UnitingCare SA Report

The UnitingCare SA ministry team builds relationships between the Synod and organisations, schools and colleges associated with the Uniting Church. To facilitate these relationships, UnitingCare SA supports strong governance, risk management and communications.

The report that follows outlines the involvement of the UnitingCare SA ministry team and the associated organisations in the life of the Synod since the UnitingCare report was prepared in March 2022 for the Synod's Annual Meeting in June 2022. Team members have provided a brief review of what has been undertaken in the different aspects of our work together.

1. Staff

The UnitingCare SA team continued 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.

Since the last report, there have been further changes to staffing.

- **Rev Dr Adrian Brown** **Interim Liaison Officer**
  The Interim Liaison Officer role was established to carry out the Executive Officer's pastoral care and governance duties while that position was reviewed. Adrian filled the role for ten months during 2022, completing his placement on 22 December 2022. His contribution was highly valued by the Synod Office staff as well as by the organisations.

- **Mark Waters** **Director, UnitingCare SA**
  The Executive Officer, UnitingCare SA role was reviewed following the departure of Rev Dr Tim Hodgson at the end of 2021. The review resulted in a change of title to Director, UnitingCare SA and some changes to the role. Mark commenced in the role on 17 January 2023 on a 0.8 full time equivalent basis.

- **Ann Cotton** **PA/Admin Officer to the Director**
  Ann has continued in this role. During 2022 and 2023, she has supported the Interim Liaison Officer, the new Director, UnitingCare SA, Synergy operations and fundraising appeals. Ann has formally submitted notice that she is going to retire from work during the second half of 2023. By giving six months notice, it will enable the team to recruit and provide a reasonable handover to the new incumbent.

- **Vacancy** **Support Officer**
  The team has prioritised the filing of the vacant Support Officer role within UnitingCare SA. Approval has been gained for the Position Description and Person Specification. At the time of writing, interviewing of potential candidates for this 0.6FTE position is underway.

The UnitingCare SA team reports through to Rev Philip Gardner in his role as Interim General Secretary. During Philip's absence on leave, matters were reported to Rev Sue Page, Acting General Secretary.

2. Governance

2.1 Reports to Synod Standing Committee

From the last annual report in June 2022 (written in April 2022) up until March 2023, 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)	64
Organisations	(Relationships, Changes of Key Staff, Not-For-Profit Sector Results)	7
Royal Commissions	(Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse [including National Redress Scheme], Aged Care, Disability)	1
Events	(COVID-19 Emergency Relief Centres, Training of Chaplains)	5
Administration	(Changes to UnitingCare SA Staff)	3
		80

2.2 Recruitment from Congregations of Board Members for Organisations Associated with the UCA

To meet their governance and financial responsibility requirements, Boards and Councils have to operate with a skills-based membership. Therefore, they seek people with professional skills or experience in a broad range of disciplines and/or industry sectors. Lived experience in various categories such as disability and diversity is also highly regarded.

Wherever possible, and often as required by the organisation's constitution, UCA members are sought for roles on the Boards/Councils of several organisations, schools and colleges associated with the Church. Increasingly, UnitingCare SA is working with the organisations to ensure that the members being nominated to the Board subscribe to and meet the ethos and the polity of the Uniting Church. This is leading to changes to constitutions and devising alternative approaches.

UCA members are encouraged to consider whether they or someone they know would be interested in serving the Uniting Church in this rewarding role. Interested people should make contact with UnitingCare SA.

2.3 Constitutions

Whether large or small, all organisations are governed according to their constitution, rules and regulations or by-laws. During 2022 and 2023, the Synod Standing Committee approved changes to the governing documents of two organisations. One of those organisations made significant changes to update its constitution to reflect current business practices and language. The other organisation requested that their chair be a person who is "committed to the ethos and polity of the Uniting Church" and who **may** (instead of "must") "be a member of a Church that is a member of the National Council of Churches in Australia". This change was supported as it better reflects a commitment to the organisation's relationship with the Uniting Church.

UnitingCare SA staff consulted with each of the organisations as they discerned the changes to be recommended to the Synod Standing Committee for approval.

Another small community service organisation linked to a congregation is in the process of exploring the viability and sustainability of incorporation under the Associations Incorporation Act. This organisation has consulted with the UnitingCare SA team for two years as they discern the best way to provide services which support the local community. Their rationale for incorporation and proposed constitution were referred to the Synod Standing Committee, which sought advice from the Resources Board. The provision of services to the community is still carried out while the discernment process continues.

3. 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 Australia Ltd	Uniting Country SA Ltd	Uniting in Care Salisbury Incorporated
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*			UnitingCare Mt Gambier
Seymour College Incorporated		**Other**	
Westminster School Incorporated		MediaCom Education Inc∅	

* These schools are incorporated under Acts of Parliament.

\# These community service organisations also provide some aged care services.

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 governance and financial 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. Discussions between UnitingCare and the organisations include highlights and successes, trends, challenges and risks. 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.

Emergency Relief Centres
UnitingCare Enfield Emergency Relief Centre
UnitingCare Modbury Emergency Relief Centre
UnitingCare Mt Barker Emergency Relief Centre
UnitingCare Naracoorte Emergency Relief Centre
UnitingCare Noarlunga Emergency Relief Centre
UnitingCare North Adelaide Emergency Relief Centre (Brougham Place Uniting Church)
UnitingCare Taperoo Emergency Relief Centre (Lefevre Uniting Church)
UnitingCare Woodville Gardens Emergency Relief Centre (The Grove Uniting Church)

In addition to the longstanding UnitingCare organisations, during 2020 relationships were established with several congregations to provide emergency food relief. Several congregations which were not previously associated with UnitingCare became "UnitingCare Emergency Relief Centres". Some of these centres and their local Church Councils are now considering whether to formally establish UnitingCare organisations with their own constitutions or by-laws, or return to providing congregation based services separate from the UnitingCare structure. However, those congregations might continue to provide food services to people in need when required. It has been recognised that with increasing demand and decreasing supply of food and resources, there is a need to investigate the long-term viability and coordination of all of these structures.

Following are comments on each of the sectors, examples of how the mission of the Church is lived out through various organisations, and changes in leadership.

3.1 Sectors

3.1.1 Schools and Colleges

New leadership appointments for three schools occurred in 2022/2023.

- Mr David Roberts, from Newington College in Sydney, replaced Mr Bradley Fenner upon his retirement as headmaster of Prince Alfred College in July 2022.
- Mr Luke Ritchie left Annesley Junior School in the latter half of 2022 and as a result, Ms Jo Rossiter has been appointed to the role of Principal. Jo is both a former student and teacher and was promoted from the Director of Primary Years into this role.
- Mr Trent Driver, from Newington College in Sydney, replaced Dr John Newton as principal at Scotch College at the beginning of 2023. Dr Newton, after eight years at Scotch, returned to the United Kingdom at the end of 2022.

UnitingCare SA thanks Bradley, Luke and John for their commitment to education in South Australia and the leadership that they have provided to their schools, especially as they addressed the significant challenges of the past few years such as COVID-19 and Year 7s moving to high school.

Schools and colleges have continued to support the mission of the Church. Some have partnered with community service organisations for joint activities, and have supported other schools during times of need.

3.1.2 Aged Care and Hospital

There are inordinate pressures upon the aged care sector across Australia. The links between the aged care chief executive officers across the country through UnitingCare Australia are highly valued. Implementation of the Australian Government's policy of a nurse on roster around the clock brings increased complexity and cost. The provision of 200 minutes of care daily adds further load upon providers. The introduction of increased wages for the lowest paid staff in aged care is seen as positive, but how this is going to be effectively funded remains a problem for the sector. Meanwhile, being able to attract and retain a skilled workforce continues to be a major issue for the sector.

Add into this the continued impact of COVID-19 with residential aged care still experiencing higher mortality rates, and the sector is under enormous pressure. All aged care providers are forecasting deficits in the coming financial year with little expectation of budget and funding reform as recommended by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. The aged care providers continue to look after their residents with dignity and compassion while meeting the standards laid down by the Government, even though this means there is an increased administrative load without adding effectively to the capacity to provide care and support.

St Andrew's Hospital also has had to battle COVID-19. It has been pleasing that the hospital has reported that the level of infection amongst patients has been kept low. Of course, they have had to cope with a workforce that has been hit hard by COVID-19 infection rates, the need to backfill and the long-term stress of

coping with the pandemic. St Andrew's is also experiencing significant issues in being able to recruit staff, and so workforce issues remain a major priority for the hospital.

All of these pressures have meant that Chaplains continue their integral role within the delivery of holistic care for residents, patients and support for staff.

In terms of staff changes, Ms Jo Boylan was welcomed to Clayton Church Homes in July 2022 as she took up the role of chief executive.

3.1.3 Community Services

A high number of communities in South Australia have services provided by organisations associated with the Uniting Church. The geographic and population reach is enormous. As an indicator, Uniting Country SA has 55 services being provided across 27 sites.

The breadth of services provided by our organisations is expansive. At a glance, these include:

- Family services
- Children's services
- Working with young people
- Supporting older people
- Domestic and family violence counselling
- Relationship counselling
- Working with Aboriginal families and communities
- Working with CALD communities
- Mental health support
- Crisis support through LifeLine
- Counselling for alcohol and other drug use
- Gambling help services
- Emergency assistance
- Homelessness support
- Social housing
- Financial counselling
- No Interest Loans
- Employment and training
- Supported employment
- NDIS services
- Home care
- Legal advice
- Advocacy
- Community development

At the national level, UnitingCare Australia has shown that organisations across the country have supported 1.4 million people per year with programs valued at $4.5 billion and staffing of 50,000 with a further 30,000 volunteers*. At least 10% of those figures can be attributed to South Australia, given the significant stake that we have in schooling, community services and aged care.

* *Cited from "Community Services, Discipleship and Renewal in the Uniting Church in Australia" – a discussion paper from UnitingCare Australia for the Act2 Project, October 2022.*

In 2022 and 2023, several Boards have selected new chairs.

- Mr Peter Hollister has taken over from Ms Sue Park at Uniting Country SA.
- Mr Paul Sherlock has been appointed as chair of UnitingCare Wesley Bowden. He takes over after the retirement of Ms Alison Kimber, who had been on the Board since 2016.
- In March 2023, Uniting Communities made the transition from Dr Sue King to Dr Kylie Heneker as their chair. Sue had chaired the Board since 2016.

UnitingCare SA thanks all of the outgoing chairs for their commitment and diligence to leading their organisations during the difficult times that COVID-19 produced.

Chairs, with their Boards, shape the organisational mission, culture, quality, service provision and financial stability of their organisations. The significant contributions by chairs in leading their Boards and working with the chief executives of large, diverse and complex organisations is highly valued.

During 2022, UnitingCare Emergency Relief Centres, which are mainly staffed by volunteers, provided prepared meals or food items for more than 200,000 meals. That effort supported thousands of people.

More than just meals, they also provided a wide range of other services, including goods from op shops and financial counselling and advice about No Interest Loans (NILs). Importantly, they made a positive contribution to the lives of clients by welcoming them into the centres.

Government funding is available to many – but not all – of the organisations. They all rely on donations, and some receive fees for a range of services. They wouldn't be able to survive without the substantial contributions made by volunteers and donors who keep the centres running and stocked. As the cost-of-living crisis grows, demand for these services continues to increase, whilst supply of goods is getting tighter. A consistent message from the centres is that new people keep coming to their doors saying that they never expected to have to seek emergency relief. Just that one extra bill at a difficult time is impacting greatly on these people and our services.

Homelessness and accommodation issues are impacting people who access services. The profile of these individuals is also changing. The fastest growing group of homeless people is women over 55 years old. Our organisations are seeing people who are sleeping in vehicles or sleeping rough in the sand dunes.

It is often heard in emergency relief centres that people never expected to need to access services or that they never thought that they would be homeless.

Cost of living pressures and increased interest rates are also driving up the cost of rental housing. The people who can least afford price hikes are often living in poverty or on low and inadequate incomes.

A conversation has been started in UnitingCare SA with the organisations associated with the Uniting Church about the place of social housing and how we, the Uniting Church, can respond to this housing crisis. Advocacy is a given. But are there models where land and property and services can partner together to address need?

Innovative models are being sought. UnitingSA is in the vanguard of housing development, having won some significant tenders to build social housing. Uniting Country SA is also looking at opportunities to build supported accommodation.

3.2 Mission

The mission of the Uniting Church is lived out on a daily basis through UnitingCare organisations. We hear God's word in Micah: "He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (RSV: Micah 6:8)

It is striking that we are not simply called to "be fair" or "act justly" (although some translations use these words). In the Revised Standard Version of the Bible we are called upon to "do justice", which is not passive at all. Our organisations under the umbrella of UnitingCare are on the frontline "doing justice" as they serve the community each day.

And the second charge upon us is to "love kindness". Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been calls in some quarters for a matching "kindness pandemic". The rise of a Compassionate Communities movement in South Australia demonstrates this. We need to be kind to each other and ourselves in increasing quantities as we see the rise of loneliness and isolation take its toll upon mental health and suicide rates.

Each of the 30 organisations (schools, colleges, aged care providers, hospital, community services and emergency relief centres) is committed to educating and serving the wider community as outreaches of the Synod and the members of the Uniting Church in South Australia.

These organisations go about their work to directly reflect the ethos of the Uniting Church.

4. Fundraising Appeals

4.1 Pancake Day

In 2023, a concerted effort was made to promote the UnitingCare Pancake Day Appeal. This resulted in some more congregations and organisations support the fundraising efforts. In addition, many of the regular fundraisers were able to raise more funds than was possible during the previous three years. Fundraising is on track to exceed last year's total.

About 30% of the fundraising events are held by groups which are not associated with the Uniting Church, such as Girl Guides, child care centres, businesses, and public and independent schools. One Girl Guides group was able to increase their fundraising from $50 in 2022 to $200 in 2023.

Funds raised will be distributed among 18 UnitingCare organisations and emergency relief centres to support people in need in SA. About 45% of funds were allocated to specific organisations and centres by donors.

It is pleasing that many of the regular fundraisers were keen to support UnitingCare again this year. Our mascot, Penny Pancake was a big hit, visiting four events to raise awareness, as well as funds.

4.2 UnitingCare Emergency Relief Centre Fund

The UnitingCare SA Emergency Relief Centre Fund was established in May 2020 to help equip Uniting Churches to offer food relief to their local communities.

From April 2022 to March 2023, $8,272 was raised to support emergency relief centres. Most of the funds were allocated to specific centres by the donors. The remaining funds were allocated equally among the centres.

5. Synergy

Synergy supports the UnitingCare SA network by harnessing the buying power of the organisations to achieve cost savings wherever possible. Currently Uniting Church associated organisations from the aged care, health care, community, school and church sectors are involved. Synergy currently manages 12 contracts valued at over $22m per annum to obtain the best value for money from suppliers.

Contracts cover the categories of energy, nursing agency staff, automatic door services, medical assessments and associated services, records management, laundry and linen services, pest control, lift maintenance and fire scheduled maintenance services.

Synergy's operations were transferred to the Resources ministry centre in January 2022. This enabled better management of the financial aspects of the contracts. UnitingCare remains the ministry centre which manages the pastoral care aspects of the relationships with the organisations associated with the Church.

Ms Aja Scarborough commenced as the Synergy Procurement and Relationships Manager early in 2022. A new Synergy Committee has been established to provide advice to Synergy, the Resources ministry centre and UnitingCare SA. Such advice will support Synergy to plan for growth and development over the coming years. These plans are likely to include sustainability goals and procurement from First Nations businesses.

6. UnitingCare Australia

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the UnitingCare network. It liaises with UnitingCare entities (including separately incorporated organisations associated with the Church) in each Synod and represents those entities in its advocacy work.

The Synod is represented on the UnitingCare Australia Board. The Board meeting in November 2022 was attended by both the Moderator, Mr Bronte Wilson and the Interim Liaison Officer, UnitingCare SA, Rev Dr Adrian Brown. The incoming Director, UnitingCare SA, Mr Mark Waters, has now been nominated to the UnitingCare Australia Board.

7. Royal Commissions

7.1 National Redress Scheme

The National Redress Scheme was established by the Australian Government in response to recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Twelve schools, colleges and community service organisations associated with the Uniting Church participate in the National Redress Scheme through UCA Redress Ltd.

Claims lodged through the National Redress Scheme are administered by the Placements and Safe Church ministry centre.

7.2 Disability Royal Commission

The Disability Royal Commission Synod Task Group is chaired by Mr Bruce Ind, who also represents the Synod on the National Disability Royal Commission Task Group. The Synod Task Group has not met during the past year as all discussions have been held at the national level.

UnitingCare Australia coordinates the Uniting Church's response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (referred to as the Disability Royal Commission). They have discerned three key principles for Synods and organisations to consider:

- "Governance and decision-making
- Complaints resolution and institutional safety
- Supported decision-making, and choice and control"

(From The UnitingCare Australia Board Pack, November 2022)

As the Royal Commission is due to hand down its final report to the Australian Government by 29 September 2023, it is timely to start getting together relevant people in SA to comment upon the findings of the Royal Commission. It is important to note that the Commission has not published any issues papers into the evidence being presented and its last progress report accessible through a web search covered 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2022 (Sixth Progress Report).

The Synod Task Group, formed in 2020, also includes Rev Cate Baker, Rev Peter McDonald, Mr Steve Roder and Mrs Linda Vinall. The connection between the Task Group's work and the Safe Church Unit, and members' own experiences in this area remains crucial. The members of the Synod Task Group have been consulted and are ready to reconvene in preparation for the handing down of the Royal Commission's reports. The Synod Task Group will expand to include organisations associated with the Uniting Church that are providing services to people with disabilities.

8. Conclusion

UnitingCare SA and the organisations associated with the Uniting Church are all experiencing financial challenges along with many people in the community. The cost of living pressures, the energy pricing and disrupted supply chains all impact our organisations, schools and colleges.

After three years, the direct impact of COVID-19 has reduced, however the rising demand for services is not abating. Every emergency relief centre is reporting an increase in participants. There are also times when it is evident that the capacity to provide stock is limited.

An upsurge in homelessness, particularly for older women, is also putting pressure on the system. Emergency Relief Centres are describing more people living out of their cars or sleeping rough.

After COVID-19, services are also identifying that there has been an increase in loneliness and isolation. The mental health effects of lock-downs and not being able to mix with people are also likely to lead to longer term mental health issues in the community. This is also being reflected in higher incidence of suicide, domestic violence and alcohol and other drug use.

The other consistent trend identified by organisations is that there are many areas in which recruiting and employing a stable, skilled workforce is of paramount importance but remains very challenging.

UnitingCare SA and our organisations – across all sectors – remain ready to meet the challenges ahead, and we give thanks for the services they provide in the community. It is timely that nationally we are looking at structures and purpose through the Act2 consultations. It is also fitting that the church is embarking upon a Mission Leadership and Development Review that is looking at the missional needs of the church.

We know that as we plan well, establish missional objectives effectively and then seek to use all of our human and physical strengths and assets to resource them, the organisations, schools and colleges associated with the Uniting Church will continue to do remarkable things.

Mark Waters
Director, UnitingCare SA
20 April 2023

The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia