

Proposal for 31st Queensland Synod October 2014



Proposal 1 Mental Health

That the Synod

1. Affirms the ongoing provision of mental health services by UnitingCare Queensland agencies and Wesley Mission Brisbane
 2. Requests Uniting Communications to identify and disseminate resources, training information and guidelines to assist congregations to engage with the issues outlined in the rationale, and coordinate the development of necessary additional resources
 3. Requests Uniting Communications to conduct a consultation process across congregations and agencies to further develop a background paper
 4. Requests all congregations to actively participate in the National Day of Prayer for Mental Health held during Mental Health Week in October each year.
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Rationale

All people, including people with mental health issues, are of immeasurable value to God.

Mental illness is very common in society making it a significant spiritual, clinical and social responsibility for the community and the Uniting Church. At least one in four families (including church families) currently has a family member facing mental health issues. Around one in two Australians will experience mental health challenges at some point throughout their life. People with mental health issues are disproportionately represented in prisons and among people experiencing homelessness.

Serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, clinical depression, obsessive compulsive disorder and panic anxiety disorder are biological brain disorders and need to be treated as is any other biologically based medical problem of any other organ of the body. Mental health is also influenced by the dominant cultural norms which shape our biology, psyche and social relations.

There is insufficient and unequal access to appropriate treatment and support for people with mental health issues and their families. This is particularly the case for people in remote or disadvantaged areas and for

certain groups in the community, including children and young people, Indigenous people and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community.

The stigma associated with mental health issues and suicide has a long history with partly religious origins, and can result in shame, fear, judgement and rejection. Stigma persists right throughout society and in church communities and people with serious mental illness face discrimination in social relationships, employment and other areas of life. (A Life Without Stigma: A SANE Report SANE Australia 2013 http://www.sane.org/images/stories/media/ALifeWithoutStigma_A_SANE_Report.pdf)

Rates of suicide in Australia are high, particularly in rural areas, for older people and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2014). Causes of Death, Australia, 2012. Catalogue No. 3303.0. Belconnen, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia. Accessed March 25, 2014 from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3303.0main+features100042012>)

As welcoming and inclusive communities, congregations can offer hope, love, care and healing, and help to break through the stigma, fear and isolation experienced by people with mental health issues and their families. Access to training about mental health issues and suicide will resource ministry teams and congregation members to provide appropriate support.

UnitingCare Queensland's agencies offer a range of supports for people with mental health issues and their families. UnitingCare Community provides assistance through Lifeline crisis support, counselling services, suicide prevention, prison ministry and a range of other programs which aim to build the resilience of children and families. UnitingCare Health provides hospital chaplaincy and Blue Care's services provide a holistic approach through its Blue Care *Tailor Made Service Model*, which aims to ensure a client's individual needs are supported, including their emotional wellbeing. As part of Blue Care's commitment to services that provide people with peace of mind, their chaplaincy team is also available to offer emotional care and bereavement support.

Wesley Mission Brisbane offers a range of support programs to assist marginalised members of the community, encourage community connections and healthy mental wellness.

Congregational engagement with UnitingCare Queensland services and other community groups providing mental health support provides opportunities to work together and serve people with mental health challenges and their families.


Proposers

A proposal from one of Synod's reporting bodies (committee, board, task group) should be submitted and signed by an authorised officer of the body.

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Proposal for 31st Queensland Synod October 2014



That the Synod:

Invites congregations to participate in Freedom Sunday on 19 October 2014 and each year on the Sunday closest to World Anti-slavery Day (18 October) through awareness and fund raising, worship, prayer and action – all poised against slavery and exploitation.

Proposal 2

Freedom Sunday

The scope of a Proposal

As the world now has more slaves than any other point in history, the Uniting Church, Qld Synod invites congregations to participate in Freedom Sunday on 19 October 2014, and each year on the Sunday closest to World Anti-slavery Day (18 October) through awareness and fund raising, worship, prayer and action – all poised against slavery and exploitation.

Rationale

There are an estimated 30 million people in situations of slavery in the world today. Modern slavery has become the second most lucrative criminal industry, overtaking the illegal arms trade. The modern slave trade, commonly known as 'human trafficking', occupies almost every corner of the earth. Women, men and children are being forced to work in horrendous conditions under the threat of violence – in rice-mills, brick-kilns, mines, and factories or on tea and cocoa plantations.

Australia is a destination country for people trafficked primarily from South East Asia, China and India. Many of the products that are sold in our stores have been tainted by the use of forced and child labour. We are all connected to modern-day slavery.

What can we do to stop this horrendous human rights abuse?

Freedom Sunday is a global day supported by denominations and organisations around the world to unite in prayer to demonstrate a united and tangible response against human trafficking. This abhorrent crime must not be tolerated. The Church must be at the forefront of the movement to end slavery!

Resources can be found at <http://www.stopthetraffic.org/campaign/freedomsunday>

Proposers

A proposal from one of Synod's reporting bodies (committee, board, task group) should be submitted and signed by an authorised officer of the bod

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Proposal for
31st Queensland Synod
October 2014



Proposal 3

Recognise Campaign for constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

That the Synod:

1. Join with UnitingCare Queensland to support the campaign to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution of Australia.
 2. Become an official *Recognise* campaign partner and encourage congregations, presbyteries, and all other Uniting Church entities to join in the *Recognise* campaign.
 3. Encourage all Church members and staff to sign up as a supporter of the *Recognise* campaign.
 4. Call on the Government to work with urgency towards holding a referendum no later than the Federal Election in 2016.
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The scope of a Proposal

UnitingCare Queensland supports the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution. Constitutional recognition acknowledges the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognises them as our country's first people. In addition UnitingCare Queensland supports the removal of the discriminatory parts of the Constitution based on race. UnitingCare Queensland has joined the Recognise Campaign as an official campaign partner. Uniting Justice Australia is a member of the Campaign's NGO Steering Committee.

UnitingCare Queensland encourages the whole of the Queensland Synod to join the Recognise Campaign and urges the Australian Government to work towards a referendum to be held no later than the Federal Election in 2016.

Rationale

Australia's Constitution makes no mention that before Europeans arrived, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had lived on this land for more than 40,000 years. Furthermore, the Constitution includes provisions that are discriminatory, including allowing states to ban people from voting because of their race.

In 2010 the Prime Minister announced the Government's intention to hold a referendum to amend the Constitution and provide for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Over the course of 2012, the Government became concerned at the low level of public awareness of the issue. Reconciliation Australia initiated the Recognise Campaign to help improve public awareness and build public support for a change to the Constitution. The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have both spoken passionately about the issue of recognition in the constitution.

Already over 220,000 Australians from all walks of life have declared their support to recognise the first Australians in our founding document. For further information about Recognise go to www.recognise.org.au.

In 2009 the Assembly amended the Preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution to recognise that:

1. When churches that formed the Uniting Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonisation, they entered a land that had been created and sustained by the Triune God they knew in Jesus Christ.
2. Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning 'sovereign' in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.
3. The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.
4. Some members of the uniting churches approached the First Peoples with good intentions, standing with them in the name of justice; considering their well being, culture and language, as the churches proclaimed the reconciling purpose of the Triune God found in the good news about Jesus Christ.
5. Many in the uniting churches however, shared the values and relationships of the emerging colonial society including paternalism and racism towards the First Peoples. They were complicit in the injustice that resulted in many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture and spirituality, becoming strangers in their own land.
6. The uniting churches were largely silent, as the dominant culture of Australia constructed and propagated a distorted version of history that denied this land was occupied, utilised, cultivated and harvested by these First Peoples who also had complex systems of trade and inter-relationships. As a result of this denial, relationships were broken and the very integrity of the Gospel proclaimed by the churches was diminished.
7. From the beginning of colonisation the First Peoples challenged their dispossession and the denial of their proper place in this land. In time this was taken up in the community, in the courts, in the parliaments, in the way history was recorded and told, and in the Uniting Church in Australia.
8. In 1985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia formed the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.
9. In 1988 the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress invited the other members of the Church to join in a solemn act of covenanting before God.
10. After much struggle and debate, in 1994 the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia discovered

God's call, accepted this invitation and entered into an ever deepening covenantal relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. This was so that all may see a destiny together, praying and working together for a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

AND THUS the Church celebrates this Covenantal relationship as a foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.

In the spirit of the Preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution the Synod is urged to join its voice to the campaign for recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution, and to encourage its members, congregations, presbyteries, entities and staff to participate in the *Recognise* campaign.

UnitingCare Queensland has joined the Recognise Campaign as an official campaign partner and has agreed it will undertake a range of activities that will build awareness with staff, volunteers and other stakeholders. The theme of the UnitingCare Queensland *Recognise* campaign focusses on belonging and storytelling and includes the following activities:

- A week of focused activities starting with launch events in Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast and Cairns, which will allow people to share their stories of reconciliation and learn about the Campaign. A toolkit will be developed to support people across the state to hold similar events over the course of the Campaign.
- Fact sheets will be developed which outline the reasons for the campaign, how people can be involved and tips to assist managers to open up conversations with staff and volunteers about Recognition.
- People will also be able to connect with the official campaign tour, “the Journey to Recognition”, where a themed bus will travel around the state at the end of the year, stopping in selected towns, for key events.
- Sharing our views with key state and federal parliamentarians

UnitingCare Queensland's campaign will use traditional communication channels as well as social media to engage our target audiences and encourage participation. UnitingCare will share resources and strategies with the Synod to support engagement with this important issue across the life of the Church in Queensland.

It is now four years since the Prime Minister announced that a referendum would be held. There was every expectation that it would be held either during this term of government or in conjunction with the next federal election. To date the Prime Minister has not announced a timeframe for the referendum and has suggested that it will not happen before or in conjunction with the next election. This could mean a referendum is not held until 2017 – 50 years after being granted the right to be included in Australia's census.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been waiting a long time. A referendum on Recognition should not be further delayed. Many informed people believe that there is sufficient time between now and the next election for the necessary work and consultations to be conducted, and for a campaign for this change to be successfully conducted. In view of this, the Synod is encouraged to urge that the referendum not be delayed beyond the federal election due in 2016.

In summary the proposal we bring to the Synod is consistent with the position of the Church as expressed in the Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church. It is an opportunity to participate in building a positive consensus within the community, for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Peoples' of Australia, and to remove the constitutional right to discriminate on the basis of race.

Proposers

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