



UNITING CHURCH ADULT FELLOWSHIP NATIONAL COMMITTEE

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the report of the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship National Committee (UCAF NC) to the 16th Assembly a lot has changed. It is with gratitude and sadness that we present this report to the 17th Assembly.

Gratitude to the elected Executive Members, representatives from Synod Committees who have served on the National Committee, and the UCAF synod committees and UCAF groups for the way they have supported each other as they recommenced following the difficult times during COVID.

Sadness, as this will be the last report to the Assembly from the UCAF NC. For a number of reasons, the decision was made at our National Gathering held in Adelaide in January 2024, to conclude this ministry at the end of June 2024. In reaching this decision we have been supported through prayer and the knowledge that God was with us in our discerning.

2. ASSEMBLY

Over many years our connection with the Assembly, through the provision of our Mandate, and the relationships with a number of staff has been greatly appreciated by the committee's executive. We thank them for their support. However, we would particularly like to mention Rev Sharon Hollis and Colleen Geyer for their guidance, especially over the last 12 months.

Our mandate is quite broad, but in effect the committee's role is to provide an umbrella of support to the Synod Committees and their groups as well as providing connections with national and international bodies with which we have a relationship.

3. THEME

The theme chosen by the current UCAF NC for the period 2021-2024 was *Travelling a new road* (Isaiah 43:18-19). A very appropriate theme we felt, as we embarked in July 2021 with the new model of committee. God leading us on a new road, following on from our previous theme of "Your Word Lights the Way". Every step was a new one as we developed relationships under the new model.

4. PROJECTS

The major project we undertook for this triennium focussed on climate change, with a postcard campaign. A series of 6 postcards were designed featuring a variety of national and international images and words. These cards were made available to UCAF groups and the Synod Committees. Those who took the cards, signed them including the UCAF group they were associated, addressed to their local federal member or the prime minister, and posted. It is hard to say how much of an impact they had.

Although many of our groups no longer specifically raise funds for projects, it is surprising when I hear of the large amounts that are raised across the church for mission / ministry projects that a group identifies with. Many UCAF groups continue to support UnitingWorld and Frontier Services. In fact, the South Australian Synod UCAF Committee have been strong supporters of the Frontier Services Bush Chaplains.



Many other projects, too extensive to list, are a great witness to the various communities, which receive their assistance. Just as Jesus' ministry challenged people to give more serious attention to the nature of service, the 'volunteer' programme is renewing our commitment to Jesus' service.

Through a number of other connections - World Day of Prayer, Australian Church Women, National Council of Women and Act for Peace – we are able to learn about needs of others locally, nationally and internationally that groups can choose to support.

5. CONFERENCES –WORLD AND SOUTH PACIFIC

Through the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women (WFM&UCW) we are part of a large movement of Christian women. Internationally this organisation has representation from seventy-one nations and over 3.5million members. Regionally we are one of the seven units (nations) that make up the South Pacific Area.

The World Assembly of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Women was to be held in Sweden in 2021, this was initially deferred until 2022. Unfortunately, owing to many travel complications this was converted into a Zoom conference.

The South Pacific Area leaders meet regularly via Zoom and have been able to develop closer relations with the leaders from New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji. This group of leaders have been looking at ways to support younger women become enthused for the church through leadership training, with a view to them being involved in roles in their local areas.

At the time of writing this report planning is well underway for the South Pacific Area Seminar to be held in September 2024 in Samoa. This event brings together around 500 women from across the Pacific and is held every five years. The program includes Bible study, sharing cultural news and news from units. Officers from the World Federation also attend this event.

6. ECUMENICAL/INTERNATIONAL LIAISON

This position holds responsibility for keeping in touch with similar organisations within partner churches and international bodies with which the Uniting Church has links. For a number of reasons, the tasks undertaken by this role have been picked up by the NC Secretary.

Through the Assembly there is loose connection with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The more formal and active affiliations are with the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, including the South Pacific Area. Through the latter group we receive the publication *Tree of Life* which provides wonderful insights from the different Areas within the World Federation and activities of many partner churches. It also highlights needs of communities across the world who are struggling. This is distributed to the groups through the Synod committees.

There has also been a close relationship with Australian Church Women. Many UCAF members are involved locally with this group, and these relationships will continue regardless of the ceasing of the work of the UCAF National Committee.

7. WORKING PROCEDURES

The working procedures underwent significant review prior to the start of the 2021-2024 triennium, which reflected the change in committee structure and how some of the work of the national committee would be undertaken. These have served the new committee well, despite some difficulties.



8. JOAN STOTT UCAF BURSARY

This bursary has been offered by the National Committee since 2009. There is provision to offer up to two bursaries each year for people studying within the Uniting Church. While this has not always occurred, usually due to a lack of applications those who have received the \$1500 have been most appreciative. Initially, the age limit was for people under the age of 35 years. However, the age limit was lifted to under 50 in 2023. This change was brought about in response to a reduction in the number of applicants. Also, this value of each bursary has been increased to \$2000.

The bursary is in recognition of the contribution of Mrs Joan Stott to the ministry of the UCAF, and her involvement with the National Committee as well as a period when she served as Secretary to the World Federation.

The information regarding the availability of this bursary is distributed through the UCA Theological Colleges. Previously this was done by the Synod UCAF Committees, but this process will undergo some change.

9. NATIONAL GATHERING

One significant change brought in as part of the review of the committee was to combine the National Consultation with the Celebration. With a new identity the National Gathering would combine the best of the Celebration and Consultation and reflect a little of what Presbytery UCAF Gatherings are. Bringing together people from a wider area to share in fellowship, bible study, activities and outings while dealing with that business required to be conducted when UCAF members from across Australia were able to come together.

It was planned to hold this event earlier in 2023, but for a number of reasons this wasn't able to take place. It was then agreed to hold this in Adelaide late in January 2024.

While the number of people who attended was not large, those who were able to gather shared in a great time of bible study, art and craft, fellowship and discussion about the future of the UCAF. In these discussions however, it was only the ministry of the UCAF NC that was affected by the decision to conclude. The Synod Committees, where they exist, and the local groups will continue unchanged.

We were blessed to have the UCA President, Rev Sharon Hollis, with us for the duration of the Gathering; her guidance and support was greatly appreciated. We were also blessed to have Mrs Olive Tanielu, President of the South Pacific Area with us during this event. Olive was able to offer insights into the current work of the World Federation and the work more locally.

10. VISITS TO SYNODS

As Chairperson I undertook visits to New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia over the past three years. These visits are always interesting and fulfilling. It's wonderful to see how the different groups operate locally, and connect with their local community or with the wider church. This is often brought about when a Presbytery Gathering is held, which sees a large number of UCAF people share in a time of fellowship, fun and food.

In W.A. I spoke at a Fellowship Day and was able to share more of the work of UCAF National Committee with the Moderator of the W.A. Synod and the General Secretary who were both in attendance. This was also a good opportunity to share more of the work on a National and International level where the National Committee is involved with. In NSW I visited Lismore who experienced the devastating floods earlier and was able to see the rebuilding process that is happening. UCAF groups throughout Australia have supported Lismore after the floods. In South



Australia I was able see first-hand a variety of activities that groups are supporting, both in the city and in the country areas.

11. THE FUTURE

While there is a great deal of sadness with the winding up of the UCAF NC, it is important to give thanks to the many women and men who have supported this ministry of the UCA since 1982 when the first National Body was established following a conference in Adelaide.

Over the years, National Committee members have served on the World Federation, attended World Assemblies and/or South Pacific Area Seminars as well as contributed to ministry and mission of the Uniting Church.

By the time the Assembly meets in July, the National Committee will formally have concluded its work. Two major aspects of the NC role will be picked up by the Assembly General Secretary. For this we are grateful, as we see these as significant aspects of our work. These being relationship with the World Federation of Methodist & Uniting Church Women and the Joan Stott UCAF Bursary.

12. THANKS

There are many people for who we are thankful to:

- The Assembly President, General Secretary and the Assembly Staff for the support and encouragement received.
- To the National Committee members for their hard work during the triennium, much has been asked of them. Special thanks to NC Secretary Pam Grant who has provided great support to me in my role as Chairperson and the committee as a whole.
- The World Federation Officers and South Pacific Area Leaders, as these relationships have taken on new meaning during the past three years.

Despite the many difficulties that UCAF groups are encountering there is strong fellowship across Australia. Much of this is not seen or spoken about, but we give thanks to God for this ministry.

In concluding, I would like to thank all Synods and Assembly for the support that has been given in many ways to this ministry over the last three years and pray that UCAF groups will continue to provide support and encouragement to each other in the future.

**Margaret Pedler,
Chairperson
Uniting Church Adult Fellowship
National Committee 2021-2024**

