



Report to the Synod of South Australia 2026

Introduction

Grace and peace to you as you gather as the Synod of South Australia.

In a time of significant change across the Church and the world, our shared life in this season continues to call us into deeper relationship with one another across cultures, generations and communities.

At the heart of our shared life is Jesus Christ, who calls, reconciles and renews his people. The current triennium theme, *Threads of Love: Weaving Christ's Love Across Cultures and Boundaries*, reflects this ongoing call to live as an interconnected, relational and Christ-centred Church — one that seeks to embody the reconciling love of Christ amid a diverse and changing world.

In the Basis of Union, we are reminded that the Church is “a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal.” In this season, that sense of pilgrimage is deeply felt as we hold together grief and hope, truth-telling and renewal, and seek to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit faithfully.

Since the Assembly last reported to the Synod of South Australia, this has been a time of significant change, discernment and renewal in the life of the national Church. We remain deeply grateful for your partnership, and especially for your willingness to host the 18th Assembly meeting from 8–13 July 2027 at the Adelaide Town Hall.

As we approach the Jubilee year marking the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia, we do so with gratitude and hope — giving thanks for the faithfulness of those who have gone before us, while discerning together how Christ continues to lead and renew the Church in this time.

One of the significant achievements in the past year has been the finalisation of a new Assembly Strategy for the period 2026-2031. This strategy is designed to cover the breadth of the Assembly's work, including its agencies. A one-page summary is provided as Attachment A to this report. The strategy is organised around three goals:

1. **Flourishing Faith** – We extend the table to everyone, inviting them to follow Jesus with courageous faith.
2. **Thriving Communities** – We work together so that we can be a truly national church and local communities can thrive.
3. **Liberating Justice** – We use our voice and our actions to confront injustice in Australia and the world.

Together, these goals express a shared commitment to renewal in the life of the Church — spiritually, relationally and structurally — as we participate in God's mission in the world.

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Flourishing Faith

Uniting in Prayer 2026

From Pentecost through to the 49th anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia, *Uniting in Prayer* will invite the whole Church into a national season of prayer, reflection and discernment.

This initiative emerges from a growing recognition across the Church that, in a season of significant change and renewal, prayer must remain at the heart of our shared life. Renewal in the Church is not something we can achieve through structure or strategy alone, but through renewed attentiveness to the Holy Spirit's leading.

Grounded in the current triennium theme, *Threads of Love: Weaving Christ's Love Across Cultures and Boundaries*, this season of prayer seeks to strengthen the spiritual, relational, and intercultural fabric of the Church across congregations, councils, and communities.

The season will include contributions from across the life of the Church — including the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, Synods, agencies, multicultural communities and ecumenical partners — reflecting the breadth and diversity of the Uniting Church.

It will include daily prayers and reflections, opportunities for congregations and councils to pray for one another, and a national online gathering concluding on the anniversary of Union.

In a time marked by uncertainty, transition and hope, *Uniting in Prayer* invites the Church to pause, listen deeply, and discern together the Holy Spirit's renewing movement among us. This commitment to spiritual renewal is also reflected in the Assembly's ongoing work on theological formation, discipleship and worship across the life of the Church.

The 17th Assembly decisions on *Stream B – A Network for a Flourishing Theological Culture* (Assembly Minute 24.08.02 – 05; ASC Minute 25.45.01-03) are being implemented under the Flourishing Faith Goal. The Commission for Theology, Formation and Leadership (CTFL) has been formed and is working through the priorities referred to them.

This includes the following:

- Pursuing a common higher education provider for theological education.
- Assuming the responsibilities of the Standards for Ministries Committee including responsibility for theological education standards and the Assembly admission of ministers responsibilities.
- Exploring theological guidance and reflection on 'mission', 'discipleship', 'evangelism' and 'diaconal communities'.
- Exploring the idea of 'Instruments of Unity'¹ as part of marking the 50th anniversary of the Uniting Church's inauguration.

¹ For more background on 'Instruments of Unity' see Rev Associate Professor Geoff Thompson, [The Theological Culture of the Uniting Church in Australia: Reflections and Possibilities](#); Also see the [Act2: The Gift of the Spirit](#).



This work reflects a growing recognition across the Church that theological formation, discipleship and worship are not separate activities but are part of a whole life of faith shaped by the Holy Spirit.

Work continues on the [Continuing Witness project](#) both through promotion of the three texts adopted as Continuing Witnesses² and the exploration of recognising other texts as Continuing Witnesses to us a Church.

Work has been initiated by the ASC on the renewal of the Uniting Church's liturgical standards including our authorised services. We marked the 20th anniversary of Uniting in Worship 2 in 2025. It also led us to recognise the need to attend to changes in our life and worship over the past 20 years. The Liturgy Renewal Project is focused on living out our commitments to intentionally:

- Being a Covenanting church
- Being a multicultural, cross-cultural and intercultural church
- Affirming transgender, gender diverse and intersex people
- Embracing the diversity of theology and worship styles across the life of the Uniting Church

This includes ongoing theological reflection and leadership formation, shaped by the voices and experiences of First Peoples, Pacific communities, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities across the Church, recognising that flourishing faith is formed by listening deeply to one another's experiences of God.

Reviving the Covenant remains a high priority for the National Assembly. A Revival of the Covenant Working Group has been appointed. The commitment of the Assembly is to work with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress to enact in our law and life the sovereignty and self-determination of Congress. This work continues to call the Church into deeper truth-telling, listening and transformation as part of our shared life together.

Thriving Communities

The work which arose out of the Act2 decisions in *Stream A – Life-giving Communities of Discipleship and Mission* (Assembly Minute 24.08.01; ASC Minute 25.03.02) and *Stream C – Sharing our Common Life and Wealth* (Assembly Minute 24.08.06-11) are being implemented under the Thriving Communities Goal.

Implementing the *Stream A – Life-giving Communities of Discipleship and Mission* decisions, the ASC is directly overseeing the implementation of changes to the Congregation and Church Council Regulations. It is also looking to finally address the gap between our rules and our reality in managing church membership. Practical changes are on track to be implemented over the remainder of the triennium to provide greater flexibility to Presbyteries and Congregations.

Alongside this the Assembly continues to point to the vision for communities of faith which includes intentional, consistent, relational and contextual ways of making and growing disciples. It also urges Synods (and Presbyteries) to both simplify pathways for

² The Confession of Bhehar, Laudato si' and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification were all recognised as Continuing Witnesses (Assembly Minute, 24.11).



new communities and pastorally attend to the dissolution or amalgamation of communities of faith.

Implementing the *Stream C – Sharing Our Common Life and Wealth* decisions are also part of the Thriving Communities Goal. The Commission for Governance, Resourcing and Administrations is working on multiple workstreams including:

- Investigating the feasibility of a three-council and a four-council model for ordering our life including widespread collaborative conversation with leaders over the coming months;
- Exploring an equitable distribution of resources and resource distribution mechanisms;
- Prioritising and exploring shared administration functions on the basis of only doing separately what we cannot do together;
- Clarifying the distribution of responsibilities across the respective councils of the Church;
- Working with agencies of the Church on the implications of these workstreams for their own life.

It is still anticipated, despite some delays, that outcomes of this work will be coming to the 18th Assembly.

A [review of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice](#) (ASC Minute 25.50.02-05) is currently underway. This is the first major review since 2009. If you would like to contribute, please do so as soon as possible.

An extensive review of our national and international ecumenical relationships was undertaken over the past year. The outcomes of this work include:

- Ongoing prioritisation of younger adults participating in the ecumenical bodies, including periodic reporting to the ASC;
- A transparent nomination and reporting guidelines for participation in ecumenical bodies;
- Establishing a dedicated ecumenical officer position within the Assembly.

President Engagement

In this season of significant change and renewal across the Church, the President's role has involved sustained engagement with the national Church through congregational visits, worship leadership, national gatherings, ecumenical relationships, and conversations with ministers, lay leaders, and communities across a wide range of contexts. This has included rural and remote communities, multicultural and multilingual congregations, emerging faith communities, and spaces led by younger adults across the life of the Church.

The role has also included strengthening relationships across government, community, and national and global ecumenical spheres, reflecting the importance of connection, partnership, and shared witness in the life of the Church.

Across these engagements, several consistent themes have emerged. There remains deep commitment and love for the Church, alongside growing awareness of the pressures many communities and leaders carry. Questions about sustainability, leadership fatigue, uncertainty and change continue to shape the life of many congregations and councils of the Church.

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At the same time, there is a growing hunger for deeper spiritual grounding, discipleship and authentic community, particularly amid rapid change. Many communities are responding with creativity, courage and faithfulness — reimagining ministry, forming new relationships and discovering renewed purpose in changing contexts.

There is also growing recognition of the importance of nurturing intercultural relationships characterised by humility, listening and shared leadership across the Church's diversity. The ongoing growth of multicultural and multilingual communities continues to reshape our understanding of leadership, worship and community life, calling us into deeper shared life and mutual leadership as one Church.

Engagement with younger adults across the Church continues to highlight a strong desire for belonging, authenticity and meaningful participation in the life of the Church, as well as the need for intentional pathways for discipleship and leadership development.

Building on these conversations and relationships, planning is underway for *Held Together*, a national young adult gathering to be held in Sydney from 20–24 January 2027, co-hosted and co-led by the Assembly and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. The President continues to work closely with National Congress leaders to shape and finalise the gathering.

Held Together seeks to renew the Church by forming disciples and weaving relationships across cultures and generations in Christ. The gathering will focus on discipleship, leadership, truth-telling, intercultural relationships and spiritual renewal, intentionally creating space for younger adults from across the Church to gather, worship, learn and discern together as part of shaping the future life and witness of the Church in the lead up to the 50th anniversary of Union.

The President has also continued to nurture relationships with national and global ecumenical partners, recognising them as an important expression of our shared witness and mutual accountability within the global Church.

The role of the President continues to be one of spiritual and pastoral leadership across the whole Church — listening deeply, encouraging communities and leaders, and helping to sustain our shared life across councils, cultures and contexts.

In this season, these engagements continue to reinforce the importance of shaping life-giving, relational and hopeful congregations and communities, as we remain open to the Holy Spirit's renewing work.

Liberating Justice

The National Assembly continues to pursue advocacy on matters of justice of national and international significance.

Uniting World is particularly focused on the impact of climate change on communities. Its deep partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region mean that in their work they are seeing first-hand the direct impact of climate change. This is leading to significant displacement and is having flow on effects to livelihoods of communities with which we work.

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Uniting World is also working in a very challenging global environment with the decline of official development assistance (ODA) across the globe, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom. Australia is just maintaining its commitments however when these two major donors have engaged in catastrophic cuts to ODA the flow on consequences are significant.

UnitingCare Australia continues its three-fold focus on:

1. Advocacy for justice for First Peoples
2. Advocacy for ageing to our full potential
3. Advocacy for economic equality & inclusion

Service sustainability also remains a pressing issue, particularly in aged care, disability care and family and community services. With the appointment of a new National Director, a full strategic review is being undertaken.

The Assembly Secretariat continues to invest in the goal of Net Zero Emissions by 2040. This includes work on standardised reporting for greenhouse gas emissions, a feasibility study for whether the Church could produce carbon offsets and national support for climate champions (ASC Minute 25.52.01-04). We were disappointed that Australia was not successful in securing COP31 in Adelaide. However, climate change advocacy remains a collaborative priority across the life of the Church.

Presidential Advocacy and Public Witness

The President has continued to contribute to the Church's public witness through advocacy, theological reflection and participation in national and global conversations on justice, reconciliation and peace.

Particular focus has been placed on climate justice, anti-racism, truth-telling and the well-being of Pacific and First Peoples communities. This has also included a continued commitment to the Church's Covenant relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and to the importance of truth-telling, justice and reconciliation with First Peoples. For Pacific communities, this has also included supporting the ongoing transition and settlement of our partner church in Tuvalu through collaboration with the Queensland and New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory Synods.

Through national and international ecumenical gatherings, including engagement with the World Council of Churches, Pacific Conference of Churches and World Communion of Reformed Churches, the President has continued to advocate for climate justice as both a theological and moral responsibility, particularly in relation to the growing impact of climate change on Pacific communities, displacement, migration and future generations.

The President has also continued to speak publicly on issues relating to racism, dignity, belonging and reconciliation with First Peoples, recognising that the call to justice is inseparable from the Church's discipleship and public witness in the world.

This has included participation in public and ecumenical conversations on peacebuilding, migration, community wellbeing, and the Church's responsibility to stand alongside communities experiencing exclusion, inequality and uncertainty.

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The President has also continued to strengthen relationships with Pacific church partners, recognising the importance of solidarity, mutual accountability, and an ongoing presence in relationships that extend beyond formal program partnerships with our assembly agency.

In this season, the Church's commitment to liberating justice continues to be expressed not only through advocacy and policy, but through faithful public witness grounded in the reconciling love of Christ.

Further information relating to the President's ministry, public witness and leadership can be found here: [Meet the President](#)

Grounded in this triennium's theme, this work affirms that liberating justice is not separate from the gospel but part of Christ's reconciling and renewing work. Across public advocacy, ecumenical engagement and relationships with communities in Australia, across the Pacific and within the global Church, the President's ministry has sought to strengthen the threads that hold people together, particularly in places marked by injustice, exclusion, displacement and uncertainty.

At the heart of this vision is the belief that the Church is called to be an interconnected, relational community, standing alongside those who are unheard, vulnerable, or pushed to the margins. In this season, the work of justice continues to call the Church beyond statements alone, inviting communities to deeper truth-telling, solidarity, compassion, and shared responsibility for one another and for creation.

As the Church approaches the 50th anniversary of Union, this vision continues to shape the President's public witness and leadership — encouraging the Church to embody Christ's love across cultures, boundaries and generations through lives of justice, reconciliation and hope in the world.

Key Staffing Updates

There has continued to be change in our key staffing. Since our last report the following staffing changes have occurred:

- Tamara Thomas has replaced Clarewen Little as the National Director, UnitingCare Australia in February 2026.
- Dave Parker has replaced Rob Floyd as the National Director, Frontier Services in May 2026.
- Dr Damian Palmer has been appointed as the Executive Officer, Commission for Theology, Formation and Leadership.
- Dr Paul Minty has been appointed as the Executive Officer, Commission for Governance, Resourcing and Administration.
- Paul Wallbank replaced Bethany Broadstock as the National Manager in May 2026.
- Rev Kath Behan concluded as National Consultant in January 2026.

Conclusion

The Assembly remains grateful for the Synods' commitment to funding the Assembly's work. We have undergone an extensive negotiation process to establish a more secure funding base for the Assembly. Work will continue as part of the equitable distribution of

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resources to ensure all our councils have the resources they need to fulfil their responsibilities.

As we approach our jubilee year and mark our 50th Anniversary, we look to the future with hope. Our work as an Assembly, particularly through the Act2 Project, is not merely strategic or structural – it is deeply spiritual, as we seek the Holy Spirit's guidance so that we may not lose our way as we participate in Christ's reconciling and renewing work.

We continue to be reminded that the future of the Church will be shaped not only by structures and strategy but also by the relationships we nurture, the truth we tell, and the ways we embody Christ's love across cultures, communities and generations.

May we continue to embody Christ's love together with faithfulness, courage and hope, as we discern the renewing movement of the Holy Spirit in this season.

Rev Charissa Suli
President

Andrew Johnson
General Secretary