



## Engagement Ministry Centre Report

Early in 2020 the Communications area within the Synod of SA was reviewed and subsequently restructured, resulting in the creation of the Engagement Ministry Centre, which has been operational since July.

The team is responsible for a wide variety of communications and media activities designed to better serve the changing landscape within the church and its community.

At the time of writing this report, the team members include:

- Winaya Kamaputri (Graphic & Digital Designer)
- Bec Preston (Project Officer)
- Bridget Ransome (Executive Officer).

Bec's contract is due to expire on January 29, 2021 and we are currently advertising the new full-time role of – Engagement and Communications Coordinator, with recruitment expected in January 2021. This role will undertake writing, editing and sourcing of material for *New Times*, and will also coordinate the Congregational Website Program, the main Synod website, UC-enews and the Synod's various social media platforms.

It is hoped that there will be a transition period between Bec's contract end date and the appointment of the new staff member, so that we have the opportunity to undertake training and a hand-over period with the appointment of the new person.

### 1. Executive Officer

I have now been in the role of Executive Officer Engagement for almost six months and during that time I have been familiarising myself with the various duties and activities provided by the Engagement Ministry Centre. This has also included becoming familiar with the various platforms used by Engagement to maintain regular, active and important communications with the Synod, Presbyteries, congregations and the wider church.

I have undertaken a review of how the area works and this has also included assessing all fees and charges for the range of services that we provide. As of January 1, 2021 there will be a new fee schedule in relation to the services we offer and although the prices will have increased, they are only nominal increases, to reflect the rising cost of materials, time and external print charges.

## 2. Core Activities

### 2.1 Congregational Website Program

As COVID-19 impacted the way in which congregations conducted services and maintained communications in 2020, we have seen a steady growth in the up-take within the Congregational Website Program.

At present the Engagement area has established and continues to manage over 60 websites built in Wordpress. Upon completion of each site, Bec provides on-going training and support so that congregations can continue to manage and update their own sites.

The Congregational Website Program was projected to generate \$10,000 in income in the 2020 Calendar year and recently invoiced \$11,200 for its services.

### 2.2 Social Media

We maintain an active and continual online presence across a range of platforms in relation to communicating key messages to presbyteries, congregations and the wider community.

Current social media platforms include:

- Facebook (with over 1,500 followers)
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Vimeo.

Our Social media messaging has been dominated by COVID-19 updates, with Rev Sue Page regularly appearing live on Facebook to update guidelines and to take questions to support congregations and the wider church community. We have also introduced a 'Fun Friday' social media post to lighten our content. These posts usually involve a quiz or word puzzle and are based around church themes.

In order to more effectively manage social media, we have also subscribed to a Hootsuite management panel which allows us to forward plan posts and to schedule them to go out on a regular basis.

### 2.3 Synod of SA Website

We continue to review the Synod's main website (<https://sa.uca.org.au/>) to re-organise information and remove outdated material in an attempt to make the website more user-friendly. At present there are over 14,000 items housed on the website and we are continuing to assess the pages with a view to ensuring that the site is up-to-date and relevant.

The current MODX built website is complex, unwieldy and not particularly intuitive to use. Added to this, we are aware that there is only one person that we know of in South Australia that can provide technical support

to the site. This presents some risk and I believe that we need to give due consideration in the future for the Synod to move its website to a more user-friendly, supported and more modern platform.

## 2.4 *New Times*

In 2020 we have produced five (5) issues of *New Times*. In 2021 we are intending to review the look, design and feel of the magazine in order to refresh it.

The annual print cost for *New Times* is approximately \$41,000 and we are currently reviewing this print quote, with a view to making a cost saving of potentially up to \$6,000 in 2021.

In 2020, *New Times* was acknowledged by the Australasian Religious Press Association (ARPA) in their annual awards for an article by Tasha Crumpler entitled 'Cycling for Christ,' and an award for photography.

Tasha Crumpler participated in our intern program and it is our intention to again offer a 12-week internship in 2021.

## 2.5 UC-enews

The UC-enews is sent out every Tuesday to over 1,500 recipients. It is an important and consistent communications platform for the Uniting Church and is well-received.

At present the compilation and preparation of the enews is quite involved and it is anticipated that the format will be refreshed and updated in early 2021.

## 2.6 Calendar and Postcard

The design and bringing together of the components required to produce any publication are often complex and time-consuming. Design takes time and ensuring that editorial content is also accurate and well-written often requires dedication and application.

I congratulate Win on her design skills with both the Synod Calendar and the Christmas Postcard and in creating the 2020 'Joy' theme.

This year's Calendar highlights the people and the areas they work in within the Synod and we have received many favourable comments.

## 2.7 Communication Strategies

I am a member of both the Property Review and Strategic Planning Working Groups and provide input and support to both of these important initiatives, especially with regard to the on-going development and application of key communication strategies.

Engagement has worked closely with staff to review, edit and design the Property Review Report and in creating a shortened version of the main report. We are also working on the Property Review video to guide in the creation of a professional and informative piece to assist in the communication of this important piece of work at the main Synod meeting and beyond.

As a member of the Strategic Planning Working Group, I also work closely with the team to bring the key elements of the plan into a strategic communications framework. Again, this will be discussed in further detail at the February Synod meeting.

## **2.8 Media**

As the Moderator is the spokesperson for the church, I regularly meet with him to review issues, concerns and any key messaging that might be required.

Additional to media considerations, Engagement also works closely with the Moderator to create and distribute communications campaigns e.g. Christmas/Easter messages, which can be used by local congregations and Pastoral notes.

## **2.9 Campaign Monitor**

The Engagement area of the Synod is responsible for sending out regular communications on behalf of the General Secretary and Moderator. We currently use a Campaign Monitor platform to send out information, and this has been a continual process in the past few months due to the changing nature of the COVID-19 situation in South Australia.

We also provide editorial oversight to other areas within the Synod that also use the Campaign Monitor facility to send out messages and updates e.g. Dollars and Sense, Insurance Services.

## **Conclusion**

At the time of writing this report, I look back on my first six (6) months in the role of Executive Officer Engagement, knowing that although there have been many challenges along the way, it has also been an exciting time for me personally to work with a talented and dedicated team and with the wider church and its people.

I look forward to 2021 with anticipation of being a part of some new and important initiatives dedicated to supporting and continuing the life of the Uniting Church in SA.

### **Bridget Ransome**

Executive Office Engagement