



Uniting Church in Australia ASSEMBLY

Assembly Standing Committee

15 – 17 March 2024

DOCUMENT 6

Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For Information, Discussion and Decision
Title	Apology to LGBTIQ+ Australians Task Group
Assembly or ASC Minute	ASC Resolutions 23.56 and 23.71.02 <i>[from November 2023 and 18 December 2023 special meeting]</i>
Consultation	
Purpose	To respond to the ASC advice concerning possible next steps to be reported at the Seventeenth Assembly.
Rationale & Findings Summary	
Attachments	
Recommendations	That the Assembly Standing Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Receive the report.2. Consider the proposals presented in the attached report.
Submitted by	Lin Hatfield Dodds, Convenor

Report from the Apology Task Group

Proposals

1. That the ASC present a final report to the Assembly meeting from the Apology TG, which describes the process since the establishment of the Task Group, in addition to major actions and issues which the Task Group has worked on, and what has been learnt in the process.
2. That the ASC recommend to the Assembly the appointment of a LGBTIQA+ reference or advisory group, and/or establish an Assembly “Pride Working Circle” to carry forward the work of the Apology Task Group and other matters applicable to the full participation of LGBTIQA+ people in the life of the Uniting Church.

Background and rationale

1. From the 18 December 2024 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) the Task Group was advised that:

The ASC would hope to set in place a series of recommendations that could lay out the next steps at the March ASC meeting so that these can be reported to the 17th Assembly.

The Task Group has noted, a second time, the ASC advice that “[t]here is no appetite for a debate at the 17th Assembly about a living apology”. Accordingly, although we had hoped for that to proceed, we have accepted the guidance of the ASC.

2. The final report is to be presented as the final report of the Task Group, not necessarily the views of the ASC. There would need to be a short covering document from the ASC itself. We believe a final report from the Task Group is important in terms of respecting the journey and considerations of the Task Group, in addition to giving some sense to Assembly members of the issues which have been wrestled with and may continue in the future.
3. The final report would note and make some comment as to why the Task Group has not recommended the words of a formal apology at this point in time. The main reasons are:
 - (a) the Uniting Church continues to live with significant diversity of practice regarding the full participation of LGBTIQA+ people. From the perspective of LGBTIQA+ people, significant Councils of the Church continue to systematically discriminate on the grounds of sexual or gender identity.
 - (b) a formal apology would not be received well, or accepted, by the large majority of LGBTIQA+ people precisely because of the diverse practices referred to in point (a).
 - (c) a Living Apology process is a more constructive way forward to facilitate respectful dialogue from a range of perspectives.

4. The Apology Task Group believes that it is essential to carry forward the work it has undertaken and commenced. In the absence of a reference or advisory group, or a working circle, the work might simply lapse, with no forward direction.
5. On details, the advisory/reference group would be appointed by the ASC, with a majority of LGBTIQ+ members plus others reflecting the diversity of the church (Congress, CALD congregations, and theological diversity). The work plan for such a group would be to continue working on possibilities such as a Living Apology, implementing the SOGICE resource being prepared, consider matters specific to trans and gender diverse people, and how safety for LGBTIQ+ people can be supported in a mainstream way.
6. Similar principles would apply if a “Pride Working Circle” were established. A “Pride Circle” could be delegated the work of the Assembly for and with LGBTIQ+ people across the spectrum of our church and experience: to build community, worship resources, safe dialogue, continued learning and formation of ordained Ministers, lay ministry agents and our church members.
7. The Task Group was asked by the ASC what a Living Apology would involve. In essence it would be a three or six year process of dialogue, storytelling, education and reconciliation with LGBTIQ+ people. This is slow and careful work – many of the specifics would depend on resourcing. A regular consultation, perhaps twice a year, with LGBTIQ+ members would assist in articulating different needs (in education, pastoral care, and advocacy) and ways of engagement. If some of that could be done through extending the mandate of the National Safe Church Unit that would have the advantage of building on that expertise, and framing the exercise in ways which large numbers of UCA members already understand and value.
8. Finally, a consultation the TG held with Uniting Vic/Tas indicated that there is now considerable knowledge and expertise in the Uniting Care network about LGBTIQ+ matters. Future work would aim to learn from that expertise.