



FRONTIER SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

Frontier Services is an Agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia (the Assembly).

The Mandate given to Frontier Services from the Assembly is:
to offer service and ministry in the name of Christ to remote Australia through compassionate care, justice and nurture of the spirit.

To live out this Mandate, Frontier Services is to:

- Maximise access to funds within and beyond the Uniting Church to support ministry and mission in remote areas;
- Work with Synods, Presbyteries and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress to facilitate ministry and mission in remote areas of Australia;
- Within its own life, act for reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous people in remote areas of Australia;
- Coordinate public benevolent activities which provide direct relief for those in the community who are isolated and/or subject to poverty, distress and other disadvantage;
- Ensure our services are provided without discrimination, with due regard to the dignity of the individual and with cultural sensitivity;
- Cooperate with other organisations to enrich and extend our work together; and
- Advocate on behalf of those in remote areas, where appropriate in cooperation with other agencies of the Uniting Church and with other organisations.

2. THE 16TH TRIENNIUM (JULY 2021 – JUNE 2024)

The three years since the 16th Assembly has seen a period of consolidation for Frontier Services in its role in supporting those living in remote parts of Australia and has shown that our work in supporting mission and ministry to rural and remote Australia remains as important as ever. We raise funds to support Bush Chaplaincy and through our Outback Links program we provide direct, tangible support to individuals and communities across the outback. We are privileged to hear of the many stories of the impact our Bush Chaplains and Outback Links volunteers have on individuals and communities across remote Australia.

The Agency has maintained a healthy financial position through the period and is extremely grateful to all our supporters for their ongoing commitment to our work and their financial support of our activities.

We continue to work closely with Synods and Presbyteries across Australia, providing financial and programmatic support for Bush Chaplaincy. Because of these partnerships across the church, Bush Chaplains continue to be a key element of the Uniting Church's mission. Living and working within their remote communities, they are the friendly visitor, the listening ear, the point of connection to other services, empathetic support, and practical helping hands of Frontier Services. Walking alongside people in both their struggles and joys, our Bush Chaplains share God's love through meeting immediate needs, building connection, resilience and community capacity.

At the time of writing, 20 Bush Chaplains in remote and rural areas were being funded and supported.

Greatly impacted during the COVID pandemic, we are encouraged to see our Outback Links volunteer program returning to strength and activity. We make sure that the hundreds of volunteers, ordinary people, who generously offer their time, energy, skills, and compassion are linked to people in need across the outback. This program continues to connect volunteers with remote farmers and communities who could do with an extra set of hands, offering both practical support and importantly, also offering friendship and connection.

Over the period, Frontier Services has undergone some changes in personnel at both the Board and staff levels, which will be recognised later in this report. The Agency has enjoyed a recent period of staffing stability, which provides a solid foundation and confidence for the new triennium.

3. STRATEGY

Developed early in the 16th triennium, Frontier Services' work had been led by a strategic plan that runs until June 2025. The plan focused on five key goals as follows:

1. Maintain a stable fundraising base and deliver an increase in revenue
2. Improve brand presence and provide platforms for the voice of those living in remote Australia
3. Efficient and strategic use of resources, ensuring appropriate stewardship of donor funds
4. Foster a committed, empowering and conducive work environment
5. Improve programmatic delivery to maximize our reach and impact across remote Australia.

To achieve the strategy, several key initiatives would be undertaken including:

- Growth in supporters and revenue, and new, diversified income streams
- Growth in numbers of Bush Chaplains and Outback Links volunteers
- Consolidation and improvement in organisational systems and processes that support the work

Pleasingly, in a difficult period marked by slow recovery from the COVID pandemic, ongoing severe climatic events and natural disasters, and a widely reported cost-of-living crisis, Frontier Services has managed to make progress in each of the above areas.

4. GOVERNANCE

Frontier Services is governed by a Board. The Board Chair is appointed by the Assembly in session, and by the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) in the event a vacancy arises between Assembly meetings. The Board members are appointed by the first ASC of each triennium and then in subsequent meetings if vacancies arise. Board members can be appointed for a maximum of three triennia or nine years.

Frontier Services maintains a skills matrix for the Board composition and is also mindful of the geographic distribution of members. The makeup of the Board and the changes that took place during the triennium are listed in the table below. Unless otherwise listed, members were appointed/reappointed at the start of the triennium.



Chair Lisa Sampson	resigned in December 2023
Deputy Chair Heather den Houting	interim Chair from December 2023 appointed as Chair in March 2024
Dorothy Creek	
Dianne Torrens	
Mark Kickett	
Sharon Lee	resigned in December 2022
Ben Cohen	
Tim Ford	
Renata Paliskis	appointed in December 2023
Stephen Webster	appointed in December 2023
Andrew Syme	appointed in January 2024
Colleen Geyer	ex officio as Assembly General Secretary (concluded December 2024)
Lindsay Cullen	ex officio as Assembly General Secretary (commenced January 2024)

Of particular note, the Chair, Lisa Sampson, who was appointed by the 16th Assembly, resigned in December 2023. Having been a Board member for eight years, and offering great leadership and service, Lisa concluded her tenure to allow a smooth transition for the next Chair. Rev Heather den Houting, the Deputy Chair, was appointed to the role by the March 2024 ASC.

Frontier Services also acknowledges with thanks the service given by Sharon Lee who resigned from the Board in 2022. We also acknowledge with thanks Dorothy Creek and Dianne Torrens who have come to the end of the nine years Board membership and are stepping down.

Aside from its triennial report to the Assembly, the Frontier Services Board reports annually to the ASC and also annually to the Assembly Finance Audit and Risk Committee. The Chair and the National Director compile these reports and present them to the relevant committee in person. Reports cover areas of Governance, Strategy, Finance, Risk and Program.

4. PUBLIC BENEVOLENT INSTITUTION

Frontier Services has Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) status. This allows us to offer tax deductibility on donations and is often a requirement in receiving trusts, grants or corporate funds. The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) defines a PBI as: *a type of charitable institution which is organised, conducted or promoted for the relief of poverty, sickness, destitution, helplessness, suffering, misfortune, disability or distress.*

This is important in terms of Frontier Services' capacity to raise funds and also guides the type of work we are required to undertake to fulfill our PBI status.



5. FINANCES

Frontier Services raises all its income. The majority comes from the generous donations of our supporters and also from bequests received from supporters of our work. This causes our income and expenditure to be somewhat unpredictable and uneven, with bequests in particular often received and accounted for in one year but expended across subsequent years. The number of donors and volume of donations have remained fairly consistent with modest growth in recent years. The number of bequests is also relatively consistent, although the total value can be skewed by one or two large gifts in a given year.

Frontier Services maintains the John Flynn Foundation (JFF), a Public Ancillary Fund. JFF has trustees appointed by the Frontier Services Board. Funds donated or bequeathed to JFF are invested per Assembly investment guidelines, with the income being directed to the ongoing support of Frontier Services' work.

In line with strategy, Frontier Services has developed its capacity to seek funds from charitable Trusts and Foundations. We have had some success in this, with funds received mostly for specific programmatic activity within the ministry area of a particular Bush Chaplain, or to deliver an Outback Links group volunteer activity.

Also in line with strategy, Frontier Services is developing a Corporate Partnership approach to build on our existing partnership with the National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA) based primarily in NSW and ACT. In its early stages, this approach seeks to explore common values, interests, and opportunities with corporations that share a rural and remote Australia focus.

It is important to recognise that cost-of-living pressures are impacting across the breadth of the work that we undertake. Recent years have seen rising inflation impact travel costs, resource costs as well as salaries and stipends. These rising costs are being experienced by our supporters as well, putting pressure on their capacity to support charitable organisations. Frontier Services' ability to grow fundraising to offset these cost increases, and also grow our program delivery is difficult. Diversifying income is one way to address this, however, it takes time and requires effort to build new relationships and trust with potential funding bodies.

6. OPERATIONS

National Director Jannine Jackson resigned from her role in September 2022 having joined in April 2017. She led the work of the Agency through a period of financial rebuilding, growing and consolidating the Agency's income and programs. She also offered strong leadership through COVID, when the organisation needed to find new ways of working and managing the challenges that arose.

Rob Floyd acted in the National Director role initially before being appointed permanently in March 2023.

Some changes in staffing were experienced during the COVID pandemic, but there has been a period of staff stability across the last 18 months.

In early 2024, Frontier Services relocated its offices from Parramatta to join the Assembly and UnitingWorld in 262 Pitt Street. This involves some shared facilities and the acquisition of a new meeting space suited to large meetings including Board meetings.

The opportunities for closer collaboration with other parts of the Assembly have already begun, and staff appreciate being close to the other parts of the Assembly.



It is important to recognise the important work and support we receive from the Assembly Services Unit, led by Leo Iosifidis. Having these shared services gives a wider breadth of expertise and capacity than Frontier Services would otherwise have.

7. REDRESS

Frontier Services joined the National Redress Scheme in 2019. The National Redress Scheme provides acknowledgment and support to people who experienced institutional child sexual abuse.

As at March 2024, Frontier Services has received and addressed a small number of historic claims and has no outstanding claims. The Board has set aside a provision for Redress and potential civil claims which is monitored at each meeting. The Board is satisfied that its provision is adequate to meet any future claims.

8. PROGRAMS - BUSH CHAPLAINS

The 20 Bush Chaplains we currently support cover five states and the Northern Territory, representing diverse geography and context. Importantly, the makeup of our Bush Chaplains has also diversified. Three of our Chaplains are First Peoples and six are women. Three of our Bush Chaplains during the last triennium have had a specific disaster recovery focus, relating to recovery following bushfires and a cyclone. Additionally, some other Chaplains have also been involved in recovery activities in their Remote Area Ministry in response to the growing number of disaster events being experienced across Australia. Over the triennium, the growth in Bush Chaplain numbers, diversity, and program focus has led to a growing range of activities and people being impacted by their work.

Frontier Services works closely with Synods and Presbyteries across Australia to ensure that each Bush Chaplain has strong support, connection with the wider UCA in their region, and the resources they need to fulfill their ministry. For some parts of the UCA, primarily those located in rural and remote areas of Australia and themselves facing personnel and resource challenges, overseeing the placement of Bush Chaplains is difficult. Some Bush Chaplaincies have a shared funding model while others are fully funded by Frontier Services. The capacity for Presbyteries and Synods to access alternative funding sources is also limited. Vacancies in Bush Chaplaincy roles have proven difficult to fill in some instances, and establishing new Bush Chaplaincies with the necessity of careful planning and commitment to both funding and oversight is challenging. The Board has developed clear criteria to assist in deciding new Bush Chaplaincy placements and funding requests.

The role Frontier Services can play in connecting Bush Chaplains and sharing learnings across the breadth of the UCA is important. To this end, Frontier Services has held retreats for Bush Chaplains as a chance for mutual sharing and learning to occur and important connections made across remote area ministries.

Reporting from the Bush Chaplains indicates their role is as important as ever. Often the only ministry presence for hundreds of kilometres, our Bush Chaplains meet with around 1000 individuals and families each quarter, while also participating in hundreds of community events and liturgical/worship activities. They report that key issues they encounter in their ministry include:

- Challenges relating to health care and lack of access to services - mental health, addiction, grief and loss, trauma
- Safety and security - housing and homelessness, domestic violence
- Social and community - relationships, parenting, aging, isolation, advocacy
- Environmental - unpredictable or extreme weather events including bushfires
- Economic and financial - cost of living, employment and unemployment
- First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities needing support
- Spiritual Care and Liturgical support



During the triennium, a number of our long-standing Bush Chaplains concluded their ministries. We offer thanks to the following Bush Chaplains for their years of excellent service.

Rev John Dihm - Pilbara

Rev Peter Wait - Tennant-Barkley

Rev Lindsay Parkhill - West Arnhem

As at March 2024, our current Bush Chaplains are as follows

Pastor Benjamin Quilliam - Centralian NT

Pastor Jill Doolan - APY East NT

Pastor Yanima Bryant - APY West NT

James Hughes - West Arnhem NT (Interim)

Pastor John Tomkins - Gascoyne WA

Rev David Jackson - Pilbara WA

Rev Erica Payne - Midwest WA

Rev Mitch Fialkowski - Murchison WA

Pastor Lindsay Ginn - Goldfields WA

Pastor Julia Lennon - Oodnadatta SA

Pastor Gary Ferguson - Ceduna SA

Rev Sunil Kadaparambil - Parkin-Sturt SA

Rev Veronica Bradley - Prom Country VIC

Rev Peter Harvey - Bush Fire Recovery East Gippsland VIC

Rev Marian Bisset - High Country VIC

Rev Noel Williams - Barwon NSW

Rev Dona Spencer - Bottle Tree QLD

Pastor Jenny Feldmeier - Cunnamulla Burke and Wills QLD

Pastor Joe Eka - Kennedy Qld

Pastor Michael Chapman - Carpentaria / McKay QLD

We also contribute to:

Rev Dr Stephen Robinson National Disaster Recovery Officer

Several additional Bush Chaplain roles are being discussed with the relevant Presbyteries/Synods.

9. PROGRAMS - OUTBACK LINKS

This volunteer program has two models of working.

The Year-round model provides a means for people in rural and remote Australia, mostly farmers, who need assistance, to contact Frontier Services and log a request. Frontier Services also maintains a database of volunteers, willing to travel to assist people in need.

Staff provide connection between people requesting support and our volunteers, manage compliance checks, assist in the organisation of volunteers to undertake the placement, and conduct a post-placement evaluation of both the support recipients and the volunteers. Volunteers typically provide their own transport and accommodation whilst they are in the placement. Over the triennium, volunteering tasks have included caretaking to give farmers a well-earned break, gardening, painting, cooking, general farm work, fencing, and child-minding. Often, however, the most important gift our volunteers offer is friendship and human connection.

The Group Trip model involves a group of volunteers, typically between 6 and 25 individuals, undertaking a volunteer placement in the same or nearby location at the same time. Aside from the work undertaken, this model also provides an opportunity for volunteers to interact with and support each other. The placement may involve working on some neighbouring properties, but also creates the opportunity to work on community facilities. Recently groups of volunteers worked on repainting a community hall and rejuvenating a community garden, as two examples. Staff organise the entire



placement and its logistics, manage compliance checks, assist in the organisation of volunteers to undertake the placement, and conduct a post-placement evaluation of both the support recipients and the volunteers. This model offers possibilities for engagement with a range of other groups including corporate partners looking to offer their staff or clients a unique experience.

The Outback Links program was significantly curtailed by the COVID pandemic but is growing again and continues to deliver powerful outcomes for individuals and their communities.

10. PROGRAMS - DISASTER RECOVERY

Frontier Services as an organisation does not respond immediately to natural disasters, however most of our Bush Chaplains are trained and involved in disaster recovery chaplaincy. To this end, we continue to fund part of the National Disaster Recovery Officer role, recognising the training and coordination that is required in that work.

Beyond this, through the ongoing work of Bush Chaplains and through the placements of Outback Links volunteers, we provide important pastoral and practical support, walking alongside communities recovering from disaster. This applies to the period often starting around three months after the disaster through until around three years following the disaster.

11. PROGRAMS - ADVOCACY

As a small agency with limited resources, the main advocacy role Frontier Services attempts to undertake is to listen to the voices of people in remote Australia and where we are able, provide them with opportunities to voice their concerns about the issues that impact their own lives and communities. In this regard, we collect and share the stories and views of people our Bush Chaplains and Outback Links volunteers are engaging with. We also conduct surveys across our supporters, volunteers, and particularly our support recipients to hear directly their concerns, challenges, and hopes. This provides us the opportunity to share these voices and stories through our own and other appropriate media channels.

12. STRATEGY

We are operating in a complex and rapidly changing world, as part of a rapidly changing Church. Our key strategies in the coming triennium are:

- Continue to grow and diversify our income streams
- Support and seek to grow the number of Bush Chaplains across Australia
- Expand our Outback Links program to broaden its reach and impact
- Continue to listen to the voices of people in remote Australia and look to maximise opportunities to share them
- Strengthen our processes and systems to ensure we are compliant with all external requirements and operating as effectively as possible

In conclusion, Frontier Services continues to offer an important ministry in the life of the Uniting Church. The funds we raise that support Bush Chaplains and Outback Links volunteers enable them to deliver real impact to individuals and communities in need across remote Australia. Our role, with and on behalf of the Uniting Church, in “standing with people in the bush” remains vital.

Rob Floyd - National Director

Rev Heather den Houting - Chair

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