



**Uniting Church in Australia**  
**ASSEMBLY**  
Assembly Standing Committee

27-29 August 2021

**DOCUMENT 8L**

Title	Reappointment of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) – UCA Dialogue
Type of Paper	For information and decision
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	UCA Members of the ECAJ-UCA Dialogue
Purpose	To receive a summary report of the Dialogue and to approve Terms of Reference and UCA membership of the Dialogue for the new triennium.
Rationale & Findings Summary	
Attachments	
Recommendations	That the Assembly Standing Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Receive the Report</li><li>2. Adopt the Terms of Reference for the ECAJ – UCA Dialogue for the triennium</li><li>3. Appoint the UCA members to the ECAJ – UCA Dialogue for the triennium</li></ol>
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# Executive Council of Australian Jewry – Uniting Church in Australia Dialogue (ECAJ-UCA Dialogue)

## Background:

(This background is based on the report provided to the March 2021 ASC by the former convener, Rev Dr Matt Wilson.)

2021 will mark the 30th anniversary of the first meeting of the UCA-ECAJ Dialogue. Born out of tension between the UCA and parts of the Australian Jewish community regarding Palestine, the dialogue has provided the foundation for a longstanding relationship between the two faith communities. The Dialogue was established to provide a forum between the two faith communities to learn and appreciate each other's beliefs, and particularly to explore and address concerns regarding issues in the Middle East. This dialogue is particularly significant to the Uniting Church because of the unique relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Jesus was born, lived and died a faithful Jew and cannot be fully understood apart from the Jewish faith of his time. This Task Group sits amid a range of strategies for maintaining the relationship between the Uniting Church and Jewish communities including the relationship between the UCA President, Moderators and other church leaders with Jewish leaders, other dialogues including at the Synod/State level and local community engagement and events that bring the two faith communities together.

## Meetings and Membership:

Through the last triennium, the Dialogue had seven UCA members. The majority of the group were ordained, with two lay representatives. Most were based in either Sydney or Melbourne, reflecting that meetings of the Dialogue alternate between Sydney and Melbourne (when meeting face to face).

The majority are long standing members of the group, in a number of cases for over 12 years. Most also serve on State or local bodies for relations between Christians, Jews and in some cases Muslims.

General practice has been for the Dialogue group to meet for a day twice each year, once in Sydney and once in Melbourne.

The membership from the ECAJ is a little more fluid than the UCA membership, with location generally determining a significant portion of the attendees. Many of the Jewish members have also been long term members – in a few cases going back to the first, or very early meetings.

When meeting in Melbourne (or via internet) the Jewish group has often had one or more younger (under 30) participants – these participants have often been 'cultural' Jews. From the Jewish side, there is always an aim to include a number of Rabbis in each dialogue meeting, but this tends to be more successful in Sydney than Melbourne, where interfaith relations tend to be seen as less important by the Jewish clergy.

The dialogue met four times during the last triennium.

## How the dialogue has addressed its terms of reference during the last triennium:

UCA aims of the Dialogue (from terms of reference 2018)

1. Maintain relationships between the ECAJ and UCA, and so model mutual and respectful relationship between the Uniting Church and Jewish community.
2. Provide advice to the ASC on sensitive issues that arise within the justice and advocacy work of the UCA and communicate carefully and respectfully with ECAJ in regard to UCA statements and positions that may cause concern for the Jewish community in Australia and internationally.
3. Respond to requests from the ASC or ARU to raise issues or areas of interest related to the work of the Assembly and provide feedback to the ASC of emerging issues that may need to be pursued by other parts of the Assembly.

4. Provide a platform for the Uniting Church and the Jewish community to learn more about each other's beliefs and traditions and to share this learning with the national church.
5. Look for creative ways to encourage and resource interfaith engagement in local congregations
6. Explore opportunities for the dialogue to engage with and invite contribution and participation from women and younger generations.

The dialogue has become a very comfortable meeting. With many long-term members, significant relationships have formed, and the stability and degree of relationship have, at times, allowed for robust discussion and the sharing of differing opinions that would have been very difficult to achieve without the benefit of long-established relationships and mutual trust.

The dialogue has, in recent years, been able to address moments of tension in relationship, usually relating to UCA statements on Israel/Palestine or personal statements or actions by UCA members relating to Israel/Palestine. This has helped members of the dialogue to understand each other, and the official statements of both the UCA and ECAJ. It has also at times helped in smoothing relations and advising key leaders and spokespeople from both the UCA and Jewish communities.

The dialogue members have shared in prayer, interpretation of scripture, awareness of each other's religious and cultural practices and discussion of social, political and national matters of concern. In the last triennium the dialogue has repeatedly addressed issues of religious freedom, hate speech, anti-Semitism and limitations on free speech within the Australian political and community spheres.

Whilst the dialogue group has a genuine interest in seeing the awareness of both UCA and Jewish communities of each other's faith, culture and view-points grow across the Australian community, the reality is that with a very small group of predominantly elderly and/or busy people based in a very small geographic area the practicality of assisting the wider UCA in deepening relationships has been very difficult, and largely unsuccessful. The very small presence of Jewish communities outside the major capital cities means that for many in the church relationship with Jewish people is not a priority born out of normal lived experience. It also means that many Jewish volunteers find themselves stretched to meet the requests for participation.

The dialogue group has, in its current form and format, largely failed to interact with younger generations. The exception to this has already been noted, in that, particularly from Melbourne, younger members of the Jewish community have been active members of the dialogue. However, potentially frustratingly from the UCA perspective, these participants tend to identify as non-religious, being 'cultural' rather than religious Jews.

#### **Looking to the 2021-24 triennium:**

The dialogue group as currently constituted is valuable in establishing and maintaining relationships and lines of communication between the UCA and ECAJ. Over the years the dialogue has become less academically focussed (there are now no full-time theological staff or students on the group). It has become more able to discuss difficult and divisive issues as relationships have formed and stabilised over time. It provides a channel where, when adequately resourced, communication over key social and political issues can be shared. Attention needs to be paid to ensure UCA dialogue members are kept informed of what is currently happening within the life of Assembly or the ASC with regard to such issues.

The dialogue needs to work on being able to be more accessible and inclusive of more people from across the UCA in forums and conversations of interest. This can be challenging as meetings need to be held between Monday – Thursday due to religious commitments.

The dialogue would also need additional resources in order to undertake work in preparation of materials, resources or educative programs.

The ASC will need to monitor this dialogue and determine whether the value of an ongoing group where a stable and continuing relationship can continue to flourish is serving the best interests of the ongoing work of the Assembly in interfaith relations.

# Uniting Church in Australia and Executive Council of Australian Jewry Dialogue

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

Approved by Assembly Standing Committee -

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<b>Purpose:</b>	The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) and Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) Dialogue is an ongoing Dialogue between the two faith communities. This Terms of Reference relates to the UCA members of the Dialogue.
<b>Reporting Arrangements:</b>	Assembly Standing Committee (ASC)
<b>Period:</b>	This Terms of Reference is for the period August 2021 – June 2024
<b>Membership:</b>	As determined by the ASC on the recommendation of the UCA Members of the Dialogue, the Assembly General Secretary and the Assembly Resourcing Unit (ARU)

### **Background:**

The UCA-ECAJ Dialogue has been ongoing for more than 25 years and has provided the foundation for a longstanding relationship between the two faith communities. The Dialogue was established to provide a forum between the two faith communities to learn and appreciate each other's beliefs, and particularly to explore and address concerns regarding issues in the Middle East. This dialogue is particularly significant to the Uniting Church because of the unique relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Jesus was born, lived and died a faithful Jew and cannot be fully understood apart from the Jewish faith of his time. This Task Group sits amid a range of strategies for maintaining the relationship between the Uniting Church and Jewish communities including the relationship between the UCA President, Moderators and other church leaders with Jewish leaders, other dialogues including at the Synod/State level and local community engagement and events that bring the two faith communities together.

### **Task Required:**

1. Maintain relationships between the ECAJ and UCA, and so model mutual and respectful relationship between the Uniting Church and Jewish community.
2. Provide advice to the ASC on sensitive issues that arise within the justice and advocacy work of the UCA and communicate carefully and respectfully with ECAJ in regard to UCA statements and positions that may cause concern for the Jewish community in Australia and internationally.
3. Respond to requests from the ASC or ARU to raise issues or areas of interest related to the work of the Assembly and provide feedback to the ASC of emerging issues that may need to be pursued by other parts of the Assembly.
4. Provide a platform for the Uniting Church and the Jewish community to learn more about each other's beliefs and traditions and to share this learning with the national church as outlined below.
5. Look for creative ways to encourage and resource interfaith engagement in local congregations
6. Explore opportunities for the dialogue to engage with and invite contribution and participation from women and younger generations.

### **Expected Outcomes:**

The UCA members of the Dialogue form, for the purposes of the ASC, a Task Group within the life of the Assembly. During the 2021-2024 Triennium the Task Group will:

1. Present an Annual Report to the ASC via ARU in time for the July ASC meeting in both 2022 and 2023, and a report for the 17th Assembly in July 2024 that is provided to the March 2024 ASC meeting.

These reports will indicate:

- Frequency of meetings
  - Any need for changes in membership of the UCA Dialogue members
  - Progress of key conversations
  - Any documents produced by the Dialogue during the period
  - Constraints or issues to be addressed (if any) for ongoing work
2. Working through the ARU, provide any documents or reports that need to be considered by ASC for input or approval.
  3. In its 2024 Report, provide an indication of the vitality of the Dialogue, suggesting what areas of work and the appropriate membership that would be required to carry this work forward.
  4. Look for ways the Dialogue can inform, engage with and invite contribution from the wider Uniting Church and especially from the Seeking Common Ground Circle.
  5. There is an expectation that some members of the Dialogue will be members of Assembly Panels and available to serve on Task Groups established by the ASC if required.

### **How the task group will work:**

#### **As a Task Group representing the Uniting Church in Australia engaged in an interfaith relationship:**

1. Listen respectfully to others and share openly and honestly about your own faith and the beliefs of the Uniting Church.
2. Do not seek to change the other and be open to learning and growing in your own understandings.

#### **As a Task Group of the Uniting Church in Australia:**

3. Be grounded in the gospel and build upon the tradition of the Uniting Church in Australia.
4. Live out our covenant as First and Second Peoples.
5. Live out our commitment to being a multicultural church, oriented towards justice.
6. Ensure that the activities of the Task Group are consistent with the Basis of Union of the UCA, the Constitution and Regulations, and align with the current strategic priorities of the Assembly.
7. Consider how the work of the Task Group relates to other councils, agencies and groups within the UCA, and work collaboratively wherever possible.
8. Consider how the work of the Task Group relates to other bodies ecumenically and with other faiths and interfaith and civil society organisations and work collaboratively wherever possible.
9. Where appropriate, conduct its work on the basis of rigorous, contemporary research and analysis.

**Membership:**

The UCA Dialogue members (Task Group) will be appointed by the ASC in their August 2021 meeting, guided by input from the ARU, having consulted with the UCA Members of the Dialogue and the Assembly General Secretary.

The UCA members of the Dialogue will comprise of up to six people, one of whom is appointed by the ASC as the Co-Convenor. It is expected the ECAJ will also appoint a Convenor.

The selection process will consider the expertise and experience required to undertake the work of the Task Group. Some consideration of geographic location will be given when selecting members given the history of Sydney and Melbourne based dialogues.

Should there be need to add new members during a triennium then ASC will do so on the recommendation of the current Dialogue members and the ARU.

**Convenor:**

The Convenor will be responsible primarily for liaison with the ECAJ in order to arrange meetings, collate necessary information and provide reports to ASC. They will present the annual report to the ASC in person and be available for questions. The Convenor will be the primary point of contact for the ARU as they support the Dialogue.

**Period:**

This Terms of Reference is for the three years of the triennium 2021-2024. The ASC understands the longterm, relational nature of inter-faith dialogues and understands that there may be an extension of the UCA participation in the Dialogue into the next triennium.

In the lead up to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly the Task Group will report to ASC through the ARU as to whether there is ongoing work to be done and if so the nature of this work.

Based on this report, the ASC will determine whether or not to extend the Dialogue into the following triennium, and then review the Terms of Reference and membership with a view to these going forward to the August ASC meeting in August 2024.

**Proposed UCA members of the  
Executive Council of Australian Jewry and Uniting Church in Australia Dialogue  
2021-2024**

It is proposed that the following people be appointed as the UCA members of the ECAJ-UCA Dialogue for the triennium 2021-2024. All the current members were part of the Dialogue for the last two triennia.

Convener: Tara Culewis

Members:

- Alison Bleyerveen
- Rob McFarlane
- Edwin Carter

There have been two people who have retired from the UCA membership at the end of the last triennium. Staff are working with the new convener to identify and approach several people.

Additional names will come to ASC in November 2021.

**Profiles:**

**Rev Tara Curlewis**

Safe Church Relationships Minister, Synod of NSW and the ACT

Member of Galston UC

UCA Synod: NSW and the ACT

Tara has been a member of the dialogue since 2018. She served as General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), during which she was co-chair of the Australian National Dialogue of Christians Muslims and Jews (ANDCMJ) and on the steering committee of the Australian Partnership of Religious Organisations (APRO). She has lead an Australian Heads of Churches solidarity visit to Palestine and Israel. Tara has worked with the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies co-leading two groups to Palestine and Israel.

I have kept it short as that appears all that is required. I am happy to complete a more detailed Expression of Interest similar to what was required 3 years ago.

**Alison Bleyerveen**

NSWACT Synod

Alison has been a member of the dialogue since 2017 and has also a member of the Seeking Common Ground Circle since its inception.

She has a Masters of Theology, specialising in the links between Christ, culture, the mission of God and the UCA. Alison is currently teaching at an independent Catholic girls school in SW Sydney. Her main teaching subject is Religious Studies and she also teaches Aboriginal Studies, Geography and English.

Alison has considerable experience teaching and leading in the area of interfaith and ecumenical understanding as a result of leading teams of Religious Education teachers in the delivery of the NSW Preliminary and HSC Studies of Religion Syllabus.

She has worked for the UCA in a number of teaching, research and facilitation roles, on and off, over a period of nearly 30 years.

**Rev Dr Rob McFarlane**

Presbytery Ministry Leader, Parramatta Nepean Presbytery

NSW/ACT Synod

Rob has served on the ECAJ-UCA dialogue since 2013. Rob has a PhD in Biblical studies, and has visited Israel a number of times for both Biblical and peace-building tours. Rob has also ministered in areas with large Jewish communities, building relationships with Jewish leaders beyond our specific dialogue partners.

**Edwin Carter – Member**

Vic/Tas Synod

Edwin has been a member of the Dialogue and also serves as Member and Treasurer of the Council of Christians and Jews Vic. He is also the Secretary of the Victorian Synod Working Party on Jewish Christian Relations.