



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

**10-12 March 2023**

**DOCUMENT 18**

Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For Information, Discussion and Decision
Title	Apology to LGBTIQ Australians Task Group
Assembly or ASC Minute	ASC Resolution 22.36.05-06
Consultation	
Purpose	To update the ASC on the work of the Task Group, including a Consultation Plan, and a Discussion Paper.
Rationale & Findings Summary	
Attachments	Attachment 1 - Nomination to the Task Group Attachment 2 – Terms of Reference Attachment 3 - Our Biblical and Theological Framework Attachment 4 - Principles to Inform the Work of the Task Group Attachment 5 - To Whom Are We Apologising? Attachment 6 - How have other faith-based organisations across the world apologised to LGBTIQ communities Attachment 7 - Consultation Plan
Recommendations ( <i>Amended</i> )	That the Assembly Standing Committee:  1. Receive the report.  2. Appoint Mikali Anagnostis to the task group.  4. Amend the Terms of Reference as set out in Attachment 2.  5. Note the task group's advice that a best practice apology from the Uniting Church to LGBTIQA+ people would be trauma informed and comprise three elements: - the apology itself - the provision and accessibility of skilled pastoral care - practical responses to the people being apologised to  6. Note the task group's view that the development of the wording of an apology without trauma informed pastoral supports in place is likely to cause harm to the persons to whom the apology is addressed  7. Request the President, Moderators and General Secretaries to meet and discuss the importance of taking a leadership role across the Uniting Church now to give life to an evidence based best practice apology process.
Submitted by	Lin Hatfield Dodds, Convenor

## **Report from the Apology Task Group**

This report to ASC

1. Responds to the request from ASC to review our current Terms of Reference, informed by six key issues;
2. Recommends the appointment of another task group member;
3. Clarifies the focussed role of the task group by removing the word “widely” from the Terms of Reference concerning consultation and replacing it with “To consult in a focussed manner necessary to develop the wording of an apology”.
4. Expresses a strong evidence-based view that an official apology to LGBTIQA+ people from the Uniting Church must be trauma informed and should be accompanied by skilled and accessible pastoral supports and practical responses to the persons to whom the apology will be addressed; and
5. Urges ASC to take the lead role for the listening, hearing and responding work that must sit around the development and delivery of an apology.

We note that while the task group was set up in 2019, it only started meeting in October 2020, two and a half years ago.

### **Nomination to the task group**

We recommend that ASC appoint Mikali Anagnostis to the task group.

Mikali’s EOI is at **Attachment 1**. Mikali would bring lived experience and local church engagement concerning trans and other gender diverse/non-binary people, which is a gap in the current membership.

We draw to your attention your desire to place two ASC members on the task group. James Aaron has joined us. We would welcome another ASC member, per the ASC resolution in July 2022.

The task group has established a position of Secretary, filled very ably by Warren Talbot.

### **Terms of reference**

We are broadly comfortable with the TOR. We proposed minor edits to you in our written report of July 2022. These are at **Attachment 2** for your consideration. We seek to add one further change, to remove the word “widely” from the first task under Task Required.

In coming to our view about our terms of reference you asked us to be informed by a range of key issues. Our consideration of these issues is as follows:

#### **1. Key issues, opportunities and theological context for an apology in this time and place**

Over the course of the past two years, the task group has focussed on building the necessary preparatory work for consultation toward the development of an apology.

Working with a group of Uniting Church theologians we developed a theological framework for apology. Our Biblical and Theological framework is at **Attachment 3**.

To develop our collective understanding of the psychology of apology we leaned heavily on task group member Graeme Randall's thesis, *Integrating Religious and LGBTQ Identities (Available to ASC members if they would like to read it)*. Graeme's work looks at how to bring people along on a journey that is potentially very difficult and painful, as an apology must involve a transformative journey on the part of those making it.

Cascading out of this work, we developed Principles to inform the work of the task group. These are at **Attachment 4**, and highlight the need for

- recognition of harm, past and current
- hearing, acknowledging and validating the stories of past and current harm
- ensuring that individuals are not unavoidably harmed through the apology process
- providing appropriate pastoral support where there is harm; and
- clarity of apology status

The task group has considered key issues, opportunities and theological context for an apology in this time and place. The documents referenced above arise out of that consideration. A working discussion paper, *Together in Humanity*, was provided to the President and Moderators and discussed at a meeting in March 2022. While this work has progressed from the original paper in multiple ways, we expect that the Uniting Church will need to develop a broad discussion paper to provide a public framework for the listening and responding work that is a necessary part of apology.

## **2. To whom might we need to apologise and for what?**

Graeme Randall works with clients who have been hurt by the fallout from denominational apologies. He is a trauma trained psychologist, a member of the task group and author of the task group paper responding to this question from ASC. His paper, *To Whom Are We Apologising*, is at **Attachment 5**. It explores what constitutes an apology, for what we might need to apologise, and to whom might we need to apologise.

## **3. How have other faith-based organisations across the world apologised to LGBTIQ communities?**

A draft paper authored by Warren Talbot, canvassing apology types and approaches from Christian denominations around the world is at **Attachment 6**. What surfaces through this paper is the reality that an effective apology can never be only be a form of words delivered at a point in time. It must involve a church's longer journey with careful engagement and opportunities for safe truth telling and thus organisational and cultural transformation.

When churches have presented apologies without offering the opportunity for people to whom the apology is directed to be heard and without reversing discriminatory policies and practices (that is, as words alone) the apology has been viewed as hollow and a negative reaction is elicited.

The apology task group is not consulting widely. We do not have a mandate to invite truth telling nor are we resourced to engage in any of this activity. Our task is to develop the wording of an apology and to consult only as is necessary for that task.

Having committed to an apology, the Assembly is responsible for ensuring that a Uniting Church apology does what it was intended to do when it committed to this course of action.

Leadership from the ASC is required now to ensure that no more damage to individuals takes place as a result of the development and delivery of an apology.

4. **From whom could an apology come?**
5. **Develop a stakeholder analysis matrix that could be used for consultation ahead of an apology?**

These are questions for the ASC to contemplate and wrestle with. Our assumption is that an official apology from the Uniting Church in Australia to LGTBIAQ+ Australians for the Church's role in the silence, rejection, discrimination and stereotyping of LGTBIAQ+ people, couples and families will be delivered at an Assembly of the Uniting Church. It could be delivered by the President, or by any combination of church leaders eg President and Moderators, President and Assembly General Secretary, President and all General Secretaries, President, General Secretaries and Moderators. You might decide to have representatives present of the particular parts of the church that have caused harm to people – our schools, social and health services, missions, overseas aid agencies and congregations. These are decisions for you. We suggest they be informed by wide consultation and truth telling across and beyond the life of our church.

We have a consultation plan for our ongoing focussed for-purpose consultations. It's at **Attachment 7** and sets out the approach to engagement that will inform the drafting of the apology.

#### **6. Consider what proposals (if any) could be put to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly**

Consideration of any proposals to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly fall into two categories. The first category concerns the wording and nature of the official apology. The ToR holds the option of there being a living apology. The second category concerns the activity that must sit around an effective apology.

The apology task group's role is to develop the wording of an apology. We are to consult only as necessary to that end. We are neither tasked nor resourced for the work that must sit around an apology that requires sensitive listening, hearing and responding.

As we have progressed our work over the past two and a half years, we have formed a strong evidence-based view that an official apology to LGBTIQ+ people from the Uniting Church must be trauma informed and accompanied by skilled and accessible pastoral supports and practical responses to the persons to whom the apology will be addressed.

We are deeply concerned that the process of consultation necessary for the task group to develop the wording of an apology may cause harm to people without pastoral care that is visible and available. We are seeing signs of this already.

We believe ASC needs to lead a dialogue across the polity of the Uniting Church about what delivering an evidence-based apology entails. Such an apology would be trauma informed; developed, delivered and received within an active and skilled pastoral framework; and give rise to practical responses to persons who experienced harm by the Uniting Church. Our General Secretaries and Moderators would become Apology leads.

There are many distressed, angry, and hurting queer folk in the Uniting Church, as well as in the diaspora of folk who have left the church. Their reasonable expectations that they are seen, heard and loved in our church are not being met consistently, or at all.

You now have our theological, psychological, and principles papers to resource the conversations we urge you to have. In addition, we can be a human resource as you prayerfully explore your role in this apology.

Our advice is that the ASC lead the Uniting Church to prepare for delivering an apology by activating specific pastoral care and through consideration of practical responses to the pain of queer folk's

experiences now. This advice is based on theological reflection, evidence from psychology, and in the experience of denominations around the world who have offered apologies to queer folk. Uniting Vic.Tas is leading the way with this trauma informed approach (see **Attachment 8** below).

*Lin Hatfield Dodds*

**Convenor, Apology Task Group  
February 2023**

## Attachment 8

Excerpt from an email from Kaye Bradshaw to Lindsay Cullen. Used with permission.

Nevertheless, I do wonder if you would be open to feedback and suggestions about this process?

At Uniting Vic.Tas, consistent with the position of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania, we supported the intention of the 2021 Victorian legislation to protect LGBTIQ+ people from the harm of coercive practices, and will do the same for anticipated 2023 reform in Tasmania. We do this because our service delivery is deeply informed by consumers/workforce with lived experience, including those who have first-hand experience of the harm that some of these practices have wrought in their lives and in those of their families and loved ones. We acknowledge that some live with the ongoing and deep impact of this harm. Because we know this, we take a trauma informed approach which prioritises cultural/psychological safety.

Working in a culturally/psychologically safe way is **careful, considered and specialist work that seeks to minimise and avoid further harm**. Understanding this, can I suggest:

- Careful consideration be given to a trauma informed approach to the establishment & work of this Task Group. Lin Hatfield-Dodds as Chair of the Assembly's *Apology to LGBTIQ Australians* Task Group and qualified in the area of counselling psychology & trauma [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lin\\_Hatfield\\_Dodds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lin_Hatfield_Dodds) is well positioned to advise on a culturally/psychologically safe approach **to minimise and avoid further harm**.
- Provision of appropriate psychological supports for Task Group members and participants. Attached is an example of how we have done this at Uniting Vic.Tas and the range of service types that **may be needed** during the life of this Assembly Task Group.

As we discussed, the Victorian legislation, resources (and training module in development for 2023) is comprehensive and clear about the role of prayer and pastoral care for people of faith, professionals, institutions and communities <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/change-or-suppression-practices/for-professionals-institutions-and-communities/>.

I would commend these resources to you.

Thank you again for the invitation

Warmly Kaye

**Kaye Bradshaw (she/her) | LGBTIQ+ Inclusion Lead**

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pride in health  
+ wellbeing



The Health and Wellbeing Equality Index is Australia's national benchmark on LGBTIQ+ inclusive service provision held annually by Pride in Health+Wellbeing

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