

Report for
31st Queensland Synod
October 2014



Report from the
General Secretary

Uniting in Christ
acting with love
living with hope
witnessing in faith
working for justice

Context:

The first phase of our Vision 2020 'Together on the way, enriching community' journey has concluded with review and reflection work being engaged across the life of the Synod. Together with this review, work has been done to inform our understanding of the church in Queensland alongside our understanding of Queensland's demography to enable the Synod to explore the next phase of Together on the way. This will be a key focus of our time together this Synod.

The objectives of each of the five Priority Directions for this phase of the Vision 2020 journey have continued to provide the focus for the work of the General Secretary. Whilst continuing a focus in Priority Direction C, continuing to develop sustainable, mission oriented organisation for the Church in Queensland, significant work has also been done in responding to each of the other priority directions since the last Synod. This report will identify broad themes for the work of the Priority Directions moving forward, understanding that the Together on the way process is at a review point.

In the reports that follow, the work of the Synod office is identified in terms of our Together on the way priority directions. Therefore, this report will focus on the work of the office of the General Secretary within that wider work, and as appropriate, point to that work.

In offering this report, I recognise and wish to record my thanks for the ministry of Dr Shirley Coulson as General Secretary of the Queensland Synod. Much of the content of this report will be work started and/or undertaken by Dr Coulson during her term as General Secretary. If, at any point in this report, there is less detail than ideally expected, it will likely be due to my relatively recent engagement with the material.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Enabling a demonstrated commitment to the shared Call and Vision

Councils of the Church working together

In seeking to enact the strategy associated with the Call and Vision, I have become aware that we currently have no formal interface of Synod (office staff), Presbytery, and Agency representatives to explore and operationalize the work that is required by enacting the strategy of the Church.

Therefore, the above groups have been convened in a body currently called PSI – **Presbytery Synod Interface**. The intent of the work of this group is not to be a decision making body, nor a strategy setting body, and it will not seek to usurp the responsibilities of the councils of the church. Rather this will be a group that takes the polity of the Church to heart in seeking to corporately enact the strategy of the Church across the life of the Church. As such, the work of this group will be reported to the SSC and to the Presbyteries and Agencies. The intent of this reporting will be to offer the operational experience of the group into the strategic and operational decision making that happens in the other councils.

Reviewing Together on the Way

As part of the review of the first phase of the Together on the way, *enriching community* journey, review has been undertaken of the strategies identified within the work plans of the Synod together with a broad engagement across the life of the Church which explored the use and usefulness of the Together on the way framework; the impact of the Priority directions in various contexts; and review of the priority directions with respect to vitality of current directions, and emerging priorities from across the life of the church. This work will be reported to the Synod.

Working within the Ethos

Work has been started, as a collaborative exercise, on developing an online course which enables people to engage in formative training around the polity, structure and ethos of the Uniting Church. Whilst still in development phase, this resource can be widely available and form a part of induction processes for people working with and within the Uniting Church.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

Enhancing the Communications and engagement strategies around Together on the way which further develops opportunities for the stories and resources to be shared in ways which support and encourage the mission of the church

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

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

The key work promoted by the General Secretary in this Priority Direction has been the ongoing engagement with worship at the Synod office. The opportunities provided vary from reflection to more formally structured worship opportunities. However, regardless of the style of opportunity, staff and visitors to the Synod office can engage in prayer as a regular part of the working rhythm of the office.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The Synod office staff team have been engaged is considering how worship will continue to form part of the work experience of the office. These plans will be enacted over coming months.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

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

In addition to continuing to work with previously identified priorities, the following key initiatives have been worked on during this Synod term.

Child Safe

The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod (UCAQ) has a population of around 2,000 children and young people (0-18years) attending weekly worship, with around 180 of the almost 250 congregations conducting specific activities for this group.

The safety of children and young people has always been a priority for the Synod. Support within the Queensland Synod has been, and continues to be strong, recently demonstrated with the resolution of the Synod Standing Committee in May 2014 to employ a full-time Child Safe Church Administrator to help resource and train youth workers, ministers, volunteer leaders and child safety officers across presbyteries and congregations of Queensland in child safe church policy and procedures. We aim to demonstrate continued commitment to a sustainable model which supports its commitment to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable people under its influence and responsibility. The work of the Synod office commits to continuing to support and encourage the Uniting Church to be a safe place for all people.

Royal Commission

On 11 April 2013 the Qld Synod received a Notice to Produce (Notice 1) from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission). Notice 1 required the Qld Synod to produce all documents in the possession, custody or control of the Qld Synod relating to any allegation, complaint, account, review or investigation regarding the sexual abuse of a child, where such abuse occurred or was alleged to have occurred within the geographical boundaries of the state of Qld where such abuse was alleged against a Minister, any employee, volunteer, contractor or other authorised person engaged by any school and all policies and procedures of the Qld Synod in relation to the handling of allegations of child sexual abuse from

1 January 1970 to date. A Queensland Synod Commission Task Group was convened in April 2013, and this group has continued to meet on a monthly basis. All Presbyteries, schools, colleges and community service providers within the Qld Synod were contacted and directed to conduct a search of their records to locate any documents relating to which Notice 1. Subsequently, the relevant documents were provided to the Royal Commission in May 2013. Any additional relevant documents which have come to light since the first response have been provided to the Royal Commission. As at the date of writing this report no further Notice has been served upon the Queensland Synod nor its agencies or representatives. As a result of the review of materials provided to the Synod and the observations of the public hearings of the Royal Commission, review has been undertaken of the policy and procedures of the Church nationally but in particular in relation to the Queensland Synod. The Church's review is ongoing and will be continually evaluated and updated as the Royal Commission releases more of its findings and recommendations. Externally, the Queensland Synod, has had direct input into work of the Royal Commission through its participation in the Round table conferences and the Issues Papers. It is anticipated that the Church would be the subject of disclosures being made by survivors of abuse at the private sittings. To date, no agency of the Uniting Church has been the subject of the Royal Commission.

Caris

The Synod has been working towards the development of a new relationships and information management system, which we have named *Caris*. The system will resource both the work of the office as it serves the church, as well as the work of our committees and boards. It will create a single 'source of truth', simplifying our data storage and recovery. More information on this can be found in the FAPS report.

Discipline Processes

Considerable resources continue to be expended on dealing with issues of church discipline. A proactive approach to addressing areas of potential conflict and breaches of the code of ethics is critical. To this end, and out of the National Conversation on Church Discipline, a small group has undertaken work relating to support for the professional supervision of ministry agents and enhancing Code of Ethics training. This work has led to a number of resources being made available through the Synod website.

This group continues to work, and is collaborating with representatives from other Synods to identify how Synods together might develop, or renew, Policy and procedures which enhance the church's processes and aid the church to be a community of reconciliation.

Uniting Church Centre

Following from property utilisation considerations and a work accommodation review a plan was established to ensure more effective use of the UC Centre buildings. This has included locating all Synod support staff on the second floor allowing the first floor to be allocated to Trinity College Queensland. This allows for the creative use of Drysllwyn house, a heritage property located on site at 60 Bayliss Street, for missional purposes.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

Development

Being intentional regarding people development is an issue across the life of the Church as we seek to identify and resource appropriately skilled and gifted people into leadership and governance roles in the Synod and across the breadth of the Church. Currently there is no consolidated plan with regard to this issue, although there are certainly development opportunities offered in a variety of contexts both within and outside the church. A consolidated approach will enhance the church's opportunity to resource the ongoing renewal of leadership for the mission of the church.

Policy

Whilst Policy development has been a focus of this last Synod term, there is a need for a greater focus on providing an extensive Policy framework and the development of key policy positions which resource the ongoing life of the Church. This work enhances the work already progressed in this area.

Compliance

In today's context of government regulated service activities and expectations of accrediting bodies we need to demonstrate that we are responsible citizens. The implementation of the ACNC has demonstrated that some of our own governance practices could be improved, and compliance obligations encourage us to meet regulated standards. We continue to recognise our need to develop our systems and processes with regard to areas of risk and Insurance, Child Safety, Blue Cards, and HR processes as we seek to be an organisation which fulfils its societal responsibilities as we declare the gospel message of grace, hope and love.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Facilitating renewal of leadership for the mission of the Church

Christian Formation Project

This role was designed to support and facilitate projects designed to develop the practices of Christian formation within the life of the Uniting Church in Queensland. The role was implemented as a direct outcome of the decisions made at the 29th Synod of the Uniting Church, held in October 2011, in order to facilitate the church's faithful response to God's call on its life at this time. The full report of this project provides insight into the outcomes generated through his work.

Period of Discernment Renewal Project

As one discreet element of the Christian formation project, renewal of the Period of Discernment (PoD) process and resources was undertaken. This work was undertaken collaboratively, with input being provided by a range of stakeholders with experience in the process. The aim of the renewal was to make the resources more accessible to the church as one method of exploration of call. These renewed resources are available on the Synod website.

The Church's commitment to the PoD is expressed well in the introductory comments from the site. "At the heart of this process is the understanding that all who have been baptised are called into the ministry of Jesus Christ. The essence of the Period of Discernment is to discern where that ministry lies."

Trinity College Queensland

Trinity College Queensland (TCQ) began on 20 July with a celebration launch of this new college encompassing Candidate education, Lay education and Chaplaincy education under the one entity. The transition process for all involved is ongoing as the college looks toward a renewed future.

One of the key developments across this Synod term (and for a more complete report, please see the BCF report) is the development of *Trinity Ole*, an online learning platform. This platform is undergoing ongoing development as it becomes available to people across the Synod, providing a learning context via online resources.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The question of development of leadership as articulated above impacts this priority direction. Aligned with this, budget provision for professional learning needs to become an accepted practice within all church contexts.

Enhancing opportunities for mentoring and coaching new members have been engaged by a number of the Synod boards, committees and commissions. Evaluation of these methodologies may lead to the development of a program of development in this space.

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Engaging in opportunities for intentional, open community connections and partnerships

Mission Engagement Framework

The Synod's work in the area of encouraging mission continues through the Mission Engagement Project Officer. The work continues to be principally research and development in nature, and exploring areas such as mission, strategic directions and discipleship. The full project report is in your papers, and includes highlights such as the forthcoming mission shaped ministry training experience to be offered through Moreton Rivers Presbytery, research tasks for Synod Standing Committee, sharing in Presbytery meetings across the Synod and encouraging fresh expression of church in various locations. I commend that report to you and encourage you to talk with Scott Guyatt if you'd like to explore these topics further.

Stats Have Faces

The Stats have Faces resource will provide congregations with a tool to help them better understand their communities, those that live in them and to engage with them. It will also assist congregations to focus their mission. This is a stand-alone resource for congregations to use to either supplement their existing mission strategy or as a way of engaging in mission planning for the first time. Statistics and research are valuable to help congregations and this resource focusses not just on the numbers but on getting to know the people and stories behind them.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The work of the Synod will identify further priorities for the Church. The work of the General Secretary will continue to seek to identify how these are supported through the work of the Synod office, and to work with the SSC to resource them appropriately.

Key achievements/initiatives

Caris – establishing an information management system for the Synod office which resources the Synod's support of the Church.

Project Roles – The Synod has benefited from the expertise of committed project staff who have resourced the Synod across a number of areas.

Royal Commission Response – There has been significant work done in both engaging with and responding to the Royal Commission. This work is seeding developmental work in the life of the Church.

Challenges/risks as we progress:

Together on the way – was never intended to be a one size fits all for the church, but a framework in which priorities could be expressed and resourced. Renewal of our key priorities, together with engagement strategies are needed to enhance the opportunity for Congregations and Presbyteries to utilise the resource.

Resourcing the Church's leadership, both lay and ordained, for a changing and diverse congregational contexts, together with resourcing leadership of boards and committees.

Compliance across the life of the Church as we seek to ensure we are effectively governed, and appropriately accountable.

Royal Commission – whilst our engagement to date has been strong, the outcomes of the Royal Commission may well expect significant change of the Church. Whilst this work is ongoing, we should not underestimate the potential requirements of us as Church.

Recommendations/strategic decisions for Synod:

Notwithstanding the issues with which the Synod will engage, one of the key strategic pieces for this Synod will be the work around the Open Space process which will surface the opportunities for the Church to pursue in the next phase of our Together on the way journey.

Contact for Report questions:

Name: John Cox

email: john.cox@ucqld.com.au

phone: (07)3377 9822