



Uniting Church in Australia

ASSEMBLY

Assembly Standing Committee

11-13 November 2022

DOCUMENT 5

Title	General Secretary Report
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For noting
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	As noted in the report
Purpose	To advise the Assembly Standing Committee on Assembly progress against Strategic Plan, operations and issues relevant to its work
Rationale & Findings Summary	See the report
Attachments	Attachment 1: Strategic Plan and Business Plan Attachment 2: Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receive the report2. Note the revised Strategic Plan and Business Plan3. Note the Protocol for Resourcing/Supporting Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels
Submitted by	Colleen Geyer Assembly General Secretary colleeng@nat.uca.org.au ; 0411 333 167

GENERAL SECRETARY REPORT

Introduction

Historically the November ASC meeting is being held outside of Sydney, in Melbourne. We express our thanks to the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania for hosting us in their offices at Wesley Place.

Since the July ASC meeting, work has begun on resolutions from the 16th Assembly, with reports to this meeting. The Assembly Strategic Plan has been reviewed following the decision to extend it for a further year and re-align future plans with the Assembly triennium and work coming from triennial Assembly meetings. (see Attachment 1) We have considered the resourcing and support of Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels, and developed a protocol for this. (see Attachment 2)

An update is being brought to this meeting about Frontier Services, and the Board Chair Lisa Sampson and Acting National Director Rob Floyd will be joining us for this. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Rob for stepping up to take the role of Acting Director. He has brought stability to the team and the work of Frontier Services in this time of transition.

It was a great privilege to attend the World Council of Churches General Assembly in Germany, as a delegate from the Uniting Church with the President and the Interim Chair UAICC. I am grateful for these travelling companions and for sharing this experience with them. (see Document 14 for a fulsome report) While there were many experiences to reflect on, my faith was enriched by the times of worship and prayer under the prayer tent and in my home group. Language was no barrier as we prayed, sang and listened as reflection opened scripture to us. It will remain a highlight of my time as General Secretary.

Assembly Secretariat Structure

In order to ensure the efficiency of the Assembly Secretariat for the strategic work we are engaged in and delivering, and after consulting all staff, we will be moving from two work units (Assembly Resourcing Unit and Assembly Services Unit) to one work unit (Assembly Resourcing Unit).

The newly organised Assembly Resourcing Unit (ARU) will include Assembly Resourcing Unit (ministry and mission), Strategic Finance and Admin, Assembly Media and Communications, and Archives. The ARU will be jointly led by the Associate General Secretary and the National Director Strategic Finance and Admin.

This flattening of the structure will allow for even more collaboration and efficiency. All services provided to the Assembly and the wider UCA will remain as they currently are.

Assembly Funding Update

The WA Synod General Secretary has advised that the WA Synod is reducing its annual funding to the Assembly to \$100 000, a reduction of \$136 000 per annum.

In a constrained financial situation for the Assembly, any reduction in funding is a concern.

The National Director Strategic Finance & Admin and I will be considering the budget, and working with AFARC on this, particularly as we come to the half yearly forecast.

Building a safe workplace

The Assembly is committed to a safe workplace for all its staff. In order to continue our attention on this the following will/will continue to occur:

- Staff will be updated re the policies dealing with staff rights at a session to be held this year. Policies that will be highlighted include complaints processes, whistleblower policy, and other HR policies.
- A staff survey will be conducted in the next 12 months. The last staff survey was carried out in 2020
- The next Senior Leaders meeting will include a session on Assembly values, and living out these values in times of conflict.
- Annual reviews for Executive staff will continue – for Agency Executive staff, this occurs in conjunction with the Board and Board Chair.

Cyber Security at the Assembly

As part of the internal audit program for the Assembly, a cyber security audit was undertaken. The Assembly is working to implement all recommendations. To enable this to happen smoothly, a Cyber Security Task Group was established under AFARC's purview.

Recently, an information session was provided to staff at its monthly meeting. Cyber security awareness training for all staff is being implemented, with staff having to complete one online module in UnitingLearning; and managers having to complete three modules. It is hoped to have this training completed by the end of the year.

Commitment to Climate Action at the Assembly

The annual report to the ASC on the progress of the Assembly Climate Action Plan is brought to this meeting of the ASC. (see Document 15)

In addition to the Climate Action Plan, we are establishing an Assembly Climate Action Task Group. This task group will support staff in enacting the Climate Action Plan, develop further efficiencies and collaborate on initiatives across all parts of the Assembly. We will also develop an Environmental Sustainability Policy to support the Climate Action Plan.

Task Group Updates

LGBTIQ+ Apology Task Group

Following the resolutions of the July 2022 ASC, the following has occurred:

- The President and the General Secretary met with the Task Group to clarify any matters from the ASC resolutions.
- James Aaron was appointed to the Task Group by the Assembly Officers. No other ASC appointment was made.
- The General Secretary offered to attend Task Group meetings if that would be helpful. The Task Group has indicated they will take up this offer when needed.
- The Task Group is preparing a project overview to assist with the work of the Task Group.
- In considering the ASC resolutions, the Task Group decided to bring a fulsome report addressing these, including progress to the March 2023 ASC meeting.

The following consultation by the Task Group has already been undertaken:

- Theologians (Revd Dr Jione Havea, Revd Dr John Squires) to assist in the development of the discussion paper
- Rev Dr Apwee Ting regarding National Conferences
- Rev Mark Kickett - UAICC
- Synod General Secretaries
- President and Moderators
- Trans/gender diverse member of a local church
- Uniting Church LGBTIQ+ Network national conference
- Rainbow Christian Alliance

The following consultations are planned prior to the March 2023 ASC meeting:

- Uniting Church LGBTIQ+ Network
- UAICC

Church in the Digital Age (CIDA) Task Group

The CIDA Task Group is continuing its work and due to three members moving placement between October and the end of 2022, and in order to finish this work, will report to the March 2023 ASC meeting.

The Chair of the Task Group reflected that responding to the terms of reference by a task group of ministry practitioners and resourcers leads to theological reflection on practice and then how to resource the Church. The digital response in congregational settings has been intuitive in many places and we are just making sense of this in ministry settings.

The Task Group believes there are aspects of their work that have moved beyond even the terms of reference and they will reflect on this in their report. There is also a strong sense that to step back from Holy Communion online is just that, a step back. They believe that digital church is now part of our Church's life

and not a stop gap due to Covid lockdowns. Access to online resources that the church can offer, including Holy Communion online, is now part of the Church's mapping of its digital future.

Chaplaincy Task Group

Following July 2022 ASC meeting where the ASC *requested the General Secretary to consider a way to progress the recommendations for further work*, I met with Rob McFarlane (Chair, Standards for Ministries Committee), Rob Floyd and Lindsay Cullen.

The Standards for Ministries Committee is keen to progress the recommendations from the Chaplaincy Task Group as part of their work. The Committee has already discussed the recommendations and is setting up a sub-group of the Committee to focus on them and their implementation.

The Committee will report to March 2023 ASC, and will include an update on this work.

Updates from Assembly Agencies

Frontier Services

(This update is provided as part of the ASC Agenda. See Document 9)

UnitingCare Australia

The UnitingCare Australia Board has been undertaking a review of the organisation's Strategic Plan including consultation with key stakeholders from across the network. The Plan has been drafted and is currently with the Board for finalization and endorsement at their November Board meeting. The final document will be provided to ASC for endorsement in early 2023. Priority areas have remained the same as in the existing Plan: Justice for First Peoples, Ageing to our full potential and Addressing economic inequality with four objectives being: Impact, Identity, Relationships and Resources/Capability.

Justice for First Peoples – the First Peoples Network comprising representatives from across the Uniting Church, the Uniting Aboriginal Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and the UnitingCare network have continued to meet regularly including a face to face gathering held in Brisbane on 29 and 30 August. There was a focus on the Government's commitment to the Statement from the Heart and a Voice to Parliament with the group issuing a joint statement at the conclusion of the gathering which is available [here](#). UnitingCare Australia was a key voice in the scrapping of the Cashless Debit Card lodging a number of joint submissions with the UAICC and appearing at the Senate Hearing. Additionally, in October we lodged a joint submission to the Senate Inquiry into the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People 2022.

Ageing to our Full Potential – Aged care continues to require significant attention as the reforms driven by the Aged Care Royal Commission are rolled out by Government. We hold fortnightly online meetings, as well a face to face meeting in Adelaide in August, with our Aged Care network to inform our advocacy in this space. The new Government has already introduced two pieces of legislation related to aged care and UnitingCare Australia has provided submissions on each. We welcomed the new Government's commitment to fund the outcome of the Fair Work case for aged care workers, one of our key advocacy focus areas in recent months. As chair of the Australian Aged Care Collaboration Ltd (AACC) UnitingCare Australia played an integral role in the formation of Aged and Community Care Providers Association (ACCPA) and we have continued to support the new organisation in his early formation stage. Internally Uniting Friends of Aging has continued to engage with Church members to support aged care advocacy including Older Persons Sunday which was held in October.

Addressing Economic Inequality – We have met with a significant number of key MPs and Senators following the election to build relationships and discuss advocacy priorities. We contributed to several roundtables as part of the Government's Job Summit process and we lodged a Pre-Budget submission to Treasury in the lead up to the Budget in October 2022. In collaboration with ANU we launched a financial wellbeing index report in Anti-Poverty week which provides a new way of measure financial stress and wellbeing. The consortium of UnitingCare network organisations delivering the government's Escaping Violence Payment trial program celebrated one year of service delivery this month with positive feedback from the Department and additional funding for the program being announced in the Budget. UnitingCare

Australia continues to influence through membership of a number of Government advisory groups including chairing the Minister's Emergency Relief National Coordination Group and sitting on the National Aged Care Advisory Council as well as the Department of Social Services and Services Australia Community Services Advisory Groups.

Disability Royal Commission – UnitingCare Australia has continued to support the Church's response to the Disability Royal Commission and the work of the National Task Group. We provide regular newsletters to key internal stakeholders with updates on the activities of the Royal Commission. Additionally, the NTG endorsed the concept of developing some overarching principles that would respond to the themes emerging from the Royal Commission in anticipation of recommendations from their final report. To craft the principles, a skills based Working Group was formed comprising representatives from the Church and services as well as people with disability, led by an expert in the space, Lesley Chenoweth AO from Griffith University. The draft overarching principles are being considered at the NTG's meeting on 15 November. The Executive Officer role to support this work has now ceased and a temporary plan has been put in place with the Assembly which involves UnitingCare Australia continuing to provide support in the short term.

UnitingWorld Programs:

We have just completed our reporting for FY2022: **We reached 201,691 people with tangible benefits, across 31 projects in 13 countries with 23 partners.** Our work tackled COVID and other emergency responses, poverty alleviation, gender equality and climate resilience.

The focus the current financial year is a full design refresh of most of our programs with our partners. This involves iterative in-depth dialog with partner churches with community level consultation on their part, to test the original assumptions and priorities against the realities of a COVID impacted world. This work has kicked off in earnest and UnitingWorld staff have started travelling to visit partners.

UCA/Partnerships:

- July: Attended DFAT's Pacific Church Partnerships Advisory Network (PCPAN) as development representative, alongside Mark Kickett, Alison Overeem (First Nations reps), Vinnie Ravetali (Pacific Diaspora Rep) and Joyce Tangi (Pasifika Youth rep) from the UCA. This is a forum for inter-church dialog set up by DFAT to guide their policy for Pacific engagement. UnitingWorld's advocacy in setting up this network has resulted in the UCA having a significant presence in this group which represents all churches across Australia and the Pacific.
- July: Arranged for President Sharon Hollis to be in Canberra during the PCPAN meeting, so that the President could have side meetings with a range of leaders from the Pacific churches.
- July: Met with Rev Tevita Havea, President of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, who requested support from the UCA for Tongan congregations outside the UCA polity to have access to UCA buildings for worship. Subsequently, convened a meeting with the leaders of the Tongan National Conference and developed a process and framework for meeting this request and closed the loop with Tonga.
- Completed project to bring a Minister from the Methodist Church of Fiji to Australia for a placement with the Sydney Fiji Parish and joined the support committee for his ongoing induction and guidance during his time with the UCA.
- Represented the UCA along with Ex President Deidre Palmer, President Elect Charissa Sulli and Rev Amel Manyon on a lobbying trip to Canberra organised by Micah Australia to advocate for international aid with the new government. (note the \$1.4B increase to the aid budget announced on 26 Oct)
- Invited President Sharon Hollis to Bali to attend the UnitingWorld South East Asia Regional conference. An incredible time engaging with heads of our partner churches from the region on the themes of safeguarding and protection in the church.

- July-Sept: Ongoing management of a sensitive partnership issue with the Methodist Church in Fiji, regarding Fijian ministers active in Australia and their relationship with the UCA Fijian National Conference. Following several rounds of correspondence, the UnitingWorld supported the Gen Sec of the MCIF to visit Australia to personally engage with the UCA's Fijian members and publicly affirm the ongoing partnership. The President participated during the Melbourne leg of the visit. We now have a working agreement on how to manage the ongoing issue.

Sector Engagement:

- Roundtable consultation with Minister Penny Wong and Minister Pat Conroy on the new international development strategy
- Briefing with DFAT Secretary Jan Adams regarding partnership with civil society organisations, as part of the ACFID Board.
- Briefing the Secretary of the Office of the Pacific regarding theological approach to gender equality
- Consultation with US Gov and US AID team on supporting new USAID strategy in the Pacific – the subsequent strategy paper released by US AID clearly highlighted the role of Pacific churches.

Fundraising:

The year has got off to a slow start, with fundraising income lower than usual for the spring campaign. The dominance of humanitarian emergencies both domestically and abroad, as well as a dour economic outlook is taking its toll. The Everything In Common campaign is about to launch next week, and we're hoping for a good summer.

Governance:

Search for new Board Chair, resulting in nominations coming to ASC.

Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels

In order to appropriately resource the work of Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels, it is important first to understand what support/resourcing is currently being offered. The current committees, task groups and panels:

- Engage more UCA members in the work of the Assembly than previously
- Undertake projects/work that delivers on/is in response to the Assembly Strategic Plan, resolutions from the triennial Assembly and work requested by the ASC
- Work best with a link back to the Assembly and the ASC in order to maintain focus and alignment, identify ways to collaborate with other work of the Assembly or the wider UCA, and to connect with external groups/ecumenical bodies

Currently, approximately 50% of the time of Assembly Resourcing Unit (ARU) staff is spent on supporting/resourcing committees, task groups and panels. The governance/secretariat support provided by the ND Strategic Finance & Admin to Committees is also significant. The following table sets out the committees, task groups and panels supported by Assembly Secretariat staff. The Executive Administrative Assistant provides logistics support to most Panels, Task Groups and Dialogues, and the Standards for Ministries Committee.

Activity / Group	Meetings	Contact Person	Assembly Secretariat Staff Support/Connection
GOVERNANCE			
Triennial Assembly	Meets every three years	General Secretary	General Secretary President Associate General Secretary EA General Secretary EA President ND Strategic Finance & Admin National Manager Media and Comms Communications staff Executive Team
Assembly Standing Committee	Meets three times a year (usually)	General Secretary Chair: President	President General Secretary Associate General Secretary ND, Strategic Finance & Admin Agency National Directors

			EA General Secretary EA President
AFARC	Meets at least four times a year	ND Strategic Finance & Admin Chair: Stuart Woodward	ND Strategic Finance & Admin General Secretary
Cyber Security Committee	Currently meets fortnightly	Chair: Geoff Kerry	ND Strategic Finance & Admin Associate General Secretary
Assembly Investment Advisory Committee	Meets four times a year	Chair: Graham Rough	National Consultant ND Strategic Finance & Admin
Standards for Ministries		National Consultant Chair: Rob McFarlane	National Consultant Executive Administrative Assistant
Heads of Colleges Meeting MEB Chairs Meeting Consultations Subgroup Meetings			
UCA Assembly Ltd	Meets four times a year and for the AGM	ND Strategic Finance & Admin Chair: John Graves	ND Strategic Finance & Admin (Staff Director) General Secretary (Staff Director) Senior Administrative Officer
National Disaster Relief Fund Committee	Meets as needed, though at least twice a year	ND Strategic Finance & Admin Chair: ND Strategic Finance & Admin	ND Strategic Finance & Admin EA General Secretary
Agency Boards	Frontier Services Board - UnitingCare Australia Board – four times a year UnitingWorld Board -	Agency National Directors	General Secretary (Ex-officio member of all Agency Boars)
UCA Redress Limited Board	Meets every two months	ND UCARL Chair: Anne Cross	General Secretary (Board member)
National Safe Church Unit Governance Committee Collaborative Action Group	Meets four times a year	Director NSCU Chair: Peter Andrews	General Secretary/Associate General Secretary National Consultants attend as needed

CIRCLES			
Advocates	Advocates meet with ARU members twice a year		Associate General Secretary National Consultants Executive Administrative Assistant
Being a Multicultural Church	Panel meets every two months	Advocate: Matagi Vilitama	One ARU member supports
Discipling the Next Generations	Panel meets every two months	Advocate: Virginia Lavaki	One ARU member supports
Growing in Faith	Panel meets every two months	Advocate: Liam Miller	One ARU member supports
Seeking Common Ground	Panel meets every two months	Advocate: Matt Wilson	One ARU member supports
Transforming Worship	Panel meets every two months	Advocate: Alex Sangster	One ARU member supports
Walking Together as First and Second Peoples	Panel meets every two months	Advocates: Alison Overeem / Nathan Tyson	One ARU member supports
Working for Justice	Panel meets every two months	Advocate: TBC	One ARU member supports
DIALOGUES			
Lutheran - UCA	Meets as agreed	National Consultant Anna Grant Henderson	Supported by National Consultant and Executive Administrative Assistant (no attendance by staff)
ECAJ	Meets as agreed	National Consultant Tara Curlewis	National Consultant
Iftar Dinner	Occurs every year	Executive Administrative Assistant National Manager, Media & Comms	Associate General Secretary Executive Administrative Assistant
TASK GROUPS			
Church in the Digital Age		National Consultant Convenor: Ann Perrin	National Consultant as needed Executive Administrative Assistant
Continuing Witness		National Consultant Convenor: Rachel Kronberg	National Consultant Executive Administrative Assistant
LGBTIQ Apology	Currently meeting monthly	National Consultant Convenor: Lin Hatfield Dodds	President and General Secretary Executive Administrative Assistant
SOGICE	November 2022 ASC will approve ToR and Members		ASC will approve ToR and Members
Net Zero Emissions Working Group	November 2022 ASC will approve ToR and Members		ASC will approve ToR and Members
Disability Task Group	ARU is a member representative		National Consultant

ECUMENICAL			
Ecumenical Gatherings*	Usually meet twice a year	Executive Administrative Assistant	National Consultants Executive Administrative Assistant
NCCA	Board meets five times a year AGM	Associate General Secretary	Rob Floyd is a Board member* General Secretary *identified by the Assembly, not a UCA position, but it is good to have a UCA presence
Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce		Associate General Secretary	As with NCCA
Ecumenical Officer	This role is held by the Associate General Secretary	Executive Administrative Assistant	Associate General Secretary
Australian Consultation on Liturgy			National Consultant
JUSTICE			
Synods staff gatherings	Monthly gathering	Synod staff	National Consultants
Our Vision (National Justice Meeting)	Reviewed every 12-18 months as is appropriate in the federal election cycle. Possible review in March/April 2023		National Consultants Executive Administrative Assistant
Refugee Council of Australia (Assembly is a paid member of the Council)	AGM annually (optional)		National Consultants
Palestine Israel Ecumenical Network	AGM annually (optional)		National Consultants
Australian Palestine Advocacy Network	AGM annually (optional)		National Consultants
Pacific labour mobility	Ad hoc	Mainly led by VicTas	National Consultant
International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons			National Consultants
NATIONAL CONFERENCES			
NC Leaders meetings including with President	Meet as needed	Associate General Secretary National Consultants	Associate General Secretary President Executive Administrative Assistant

NETWORKS			
National Youth and Children Coalition	Regular connection		National Consultants
National Lay Educators	Regular connection		National Consultant
Uniting Network	As required		National Consultant

*Opportunities established by the ARU for people in UCA interested in ecumenical work; informal by invitation and Seeking Common Ground Panel; focus on sharing and deeper understanding of ecumenism and a growing acceptance that interfaith dialogue and understanding is also important.

Protocol for Assembly Secretariat Resourcing/Supporting of Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels

When resourcing/supporting Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels, we will prioritise the good use of Assembly staff time and their workload, while also fostering working relationships and good decision-making.

This protocol is to provide guidance to Assembly Secretariat staff in their resourcing and supporting of Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels, being cognisant of the number of staff, and their responsibility to also deliver on work priorities, projects, development of resources and representing the Assembly in various contexts.

The protocol also recognises that financial resources to resource/support Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels are scarce, and therefore must be used wisely.

The following principles are to be followed in resourcing/supporting Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels:

- All Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels will meet in an online format, unless there is a particular reason they should meet in person for a specific event/meeting. The exception to this principle is the Assembly Standing Committee that will meet twice a year in person, and once a year online.
- The regularity of meetings will be considered with the Committee/Task Group and Panel, at least every two years, in order to consider efficiency and necessity of meetings.
- Usually, Assembly staff will spend no more than 40% of their time resourcing/supporting Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels. If the impact of resourcing/supporting Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels adversely affects a staff person's work responsibilities, an alternative way of providing resourcing/support will be considered and implemented.
- Assembly staff will usually resource/support Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels whose work correlates with their areas of expertise.
- Usually, only one Assembly staff person will resource/support an Assembly Committee, Task Group or Panel.
- Budgets for resourcing/supporting Assembly Committees, Task Groups and Panels will be considered annually, and adjusted if needed.
- Where possible, carbon emissions will be minimised in line with our target of net-zero emissions by no later than 2040.

This protocol is to be reviewed in November 2024.