

## Standards for Ministry Committee

### 1. BACKGROUND: HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE

The review of Assembly structures in 2018 resulted in a new Assembly committee, the Standards for Ministries Committee, which incorporated the work of the previous Education for Ministry Working Group and the Admission for Ministers Committee. The Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) established the Standards for Ministries Committee and adopted the mandate in Appendix A, minuted as ASC resolution 18.05.02. Members were appointed at the August 2018 ASC meeting in resolution 18.44.06. The Committee held its first meeting face-to-face in November 2018. The founding chairperson was Dr Kaye Roberts-Thomson.

During the initial online portion of its meeting in July 2021, the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly appointed the Rev Dr Robert McFarlane as chairperson. Since then, the Committee has met by Zoom four times each year before each ASC meeting. There are no face-to-face meetings of the Committee.

### 2. THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

SFM Committee members over the last triennium have been:

- Rev Fran Barber
- Dr Ross Chambers
- Pastor Joanna Drayton (resigned mid-term)
- Rev Ben Gilmour
- Rev Dr Paul Jones
- Rev Mark Kickett
- Rev Dr Cathie Lambert (since 2023)
- Dr Elaine Ledgerwood (resigned mid-term)
- Rev Scott Litchfield (since 2023)
- Rev Dr Robert McFarlane (Chairperson)
- Rev Helen Paine (resigned mid-term)
- Rev Jay Robinson
- Rev Dr Christine Sorenson (resigned mid-term)
- Rev Isabel Thomas Dobson
- Rev Dr Peter Walker
- Rev Dr Anne Wright (resigned mid-term)
- Rev Dr Sean Winter

The Committee is grateful for the close support of Assembly staff:

- Ms Anna Catliffe
- Rev Lindsay Cullen (until 2023)
- Rev Dr Sunny Chen (since 2023)

The work of the Committee has two areas of focus. The first is ongoing work fulfilling Assembly oversight responsibilities for Colleges and Synods' Ministerial Education Boards (MEBs) as set out in the Regulations. The second area is acting on Assembly and ASC resolutions.

### 3. FULFILLING ASSEMBLY'S OVERSIGHT RESPONSIBILITIES

In a broad sense, SFM is the vehicle by which Assembly exercises its oversight responsibilities as a Council of the church in the regulated area of setting standards for ministry education, and ensuring that those standards are met by Ministerial Education Boards (MEBs) and recognised Colleges.



One aspect of oversight is conducting a consultation every five years with each Synod. The purpose of the consultation is both to provide an opportunity for reflection and recommendations for MEBs and Colleges to consider, as well as to recommend to ASC whether to recognise the MEB/College as fulfilling appropriate standards and Regulations for lay and ordained Specified Ministries. With six Synods, that means one or two consultations every year in a five-year roster. These have all been conducted when due with the exception of NSW/ACT being overdue due to the designated team having become unable to fulfil their task. The most recent consultation was with the Northern Synod and we await the report of that consultation team. All Colleges and MEBs have been approved by ASC as meeting the Assembly's standards at each five-yearly interval. Due to the relational nature of such consultations, face-to-face visits have resumed after COVID necessitated Zoom-only for some.

SFM also facilitates twice-yearly gatherings of the chairs of the MEBs and, separately, the Heads of Colleges. These are times of mutual encouragement, reflection and enhancement of collaboration.

In past decades there have been National Theological Educators Gatherings every three years for faculty from all our Colleges. These are initiated by SFM and hosted by the relevant Synod College. After a COVID interruption, there has been one national gathering in Melbourne in December 2022 and there will be another in Darwin in July 2024. Each national gathering is preceded by a face-to-face Heads of Colleges gathering hosted by the SFM chairperson in collaboration with the local Head.

#### **4. NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE 16TH ASSEMBLY**

1. A major focus of MEBs, Colleges and the SFM Committee has been the response to COVID. A positive has been the major leap in video conferencing and other on-line learning. While the Northern Synod was not affected by lock-downs within the NT and WA as much as other jurisdictions and did not suffer a loss of student numbers, other Colleges have been significantly impacted. It had been anticipated that numbers would rebound, but this has not yet proven to be the case.

2. Our Colleges and other UCA agencies have grown remarkably in collaboration with one another. Examples include:

- NS phase 3 ministers participating in annual retreats led by the NSW/ACT Vital Leadership Team.
- WA candidates for ordained ministries enrolling in University of Divinity degrees through Pilgrim College (VicTas).
- The SA Uniting College for Leadership and Theology joining the University of Divinity as a member institute, having left Flinders University and the former Adelaide College of Divinity.
- Delivery of Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry and Intentional Interim Ministry training by trainers in VicTas equipping Leadership and Ministry (eLM), NSW/ACT Vital Leadership Team, and two volunteer trainers in Qld.

SFM rejoices in both the culture and practice of collaboration that exists across our Colleges and other agencies at this time.

3. Since 2016, Standards for Ministry have been defined by 14 attributes expected of ministers rather than Rules detailing six content areas. Noting both implementation time, and that candidates are typically in formation for three years, the impact of the change has only been apparent since approximately 2020. All MEBs and Colleges report that this change has been effective and well-embraced. In particular, there has been a continued move towards flexible pathways to ordination in both education and formation. More flexible pathways have also enhanced collaboration between Faculties and Presbyteries in formation panels.

4. SFM is pleased with the enhancement of Deacon education, as noted below.



## 5. ONGOING WORK

Current work being undertaken by the SFM includes:

- Initiating a review of the Codes of Ethics for Lay Preachers and Lay Leaders.
- Appointing a working group to document standards for chaplaincy training.
- Re-establishing a Ministry of Pastor Working Group.
- Further development of Phase 4 (continuing education) oversight.

## 6. ACTING ON ASSEMBLY AND ASC RESOLUTIONS

The 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly passed two resolutions with direct application to SFM.

22.09.04

*Note 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 draws the attention of UCA theological colleges to the need to provide specific courses, formation and field placements for Deacon candidates to prepare them for diaconal ministry.*

SFM has responded to this resolution in three ways:

1. Including a request for comment on specific diaconal education, formation and field education from each MEB in their annual report.
2. Appointed a Deacon with both ministry and education experience to the Committee.
3. Recommended that all Colleges adopt the Uniting College for Leadership & Theology (UCLT) program for Deacon formation. See below.

The MEBs reported on both the diverse practical ways in which they fulfil this requirement as well as the actual numbers of candidates. The number of candidates for MoD in our Synods range from 0-3, with only one Synod (VicTas) having reached 3 candidates at any one time across the three years of formation. Accordingly, each College provides a bespoke program for their MoD candidates developed collaboratively for each candidate, and in collaboration with formation panels which include Presbytery representation.

The Uniting College for Leadership and Theology (SA Synod) has picked up responsibility for the required Deacon Intensive, and developed a formal program with three diaconally-focussed subjects with integration into a Master of Social Work to support bi-vocational ministry. SFM has commend this to all our Colleges. Several with Deacon candidates are supporting them to participate, ensuring both quality and creating a critical mass. A number of Colleges have embraced this program.

SFM considers this an excellent improvement in the provision of Diaconal education, training and formation over the last triennium.

22.06.05

*To request the Standards for Ministry Committee to identify the most appropriate way to embed learning from the wisdom of First Peoples, care of creation, climate justice and the spiritual and theological basis for a zero emissions church into formation, education and training for the specified ministries of the Uniting Church and report back to the November 2022 meeting of the Assembly Standing Committee.*

SFM has responded to this resolution in two ways.





First, the MEBs were asked to comment in their annual report about how their current work reflects this request. All reported on various First Peoples programs, eg Walking on Country, and also on climate action. No College responded to the highly specific nature of the request.

Secondly, SFM responded to ASC by noting that Assembly and SFM do not direct Colleges as to curriculum, and that Colleges provide formation, education and training for the Specific Ministries according to the 14 attributes in the “Standards for Theological Education & Formation : Phase 2 for Ordained Ministries”, amended in February 2021 and received by ASC in March 2021. Further, the SFM Committee noted that there is no documented “theological basis for a zero emissions church” and invited ASC to appoint a working group to develop one, in addition to identifying the holders of such First Nations wisdom.

SFM was not able to act further on this resolution.

## 7. CONCLUSION

- Regulated oversight responsibilities of Assembly have been consistently fulfilled by SFM in the last triennium.
- Previous initiatives have been maintained, notably the shift to “attributes”.
- COVID had a positive impact on developing online learning, but an ongoing negative impact on numbers of students.
- Ongoing work, notably working groups, is limited by volunteer status of members, usually with full-time jobs.
- There is a strong and growing culture of and practice of collaboration across our Synods' Colleges.
- There has been a significant enhancement of Deacon education since the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly.

**Rev Dr Robert McFarlane**  
**Chairperson**  
**Standards for Ministry Committee**

