



# UnitingCare Report

## 1. Executive Summary

UnitingCare SA provides a link between the Synod and organisations, schools and colleges associated with the Uniting Church, as well as Church agencies. Governance and other matters relevant to the relationship between the Church and organisations are administered by the UnitingCare SA ministry team.

The report that follows outlines the involvement of the UnitingCare SA ministry team in the life of the Synod since the Synod's Annual Meeting in November 2019. Team members have provided a brief review of what has been undertaken in the different aspects of our work together.

Events such as bushfires, COVID-19, Royal Commissions and Anti-Poverty Sunday resulted in significant impacts on the activities of the team and the UnitingCare network. Some of those events are outlined in this report.

The last year has been both very challenging and very rewarding.

### 1.1 Staff

The UnitingCare SA team continues to offer their diverse gifts to the work of the Synod as this work is lived out through the organisations which are associated with the Synod. The team currently comprises:

- Rev Tim Hodgson      Executive Officer
- Ann Cotton              PA/Administration Officer
- Julianne Rogers        Events, Communications and Promotions Coordinator
- Emily Brodie-Tyrrell    Synergy Manager

Ann, Julianne and Emily have provided great support to me and to the UnitingCare network. Their work throughout the year has been exemplary.

COVID-19 caused significant upheaval to the work situation and workload, as mentioned later in this report. I am proud of the work done by the team. In particular, Julianne is commended for the tremendous work she undertook. Under difficult circumstances and during an extended period, Julianne created COVID safe operating procedures and provided on-the-ground support to Emergency Relief Centres.

The COVID-19 workload took priority over other work responsibilities. During the year many other tasks were postponed or, after due consideration, were relinquished.

The team quickly adapted to working from home. Daily team video calls ensured that we kept in touch from a work perspective and, importantly, on a personal level as we supported each other during those challenging times.

During November, Julianne resigned to return to tertiary study. She has made a valuable contribution to UnitingCare during the last nine and a half years. The Events, Communications and Promotions Coordinator role has changed significantly during the last year, and will now be reviewed.

## 1.2 Governance

### 1.2.1 Reports to Synod Standing Committee

From the last annual report in November 2019 up until September 2020, UnitingCare reported on or recommended proposed resolutions to the Synod Standing Committee in relation to the following matters.

Topic		Reports/Resolutions
Governance	(Constitutions; Board/Council Appointments, Restructures and Reviews)	81
Royal Commissions	(Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse [including National Redress Scheme]; Aged Care; Disability)	10
Events	(Bushfire Relief, COVID-19 Emergency Relief Centres)	4
Organisations	(Ethos documents, Relationships, Visits to Organisations)	5
Administration	(UnitingCare Australia; Synergy)	2
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### 1.2.2 Recruitment from Congregations of Board Members for Organisations Associated with the UCA

In 2019, an internal audit found that many UCA board members are in the third age (eg, 60s/70s). As a part of working to increase awareness of board requirements, a strategic plan was created. The first action on the strategic plan was the “Jump on Board” campaign. This campaign (originally from 2011) was readvertised in the New Times November/December 2019 edition with interviews of prominent current board members to encourage other Uniting Church members to consider how their skills might fit with an organisation.

## 2. Organisations

Currently the following organisations associated with the Uniting Church relate to the Synod through UnitingCare SA.

Schools/Colleges	Aged Care/Hospital	Community Service	Small Organisations
Annesley College*	Clayton Church Homes Incorporated	Uniting Communities Incorporated	UCare Gawler Incorporated
Lincoln College Incorporated	Eldercare Incorporated	Uniting Country SA Ltd	Uniting in Care Salisbury Incorporated

Schools/Colleges	Aged Care/Hospital	Community Service	Small Organisations
Pedare Christian College Incorporated	Helping Hand Aged Care Incorporated	UnitingCare Wesley Bowden Incorporated	UnitingCare Copper Triangle
Pilgrim School Incorporated	Resthaven Incorporated	UnitingSA Ltd	UnitingCare Glenelg
Prince Alfred College*	St Andrew's Hospital Incorporated		UnitingCare Kapunda
Scotch College*		<b>Other</b>	UnitingCare Mt Gambier
Seymour College Incorporated		ACHA Health <sup>#</sup>	
Westminster School Incorporated		MediaCom Education Ltd <sup>Ø</sup>	

\* These schools are incorporated by Acts of Parliament.

# ACHA Health is connected to the Synod through the appointment of a Board member. Several years ago, there was a formal relationship with The Memorial Hospital, which is a now part of ACHA Health. Contact will be made with the organisation to establish a formal relationship through UnitingCare SA.

Ø For convenience, MediaCom Education Incorporated reports to the Synod through the UnitingCare SA reporting mechanism but it is not technically part of the UnitingCare SA network.

UnitingCare SA is the interface between the Church and each of these organisations. This involves many different conversations throughout any year, including an annual report and conversation that addresses each organisation's financial and governance situation. This annual conversation is triggered by the presentation of each organisation's audited financial reports following the end of the calendar or financial year, according to the structure of the fiscal year. Part of this interface also includes the presentation of proposed constitutional changes and board/council appointments for organisations for whom the Synod acts as approving and/or appointing authority.

During 2020, as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and increased workload for many of the organisations, schools and colleges, as well as for UnitingCare SA staff, the usual formal reporting and review cycle was not completed. However, an appropriate level of contact with each organisation has been maintained.

In addition to the existing UnitingCare associations, relationships were established with several congregations to provide emergency food relief. Eight congregations which were not previously associated with UnitingCare became "UnitingCare Emergency Relief Centres". (Refer to section 3.2.)

## 2.1 Aged Care/Hospital

During the last year, the Aged Care sector has faced two significant challenges – the ongoing Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and COVID-19. Fortunately, aged care homes in SA have not (up to this point) endured the tragic level of deaths which has occurred elsewhere. This has been due to their diligence in implementing strict protocols to keep their residents and staff safe. Special arrangements

were made to enable end of life care which was dignified and compassionate. Implementing those protocols and providing care have taken great discipline, as well as courage in the face of some harsh criticism.

St Andrew's Hospital was also significantly disrupted by government restrictions on elective surgery and changes to protocols. After the initial restrictions, the hospital settled back into its usual operating mode, with modified safety protocols.

At the time of writing this report (late November 2020), South Australia experienced a strict lockdown. This had a significant effect on the aged care sector and hospitals, even though the lockdown was for a relatively short duration.

## 2.2 Community Services

Community service organisations, large and small, began 2020 with plans to continue and/or expand their services. By March, every organisation faced significant changes to their operations. Some services, such as community meals, had to be abandoned due to government restrictions. However, other services continued to operate, with the safety of clients and staff becoming even more important than previously.

Many services and programs have now resumed, while others have been modified. All operate under COVID safe protocols. *(For further information about community services offered during the pandemic, please refer to section 3.2.)*

### 2.2.1 UnitingCare Glenelg – Meeting a Member of the Community

“Three years ago, Mtanios (Tony) fled his home in Tartus, a seaside city in Syria, with his wife Suhair and their two sons Rony (15) and Roberto (13). They arrived in Adelaide as refugees and are trying to build a new life in Australia. The journey has not been easy.

Though he is a qualified brick layer, his struggle with English has left Tony unemployed. He came to St Andrew's for food shortly after the pandemic began. We communicate more easily with the translator app on his phone, where Tony also has a video of Tartus and the home he built. Many of the buildings, including his home, are no longer standing because of the war. Tony looks at the photos and tears pool in his eyes.

Before becoming a volunteer at UnitingCare Glenelg, Tony would walk along the shore between Brighton and Glenelg for hours each day, seeking solace. ‘The sea takes all the negative energy from my body,’ explains Tony. ‘It is a bridge between here and Tartus for me.’ Tony says being a volunteer gives him a sense of belonging in Australia. ‘Volunteering is the hope I have now,’ he offers. ‘I have suffered a lot and I no longer want to deal with money.’



When invited to share a word through the newsletter, Tony smiled, spoke into his translator app, and out came: *'Thanks to Australia I live in. She fed me from the first moment I came. There is peace, safety, security for children. It is my wish to live in peace with everyone here. This is important for human life.'* ”

*Story provided by Rev Christine Gilbert, St Andrew's by the Sea Uniting Church, Glenelg*

## 2.3 UCA Schools

The operation of schools and colleges was significantly impacted by COVID-19. Remote learning was quickly implemented and became a useful tool to maintain students' education.

Boarding schools and Lincoln College, which provides residential services for university students, were particularly affected by the closure of international and state borders. Some colleges associated with the Church were at the forefront with changed procedures. Seymour College introduced strict protocols for international students at the beginning of Term 1.

### 2.3.1 Pedare Christian College – Food Donation

Pedare Christian College heard about the work of UnitingCare Emergency Relief Centres and wanted to help. This was their post on social media:

“A huge thank you to all our wonderful Pedare families for their generous donations. Over 1,000 food items have been collected during the Junior School 'Food Drive Fortnight'.

Donations will go to the local UnitingCare South Australia Emergency Relief Centre at Modbury Uniting Church to provide for the many individuals and families who have been affected by the economic fall-out of COVID-19.”



*Pedare Christian College representatives with donated goods*

## 2.4 Pancake Day and Target Christmas Appeal

UnitingCare Pancake Day went ahead as usual until the COVID lockdown hit right in the middle of the fundraising period. Nonetheless, Pancake Day raised over \$15,000 which has gone to UnitingCare organisations and UnitingCare Emergency Relief Centres to support people in need here in SA.

The 2019 Christmas Appeal was the first Christmas Appeal where Target ran the appeal on our behalf instead of as a partnership. Uniting Churches near Target stores were still requested to help facilitate the appeal as local coordinators. As reported in the media, Target spent the majority of 2019 in financial trouble. The results of the appeal were as expected, with a total national income of \$362,372.80 (a reduction of \$138,063.08 on 2018). SA received \$33,224.00 (a reduction of \$5,463.00), which was raised by Target stores in SA. These funds represent 9.2% of the total funds raised, where SA is only 7.1% of the total Australian population. Thank you to all of the generous South Australians who gave to support the work of UnitingCare in SA.

### 2.4.1 Christmas Appeal donations helped South Australians in need

In the Gawler region, a young mother was brought to UCare Gawler by the local police. She had recently been provided with secure housing for herself and her young children, escaping from domestic violence. Thanks to the Christmas Appeal, UCare Gawler was able to offer new toys, lollies and a large Christmas hamper. She thanked the team and told them that she would have some joy that Christmas.

In metro Adelaide, a middle-aged man, Sam, who resides in a private rental, came to UnitingSA because his rent consumed 85% of his income from Newstart (now JobSeeker). With his persistent anxiety and depression, he struggles to maintain his utilities and a prepaid phone. Sam often walks long distances because he can't afford bus fare. His 12 year old son, Jake, stays with him on weekends, but this didn't qualify Sam for additional support because he didn't care for Jake for enough hours. He was unable to provide any entertainment or outings for Jake, and buying the extra food for a growing boy was more than he could stretch to. The Christmas Appeal provided an opportunity for Jake to receive Christmas gifts and a Christmas lunch which Sam would not have been able to provide without the generous donors to the Christmas Appeal.



## 2.5 Synergy

Synergy is a collective buying group, established by the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of South Australia. It combines the buying power of 17 Uniting Church associated organisations in the aged care, health care, community, school and church sectors to obtain the best value for money from suppliers. Synergy currently manages 16 contracts valued at over \$25m per annum. Contracts cover the categories of facilities management, energy, health and aged care services and business services. Aside from procurement and contract management, Synergy also runs events throughout the year to bring member organisations together to network, collaborate and learn.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the procurement operations of the UnitingCare associated organisations and Synergy. In the early stages of COVID we experienced unprecedented demands and complications with sourcing goods and services – in particular PPE. Synergy's focus was to support the organisations, including the Synod, Churches and UnitingCare Emergency Relief Centres to maintain business – including through sourcing quotes for items outside of our contract areas. We also undertook increased compliance monitoring of suppliers and ensured they had sufficient business continuity arrangements in place so that supply of services to our organisations would not be interrupted. We have been very fortunate that none of our Synergy contracted service deliveries were interrupted by COVID and we thank our suppliers for their hard work in ensuring that our organisations were able to continue their operations.

While Synergy was unable to release new tenders and hold events during the earlier stages of COVID, we are now back to our normal services. Two virtual events have been held, one on energy and another on the impact of COVID on procurement and changes to the contingent labour market (nursing). We are also preparing to release 'Laundry and Linen Services' and 'Temporary Labour Hire (Nursing Agency) Services' to the market. Both of these contracts are large group tenders – eight organisations have signalled their intention to join the linen contract and six are part of the temporary labour hire contract.

Another significant project for Synergy has been on creating and finalising documentation to transform Synergy from a 17 year long 'project', to a professional, ongoing and sustainable procurement and contracting service. This documentation includes a Business Plan, Charter, Participant Contribution Agreements, Letter of Intent and a Joint Venture Agreement Template. Subject to approval of the above documentation, in 2021 Synergy plans to implement these new governance processes and begin the journey of growth – in both size and service offerings. The aim is for Synergy to continually achieve better value for all participants and help UnitingCare associated organisations, in particular, save money and achieve their mission of serving our community.

## 3. Events

### 3.1 Bushfires

In February, UnitingCare SA facilitated a meeting to discuss the support needed in SA following the significant bushfires last summer. Participants included the Moderator, General Secretary, Claerwen Little

(National Director of UnitingCare Australia), Wendy Perkins (Disaster and Recover Ministries Coordinator) and representatives from community service organisations.

Several organisations associated with the Uniting Church provided support to communities affected by the bushfires. Services ranged from provision of emergency food and clothing, to ongoing counselling.

Claerwen Little represented UnitingCare Australia and the Uniting Church on the Federal Government's task group which liaised with the National Bushfire Recovery Agency.

### 3.2 COVID-19 & Emergency Relief Centres

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt at the grassroots level by congregations and UnitingCare organisations which provide community services. The COVID-19 situation resulted in a significant increase in the workload for the UnitingCare SA team.

With support from Church Councils, 13 congregations formed UnitingCare Emergency Relief Centres (ERCs) to provide food relief to people in need either out of their current services or starting completely new food relief operations. These programs were exempted from some restrictions under the state government's Emergency Management Act as they were deemed essential voluntary community services (food relief).

During this time the UnitingCare SA team created and implemented an extensive Coordinator's Manual which included all Synod and COVID required policies and procedures for WHS, HR, Safe Church and insurance compliance, and posters for compliance and promotion of their activities to the community. A Volunteer's Manual was created to bring together the information that is relevant for volunteers to be used for induction purposes. Each ERC was visited twice by the UnitingCare SA team, who then tailored site-specific operational instructions for three stages of government restrictions for the protection of volunteers and the public during the lockdown.

Many existing volunteers who were considered to be vulnerable people were initially only able to provide assistance from home, not help at the ERC locations. However, as the situation in SA eased, many of those volunteers returned to the centres.

Since late March, two weekly video conferences with ERC coordinators have been held. These meetings provide the coordinators with the opportunity to support each other, as well as receiving updated information and support from the UnitingCare SA team. These meetings have included a weekly situation report for collating statistics. The situation in SA continues to be reported to Claerwen Little, who chaired the Federal Government's emergency relief task group.

Community partnerships have been an important way of supporting more people in need. There have been several partnerships including between congregations, a local caterer, the Red Dove Café, Pedare Christian College (*see story in section 2.3.1 above*), Uraidla Primary School, OzHarvest, Foodbank, SecondBite, and Meals on Wheels. Two donations from the famous Country and Western singer, Beccy Cole, were also notable.



ERCs have been receiving support from financial donations through the Uniting Church SA Relief Fund UnitingCare SA Emergency Relief Centre Appeal. We are thankful to our generous donors who enable ERCs to serve in the community.

Pleasingly, support and partnerships grew between ERCs and congregations. For example, several UnitingCare ERCs shared food and donations with each other as need arose.

The work of the UnitingCare ERCs was featured on two news spots on Ten News First Adelaide and a spot on ABC radio.

From April to November 2020, the entire ERC network provided over 90,000 instances of assistance. On many of those occasions, several family members would have been helped, so the number of individuals who have been touched by the service of the Uniting Church is significantly more.

Around the time of writing this report, the strict lockdown caused all relief services to be temporarily suspended. After consultation and due consideration by Church Councils and ERC Coordinators, several of the ERCs have decided to continue to provide food relief. They are implementing Level 3 operating procedures, which were prepared and provided to the Coordinators in March, and were recently reviewed. Some Church Councils and Coordinators discerned that it was not appropriate for their ERCs to operate during the lockdown.

### **3.3 National Redress Scheme**

All twelve schools, colleges and community service organisations which were invited to participate in the National Redress Scheme through UCA Redress Ltd agreed to join and have been declared by the Department of Social Services.

At the time of writing this report, the Synod is not aware of any claims lodged with the National Redress Scheme which relate to those schools, colleges or community service organisations.

### **3.4 Aged Care Royal Commission**

On behalf of the Assembly, UnitingCare Australia is coordinating the Uniting Church's response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (the Aged Care Royal Commission).

Several South Australian aged care providers which are associated with the Church have joined a national network of Uniting Church aged care providers.

This sector has been affected by the outcomes of the Royal Commission. Providers associated with the Church are confident that they maintain high standards of care.

### **3.5 Disability Royal Commission**

On behalf of the Assembly, UnitingCare Australia is coordinating the Uniting Church's response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission).

A Synod Task Group was formed early this year and has met on four occasions. Members of the Synod Task Group are Rev Cate Baker, Rev Tim Hodgson, Bruce Ind, Rev Peter McDonald, Steve Roder and Linda Vinall.

In August, on behalf of the National Task Group, the protocol and communications strategy were distributed to the Synod, Presbyteries and congregations. In addition, the Synod, Presbyteries, congregations, organisations, schools and colleges were asked to complete a survey about their involvement with people with disability. Survey results will help to inform the Church's communication with the Disability Royal Commission, and assist the Church as it considers its engagement with people with disability.

National and State Task Group members prepared a prayer of lament for the unacceptable treatment and tragic deaths of some people with disability who do not receive the care and dignity which they deserve.

### **3.6 Anti-Poverty Sunday**

In 2020, Fiona Kelly, Chief Executive of UnitingCare Wesley Bowden (UCWB) was the co-chair of Anti-Poverty Week SA. She asked the UnitingCare SA team to support the messages of Anti-Poverty Week and to engage the Church in that support. The UnitingCare SA team worked with the Moderator and Engagement team, as well as UCWB, to develop and promote Anti-Poverty Sunday. Resources including videos, online worship and sermon preparation materials were created and curated on the UnitingCare SA webpage. A Ten News First feature was broadcast in combination with Anti-Poverty Week, UCWB and UnitingCare Taperoo. Thanks also go to UnitingCare Modbury partner Journey Uniting Church for creating an online worship.

## **4. Conclusion**

The last year has been both very challenging and very rewarding for the UnitingCare SA team and the organisations, schools and colleges associated with the Uniting Church.

We pray that the efforts of people and organisations connected with the Uniting Church will result in positive outcomes and enriched lives for the people we serve.

**Rev Tim Hodgson**

*Executive Officer*

*UnitingCare SA*

23 November 2020