



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

15-17 March 2024

DOCUMENT 16

Title	UCA-Lutheran Dialogue Terms of Reference
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	Decision
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	UCA-Lutheran Dialogue, Associate General Secretary
Purpose	To propose a new Terms of Reference for the UCA-Lutheran Dialogue for ASC Approval.
Rationale & Findings Summary	Over past years, the UCA-Lutheran Dialogue has focused on the question of shared understandings of Holy Communion. The intention of the group had previously been to consider shared understandings of ministry, but following discussions with the Associate General Secretary and amongst the Dialogue group, it has been proposed that the group might productively step back a little in order to address challenges common to both churches and the ways forward in which they might be addressed.
Attachments	Covering Letter from UCA members of the Dialogue
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: 1. Approve the Terms of Reference for the UCA-Lutheran Dialogue.
Submitted by	Rev Dr Anna Grant-Henderson, UCA-Lutheran Dialogue, UCA Co-chair

Lutheran Church of Australia and Uniting Church in Australia Dialogue

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Approved by Assembly Standing Committee – ?

Purpose: The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) and Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) Dialogue is an ongoing Dialogue between the two churches. This Terms of Reference relates to the UCA members of the Dialogue.

Reporting Arrangements: Assembly Standing Committee (ASC)

Period: This Terms of Reference is for the period July 2024 – July 2027

Membership: As determined by the ASC on the recommendation of the UCA Convenor of the Dialogue, the Assembly General Secretary and the Assembly Resourcing Unit (ARU)

Purpose of the Dialogue

The UCA, recognising that it is in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic and seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and his will, undertakes to continue to dialogue with the LCA. (See B of U Para. 1) And so, it undertakes this dialogue, recognising the authority of the Assembly has to enter into association with other churches. (See UCA Constitution Cl. 38(b)(xi) and (xii))

Purpose of this Document:

The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) and Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) Dialogue is an ongoing Dialogue between the two churches. The purpose of this document is to be the Terms of Reference for the UCA members of the Dialogue. (Note: the Lutheran Church of Australia has a separate statement of authority and terms of reference, though the Lutheran members of the Dialogue were supportive of these Terms of Reference.)

Background:

The future of ecumenical dialogue (excerpts taken from draft letter of Craig Thompson)

The Dialogue between the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) and the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) has spanned some forty years. It has produced a number of significant statements, most recently *At the Table* (2022).

Nonetheless, the Christian ecumenical landscape has shifted enormously since its mid-twentieth-century heyday, such that the older impetus towards denominational unions is almost totally lost. This is in part on account of the ongoing effects of the demise of Christendom, reducing time and energy for “external” conversation, and in part reflects the development of a global Christian reality which is not invested in the older western ecumenism. While the LCA continues to participate in several dialogues, the UCA now invests little in direct ecumenical conversation towards the kinds of ends which brought it into being, apart from the LCA-UCA Dialogue.

In view of these changed circumstances, recent LCA-UCA Dialogue meetings have been re-considering the Dialogue’s reason for being. We doubt that there is much benefit in continuing the kind of work which has been attempted over the last forty years or so. denomination when, internally, there is ongoing conversation which might yet change a Church’s position.

As such, the Dialogue proposes that, rather than wrestling with each other’s theological minutiae, there may be rather great value in addressing together some of the shared challenges in the denominations, with a view to cooperative problem-solving.

Precisely what these challenges are, or which should be prioritised, is not clear, but working together towards a better understanding of common issues (looking forward in the same direction) might be a more promising future for ecumenical engagement than working on things we separate us (looking at one another). This is at least the case for the conversation between the Uniting and Lutheran Churches, which seemed to have agreed that each is, indeed, the church.

We propose, then, that our respective Churches consider such a shift in the intention and form of the LCA-UCA Dialogue (and, by extension, any other dialogues) as would enable a further growing together by working more on the challenges we have in common and less on what we imagine might still divide us.

Tasks Required:

Reflecting the work completed through the previous triennium, feedback from the ASC and planning with LCA Dialogue partners in April 2024:

1. The original intention for ecumenism was part of a mission outlook and the dialogue needs to identify areas of mission in local communities. These areas of mission could reflect differences of understanding of the world & be part of diverse cultural-linguistic backgrounds.
2. Therefore, the mission of each of our churches needs to move from the focus on church structures to “an ecumenical intercultural hermeneutic which will enable us to comprehend unity as a fellowship of those who continue to be different and to offer

criteria for this". (Flett) *I think this is important and is the theological work that needs doing.*

3. The dialogue identify the challenges common to each church and suggest ways in which together the churches could address them, for example, how does fellowship in the UCA live and work with its diverse theological congregations.
4. Continue to work on a study version guide for the ATT document.
5. The dialogue have 2 face to face meetings a year in Melbourne held at CTM with Zoom meetings scheduled as needed. Members of the dialogue come from Melbourne/or surrounds and noting this commitment is voluntary.
6. Through the Dialogue, maintain relationships between the LCA and UCA and provide feedback to the ASC of emerging areas of interest or emerging issues that may need to be pursued by other parts of the Assembly.

Expected Outcomes:

The UCA members of the Dialogue form, for the purposes of the ASC, a Task Group within the life of the Assembly. During the 2024-2027 Triennium the Task Group will:

1. Present a written report annually to the ASC via ARU in time for the August ASC meeting in both 2025 and 2026, and a report for the 19th Assembly in July 2027 that is provided to the March 2027 ASC meeting.

These reports will indicate:

- Progress of key conversations
 - Any documents produced by the Dialogue during the period are deposited in the dropbox.
 - Constraints or issues to be addressed (if any) for ongoing work
 - Any need for changes in membership of the UCA Dialogue members
2. Working through the ARU, provide any documents or reports that need to be considered by ASC for input or adoption.
 3. Forward unconfirmed and confirmed minutes after each dialogue meeting to the ARU for Assembly records.
 4. In its 2027 report to ASC, provide an indication of the vitality of the Dialogue, suggesting what areas of work and the appropriate membership that would be required carry this work forward.

How the task group will work:

1. Be grounded in the gospel and build upon the tradition of the Uniting Church in Australia.

2. Live out our covenant as First and Second Peoples.
3. Live out our commitment to being a multicultural church, oriented towards justice.
4. Embody an inclusive church where those of differing ability, age, gender, race and sexuality are welcomed
5. Ensure that the activities of the Task Group are consistent with the Basis of Union of the UCA, the Constitution and Regulations, and align with the current strategic priorities of the Assembly.
6. Consider how the work of the Task Group relates to other councils, agencies and groups within the UCA, and work collaboratively wherever possible.
7. Consider how the work of the Task Group relates to other bodies ecumenically and with other civil society organisation and work collaboratively wherever possible.
8. Where appropriate, conduct its work on the basis of rigorous, contemporary research and analysis

Membership:

The UCA Dialogue members (Task Group) will be appointed by the Assembly in their July 2024 meeting, guided by input from the ARU, having consulted with the UCA Convenor of the Dialogue and the Assembly General Secretary.

The UCA members of the Dialogue will comprise of up to six people, one of whom is appointed by the ASC as the Convenor.

The selection process will consider the expertise and experience required to undertake the work of the Task Group. Some consideration of geographic location will be given when selecting members given the UCA are predominantly located in Victoria. Only 1 member of the LCA comes from Victoria.

Should there be need to add new members during a triennium then ASC will do so on the recommendation of the current Dialogue members and the ARU.

Convenor:

The Convenor will be responsible primarily for liaison with the LCA in order to arrange meetings, collate necessary information and provide reports to ASC. The Convenor will be the primary point of contact for the ARU as they support the Dialogue.

Period:

This Terms of Reference is for the three years of the triennium 2024-2027. The ASC understands the longterm, relational nature of ecumenical dialogues and understands that

there may be an extension of the UCA participation in the Dialogue into the next triennium.

In the lead up to the 19th Assembly the Dialogue Task Group will report to ASC through the ARU as to whether there is ongoing work to be done and if so the nature of this work.

Based on this report, the ASC will determine whether or not to extend the Task Group into the following triennium, and then review the Terms of Reference and membership with a view to these going forward to the July UCA Assembly