

Mission & Leadership Development Board (MLDB) Report

1. Introduction

The Mission Leadership and Development Board (MLDB) has embraced significant change since the last Synod as it has met many challenges. Its brief, on behalf of the Synod Standing Committee, is to oversee the activities of the Uniting College of Leadership and Theology (UCLT) and the Theological library, as well as the Mission Resourcing Unit and the Aboriginal Spirituality Centre.

For the College, significant change was precipitated by Flinders University ending its association as it withdrew its theology courses. This reflected the external environment faced by most Australian public Universities as enrolments have rendered the courses economically unviable. UCLT joined the University of Divinity. However, in line with the wider trend, UCLT's student enrolments are down, which is further exacerbated by the financial pressure on most students which sees them only studying one subject per semester. Budget reductions with staffing cuts including not filling the leadership position put pressure on the ability to deliver a comprehensive education. However, UCLT has recruited well and is developing a sustainable economic strategic plan subject to the Synod's strategic plan, and what will be invested in the education of our ministers, deacons and lay members in addition to income sources from student fees and trusts such as the RH White and Parkin Trusts.

The Mission Resourcing Unit was re-organised with the creation of six mission activator positions under an executive officer to work with congregations. This initiative is evolving well with interactions on a variety of projects and supporting successful events such as the Emerging Leader's Retreat.

The subcommittees of the MLDB have been reformed and in addition to the UCLT Academic Committee membership, two new committees are the Justice Mission and Theology Committee and the Specified Ministries Development Subcommittee which has re-energised the structure and provide greater focus.

The MLDB, where the members are now appointed by Standing Committee, is returning to full strength now that the various reviews have been completed, and a skills matrix has guided the breadth of skill required, which sets us up well for the tasks ahead.

The current membership is detailed below:

Role	Member Name	Membership Type
Chairperson of MLDB	Prof Ian Olver	Appointed
	Richard Idzikowski	Appointed
	Rev Steph Tai	Appointed

	Rev Barry Littleford	Appointed
	Leesa Story	Appointed
Chair of SMD	Dr Kaye Roberts-Thomson	Ex-officio
EO/Principal UCLT	Rev Prof Vicky Balabanski	Ex-officio
EO Mission Resourcing	Rev Jenni Hughes	Ex-officio
Moderator	Rev Peter Morel	Ex-officio
Gen Sec	Rev Philip Gardner	Ex-officio
Chairperson of JMT	Rev Paul Turley	Ex-officio

2. Subcommittees

2.1 Specified Ministries Development (SMD)

The Specified Ministries Development Subcommittee provides oversight, direction and guidance of the Specified Ministries in the UCA Synod of SA, in keeping with the strategic vision of the Synod and the Mission and Leadership Development Board and in compliance with the Assembly Regulations; to resource the MLD Board in the fulfilment of its responsibilities as a MEB.

This includes responsibility for the oversight (and when relevant the membership) of:

- Synod Selection Panel (SSP)
- Leadership Formation Days (LFDs)
- Formation Panels (FPs) (including provision for Admission of Ministers)
- Ministry of Pastor (MoP) academic offerings and pathways
- Ministry of the Word (MoW) academic expectations and pathways
- Ministry of Deacon (MoD) academic expectations and pathways
- Chaplaincy Training
- Lay Preacher (LP) training
- The discernment of new accredited training pathways.

2.2 Justice, Mission and Theology (JMT)

The Justice, Mission and Theology Subcommittee is tasked with encouraging, resourcing and discussing ministries of justice and mission within the UCA Synod of SA, in keeping with the strategic vision of the Synod and Mission and Leadership Development Board.

This includes responsibility to:

- provide timely and prophetic public witness in the wider church and society.
- be attentive to issues of social justice, environmental action, covenanting and major issues of community concern.

- connect, collaborate and communicate among key stakeholders and ministry groups within the Synod.
- select, advised by the Moderator, a limited number of issues of focus (e.g. 3) to specifically equip and resource each year (these may be the same across a number of years or vary from one year to the next).

2.3 Academic Committee

The Academic Committee provides oversight of the academic and research functions of the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology (UCLT). The Academic Committee ensures that the UCLT is fully compliant with the required Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) included in the Annual Report to the University of Divinity.

3. Other associated Committees or Groups

3.1 Synod Selection Panels

The Synod Selection Panel continues to play a key role in the discernment and selection of Candidates for specified ministries within the Synod. The Panel is available to meet up to six times per year and considers a maximum of two applicants per meeting. In 2025, the Synod Selection Panel met on three occasions and interviewed five applicants.

In its discernment, the Panel gives careful regard to specified matters as outlined in Regulation 2.3.2.4, including the spiritual maturity and motivation of applicants, their leadership capacities and potential, their ability to undertake the required course of study, their vocational suitability for the specified ministry being sought, and their character and personality. Interviews were assessed alongside reports from Presbyteries, psychological assessments, and medical reports. Each applicant was supported by a nominated support person during the interview process.

In 2025, all Panel decisions were reached unanimously. Of the five applicants interviewed, four applications were accepted, and one was accepted with conditions. All applicants were seeking candidacy for the Ministry of the Word and came from Generate Presbytery and the Presbytery of Southern South Australia.

The Synod Selection Panel works well together and is well supported administratively. With a culture of reflection and continuous improvement, refinements are made to the processes and practices of the Panel as required.

The Panel is a cohesive group, respectful of one another and deeply committed to serving God and the Church. It is a joy to hear the stories of God's call and the journeys of each applicant. The Panel values the openness and humility shown by applicants in submitting themselves to the selection process of the Uniting Church. The Panel approaches its task prayerfully and with great care, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it listens deeply to each applicant and to one another. It is a privilege to be part of this discernment process.

Rev Lynne Aird - Chairperson, Synod Selection Panel

3.2 Joint Presbyteries & Synod Lay Preachers' Committee

There are several roles and responsibilities that fall within the remit of the Joint Presbyteries & Synod Lay Preachers' Committee (commonly known as Lay Preachers' Committee / LPC). Some fulfill formal administrative responsibilities, per the relevant Regulations; some are pastoral; some are educational.

Lay Preachers in the Synod of SA

One of the formal roles of the LPC is to keep the **Roll of Accredited Lay Preachers** in SA.

At the end of March, the numbers stood at:

Active and available to preach (some limited to their local area only)	106
Inactive (temporarily)	4
Candidates (one of whom is awaiting a date for Commissioning).	3

We have been pleased to commission 4 new Lay Preachers and welcome 2 Candidates over the last 2 years. Several of our long-serving Lay Preachers have retired in that period.

Administrative matters

LPC acts on behalf of the three Presbyteries in SA to take care of those administrative matters assigned to Presbyteries by the Regulations.

- As noted above, we keep the list of Accredited Lay Preachers;
- LPC receives and processes applications to be received as Candidates and applications for accreditation.
- LPC also keeps itself informed about developments and changes in education and formation for Lay Preachers, though responsibility for delivering that service to candidates rests with Uniting College.

There has been one small but significant change in the way LPC works in practice: Lay Preachers' Committee is accountable now to the Specified Ministries Development Subcommittee (SMD) which was established late in 2025; SMD has resolved that that relationship is to relate to policy and general oversight only, and that LPC's working relationship, that is, in all recommendations re Candidates and Accreditation, will be directly with the relevant Presbytery. We have observed that the new arrangement is working well, and is appreciated by the Presbyteries.

Lay Preachers' Committee finds itself in another somewhat strange situation – our formal role relates to those lay people who are formally accredited and recognised as Lay Preachers: but we are very aware that there are many people preaching on any given Sunday who do not hold that formal status – and indeed that without people such as these there would be many congregations with nobody to proclaim the word of grace each week. Accordingly, LPC has resolved to extend the full range of its services to people such as these, and we invite all people who are engaged in the preaching ministry of the Church to join with us as a Lay Preachers' Committee.

We also have a working relationship with the National Lay Preachers' Committee through our representation on that Committee.

Pastoral support

Support and encouragement are offered to Lay Preachers through:

- Newsletter emailed twice per year
- The recognition by Synod of **Lay Preachers' Sunday** on the first Sunday in August each year; in connection with this occasion, worship and preaching notes are prepared and loaded onto the Synod website, Lay Preachers page.
- Recognition each year of people who reach major anniversaries.
- Subsidies for resources purchase and conference / seminar attendance.

Professional Development (Continuing education)

Lay Preachers' Committee does not normally provide or conduct continuing education sessions itself but does actively advertise and support programmes offered by other bodies. Accordingly we promoted the visit early in 2024 of Rev Dr Sunny Chen (organised by CMLA), and the Festival of Learning on-line conference organised jointly by Uniting College and Australian Lutheran College, as well as more recent CMLA initiatives.

A major event for Lay Preachers across Australia in 2026 will be the **National Conference of Lay Preachers**, held from the 4th – 6th of September in Melbourne. Advertising for this will begin soon.

Continuing matters of concern

There are some matters of continuing concern, some of which “belong” at Assembly level, but they get a mention here because the SA Lay Preachers' Committee shares those concerns.

- **Safe Church:** LPC fully supports the polity of both Assembly and Synod re measures undertaken under the Safe Church banner, including that there should be nobody participating in any leadership of worship without having completed the required Screening process.
- **Code of Ethics:** we hear the occasional report of lay people speaking in ways inconsistent with the various Codes of Ethics of the Uniting Church; we believe relevant Assembly people are aware of the matter, but again, who has the authority to take such action as may be necessary has to be resolved.
- **Lay Presidency at the Sacraments:** various people, including Lay Preachers but not only them, have noted the pastoral issues arising when a Congregation is not able to find a Minister to preside at Holy Communion on a given day. National LPC recognises that this is properly a matter for Assembly: it is reported here only for information.

We thank God for the work of our Lay Preachers and for their commitment to serve God through this ministry.

Max Howland - Convener

Prof Ian Oliver AM

Chair, Mission and Leadership Development Board

13 May 2026



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia