Report for
32nd Queensland Synod
May 2016

Report from
Board for Christian Formation

Context

The Board for Christian Formation (BCF) gives oversight to processes involved with the selection, training and continuing education of people in specified ministries within the Synod. In addition, the BCF promotes the general growth in spiritual and theological understanding of people within the Synod. The key bodies that the BCF is able to do this through are the Synod Selection Panel, Trinity College Queensland (TCQ) and the Alcorn Fellowship Trust.

The BCF has developed a strategic plan based on the Vision 2020, Assembly and Synod By-law requirements, and the priority directions of the 31st Synod. The mission, vision and aspirations developed within this plan are as follows:

Our mission

The mission of the Board for Christian Formation is to provide leadership for the Synod in the area of Christian education and formation.

Our vision

The vision of the Board for Christian Formation is that we will see a church that is formed for Christian mission.

According to the *Basis of Union (BOU)*, Christian mission is to participate with Jesus Christ to:

- make disciples (*BOU* paragraph 1)
- be a people of reconciliation (*BOU* paragraph 3)
- work for the renewal of all creation (*BOU* paragraph 3)
- always be on the way to the promised end (*BOU* paragraph 3).

Our aspirations

1. Be a prophetic voice and a catalyst for innovation
2. Provide key leaders for the service of God's mission through the church
3. Ongoing curriculum review and implementation to fulfil the vision of TCQ
4. Employment and training of staff to fulfil the mission and vision
5. Staff engagement and commitment to be a discipling community
6. Development of strong partnerships with synods, presbyteries and agencies
7. Growth in student numbers
8. Establish partnerships with other institutions for the purpose of awarding accredited courses.

Our identified priorities

Members of the 31st Synod discerned the following priorities. These priorities sit alongside the Vision 2020 statement and as such the following report incorporates both the priorities of Vision 2020 and the priority directions of the 31st Synod. As already outlined these documents gave rise to the strategic plan of the BCF in which we have identified our own priorities. By way of summary the Synod priorities relate to the BCF strategic priorities as follows.

Queensland Synod Current Priorities1 (SCP)

1. Worship gatherings that can include people who have never attended worship or belonged with church
2. Making faith-sharing a priority for the Uniting Church
3. Church planting
4. Developing church planters – pioneers and entrepreneurs
5. Holy Spirit as defibrillator
6. Formation for ministry
7. Resource sharing urban/rural
8. Children, youth, young adults and family ministry as a priority.

BCF strategic priorities and how they engage the Synod priorities

1. Lifelong formation for Christian life

a) Across the generations and cultures (SCP 8)
b) Faith-sharing (SCP 2)
c) Engaging worship (SCP 1)
d) Pastoral care (SCP 1–8)
e) Spiritual disciplines (SCP 5)

2. Leadership formation and ongoing professional development for Christian mission

a) Christian service (schools and community services) (SCP 1, 2, 7, 8)
b) Ministerial education (congregations) (SCP 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8)
c) Missional communities (church plants and Fresh Expressions) (SCP 3, 6, 7, 8).

There are comments relating to the various priorities in what follows. It was deemed important to share an additional reflection from the Vision 2020 “Organised for mission”, as much of our time in the last 18 months has been adjusting to a new way of operating.

Organised for mission

The BCF has had some significant issues to address as we have become more organised for mission. As many will remember Trinity College Queensland was only launched in mid-2014 as an amalgamation of Trinity Theological College, Pilgrim Learning Community and chaplaincy training. TCQ was still in a settling-in period when the BCF had to deal with a major issue.

This issue was that the tertiary provider relationship that we had with the Australian Catholic University (ACU) was due to finish at the end of 2014. The BCF was able to negotiate a one year extension as we explored our options. We are grateful to ACU for the long relationship we have had since the dissolution of the Brisbane College of Theology. Members of the BCF and representatives of TCQ engaged in a process of consultation and discernment. After much deliberation a decision was taken to enter into an agreement with Charles Sturt University (CSU) through an affiliation with the United Theological College, Sydney (UTC). This partnership also means that we are now working alongside St Francis Theological College which is part of CSU as well. It is believed that this relationship will provide scope for expansion and creativity that was previously lacking in the relationship with ACU.

At the same time the BCF was engaged in national conversations around theological education and more sustainable approaches. These conversations have led to greater cooperation on a number of fronts and have given opportunities for cooperation across synods, especially for Trinity OLÉ and the library. Arising from these conversations the Assembly made some significant changes to the regulations that have shifted the priorities of BCF and the Synod. Candidates no longer have to train within a synod and the BCF has a much greater responsibility around the TCQ budget.

This responsibility around the TCQ budget has been a difficult issue as the BCF, like many Synod bodies, relies on funding being released for its work by the Synod Standing Committee (SSC). The BCF is aware of ongoing budget constraints and challenges for the SSC and is seeking to find ways to be more secure and sustainable for the sake of future planning for growth. In recent years low numbers of candidates within the college have sometimes been misunderstood as somehow being representative of the totality of TCQ’s work. It is important to acknowledge that TCQ is seeking to expand the student base at all levels of engagement, from unaccredited to postgraduate work. In addition, TCQ continues to explore how to further help the Synod and presbyteries with training and opportunities for education which do not necessarily involve enrolment within the college.

Another situation that has emerged is the development of Newlife College which is particularly focussed on lay ministry training. Newlife is supported by Adelaide College of Divinity and Uniting College for Leadership and Theology. The BCF has sought to engage in conversations with Newlife in order to develop a relationship of cooperation and collaboration.

In late 2015 the BCF underwent board training and as a consequence began the process of establishing further sub-committees. At the time of preparing this report the committees are currently in the process of developing terms of reference and seeking members from beyond the BCF. It is anticipated that this decision will help streamline meeting processes and keep important items on the agenda and progressing.

Finally, the BCF has taken the significant move to appoint a full-time director of education for ministry, who is also the principal of Trinity Theological College. The BCF determined that to move TCQ ahead a greater focus in leadership would be needed to fulfil the strategic vision of the BCF and for TCQ. The key change is that the director is to have minimal teaching responsibilities.

Prior to this the director/principal role had been fulfilled by a teaching member of faculty. We give thanks to God for Dr Aaron Ghiloni who fulfilled the role of director of education for ministry until mid-2015 and for Rev Dr Wendi Sargeant who was acting director from when Aaron was on study leave until March 2016. In March of 2016 Dr Leigh Trevaskis began his role as the new director and we encourage your prayers and support for Leigh and the work of TCQ.

Formation for ministry

At the previous Synod a review of formation was initiated through the open space process. The breadth of the review was unclear. After consideration the BCF empowered a task group to work on a review of Phase 2 of the formation process; the training of people for specified ministry. The final report of this review will be presented after this report is completed. In the interim it is important to note that there has been a decision to change the approach to field placement. TCQ has developed a new approach which means there is no longer a separated year of field education. This change brings us into line with other synods and may truncate the time taken for training for some candidates, as well as providing greater flexibility and broader experiences for candidates. This approach will be monitored over the next few years. We believe that this decision will help develop a “theologically informed, creative and visionary leadership” and is part of our “being organised for mission”.

Resource sharing urban/rural

Questions were raised with both the BCF and TCQ around rural experiences for candidates. A number of opportunities were provided to students through TCQ. In addition, the development of Trinity OLÉ as a blended learning platform has been taken up by students within the Synod and across the other synods of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Report

The last 18 months have been a rigorous time for the BCF. Whilst still adapting to the changes in the establishment of TCQ, the BCF has:

- finalised changes to the Synod selection process
- helped guide a review of formation
- renegotiated the tertiary provider relationship
- adapted to new Assembly regulations
- developed and implemented Ministerial Candidate Support with accompanying tools
- developed stronger links with the Alcorn Trust
- prepared a policy guide for CEM with accompanying tools
- struggled with budgetary issues
- appointed a new director.

Key achievements/initiatives

The most important outcomes have been the implementation of the new selection panel process for candidates; the development of a CEM tool; and the relationship that we have established with CSU through UTC.

Challenges/risks as we progress

The BCF has been given oversight for the selection, training and ongoing education for ministry. TCQ is a vital and vibrant gift to the Synod. There are excellent opportunities to engage in personal spiritual and theological development. The new situation has meant that we are now in a much more “competitive” situation. One of the risks we face is a lack of support and cooperation in building the life of TCQ and what it can offer this Synod, other synods and the wider church. Questions around ongoing funding and how to increase the revenue of TCQ and fund other aspects of the work of the BCF remain a concern. The challenge to shift our thinking around TCQ as being a place of learning for any Christian, Uniting Church or otherwise, is also an important one. TCQ has great potential to grow as an asset to the church and its future and we invite your prayers and support.

Issues to be addressed

With the new relationship with CSU a range of new opportunities are emerging and we need to be flexible enough to be able to take hold of these.

It is important as we move ahead to continue to think deeply about how the work of the BCF can reflect the needs of the Synod in its key priority areas.

The profile of TCQ and the range and quality of courses, formation and teaching that it offers needs to expand.

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