



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

**15 – 17 March 2024**

**DOCUMENT 19**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Assembly Resourcing Unit, Mission and Ministry, including Circles of Interest</b>
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	Information
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	Assembly Resourcing Unit, Mission and Ministry Assembly Advocates
Purpose	To inform the ASC of the activities of the ARU M&M including the Circles of Interest.
Rationale & Findings Summary	
Attachments	
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: 1. Receives the report.
Submitted by	Rev Lindsay Cullen, Assembly Associate General Secretary

## **Introduction**

Since the last time the Assembly Resourcing Unit, Mission and Ministry reports (March 2023), the largest change has been the recruitment of two National Consultants and a part-time Policy and Advocacy Officer, following a longer than desirable period during which the Associate General Secretary was the only member of this team. Thankfully, in mid-August, Raúl Sugunanathan joined the team and Rev Dr Sunny Chen and Rev Kath Behan began in November. A key focus for the team therefore has been the process of orientation and a series of meetings with stakeholders right across the Church. The process of team building has been further complicated by the fact that the Associate General Secretary has had to move into the role of General Secretary (Interim), which has necessitated a significant degree of briefing during the period of November and December, and joint responsibilities from 1 January 2024.

Throughout this time, despite resource constraints, the ARU (M&M) has continued to speak at Church services, visit National Conferences, work collaboratively with Comms on content for National Update and Socials, has engaged with ecumenical and UCA justice forums and groups, and continued to communicate regarding aspects of our core Identity (as outlined in the Assembly Strategic Plan) with the wider Church.

## **The Voice Referendum**

This was a particular focus of the team's work for about 6 months leading up to the referendum in October. In concert with the Comms Unit, members of the team spoke at congregations, developed FAQs in PDF and Powerpoint forms, ran workshops, hosted online seminars, wrote pieces for National Update and social media, and organized a nation-wide Vigil service on the evening before the referendum.

While the outcome was not what any of us had desired or worked for, nonetheless there was a sense that we had worked collaboratively and strategically in a way which was powerful and a model for further projects and focus areas.

## **Circles of Interest**

The ARU (M&M and Comms) met with the Advocates on two occasions since our last report, once in June 2023 (online) and once in February 2024 (face to face). These meetings are always greatly appreciated by the Advocates, especially the chance to discuss together as Advocates, the possibilities for joint projects and opportunities to collaborate. For example, a couple of the events organized during the Voice campaign arose from Advocates of different Circles sharing ideas and planning together.

At the most recent meeting with the ARU, Advocates were asked to prepare notes of achievements and challenges for this report.

1. Walking Together with 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> people (Alison Overeem)
  - Challenge to get the panel together, quite a big portfolio to carry as an Advocate
  - Last year was the year of campaign; this year we contemplate about where to now, reflecting on whether campaign works well
  - Disappointed by merely 360 members on the Circle given the preamble of the UCA
  - The pain within the Circle after the Referendum

- Thankful for the support of the Assembly
  - After attending last week's Melbourne's Indigenous Conference, this Circle should be the heart of what we do as a Church
2. Discipling the Next Gen (Nia Lavaki)
- The Circle was dormant with nothing happening last year;
  - Not sure what the Circle is meant to be doing
  - The complexity of not simply doubling up work done by Synods / Presbyteries
  - Organising national events could be a focus, but seeming issues of funding
  - There are differences between children, youth, young adult, and young families, putting all into a single circle might not be the best way
  - Social media: few people post, younger people are not interested in FB
3. Working for Justice (Alex Sangster)
- Last year, we focused on The Voice, Gaza is a current focus
  - As an Advocate, to gather the Circle is challenging, as there is nothing on which for the members to work together (unlike Alex's previous Transforming Worship role during the Pandemic, there was a strong focus to produce works)
  - Keen to move to doing justice than just merely sharing information
4. Growing in Faith (Liam Miller)
- Circle hosted an invitation to studying and discussing the BoU, with a small response
  - Cultivating a theological culture but struggling with both numbers and focus for work
  - Reference from ASC with a focus on sacraments, church in the digital age, however after early discussion, it was a struggle to find people to do the work
  - Also connected with and gave input to Act2
  - Liam is also wrestling with other commitments and family life and looking after the Circle whilst starting a new placement
  - Some people miss the Working Group model (long term focus on certain important works) and feel a lost of identity, but at the same time, when a project / focus is suggested, people are spread too thin to contribute greatly
5. Seeking Common Ground (Matt)
- The Circle only real focus is the FB page and occasional posting
  - Also, Ecumenism and Interfaith work are areas that have been struggling across the Church in almost all Synods
  - Panel currently has only 2 members
  - Interfaith has been a huge problem for the past 6 months, relationships with Muslims and Jewish have been challenging; a key member of the Jewish-UCA dialogue passed away
  - The time before and after the Assembly will remain difficult due to the world's situation
  - Matt has decided to put his effort into sustaining, energizing the Jewish-UCA dialogue, as previous co-chair, Tara Curlewis has needed to step down after her relocation to Rome
6. Being a Multicultural Church (Paul Goh)
- Paul has been on the Panel since the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly

## Assembly Resourcing Unit, Mission and Ministry

- Since COVID, he has been collaborating with the Assembly, including organizing webinars
- Implementation of the Intercultural Neighboring Sunday to celebrate the 1985 Declaration was successful
- Last year, the production of the Celebration Guide, an outcome of the collaboration of the Circle, Panel and the Assembly
- The Panel has 6 members; one SA; one WA; one NSW/ACT; one VICTAS; two in QLD; none in Northern Synod
- Only VICTAS has 2 positions for multicultural ministry; no staffing in other Synods (although NSW/ACT now moving towards a Intercultural Church team)
- Meeting frequency: sometimes bimonthly
- Keen to work with other Circles: Walking with First and Second People, Working in Justice
- As at 1 February 2024 there are 300 FB members;
- Paul, after attending the Indigenous Conference; wonders about the possibility of engaging in international collaboration / conference, e.g. United Church in Canada
- Paul has been with the ACT2 project Steering Committee

### 7. Transforming Worship (Jon Humphries)

- One of the most active Circle FB pages, with 1300 members and regular posting from panel and other members
- Developed an order of service for Frontier Services
- Developed resources last year for Uniting in Prayer and we are currently looking to revising them for this year
- Seeking to recruit new members for Panel
- [NOTE – Jon was not present at our Advocates meeting but sent these dot points in prior to the meeting. Jon has also provided a longer report which can be sent to ASC members upon request.]

Members of ASC will recognise that some of the challenges to which Advocates refer have been noted repeatedly over the past Triennium and represent questions sometimes raised by members of ASC about the ways in which Circles are working well and ways that they are not working as hoped. The new ARU (Mission and Ministry) team has determined to have a focus on strengthening the work of Circles, and have done some preliminary investigation and thinking, which will be shared with the ASC in due course, after further planning and testing has occurred within the team and in concert with the Advocates and Panels.

Lindsay Cullen

Associate General Secretary