



**Uniting Church in Australia**  
**ASSEMBLY**  
Assembly Standing Committee

**15-17 March 2024**

**DOCUMENT 15**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Standing Committee Report to the Seventeenth Assembly</b>
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	For information, discussion and decision
Assembly or ASC Minute	Not applicable
Consultation	President
Purpose	To provide for ASC members a report from the Standing Committee regarding its work over the current triennium to the Seventeenth Assembly.
Rationale & Findings Summary	See report. Note that the report in a few places will need to be completed/updated following this meeting.
Attachments	Nil
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Receive the report</li><li>2. Following any amendments, approve a final form of the report to be included in the reports to the Seventeenth Assembly</li></ol>
Submitted by	Lindsay Cullen Assembly General Secretary <a href="mailto:gensec@nat.uca.org.au">gensec@nat.uca.org.au</a>

# Standing Committee

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Standing Committee held five meetings and seven meetings via video conference during the last triennium. The move to online meetings continued as the global response to the Pandemic moved to establishing procedures to find a way forward. In addition to scheduled Standing Committee meetings, three online meetings were held to deal with various issues. Consideration of scheduling more than three meetings a year was considered for the future. In an historical first, the Standing Committee met four times between Assembly meetings, the Sixteenth Assembly Online and Reconvened meetings. It also met for the first time outside of Sydney, meeting in Melbourne in November 2022. When the Standing Committee met face-to-face, meetings commence with an Agenda discussion and dinner on Friday evening and conclude at 4.00pm on Sunday; when meeting online, meetings began Friday night and concluded on Sunday afternoon. The exception in this triennium was the March 2024 meeting which began at lunch in order to address the significant amount of preparation for the Seventeenth Assembly. The Standing Committee begins each of its meetings with worship which usually includes Holy Communion. Throughout, worship and prayer provided by the President and members of the Standing Committee is an important foundation for its work. Over the last triennium the Standing Committee has been very conscious, and grateful, that it has been supported by the prayers of many members of the church and is certain that this support has been reflected in the spirit with which its work has been undertaken and the outcomes of its deliberations.

1.2 The venue for 4 meetings has been Mary McKillop Place (MMP) in North Sydney. When MMP was unavailable for the meeting in November 2022, the Standing Committee met at the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Synod offices in Wesley Place in Melbourne. All other meetings for the triennium were held online.

1.3 There have been several changes to the membership of the Standing Committee since the Sixteenth Assembly. Rev Philip Gardner resigned in July 2023 due to his appointment as the General Secretary of the South Australian Synod. Raul Sugunananthan resigned in August 2023 due to his appointment as Policy and Advocacy officer for the Assembly. The Standing Committee made one co-option in order to augment the skill mix of Standing Committee members. The participation of individual members of the Standing Committee is presented in the table below.

1.4 *Please note the attendance numbers are for meetings up to 15/12/23 and will be updated following March 2024 meeting*

Member	Able to Attend	Attendance
Sharon Hollis	10	10
Colleen Geyer	10	10
Charissa Suli	10	8
Deidre Palmer	10	10
Mark Kickett	10	10
Ayla Williams	10	9
James Aaron	10	7
Sandy Boyce	10	10
David Busch	10	9
Michael Dobson	10	10
Linda Driver	10	8
David Fotheringham	10	9
Philip Gardner	7	6
Richard La'Brooy	10	10
Nicole Mugford	10	10

Alison Overeem	10	10
Catherine Pepper	10	10
Raul Sugunananthan	8	6
Roberta Stanley	10	8
Lilliani Tahaafe-Williams	10	6
Geoff Thompson	10	10
Yuko Tonai-Moore	10	10
Anna Wilson	10	10
Kerry Wilson	10	9
<b>Coopted members</b>		
Stuart Woodward (from November 2021)	9	9

- 1.5 Business for the Standing Committee is generated by developing issues in the life of the church and society as well as referrals from the Assembly, Assembly agencies, synods, presbyteries, and from Standing Committee members. In addition, the Standing Committee exercises oversight of the work of the Agencies and in particular monitors performance of Boards to which it has delegated significant authority; as well as taking responsibility for ensuring the responsible management of finance and risks in the Assembly. The Standing Committee investigates risk at its meetings through reviewing its Risk Appetite Statement, Risk Register and summaries of the risk registers of the agencies (AFARC reviews agency risk registers in detail).
- 1.6 Following decisions made at the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly, a major area of work for the Standing Committee was the Act2 Project, which actioned the resolutions from the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly regarding the urgent work of what is required for the future of the Uniting Church. Additionally, significant work following decisions at the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly regarding continuing witness, climate justice, preventing harm from sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts (SOGICE), moving forward in being a multicultural church and reviewing Section 5 of the Regulations also contributed to the Standing Committee's agenda. All of these will be discussed in more detail later in this report.
- 1.7 In addition to these major calls on its time the Standing Committee has also addressed itself to the referrals from the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly and other matters brought to it from within the life of the church.
- 1.8 Standing Committee minutes have been edited to remove items determined by ASC to remain confidential and are currently being processed for upload to the Assembly's illuminate document portal.

## 2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF THE 16<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY

- 2.1 Of the significant amount of work referred to the Standing Committee from the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly, most was attended to and completed. Some outstanding items or items in progress are as follows:
- 2.2 **Apology to LGBTIQ+ Australians** (Assembly minute 18.30). **Add outcomes from the March 2024 ASC meeting.**
- 2.3 **A call to action for climate justice: listening to First Peoples wisdom** (Assembly minute 22.06). While some parts of this resolution were enacted, the ongoing work by the Net Zero Emissions Working Group established by the Standing Committee will report to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly as requested.
- 2.4 **Preventing Harm from Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Change Efforts (SOGICE).** (Assembly minute 22.11) The Standing Committee established a Task Group to develop a process

to provide a national resource for congregations, agencies, and individuals to learn how they can help prevent harm from SOGICE ideology and practice. The work of the Task Group is ongoing.

### 3. ARISING FROM THE 16<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY

3.1 All resolutions of the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly where the Assembly resolved to undertake certain action were put into effect, apart from those identified in Section 2 of this report. Those matters that were referred to the Standing Committee for implementation are reported in the following section of the report.

3.2 **Amendments to Regulations.** There was one decision by the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly approving amendments to the Regulations, and to delegate to the Standing Committee the ability to review and approve changes to Section 5 of the Regulations (see Section 13 of this report). The Assembly Legal Reference Committee suppng Committee with expertise and wisdom in drafting the Regulations that were approved by the Standing Committee. In addition, there was 1 Presidential Ruling plus several other requests that did not lead to a Ruling (complete this sentence after March 2024 ASC meeting).

3.3 **Continuing Witness.** (Assembly minute 22.05) The Standing Committee in response to this resolution requested the Assembly Communications Unit to work with the Task Group to develop consultation resources for Presbyteries, Congregations and members to consider The Confession of Belhar, Laudato si' and The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification for reception as continuing witnesses between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Assemblies. This work was completed. Synods were encouraged to promote the resources so that the Task Group could bring a report to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly.

3.4 **Aging and Aged Care.** (Assembly minute 22.08) This resolution was reported in Assembly communication channels, and distributed resources for Older Peoples Sunday. <<https://unitingcare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Older-Persons-Sunday-Worship-Resources-2022.pdf>>

3.5 **Deacons in the UCA Anniversary.** (Assembly minute 22.09) In response to this resolution the General Secretary wrote to Uniting Church Theological Colleges emphasising that the current 'Standards for Education and Formation of Candidates for Ordination - Phase 2' requires that 'due attention be given to the different perspectives of Ministry of Deacon and Ministry of the Word' (Clause 15), and reminding them of the need to provide specific courses, formation and field placements for Deacon candidates to prepare them for diaconal ministry. The Standards for Ministries Committee will include a question regarding courses, formation and field placements for Deacon in the consultations carried out with the Ministerial Education Boards, will include in their report to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly any work or outcomes as a result of this resolution.

3.6 **Moving Forward in Being a Multicultural Church** (Assembly minute 22.10). The Being a Multicultural Church and Transforming Worship Advocates and Panels worked together to develop resources for Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday. <<https://uniting.church/intercultural-neighbouring-sunday-2023/>> The General Secretary wrote to Synod General Secretaries encouraging Synod Placement Committees and Presbytery Pastoral Relations Committees to review and revise the Minister Leadership Profile Form and Congregation Placement Profile and other key reporting and review documents to reflect the ethos and characteristics expressed in Living with the Neighbour Who is Different (9<sup>th</sup> Assembly, 2000) and One Body Many Members: Living faith and life cross culturally (13<sup>th</sup> Assembly, 2012). The requests in the resolution to to consider an approach to move towards simpler, friendlier, and more equitable church structures, processes, and ways of working that foster CALD participation and intercultural partnership; and to undertake a review of the national property policy for the UCA following any relevant work by Act2 were included in the Act2 Project.

## 4. ACT2: ON THE WAY

- 4.1 Following the consideration of the Act2 report, the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly (Assembly minute 22.04) resolved to recognise the urgency of the work and request the Assembly to continue the work, bringing a report and associated recommendations to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly.
- 4.2 The Standing Committee, in order to progress this significant work for the Uniting Church, established the Act2 Steering Committee, approved its Terms of Reference and its membership. Each Synod was asked to nominate a member for the Steering Committee; and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress were able to appoint two members. The President chaired the Steering Committee
- 4.3 The General Secretary made Assembly resources, including financial resources available for the establishment of the Act2 Project Unit as agreed to by the Standing Committee. Synods were also requested to provide strategic and planning work already undertaken to inform the project; and some Synods financially contributed to the budget for the final year of the Act2 Project.
- 4.4 The Act2 Project reported on progress to each meeting of the Standing Committee throughout the triennium. Its report to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly is [Report ?](#).

## 5. VOICE TO PARLIAMENT

- 5.1 At the March 2023 meeting of the Standing Committee the following resolutions were made concerning the proposed change in the Australian Constitution to recognise an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament:

*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*

*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;*

*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;*

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

*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*

*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.*

- 5.2 The Assembly Resourcing Unit and the Assembly Comms unit worked tirelessly alongside a large collaborative team from Synods, Assembly and Synod Agencies and other ecumenical and civil society organisations and networks in order to support and advocate for the 'Yes' vote.

## 6. ADDITIONAL WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

- 6.1 **Resignation of the General Secretary.** The Standing Committee was advised of the resignation of the General Secretary in August 2023. In November 2023, the Standing Committee advised the President to appoint Rev Lindsay Cullen to the role of General Secretary (interim) from the beginning of 2024 until an appointment is made by the 17th Assembly.
- 6.2 **Ecumenical Dialogues.** The Standing Committee approved revised Terms of Reference and members for the Executive Council of Australian Jewry – Uniting Church in Australia dialogue, and the Lutheran Church of Australia – Uniting Church in Australia dialogue.
- 6.3 **Holy Communion in Online Settings.** In March 2022, the Standing Committee considered a report provided by the Holy Communion in Online Settings Task Group, and resolved to recognise the ways in which the Uniting Church has received the gift of Holy Communion in online settings, and abstaining from Holy Communion while worshipping online. It encouraged the Church to continue this period of creative, contextual theological exploration and celebration and to allow the continuation of online gatherings for Holy Communion.
- 6.4 **Chaplaincy Task Group.** The Chaplaincy Task Group produced a report with a number of important recommendations regarding the preparation of Chaplains, the role of Chaplains and processes and pathways relevant to Chaplaincy. The ASC determined that the best course of action was to refer these recommendations to the Standards for Ministries Committee. That Committee has subsequently recruited members for a “Chaplaincy sub-committee” and is working through the recommendations.
- 6.5 **Disability Royal Commission National Task Group.** The Disability Royal Commission National Task Group continued its work in this triennium, following the establishment of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. The National Task Group as well as monitoring the work of the Royal Commission and any involvement from Uniting Church agencies, acknowledged the importance of considering theological perspectives on disability and included this into its agendas. It also set up a Working Group to develop some Overarching Principles for the work and activities of the Uniting Church. This significant work will be completed in 2024. The Royal Commission handed down its final report and recommendations in September 2023.
- 6.6 **The Church in the Digital Age Task Group.** The Church in the Digital Age Task Group provided an extensive report on current practices, barriers and opportunities regarding the use of digital communities and gatherings for worship, community building and mission. Subsequently the ASC commissioned the Transforming Worship and Discipling the Next Generation Circles to come up with some guidelines and descriptions of best practice in this area. The ASC asked that this document be made available for wider sharing and can be found [<insert the URL>](#).

## 7. EXERCISING OVERSIGHT OF ASSEMBLY AGENCIES AND COMMITTEES

- 7.1 The Standing Committee has invested significant effort in the preparation for, and conduct of, regular meetings with Board and Committee Chairs and National Directors ensuring that rigorous attention is given to the oversight of delegated Boards and Committees. During this triennium the Standing Committee worked through a schedule for reporting to it by Assembly agencies and committees according to a common reporting framework. Included in this framework is governance

documentation, risk, governance and compliance, financial status, policy, public profile, delivery on Strategic Plans and operational matters.

- 7.2 There is more detailed and regular oversight of the finances and risks in individual areas of operation via the work of the Assembly Audit, Finance and Risk Committee. The Standing Committee continued oversight of its risk register for its own areas of responsibility and it is provided at each meeting of the Standing Committee for consideration and review. During the triennium the Standing Committee considered its Risk Appetite Statement, and reviewed the risk register in line with the Statement.
- 7.3 The task of continually improving governance capacity in the Standing Committee is key to the effective work of the Standing Committee. Standing Committee pays attention to expanding the source of people who can be identified for serving on Assembly bodies in an attempt to add diversity and deepen the skill mix available for the work of these groups. Additionally, Standing Committees underwent an extensive orientation and several training sessions on the nature and role of governance.
- 7.4 The Standing Committee Governance Advisory Committee met regularly following each meeting of the Standing et Committee, which has been beneficial for the work of the Standing Committee.

## **8. COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

- 8.1 The pandemic and its impacts continued into this triennium of the Assembly's work. A significant impact was seen in the decisions that the previous Standing Committee made to hold the meeting of the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly over two meetings, an online meeting in 2021 and a reconvened in-person meeting in 2022. The new Standing Committee met online for three meetings at the beginning of the triennium due to the pandemic.
- 8.2 The Standing Committee was briefed about operational impacts as they occurred in order to resource the governance oversight that it has of the Assembly.

## **9. PRESIDENTIAL RULINGS**

- 9.1 There have been no Presidential Rulings to date, however there may be one coming to the March 2024 ASC for approval. If this is the case, insert information here or delete this section.

## **10. ASSEMBLY FINANCE**

- 10.1 Following on from the previous triennium, the Assembly has continued to attend to robust budget and cost controls in order to move to a more financially sustainable future. The oversight, advice and wisdom of members of thcoe Assembly Finance Audit and Risk Committee, and the Assembly Investment Advisory Committee; as well as the commitment of Assembly executive leaders have continue to building the foundations for this important goal. The detailed report regarding Assembly finance is provided as document **[add number]**
- 10.2 Standing Committee appreciates the generous financial contributions from the Synods towards the Assembly budget for each of the three years of 2021-2024. This support continues to be given when resources across the Church are under significant stress and need to be wisely managed and distributed.
- 10.3 During this triennium, the Assembly has also had to face financial challenges. The responsibility that the Assembly has, to pay redress to survivors of historical sexual abuse remains an important commitment. Provisioning for these payments has been a significant undertaking in order to meet this responsibility. COVID-19 continued to impact on all parts of the Assembly for part of this

triennium. The Standing Committee received regular updates on these challenges, and the Assembly Finance Audit and Risk Committee also scrutinized the risks and financial impacts, providing advice to the Standing Committee. In order to consider the future financial sustainability of the Assembly, the Standing Committee established the Assembly Secretariat Financial Sustainability Working Group.

## **11. EXEMPTIONS FROM THE OPERATION OF REGULATIONS**

- 11.1 From time to time the Standing Committee is asked to exercise its authority under Regulation 3.10.1 to approve alternate Regulations and/or exemptions from Regulations for particular bodies.
- 11.2 During the last triennium there were **three** requests for exemption to the operation of the Regulations.
- 11.3 An exemption from Regulation 3.7.4.1(a)(i) was granted to the Queensland Synod in order that the ex-Moderator served on the Synod Standing Committee for a period of one year after their moderatorial term ends.
- 11.4 An exemption from Regulation 3.6.3.3 was granted to the Northern Synod in order that the Northern Synod Standing Committee could make a normal five-year appointment of a General Secretary.
- 11.5 An exemption from Regulation 3.6.3.3(a) was granted to the Northern Synod to allow the Northern Synod Standing Committee to appoint a new General Secretary on the recommendation of the Joint Nominating Committee.
- 11.6 **Add a section and update number above if one or both of the requests to the March 2024 meeting are approved.**

## **12. AMENDMENTS TO THE REGULATIONS**

- 12.1 Regulations 3.8.7(c) and 3.8.7€ were amended to update requirements for the audit of small congregations financial statements.
- 12.2 **Include review of Section 5 of the Regulations in accordance with decisions made at March 2024 ASC meeting.**

## **13. STAFF MATTERS**

- 13.1 During the course of this triennium, the Standing Committee received the resignation of Rob Floyd as Associate General Secretary, and appointed Rev Lindsay Cullen into the role; received the resignation of Jannine Jackson as National Director of Frontier Services, and appointed Rob Floyd into the role; received the resignation of Colleen Geyer as General Secretary and advised the President to appoint Rev Lindsay Cullen to the role of General Secretary (interim) until an appointment of General Secretary is made by the 17th Assembly. The Act2 Project Unit was added to the Secretariat, with Andrew Johnson recruited as the Project Lead. Four staff (2.6 FTE) resourced the Act2 work.

## **14. BUSINESS PASSED TO THE NEXT STANDING COMMITTEE**



- 14.1 The outgoing Standing Committee has provided a number of suggestions for attention and action by the incoming Standing Committee arising from its work on governance and other matters.

**15. FUTURE MEETING DATES**

- 15.1 The incoming Standing Committee elected by the Seventeenth Assembly will hold its first two meetings in Sydney on August 30-September 1 and November 22-24.