

Report for
31st Queensland Synod
October 2014



Report from
**Project Officer – Christian
Formation**

Context:

Role

This role is part of a strategic response to Priority Direction C: “Developing sustainable mission oriented organisation (way of being) for the Church in Queensland”. The role will support and facilitate projects designed to develop the practices of Christian formation within the life of the Uniting Church in Queensland. The role is being 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.

Key Responsibilities

- resource and bring to fruition the *Grow Faith* project aimed at providing online devotional resources for young people and young adults
 - research, resource and bring to completion the Period of Discernment (POD) resource project aimed at providing accessible resources to people engaging in the POD
 - provide some support to and liaise with the youth and family workers network of the Uniting Church in Queensland
 - research trends and new initiatives in Christian formation, in collaboration with Pilgrim Learning Community, Trinity Theological College staff, current networks of Christian educators and those interested in Christian formation and presbytery ministers, such that new initiatives in Christian formation might be identified and enacted within the *Together on the way, enriching community* framework
 - resource and support as appropriate the school of discipleship and *Stretching Faith* (a theological retreat for young adults) initiatives
 - develop networks of gifted and committed practitioners to facilitate ongoing Christian formation work in the Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church
 - develop, manage and bring to completion other agreed projects aligned with the *Together on the way, enriching community* framework.
-

Responses to our Priority Directions since last Synod

Facilitating renewal of leadership for the mission of the church

Period of Discernment: The resources for a revamped POD have been completed and are being piloted this year. So far feedback has been positive.

Grow Faith: This year saw the beginning of our collaboration with the *A Big Year* online discipleship resource. Our role was contributing to the development of the resource and creating a monthly short video to introduce themes.

Summer Madness: Summer Madness 2013+ ran well but had decreased attendance due to NCYC and changing the date from January to December.

Youth and Children's Ministry and Formation Research: Between the Mission Officer and myself, we have reviewed a number of evidence-based pieces of research on Christian formation and mission and have overlaid this with both the 2006 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) and the 2014 Uniting Church in Australia census data. Needless to say there are significant areas of concern and challenge (see below). We have been working with various bodies to consider the implications of the research and our current situation, and possible ways forward. In particular there has been much discussion with the Presbytery-based youth and children's workers on our key priorities and what can we do together.

Working towards our Priority Directions in the future

The role finishes at the end of 2014. Between the end of Synod and the end of December the key work to be completed is:

- Period Of Discernment
 - modify POD materials using feedback from participants
 - place all POD materials online
 - finalise how the Synod will resource the POD going forward
 - communicate any changes with Presbytery POD coordinators
- Summer Madness 2015.

Key achievements/initiatives

See above

Challenges/risks as we progress:

In looking at the Uniting Church Queensland census and NCLS data, it is clear that a massive issue faced by most congregations is that we are losing young people at an alarming rate. NCLS 2006 data tells us that we retain fewer than 38 per cent of 15+ aged children of Uniting Church attenders. We believe that by the time an attender's children have reached age 25, between 25-33 per cent remain in the Uniting Church in Australia.

It seems that many congregations and most Uniting Church Queensland bodies are not directly addressing this issue. It is clear from evidence-based research that while there are key steps that can be taken, the first step is a value and priority placed on ministry with children, young people and their families across the WHOLE church (not just delegating to youth workers and leaders).

Unless this crisis is owned and addressed we will continue to bleed young people. In doing so we will be showing that we do not value young people or believe that they have a place in the church. In effect, we will be saying to young people that it was more important for us to run the church the way we like than for them to discover the Good News of Christ.

Recommendations/strategic decisions for Synod:

It is recommended that the 31st Synod receive this report.

Contact for Report questions:

Name: Mark Cornford

email: mark.cornford@ucaqld.com.au

phone:0437 019 862