel in fresh ways
7. pursue God's mission in partnership

Statements of Intent

- Focus on Vision and Mission Principles - We will focus proactively and strategically on engaging in effective and relational mission.
- Foster faith, deepen discipleship - We will support and inspire people of all ages to come to faith and to grow in their faith, stimulating interest in Christ and his way in the wider community.
- Be lighter and simpler - We will be lighter and simpler in our practices and formal structures so we can be more flexible and proactive in responding to the movement of the Spirit.
- Grow leadership capacity - We will grow the capacity of all forms of leadership in the current and future Church.
- Nourish contextual expressions of church - We will recognise and nourish the diversity of forms in which we gather as communities of faithful people.
- Seek reconciliation between First and Second Peoples – We will be active in pursuing a better way in our shared relationships between First and Second Peoples, as modelled to us by Christ's covenant. We will work in solidarity with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress for the advancement of God's justice and righteousness in this land
- Act together across cultures and generations - We will develop and deepen our relationships to be, in practice, an inter-cultural, inter-generational church.
- Deepen partnerships and trust - We will develop a more cohesive culture of trust, partnership and support.
- Share our resources - We will be more strategic in the organisation and sharing of all our resources – our people, property and finances – for the common good.
- Build resilience, strengthen accountability - We will act with faithful integrity by way of mutual accountability, wise stewardship and good governance.

Strategic Priorities

- Ministries which foster diverse gathered communities of renewal, Christian practice and mission
- Culturally diverse mission and ministry
- Mission and ministry with children, youth, their families and young adults

Areas of Focus

- The identity of Jesus Christ and Christianity in a post-Christendom world
- Multi-cultural and multi-faith Australia and its relationship to its First Peoples
- Peace-making, power and powerlessness, being with and for the poor
- Inter-faith and intercultural engagement, encounter and learning.