

Uniting Church in Australia

ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE

MARY MACKILLOP PLACE, NORTH SYDNEY, NSW

10 – 12 March 2023

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, Roberta Stanley, Charissa Suli, Lilliani Tahaafe-Williams, Geoff Thompson, Yuko Tonai-Moore, Ayla Williams, Anna Wilson, Stuart Woodward.

In attendance: Jenny Bertalan, Lindsay Cullen, Mark Lawrence, Stuart McMillan, Lara Regan and Andrew Williams.

AGENDA DISCUSSION

The elected members of the Assembly Standing Committee gathered on Friday afternoon to discuss the Agenda of the meeting. The President led this conversation.

WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The President and the members the President acknowledged the First Peoples of their respective lands. The President welcomed Leo Iosifidis for matters related to the Assembly Audit, Finance and Risk Committee report, Risk Management and Investment Policy, Heather den Houting for matters related to Regulations Review Report and the Frontier Services National Director Nomination, Ann Perrin for matters related to the Church in the Digital Age Task Group Report, Andrew Johnson for matters related to the Act2 Report, Lin Hatfield Dodds and Graeme Rendall for matters related to the Apology Task Group Report, Rob McFarlane for matters related to the Standards for Ministries Committee Report, Matagi Vilitama for matters related to Being a Multicultural Church Circle, Matthew Wilson for matters related to Seeking Common Ground Circle, Jon Humphris for matters related to Transforming Worship Circle, Virginia Lavaki for matters related to Discipling the Next Generations Circle, Alex Sangster for matters related to Working for Justice Circle and Liam Miller for matters related to Growing in Faith Circle.

WORSHIP On the Friday night the President led worship and the closing prayer on Friday and Saturday night were offered through The Examen video, Catherine Pepper led the Saturday morning worship, the Sunday morning worship was delivered by David Fotheringham and the closing prayers were offered by Lilliani Tahaafe-Williams.

APOLOGIES

23.01 **It was resolved** to receive the apology of Kerry Wilson, Raul Sugunananthan, Heather den Houting Jane Fry and James Aaron for the whole meeting.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

- 23.02** **It was resolved to** 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.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

23.03 **It was resolved to:**

23.03.01 confirm the minutes of the meeting held 11-13 November 2022 with the deletion of Roberta Stanley's name from the list of those present; and

23.03.02 approve that ASC Minute 22.17.07 be deemed confidential for 10 years and not be included in the November 2022 minutes that are published on the Assembly website.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

23.04 **It was resolved to:**

- a) note:
 - (i) Stuart McMillan's conflict of interest in relation to Document 5 – Consent Agenda (Redress) since he is the current General Secretary of the Northern Synod and he worked on Appendix 1 to the report; and
 - (ii) resolve that he be present for this business but only respond to questions if directed by the President;

- b) note:
 - (i) David Fotheringham's conflict of interest in relation to Document 8 – Project Possum since he is the Moderator of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania and already has a position at the April 2023 meeting in his Moderator role; and
 - (ii) resolve that he be present for this business but not to vote.

- c) note:
 - (i) Nicole Mugford's conflict of interest in relation to Document 11 – SOGICE Report - Task Group Nominations since she is a nominee; and
 - (ii) resolve that she 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 4, consisting of a report on her activities since the November 2022 meeting of the Standing Committee.

- 23.05** **It was resolved to** receive the report (Attachment A).

UAICC REPORT

Mark Kickett presented Document 3, consisting of a report on the conversations UAICC had and the actions they took.

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

BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS STANDING COMMITTEE

1. A Call to Action Report - Working Group Member Nominations (ASC Minute 22.56.03)

Lindsay Cullen spoke to Document 12, consisting of nominations for the Working Group membership.

23.07 It was resolved to:

23.07.01 approve the nominations of James Thom and Richard Arnold to the Call to Action (Net Zero Emissions) Steering Group;

23.07.02 appoint Catherine Pepper and Yuko Tonai-Moore to the Steering Group; and

23.07.03 request the Steering Group to:
a) further define the tasks required to undertake this project; and
b) empower the Steering Group to find and facilitate further volunteers as required in order to achieve the project goals.

2. Church in the Digital Age Task Group (ASC Minute 20.78.04)

Ann Perrin presented Document 15, consisting of the final report from the Church in the Digital Age Task Group. Table discussion ensued.

23.08 It was resolved to:

23.08.01 receive the report;

In order further to equip the Uniting Church in its worship, witness and service in a digital age,

23.08.02 request the Advocate and Panel of Transforming Worship to report to the Associate General Secretary on any learnings coming from the ongoing use of digital and hybrid settings for worship across the Church for incorporation into a report to the November 2023 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee;

23.08.03 request the Advocate and Panel of Discipling the Next Generation to report to the Associate General Secretary on any learnings coming from the ongoing use of digital platforms by emerging generations, for incorporation into a report to the November 2023 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee; and

23.08.04 request the Advocate and Panel of Growing in Faith, to prepare a report for the March 2024 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee with respect to the following issues in the light of the 'Digital Age':

- a) The theology and practice of being ecclesia,
- b) How we understand humanity and personhood,
- c) The theology and practice of the sacraments; and

23.08.05 thank and discharge the Church in the Digital Age Task Group.

3. LGBTIQA+ Apology Task Group Report (ASC Minutes 21.61.02 and 22.36.05-06)

Lin Hatfield Dodds and Graeme Rendall introduced Document 18, consisting of an update on the work of the Task Group, including a Consultation Plan, and a Discussion Paper. Table group discussion followed.

23.09 It was resolved to:

23.09.01 receive the report;

Noting 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; and

Noting 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,

23.09.02 pause the work of the Apology Task Group while the ASC considers the significant issues raised by the Task group in their report, and how best to respond; and

23.09.03 request the President to consult with the Assembly Standing Committee members and others as appropriate regarding next steps, and to bring a report to the July 2023 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee.

4. SOGICE Report – Task Group Member Nominations (ASC Minutes 22.59.03-04)

Lindsay Cullen spoke to Document 11, consisting of nominations for the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts (SOGICE) Task Group.

23.10 It was resolved to:

23.10.01 receive the report;

23.10.02 approve the nominations of Nicole Mugford, Warren Talbot and Kate Barton to the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts (SOGICE) Task Group; and

23.10.03 request:

- a) the Associate General Secretary to convene the first meeting of the Task Group and identify a convenor; and
- b) request the Assembly Officers to approve any more members to the Task Group.

FROM ASSEMBLY BODIES

1. Act2 Report

Andrew Johnson introduced Document 17, consisting of an update regarding the work and process of the Act2 project. Document 17A contained a summary of the project's timeline.

23.11 It was resolved to:

23.11.01 receive the report; and

23.11.02 noting the decision of 16th Assembly regarding Act2 and the draft budget of the Act2 Project, request the Assembly General Secretary write to each of Synods requesting they consider what financial contribution they are able to make to fully funding the Act2 Project for the 2023-24 financial year.

2. Assembly Audit, Finance and Risk Committee

Stuart Woodward and Leo Iosifidis spoke to Document 7, consisting of a report on the management of finance, audit and risk issues across the Assembly.

23.12 It was resolved to receive the report.

3. Assembly Ministry and Mission and Circles Report

Lindsay Cullen introduced Document 10, consisting of a report on the work of the Ministry and Mission Team of the Assembly Resourcing Unit in the face of the challenges presented by the rebuilding as a result of coming out of the pandemic, significant staffing changes and a modification to the overall structure of the Assembly Resourcing Unit. The report also contained the report from the Advocates of all the Circles of Interest and the Expressions of Interest from Alex Sangster for the role of Advocate of the Working For Justice Circle, and Jon Humphries for the role of Advocate for the Transforming Worship Circle. The Advocates of the Circles of Interest responded to questions from the members of the Assembly Standing Committee via Zoom.

23.13 It was resolved to:

23.13.01 receive the written report along with verbal updates from the Associate General Secretary and from the Circle Advocates; and

23.13.02 approve the appointment of two new Advocates — Rev Alex Sangster (Working for Justice) and Rev Jon Humphries (Transforming Worship).

4. Assembly Risk Management

Leo Iosifidis presented Document 9, consisting of an update to the Risk Management System and Framework of the Assembly. Documents 9A, 9B and 9C contained the risk appetite statement, dashboard/heatmap reporting of risks, risk register from the November 2022 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee and the Assembly Standing Committee's risk governance principles. Table discussion followed.

23.14 It was resolved to receive the report.

5. Assembly Secretariat Financial Sustainability Working Group

Stuart Woodward introduced Document 16, consisting of a proposal to establish an Assembly Secretariat Financial Sustainability Working Group, with Terms of Reference as attached.

23.15 It was resolved to:

23.15.01 approve the establishment of the Assembly Secretariat Financial Sustainability Working Group;

23.15.02 approve the Terms of Reference for the Working Group as submitted;

- 23.15.03 appoint Michael Dobson and Richard La'Brooy to the Working Group;
- 23.15.04 authorise Assembly Officers to appoint the Convenor of the Working Group; and
- 23.15.05 request the Assembly General Secretary to convene the first meeting of the Working Group as soon as is practicable.

6. Regulations Review Task Group Report

Heather den Houting spoke to Documents 13, 13A and 13B, consisting of an update to on the work of the Regulations Review Task Group, flow charts and discipline scenarios.

- 23.16** **It was resolved to** note the current status of the review of Part 5 – Church discipline – of the Regulations.

7. Standards for Ministries Committee Report

Robert McFarlane introduced Document 19, consisting of a report on various Ministerial Education Board developments.

- 23.17** **It was resolved to:**
- 23.17.01 receive the report;
- 23.17.02 note the formation of the NSW/ACT Synod Ministerial Education Board;
- 23.17.03 note ongoing conversations with WA Ministerial Education Board and Faculty;
- 23.17.04 note the resignation from the Standards for Ministry Committee of the Rev Dr Christine Sorenson and the Committee's withdrawal of membership of the Rev Helen Paine; and
- 23.17.05 note the intention of the Standards for Ministries Committee to bring a nomination for a new member to the next meeting of the Committee.

GENERAL BUSINESS

1. Consent Agenda

The General Secretary presented the various documents which constituted Document 5, Consent Agenda. Table group discussion re the redress matter followed.

- 23.18** **It was resolved to:**
- 23.18.01 receive the report; and
- 23.18.02 note the revised Strategic Plan and Business Plan.

Redress:

- 23.19** **It was resolved to:**
- 23.19.01 a) note the information regarding the history of the Methodist Overseas Mission with responsibility for Croker Island Mission and the subsequent incorporation of Somerville Homes with responsibility for continuing services from 22 July 1971; and

- 23.19.02 b) accept the liability for redress and civil matters relating to child sexual abuse at Croker Island Mission from 1969 to 22 July 1971;
- 23.19.03 that where it is not possible to determine exact dates of abuse and where it is agreed that they most likely occurred over a period that spanned both before and after 22 July 1971, it is proposed that Somerville and the Assembly accept joint responsibility for those claims in equal measure with each bearing 50% of associated costs;
- 23.19.04 note the response from the Chair, UnitingWorld Board in response to ASC resolution 22.67.02.;
- 23.19.05 as per ASC Minute 22.67.02, re-iterate its expectation that UnitingWorld share equally with the Assembly the funding of redress and civil claims arising from the Croker Island Mission, utilizing funds and other assets to the extent that these can legitimately and appropriately be used for this purpose;
- 23.19.06 seek confirmation from the UnitingWorld Board that such sharing will be instituted prior to the end of April 2023; and
- 23.19.07 request the President and the Assembly General Secretary to convey this minute to the UnitingWorld Board Chair.

2. Frontier Services National Director Nomination

Heather den Houting spoke to Document 14, consisting of a nomination for the position of National Director, Frontier Services.

- 23.20** **It was resolved to** approve the appointment of Rob Floyd as National Director of Frontier Services in a permanent position.

3. Project Possum

Heather den Houting introduced Documents 8, consisting of the documentation which has been developed so far to inform the national meeting to be held 21-22 April 2023. These documents include: Financial health commentary Feb 2023 (8A), Master Content (AB) 20220831 Legal Advice - Exposure of UCAPT(Q) to Liabilities (8C) and UCA opinion Leigh Warnick (8D). Table discussion ensued.

- 23.21** **It was resolved to:**

- 23.21.01 receive the report;
- 23.21.02 note the documents that have been developed to date to inform the national meeting, 21-22 April 2023;
- 23.21.03 note that the President, the General Secretary, the National Director Strategic Finance & Administration; and elected ASC members Stuart Woodward, Charissa Suli and Nicole Mugford will attend the national meeting;
- 23.21.04 authorise the members of the Assembly Standing Committee appointed to the meeting, to make decisions at the meeting based on the information they are provided with; and
- 23.21.05 request the General Secretary to provide a written report regarding the outcomes of the national meeting, as soon as possible after the meeting.

4. Vic/Tas Synod Standing Committee Letter re A Voice to Parliament

The General Secretary presented Document 6, consisting of a letter from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Standing Committee regarding A Voice to Parliament.

23.22 It was resolved to:

23.22.01 note the letter from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Standing Committee;

Having heard from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and informed by our commitment to the Covenant between the Uniting Church and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and our advocacy on issues of importance to the First Peoples of Australia; and recognising that there is a diversity of perspectives

23.22.02 declare the support of the Uniting Church in Australia for the proposed change in the Australian Constitution to recognise an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament, as a step toward the invitation of the Uluru Statement to voice, truth telling, and treaty;

23.22.03 noting the significance of this moment in our nation's history and relationship with its First Peoples, to call on church, community and political leaders to engage the referendum issues, modelling respectful and constructive dialogue;

23.22.04 communicate the support of the Uniting Church in Australia for the proposed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice to Parliament to parliamentary leaders;

23.22.05 invite the whole Uniting Church to see the referendum as a challenge to reflect further on our own practices in our relationships with First Peoples within and outside the Church in expressing the priority of the Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress; and

23.22.06 request the Assembly General Secretary to provide resourcing to the Church in support of the 'yes' campaign, pointing to the Church's previous Covenant commitments and resolutions.

CLOSURE

The meeting closed at 4:00pm with prayer led by Lilliani Tahaafe-Williams.

**DATES FOR 2023: 21 – 23 July 2023
10 – 12 November 2023**