

Report for
31st Queensland Synod
October 2014



Report from
Board for Christian Formation



Context:

The Board for Christian Formation (BCF) plays the key role within the Queensland Synod with respect to the oversight of the selection and training of people entering specified ministry. The BCF also plays a significant role in the development of formation and education opportunities for any who wish to grow in their faith and understanding.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Enabling a demonstrated commitment to the shared Call and Vision

Within its work the BCF has constantly referred to the Priority Directions of the Synod and has used them to guide it in the amalgamation of Trinity Theological College, Pilgrim Learning Community and chaplaincy education; in the development of the associated by-laws, staff structure and vision for Trinity College Queensland; and in its work with the Synod Selection Panel, Period of Discernment (POD) and other educational and formation entities.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Promoting a discipline of prayer and spirituality (individual and corporate)

Worship and prayer are integral to the life of Trinity College Queensland as it develops spiritual leaders for the church.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The BCF is working with the leadership of Trinity College Queensland to discern how to develop the college as a Christian community.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Developing sustainable mission orientated organisation (way of being) for the Church in Queensland

The BCF has focussed a great deal of energy since the 2013 Synod in following through on the commitment to amalgamating Trinity Theological College and Pilgrim Learning Community as a reflection of the network for Christian formation. During this process the decision was taken to draw chaplaincy education into the new entity. (Please refer to the “Key achievements” section for more detail).

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

There are two key areas in which the BCF is seeking to achieve more sustainable and mission-oriented organisation within the Synod in regards to formation, education and training.

Firstly, by engaging in conversations with other bodies within the Synod which have involvement in the training and education of people, both lay and ordained. This includes strengthening the ties the board has with the Alcorn Fellowship Trust by nominating a BCF representative to the Trust. It has also involved some engagement with congregations and Presbyteries that offer significant opportunities.

Secondly, in late May the President of the Assembly invited the Synod to make a submission in terms of national cooperation for theological education, in particular the formation of a single national college possibly in multiple locations. The BCF has been given the responsibility to engage in this process and hopes to bring the progress of this discussion in verbal form to the Synod in session.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Facilitating renewal of leadership for the mission of the Church

With the development of the new staff structure for Trinity College Queensland the BCF discerned that Dr Aaron Ghiloni would be placed as the Director of Trinity College Queensland. As director, Aaron is also recognised as principal with regards to the affiliation agreement that the Synod has with the Australian Catholic University (ACU).

There have been a number of changes of staff at Trinity College Queensland including the placement of Rev Dr Wendi Sargeant and Dr Janice Rees. In addition, Anna Lagos and Lyndelle Gunton have been employed in Trinity Theological Library as learning and teaching librarians. In the process of amalgamation we also recognise that Rev Lynne Gibson and John Coles became part of the Trinity College Queensland staff.

The staff at Trinity College Queensland are committed to developing leaders for the mission of the church, both lay and ordained, and continue to explore how to do this most effectively. During the process of formation a significant survey was undertaken which has helped in the process of considering directions for the new college.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The BCF has been involved in conversation with Rev Mark Cornford who has been developing Period of Discernment (POD) resources.

The Synod Selection Panel processes are currently under review. This task will be completed prior to the Synod meeting.

In collaboration with the Governance Nomination and Remuneration Committee (GNRC) the BCF is exploring ways to address the funding of ordinand candidates.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Engaging in opportunities for intentional, open community connections and partnerships

Trinity College Queensland provides a range of formation opportunities and intensives whereby students engage with the various agencies of the Uniting Church.

The ongoing relationship with ACU provides connections with Roman Catholic Church.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

Consideration is being given to other partnership that may be helpful in the formation, training and education of people engaged in ministry within the church.

Key achievements/initiatives

The key achievement of the BCF has been to work through the process of change which has established Trinity College Queensland. The college has a commitment to lifelong ministerial and professional education, training and formation. Having now been established in this form it is anticipated that the college will seek to broaden the base of interest and number of students engaged in education and formation across the Synod. The following excerpt captures something of the vision and energy that lies within Trinity College Queensland:

Trinity College Queensland is *uniting for an informed faith*.

When we say *uniting* we mean that Trinity is an inclusive college. Our educational programs are designed to serve the church in its length and breadth:

- If you plan to become a chaplain, Trinity is for you.
- If you are interested in exploring your faith journey at a deeper level, Trinity is for you.
- If you want to study to become a Pastor or Lay Preacher, Trinity is for you.
- If you want to study for ordained ministry, Trinity is for you.
- If you want to continue deepening your ministry and theological knowledge, Trinity is for you.



When we say *uniting* we mean that Trinity is ecumenical. We belong to the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod – an innovative church that, historically, grew out of a variety of Christianities; a diverse Australian church that continues to welcome a wide range of people. This diversity is reflected in our curriculum. Our Bachelor of Theology program is offered in partnership with Australian Catholic University—Australia’s premier faculty of theology. Our other programs are likewise diverse with teachers and students coming from a variety of Christian backgrounds. At Trinity you will be welcomed.

When we say *informed faith* we mean that Trinity takes education seriously. Our attempts to speak of God and to minister in the love of Christ must be informed by an “inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry.” Trinity’s teaching staff are deeply committed to assisting students deepen their spiritual understanding by engaging more deeply with biblical texts, church doctrine, and theologically-informed practices.

When we say *informed faith* we mean that Trinity provides an accessible theological library, a highly-qualified teaching staff, and a range of challenging learning opportunities (both online and face-to-face) for the purpose of growing faith. At Trinity you will be supported and challenged in your spiritual life.

When we say *uniting for an informed faith*, Trinity College Queensland tips its hat to Charles Wesley and his 1748 hymn, written at the opening of a Methodist school in England:

***Unite the pair so long disjoined
Knowledge and vital piety,
Learning and holiness combined,
And truth and love let all men see.***

Challenges/risks as we progress:

Having given a great deal of energy to establishing Trinity College Queensland the BCF is facing the prospect of a potentially difficult process of conversations and negotiations with other Synods around theological education and formation at a national level. This conversation provides great opportunities but also has within it some significant risks.

The multiple pathways people are using to begin their study options, including accessing training outside the Queensland Synod, either from other Synod or non-UCA providers, is raising some challenging issues as to recognition of prior learning.

In addition, the ongoing questions about support for candidates and the constantly changing landscape of tertiary education remain significant issues.

Contact for Report questions:

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Report for
31st Queensland Synod
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Report from
Trinity College Queensland



Context:

Trinity College Queensland offers theological education that relates the gospel to cultural contexts. The college has three broad teaching areas: lifelong education, professional education, and ministerial education. At the initiative of the Board of Christian Formation, the college was launched in July 2014. Trinity College Queensland brings together the staff, curricula, and resources of Pilgrim Learning Community, chaplaincy education, and Trinity Theological College including the Trinity Theological Library. Students of the college can receive the following qualifications:

- Cert IV in Pastoral Care (in partnership with Wesley Mission)
- Bachelor of Theology (in partnership with Australian Catholic University).

In addition to these qualifications, the college offers a range of adult faith education programs, many of which lead to recognition in the Uniting Church in Australia including lay preacher accreditation. The college also offers a number of continuing education opportunities including intensives, workshops, study resources, research supervision, and guest lectures. These programs are offered in a range of formats from face-to-face to blended to fully online.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Developing sustainable mission orientated organisation (way of being) for the Church in Queensland

The creation of Trinity College Queensland brought together Pilgrim Learning Community, chaplaincy education, and Trinity Theological College including the Trinity Theological Library. One reason for this initiative was to create greater collaboration between the staff, curricula, and resources of these entities. A goal of this unified educational provider is to engage a greater number and range of people in learning opportunities.

Although these are early days for Trinity College Queensland (launched on 20 July 2014), some of mission-orientated initiatives include:

- There are expanded opportunities through the Trinity Theological Library for resourcing and supporting educational activities within the Synod. Recent initiatives include increased purchase of ebooks; collection development to support lay education and practical ministry and reading for leisure; development of Trinity Online Learning Experience (OLÉ), an online learning portal; redesign of the library website; creation and implementation of the role of Learning & Teaching Librarian to link the library with the educational activities of the college and Synod.
- Movement of the formation program for candidates from a weekly format to an intensive block format enables greater participation by students who live at a distance and those involved in full-time work.
- The Certificate IV in Pastoral Care provides training for people working in chaplaincy and aged-care contexts.
- In our lifelong learning programs, which are mostly accessed by lay people, units in mission and ministry are intentionally incorporated into courses. This includes a strong focus on spiritual formation as well as academic and practical formation.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The college has been exploring the experiences of candidates who are in full-time ministry placements and, in conjunction with the Board for Christian Formation (BCF) and Governance Nomination and Remuneration Committee (GNRC), ways to support candidates financially.

The college recognises a need for improving its approach to communication, promotions, and advancement. No staff member currently has this as a primary focus of their role.

We anticipate an ongoing review of the courses in our lifelong learning programs to incorporate a focus on mission and ministry aligned to the perspective of the Uniting Church in Australia.

The Trinity Theological Library is working toward the following: intentional collection development; the provision of IT support to maintain and develop Trinity OLE; continued development and support of the blended online learning experience by the Learning & Teaching Librarian; implementation of an operational plan to better manage the role of the Learning & Teaching Librarian.

College staff are exploring ways of incorporating online learning into various aspects of the curriculum and have undertaken professional development in this area.



Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Facilitating renewal of leadership for the mission of the church

Trinity College Queensland is committed to educating creative and visionary leaders with a strong sense of Christian identity. We have been developing curricula which intentionally teaches hermeneutical skills that enable people to engage theologically with Australian culture in its ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Specific initiatives include:

- the creation of a faculty position in apologetics and evangelism
- a thorough review of the Bachelor of Theology degree which led to revitalised units
- developing contextually conscious learning opportunities in areas such as interfaith studies and theology from the margins
- development of a unit on a theology of leadership
- greater emphasis on preaching and developing preaching skills for candidates in the formation program
- modelling leadership in pastoral care and chaplaincy and training others for leadership roles in this area
- expansion of our field education program so that (a) candidates are required to engage in “pioneering” ministry projects during their field year, and (b) practical, field components are built-in to all stages of candidature
- ongoing professional development of ministry agents through the provision of relevant theological resources via the Trinity Theological Library and other continuing education initiatives
- provision of educational services to support accreditation processes for members engaged in specified ministries (lay preacher, ministry of pastor) as well as those in church-recognised ministry areas (Period of Discernment and lay presiders).

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

In a self-consciously multicultural church, it is vital that the college prioritise increased engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, students, and teachers.

The college aims to work towards providing online resources to support broader leadership development (beyond specified ministry) in the Uniting Church in Australia and is currently in discussion with other states regarding collaboration in a broad range of educational programs.

The Trinity Theological Library aims to develop resources such as professional reading guides, online reading groups and online documentation/e-portfolios for ministry agents undertaking professional development.



Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Engaging in opportunities for intentional, open community connections and partnerships

Trinity College Queensland is seeking to make connections with the community in the following ways:

- development of our chaplaincy program to serve regional centres through online learning
- provision of an online induction program for staff in schools and other agencies
- development of Trinity OLE
- increased acquisition of ebooks
- use of social media to connect with the wider church community
- development of learning opportunities for theological reflection on community contexts
- participation by the library manager on the National Assembly Historical Reference Committee.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

- establishing national cooperation through the Formation, Education and Discipleship (FED) Assembly working group to enlarge the scope of the induction program for staff in schools and other agencies
- continued development of Trinity OLÉ to enable blended learning opportunities within the Synod and nationally
- increased IT support for continued use of Trinity OLÉ
- participation in various consultations on the possibility of national approaches to theological education
- developing learning opportunities to heighten awareness among church members that the church is a place for learning
- planning for a Queensland Synod archives.



Key achievements/initiatives

An important initiative has been the development and launch of Trinity College Queensland. Bringing this new college into existence has involved an incredible amount of work by college staff. This has not been “busywork” but has helped us to review and improve our approach to theological education. Our approach to resource support, lifelong education, chaplaincy education, and ministerial education has dramatically evolved in the past 18 months. We are thankful to the church, particularly the Board for Christian Formation and Synod Support Services, for their support during this time. As a newly formed team we are committed to finding new ways to be catalysts for excellence in theological education.

Challenges/risks as we progress:

Although Trinity College Queensland has been launched, there is much work to be done. We are well aware that we have launched a process, not a finished product. There are likely to be “growing pains” for the college as it develops new ways of working.

The recent inauguration of the Trinity Online Learning Experience (OLÉ) has sparked national interest. This initiative will need support in order to ensure that a stable and well-maintained online learning platform continues to grow and serve the church.

Theological education in the Uniting Church is in some ferment. The college will be a full participant in conversations about national approaches to theological education. A challenge for the college in these times is to maintain a high standard of Christian education within the Queensland Synod while being open to new models and ideas.

Recommendations/strategic decisions for Synod:

The College recommends that the Synod establish a process for reviewing the resourcing and structuring of Continuing Education for Ministry (CEM). The following matters may be considered in the review: how ministry agents engage in ongoing learning; how CEM is funded and how funding is most effectively distributed for ministry and mission outcomes; whether the Synod can improve ministry and mission outcomes through new CEM models.

Issues to be addressed:

The following matters require action for the continued growth of the college:

- increased IT support to ensure the stability and maintenance of the Trinity OLÉ platform
- improvement in the college's approach to advancement, development, and communications.

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