

ASSEMBLY RESOURCING UNIT INCLUDING ASSEMBLY CIRCLES OF INTEREST

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Established in July 2017, the Assembly Resourcing Unit (ARU) is a multi-disciplinary, collaborative, project-based team that resources the work of the Assembly as set out in the Constitution and Regulations, the Assembly Strategic Plan, the national work of the Uniting Church and specific projects as identified by the Assembly and the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC).
- 1.2 In November 2022, the General Secretary advised the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) that in order to ensure the efficiency of the Assembly Secretariat for the strategic work it is engaged in and delivering, and after consulting all staff, the Secretariat would move from two work units (Assembly Resourcing Unit and Assembly Services Unit) to one work unit (Assembly Resourcing Unit).
- 1.3 The newly organised Assembly Resourcing Unit (ARU) includes Assembly Resourcing Unit (Mission and Ministry), Strategic Finance and Admin, Assembly Media and Communications, and Archives. The ARU will be jointly led by the Associate General Secretary and the National Director Strategic Finance and Admin. The work of the Strategic Finance and Admin team is primarily engaged in general administrative support for the work of the Secretariat and the Assembly Finances (see report B3A), so this report focusses on the Mission and Ministry team and the Media and Communications team.
- 1.4 This flattening of the structure allows for even more collaboration and efficiency. All services provided to the Assembly and the wider UCA remain as they previously were.

2. TEAM COMPOSITIONS

The Mission and Ministry team within the ARU has seen a number of personnel changes since the past Assembly. Rev Charissa Suli departed the team in July 2022 in order to step away from the Assembly to prepare for coming back in a new role as President. Associate General Secretary Mr Rob Floyd resigned in late 2022 – shortly afterward taking up the permanent role as National Director of Frontier Services, after some time acting in that role – and Rob was replaced after a recruitment process, by Rev Lindsay Cullen in November 2022. In May of 2023, Rev Dr Apwee Ting concluded in his ARU role to take up an opportunity working with UnitingWorld. A recruitment process for new ARU team members was begun, but in order to help fill the gap, Mr Chris Barnett was employed in a part-time contract role for the second half of 2023. Following the recruitment process, three new team members were added to the ARU. Mr Raúl Sugunanathan was offered a new part-time role – Assembly Policy and Advocacy Officer, which began in August 2023, and a few months later, Rev Dr Sunny Chen and Rev Kath Behan took up roles as National Consultants. Sadly, the Assembly has recently farewelled Raúl as he took up a full-time opportunity doing community organising with the Sydney Alliance.

The Media and Communications team has also had some personnel movement in the past years. National Manager of Media and Communications, Bec Beisler has for some years been retraining as a Primary School teacher, and completed her studies in 2023. As a result, in 2024, Bec has dropped down to 2 days a week this year and will, sadly for us, complete her time with the Assembly following the Assembly meeting. Bec has been a long-time employee with the Assembly in a variety of roles and she will be greatly missed, though we wish her well in her new phase of life as a teacher. Bethany Broadstock has for the past couple of years shared her time between communications for the Act2 Unit and as part of the Assembly Comms team. This year, as Bec has dropped back in hours to begin her teaching career, Bethany has been appointed as the joint Manager of Media and Communications, and she will take over that role on a full-time basis after the Assembly meeting. Michael Zewdie continues to perform sterling work as the main technical support for the website as well as the video and photographic

production work he does for the team. During the past 18 months, to cover the times when Bec has had student placements or now, casual teaching commitments, the Assembly has also been pleased to have Abbey Sim and Scott Guyatt doing casual work for the team, and in Abbey's case, a short term contract leading up to the Assembly Meeting. We have valued the work of all those who have been part of the team in different ways.

3. AREAS OF WORK

3.1 Intergenerational

During his time with the Assembly, Chris Barnett was instrumental in building connections with Synods and Presbyteries, and those people working intergenerationally in other Councils of the Church. With Chris' assistance, the ARU was able to complete a project started by previous National Consultants working in collaboration with the NYCC network (National Youth, Children and Family workers Coalition) — a Vision for being an Intergenerational Church (<https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/932>). The ARU now also has a collection of updated intergenerational resources (<https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/917>) and looks forward to continuing to resource this area of the Church's life in the coming Triennium.

3.2 Voice Referendum

The ARU joined the wider Assembly and Agencies in seeing the Referendum on the Voice as being a significant moment in the life of the Church, given our Covenant with the UAICC and our commitment to justice for First Peoples. The ARU (including wonderful work from the Comms team, and along with our Circles) were actively involved in providing information and resources, running workshops and webinars, connecting Church members with advocacy training and opportunities and on the evening before the Referendum, organising a nationwide prayer vigil service which participants found extremely moving. Policy And Advocacy Officer Raúl Sugunanathan played a particular significant role in this work.

While the outcome was not what any of us had desired or worked for, nonetheless there was a sense that we had worked collaboratively and strategically in a way which was powerful and a model for further projects and focus areas.

3.3 Supporting Task Groups, Committees and Circles

The Assembly Resourcing Unit (Mission and Ministry and Communications teams) continue to support the work of ASC Task groups, Assembly Committees and the Assembly Circles of Interest. Most Task groups and Committees will have one member of the Mission and Ministry team assigned to work with that Task Group or Committee. Similarly, each Circle of Interest has a member of the M and M team assigned to support the Advocate and the work of the Panel and wider Circle.

The Comms team also supports needed website development or communications required by Task Groups, and participates with the M and M team in regular meetings with Circle Advocates to discuss communications strategies, joint projects and highlighting the work of Circles in our weekly 'National Update' email.

3.4 General strengthening of Identity

The Assembly Resourcing Unit regularly focuses on core identity aspects of the Uniting Church, through our regular communication channels, through preaching opportunities, podcasts, webinars and by making contribution to projects and Committees of other Councils of the Church and National networks.

Engagement with National Conferences is another key way that the ARU strengthens the identity of the Uniting Church as an Intercultural Church. This includes attendance at National Conference meetings, regularly gathering together National Conference Chairs, and supporting and distributing resources 'in language'.



3.5 Archives

The work of Assembly Archivist Christine Gordon has been very significant during the time since the last Assembly. Christine continues to be a resource to the work of the Church in researching and finding documentation related to the Church's work in Redress and addressing Civil claims. Christine has also spent much time working with our Agencies in rationalising, indexing and storage of many boxes of information. This has been critical for the Assembly in our new offices with limited storage space, and has been particularly helpful for Frontier Services as they have moved to join us in our offices at 262 Pitt Street.

Along the way, Christine also makes sure to take opportunities to share the stories of the Uniting Church's life, through Communications channels, at staff events and on one memorable occasion, sharing some wonderful 'treasures' of the UCA with a group of spellbound Assembly Standing Committee members at an after dinner event during an ASC meeting.

4. CONCLUSION

The Assembly Resourcing Unit, including the Mission and Ministry Team and the Communications Unit are a small but talented group of people with varied roles and a focus on collaboration and facilitation. I have been pleased to lead the ARU along with Leo Iosifidis, and am proud of the work that all of the teams do.

Rev Lindsay Cullen
Associate General Secretary





5. ASSEMBLY CIRCLES OF INTEREST

The Assembly established its seven Circles of Interest to assist people to engage with the Uniting Church's national work, providing opportunities for people to be informed, to contribute and to connect with others.

Each Circle represents a broad area of the Assembly's mission and ministry. Together, the seven circles encompass some of the core values of the Uniting Church and how we contribute to God's mission in the world.

The Circles are:

- Being a Multicultural Church (BMC)
- Discipling the Next Generations (DNG)
- Growing in Faith (GIF)
- Seeking Common Ground (SCG)
- Transforming Worship (TW)
- Walking Together as First and Second Peoples (WTFSP)
- Working for Justice (WFJ)

People are free to join one or more of the circles. Each circle is a platform for learning and sharing among its members and provides a mechanism to offer input into the Assembly's work. Through this interaction, the Circles become a sharing and learning space where we are stretched, faith is deepened and together we listen to where God is leading the Church.

Members of the Circle are connected to the circle via regular email communication and have the option to join circle conversations on social media (Facebook).

Each Circle is supported by Panel Members identified by the Assembly as people with particular gifts and expertise in that area of interest. An Advocate is also appointed to each Circle to nurture and encourage activity, conversation and input from Circle members. Advocates report to the Assembly Standing Committee twice per triennium on the activity of their Circle.

In period 2022-2024, the Advocates were as follows:

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| • Being a Multicultural Church (BMC) | Rev Dr Matagi Vilitama |
| • Discipling the Next Generations (DNG) | Virginia (Nia) Lavaki |
| • Growing in Faith (GIF) | Rev Liam Miller |
| • Seeking Common Ground (SCG) | Rev Matthew Wilson |
| • Transforming Worship (TW) | Rev Alex Sangster / Rev Jon Humphries |
| • Walking Together as First and Second Peoples (WTFSP) | Alison Overeem |
| • Working for Justice (WFJ) | Rev Loni Vaitohi / Rev Alex Sangster |

(Health issues and the subsequent passing of Rev Loni Vaitohi, led to changes of Advocate for two of the Circles, with Rev Alex Sangster moving from Transforming Worship to Working for Justice, and Rev Jon Humphries stepping into the role of Advocate for Transforming Worship. The Assembly gives sincere and grateful thanks for the faithful work of Rev Vaitohi and all of those who serve as Advocates and on Panels for our Circles of Interest.)

A description of the role of Circles, Panels and Advocates is found in **Appendix 1**



5.1 Being a Multicultural Church

The Uniting Church rejoices in its diversity of races, cultures and languages as God's gracious gift and seeks to be a true multicultural church living its faith and life cross-culturally. The Being a Multicultural Church Circle seeks to create genuine ways for diverse voices and contributions to be respectfully heard across the wider membership of the church. We are called to be 'One Body and Many Members'; "a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole" (The Basis of Union, par 3) and that includes the "diverse gifts" showered upon us through being a Multicultural Church and becoming an Intercultural Church. Culturally and linguistically diverse gifts and expressions of faith can enrich and renew the Uniting Church's Pentecost vision and identity as "a fellowship of reconciliation", and "a pilgrim people" - those from First Nations and those "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev 7:9). Being a Multicultural Church and becoming an Intercultural Church is also a missional challenge and an opportunity for renewal in an increasingly multicultural Australian society, and it needs to be intentionally pursued by equipping people of God with cultural intelligence and humility and building leadership capacity for intercultural ministry and mission.

Since the 4th Assembly declared "We are a Multicultural Church" in 1985, the Uniting Church "seeks to be open to changes that the Holy Spirit will bring to the church because of the creative contributions of people of different racial and cultural groups to its life" and has had a strong commitment to being a multicultural church. On any Sunday, more than 200 congregations and faith communities within the UCA gather to worship using a language or languages other than English. Around 45 languages, 15 of which are languages of our First Peoples, are used each week across our congregations. And we have 13 National Conferences which support those communities of the same culture. Whilst not formally, National Conferences have developed relationships with some CALD Faith Communities from 36 partner churches in the Pacific, Asia and Africa including Zimbabwe and South Sudan. As many Australian communities are composed of around half the people being from CALD backgrounds, we are blessed by these gifts, graces and contributions from CALD faith communities to join in the renewing and reconciling work of the Holy Spirit in our worship, witness, service, and disciple making.

For the triennial period of 16th Assembly, further resolutions and initiatives were developed to move forward in being a multicultural church living life and faith cross-culturally and interculturally. At the reconvened 16th Assembly meeting, which was held on 6th to 9th May 2022, then Being a Multicultural Church (BMC) Circle Advocate Rev Dr Matagi Vilitama and Panel member Rev Dr Paul Goh moved a proposal titled 'Moving Forward in Being a Multicultural Church' that seeks to deepen the Uniting Church's commitment to living faith and life interculturally through a range of measures including a new annual Sunday of celebration, 'Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday', and the Assembly has passed this proposal. This resolution has been publicised through Assembly news and website at this link, [Moving to a truly intercultural Church - Uniting Church Australia](#)

In implementing one of these Assembly resolutions, Being Multicultural Church Circle coordinated and collaborated with Assembly Resourcing Unit and Communication team in producing a [2023 Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday Celebration Guide](#) including 2023 Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday Prayer, sample liturgies and 10 ways to celebrate Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday. Replacing One Great Sunday of Sharing, the 3rd Sunday in July (or another date best suited to the local setting) is observed as 'Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday' to celebrate UCA being a Multicultural Church and to create an opportunity for congregations and faith communities to connect and build relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse communities in their neighbourhoods.

At an Assembly Act2 Project Unit-hosted National Forum on "Our Multicultural and Intercultural Identity" held on the 3rd of August 2023, then BMC Advocate Rev Dr Matagi Vilitama and Panel

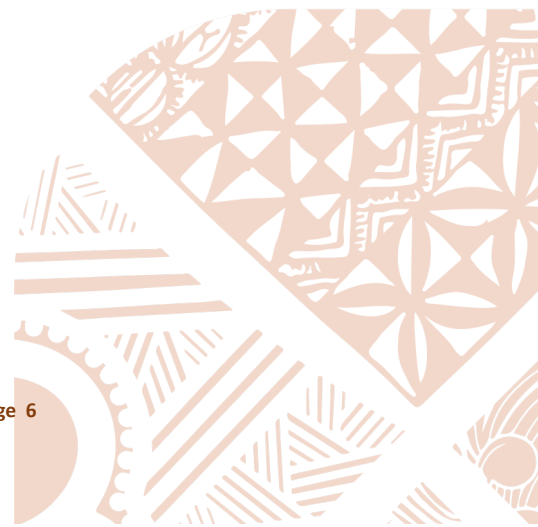


member Rev Dr Paul Goh contributed to ongoing conversation about what being a multicultural church means both on the ground and nationally asking questions: How is the Uniting Church in Australia a multicultural church today? How has this shaped our identity and self-understanding. Its summary and recording are available to view at [Act2 website](#).

At the end of 2024, Rev Dr Paul Goh was appointed as interim Advocate for the Being a Multicultural Church Circle until the 17th Assembly as Rev Dr Matagi Vilitama, the inaugural Advocate for Being a Multicultural Church Circle, was concluding his ministry in the Uniting Church to return to his home island, Niue. We give thanks to God for Matagi's servant leadership and the contribution he has made as the Advocate for the Circle for the past five years. We also would like to acknowledge all creative contributions offered by our panel members for Being a Multicultural Church Circle for the past three years: Cyrus Kung, Levon Kardashian, Milise Ofa Foiakau, Sandy Brodine, and Paul Goh (Interim Advocate).

With the theme for the 17th Assembly and the next triennium, "Threads of Love, Weaving Christ's Love Across Cultures and Boundaries," we look forward to celebrating the 40th anniversary of the UCA declaration 'We are a Multicultural Church' in 2025.

Rev Dr Paul Goh (Interim Advocate)





5.2 Discipling the Next Generations

At its heart, “The Great Commission” (Matt 28:16-20) is a call to pass on the faith by making disciples who follow in the footsteps of Jesus. A key part of discipling is the way the Church nurtures and encourages children, youth and young adults within its family. We seek to resource the next generations of Christian faith by inviting younger people to join in God’s mission, equipping and releasing them to do so.

The Discipling the Next Generations Circle is an invitation to be involved with how the Assembly supports our next generation of leaders and to connect with others who are passionate about this space.

Open to everyone, Circle members will have the opportunity to learn more about and to participate in the ways we do this, including the creation of resources, developing intergenerational awareness in diverse settings and the initiation and support of national youth events.

For the past three years I have had the honour to lead as the Circle Advocate. This role has been made possible with my panel members Melissa Neumann from SA Synod, Steve Molkentin, Michael Ramaidama, Rev Jason Kioa who are from the NSW/ACT Synod as well as Rev Amanda Nichols from VIC/TAS Synod and Joshua Harbort from QLD Synod. We have an active social media page on Facebook with about 289 members.

The DNG Panel has met ten times via zoom over the last 3 years. During these meetings we discussed how we could share the different resources from a grassroots level to a nation level. We tried creating ways of being able to connect and share ideas with each other and see how we can be a better support network for each other.

At our last Panel Meeting we spoke about what the future holds for the DNG Circle. We discussed and shared thoughts on what and who is the next generation? Is this the appropriate description or wording? Or is there another term we could use. We also believe that we should be hosting a few forums throughout the year where we have special guests who can share their knowledge and wisdom with those who may need training.

We look forward to the journey we are continuing on to enrich, empower and encourage all of God’s people.

Virginia Lavaki (Advocate)



5.3 Growing in Faith

The Growing in Faith Circle devoted the early months of this Triennium to compiling a resource and discussion kit to serve churches in their conversations about what it would mean to return to face-to-face gatherings after covid lockdowns and restrictions. In particular we hoped to help people parse the ways in which various theological commitments (such as neighbour love, inclusion and welcome, and care for the vulnerable) could be in tension. The resource produced and collected pieces from within and beyond the Uniting Church and offered questions and discussion prompts particularly aimed at supporting ministers and Church Councils in their deliberations.

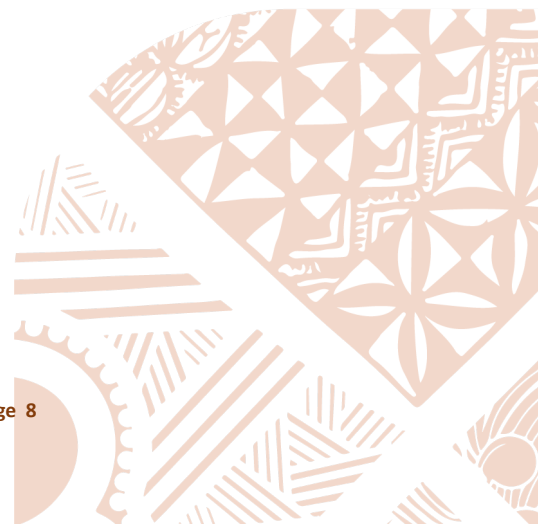
Following the Basis at 50 Conference hosted by the President, the Growing in Faith Circle helped to collect, collate, and distribute some reflections on “Ministry and the Basis of Union” through the Assembly Website. Along with these reflections we also sourced and posted responses to the initial reflections and hosted an ongoing conversation on the topics and questions that were raised.

Over the past year, members of the Growing in Faith circle helped produce a report for the ASC on concepts of ecclesia, personhood, and sacraments in the digital age. The report went beyond the practical/pressing questions of the appropriateness (or not) of the sacrament of communion over zoom, and sought to explore the deeper theological questions and tensions of mediation, presence, embodiment, and relations. The report was received by the ASC at their March meeting.

Members of the Growing in Faith circle continued to contribute to Assembly communications, providing blog posts, Facebook reflections and prayers, and resources for Lenten and other studies and series.

The primary issue the circle faced across the Triennium was recruitment. Both the panel, and active, regular members of the circle remain small, despite the efforts early in the Triennium to raise engagement through videos and special newsletters. Hopefully this can be improved in the coming term.

Rev Liam Miller (Advocate)





5.4 Seeking Common Ground

The Seeking Common Ground Circle (SCG) embodies how the Uniting Church is in relationships that are ecumenical, interfaith and with people of no institutional faith. The transition from this area of work operating within a committee model to this Circle model of collaboration within these areas of ministry has continued to be a struggle.

The Circle has used both an email Newsletter and a Facebook group as the major platforms for connecting members. However, engagement in conversation is minimal and the Facebook group has not become a relational space for its members.

UCA members engaged in Relationships with Other Faiths and in Ecumenical work have not always shared common goals, this discontinuity remains a relational and operational struggle for the circle. Members have responded to specific requests by Assembly staff for information about Jewish-UCA and Lutheran-UCA relationships.

The Lutheran-UCA dialogue group reached a conclusion during this triennium.

The Jewish UCA dialogue has had the challenge of transitioning to an online rather than face to face gathering, and losing some key members, with the relocation of the UCA co-chair, Rev Tara Curlewis to Rome in late 2023, and with the passing of Jeremy Jones, the founding Jewish co-chair earlier in 2023. As previous UCA co-chair I acknowledge the work of Rev Tara Curlewis initially as a member of the dialogue, and then as UCA co-chair when I left to become Advocate in 2021. Her contribution to the life of the dialogue has been strong, and it may not have survived the death of Jeremy Jones had Tara not worked hard in maintaining pastoral and personal relationships with the Executive Council of Australian Jewry during that period. It is also important to acknowledge in this report the incredible work of Mr Jeremy Jones AM over the entire life, to this point, of the relationship BETWEEN THE Jewish community and the UCA. Jeremy has worked tirelessly with a number of UCA co-chairs to build and maintain this relationship, born in times of division and uncertainty, and has helped to navigate the relationship to a much stronger place where, whilst we may not always agree on issues, there is a willingness and wisdom to listen and learn from each other. His contribution to inter-faith relationships and to the cohesiveness of Australian society has been significant, and he is sorely missed.

The majority of those associated with the circle remain locally active in continuing to nurture strong ecumenical and/or interfaith relationships where they are placed. They tend to be connected into those relationships as individuals rather than with any particular authority to represent the UCA in those relationships.

Circle members have participated in and contributed to the organisation of Iftars (including the Assembly Iftar events) and local ecumenical and interfaith activities in their own settings.

In the first half of the triennium a number of online meetings of ecumenically active UCA leaders were held. With changes in staffing at Assembly, and with a change in placement for the Advocate, this became more difficult and has not continued in 2023. It has been noted that the nature of ecumenism and ecumenical relationship has changed since the early years of the Uniting Church, and the dialogues and formal relations of earlier years are more difficult to sustain. A number of these around the country have ceased to be over the past triennium. This, however does not mean that ecumenism is dead, rather it tends to operate as a functional, local engagement rather than the more formal, official relations of the past. The circle has not always found this change easy to operate with.

Beyond formal ecumenical and interfaith relationships, UCA members and some members of SCG are engaged in UCA and wider responses to issues like Climate Change and Justice in the wider community. These are areas of strong ecumenical action and some members note that we are stronger when we work well with others around key prophetic and justice issues.



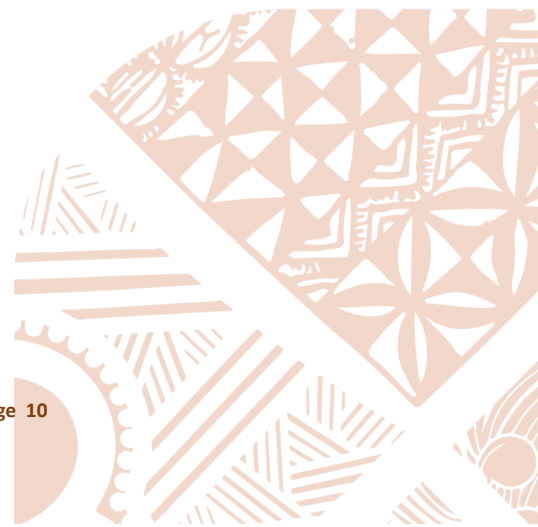
Several discussions have been held between the circle panel, the advocate and Assembly staff as to whether the current circle structure is the best way to resource, encourage and equip the church in this area of the Assembly's work. The experience of the past 6 years has tended to suggest it is not, however a better alternative is yet to be found.

The membership of the circle panel has struggled over the triennium with how to hold the sometimes disparate aims of the SCG circle together. Membership has reduced over the triennium with only myself and Rev Marie Wilson remaining. I thank those Assembly staff and panel members who have served over the time for their engagement. With the changes, challenges and issues, particularly over the past 6 months, I will retire as circle advocate at this assembly and resume the UCA co-chair of the Jewish-UCA dialogue.

Into the next triennium there are a number of opportunities for focus for this area of the churches ministry

- Engaging and encouraging ecumenical and inter-faith partnerships and relationships in particular local contexts and situations
- Building networks and creating a 'reference bank' to assist local ecumenical/inter-faith endeavours
- Finding an effective way to resource, equip, nourish and network ecumenical and interfaith relationships across the church
- Continue to build and maintain relationships in order that when challenges such as the Israel-Gaza conflict or the recent terror event in Sydney occur, relationships exist and are strong enough to weather the challenges and assist in continuing to build and sustain social cohesion.

Rev Dr Matthew Wilson (Advocate)





5.5 Transforming Worship

The Transforming Worship Circle of Interest continues to be active in seeking to promote an engagement with worship which is meaningful and transformative.

Major Projects

We assisted in developing resources for Uniting in Prayer 2023 and are working on some revisions for this year's resources for the 2024 Uniting Prayer initiative. We have helped develop a 2024 order of service for Frontier Services at their request which can be used by remote congregations, people or chaplains and which incorporated an Australian theme to prayers etc..

Encouraging Interest and Resourcing the Church

Our primary form of engagement continues to be the Facebook Group. We have seen an uptake in interest and have a significant number of new members to the group in recent times. We have also had an increase in the number of members who are offering regular contributions to the group. We have been blessed by the breadth of these contributions. They range from prayers, songs, blogs about topics of faith and discipleship often related to the Revised Common Lectionary readings for the week. There are also discussion topics and some sharing of relevant posts from other circles of interest.

We recognise the limited reach of Facebook engagement and are considering other ways to engage with people in the Church, many of whom do not use social media. The notion of an email/newsletter has been considered, but we have not had anyone volunteer to curate content, and the notion of email overload was raised. In a meeting with the Resourcing Unit's national consultants the idea of a combined newsletter/publication which gathered content from all the Circles of Interest and shared that possibly quarterly, was suggested as a way to achieve wider coverage and engagement.

New Directions

The Panel has identified the need to review its purpose and focus as part of a healthy ongoing reflection process. Given the broad remit for the Circles of Interest the Transforming Worship Circle has gone back to some definitional questions to explore such as what is worship, how is worship transformative and how might we encourage and resource transformative worship experiences in the Church, as well as how might we need to transform our worship as it is and what might be needed to resource this?

We are also keen to encourage members of the Panel to use agency in working in their field of interest relating to Transforming Worship and create new initiatives and resources, whilst at the same time understanding the need to resource the wider Church with its breadth of cultures and worship traditions. Our hope is to be able to do this in ways which share the richness of our Church's excellent and creative people and congregations who work in their context to honour and serve God faithfully, so that we might collectively share and learn from each other. We are, thus, also keen to resource and support the full range of expressions of worship in the Uniting Church. The limiting factor is learning of the breadth of these expressions and gaining the participation and activity of people who are able to do this.

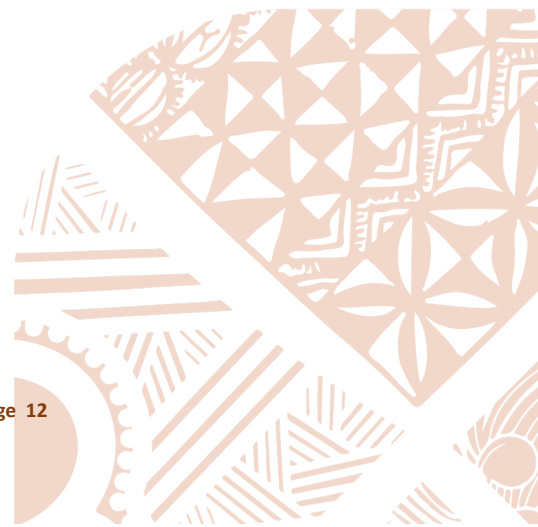
Capacity

As with many aspects of Church life, we encounter the limiting factor of capacity of members to contribute based on balancing their many other commitments in their lives and ministries. Even though many people are keen, due to the timing of projects or evolving situations and circumstances in people's lives, they are not always able to contribute to the life of the Circle in the way that they would like or would have hoped to. We have seen a change in the membership of the panel in the last two years as people have adjusted their involvement in order to manage what they are able to commit to.



We have sought new members for the panel at the end of 2023 and have gained a few new faces who are keen to be involved. The issue of gaining broader representation is a consideration and there is a Catch-22 at work at times when we take up those who are willing to volunteer, but who may not be diverse in representing the breadth of cultures and age-groups in the Church. This then leads to content creation and direction which reflects the interests, passions and culture of those who have volunteered, which may encourage more of similar people, but may dissuade others from different groups because they may interpret from what is shared that the Circle of Interest is not interested in their kind of group. However, without a broader representation of members and contributors, it is hard to generate content of a broader range of interests.

Rev Jon Humphries (Advocate)





5.6 Walking Together as First and Second Peoples

Overview

It has been an interesting and challenging triennium, as we have navigated the work of this circle and its intent and impact, sitting at the heart of who we are at the UCA .

The increased engagement in the circle, the resources, the reflections and the sharing and education has been humbling.

Highlights

The referendum was a focus of the circle during 2023.

The discussions, engagements, webinar with the justice circle, just one of the many highlights.

The sense of solidarity across the circles and the Uniting Church, and our ARU family continued to be a source of support, care and compassion.

We became woven with other Circles in our shared advocacy, promotion, and engagement.

We continued to work through our annual cultural calendar of events, as a focus point for sharing and distribution of resources across the life of the Church

The circle gives mob a platform for voices for justice for First Peoples, it's a space and place for digging deep into the covenant and the preamble.

As we approach the 30th anniversary of the Covenant we again have a platform for sharing, informing, discerning, weaving and unweaving.

Gratitude

We are grateful for the contribution of the panel members and all circle members. The diversity of resources has been a blessing to the circle and beyond.

The support of the ARU and the solidarity with other circle advocates has and continues to be a highlight in how we discern and forward plan, for transformative exchange and impact; as separate circles, but more so our shared advocate family / takarilya.

Challenges

It has not always been possible to meet as often as we might like, busy competing schedules obviously form part of this and as we move forward on how we navigate this, we will look at best practice solutions and possible ways forward.

Reflections

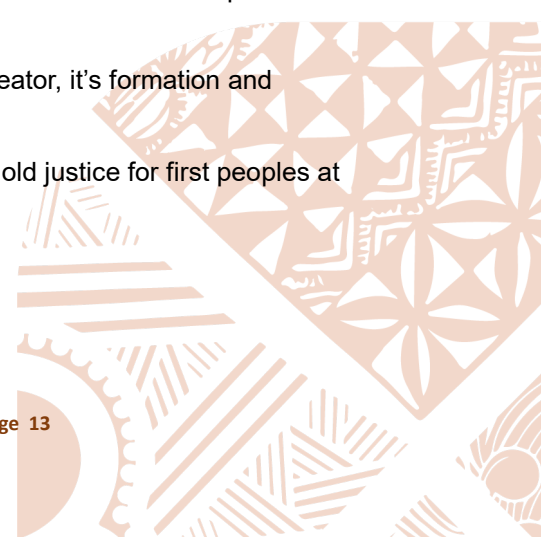
It had been an honour and privilege to serve as the circle advocate for the last triennium, it's given space and place for voices to be held and heard, for advocacy to take shape, form and be at the cultural centre of who we are in our takila / heart, with through and for the covenant and the preamble.

Shaping the Circle

What shape this work takes moving forward will be called to us be the creator, it's formation and structure may change and be rewoven.

There sits the discernment of how we as the UCA continue to hear and hold justice for first peoples at the heart of who we are.

May we know justice
May we grow justice
May we through love be justice





May we know troth telling
May we know truth acceptance
Of all that sits in the lands know called Australia

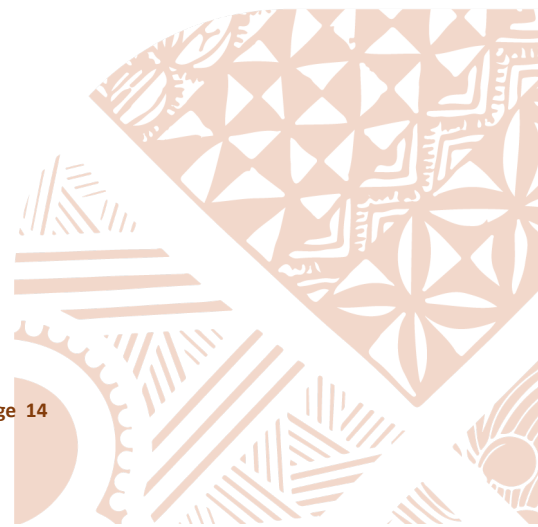
May we know and grow from ancient wisdom and knowledge May we be called to all the Lands call us to.

In closing

This platform is crucial to the life of who we are in our walking together, it's given me a voice, my mob a voice and justice a voice.

For me. this circle, and it's intent and potential for transformative change, sits at the core of all our advocacy, how do we weave it into all of who we are ?

Alison Overeem (Advocate)





5.7 Working for Justice

This last year as Advocate in the Justice space has seen a focus on First Nations Justice advocating for a YES in the Referendum and having the privilege to work closely with sista Alison Overeem and the Assembly team on the webinar Yarning for Yes.

Later in the year the world was rocked by the horror of October the 7th with the brutal and devastating Hamas attack and then the subsequent genocidal war that is unfolding before our eyes.

In response, with a small team including Raul Sugunanathan and Helen Richmond we co-ordinated the Prayer for Peace in the Holy Lands Vigil which was a deeply moving and well attended offering.

I have also been part of the co creation of the Gaza Peace Pilgrimage in Naarm and working closely with the ecumenical community who is holding this space. We were very grateful to the UCA Assembly for its support of this important and peaceful offering into a space of conflict, controversy, and violence.

I would be grateful for ongoing Assembly support in an agile and prophetic way when it comes to other areas of conflict- particularly the war against our earth. I feel there is a real role for us to play as the UCA in join with other folk of faith and non faith at the frontlines of environmental battles and putting serious commitment into encouraging our people to make a stand in these spaces.

Thanks for trusting me to be part of this vital ministry.

Rev Alex Sangster (Advocate)





Appendix 1

How Circles, Panels and Advocates Work

Assembly Priorities

In carrying out their work, all Advocates and members of Circles and Panels will be mindful of broader Uniting Church and Assembly priorities in all they undertake including:

- Living out our covenant as First and Second Peoples
- Living out our commitment to being a multicultural church
- Being oriented towards justice, grounded in the Church's relationships of solidarity with those most affected by injustice and concerned with the needs of the whole creation
- Being an inclusive church where those of differing ability, age, gender, race and sexuality are welcomed
- Ensuring that all activities are grounded in the Gospel, consistent with the Basis of Union of the UCA, the Constitution and Regulations, built upon the traditions of the Uniting Church in Australia and align with the current strategic priorities of the Assembly
- Considering how the work relates to other Circles, Councils, Agencies and groups within the UCA, and working collaboratively wherever possible
- Considering how the work relates to other bodies ecumenically, and with other faiths and civil society organisation and working collaboratively wherever possible
- Conducting the work on the basis of current best practice and with regard to contemporary research in the area
- Contributing positively to Australian civil society including by representing the Uniting Church position appropriately

Members of a Circle will:

- Be Informed
- Be Resourced
- Participate in Sharing
- Provide Input
- Be Collaborative

Members of a Panel will:

- Exhibit the following characteristics
 - Expert in latest thinking in the ministry area
 - Active participants in the field of work
 - Expert in the theological underpinnings of the ministry area
 - Aware of UCA positions (current and historic) and current ongoing work across the life of the Church
 - Able to help critique and formulate UCA positions
 - Available to provide expert input to their Circle or other groups in the life of the UCA
 - Available to participate in Task Groups
 - Able to suggest suitable outside expert input in the field of work
 - Well informed about opportunities for training and other events
- Undertake the following roles in order to support Advocates and Assembly staff
 - Provide feedback to Assembly on policies and resources in their area of expertise as required
 - Serve on Task Groups appointed by the ASC



- Read widely, filter and share resources to their Circle
- Mentor and nurture developing leaders within the Circle
- Gather input from Circle to feed into policy development and development of future ministry priorities
- Gather sharing from their Circle to communicate more widely
- Assist in documenting and drawing upon the history of the Church's work in a ministry area

Advocates will:

- Exhibit the following characteristics
 - Passionate and able to inspire others in their area of ministry
 - Good communicators in all forms
 - Widely known and respected in the field of work
 - Committed to collaborating across the Church and to the National work of the Church
 - Aware of others in the ministry area and good at networking
 - Able to mentor and nurture developing leaders
 - Experts in their area of ministry (see Panel member description)
- Undertake the following roles in order to support ASC and Assembly staff
 - Engage, inspire, resource and communicate with their Circle
 - Monitor the health and vitality of their Circle and of Panel members
 - Cultivate and maintain information about potential Panel and Task Group members
 - Suggest to ASC possible membership and Terms of Reference for Task Groups
 - Liaise between Circles, Panels, Task Groups and Assembly staff
 - Draw out of UCA policy statements and resources the specific issues of relevance and significance for their Circle
 - Gather input from their Circle to feed into policy development and future priorities
 - Regularly communicate with other Advocates to determine possibilities for cross-fertilisation and collaboration

