



QUEENSLAND SYNOD

The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod stretches from the islands of Torres Strait to Goondiwindi on the New South Wales border, from Coolangatta on the eastern coast to Mt Isa in the heartland of the Queensland outback. We come together in rural congregations, Indigenous services, and remote area ministries, as well as in large and small urban congregations. We work together in vibrant schools, in a wide range of community services, in aged care, childcare and hospitals, and in local expressions of ministry through word and service.

Over the past three years, in this time of challenge and change, people all over the Synod have worked to nurture flourishing and hope, to grow as disciples, to develop new structures and processes, to keep others safe, to care for people in need, to advocate for necessary change, to strengthen relationships, and to find sustainable and innovative solutions.

We are one church, uniting and centred on Jesus Christ. We are a church for all people, committed to a powerful diversity and our covenant relationship with First Nations people across the country. We are a church with informed faith, with purpose, we are disciples and pilgrims on the way. We are also one church made up of many voices.

In recognition of this blessing we have asked people from across the Queensland Synod to speak of their priorities, and perspectives in this report so that we might better understand, not only what has been happening, but who we are and where we are travelling together. We cannot hope to include all the work that is happening across the church in Queensland - our deepest thanks to all those who have shared their perspectives here, as well as everyone who is working with us throughout the entire Synod, with faith for a new season of renewal and growth.

1. PLENTY

Plenty remains, at its core, a bold commitment to culture change for the whole Uniting Church in Queensland, a journey towards the ambition of a shared life and flourishing communities. Working groups have collaborated over the last three years to progress the priorities affirmed by the Synod: Discipleship, Transforming Communities, being Fit for Purpose, and committing to and celebrating our Life Together.

The 2022 progress report, *Taking the Initiative* presented over 115 initiatives and actions. The 2023 progress report *Walking Together* outlined the implementation of these initiatives and the work to: affirm common ground in shared ethos, policy, and position statements; realign responsibilities and resources, create cross-synod networks – communities of practice, forums, and key partnerships; build the capacity of our people with coaching, mentoring, training; develop and deliver enablers such as tools, guidelines, programs, and events; and share resources and information.

The next focus is to intentionally embed the Plenty priorities within existing councils, boards, and committees of the Synod and to encourage the whole church to grow in the four key priority areas and enable and equip each congregation, presbytery, organisation, entity, and agency to do the plentiful work that they discern is right for them.

(Rebecca Riggs, Communications Manager)

2. DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship has been a significant focus of the Plenty strategic program over the last 3 years aligning with a shared definition: Discipleship is knowing and living Jesus' way, in community for the restoration of all things.



Working groups across the Synod have unpacked what this means for creating a *culture* of discipleship across the Uniting Church in Queensland and embracing *innovation* in practicing discipleship in all of the work that the Uniting Church undertakes. A range of initiatives have developed in response including online renewal prayer gatherings hosted by a different Uniting Church facilitator every month; book clubs exploring books relating to discipleship culture, innovation and engaging young people; and the support and promotion of Synod-wide discipleship training hosted by Presbyteries.

We have developed the *Discipleship Strategy Tool* and piloted it with a group of congregations to ensure it is accessible and easy to use. At the same time, a co-ordinated approach to discipleship across the Presbyteries is being co-created to support ease of sharing resources from all parts of the Synod.

Our continuing challenge is to remember that this work is not something that will be accomplished within a finite time period. This is now, and always will be, the work of the Church. Discipleship is not a trend, theme or short-term strategic objective but is the whole reason the Church exists. As such this provides enormous opportunity as this is discovered and more deeply and fully embraced. (Paul Wetzig, Mission Project Officer)

3. TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES: UAICC, AND COVENANT WORK

In August 2023, we the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress - Queensland Regional Council became known as Muth arrak (*fire drill in Thaynakwith language a name offered by UAICC Elder Auntie Mary-Ann Coconut*). The Creator Spirit gifted us our lands and we are to care for it and all creation with the same love that is gifted to us by our Jesus our Lord. Fire upon the lands works to renew and the fire that burns within our heart serves to inspire. We are reminded that in **Luke 24:32**, *They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*

Muth arrak are working with our congregational and faith community members in the communities of Napranum, Mornington Island, Aurukun, Gordonvale, Townsville, and Zillmere to understand God's work and how we can support discipleship through development of First Nations pastoral and ministerial leadership. After losing a leading Elder within the life of the church, St Barnabus UAICC Napranum has installed a new church council with new younger members and emerging Elders taking their rightful place in congregational leadership life. The Holy Spirit is alive in the community with Uncle Roy Chevethum winning his election for Mayor of Napranum.

Mornington Island congregation is beginning a partnership with Mission Australia to have a Chaplain / Pastor from the community recognised as a paid position with UAICC Church on Mornington Island, and Townsville West End congregation is taking an ecumenical approach to practical reconciliation and covenanting with a focus on youth ministry and outreach. Zillmere UAICC is partnering with Wontul-By-Buya to provide Cert III Ministry block training for approximately 10 of their congregational members and Pastor Sono conducted her first baptisms during this year's resurrection Sunday service.

Muth arrak is renewing as an expression of God's love and work through the Covenant, to write a new story for future generations.

(Kim Korbe, Reconciliation Action Plan Program Manager)

3.1 Transforming Communities: Social Justice

The Moderator's Advocacy and Social Justice Team (MAST), supports the Moderator in conducting systems and public advocacy on a range of social justice issues that impact on the human rights of vulnerable people. The Synod's advocacy has included issues such as youth justice, social isolation and loneliness, domestic and family violence, First Nations justice and voice, treaty and truth, disability and mental health, and Australia's human rights obligations.



A range of activities have supported our advocacy efforts in collaboration across the Uniting Church in Australia: written submissions to government consultations on policy and legislation; public statements and media releases, attending forums and roundtables with government and community stakeholders, as well as presenting forums and panels with subject matter experts for the church community to attend.

While sometimes overwhelming, the opportunities to speak up to improve the lives of vulnerable people are endless. The Queensland Synod is an active and engaged participant as it moves toward becoming a trusted stakeholder advisor and public voice of insight and compassion.

(Natalie Clements, Social Justice, and Policy Coordinator)

3.2 Transforming Communities: Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability remains a key priority for the Queensland Synod. A *Flourishing Creation: Queensland Synod Action and Advocacy Plan 2030* adopted at the 36th Synod supports the whole church community to contribute to a future which is greener, fairer, and healthier for all. It outlines our commitment to empowering people, water conservation, climate-friendly transport, transitioning to a circular economy, advocating for change, and reaching net-zero emissions by 2040.

Our Environmental Sustainability Officer has progressed several initiatives to deliver on Synod-wide commitments. As a member of the *Power Together* coalition we advocate with other community organisations to make renewable energy and energy efficiency accessible to all Queenslanders.

A key challenge is access to reliable data. We are working to embed data capture throughout congregations, early learning centres, schools and colleges, Synod agencies and business entities. This year we are also implementing an “eco site scorecard” at Uniting Early Learning centres. This is a self-assessed scorecard for initiatives in waste, energy, water and leadership and education as part of a continuous improvement program.

(Emily Murray, Environment and Sustainability Project Officer)

4. FIT FOR PURPOSE: GOVERNANCE CHANGE

Transformational Governance changes are a significant part of the fit-for-purpose body of work identified through *Project Plenty: Shared life. Flourishing communities*.

Incorporation provides opportunity to reframe our structure and relationship with institutions to best serve the Church and community for the next 50 years. Navigating the regulatory framework and the Church mission across the hospital, health, aged care, community health and education sectors is considerable, and we are encouraged by the promise of **Philippians 1:6** “*being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*”.

Synod engaged external experts to inform its view of incorporation including a review of the strengths and opportunities of various church governance models. This foundational work culminated when the 37th Synod resolved to allow institutions to incorporate. We acknowledge NSW/ACT and VICTAS Synods for sharing their wisdom and experience, and, importantly, the collaborative relationship with UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission Queensland as they progress towards incorporation. We actively participated in the establishment phase of ACT2, discerning how potential changes made at this Assembly may influence our local context.

There is a key opportunity to create a community of practice within the Synod and between other Synods in relation to corporate governance with the aim of sharing and learning from each other with a view to improving governance outcomes for the Church.

(Simon Moore, Corporate Governance)



4.1 Sustainability

At a high level, the Property and Finance areas have been focussed on financial sustainability for the medium/long term as well as provision of service to other church bodies in the Synod. This has been demonstrated by the development of a clear 5-year strategic plan by the Property Board with clear expectations regarding growth. This covered the areas of Property Development - to return liquid funds back to the church at a much higher level than just selling existing land and buildings; Equities – the continuation of the long-term strategy; Enterprises – consolidate the financial performance in childcare and Mission – assist congregation and presbyteries in their growth plans.

We have continued the congregational bookkeeping program to support congregations to consistently produce financial information. A standardised 'package' was developed as an 'opt in' option for congregations including online software (Xero), a standardised chart of accounts, bookkeeping training, and support at Synod office. Additional support is available upon request. Pleasingly, over the last 3 years the take-up has been more than 65% of congregations across the Synod.

(Peter Cranna, Executive Director – Finance Property and Enterprises)

5. WESLEY MISSION QUEENSLAND

Wesley Mission Queensland (WMQ) lives out its Mission by providing community support; mental health services; aged, disability and palliative care; and retirement living. Our staff engage with people from all walks of life to encourage choice and independence. Our Strategic Plan underpins our Mission *'We walk alongside people in need offering care and compassion and promoting choice, independence and community wellbeing.'*

Over the past three years, WMQ embarked on a journey of transformation while responding to new reforms with positive outcomes. Safe and high-quality services are delivered with care and compassion, and during times of environmental, economic, and geo-political hardship, while staying true to our Mission. As we continue our transformation, **Hebrews 3:4** reminds us *'for every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.'*

Strategically WMQ has navigated the complexities of our changed governance structure. From our origins in 1907 as a mission activity of the Albert Street Uniting Church to now, as an Institution of the Queensland Synod and a registered public benevolent institution. We hold the Mission and legacy of our origins at the centre of all that we do. We still have a way to go on this journey and look forward to an outcome of renewed and strengthened missional alignment and relationship with our spiritual home, Albert Street Uniting Church.

In February 2024, WMQ warmly welcomed Colleen Geyer to the Wesley Mission Queensland family as our Director of Mission. We prayerfully look forward to our future as we continue to serve the people in our care.

(Ms Jude Emmer, Chief Executive Officer WMQ)

5.1 UnitingCare

UnitingCare in Queensland (UCQ) has the great privilege of delivering health, aged care, disability, and community services to thousands of people a day throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory. We remain grounded in the beliefs of UnitingCare's founders and inspired by Jesus' words in **John 10:10** *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* This inspires us every day to change people's lives for the better.

2022-2024 was challenging from a range of perspectives including, workforce, increased regulation, economic stressors, and financial performance, along with an aging population and aged care reforms.



We aim to be Australia's most trusted and respected health and community services provider, delivering exceptional values-based care to families in Queensland and the Northern Territory in every corner of every community, and globally recognised as a leader in care model innovation for ageing people.

To realise this vision, we align planning around three key goals for the organisation: Aged Care and Community: Being a market leader in high-quality, innovative, person-centred aged care services in the home and in the community; Family and Disability: Expanding our social impact through growth of our child and family services and an optimised disability service offering; and Hospitals: Maintaining highly regarded, clinically excellent hospitals delivering the best possible health and life outcomes for patients.

UnitingCare's long-term 2030 strategy involves implementing an integrated operating model to enable a more sustainable and scalable delivery of our mission, while addressing significant regulatory and financial challenges.

(Peter Armstong, Director of Mission UCQ)

6. UNITING EDUCATION SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Uniting Education Schools and Colleges links the Queensland Synod and affiliated educational institutions, supporting their established objectives and fulfilling the Church's educational mission and missional focus. The portfolio encompasses various schools and residential colleges.

Over the last three years, Uniting Education has made significant strides in addressing challenges and identified risks, including the impact of Covid-19 on education. While 2023 saw fewer disruptions, we continue to prepare for future uncertainties. Key challenges such as balancing strategic resourcing with compliance, funding needs, infrastructure limitations, and sourcing suitable board members persist, demanding proactive management. Moreover, the emerging twin challenges of meeting the increasingly diverse needs of students and recruiting and retaining quality teaching staff, particularly in technical subjects, underscores the importance of innovative strategies and collaborations.

In response, Uniting Education has focused on strategic planning, governance reform, relationship-building with educational institutions, and fostering a culture of discipleship. Development of assurance frameworks, collaboration between schools and the Church, and support to staff and students demonstrate a commitment to thriving educational communities aligned with Church values and vision. The immediate short-term priority for Uniting Education is establishing a shared identity statement with its diverse schools and colleges, together with co-creating a 'fit for purpose' approach to governance.

(Jon Moriarty, Executive Officer-Schools, and Residential Colleges)

6.1 Uniting Early Learning (UEL)

The last 3 years has been a transitional time for Uniting Early Learning (UEL). In 2021, operations of all services were transitioned to Uniting Early Learning governed by the Property Trust. The UEL team and the Synod Office is deeply grateful for the diligence and willingness of congregations, schools and other organisations throughout the transition period, and their continued support of UEL services.

UEL views ongoing relationship with congregations, schools, and other organisations as a key enabler of missional success to bring life in all its fullness to children, families, and their communities. We have worked diligently with all parties to acknowledge the challenges of the transition process and prioritise positive engagement to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to bettering the connection between church and service.



Ongoing congregational support for In Home Care services across remote Queensland has been greatly appreciated. Pastoral care for grieving families has been an important demonstration of the love of Christ in times of need and the difference between UEL and other services. “Grandfriends” is an extraordinary program run weekly in a number of the services where congregational members attend the service and interact with the children. The program brings joy, hope and connection into the lives of children and “grandfriends” alike.

UEL has undertaken systems improvements including standardised policies and procedures and group practices to bring uniformity of practice across our services while supporting compliance, quality, and financial sustainability.

Growth through strategic service expansion and streamlining processes is a key opportunity. We are approved by Education Queensland to tender for state school Outside School Hours Care provision. We are working with congregations to identify opportunities for new services both on church property and on other sites. Importantly, we continue to combine learnings from the corporate world with our missional focus and caring culture to create systems and processes that support growth and safe high-quality education.

(Belinda Briggs, General Manager Uniting Early Learning)

As we continue on into 2024 under the leadership of a new Moderator and General Secretary, the Synod Office has developed a new FY2025 to 2027 Strategy which outlines the firm foundations we seek to build - to enable, equip and encourage a renewing and growing church across Queensland. With the Plenty Vision of Shared Life and Flourishing future before us, we will focus our resources on five priority areas: Mission Renewal and Growth, The Flourishing of Presbyteries, Forming leaders, Fit-for-purpose Governance, and Stewarding our Resources.

We are thankful for God's leading through this time in the life of the Synod, for the insights of the Mission Collaboration and Co-ordination Committee (MC3) (established at the 36th Synod) and for the expertise and commitment of the Synod Office teams. We maintain the vision to be one church active in every Queensland community, bearers of Christ's offer of life in all its fullness. Through our shared life we are committed to a flourishing future for church and community.

We hold firm to the hope that God will continue to sustain us, use us, and transform us as we bear witness to and participate in God's mission. May the flame of hope of the gospel encourage us, transform us, and propel us forward to a daring faith for this new season.

Rev Dr Adam McIntosh
General Secretary

