



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

21-23 July 2023

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| Title | ARCHIVE REPORT |
| Type of Paper (Information/Decision) | Information |
| Assembly or ASC Minute | |
| Consultation | |
| Purpose | To inform the ASC of the work undertaken by the Archivist in the past 3 years, current status of the Archive and what is hoped to be achieved in the coming 2-3 years. |
| Rationale & Findings Summary | |
| Attachments | Attachment A - Central Catalogue Listings of the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly Archives |
| Proposal/s | That the Standing Committee receive the report |
| Submitted by | Christine Gordon (Archivist) christineg@nat.uca.org.au 0425 214 771 |

Hello!

My name is Christine Gordon and I have been the Assembly Archivist for 22 years. I have loved every minute of this work!

The work involves assisting all the Agencies (many of them now closed) of the Assembly, as well as Synods, Uniting Church members and researchers from all around the world. Just these past few weeks, I have helped a Rhodes Scholar access material on *Illuminate* and at the Mitchell Library, met with a representative of the Korean Broadcasting Service to share copies of film, sound and photographic material and given permission for an American production company to use a small percentage of footage of the film "The Inlanders" in an episode of *The UnXplained with William Shatner ep. 329!*

As part of my work and in a voluntary capacity, I have been able to work with UnitingWorld to spend time in Tonga and the Cook Islands to provide archival advice and practical guidelines to our partner churches, The Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga, the Cook Island Christian Church and to Nungalinya College, Darwin. I have also had the privilege of visiting and working with most Synods, attended 6 Assemblies, worked with 8 Presidents, 2 General Secretaries and numerous National Directors and staff members.

The Archives has a role as guardian of corporate memory. By providing for the appropriate care of UCA Assembly Archives and being able to direct others where to find what they need, historians, storytellers and church leaders are offered the resources to share our UCA story truthfully, based on evidence.

Archives are those records that must be kept permanently either for legal reasons, because they include important financial or administrative information, or for their historical value. They may provide evidence of the Uniting Church's origins, policies, organisational structure, programs, major activities or special events. The records may come in different forms, e.g., minutes of meetings, annual reports, property plans, files, registers, photographs. Many of these records may now be in electronic form only.

A Retention and Disposal Schedule for all Councils and Agencies of the Church was devised and approved by ASC in 2005. With some minor tweaks, the Assembly Agency Schedule remains the basis for all the decisions regarding material retained.

The vast bulk of the archives of UCA Assembly and Assembly agencies (and their predecessors) is housed at the Mitchell Library (State Library of New South Wales), while the AIM/Frontier Services collection is housed at the National Library of Australia. Other material is housed at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA). We are fortunate enough to have had remarkably good collegial relationships with these major repositories over many years and each of them consider our collections to be highly valuable and many are frequently accessed.

The issue of electronic archiving has had a long and frustrating history. A major detailed proposal was presented by the NAHRC to the 11th Assembly in 2006 and then a second attempt with revisions was brought to the 12th Assembly in 2009. Lack of funds to implement, and other factors led to a long delay in what has become an increasingly urgent matter. For those with a responsibility for the care of archives, as well as those who need to be able to access the records, the questions are broader than basic records management. The earlier work on this proposal was updated in 2015 in light of the then current technology, costs and opportunities and was presented once more to the General Secretary in hope of action. It was around that time that the Assembly choose to merge their IT with the NSW/ACT IT Department and over the coming years EDRMS and SharePoint became the preferred way to Archive UCA Assembly material. However, this has proved frustrating and in my professional capacity as an Archivist, whilst this system may provide a platform for legal content, it cannot manage historic content

that can be accessed by the users outside of the Sharepoint family. My plan is to write recommendations as to how that is possible going forward in light of current technologies and what is already available electronically.

Lockdown was a particularly fruitful time in terms of work achieved. Without the ability to access boxes and with fewer researcher requests it enabled me to work on a number of projects. The most significant being able to identify and upload 1000's of documents onto both the Camden Theological Library's *Illuminate* and also curate the documents of the old Uniting Church and UnitingJustice Websites to add to the Assembly's version of *Illuminate*. The working papers, Minutes and some orders of service for all 16 Assemblies (including sound tapes and the Inauguration from the First Assembly), and the ASC from Union until March 2023 are now available electronically through *Illuminate*, although the ASC working papers are closed to the public. Significant collections are also now available on *Illuminate* including a full set of Church Union papers, the President's papers which are also closed to the public (up to and including Stuart McMillan's), complete sets of the Inlander and Frontier News and a full set of the Missionary Review (Methodist Overseas Mission) from 1891 until 1977 and this is probably the most researched journal of the entire collection and its digitisation and uploading has been a momentous accomplishment and is a valuable addition for researchers in general and especially across the Pacific.

Also during 2020 - 2022 and the protracted time between and after lockdowns, 1000s of slides and photographs were digitised, including precious old photo albums that tell the history of our early involvement in the Pacific and Asia. There are also images of the first and consequent Aboriginal mission stations and it is my intention to make copies available to each of these communities.

Perhaps the greatest achievement during this period was the completion of a Central Catalogue Listing of all the records of the Assembly and the agencies of the predecessor churches that were national bodies which became the responsibility of the UCA Assembly. It includes the whereabouts of records in all the Institutions listed above, other relevant collections, and what is available on the *Illuminate* website. It also includes URL links to the major collections. The completion of the catalogue has been a major work, although it will continue to grow as more material is archived.

The last 18 months has also been very productive. Copies of some significant old films made by MOM and BOEMAR and AIM/Frontier Services in the National Film and Sound Archive have been copied to DVD or USB and some have been shared with the appropriate communities.

There have been 250 boxes (mostly the President Papers, UnitingWorld and Joint Board of Christian Education (later Christian Education) sorted, described, indexed and sent to the Mitchell Library, 50 Frontier Services boxes to NLA and 2 boxes of sound and film to NFSA. My thanks go to long-time volunteer, Jim Andrighetti, a retired State Librarian who types up the descriptions of the archive boxes in minute detail and virtually doubled my work-load last year and in the years before Covid.

Sound cassettes, VHS cassettes, floppy disks, DVDs, and CDS have all been catalogued and curatorial decisions made as to what is important to keep. A major project is under way to digitise this material and more than half have now been transferred to electronic formats.

Paper records of the Secretariat and all old agencies are now completely finalised. Paper records of UnitingWorld will be completed soon and these records will form another (and the last major) consignment to the Mitchell Library.

A volunteer continues to digitise our collection of slides and this will soon be finished. There are many photographs still to be digitised and boxes of artefacts to be sorted and housed. As significant documents come to light, they too need to be scanned and added to *Illuminate*.

The most significant work still to be done will be the retrieving, sorting and describing 800+ boxes of Frontier Services material that has accumulated over the years including 100s of boxes that were sent to storage during the 2013-2015 upheaval. I am already working with Rob Floyd and the team in helping make decisions regarding the downsizing of resources kept in the new office and where important materials may be placed for long-term preservation. This will keep me busy for the next couple of years!

I look forward to meeting you all at the coming ASC dinner. Christine Gordon.