



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

21-23 July 2023

DOCUMENT

Title	THEME FOR THE 17 TH ASSEMBLY MEETING AND THE TRIENNIUM 2024-2027
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	Information and Decision
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	A small group of lay and ordained members of the Uniting Church in Australia. Members of different age groups, nationalities and various councils across our national church.
Purpose	To decide the theme for the 17 th Assembly meeting and Triennium 2024 - 2027
Rationale & Findings Summary	
Attachments	
Proposal/s	Proposals: That the Standing Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receive the Report2. Approve the theme for the 17th Assembly and the 2024-2027 Triennium – “Threads of Love: Weaving Christ’s love across cultures and boundaries”.
Submitted by	Rev Charissa Suli, President Elect

THEME FOR THE 17TH ASSEMBLY MEETING AND THE TRIENNium 2024-2027

Theme: "Threads of Love: Weaving Christ's Love Across Cultures and Boundaries"

An old Tongan proverb says, 'oku nofo fakataha ha kii kolo lavame'a, ngaue fakataha, mo fetokoni'aki, which translates, *"that a successful village lives together, works together, and helps one another."*¹ This proverb is particularly true for the Tongan women who weave handicrafts in Tonga and work together to prepare the necessary resources to weave the Tongan Fala (mat). Although the Tongan Fala is a highly valued craft in Tongan culture, it is the process of 'lalanga' (weaving) that is valued by the community. That is, the weaving together of the strands to create the Fala; the commitment, patience, skill, and intentionality you bring as a weaver; the fellowship that occurs when you weave with others; and the joy that comes from completing a Fala is respected by the community. The weaving of the Fala is sacrificial labour, and women work diligently in communities to 'lalanga' the Fala so that the talanoa (dialogue) of people who sit on the Fala can begin. Each strand of the Fala is important to each other in the same way that the Holy Spirit gifts and empowers all members of the Church to confess Jesus Christ and serve him as one body with many members who contribute to the ministry and mission of the Church.² As followers of Christ, we are weavers of a more generous and inclusive fala which holds our diversity together in Christ's love. We continue to be on a pilgrim journey diligently intertwining the threads of God's love, grace, and salvation into the tapestry of our lives and communities. The rich history and symbolism of weaving the Fala has inspired my theme for the 17th Assembly which is "Threads of Love: Weaving Christ's Love across cultures and boundaries."

This theme focuses on the importance of weaving Christ's love across cultural and social boundaries. It challenges the church to weave Christ's love into the world by building bridges across divides and bringing people together in love and unity. It underlines the act of disseminating Christ's love beyond all boundaries, calling the Uniting Church to diligently weave this enduring thread of love in our worship, witness, and service. In alignment with this theme, the 2010 preamble to its constitution states, "The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom, and ceremony."³ This passage reinforces the omnipresence of God's love in Christ, surpassing all cultural and social barriers, and aligns with our proposed theme.

The phrase "Threads of Love" is a reference to Paul's Letter to the Colossians (3:14), where he proclaims, "and over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."⁴ This biblical citation strengthens the basic notion that love, as the ultimate unifying force, brings together all virtues, cultures, and peoples in Christ's name. Our theme spotlights the transformative power of Christ's love, as it overcomes cultural boundaries and unifies us in His service. It implores us to acknowledge and honour our shared humanity as creations of God and reminds us of our communal duty to shape a world that mirrors the love and unity Christ has for us all.

This theme is also inspired from the account of the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus at the well, as retold in the Gospel of John (4:1-42). In this narrative, Jesus, a Jew, traverses a cultural and religious chasm by initiating dialogue with a Samaritan woman, who was marginalized in her society. Contrary to societal norms, Jesus acknowledges her dignity, engaging her in deep theological discourse and revealing Himself as the Messiah. Transformed by this encounter, the woman becomes a beacon of Christ's love, sharing her experience with her community and leading many toward belief in Jesus. This narrative symbolizes the act of weaving Christ's love across cultural and societal boundaries, serving as an inspiration for the Uniting Church. It reminds us of our call to follow in Jesus's footsteps, breaking down barriers, engaging in open dialogue, and spreading the transformative love of Christ, regardless of societal or cultural divisions. As the Samaritan woman who became a beacon of God's love, we too are

¹ "Upholding Cultural Traditions in Tonga," IFAD, <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/latest/-/upholding-cultural-traditions-in-tonga>.

² "The Basis of Union - Uniting Church in Australia Assembly," Basis of Union (Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, 1992), <https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/HistDocs/basisofunion1992.pdf>, paragraph 3.

³ Uniting Church in Australia assembly - the revised preamble, <https://www.assembly.uca.org.au/hef/item/668-the-revised-preamble>.

⁴ ZONDERVAN, *NRSV Bible* (GRAND RAPIDS: ZONDERVAN, 2011).

called to become weavers of Christ's love in our communities. For when we drink from the well of Jesus Christ, it is possible to 'talanoa' across barriers that may previously kept us apart, finding common ground that transcends any tension. As we 'lalanga' stories, events, resources, mission, and our lives together, the Fala is Jesus Christ, who is always the centre point that ties the threads together. And when we allow ourselves to cross a border and be willing to feel the discomfort of being without borders or the edges of a Fala, our lives are transformed through Jesus Christ where we no longer see Jesus as a Jew, a man, or a prophet; he has become for us the Messiah. It is in this understanding of Christ's love that we begin to provide spaces for lalanga (weaving) so that people can experience this life-giving water as people weave and re-weave their lives on the fala, which is Jesus Christ. By exploring the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman through the lens of the theme, we recognize Christ's love as a thread that weaves acceptance, redemption, purpose, and witness into our lives, bringing about transformative change and inviting others to encounter the transformative power of his love as well.

The theme "Threads of Love: Weaving Christ's Love Across Cultures and Boundaries" not only calls the Uniting Church to weave together the strands of Christ's love but also invites us to consider the act of unweaving the broken strands that hinder our unity and transformative change. Just as a weaver carefully removes damaged or disruptive threads from the fala, we are called to identify and address the broken strands in our church and society. Un-weaving these broken strands requires self-reflection, confession, lament, and a commitment to restorative justice, as we work toward reconciliation, equality, and inclusion. By un-weaving any broken strands and mending the fabric of our church, we create space for transformative change to flourish, allowing Christ's love to weave a more inclusive, just, mission focused and disciple-orientated community.

This theme also holds profound significance for the Uniting Church in Australia in the changing landscape of mission. Just as the Tongan women, guided by the wisdom of their proverb 'oku nofo fakataha ha ki'i kolo lavame'a, ngaue fakataha, mo fetokoni'aki, which translates, *"that a successful village lives together, works together, and helps one another,"*⁵ we too are called to live, work, and support each other in our discipleship, mission and ministry. We have a shared commitment to weave Christ's love into the complex fabric of our culturally diverse society. As we intertwine the threads of love across all cultural and social boundaries, we aspire to create a vibrant and unified community reflective of Christ's love. Guided by this shared vision, let us, the Uniting Church in Australia, be inspired to weave together a future that encapsulates the essence of Christ's love, a future where unity is celebrated, diversity is cherished, and every thread of our communal tapestry resonates with the boundless love of Christ.

Rev Charissa Suli
President Elect
charissa@sydneypresbytery.org.au
0413 188 105

Proposals:

That the Standing Committee:

1. Receive the report.
2. Approve the theme for the 17th Assembly and the 2024-2027 Triennium – "Threads of Love: Weaving Christ's love across cultures and boundaries".

⁵ "Upholding Cultural Traditions in Tonga," IFAD, accessed September 1, 2021, <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/latest/-/upholding-cultural-traditions-in-tonga>.