



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

12-14 November 2021

DOCUMENT

Title	Apology to LGBTIQ Australians Task Group Report
Type of Paper	For information, feedback and decision.
Assembly or ASC Minute	21.19.02 request the Task Group to provide a report including a proposed project plan and any budget implications to the August 2021 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee.
Consultation	Members of the Task Group
Purpose	Progress report for ASC and seeking ASC feedback
Rationale & Findings Summary	This report includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Summary of progress
Attachments	Terms of Reference for the Task group
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receive the Report2. Provide feedback to the Task Group on the questions proposed in the report3. Request the Task Group to provide an update report to the November 2022 ASC.
Submitted by	Lin Hatfield-Dodds (Task Group Convenor) hatfield.dodds.lin@gmail.com 0408 402 222

Uniting Church in Australia
Assembly
Apology to LGBTIQ Australians Task Group
Report to the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC)
November 2021

Purpose

1. To provide an update to ASC of work undertaken to date;
2. To seek guidance from ASC in regard to the proposed project plan and resources required to implement it; and
3. To bring to ASC's attention the need for Councils of the Church to ensure that adequate pastoral care and other supports are in place for survivors before the Task Group commences wide consultation.

Introduction

The Task Group was formed by ASC in July 2019 to develop an official apology to be offered from the Uniting Church in Australia to LGBTIQ Australians for the Church's role in the silence, rejection, discrimination and stereotyping of LGBTIQ people, couples and families. A proposal to commence this work was presented to the July 2018 Assembly meeting but was not dealt with then due to the pressures of time.

The Task Group was charged with consulting widely with LGBTIQ people and other members of the Church. The Terms of Reference (attached) state that the apology might draw on, but not go beyond, existing statements, decisions and theological work that has been approved by either the Assembly or ASC.

Lin Hatfield Dodds was appointed as Task Group Convenor by ASC in September 2020.

Meetings commenced in October 2020. After an extended period of consultation and engagement, the Task Group intend bringing a proposal regarding an apology to the 17th Assembly.

Assembly Associate General Secretary Rob Floyd is the Task Group's link to the Assembly and has provided wise counsel and made some secretariat assistance available to the Task Group. A Task Group member, Warren Talbot, has drafted minutes and correspondence.

Work to date

The Task Group has met eleven times to date, all virtually. Meetings are monthly, with a break over the summer period. The Task Group has had access an online library of UCA documents and statements related to sexuality that can be accessed through the Assembly website.

Communication with partner churches in Canada, the UK and Aotearoa/New Zealand has commenced. A Discussion Paper is in development, looking at comparable apology initiatives for LGBTIQ peopleⁱ taken by our partner churches in Australia and overseas, and processes utilised by those churches and nations

in relation to matters of apologies and reconciliation processes. The Discussion Paper will also provide a biblical and theological framework for an apology, and reflections grounded in the Basis of Union.

The Task Group has reached out to key UCA leaders with a history of thoughtful and theological engagement in this space, including past President Alistair Macrae. Key theological contributors to the Discussion Paper, and to Task Group thinking generally include Elizabeth Raine, John Squires, and Jione Havea.

Over the course of 2021, the Task Group has focussed on preparing to consult widely across the UCA. Workshops with experts have been held to consider how to engage in culturally competent ways with UCA National Conferences (Apwee Ting) and the UAICC (Mark Kickett).

Guiding principles

The principles guiding the Task Group's work are framed both theologically and psychologically:

- (1) Ensure that no avoidable harm to individuals results from processes recommended to the Assembly*
- (2) Respect agency and autonomy of all involved in the apology process*
- (3) Work towards health, embracing pain as part of the healing process*
- (4) Hear and validate people's stories as a key element in developing an Apology*

Key project stages

Task Group intends to hasten slowly, to ensure that all aspects of consultations and the development of an apology have been carefully considered before commencing engagement with survivors and others.

The Task Group anticipates that planning and preparation will run to the end of 2021, leading into 18 months of consultation and engagement across and beyond the UCA from early 2022 to mid-2023. This work will culminate in the development of an apology, the liturgy/ritual through which it will be delivered, and a report to the 17th Assembly over the period mid to end-2023. The Task Group is working towards presentation at the 17th Assembly, anticipated to be in July 2024.

The Task Group has chosen to work carefully, relationally and reflectively. We believe that this work has the potential to be of both substance and significance to the Church and to the broader community. We note in previous decades the importance of the work in developing relational work and apologies. The areas of a covenant with the UAICC and an apology to survivors of institutional child sexual abuse are just two examples.

We note that the Terms of Reference require the Task Group to 'consult widely', to engage in a 'respectful process' and that this will involve 'listening to all.' We are most pleased to work with this framework and believe that careful listening and reflective work is necessary for any apology to have meaning or significance.

We note that the Terms of Reference also anticipate that this work, while arising within the life of the Church, has the potential for particularly broad impact: "within the Uniting Church, with the Australian LGBTIQ communities, and the wider society." It is appropriate for the preparation of the apology, therefore, to consider a range of settings, contexts and understandings. For that to occur, part of the Task Group's "listening to all" will need to involve listening beyond the life of the Church, as well as listening across the life of the Church. There is little value in framing an apology that has not heard

from those who have been so impacted that they have chosen to break a relationship with the church, or those who have never felt welcomed and included.

The Basis of Union (which is clearly guiding all of our work) requires us to be open as a church to continual renewal and to work by (positive) contact with contemporary thought. Accordingly, we will be engaging and reflecting on the UCA's foundational theological basis and also the ways in which contemporary medical, psychological, and sociological fields have brought new insight.

Importantly, while central to our understanding and expression of the faith, confession, repentance and renewal are difficult. They confront us with our own reality; at times we would prefer this was not the case. These all take time and may be best understood by way of considering times of preparation, death, resurrection and response. As an Easter faith experience is often made more significant by a time of Lenten preparation, and that this in turn can lead to an ongoing life of deeper connection with the life-giving presence of the Spirit, so too the work relating to this Task Group may be best framed with deep preparation in the hope of a relationally based renewal as its ongoing outcome.

The Status of An Apology

The temptation is to assume that all those within the LGBTIQ+ community and their allies – whether within or outside the UCA – need to receive an apology from the UCA. The reality is likely to be more nuanced and complex. Some people may not be ready to receive an apology due to the hurt they have received and perhaps continue to endure. Others might be indifferent to whether the UCA offers an apology or not. Some may receive an apology in a positive light.

For many, the concept of an apology carries with it assumptions that there be a reconciliation, or a favourable response. However, people process harm or trauma at their own pace and in their own time. This requires from us, the church, the acknowledgement that everyone may not be willing to hear or engage with an apology. The Task Group recognises that the act of apologising may cause people to recall past trauma – thereby be re-traumatised.

The Task Group will be informed by the responses we receive from those within the LGBTIQ+ community, as well as those from other areas of the Church, being sensitive to balances involved as we listen and consult across the Church in 2022 and 2023.

An apology offered by the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia to the Australian LGBTIQ community must be an act of integrity by the Assembly as much as it must be a genuine and appropriate apology.

Resourcing the work

The Task Group believes that the effectiveness of its sensitive work would be greatly enhanced by coming together face to face annually over 2-3 days and being able to conduct some consultations face to face.

Managing responses to an apology

The role and scope of the Task Group requires a primary focus on the development and delivery of an apology from the UCA to LGBTIQ people who have been hurt by it. This will necessitate engaging with enough of the people who have experienced hurt so that the Task Group understands broad themes and specific issues as required to enable it to develop a meaningful and respectful apology. It is not the role

of the Task Group to set out to listen and engage with all LGBTIQ persons hurt by the UCA – this is something for the ASC and Assembly to consider.

However, the wide consultations that the Task Group has been tasked to undertake will almost certainly give rise to a need for the Councils of the UCA to engage in a timely and pastoral way with people whose pain is surfaced through the processes of developing the apology. This is a key matter that the Task Group believes needs resolution before consultations begin.

The Church will need pastoral supports and theological resources ready. To this end, we request that the Assembly Standing Committee consider the Assembly's responsibility in managing responses to the apology work.

We further request that the ASC reaches out to engage the Synods, Presbyteries and Congregations of the UCA to ensure that Councils across the life of our Church are ready and equipped for the range of likely responses.

It's not all downside at all – if we get this right as a church, the potential for new life and energy across the UCA is significant. Churches all over the Western world have an attraction and retention issue with people under 40 as we do not connect well on issues of identity or the environment. How we prepare for and lean into this apology has the potential to address one of those issues.

Questions for consideration

1. Does the ASC affirm the direction of the Task Group project plan?
2. How might the Task Group determine the nature of the consultations and which ones are best conducted face to face, and which can be conducted virtually? What resources could the ASC make available to the Task Group to enable it to consult widely and face to face where required?
3. How might ASC take a lead role in assisting the whole Church prepare for responding in timely and pastoral ways to all LGBTIQ persons hurt by the UCA, and to the range of responses elicited by the development and delivery of the apology?

Recommendations

That the Assembly Standing Committee:

1. Receive the Report
2. Provide feedback to the Task Group on the questions proposed in the report
3. Request the Task Group to provide an update report to the November 2022 ASC.

Apology to LGBTIQ Australians Task Group Members

Lin Hatfield Dodds

Kippax Uniting Church
Convenor
CEO, Benevolent Society
Chair, Uniting World
Former National Director UnitingCare Australia

Wendy Hendry

Margaret River Uniting Church
Social Justice Officer, WA Synod
Former national co-convenor, Uniting Church LGBTIQ+ Network

Revd Gordon Ramsay

Gunghalin Uniting Church
CEO, Alliance for Gambling Reform
Former Attorney-General, ACT Government

Graeme Randall

Leichhardt Uniting Church
Psychologist, Pastoral Counselling Institute, Uniting NSW/ACT

Warren Talbot

Pitt Street Uniting Church
Campaign Engagement Officer, UnitingCare Australia
Former national secretary, Uniting Church LGBTIQ+ Network

Revd Apelu Tielu

Minister, Queanbeyan Uniting Church

Observer/participant

Revd Elizabeth Raine
Minister, Tuggeranong Uniting Church

i 'LGBTIQA+' is an evolving acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and many other terms (such as non-binary and pansexual) that people use to describe experience and understanding of their gender identity, sexuality, and physiological sex characteristics.

APOLOGY TO LGBTIQ AUSTRALIANS TASK GROUP

TERMS OF REFERENCE

[July 2019 – noting subsequent change of Convenor in Sep 2020]

Purpose: To develop the wording of an official apology from the Uniting Church in Australia to LGBTIQ Australians for the Church's role in the silence, rejection, discrimination and stereotyping of LGBTIQ people, couples and families.

Reporting Arrangements: Assembly Standing Committee (ASC)

Period: This Terms of Reference is for the period of achieving the purpose of the task group

Membership: As determined by the ASC on the recommendation of the Assembly / Assembly General Secretary / Assembly Resourcing Unit (ARU)

Task Required:

1. Consult widely with LGBTIQ and other members of the Church in order to develop the wording of an official apology from the Uniting Church in Australia to LGBTIQ Australians for the Church's role in the silence, rejection, discrimination and stereotyping of LGBTIQ people, couples and families. When considering this, the task group will engage in a respectful process in developing an apology, which will involve listening to all, honestly naming the past and respecting differences. An apology will hopefully contribute to healing and reconciliation within the Uniting Church, with the Australian LGBTIQ communities and the wider society.
2. If timing is appropriate, bring a proposal regarding an apology to the 16th Assembly. The best apology might be a "living apology" though this does not preclude a formal statement by the Assembly.
3. The apology might draw on, but not go beyond, existing statements, decisions and theological work that has been approved by either the Assembly or ASC in the past.

Expected Outcomes:

At the conclusion of its work the Task Group will:

1. Present a Draft Report to the Assembly General Secretary outlining the directions the group is taking to the ASC by March 2020.
2. Present a Final Report including an executive summary and any proposals / recommendations for consideration at the 16th Assembly to the ASC by November 2020

Note: Should additional time be required to complete this process and it is evident that this will not be ready for consideration at the 16th Assembly, then future expected outcomes and a revised timeframe should be determined at the November 2020 ASC meeting.

How the task group will work:

1. Be grounded in the gospel and build upon the tradition of the Uniting Church in Australia.
2. Live out our covenant as First and Second Peoples.
3. Live out our commitment to being a multicultural church, oriented towards justice.
4. Embody an inclusive church where those of differing ability, age, gender, race and sexuality are welcomed
5. 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.
6. Consider how the work of the Task Group relates to other councils, agencies and groups within the UCA, and work collaboratively wherever possible.
7. Consider how the work of the Task Group relates to other bodies ecumenically and with other civil society organisation and work collaboratively wherever possible.
8. Where appropriate, conduct its work on the basis of rigorous, contemporary research and analysis

Membership: (appointed by ASC in July 2019)

Ian Tozer (Convenor) – withdrew from this role in late 2019

Lin Hatfield Dodds (Convenor) – appointed by ASC in Sep 2020

Warren Talbot

Leanne Jenki

Graeme Randall

Rev Sani Vaeluaga