



renewal

SYNOD 37

R02 The General Secretary's Report

37th Queensland Synod

It is with mixed emotions that I offer my final report as General Secretary of the Queensland Synod since accepting the role in 2016. To serve God and the Uniting Church as General Secretary has been one of the great privileges of my life and memories of the joy and challenges of the role will remain with me for years to come. I look forward with excitement to a new season of ministry in rural Victoria in 2024 and beyond, as yet another way of acting out the call of church in my life. I celebrate the richness and diversity of the Uniting Church and its continual challenge to itself to always be a people on the way.

During this term of Synod, I have welcomed the opportunity to travel widely across the state. I enjoyed the life-transforming experience of visiting western Cape York, encountering both the unique challenges and amazing blessings of life in those remote communities. I have valued the chance to spend time in rural communities such as Crows Nest and Thornville, learning how important it is for a church to allow itself to be transformed by its community. I have joined in Presbytery meetings across the state, visited the Frontier Services Bush Chaplains Gathering, and significant events such as Raymont College's Commencement Dinner and the UnitingCare Queensland Full Circle and Reconciliation Awards event. In each place I have visited, I have met the wonderful people of the Uniting Church, each of them continuing the strong tradition of worship, witness and service that is so deeply embedded in our shared story.

As I have travelled, I have reflected on how the Office of the Synod can best extend its support to serve those who serve others, and I have also seen that we work together with grit and commitment during a period of immense challenge and change. We've felt the impact personally, we've faced it as a Church, and we have experienced it as a wider society.

While the most difficult moments of the COVID-19 pandemic now appear to be behind us, this season has continued to be challenging at home and across the globe. Well-documented financial challenges, political and military conflicts, housing shortages, continuing high levels of illness, and social disconnectedness can shake our sense of control and wellbeing. In such times, the levels of anxiety in the community increase and we are not immune to this experience ourselves.

I am surer than ever that the way of Jesus offers something unique, something vital in this time. We are called to love, not fear. We are called to follow Jesus, to heal and help the communities that we are part of, to be careful and wise stewards, to keep those in our care safe and well, and to continue in our identity as uniting, to prioritise our life together. As we move forward in a time when change is inevitable, we have opportunities to break free from constraints of expectation, habit, and pattern to celebrate and utilise both ancient and fresh ways to love our neighbours, serve God and proclaim the gospel.

The Office of the Synod plays a particular role in the life of our church, and I give thanks for it. I understand that we can, at times, be seen as the bearers of obligation, compliance, and paperwork. Crucially though, we are charged with the vital task of helping our church hold its hand to the wheel, maintaining our mission focus in ways that are effective, safe, and sustainable.

With that in mind, I want to take this opportunity to thank again the wonderful people in our team who work tirelessly to serve our church - our congregations and presbyteries, entities and agencies, schools, and colleges. It has been an honour to work with you all.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all those who share in the work of the church across the Synod, all those in ministry, in committees and councils, and the teams in our agencies, entities and organisations throughout Queensland. For the joy of working with you, I give thanks to God.

To our incoming General Secretary, I offer my very best wishes. I will pray for you as you bring your unique gifts and fresh approach to the work of serving in this role. Even as I transition to a new season of ministry in rural Victoria, my thoughts will remain on the journey of the Queensland Synod.

Finally, I pray as we continue the pilgrim's journey together, that we all approach that which we love with clear minds and soft hearts. May we recognise that we only ever see partially at best, and may we set our assumptions and certainties down at the foot of the cross and ask God to guide us home.



Rev Heather den Houting

Mission Focus

Playing our part in enabling the work of the Church and sharing in the mission of God is at the heart of the Office of the Synod. The *Basis of Union* reminds us of our call as a Church to be a “fellowship of reconciliation...an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself” and our teams have worked to encourage, enable, and equip the mission of Christ expressed through our congregations, presbyteries, agencies, schools, and colleges.

Enabling a Discipleship Culture

Our shared commitment to growing a new discipleship culture across the Church has continued - we have worked to encourage the emergence of this new culture through the provision of resources, events, activities, and training over the term of this Synod and supporting the extraordinary work of other parts of the church as they explore and energise discipleship within their spheres of influence.

The Mission Engagement Team and the Discipleship working group have sought opportunities to support and resource Presbytery gatherings, and Presbytery and Congregational mission initiatives. They are working collaboratively to finalise resources, including a Discipleship Framework focussed on lifelong discipleship and a commitment to children, youth, young adults, and families. (CYYAF)

An online Discipleship Book Club has been established, meeting monthly, to reflect on books that stimulate thinking and action across the Synod. The group have already engaged with authors such as Michael Frost, Kara Martin, Todd Bolsinger, Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Stephen Judd. The Book Club meets online and is open to all. Weekly online prayer gatherings have also been established for people from across Queensland to pray for the renewal of the church.



MC3 Establishing and Planning

After being formed at the 36th Synod, the Mission Collaboration and Consultation Committee began its work during this term of Synod. Established as a subcommittee of the Synod Standing Committee, early work has been focussed on team building, establishing its powers and responsibilities and structures for reporting and accountability. MC3 is being supported by the Office of the Synod to focus on how they might best nurture and support new missional ideas and projects which have the potential for wider impact on the church. They are particularly looking for opportunities that have impact across several presbyteries, are scalable and that engage congregations and agencies in discipling and church planting.

Chaplaincy

The Office of the Synod’s involvement in Chaplaincy continues on two fronts. Through our Ministry Agents Coordinator, we support Synod-appointed chaplains in public hospitals, Queensland Police Service, Uniting Church schools, Raymont College Queensland, and Trinity College Queensland. Chaplains in these settings have offered wonderful support and ministry to colleagues, students, patients, and the wider community.

The Chaplaincy Strategy agreed upon prior to the 36th Synod, informs our broader work in terms of chaplaincy. We have worked to understand the status of chaplaincy in a post-pandemic setting, including updating records and rebuilding data, and continued to prioritise a positive working relationship with Chaplaincy networks in UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission Queensland. We completed a review of Synod Public Hospital Chaplaincy services, identifying both short-term operational improvements and future strategic options. Progressing work in this area is dependent upon decisions regarding the operations of the Chaplaincy Commission and a Chaplaincy Commission Executive Officer.

Key changes and achievements have included: developing a new contract with the Queensland Police Service for the provision of chaplaincy services, a transition of chaplain roles to Directors of Mission at

The Lakes College and Moreton Bay College, and current discussion about a similar transition at Scots PGC College, a part-time Chaplaincy Coordinator to be appointed at Toowoomba Hospital jointly funded by Queensland Health and local Toowoomba churches, and ongoing discussions with hospital bodies regarding funding for Chaplaincy Coordinator roles.

Memorial Garden

Part of our missional journey includes lament and repentance and in December 2022, the Office of the Synod opened a memorial garden to acknowledge child sexual abuse that occurred within Uniting Church-based institutions. Made possible by a grant from the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Grants Program, the event brought people together from across the church and support services with survivors and Forgotten Australians. This was an important moment in rebuilding relationships between the Church and those who have experienced harm.



The Memorial Garden, at the entrance of the Synod office in Auchenflower, is a place for reflection and contemplation. It serves as a constant reminder of the harms of the past and the need for the relentless pursuit of safety for children and vulnerable people across the life of the Church into the future. The following apology is displayed on the plaque in the Memorial Garden:

The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod honours those who have survived neglect, abuse, and sexual abuse when in our care.

We apologise for the harm done to you.

We believe you. We failed you.

We are sorry.

We will listen to you and learn from you and do all we can to prevent this from happening again.

We commit to being a safer church for all.



Raymont Christian Community

A vibrant Christian community has formed at Raymont College Queensland. The community connects approximately 40 students and supports others who attend local congregations including Newlife Brisbane. Several young people have been baptised and are growing in their faith and love of God.

At a time when 40% of 18–25-year-olds in Queensland struggle with mental health, the deep and committed work to help students connect and overcome has brought staff and students alike a sense of mission direction and purpose. The community is seen by both Christian and non-Christian students as being a genuinely inclusive and welcoming environment.

Mission Focus for UEL

Since September 2021, all early learning services operated by the Uniting Church Queensland were consolidated within the Uniting Early Learning (UEL) portfolio and work has been done over that time to align the foundational principles by which the wide variety of services and the people who work in them can identify as Uniting Church. This year a UEL Vision, Mission and Philosophy document has been drafted to guide the many and varied UEL services and Office of the Synod UEL team as they support “every child to flourish, and grow to their full potential, within a faith based nurturing environment”.

Advent and Christmas Journey to Joy 2022; Lent and Easter Resources 2023

The Office of Synod and UnitingCare Queensland collaborated to create Christmas messages and designs as part of a mission-focused resource for Advent and Christmas. The ‘Journey to Joy’ and ‘Unwrap the Joy’,

resources, themes and designs were made available across the Church, and used within the UnitingCare Qld Christmas appeal. The Christmas reflections document was downloaded more than 600 times. The CYYAF working group also gathered Advent reflections, prayers, and other resources from people across the Synod and over 150 groups in communities, congregations, and early learning centres accessed these resources.

The Synod Office Mission team and the Discipleship working group collaborated to create intergenerational *"Journey with Jesus"* resources for Lent and Easter 2023. The resources included worship resources, a Lenten journal, prayers, and activities. They were used by more than 500 people and groups across Queensland and beyond.

Supporting Our People, Transforming Our Communities

The work we undertake to support the people of our church, in our workplaces and in our communities is an expression of our love for God. Jesus called us to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mark 12) and reminded us that we should be known by our love for one another (John 13). We seek to support, enable, and value the people around us. Pouring time and energy into people - our neighbours, our community, and our staff is, in a real sense, sharing in the mission of God.

Better Together

During this term of Synod, we worked to refine our Office of the Synod culture and values to complement and support the mission of the church more fully. This work helps us better focus on the unique needs and circumstances of those we support. We have collectively identified the guiding philosophy of “We are Better Together” as informing our role in the shared vision of the church.

To deepen the commitment to Better Together, we established a staff culture playbook, held town-hall style meetings at the Synod office and early learning centres, conducted a staff survey, and worked to constantly reflect on our behaviours at team meetings. It has helped us in a difficult employment market to think about our staff’s experiences of working for the Uniting Church and to develop recruitment processes and materials to support a new workforce planning strategy.



Staff Support

We have placed a deliberate emphasis on the well-being of our people across the Synod. Ensuring positive workplace support, and access to a high-quality Employee Assistance Program is important. We’ve highlighted RUOK Day, undertaken a comprehensive review of our Workcover arrangements, and established terms to review our Sickness and Accident Program. The Moderator’s recent 2023 Convocation, focussed on the wellbeing of ministry agents, examining supervision, spiritual well-being, practical steps, and well-being theology.

The People and Culture team launched the Office of the Synod’s first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategy oriented to attracting applicants of diverse backgrounds, capabilities, and experience. It recognises the value of that diversity, and a unified and respectful culture across our work locations.

We continue to operate in a hybrid working environment, with staff working on-site, online and from home depending on roles and requirements. Offering this hybrid workplace model has been one part of an evolving recruitment and retention focus during what is a challenging time in the broader workforce market.

Training and Development

The Synod Office has a licence for the Global Leadership Summit material. Delivering components of this material in lunchbox sessions is helping to develop our leadership capacity and align our leadership framework with a global Christian leadership cohort.

Our People and Culture and Mission Engagement teams have developed and delivered extensive training opportunities to the Church during this term of Synod. A governance module oriented toward schools and colleges has been acquired for the edUCate training platform. It addresses governing body needs and streamlines mandatory legislative training. Complaints and disciplinary process training took place, along with the ongoing delivery of Safe Ministry with Children training, both in-person and through the edUCate platform.

Ministry Matters Unit

The Ministry Matters Unit has prioritised an update of our Synod Ministry Handbook. The handbook, once complete, will hold up-to-date information, policies and resources related to ministry in general and the

ministry placements process in particular. The team has been collaborating with other Synods to update and standardise national resources to ensure a consistent approach across the country.

Social Justice and Advocacy

The Moderator is supported in his role as the spokesperson for the Synod by the work of the Moderator's Advocacy and Social Justice Team (MAST). This team has worked in collaboration with others across the Synod to develop frameworks supporting ongoing collaborative advocacy and action.

The team has supported the Moderator to speak publicly on issues such as voluntary assisted dying, the needs of refugees, the youth justice "Raise the Age" campaign, the Voice to Parliament, and calling for changes to the Public Trustee in Queensland. They worked to advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable and to equip and empower the wider church to get involved.

The Queensland Synod, UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission Queensland wrote a joint submission to the Disability Royal Commission on their proposals for reform of the guardianship system in Australia. The Synod Office also collaborated with other organisations to contribute recommendations to the Queensland Government on its compliance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

Wellbeing and Mental Health Pilot

The Friendly Spaces pilot program has commenced on the Gold Coast and aims to address mental health, domestic violence, and social isolation challenges within the Gold Coast community. Significant needs were highlighted in the Gold Coast Public Health Needs Assessment, and the program is a result of a wide collaboration, with many subject matter experts in the Office of the Synod working with Lifeline, UCQ and WMQ staff and Elanora, Newlife, Burleigh and Southport congregations. It aims to establish safe spaces within churches and programs on the Gold Coast, supported by trained volunteers known as Friendly Face connectors. The program objectives include equipping volunteers in mental health and domestic violence awareness and strengthening connections between community services in the area.

Covenanting

In July 2022, we were delighted to support the Moderator and the Covenanting working group to host a Townsville gathering involving both First Nations people and others. A place of telling truth, sharing story, and fuelling faith, the gathering acknowledged the past and looked towards the future. It was with great joy then, that we witnessed the first meeting of the new Queensland Regional Council of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in June 2023. This first meeting included the commissioning of Rev Roberta Stanley as Queensland Regional Chair.



The Synod Standing Committee determined that the Queensland Synod, standing in solidarity with Assembly and the UAICC, supports the priorities identified in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. This includes the constitutional establishment of a Voice to Parliament. This Synod's advocacy position and the communication and engagement strategy for the Voice to Parliament for First Nations people was drafted in collaboration between the Covenanting working group and the Moderator's Advocacy and Social Justice Team. The work included an event with Thomas Mayo, one of the authors of the Statement from the Heart, and the sharing and creation of resources, public statements, stories, videos, and social media campaigns.

The Covenanting working group sponsored a storytelling project to record the covenanting stories of both First Nations people and other supporters. Photographer and documenter Jo-Anne Driessens helped participants share stories of their personal history and experiences with God, and their individual and communal hopes for the future. The project culminated in an exhibition at Wesley House in May 2023.

Environment and Sustainability

Delivering the opportunities and priorities outlined in the Flourishing Creation Action and Advocacy Plan remains a focus for the Office of the Synod. Working with other groups across the Synod, the focus is on the six options in the plan: empowered people and connection, mobility, energy, water, reduce-reuse-recycle, and advocacy. This year as an expression of our commitment to environmental justice, we joined the “Power Together” advocacy campaign of the Queensland Conservation Council and we are developing a “sustainability score card” to enable congregations and other entities to assess their efforts and their improvements in the sustainability space.

Voluntary Assisted Dying

During this term of Synod, the Queensland Government’s legislation on Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) was established and enacted. Preparation for this legislation led to a great deal of work in establishing policy and practice in agencies and across the church. The Office of the Synod thanks UnitingCare Queensland and Rev Dr Adam McIntosh for their outstanding leadership in this area.

We supported the hosting of a Minister’s Convocation to enable ministry workers to understand VAD policy and processes and also created and collated a range of resources available on the website.



A Safe and Sustainable Church

In this time of widespread systemic challenge and change the Queensland Synod is committed to intentional and mature analysis and improvement, to ensure that our governance and structures, our policies and our procedures are effective and fit for purpose. The Office of the Synod are also focussed on developing the best operational systems to enable us to steward our resources in a sustainable manner, to align with our legal and regulatory responsibilities, and perhaps, most importantly, to keep the people in our care safe.

Governance

As part of our work through Project Plenty, we commissioned a report into the status of our current Governance arrangements and fielded suggestions for changes to ensure we are 'Fit for Purpose' in outworking our mission. This work was done by Elizabeth Jamieson and Board Matters and the '*Governance Research Brief Report*' was delivered in March 2023.

The report has been distributed widely amongst the church for comment. These comments have now been received and this document will prove helpful over the next few years as the church considers how it might morph and adjust in light of our rapidly changing culture and regulatory environment.

Regulations Review for Assembly

The 16th Assembly resolved to undertake a review of the regulations, concentrating on the complaints and discipline section as a matter of priority. The General Secretary is the national lead in this project and Malcolm Hinton is the project worker. A comprehensive consultation and clarifying process resulted in us producing a first draft of a revised Part 5 of the regulations (Part 5 relates to Discipline). These drafts were circulated to stakeholders around Australia for consultation and comment with follow-on work underway at the time of writing.

Office of the Synod Staffing

The current term of Synod has been a period of consolidation and consistency with respect to the staffing structure. A major task was the completion of a strategic and operational workforce planning process. This enabled us to better understand the skills, experience and staff required to deliver the strategic and operational goals of the Synod and to predict and prepare for potential personnel changes in high-risk or high-urgency areas. We continue to operate a lean staffing model supported by a project methodology. We assess staffing regularly against our priorities, budget, and any emerging issues across the Church.

Business Development Support

The Business Development Unit (BDU) exists to source and support innovative activity that builds a financially sustainable church. The team supports congregations, presbyteries, agencies, and entities across the church. Since the 36th Synod, the focus has been on support for business planning, better use of property, planning for Op Shops or coffee shops, purchasing and procurement, accessing solar power and the UCare congregational management system.

Investigation into social and affordable housing projects is a current priority with a decision-making and strategic framework delivered in August 2023. BDU supported the transition of Barnabas House into the management of the Office of the Synod and have engaged widely to provide electricity savings for a number of sites through a three-year procurement contract.

Alexandra Park Conference Centre

It has been an exciting year for Alexandra Park Conference Centre as they welcomed over 14,000 people during the 2022-23 financial year. "Year 7 ACE camp was a blast," wrote Kawana Waters State College after their stay. A staff member from MacGregor State School described their time as the "best camp (accommodation, sports, activities, food) I've experienced as a teacher (of 37 years)"

Demand for facilities and services is at an all-time high as we experience a bounce back to full operation post Covid. The team are so busy that groups often bump in and out on the same day, creating occasional

logistical challenges. This is a nice challenge to have. We are continuing to expand and update facilities to meet demand and keep pace with client expectations. Another 8 ensuite-equipped rooms, each with double beds and bunk beds are under construction and will open later in 2023.

The focus remains on ensuring the facility is well-kept, continuously improving, and suits the requirements for our own church meetings and events and for the wider community. Alexandra Park Conference Centre is an excellent venue supported by a team that the Uniting Church can be proud of.

Raymont Residential College

Raymont Residential College commenced the 2023 academic year with a full complement of students and a waiting list for the first time in five years. This represents an excellent recovery from the pandemic period and is a tribute to the vibrant, healthy community that has been established at Raymont. We thank the excellent team of staff, our Student Leadership Team and both outgoing Principal Stuart Christ and new Principal Krishna Stanton for their outstanding work.

Highlights for the year include our annual Raymont Battle of the Bands, leadership development program, 'Flourishing at University' series, academic support, and social events such as lawn bowls and croquet. We celebrated formal occasions too, with our annual Commencement Dinner and end-of-year Gala bookending the year and a much-enjoyed parent soiree. Raymont students worked together this year to raise \$2000 for cancer charities through a Relay for Life team.

Trinity College Queensland

An update on the activities of Trinity College Queensland is incorporated into the report of the Board for Christian Formation.

Uniting Early Learning

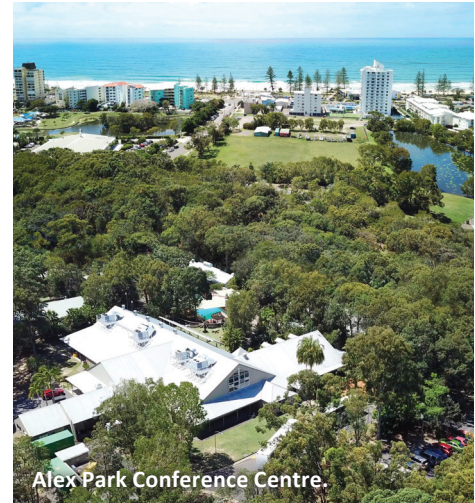
Uniting Early Learning (UEL) serves hundreds of families and over 1000 children through 22 centres and services across Queensland. We delight in the opportunity to support Queensland families through the provision of high-quality centre-based, family day care, after-school hours care and in-home care. We're proud of our team of 270 educators and love the opportunity to work with local church congregations to serve in mission together.

It has been a busy period implementing our transformation program during the term of this Synod. We are growing in our enrolments and have also made significant operational improvements.

Together these factors put us ahead of schedule in terms of projected financial performance.

Early Childhood educators are among the most in-demand roles across the nation, and we have found attracting and holding our staff has been increasingly difficult. A series of job information sessions were held in late 2022, welcoming prospective staff to learn more about UEL. This remains a focus for 2024, with the support of the Synod People, Culture and Learning team.

In May 2023 we celebrated the first anniversary of Uniting In-home Care. This exciting program enables us to pair our educators directly with families to care for, nurture and support children's development in their own home and family setting.



Alex Park Conference Centre.



Safe Ministry with Children

Improving Safe Ministry with Children Training remains a priority, working closely with the Safe Ministry Administration Officer and the National Safe Church Unit (on integration with the national training). All Learning and Development team members are completing the training themselves to ensure they have experienced firsthand any issues and concerns being reported.

A reference group has been formed from Presbytery representatives and Office of the Synod staff to better collaborate around the areas of learning and development across the Synod. Presbytery Ministers have identified edUCate access and Safe Ministry with Children training as priorities, and the reference group will focus on these areas. The group will also identify options for engaging with Presbytery and Congregations on learning needs, complementing consultations previously undertaken with Office of the Synod leaders and governing body chairpersons.

Property

The property team has been focused on enabling and working with multiple Congregations, Presbyteries, schools, and agencies, assisting these groups as they navigate property proposals through the approval channels of the Church in the areas of sales, purchases, renovations, and infrastructure matters and including congregational alternative use proposals. They are also working to support the resolution of the heritage disputes on Ashgrove Avenue and Wilston sites through the courts.

As a result of a generous bequest, Emmanuel Enoggera Uniting Church acquired a significant parcel of land (21 hectares) at Kooya Road, Mitchelton. The congregation, supported by the Property Trust, have worked hard to explore potential use for the site, to benefit both the community and the Church. After initial exploration of the site's potential for delivering community services, it became apparent the location wasn't ideal for such use. Office of the Synod staff in both the property and communications teams are supporting the Property Trust and congregation to progress a development application for 92 residential subdivision lots, together with a community park.



Kooya Rd, Mitchelton.

Finance

Through their Andy's Place project, St Andrews Uniting Church provides community support including a community meal each Saturday night. Meanwhile, at Elanora Uniting Church, the Dwell Youth Hub helps provide a safe place to improve mental health for young people. Our finance team has worked with both groups to help achieve deductible gift recipient (DGR) status. This is a great outcome, enabling both projects to access significant new levels of support and enable their ongoing mission.

Treasury worked closely with congregations that required financing, especially for property projects including assisting Redcliffe Uniting Church to consider options for debt reduction and helping Southside Uniting Church to consider the use of mission development funds, op-shop, and other project considerations.

Insurance

The final report of an independent review of the insurance program has driven the implementation planning of the recommendations. The annual insurance renewal was conducted as of 31 October



Redcliffe Uniting Church with new Community Hub.

2022, and the invoices distributed and implementation of significant process improvement in the claims management area across multiple insurance lines has been a priority, in particular delivering the expertise and efficiencies for the whole Synod of claims management processes being administered by a third party.

System Improvements

- **Payroll System**

Our new payroll system, Kronos, is now fully implemented and has been made available for ministry agents and payroll bureau congregations. This is a significant milestone for the Office of the Synod, and we expect significant improvements in the level of efficiency and customer service for the many staff that we pay through this payroll system.

- **IT**

Considering the increasing frequency of cyber-attacks on organisations of all sizes, we have continued to work hard to do everything possible to ensure the safe, ongoing provision of IT services. As part of this commitment to ongoing service, significant projects this year involved the installation of uninterruptible power supply units at both Alex Park and the Synod office and the rollout of device protection and management software.

- **Congregational Bookkeeping**

Since 2019 the Office of the Synod has coordinated a congregational bookkeeping project to support the healthy operations of congregations. The initial service, offered in partnership with Xero, included discounted access to Xero cloud-based accounting software, a standardised Chart of Accounts, assistance for Treasurers with the use of the software and general accounting issues and help transferring data to Xero.

Over 100 presbyteries and congregations have joined the project. During 2023, the staff resourcing the project were brought in-house within the Synod Office. A further extension to the initial project now sees a fee-for-service bookkeeping service offered, with many existing customers taking up this service.

Provision of Business Services to the Northern Synod

In May 2023, the Queensland Synod entered a partnership to assist the Northern Synod with business and strategic services. The focus is on supporting the Northern Synod to ensure its structure and financial base can adequately meet the demands of the future. The services currently being provided include support services and training regarding risk management and WHS, strategic financial services, and HR support services. Additionally, we are assisting with the design and development of organisational structures to best support ministry in the Northern Synod.

An Executive Consultant is in place to coordinate this collaborative work, and the Synod Standing Committee of the Northern Synod has, under section 70 of the UCA Constitution, delegated the powers and responsibilities of its General Secretary to the General Secretary of the Queensland Synod. This delegation is in place on a trial basis and under regular review to ensure its suitability for both the Northern Synod and the Queensland Synod. It is a profound privilege to share in supporting the work and ministry of the Northern Synod.

Alignment and Engagement: Creating One Church

We are committed to serving the whole church in a way that builds a shared identity, establishes and strengthens relationships of trust, and nurtures a willingness to work in unity. Almost everything in this report has been achieved collaboratively, through relationship and connection. We are committed to intentionally creating opportunities to connect, to recognise and strengthen our life together.

Plentiful Mentoring Leadership Program

The second Plentiful Mentoring Leadership Program (PMLP) drew participants from congregation, presbytery, agency, school, and Synod teams with 29 completing the program after more than 40 began. The program's strong focus on mentoring and cross-Synod networking remains key to its value to participants. We are noticing an organic increase in collaborative relationships among past PMLP participants, together with increased confidence, and the skills and willingness to explore difficult conversations. Participants in the program are also offering themselves for other leadership opportunities across the Synod.



Plentiful Mentoring Leadership Project (PMLP).

Future iterations of the PMLP may extend to an emerging leaders' version and an executive track. One significant challenge to overcome is the capacity to commit to the program alongside operational responsibilities – a challenge for both the participants themselves and their leaders and line managers.

Developing a Fundraising Cohort

Our fundraising and bequests area supports congregations, presbyteries, and agencies to build capacity to raise funds and encourage bequests. This has involved congregation and presbytery visits, and several webinars and gifts-in-wills presentations. This year the team hosted a webinar providing practical advice and insight into how to access grant funding. Over 40 people attended the webinar, and it is now available for others to view on the Synod website. A cohort of passionate fundraising champions from across the state are connecting with each other and the Fundraising team and a series of videos and a bequest brochure have been delivered to enable fundraising capability. Our future focus includes supporting congregations to achieve an increased success rate in grant applications, strategic grant planning for presbyteries and congregations, and ongoing support for fundraising champions across the church.

Assembly Act2 Project

The Assembly is undertaking a wide-ranging consultation conversation under the banner of The Act2 Project. Congregation and Presbytery representatives have been invited to share in this consultation. Kevin Griffith (ED Shared Services) has been appointed as the Synod representative to the Act2 working group as an expression of our commitment to the project.

Office Bearers Gathering May 2023

More than 30 office bearers from Presbyteries across Queensland gathered in May for a series of training, resourcing, and equipping sessions. The event was hosted by the Office of the Synod with 28 staff meeting with participants. The event wrapped up with a deep dive into effective governance in meetings.

Dostana – partnership with Diocese of Amritsar, official launch June 2023

In May 2020, Dostana was endorsed as an official activity of the Queensland Synod. During the COVID-19 pandemic, no events or exchange visits were able to be conducted, but we were able to maintain contact with our friends in the Amritsar Diocese.

It was always our intent to hold a launch event for the Dostana Group following its adoption as an official Synod activity, and in May 2023 we were finally able to host this joyous occasion. The event was held at the Synod office and linked online with our partners in the Diocese of Amritsar in India, and Uniting World

in Sydney. At the event, we also revealed plans for our upcoming visit to India in November as well as our hope that members of the Diocese might be able to visit us here in 2024.

Multi-Cross-Cultural Reference Group

The Multi-Cross-Cultural reference group continues to work in support of the long-term commitment and mandate of the Uniting Church to be a multi-cultural church. During this term of Synod, five strategic focus areas (connecting, resourcing, educating, leadership and advocacy) have shaped the work of the committee. Outcomes include:

- supporting culturally and linguistically diverse candidates for ministry,
- introducing Voice of the Martyrs and prison ministry opportunities,
- working alongside the Assembly Being a Multicultural Church panel to develop and distribute resources for the 2023 Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday event,
- collaborating with Synod Fundraising support to explore opportunities for multicultural and community grants for CALD community events in the 2023/24 period, submitting a grant application for a 2024 Multicultural Celebration Event,
- celebrating a multicultural service for Pentecost Sunday, with Rev Seung Jae Yeon (Chair of the Korean National Conference), which was live streamed from Broadwater Road Uniting Church,
- hosting regular networking and fellowship gatherings, and
- sharing resources and information through the MCCRG Facebook page.

UEL Connecting with Congregation and Community

Engagement between UEL services and congregation is a high priority. In August 2021, Uniting Early Learning partnered with several of our co-located congregations to express our thanks to our staff as part of the Early Childhood Educators Day. Members of our congregations provided morning tea and presented certificates of appreciation which were gratefully received by staff. Involvement of congregations on Early Childhood Educators Day built trust, connection and relationships between congregations and centre teams.

Our Intergenerational Play Program involves members of local Uniting Church congregations interacting with the children at Uniting Early Learning centres. Bringing great joy to both children and adults, the program presents a wonderful opportunity for congregational mission engagement with local Uniting Early Learning centres. There are already several centres involved in the Intergenerational Play Program after its February 2023 commencement and we would love the opportunity to work with other congregations to implement it at each of our centres.



Uniting Education Schools and Colleges

Uniting Education Schools and Colleges exist to provide a link between our Church and its 18 affiliated schools and residential colleges. We provide well-researched advice and advocacy, strengthen governance capacity, build relationships with and between our schools and colleges, and emphasise our shared mission.

The appointment of Ms Margaret Berry as the new chair of the Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association (PMSA) was a highlight this year. Ms Berry comes to the role from serving as Principal at Robertson State School and brings 30 years of teaching experience to the role. She has been with the PMSA for five years, including the last two as Deputy Chair.

The resumption of quality training and development for school and college board members after a COVID-related interruption has been achieved. Workshops re-commenced with Stephen Howell joining us to explore defensible decision-making.

Property and Insurance Workshop

The Synod property and insurance teams, in response to widespread congregational and presbytery interest, hosted a Property and Insurance workshop in March 2023.

Members from across the church took the opportunity to meet with the team and explore ideas and possibilities for closer cooperation. The workshop included briefings on technical aspects of property and insurance and a question-and-answer time. Building stronger relationships between Synod office staff and congregation and presbytery representatives was a key outcome.

Property and insurance staff are ready to work with congregations and presbyteries for the benefit of our church's mission and service. Similar workshops will be hosted in future and will be advertised across the Church.

Synod Website and Hub

The much-anticipated project to refresh the Synod website is underway. The project will deliver two interconnected websites. The first will be a public-facing site, highlighting the purpose, identity, and presence of the Uniting Church to all church members and all Queenslanders. The second, known as 'The Hub' will be focussed on the staff, ministry agents and volunteers who undertake the work and processes of the Synod, providing a simple-to-navigate, and reliable library of information needed for every aspect of our church life. It will be home to policies, guidance, templates, forms, and other content addressing mission, property, finance, insurance, and so on. Up-to-date information, clarity and improved user-experience are foundational principles for the new build. Delivery is anticipated by early 2024.

Life Together workshop

The Life Together Narrative Workshop held this year brought together participants from schools and colleges, agencies, entities congregations, presbyteries, and Synod Office teams, to weave together stories about the Uniting Church in Queensland. The group discussed founding principles, the history, ideals, and qualities that define us. They shared stories of the individuals who had powerfully impacted their journey of faith and spoke into a core commitment to continuing the journey together. Content developed from the workshop will be used on the new website and shared through a variety of channels as part of the broader story of the Synod. Through their work together, the group produced their declaration about the identity of the Uniting Church.



Life Together Narrative workshop.

We are the Uniting Church in Queensland

A group of people from congregations, faith communities, presbyteries, agencies, entities, schools, colleges, boards, committees and working groups across the Synod came together. We met to share perspectives, to tell each other stories of our **life together** as a church, as a complex interconnected community, and as a people of God. At the end of our day together our individual responses to the question, “*why are you a part of the Uniting Church?*” were woven together.

We are.

We are invited, called, inspired, transformed, to be a living hope.

We were born or welcomed into the Uniting Church,
We know Jesus in the context of the Uniting Church,
We meet and form relationship here, which opens doors and allows us to
explore our identity as part of a uniting and loving whole under God.

Our church has accepted, nurtured, challenged, stretched, invested in, and grown us,
People believed in us, formed and nurtured us, invested in us, equipped us,
Family and dear friends - forming our faith and drawing us towards Christ, the centre.
The vision and passion with which others have led the church has been passed on to us.
Our church made a home for our families, formed us, included us, invited us to take part in serving.

We feel called by God to serve and feel aligned to the mission and values of the church,
Our values are aligned to allow us to use our gifts to support others who are struggling,
We stand for justice.

We are committed to reconciliation and to recognizing and acknowledging that Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the sovereign peoples of these lands.
We are called to caretake God’s good inheritance, to be a light in the heart of community.

We hope for Christ to rule and renew us in his own strange way,
We are always on the move and haven’t arrived yet.

Our heart and soul are drawn to the Uniting Church’s audacious belief that it is possible to hold the tension
of difference and reconciliation as a living example of Christ’s call to love,
We are called to assist in seeing a sometimes tired and confused church rediscover the energy of Jesus and
the genius of our founding heart and direction.

God planted us here, called us to ministry here, and has not called us away.
God called us here and hasn’t let us go.

This is the place that we are called to live out our baptism, and there is nowhere better or worse to go.



Proposals to the 37th Synod

It is proposed that the 37th Synod receive this report.

Contact for report questions

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The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD