



#realunitingchurch

Report from Communications and marketing

Context

As part of the Synod office restructure in July 2017, Uniting Communications changed its name to Communications and marketing. The fundraising and research functions (and roles) moved into different portfolios within the Synod office. The purpose and structure of the communications and marketing functions remain under review. The roadmap for implementation of the recommendations from this review is expected to be completed in October.

Prior to the Synod office restructure Uniting Communications was the communications, marketing, fundraising and research team of the Queensland Synod office.

Communications and marketing continues to give a voice to and connect diverse ideas, people and churches within the broader Uniting Church in Queensland through Uniting News, *Journey* magazine (print and online), videos and podcasts and via Synod social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter.

We manage the reputation of the Queensland Synod within and beyond the church, for example by managing media requests for official Uniting Church comment from the moderator or advising congregations on how to deal with negative publicity.

We support all parts of the Synod office to maintain professional, cohesive resources as well as supporting the marketing of the Uniting Church Foundation, Alexandra Park Conference Centre, Raymont Residential College and Trinity College Queensland.

We help congregations maximise their communications opportunities in their local communities through activities like the Christmas and Easter resources.

We also help the church and the public understand the role of the moderator and the church in society.

Participation in ecumenical and national Uniting Church communications networks continues to be an encouraging and productive part of our work.

Foci since the 32nd Synod

The Communications and marketing team's foci since the last Synod meeting have primarily been around supporting the work required by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (mostly in regards to Shalom Christian College), promoting the 40th anniversary of the Uniting Church, redesigning the Synod website, exploring the revised Priority Directions and assisting in the production and promotion of resources like the Safe Ministry with Children suite and the RE framework.

Highlights

Some of the highlights since the last Synod:

The **coverage of the 32nd Synod** was particularly successful with 21 articles posted on JourneyOnline over the four days and unique content shared on social media. Facebook engagement increased by 7796 per cent during the 32nd Synod and unique visitors to JourneyOnline increased by 55 per cent. The communications team completed 74 tasks and items of collateral (from branding and proof-reading reports to creating flyers and signage) for the 32nd Synod including a wrap-up video of the Unchained event—an event that we were instrumental in planning.

In January 2017 we rolled out a new Synod website.

Journey won three Australasian Religious Press Association (ARPA) Awards in 2016: Dianne Jensen's profile on Uniting Church member and physicist [Dr Joel Corney](#) won the best profile category and Bruce Mullan's exploration of the Uniting Church's [marriage discussions](#) won bronze for best theological article. *Journey* also won the silver award for the coveted category of best design (magazine). Ashley Thompson was awarded a scholarship to attend the conference and addressed those gathered for the awards ceremony.

This year, *Journey* won two ARPA awards. Ben Rogers won a bronze for 'best new writer' for his profile on controversial Queensland creationist [Ken Ham](#). Dianne Jensen and Ben Rogers won a silver award for 'best feature, multiple authors' for their feature story on [Indigenous incarceration and First Peoples prison chaplains](#).

With over 300 entries in the awards each year, this recognition is a reminder that our *Journey* magazine stands out amongst Christian publications from across Australia and New Zealand.

It was wonderful to see so many congregations, schools and agencies using the **40th anniversary** celebration pack materials. The 40th anniversary video had excellent engagement on social media, helping us share some of the core elements that make up the Uniting Church with potentially untapped audiences.

There has been significant work on internal communications at the Synod office, particularly with the development and maintenance of a staff intranet.

In-house video productions since the last Synod include:

- Unchained video wrap-up
- Two Christmas 2016 videos
- Easter 2017 video
- Three *Journey*: 'the big questions' videos
- Short videos of the moderator for the Monday midday prayer series

- Facebook videos, particularly related to the 32nd Synod
- A promotional video for Trinity College Queensland (in progress).

Priority Directions

The Synod-wide Priority Directions underpin everything we do. Here are some examples of our work in this space.

Christ-centred, at prayer, and listening

Monday midday prayer continues across a number of our communications channels including *Journey*, Uniting News, social media and the Synod website and is displayed in the foyer of the Uniting Church Centre in Auchenflower. A new initiative proving popular is videos of the moderator saying the prayer. These are particularly popular on Facebook.

As part of the **Christmas 2016** *Hope has a name* campaign we released a video of poet Nyaluak Leth reciting a poem/prayer she wrote to enhance the theme.

A #realunitingchurch **podcast** on prayer and Christian meditation will be released in September 2017.

Discipleship

Significant editing and design was done on the RE framework for Uniting Church schools. Mardi Lumsden was the MC for two Stretching Faith panel discussions for the Bremer Brisbane/Moreton Rivers presbyteries young adult events.

Leadership

The team has done editing, design, communications planning and implementation on the following:

- The leadership development framework
- The placements review process
- Royal Commission/Shalom Christian College
- Interim Redress Scheme refresh and major communications plan
- Safe Ministry with Children documents and micro-site (editing, designing, updating and maintaining forms, training modules, etc.)
- RE in Uniting Church schools framework
- #realunitingchurch podcast episode on leadership.

Connecting with communities

Since the 32nd Synod, the **Uniting Church Foundation's** fundraising activities included:

- Easter Madness Appeal to enable faith and leadership opportunities for 18 young people in regional, rural and remote Queensland.
- Reach Out Appeal to enable funding for an asylum seeker from Papua New Guinea to be awarded refugee status in Australia.
- \$10 for 10 Appeal to enable vocational training courses for Indigenous students from Unity College and Sunshine Coast Grammar School.
- Disaster Relief Appeal to enable community recovery in North and Central Queensland for those impacted by Cyclone Debbie.
- Community fundraising via book sales of *The Man on the \$20 Note* by Uniting Church elder Everald Compton, who donated funds from book sales to the Mission Area of Indigenous Education, and the Entertainment Book 2016/2017.

The **2016 Christmas campaign** *Hope has a name* saw 30 congregations purchase postcards with 62,000 cards distributed across Queensland as well as New South Wales and Victoria. An accompanying social media campaign (including two short videos) was beautifully executed.

Through research officer Sue Hutchinson and research officer/Uniting Green liaison David Weddell (each three days per week) the church has made submissions to a number of government inquiries including:

- Inquiry into Abortion Law Reform by the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee (July 2016)
- Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee regarding the Health (Abortion Law Reform) Amendment Bill 2016 (October 2016)
- Towards an All Abilities Queensland Consultation (April 2017)
- Education, Tourism, Innovation and Small Business Committee Inquiry into the Child Protection and Education Legislation (Reporting of Abuse) Amendment Bill 2017 (June 2017).

The research officers are active in a number of ecumenical and national Uniting Church social justice and environmental groups as well the Queensland Community Alliance. In June 2017 they presented a workshop on social justice action at Indooroopilly Uniting Church. The fortnightly Reach Out Speak Out enews has 170 subscribers and the alternate fortnightly Uniting Green Update enews has 273 subscribers. In early September 2017 the new Reach Out Speak Out Facebook group had 73 members.

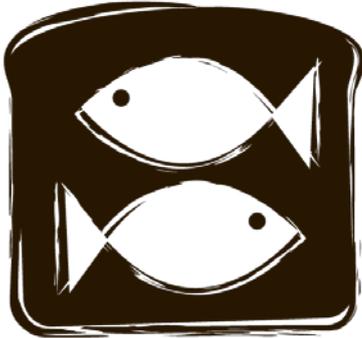
Work continues with the **Chaplaincy Commission** to produce a major promotional video celebrating the breadth and depth of chaplaincy across the Uniting Church in Queensland. This video will be launched at the 33rd Synod. Accompanying resources including a chaplaincy micro-site on the Synod website will be created in addition to the resources created for Chaplaincy Sunday and the Chaplaincy Affirmation Days in 2016 and 2017.

Youth, children and families

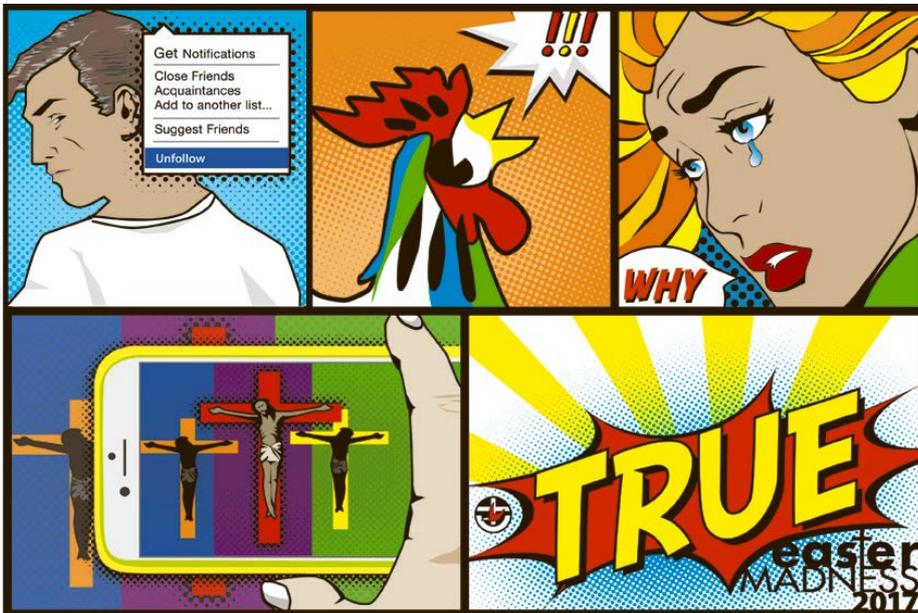
The work the communications and marketing team have done in the space of youth, children and families is primarily around the brand design and proof-reading and design of documents. We supported the creation of Safe Ministry with Children resources and the micro-site on ucaqld.com.au. We have assisted in the creation of the RE in Uniting Church schools framework alongside the Schools and Residential Colleges Commission.

The #realunitingchurch podcast included an episode on young people and the church and *Journey* has featured many stories on activities for youth and children such as day camps, Easter and Country Madness and Yurora.

Team members worked with Steve Molkenntin to create the Bread Fish Too logo (below).



We also worked with the Easter Madness committee to create the Easter Madness appeal and Easter Madness 2017 branding (below).



... as the church grows, transitions and innovates.

Throughout 2016 Mardi Lumsden and Scott Guyatt produced the **Church Unchained** podcast.

The podcast series explored innovation and the church and featured nine episodes with 978 total listens (an average of 108 listeners per episode). The most popular episode was on what the church can learn from virtual reality and [Pokémon Go](#) (235 listens).

Assistance has been provided to Trinity College Queensland in communicating their transition and promoting events. *Journey* also regularly features columns and videos with Trinity faculty. We have worked closely with Raymont Residential College to review their branding and marketing collateral after a name change and shift in service offerings at the start of 2017, including a redesign of the Raymont website.

Communications and marketing team members were instrumental in the planning and delivery of the Synod Unchained event at the 32nd Synod and produced a [wrap-up video](#) of the event.

We are currently preparing a Synod office annual report to be released as part of the October 2017 edition of *Journey*.

Report

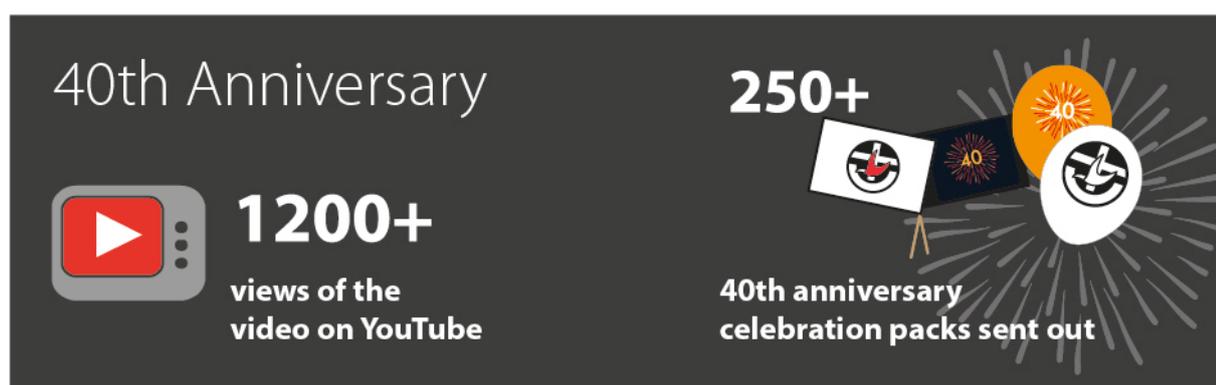
40th anniversary

More than 250 congregation celebration packs were sent across Queensland to help congregations celebrate the anniversary of the Uniting Church in their own way. The resources were used by our schools and agencies as well as in some other Synods and the Assembly.

The 40th anniversary video had great engagement and feedback. Thank you to all who were involved. Throughout 2017 there have been monthly features and additional content around the 40th anniversary in *Journey* print and online and across social media platforms. Many congregations have shared photographs of their celebrations via the Synod Facebook page.

The [#realunitingchurch](#) podcast series began in January 2017. It explores the core identity of the Uniting Church during its 40th year and where the church might go in the next 40 years. The series picks up the theme of the 33rd Synod and endeavours to be conversation starters about a range of topics that the Uniting Church in Queensland is grappling with in the lead up to this Synod in Session. This series intentionally has a more internal audience than the Church Unchained podcast series.

Total listens (at time of submission) was 473 for seven episodes (average per episode of 67.6 listens). The most popular episode to date is "[What if the church had a mid-life crisis?](#)" This series will continue until at least the 33rd Synod.



Royal Commission

An external consultancy was temporarily commissioned to assist with communications around the church and Shalom Christian College giving evidence at the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in November 2016. As a result there remains a significant amount of work relating to crisis communications and media relations.

Upgrade of ucaqld.com.au

A refreshed Synod website was launched in January 2017 after six months of work. The new site is more mobile-friendly and responds to feedback from users. It remains a work in progress. Stage two of the website is to review all content and continue to maximise the user experience and SEO (search engine optimisation). The chaplaincy micro-site will be online before the 33rd Synod.

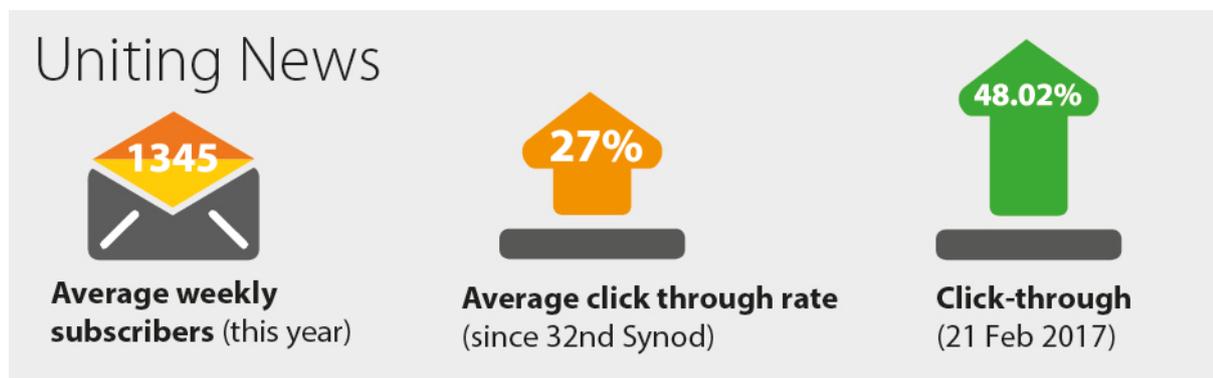
A review of the 'Find a church' function is on the horizon, ideally to incorporate search topics beyond 'location' (e.g. if a congregation has children's programs).



Uniting News

The weekly enews from the general secretary, Uniting News is delivered to an average of 1345 people each Tuesday afternoon. Those in positions of responsibility (placements, church council chairpersons, etc.) are required to receive Uniting News as it contains important information from the Synod office and other parts of the Uniting Church.

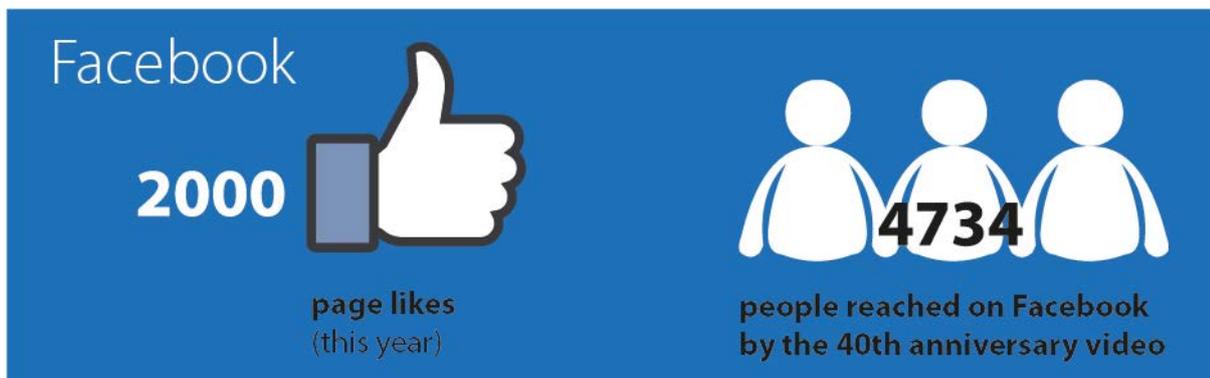
Twenty seven per cent of users click a link in each edition. The highest click-through rate was over 48 per cent in February this year. According to Campaign Monitor, a healthy click-through rate is around 15 per cent.



Social media

There has been continued growth and engagement on our social media channels, particularly Facebook. Social media is and will continue to be an important place for the church to engage. We now have 2000 Facebook page likes, which was our aim by the 33rd Synod. While page

likes are important, it is more important to have an engaged audience, so we measure the success of social media campaigns by audience engagement (post likes, shares, comments, etc.).



UnitingWomen 2018

The Synod office is developing and implementing a marketing plan for the UnitingWomen conference to be held at Somerville House in Brisbane on 20–23 September 2018. The conference will be officially launched at the 33rd Synod. The theme is “Weaving wisdom and wonder” and we hope women from all Queensland congregations will attend.



Challenges/risks as we progress

We have a current challenge around the clarity and priority of messages (Priority Directions, Key Change Initiatives, 40th anniversary, #realunitingchurch, etc.) and the integration of these messages into one cohesive message. Some of these issues will be addressed through the communications review.

One way to assist in conveying complex messages is through video. Consequently, there is an increased need for dynamic video resources from the Synod office, Trinity, Raymont and Alex Park. Video production requires particular skills which need to be appropriately invested in and resourced. However, videos provide an opportunity for the Synod to share its desired messages in a creative and sharable way.

The way people access news, television, movies, music and even church services has drastically shifted in recent years. On-demand streaming services have transformed how we access television and films. People can watch Life.Church or download Bill Hybels' latest Willow Creek sermon if they can't get to their local church.

If the Uniting Church is to be truly innovative in connecting with people on platforms like streaming services (e.g. Netflix), social media and podcasting we will need to change how we think and invest in sharing information. We will need to lead the way in how the church engages with and is part of popular culture. We often lament the lack of Uniting Church voices in public discourse about religion in society. Perhaps we should create our own? Imagine a Uniting Church version of *Q and A*, a documentary series on the church and community at Mapoon or a pre-packaged radio show about cross-culturalism or church planting that is syndicated around Australia and maybe even the world!

To do this would require investment, long-term vision and commitment and the necessary resources. This approach would not be without risk, but what is the risk if the Uniting Church remains silent in these spaces?

Contact for report questions:

Name: Mardi Lumsden
Position: Manager, communications and marketing
Email: communications@ucaqld.com.au Phone: 3377 9910