



mylathina takila-ti Le:wun tunk-ungai tuldangk tunk-ungai
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Assembly Standing Committee

33 Act2: On the Way

That the Assembly resolve to:

Identity and Vision

- 1. Acknowledge that the Uniting Church in Australia:**
 - a. Lives and works within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, guided by its Basis of Union (Paragraph 3, Basis of Union; Clause 2 of the Constitution).**
 - b. Is committed, along with the whole church of God, to serve the world for which Christ died, and awaits with hope the day of the Lord Jesus Christ (Paragraph 1 Basis of Union).**
 - c. Is called to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself (Paragraph 3, Basis of Union).**
 - d. Is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal, and that the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come (Paragraph 3, Basis of Union).**

- 2. Acknowledge that:**
 - a. Christ alone is supreme and constitutes, rules and renews his Church.**
 - b. The responsibility of governing our life belongs to all by virtue of their gifts.**
 - c. Our councils have responsibilities both in relation to the Church and the world.**
 - d. Each council is asked to wait upon God's Word and obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight.**
 - e. The relationship between councils is defined by the goal of being united by mutual submission in service of the Gospel.**

- 3. Acknowledge that as a Church:**
 - a. We are in covenantal relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (Covenanting Statement, 1994; Preamble to the Constitution).**
 - b. We are a multicultural church (We are a multicultural church, 1985).**
 - c. We are committed to gender equality in leadership (Paragraph 14, Basis of Union).**
 - d. We affirm the ministry of every member of the Church, both lay and ordained (Paragraph 13, Basis of Union).**
 - e. We are committed to the promotion of justice (Statement to the Nation, 1977; Statement to the Nation, 1988).**



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- f. We value scholarly enquiry and an informed faith, learning from a breadth of theological perspectives and contemporary thought (Paragraphs 5 & 11, Basis of Union).
- g. We are called to be a safe church, providing safe environments for all people including children and young people, so that they may live life in all its fullness.
- h. We are called to make and grow disciples through communities of worship, witness, service and discipleship formation.
- i. We seek to engage with our ecumenical partners in seeking union with Churches (Paragraph 2, Basis of Union).
- j. We seek friendship and understanding with people of other faiths (Living with a Neighbour who is Different, 2000).

Imperative for Change

4. Note the challenges identified within the Act2 Report regarding the current structures, practices and ways of working which are now impeding the ability of the Uniting Church to live out our vision and calling.
5. Note the opportunities identified within the Act2 Report to explore changes to our structures, practices and ways of working which will enhance the Uniting Church's ability to live out our vision and calling into the future.
6. Heed the call of the Basis of Union, and invite the whole Church to enter a period of self-examination in which we consider afresh our common commitment to the Church's mission.
7. Request all Congregations, Presbyteries, Synods, agencies, schools and other institutions of the Church to engage with the work of the Act2 Project in a spirit of mutual submission in service of the Gospel.

Project Outcomes

8. Endorse the scope of the Act2 Project as:
"identifying and implementing structures, practices and ways of working which:
 - a. Create an enabling environment for local communities of worship, witness, service and discipleship formation.
 - b. Foster a cohesive national character of the Church and collaborative ways of working across the Church.
 - c. Fulfill the Church's legal, ethical and social obligations." (ASC Minute 20.43.02)

Next Steps

9. Request the Assembly Standing Committee undertake a process to review the current interconciliar model of governance of the Uniting Church. The scope of the review should include:
 - a. Evaluating the principles of an interconciliar model and how they are being lived out across the life of the Church.



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- b. Considering the number of Councils required.
 - c. Considering the specific roles and responsibilities of each Council and the relationships between these Councils.
 - d. Considering the resourcing available across all the Councils and the equitable allocation of the resources to fulfill their respective responsibilities.
 - e. Considering opportunities to release resources for investment in ministry and mission.
10. Authorise the Assembly Standing Committee, following consultation with the Church, to provide guidance to the Church and amend the regulations relating to communities of faith to provide for more flexible and innovative local and digitally gathered communities of faith and discipleship formation, such as providing for:
- a. The recognition and oversight of online communities of faith.
 - b. The networking together of communities of faith.
 - c. The more flexible provision of ministry across multiple communities of faith.
 - d. The recognition, development and resourcing of new communities of faith.
11. Request the Assembly Standing Committee to lead a national process with the Synods and other relevant councils and bodies to identify a new theological education framework in the context of developing the Uniting Church's theological culture. The process should give regard to access, efficiency, relevance, and quality of discipleship formation, theological education, ministerial formation, public theology and other educational needs of the Church.

Process

12. Commit to the Church that in pursuing the next steps of the Act2 Project, the Assembly will undertake wide consultation with the Congregations, Faith Communities, Councils and institutions of the Church.
13. Request the Congregations, Faith Communities, Councils and institutions of the Church to engage with the next steps of the Act2 Project as an expression of our common commitment to the Church's mission and a demonstration of our unity.
14. Request the Assembly Standing Committee to identify, source and make available the resources required to effectively pursue the next steps proposed.
15. Request the Assembly Standing Committee to bring a further report and recommendations to the 17th Assembly.



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Proposer: Catherine Pepper

Seconder: Richard La'Brooy

Rationale

There are five sections within the proposals:

- Identity and Vision
- Imperative for Change
- Project Outcomes
- Next Steps
- Process

Identity and Vision

As we enter into a period of change it is important to continue to affirm those foundations which continue to shape our life. In particular, this proposal affirms fundamentals about our ecclesiology within the one holy catholic and apostolic church and the nature of our life through shared responsibility and communal discernment. It also affirms core markers of our identity which are grounded in the Basis of Union and existing decisions of the Assembly. Affirming that which is important to our life as a Church is critical to any period of change so that in whatever change we bring we continue to honour and preserve those aspects of our life which are central and important.

Imperative for Change

This section recognises that the Act 2 Project has, through its consultation, identified both challenges and opportunities for change to our life together as a Church. These are outlined in the report. In brief they identify that our structures are no longer fit for purpose, there are significant resourcing constraints, limitations in personnel and capability required to meet our existing practices, and insufficient flexibility to support new ministry and mission. There are also opportunities for us to build a more cohesive identity as a Church, collaborate more effectively, work together more efficiently, and release resources to support new ministry and mission opportunities. This section also recognises that the Basis of Union calls us to self-examination. This call is particularly related to how we order our institutional life together. It also invites all parts of our Church's life to join us in that self-examination, recognising that this may include changes in our life which will require us to give up existing roles, responsibilities, or resources as an act of self-sacrifice in service of the Gospel.

Project Outcomes

This section asks the Assembly to endorse the scope and three outcomes approved by the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC Minute 20.43.02) in the creation of the Act 2 Project. The ASC recognised the purpose of the project was not solely to explore new structures, practices and ways of working but also to implement them. The three outcomes identified by the ASC have shaped all the consultation to date. The first recognised the centrality of local communities of faith to our life and the need for all councils of the Church to support and enable their worship, witness, service and discipleship formation. The second recognised that we are one Church within the one holy catholic and apostolic church and there are



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significant practical opportunities to collaborate more effectively across the Church and foster a cohesive national character, grounded in our identity and vision. The third recognised that both our own commitment to high ethical standards and the external legal and social environment mean that we need to maintain our commitment to these obligations. However across the consultations we heard this is currently a significant burden in parts of our Church and many people identified there were opportunities to do it more efficiently and effectively.

Next Steps

This section identifies three specific opportunities for fulfilling the project outcomes. These are:

1. A review of our current governance. Throughout the consultation there were many opportunities identified for significant improvement in our governance. This seeks to provide the scope to consider in a systematic way how this could improve and would include wide consultation across the Church. While this is a significant undertaking, the consultation to date indicates that this is a critical and urgent issue facing our Church which cannot continue to go unaddressed. It does not suppose any particular outcome however it is hoped that if this change can be successful it would yield significant opportunities to the Church for more effective oversight, resource allocation and ultimately a greater focus on ministry and mission.
2. A more flexible approach to our communities of faith. The consultation identified that while there are currently flexible options within our regulations for local communities of faith, they are either not flexible enough or not being flexibly implemented across the Church. However this flexibility is not fully realised due to either narrow interpretations of the regulations or unfamiliarity with the extent of flexibility provided for in the Constitution and Regulations. As new models of community emerge, there would be significant value in the ASC issuing guidance to the Church in the recognition, oversight and support of these new models. Alongside guidance, it also authorises the ASC to make amendments to regulations relating to communities of faith to enable and provide greater flexibility for new models not anticipated by the current regulations.

This proposal provides authorisation to the ASC to amend the regulations to improve flexibility. This is particularly pressing in online or digital communities, which may be geographically dispersed. There are also opportunities for a simpler process for communities of faith (whether congregations, faith communities or other groups of gathered disciples) to be networked together. There are also challenges faced in sharing ministry across communities of faith, particularly smaller communities. Also, while the designation of 'faith community' has provided some flexibility to new communities of faith, it is not always suitable as communities grow and mature but where recognition as a congregation is not appropriate.

3. A national theological education framework. A constant theme identified through the consultation when considering national identity and collaboration was the opportunity to move towards a national approach to theological education. This has been a matter of discussion for many years across the life of the Church however the consultation indicates that now is the opportunity to take a more intentional approach. There are many issues to work through and competing interests and priorities within the Uniting Church's distinctive theological culture. This is a concrete way to give expression to our national identity, better equip our ministers for ministry, offer



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greater opportunities to all members for discipleship formation and release resources for ministry and mission.

Process:

This section provides principles and commitments as an Assembly to guide the ASC in its oversight of the Act 2 Project. It also recognises that this project will require resourcing to be successful and tasks the ASC with finding that resourcing as a priority.

Decisions which require the Assembly in Session would be brought to the 17th Assembly following wide consultation across the Church. While the Assembly is the council to lead and oversee change of this scale, it will not succeed without the commitment and engagement of the whole of the Uniting Church as an expression of our common commitment to Christ.