



#realunitingchurch

Report from **Synod Multi Cross Cultural Reference Group**

Context

The Synod Multi Cross Cultural Reference Group seeks to encourage, inform and guide congregations, presbyteries and Synod agencies and activities as they incorporate into their life and mission the Uniting Church in Australia's commitment to being a truly multicultural church.

Cultural diversity is a rapidly growing feature of the church's life and the Australian community in which we witness and serve. But the impulse for multicultural engagement is not merely sociological. The challenge of being truly multicultural is theological and ecclesiological — the call to more fully become the sign and foretaste of a reconciled humanity under Christ, living out our baptism into Christ's body as a fellowship of reconciliation, one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth.

As a reference group, we seek to be a resource, enabler, advocate and bridge; to help to build relationships, to be a catalyst for events, and to bring expertise and encouragement to situations where cultural diversity offers particular challenges and opportunities. We also seek to support culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, congregations, leaders and ministry agents in their life within the church. We both initiate proposals and respond to requests, drawing on the gifts and skills of our members and the wider culturally diverse communities of the church.

Our priorities since the 32nd Synod have focussed on developing the work in the five strategic priorities for 2016-17 which we indicated in our report to that Synod:

1. Help develop stronger links between CALD faith communities/congregations and the Uniting Church (primarily through presbyteries and the Synod MCCRG), to enhance the mission of the church;

2. Establish a Synod-wide next generation CALD leaders network and development program;
3. Create cross-cultural experiences of worship and fellowship which, among other things, foster and showcase the leadership and gifts of young people and women in our CALD communities;
4. Establish effective platforms of communication to connect people across cultural groups and encourage wider Uniting Church cross-cultural engagement;
5. Foster awareness of biblical, theological and ministry resources from different cultural perspectives, and encourage greater reflection of cultural diversity in congregational worship and study.

The MCCRG membership has changed several times since the 32nd Synod. Currently it comprises two ordained and 10 lay members (not including ex officio) drawn from 10 cultural backgrounds.

Priority Directions

Parallel with the reference group's identification of its five strategic priorities, the 32nd Synod discerned its own five thematic priorities. Our work intersects directly with three of those Synod priority directions.

The new cross-cultural leadership development network, Next Gen Arise, contributes to the priorities of **Discipleship and Leadership development**.

The reference group's engagement with multicultural communities through events and forums, and its visits to each presbytery through 2017 to stimulate discussion about engaging with cultural diversity in the communities served by our congregations and agencies, supports the priority of **Community connection**.

Multicultural capacity-building has also been identified as one of the four Key Change Initiatives to guide the Synod's work in fulfilling those five priority directions. Our work with presbyteries to identify needs and possible resources, both for enhancing our multicultural churches in their relationship with the wider Uniting Church and for improving cross-cultural competencies in the wider church will contribute to this.

Report

This report will focus on the five strategic priorities which have shaped our work since the 32nd Synod.

Strategy one – Equipping the whole church

- MCCRG members met with Presbytery Synod Interface to explain this priority and gain support for presbytery engagement through 2017.
- An MCCRG delegation has visited each presbytery for the purpose of gathering data on multi-cross-cultural congregations, identifying relevant concerns and challenges and connecting the work of the reference group with presbyteries.
- Developed and ran two workshops on the Code of Ethics for Multi-Cross-Cultural Ministry.
- A presentation at the National Presbytery Ministers' Conference in April 2017 created discussion about multi-cross-cultural issues.

Learnings and further directions

- There is an enormous variety of multi-cross-cultural engagement by congregations across presbyteries with some effective and creative initiatives, but also some significant challenges.
- It may be useful to work directly with Pastoral Relations Committees within each presbytery to develop their oversight and engagement with multi-cross-cultural ministry.
- There is a need for cross-cultural awareness and skills in congregations and for people in church leadership roles. MCCRG plans to run the Assembly ‘Reading Cultures’ cross-cultural training course for Synod and presbytery leadership through 2018, and would seek to develop workshops and resources for congregations. We also will seek to work with Trinity College Queensland in developing the training in cross-cultural competencies for ordinands.
- Many multicultural congregations are unfamiliar with Uniting Church processes but are keen to learn and they respond well when training is given. MCCRG has been developing and trialling training packages for church councils and congregations and will continue this, including producing multi-lingual topic sheets covering major areas of governance, church life and witness.

Strategy two – Next Gen Arise

- MCCRG’s proposal to create a cross-cultural leadership development network was accepted and funded in 2016/17 Synod budget, including a 0.25 project officer position. This has seen the emergence of Next Gen Arise with Pastor Noah Kim appointed as project officer, beginning work September 2016.
- Noah has gathered a core leadership group of 12-15 emerging leaders from different cultural backgrounds to spearhead the development of Next Gen Arise, including cross-cultural worship celebrations on the 5th Sundays of the month, monthly Saturday afternoon leadership training workshops, social media platforms and email contacts, and an inaugural leadership training and planning camp in August 2017.
- The Next Gen Arise team also has developed good links with similar movements in other Synods, and there is discussion about Queensland hosting a national Uniting Church next generation conference in 2018.
- Next Gen Arise is keen to work alongside, and not replace, next-gen empowerment strategies which may arise within cultural groups. We were excited to see the first Samoan next-gen retreat held in Brisbane in June 2017, and we celebrate the growing role of 2nd-Gen in the leadership of the annual Tongan National Conference.
- Funding for the project officer position has continued (at 0.25) into 2017-18 as the priorities and directions of Next Gen Arise continue to develop under Noah’s leadership.
- MCCRG has sponsored emerging leaders to attend key events such as the National Young Adult Leaders Conference (NYALC) in July 2016 and Yurora/NCYC in January 2017. Overall, 20 youth and young adults from Brisbane attended NYALC 2016 sponsored by the Queensland Synod and South Moreton Presbytery.
- We have appreciated collaborating with Trinity College Queensland to facilitate culturally appropriate approaches to theological training and pathways for CALD people and emerging leaders. We acknowledge with gratitude the work of Rev Mel Perkins through 2016 and subsequently Dr Leigh Trevaskis and Rev Dr Peter Hobson in their encouragement of CALD students and facilitating access to courses and appropriate assessment tools.

Learnings and further directions

- Connecting Next Gen Arise with emerging cross-cultural leaders outside South East Queensland is an important challenge.
- Next Gen Arise is working with Synod initiatives to identify and equip emerging cross-cultural leaders to participate in presbytery and Synod activities and leadership.

Strategy three – Cross-cultural integration

- Kangaroo Point Uniting Church hosted a MCCRG forum in October 2016 on ‘Generational Transitions in a Multi-Cultural Church’. This was a lively, challenging forum which also introduced the new Next Gen Arise initiative. It highlighted the energy and passion, but also the challenges, that lie behind the church’s goal of empowering and equipping next-generation leadership in multicultural communities.
- MCCRG organised a multicultural celebration marking the Uniting Church 40th anniversary at Beenleigh Region Uniting Church in June 2017. This attracted over 300 people. It was a great day of celebration, feasting and worship, and created excitement for similar events to be held in the future.
- We have encouraged attendance by CALD representatives at the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Women (South Pacific) conference in July 2018.

Learnings and further directions

- There is a misconception that events labelled ‘cross-cultural’ only apply to CALD communities and not to the church as a whole. How do we promote a holistic understanding of the entire church being inherently multicultural and that ‘cross-cultural’ is an invitation to everyone?
- We continue to be inspired by the issues raised at our community forums and we intend to continue to promote these.
- The Uniting Women national conference in Brisbane in September 2018 will be an important opportunity to engage our multicultural communities in a national Uniting Church event as leaders and participants. The MCCRG chairperson is on the planning team.
- Connecting CALD fellowship groups with the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship (UCAF) network holds potential for new whole-of-church relationships.

Strategy four – Communications

- A Facebook page has been established to focus on multi-cross-cultural news and groups.
- The MCCRG website has been revised.
- We have appreciated *Journey*’s ongoing interest in and commitment to including cultural diversity in its content.

Learnings and further directions

- Social media platforms require ongoing contributions of content, which can be difficult to source from CALD communities. ‘Telling the stories’ remains a constant challenge.

Strategy five – Biblical and ministry resources

- At the time of writing, production of video Bible studies based on the 2016 Synod multicultural Bible study presentations had not been completed.
- This priority has not been able to receive the attention we had hoped. However, we note the emergence of publications and websites which offer broadly multicultural and ‘global South’ resources for worship and church life, and we would be keen to promote these.

Other matters

- The MCCRG assisted in two Uniting Church national conferences held in South East Queensland since the 32nd Synod; the biennial Fijian *koniferedi* at Mt Tamborine (July 2016) and the annual Niuean National Conference (September 2016). Looking ahead, we look forward to welcoming the Korean National Conference to the Sunshine Coast in October 2018.
- MCCRG records its deep thanks to Rev Dr Jovili Meo and Radini Lisa Meo for their participation in the MCCRG and their leadership in the Fijian community over many years. Their move to Sydney mid-2016 for family reasons has been a great loss to this Synod. We also thank Rev Hohaia Matthews for his leadership in this space while at Logan Central Multicultural Uniting Church. He has retired and the family have returned to South Australia.

Challenges/risks as we progress

We note a growing awareness across the Synod of the need for the Uniting Church to be more open to multicultural constituencies and responsive to its multicultural social context. This rising level of recognition and intentionality is most welcome.

Our visits to presbyteries have revealed some great stories but also identified challenges. And not just for our mostly-Anglo congregations. Our culturally defined churches also face growing challenges in ministering to both first and second generations, and they need the wider Uniting Church to journey with them.

Cross-cultural literacy and competency for the whole church, the training and empowerment of emerging cross-cultural leaders, and reaching across monocultural ‘silos’ to express a more integrated life of cultural diversity under Jesus Christ, remain critical needs and priorities.

Proposal

It is proposed that the 33rd Synod receive this report.

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