

Uniting Church in Australia

ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE

VIA ZOOM

11 - 13 March 2022

PRESENT Sharon Hollis (President), Sandy Boyce, David Busch, Michael Dobson, Linda Driver, David Fotheringham, Philip Gardner, Colleen Geyer, Mark Kickett, Richard La'Brooy, Nicole Mugford, Alison Overeem, Deidre Palmer, Catherine Pepper, Raul Sugunanathan, Roberta Stanley, Lilliani Tahaafe-Williams, Geoff Tompson, Yuko Tonai-Moore, Ayla Williams, Anna Wilson, Kerry Wilson, Stuart Woodward.

In attendance: Felicity Amery, Jenny Bertalan, Jane Fry, Heather den Houting, Rob Floyd, Mark Lawrence, Stuart McMillan and Andrew Williams.

WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The President and the members the President acknowledged the First Peoples of their respective land. The President welcomed Heather Watson for matters related to Governance Orientation, Jason Bryan for matters related to Investment Training/Information, Leo Iosifidis for matters related to Assembly Audit, Finance and Risk Committee report, Claerwen Little and Geoff Batkin for matters related to UnitingCare Australia report, Lin Hatfield Dodds and Gordon Ramsey for matters related to LGBTIQ Apology Task Group report; Ann Perrin for matters related to Online Gathering for Holy Communion report, Rachel Kronberger for matters related to Continuing Witness Task Group report.

WORSHIP On the Friday afternoon the President led worship and the closing prayer on Friday and Saturday night were offered through The Examen video, Yuko Tonai-Moore led the Saturday morning worship Linda Driver led Sunday morning worship and the closing prayers were offered by Kerry Wilson.

APOLOGIES

22.01 **It was resolved** to receive the apologies of Charissa Suli and James Aaron for the whole meeting, Richard La'Brooy for the 1st session on Friday, Roberta Stanley for Friday and Saturday, Kerry Wilson for the evening sessions on Friday and Saturday, Heather den Houting for Friday evening.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The General Secretary spoke to the agenda and timetable as listed in Document 1.

22.02 **It was resolved to:**

22.02.01 approve the timetable and agenda of the meeting as outlined in Document 1, noting that the committee is free to vary the agenda at any time; and

22.02.02 remove Documents 2-CA1 – Assembly Investment Advisory Committee Member Nomination and 2-CA2 – Panel Member Nominations from the Consent Agenda.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

22.03 It was resolved to confirm the minutes of the meeting held 12 – 14 November 2021 with the addition of the following:

22.03.01 "Associate" to 'General Secretary' in Minute 21.62.03 to read:
21.62.03 request the *Associate* General Secretary, in consultation with Advocates and Panels of relevant Circles of Interest and the Church in the Digital Age TG, to bring a report about the permanent approval of online gathering for worship with Holy Communion, including reflections on what has been learnt about Communion both through practicing online communion and abstaining from it, to the March 2022 ASC. If relevant it should also include proposals and rationale for the consideration of the 16th Assembly at its reconvened meeting in 2022; and

22.03.02 Stuart Woodward to the list of members present.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

22.04 It was resolved to:

- a) note:
 - (i) Stuart McMillan's conflict of interest in relation to Document 15 – Letter from Northern Synod re Exemption from Regulations since he is the Interim General Secretary of the Northern Synod; and
 - (ii) resolve that he be in attendance for this business but not speak or vote;
- b) note:
 - (i) Stuart McMillan's conflict of interest in relation to Document 6D – Redress matters since he is the Interim General Secretary of the Northern Synod; and
 - (ii) resolve that he be in attendance for this business but not speak or vote;
- c) note:
 - (i) Raul Sugunananthan's conflict of interest in relation to Document 2-CA2 – Panel Member Nominations since he is nominated for the Working for Justice Panel; and
 - (ii) resolve that he be absent for this business.

NOTE CONSTITUTION CLAUSE 39

The Standing Committee members were reminded of the Constitution clause 39, as per ASC minute 00.71:

"On matters which, by a two thirds majority vote, the Assembly deems to be vital to the life of the Church, the Assembly shall seek the concurrence of the Synods and/or Presbyteries and/or Congregations as the Assembly may determine."

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The ex-President took the chair while the President spoke to Document 3, consisting of a report on her activities since the November 2021 meeting of the Standing Committee.

22.05 It was resolved to receive the report (Attachment A).

UAICC REPORT

Mark Kickett presented Document 4, consisting of a report on the conversations UAICC had and the actions they took.

22.06 It was resolved to receive the report. (Attachment B)

BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS STANDING COMMITTEE

1. Continuing Witness Task Group Report (15th Assembly Minute 18.31 and ASC Minutes 18.35 and 18.53)

Rachel Kronberger presented Document 9, consisting of the final report of the Continuing Witness Task Group submitted to the Assembly Standing Committee prior to the 16th Assembly (Reconvened).

22.07 It was resolved to:

22.07.01 receive the report;

22.07.02 approve the proposed Report to Assembly to be forwarded to the 16th Assembly (Reconvened);

22.07.03 approve the Proposals for the 16th Assembly (Reconvened) to be forwarded along with the report; and

22.07.04 request the Assembly Communications Unit to work with the Task group in preparing Video and other material based on the previously approved reports of the Task Group for use in presenting to the 16th Assembly (Reconvened) and for use in the subsequent Church-wide conversation.

2. General Secretary's Report Strategic Plan and Business Plan Review Redress Matter (ASC Minutes 21.68.02 and 03)

The General Secretary introduced Documents 6, 6A, 6B, 6C and 6D, consisting of a report on the Assembly's progress against Strategic Plan, operations and issues relevant to its work. The attachments include a report on the Covenant, the Assembly's Strategic Plan and Business Plan, Review of Assembly Secretariat and Redress Matters.

22.08 It was resolved to:

22.08.01 receive the report;

22.08.02 note the actions in the Review of Assembly Secretariat and Strategy for Current Triennium; and

22.08.03 request the General Secretary to take note of the feedback regarding the review and report to the July 2022 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee.

Redress Matters

22.09 It was resolved to:

22.09.01 receive the report;

22.09.02 note the timeline at Attachment 1 to the report;

- 22.09.03 a) accept the liability for redress and civil matters relating to child sexual abuse at Croker Island Mission from 1941-1968 on behalf of the Assembly Secretariat and other relevant Assembly Agencies; and
- b) authorise the reimbursement of payments already made, by the Northern Synod relating to the time period approved by the Assembly Standing Committee, from Assembly funds;
- 22.09.04 request the General Secretary to enter into further conversations with the Northern Synod re the liability for redress and civil matters relating to child sexual abuse at Croker Island Mission from 1969-1972;
- 22.09.05 request the National Director, Strategic Finance & Admin to undertake modelling regarding total potential liability, and associated provision required to be made;
- 22.09.06 note that redress payments for Mogumber Mission, while it was under the oversight and responsibility of Methodist Overseas Mission, are currently shared by the Assembly Secretariat and UnitingWorld;
- 22.09.07 request the General Secretary to bring a report to the July 2022 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee on all matters in these resolutions, including how the liability for redress and civil matters relating to child sexual abuse at Croker Island from 1941-1968 will be apportioned in the Assembly; and
- 22.09.08 request the General Secretary to have a conversation with the Chair, UnitingWorld Board and National Director, UnitingWorld regarding decisions made by the Assembly Standing Committee in relation to these matters.

3. Holy Communion in Online Settings Task Group Report (ASC Minute 21.62)

Ann Perrin introduced Document 12, consisting of a report from the Task Group and its recommendations regarding Holy Communion in Online Settings.

22.10 It was resolved to:

- 22.10.01 receive the report;
- 22.10.02 recognise the ways in which the UCA has received the gift of Holy Communion in online settings, and abstaining from Holy Communion while worshipping online;
- 22.10.03 encourage the Church to continue this period of creative, contextual theological exploration and celebration; and
- 22.10.04 allow the continuation of online gatherings for Holy Communion.

4. LGBTQI Apology Task Group Report (ASC Minute 21.61.02)

Lin Hatfield Dodds and Gordon Ramsay presented Document 14, consisting of a report on the work the Task Group has undertaken since its establishment. The draft Project Plan was also submitted the Assembly Standing Committee.

22.11 It was resolved to:

- 22.11.01 receive the report;

- 22.11.02 approve funding one or two members of the Task Group to attend a Congress gathering in 2022 up to a maximum budget of \$2000, and advise whether it is culturally appropriate to participate in such a gathering via Zoom;
- 22.11.03 notes that the Task Group is developing a Discussion Paper on a range of theological, biblical and other considerations pertinent to the formulation of an apology to LGBTIQ Australians to guide its consultations; and
- 22.11.04 note that the Project Plan of the Task Group involves bringing specific wording of an apology to the Assembly Standing Committee in early 2024, with a view to the apology being offered during the seventeenth Assembly in July 2024; and
- 22.11.05 appoint Elizabeth Raine as a member of the Task Group.

FROM ASSEMBLY BODIES

1. Act2 Task Group Report

The General Secretary presented Document 10, consisting of an update on the work and process of the Act2 project and the associated recommendations and rationale for the 16th Assembly reconvened meeting.

22.12 It was resolved to:

- 22.12.01 receive the report; and
- 22.12.02 endorse the report, recommendations and rationale for the 16th Assembly reconvened meeting.

2. Assembly Audit, Finance and Risk Committee

Stuart Woodward and Leo Iosifidis spoke to Documents 7 and 7A, consisting of a report on the management of finance, audit and risk issues across the Assembly and a nomination for the Assembly Investment Advisory Committee Chair position.

22.13 It was resolved to:

- 22.13.01 receive the report;
- 22.13.02 recognise a Minute of Appreciation for the outgoing Chair of the Assembly Investment Advisory Committee – Jason Bryan; and
- 22.13.03 approve the appointment of Graeme Rough as Chair of the Assembly Investment Advisory Committee.

3. Assembly Risk Management Report

Leo Iosifidis presented Document 8, consisting of an update to the Risk Management System and Framework of the Assembly.

22.14 It was resolved to receive the report.

4. Regulations Review Task Group Report

Heather den Houting spoke to Document 11, consisting of a report on the work of the Regulations Review Task Group to date and the proposed way forward for its work.

22.15 It was resolved to:

- 22.15.01 receive the report;
- 22.15.02 bring a proposal to the reconvened 16th Assembly meeting in May 2022, seeking the Assembly to:
- a) defer any review of the Regulations that are associated with, or ancillary to, the broad strategic work done as part of the Act2 process, other than Part 5 – Church Discipline – to ensure that any proposals as part of the review are aligned to the strategic direction of the Assembly; and
 - b) delegate, pursuant to Regulation 3.10.2(a)(ii), to the Assembly Standing Committee the authority to make Regulations under Part 5 of the Regulations (Church Discipline), subject to:
 - (i) those Regulations complying with the framework of principles articulated in **Attachment 2**; and
 - (ii) the approval of those Regulations by the Assembly Standing Committee on the advice of the Assembly Legal Reference Committee.

5. UnitingCare Australia Report

Claerwen Little and Geoff Batkin presented Document 13, consisting of the annual update on the work of UnitingCare Australia.

- 22.16** It was resolved to receive the report.

GENERAL BUSINESS

1. Consent Agenda

The General Secretary presented the various documents which constituted Document 2, Consent Agenda.

- 22.17** It was resolved to:
- 22.17.01 appoint Amanda Wood as member of the Assembly Investment Advisory Committee;
- 22.17.02 record its thanks and appreciation for the service Rev David Jackson has provided as Defence Force Chaplain;
- 22.17.03 receive the Disability Royal Commission National Task Group Report; and
- 22.17.04 receive the report of the UCAF National Committee.

2. Letter from the Northern Synod re Request for exemption from Regulations

Stuart McMillan spoke to Document 15, consisting of a letter seeking an exemption from Regulation 3.6.3.3.

- 22.18** It was resolved to grant the Northern Synod an exemption from Regulation 3.6.3.3 in order that the Northern Synod Standing Committee can make a normal five-year appointment of a General Secretary.

3. Panel Member Nominations (taken out from Consent Agenda)

The General Secretary presented Document 2-CA2, consisting of additional nominations to Panels.

- 22.19** It was resolved to:

- 22.19.01 receive the report;
- 22.19.02 appoint Siosiana Joyce Tangi to the UCA – Executive Council of Australian Jewry Dialogue; and
- 22.19.03 appoint Raul Sugunanathan to the Working for Justice Panel.

4. Climate Change Proposal

Catherine Pepper spoke to a new agenda item, consisting of a proposal re climate change.

22.20 **It was resolved to** approve that the following proposals be put to the reconvened 16th Assembly by the ASC:

That the Assembly:

1. Acknowledge that since time immemorial the Creator gifted First Peoples to be the timeless caretakers of country and the natural environment.
2. Confess that as Second Peoples we have heard the wisdom of First Peoples, the call of our Partner Churches, and stories of communities already affected by climate change, but we have not listened. We have failed to act as a whole Church with the level of urgency needed, and have not made the fundamental behavioural changes needed to care for creation. We confess that while effort has been made to change from ways that destroy the Creator's good creation, carbon pollution continues as a direct result of our activities individually and as a Church, and global carbon pollution is now causing irreversible harm;
3. Commit anew to listen to First Peoples wisdom and knowledge, and to take practical climate action including changing our own behaviour;
4. Call on all Councils of the church, agencies and schools who have not already done so to join with the Assembly in committing to net zero emissions by 2040 at the latest, so that together we can become a zero emissions Church. We further urge all Councils to make use of the resources, stories and carbon accounting tools made available online;
5. Request the Standards for Ministries Committee to identify the most appropriate way to embed learning from the wisdom of First Peoples, care of creation, climate justice and the spiritual and theological basis for a zero emissions church into formation, education and training for the specified ministries of the Uniting Church and report back to the November 2022 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee;
6. Request the Assembly Circles, Advocates and Panels to include learning from the wisdom of First Peoples, care of creation, climate justice and the spiritual and theological basis for a zero emissions church into their work for the remainder of this triennium;
7. Request the Assembly Standing Committee to:
 - a) establish a national zero emissions church working group to:
 - gather data on commitments to greenhouse gas emission reduction made across the life of the church, and progress towards those commitments
 - share stories, expertise and learnings on effective strategies and resources to reduce emissions, prioritising the wisdom of First Peoples
 - consider how the whole of the church can move together to net zero emissions by 2040; and

- b) bring a report on findings and recommended next steps to the 17th Assembly.

CLOSURE

The meeting closed at 5:00pm with prayer led by Kerry Wilson.

DATES FOR 2022: 15 – 17 JULY 2022
11 – 13 NOVEMBER 2022