

Uniting Church in Australia

ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE

MARY MACKILLOP PLACE, NORTH SYDNEY

15 – 17 March 2024

PRESENT Sharon Hollis (President), James Aaron, Sandy Boyce, David Busch, Lindsay Cullen, Michael Dobson, David Fotheringham, Mark Kickett, Richard La'Brooy, Nicole Mugford, Alison Overeem, Deidre Palmer, Catherine Pepper, Roberta Stanley, Charissa Suli, Lilliani Tahaafe-Williams, Geoff Thompson, Yuko Tonai-Moore, Anna Wilson, Kerry Wilson, Stuart Woodward.

In attendance: Jenny Bertalan, Jane Fry, Philip Gardner, Mark Lawrence, Adam McIntosh, Lara Regan and Andrew Williams.

AGENDA DISCUSSION

The elected members of the Assembly Standing Committee gathered on Friday afternoon to discuss the Agenda of the meeting. The President led this conversation.

WELCOME AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The President acknowledged the First Peoples of the land on which the meeting took place then welcomed Leo Iosifidis for matters related to the Assembly Audit, Finance and Risk Committee report including the Project Possum report, Risk Management report; Andrew Johnson for matters related to the Act2 report; Lin Hatfield Dodds for matters related to the LQGTIQ+ Apology Task Group report; Heather den Houting and Malcolm Gledhill for matters related to the Regulations Review Task Group report; Rachel Kronberger for matters related to the Continuing Witness Task Group report; Rob McFarlane for matters related to the Standards for Ministry Committee report; Richard Arnold for matters related to the Toward Zero Emissions Working Group report; Liam Miller for matters related to the Growing in Faith Circle of Interest report; Anna Grant-Henderson for matters related to the UCA-Lutheran Dialogue report.

WORSHIP Mark Kickett conducted the Friday night worship and on Friday and Saturday night the closing prayer was offered through The Examen video, Charissa Suli led the Saturday morning worship, the Sunday morning worship was delivered by Deidre Palmer and the closing worship with Holy Communion was offered by the President.

APOLOGIES

24.01 **It was resolved** to receive the apology of Linda Driver for the whole meeting, Catherine Pepper for Friday, James Aaron for Sunday afternoon.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The General Secretary spoke to the agenda and timetable as listed in Document 1.

24.02 **It was resolved to** approve the timetable and agenda of the meeting as outlined in Document 1, noting that the committee is free to vary the agenda at any time.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

24.03 It was resolved to confirm the minutes of the meeting held 10-12 November 2023 and those of the meeting held 18 December 2024.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

24.04 It was resolved to:

- a) note:
 - (i) Stuart Woodward's conflict of interest in relation to Document 12 - Assembly General Secretary's Report since includes a proposal relating to extending his term as member and Chair of the Assembly Finance, Audit and Risk Committee; and
 - (ii) resolve that he be present for the discussion of this business then leave prior to decision making; and

- b) note:
 - (i) Stuart Woodward's conflict of interest in relation to Document 14 - Report on Preparations for the 17th Assembly since it foreshadows the possible co-option by the Assembly Standing Committee of a member of the Assembly Finance, Audit and Risk Committee to be a member of the 17th Assembly and Stuart, as the Chair of AFARC is the likely nominee; and
 - (ii) resolve that he be present for the discussion of this business then leave prior to decision making.

NOTE CONSTITUTION CLAUSE 39

The Standing Committee members were reminded of the Constitution clause 39, as per ASC minute 00.71:

"On matters which, by a two thirds majority vote, the Assembly deems to be vital to the life of the Church, the Assembly shall seek the concurrence of the Synods and/or Presbyteries and/or Congregations as the Assembly may determine."

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The ex-President took the chair while the President spoke to Document 3, consisting of a report on her activities since the November 2023 meeting of the Standing Committee.

24.05 It was resolved to receive the report (Attachment A).

UAICC REPORT

Mark Kickett presented Document 4, consisting of a report on the conversations UAICC had and the actions they took.

24.06 It was resolved to receive the report. (Attachment B)

BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS STANDING COMMITTEE

1. **Assembly Audit, Finance and Risk Committee Report Including Project Possum (ASC Minute 24.68)**

Stuart Woodward and Leo Iosifidis spoke to Document 10, consisting of a report on the management of finance, audit, and risk issues across the Assembly with special regard to Project Possum which had seen significant progress.

24.07 It was resolved to receive the report.

2. Continuing Witness Task Group Report (ASC Minute 22.43.01)

Rachel Kronberger introduced Document 8, consisting of the final report of the Continuing Witness Task Group to the 17th Assembly.

24.08 It was resolved to:

24.08.01 approve the proposed report to the Assembly to be forwarded to the 17th Assembly;

24.08.02 approve the proposals for the 17th Assembly as amended by the ASC to be forwarded along with the report;
and noting that the intended process of feedback did not eventuate, request that in the planning of the Assembly meeting consideration is given to the following means of resourcing the discernment during the meeting:
use of the some of the liturgical material already prepared by the Task Group;

24.08.03 use the questions prepared and intended for the Presbytery process as a basis for formulating the questions to be asked in Working Groups;

24.08.04 request the ARU to ensure that the short video endorsements of the three documents are completed and added to the existing Continuing Witness page of the Assembly website as early as possible; and

24.08.05 thank and discharge the Continuing Witness Task Group.

3. LGBTIQ+ Apology Task Group Report (ASC Minutes 24.56 and 24.71.02)

Lin Hatfield-Dodds and Warren Talbot presented Document 6, consisting of a report on the possible next steps to be reported at the Seventeenth Assembly.

24.09 It was resolved to:

24.09.01 receive the report;

24.09.02 approve the establishment of a Pride Circle, Advocate and Panel;

24.09.03 request the General Secretary to bring to the August 2024 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee proposed nominees for Advocate and Panel, along with draft Terms of Reference for ongoing work (related to a 'living apology') to be done by the Panel, based on items 5 and 6 of the Apology to LGBTIQ Australians Task Group report to the March 2024 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee and ensuring a trauma informed approach is embedded in the Terms of Reference.

FROM ASSEMBLY BODIES

1. Act2 Report

Andrew Johnson presented Documents 5, 5A, 5B and 5C, consisting of a report of the Act2 Project for the 17th Assembly including proposals for

consideration by the 17th Assembly '*Act2: The Gift of the Spirit*', the Integrated Roadmap and a Legal Advice Update/

24.10 It was resolved to:

- 24.10.01 receive the report including *Act2: The Gift of the Spirit*;
- 24.10.02 submit the revised report *Act2: The Gift of the Spirit* to the 17th Assembly including the revised proposals within Chapter 7 for consideration by the 17th Assembly;
- 24.10.03 authorise the Act2 Steering Committee to revise *Act2: The Gift of the Spirit* to reflect the revised proposals above in Stream C of Chapter 7, of *Act2: The Gift of the Spirit*;
- 24.10.04 request the General Secretary to arrange for further work to be undertaken to:
- a) produce a revised budget for the implementation of the revised proposals, noting the commitment to produce an indicative budget by the date of the publication of the report;
 - b) investigate potential sources of funding in order to resource the 17th Assembly meeting; and
 - c) report to the Assembly Standing Committee on the revised budget and potential sources of funding by August 2024; and
- 24.10.05 request the Act2 Project to bring any amendments to the Constitution to the April 2024 meeting of the ASC that would assist in the implementation of the proposals contained within Stream A (Life Giving Communities of Faith and Discipleship) of Chapter 7 of *Act2: The Gift of the Spirit*.

2. Assembly Resourcing Unit and Circles of Interest Reports Including Growing in Faith Circle of Interest on Holy Communion

The General Secretary spoke to Document 19, consisting of a report on the activities of the Assembly Resourcing Unit and Circles of Interest and Liam Miller presented Document 19A, consisting of a report from the Growing in Faith Circle following the referral of questions arising from the Church in the Digital Age report.

24.11 It was resolved to:

- 24.11.01 receive the reports; and
- 24.11.02 request the General Secretary to invite the Growing in Faith Circle of Interest to do any further work arising from the paper presented at the March 2024 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee.

3. Assembly Risk Management

Leo Iosifidis presented Document 10, consisting of an update to the Risk Management System and Framework of the Assembly. Documents 10A, 10B and 10C contained the risk appetite statement, dashboard/heatmap reporting of risks, risk register from the November 2023 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee and the Assembly Standing Committee's risk governance principles.

- 24.12 It was resolved to** receive the report.

4. Climate Action Plan Report

The General Secretary introduced Document 20, consisting of a progress report and recommendations on the way forward.

24.13 It was resolved to:

- 24.13.01 receive the report;
- 24.13.02 request the Toward Net Zero Steering Group to consult with each Agency and the Secretariat/Assembly Resourcing Unit to enable a better understanding of appropriate targets and best practice measurement and recording tools for tracking these goals;
- 24.13.03 request each Board and the General Secretary to work individually on a tailored Climate Action Plan for that part of the Assembly;
- 24.13.04 request the General Secretary to bring a report detailing the outcomes of this process to the November 2024 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee;
- 24.13.05 ensure that the shortfall in our emissions reduction is covered through purchase of an offset; and
- 24.13.06 seek the help of an expert to re-baseline the Assembly 2019 emissions.

5. General Secretary Report

The General Secretary presented Document 12, consisting of a report on the Assembly's progress against Strategic Plan, operations and issues relevant to its work.

24.14 It was resolved to receive the report.

6. Lutheran-UCA Dialogue Terms of Reference

Anna Grant-Henderson presented Documents 16 and 16A, consisting of the proposed new Terms of Reference for the Lutheran -UCA Dialogue and a letter from the UCA dialogue team regarding the future of the Lutheran-UCA Dialogue.

24.15 It was resolved to approve the Terms of Reference for the UCA-Lutheran Dialogue.

7. Regulations Review Report

Heather den Houting and Malcolm Gledhill introduced Document 7, consisting of a report on the Regulations Review process, Document 7A, consisting of the draft Revised Discipline Regulations and Document 7B, consisting of the Amended Framework of Principles

24.16 It was resolved to:

- 24.16.01 receive the report;
- 24.16.02 approve the revised Discipline Regulations materially as amended by the Assembly Legal Reference Committee, for use from 1 Jan 2025;
- 24.16.03 request the Assembly Legal Reference Committee, in consultation with the Regulations Review Task Group to give consideration to whether a specific clause should be added to Regulation 5.1, the definitions concerning procedural fairness, with respect to the principle of timeliness, and bring a report by the August ASC meeting; and

- 24.16.04 request the General Secretary to facilitate with Synod General Secretaries, a plan for appropriate training and implementation for the revised Regulations to be enacted prior to 1st January 2025.

8. Standards for Ministry Committee Report

Robert McFarlane spoke to Document 11, consisting of a request for a change to Regulation 3.1.6 (j) (vii) and reporting on Ministerial Education Board/College responses to Assembly requests.

24.17 It was resolved to:

- 24.17.01 receive the report; and

- 24.17.02 approve the amendment to Regulation 3.1.6 (j) (vii) as detailed in the body of the report to be included in a report and proposal to the 17th Assembly.

9. Toward Net Zero Emissions Steering Group Report

Richard Arnold presented Document 18, consisting of a report and proposals from the Assembly Net Zero Emissions Steering Group for the 17th Assembly.

24.18 It was resolved to:

- 24.18.01 receive the report; and

- 24.18.02 recommend that the report and its proposals be sent to the 17th Assembly as part of the Assembly Standing Committee Report.

10. Uniting Church Adult Fellowship National Committee Winding up

The General Secretary spoke to Document 21, consisting of a report on the decisions taken at the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship National Gathering held in Adelaide, January 2024 and a request for some actions arising from this.

24.19 It was resolved to:

- 24.19.01 receive the report;

- 24.19.02 request the General Secretary to address the two issues highlighted by the UCAF report:

- a) how the relationship with the World Federation of Methodist & Uniting Church Women might be continued through one of the areas of the Assembly; and
- b) how the Joan Stott UCAF Bursary might be administered in the future;

- 24.19.03 request the Business Committee of the 17th Assembly to enable an appropriate acknowledgement and celebration of the work of the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship National Committee within the program of the Assembly.

GENERAL BUSINESS

1. Assembly Standing Committee Report to the 17th Assembly

The General Secretary introduced Document 15, consisting of report from the Assembly Standing Committee regarding its work over the current triennium to the Seventeenth Assembly.

24.20 It was resolved to:

24.20.01 receive the report; and

24.20.02 following any amendments, approve a final form of the report to be included in the reports to the Seventeenth Assembly.

2. Consent Agenda

The General Secretary presented the documents which constituted Document 2, Consent Agenda.

Lutheran-UCA Dialogue New Member Nomination

24.21 It was resolved to:

24.21.01 appoint Rev Sandy Boyce to the Lutheran-UCA Dialogue; and

24.21.02 request the General Secretary to write to Rev Denise Liersch thanking her for her service.

Appointment of Frontier Services Board Chair

24.22 It was resolved to:

24.22.01 receive the report from Frontier Services; and

24.22.02 appoint Rev Heather den Houting as Chair of the Frontier Services Board until the 17th Assembly.

3. Gaza/Israel Proposal

The General Secretary presented Documents 13 and 13A with Document 13 consisting of a proposal to enable the Assembly Standing Committee to make a response to the current situation in Israel-Gaza, which may provide a focus for advocacy by other Councils of the Church and which provides some direct invitations for action to members of the Uniting Church and Document 13A consisting of a letter from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania containing the resolutions passed by the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Standing Committee regarding the situation in Gaza.

24.23 It was resolved to:

24.23.01 note resolutions of the Assembly Standing Committee 08.29 and 11.33 and Assembly Resolution 15.35;

24.23.02 support the Middle East Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches in their advocacy concerning the Israel-Palestine conflict;

24.23.03 condemn all acts of brutality and atrocities committed, noting that such actions continue to form barriers to any efforts at peace;

24.23.04 welcome the efforts the Australian Government has made to see an end to the current escalation in the war between Israel and Hamas including by calling for a humanitarian ceasefire, the release of all hostages, and opposition to Israel's illegal settlements in Palestinian territories;

24.23.05 welcome the humanitarian assistance the Australian Government has provided to Palestinians and urge that the Australian Government continue to provide such funding to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza;

24.23.06 call on the Australian Government to:

- a) support the International Court of Justice's provisional measures for the prevention of genocide including calling for a sustained ceasefire, ending weapons exports to Israel and providing greater transparency over Australia's weapon exports;
- b) do all it can to facilitate a meaningful and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians and facilitate an end to atrocities and acts of brutality no matter who perpetrates them;
- c) provide financial assistance and political support to organisations working for a meaningful and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians; and,
- d) impose targeted sanctions on Israeli settlers responsible for serious human rights abuses against Palestinians;

24.23.07 call on the Government of Israel to:

- a) end its use of extrajudicial killings against suspected terrorists, and instead seek to bring suspects to trial in judicial processes that meet international standards;
- b) end impunity for members of the Israeli security forces and settlers that murder Palestinians and bring such people to justice in judicial processes that would meet international standards; and,
- c) abolish the practice of Administrative Detention that allows Palestinians to be imprisoned without knowing the charges against them or being able to contest the evidence used to imprison them;

24.23.08 encourage congregations to offer support and comfort to those who are living with grief and fear in their communities as a result of the current escalation in the conflict and acts of racial and religious hatred happening in Australia including by:

- a) praying for, listening to, and promoting the voices of those who are suffering;
- b) participating in events and actions in support of a just peace; and
- c) donating to the *Act For Peace* Gaza Emergency Appeal and *Palestinian Christians in Australia* accommodation Drive; and

24.23.09 write to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Australian Greens, the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, the Israeli Ambassador to Australia and the Head of the General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, to inform them of the clauses above.

4. 17th Assembly Preparations Including Co-options, President-elect Nominations

The General Secretary introduced Document 14, consisting of a report on preparations for the 17th Assembly, Document 14A containing a request from Synod of Victoria and Tasmania re President-elect Nominations, Document 14B containing a request from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania re youthful members. Deidre Palmer spoke to Document 14C, consisting of a report from the President-elect Nomination Committee.

24.24 It was resolved to:

24.24.01 receive the report;

- 24.24.02 in accordance with Regulation 3.10.1(a), provide a blanket exemption from Regulation 3.6.4.1(d) to the extent required to enable an extension of time for any valid Nominations for the President-Elect up until no later than 26th April 2024;
- 24.24.03 In accordance with Regulation 3.10.1(a), provide an exemption from Regulation 3.3.8(a)(iii)(3) to the extent required to allow for:
- a) fewer than one in ten 17th Assembly members appointed from within the bounds of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania to be of a youthful age; and
 - b) the 52 17th Assembly members beyond youthful age currently appointed, or their replacements should a current appointee become unavailable, from within the bounds of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania to remain eligible to be 17th Assembly members; and
- 24.24.04 approve the appointment of members to the 17th Assembly by Frontier Services, UnitingCare Australia and UnitingWorld (2 members each), and by Audit, Finance and Risk Committee, Assembly Legal Reference Committee and Standards for Ministries (1 member each); and
- 24.24.05 appoint as members of the 17th Assembly the people nominated by ASC members and subsequently confirmed by a majority of ASC members in an electronic ballot. (Attachment C)

CLOSURE

The meeting closed at 4:00pm with worship and Holy Communion led by the President.

DATES FOR 2024

30 AUGUST – 1 SEPTEMBER 2024
22 - 24 NOVEMBER 2024