

Synod '24



UnitingCare SA Report

The UnitingCare SA ministry team builds relationships between the Synod and aged-care, community services, relief centres and schools and colleges associated with the Uniting Church in South Australia. To strengthen these relationships, UnitingCare SA supports sound governance, risk management, financial sustainability and communications.

This report outlines the involvement of the UnitingCare SA ministry team and the associated organisations in the life of the Synod since the last UnitingCare SA report dated April 2023.

1.1 Mission

The mission of the Uniting Church is lived out on a daily basis through UnitingCare SA organisations. Rev. Paul Turley wrote in his article “What is Mission?” in the October – November 2023 New Times that “Jesus partied with sinners, healed the sick and welcomed the broken, the poor and the outcast because it was his nature to do so. It is in the nature, the DNA of the church to do the same.

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)

Each of our organisations (schools, colleges, aged care providers, hospital, community services and 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. Alongside of them, we can look to “do justice” as part of the Uniting Church’s DNA for it is these organisations that go about their daily work to directly reflect the mission and ethos of the Uniting Church.

1.2 Organisations

As at August 2024, the organisations associated with the Uniting Church through UnitingCare SA are:

Schools/Colleges	Aged Care/Hospital	Community Service	Relief Centres (cont.)
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	Relief Centres	UnitingCare Mt Barker
Scotch College*		UnitingCare Enfield	UnitingCare Mt Gambier
Seymour College Incorporated		UnitingCare Woodville Gardens (The Grove UC)	UnitingCare Modbury
Westminster School Incorporated		UnitingCare Taperoo (Lefevre UC)	UnitingCare Noarlunga

* These schools are incorporated under Acts of Parliament.

These community service organisations also provide some aged care services.

There have been a number of organisational changes over the past sixteen months. These include:

- UnitingCare Naracoorte Relief Centre – the local community of Naracoorte and surrounds continues to be served by the Naracoorte Uniting Church with food support and vouchers. In October 2023, their Church Council decided to continue the work that they have been doing in

their own right, and not as part of the UnitingCare network. Their faithful contribution to the operations in their own area remains highly valued.

- UnitingCare Kapunda – at the end of June 2024, the Kapunda Uniting Church took the hard decision to close its doors. The local UnitingCare Board which was accountable to the Kapunda UC Church Council resolved to keep operating if possible with their food relief three days per week and their Friday luncheons for isolated people in the community. The newly established Light Country Community Centre Kapunda has been incorporated and managed to continue service from the Kapunda Institute Hall with support from the local Council.
- UnitingCare North Adelaide has been operating from the Brougham Place Uniting Church since the COVID Emergency Management implementation in 2020. It closed its operations on August 14 2024 as demand had grown significantly (up to 78 visitors per week), volunteer numbers were dropping (sometimes only four per week), the vacancy for the Coordinator had not been filled and building works were imminent which meant that they could no longer use the ramp and basement space in the church. It is hoped that Oz Harvest opening up in August and offering three days per week at a food “supermarket” in Hindmarsh will offset some of the need amongst the North Adelaide visitors.
- UnitingCare SA has been the conduit for reporting the work of Media Com to the Synod Standing Committee. Media Com’s Board resolved to close its physical operations at the end of June 2024. Some online presence is maintained and the ongoing functions of Media Com are being considered for optimal governance and location.

For the remaining organisations, UnitingCare SA is the interface between them and the Church. This involves many different conversations throughout any year, including an annual meeting focusing upon each organisation’s governance and financial situation (referencing their audited financial report). A dialogue is facilitated that includes the organisation’s highlights and successes, trends, challenges and risks. Items discussed in this meeting may also include the presentation of proposed constitutional changes and Board/Council appointments for organisations for whom the Synod acts as approving and/or appointing authority.

2. Sectors

2.1.1 Schools and Colleges

A change in leadership occurred for Lincoln College with Dr Paul Tosch’s resignation as Chief Executive Officer in September 2023. Ms Carolyn Mee commenced as the Head of School for Lincoln College at the beginning of December 2023.

Mr Bronte Wilson had his designation to the Pedare Christian College Council changed from the Moderator’s nominee to an ordinary member of the Council. He was subsequently elected as the Chairperson of Pedare in April 2024.

Mr Richard Hockney continues as Chairperson to the Council of Prince Alfred College after his re-appointment for a fifth term of three years, to the Council commencing 1 January 2024.

The invaluable work of Schools Chaplains where they are in placement continues to be seen as a major link between the schools and the Uniting Church. The wellbeing of students, families and staff is supported through such pastoral care.

Facilitated through UnitingCare SA, the Moderator hosts the schools and colleges Principals at a series of breakfasts three times per year. Finding an opportunity for this group to network and informally share items of interest has benefit for all parties.

2.1.2 Aged Care and Hospital

Aged care reform is still desperately needed across the country. The findings from the Aged care Royal Commission have still not been fully implemented.

Whilst wage increases to the underpaid carer workforce have been greatly appreciated so that the “churn” of staff can be turned around, the sector still needs a funding model that reflects the actual costs of providing quality aged care. It is hoped that the South Australian Government’s proposed changes to Portable Long Service leave across the sector will help to improve retention. Similarly, the introduction of having Registered Nurses in place all around the clock recognises the health needs of the ageing community. But many facilities have struggled to find adequately qualified staff to fill vacancies.

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’s advocacy across the aged care sector as one of their three major priorities has been highly valued.

The governance of the aged care providers remains stable with one change to leadership occurring during the year. Ms Janet Finlay was appointed chairperson to the Helping Hand Aged Care Inc Board commencing 2 December 2023.

The private health sector continues hold a number of challenges in which to operate. St Andrew’s Hospital has had a year of growth and development as well as watching the maintenance needed on older buildings (some heritage listed). The new suite of consulting rooms on South Terrace brings private consultants into the operations. The oncology work at St Andrews continues to be significant.

After twenty-three years as the Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Walker has instigated his succession plan and will conclude duties by the end of 2024. The Board has recruited Ms Eileen Sawyer from the United Kingdom in his place. Stephen has been a wonderful leader at St Andrews and will be greatly missed. However, having consolidated the management team at St Andrews Hospital, they are well positioned to face the future.

2.1.3 Community Services

Uniting Communities, Uniting Country SA, UnitingCare Wesley Bowden and UnitingSA all have extensive reach into the community. Their expansive program list is highlighted below. The geographic and population connection in SA is considerable. At a glance, these include:

- Family services
- Children’s services
- Working with young people
- Supporting older people
- Domestic and family violence counselling
- EVP – Escaping Violence Payments
- 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 (NILs)
- 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 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 2023 and 2024, several Boards have selected new chairs.

- Mr Peter Hollister was re-elected as Uniting Country SA Chairperson and Mr Paul Thomas elected as the Deputy Chairperson at their AGM 1 Nov 2023
- Mr Darren Button was appointed as acting Chair to the Board of UnitingCare Wesley Bowden Inc. effective 19 June 2023. He was subsequently appointed Chair to this board effective 23 February 2024.

UnitingCare SA thanks all of the chairs and Chief Executives of our large, diverse and complex organisations for their commitment and diligence to leading their Boards and organisations. Shaping the organisational mission, culture, quality, service provision and financial stability of their organisations provides a significant contribution to community services in SA.

Uniting Country SA and UnitingSA have been leaders in the development of social housing developments in rural and metropolitan South Australia. The level of homelessness seen through the Relief Centres demonstrates that the need is great (and growing). People sleeping rough in church car parks, people being offered swags instead of rooms, homeless people sleeping in the sand dunes or under the jetties at our beaches; our services see all of these sorts of situations. Affordable

housing and the ability to marshal all of our resources as a community to increase the supply of housing remains a significant issue for the work of UnitingCare SA over the coming two years.

2.1.4 Relief Centres

The Emergency Management declaration as a result of COVID 19 is well and truly over. However, the need for food support and other cost-of-living supports remains significant (and growing).

Rental crises, electricity prices and the increased prices of food and grocery items have hit hard. Our Relief Centres have declared that they no longer can be deemed “Emergency” centres because they keep seeing people regularly who require food support.

As the demand for food relief has gone up, all stores and programs have experienced “belt-tightening”. It has been harder and harder to source food for those that visit one of our Relief Centres. The incredible voluntary donation from congregations and local people helps to spread the load. One Nandos’ franchise would bring in 40 frozen meals to one of our Relief Centres each week. Generous and heart-warming stories like this are repeated time and again.

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. This might be Ukrainian refugees, homeless people, recently released prisoners or people experiencing mental health issues.

The long-term viability and sustainability of these Relief Centres will be supported in 2025 with a Relief Centre Oversight Group. It is hoped that ongoing contributions from the Uniting Church Emergency Relief Fund will continue to support this work.

2.2 Advocacy

2.2.1 Disability Royal Commission

The Disability Royal Commission Synod Task Group (DRC-STG) is chaired by Mr Bruce Ind OAM who also represented the Synod on the National Disability Royal Commission Task Group. The National Task Group concluded its work in February 2024 with an Assembly Standing Committee resolution in March 2024 endorsing the People with Disability Overarching Principles for promotion through the respective Synods.

These core principles are:

- The voice, safety and wellbeing of people with disability is embedded in culture, governance and organisational leadership.
- Person-centred and accessible trauma-informed complaints processes.
- People with disability are safe from abuse, violence, neglect and exploitation, including physically, culturally and psychologically, and institutional safety responsibilities and measures are well understood and embedded in all levels.
- Supported decision making and choice and control are encouraged in all levels of an entity.

The DRG-STG reconvened in the middle of 2023 with its membership also including Rev Cate Baker, Rev Peter McDonald, Mr Steve Roder and Mrs Linda Vinall. Mr Mark Waters, Director, UnitingCare SA provided executive support along with UnitingCare SA team members taking the minutes.

The DRG-STG was augmented by leaders from Disability Services in UnitingSA, Uniting Communities and Uniting Country SA becoming communicating members.

The Royal Commission handed down its final report to the Australian Government on 29 September 2023 and it included 222 recommendations for the Australian Government and governments across all other jurisdictions to address. Four out of the six Commissioners recommended that programs in education, group housing and employment be de-segregated over time.

The Governments' responses were due to be tabled by the end of March 2024, but an interim response was provided at the time. At the end of July 2024, the Governments responses were tabled.

Thirteen of the 172 recommendations targeted nationally were accepted by the Australian Government. Many others were "Accepted in Principle". The others were "subject to further consideration" or "noted".

Disability advocates have been disappointed with the Governments' responses. None of the rights-based principles regarding segregation or de-segregation have been addressed. The Commissioners had found that levels of abuse, violence and exploitation was greater in segregated environments.

In the absence of significant direction from Governments, the DRC-STG has embarked upon the following strategies:

- An awareness campaign for churches and organisations regarding people with disabilities. Video vignettes have been produced, articles have been written for the New Times and a panel was held at the commissioning of Rev Prof Bart Bruehler.
- Exploration of a Disability Chaplain's role working primarily in advocacy from the Synod Central Office.
- The WA Disability Access and Inclusion Policy has been adapted as a draft for South Australia.
- Regular reports have been provided to the Property Trust / Resources Board regarding the progress of the Royal Commission and any identifiable risk factors that may arise for the church.

2.2.2 Covenanting

It has been a significant year in terms of Covenanting in the Uniting Church. The October 14 2023 Referendum sought the fundamental human right of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. This was requested by a comprehensive Aboriginal consultation process in 2017 and supported by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC). Many UnitingCare agencies supported this proposition and campaigned for its introduction. This was consistent with their Reconciliation Action Plans and their commitment to their First Nations workers and clients.

Whilst the Referendum vote did not support an Aboriginal Voice to parliament in the Constitution, the outcome has motivated people to keep working for reconciliation and redoubling steps to Close the Gap on so many indicators of disadvantage that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The 30th Anniversary of the Covenant between the UAICC and the Uniting Church in Australia provided another important opportunity to celebrate the positive relationships that we have in our church between first and second peoples.

Respected Aboriginal leaders in our church and across the country decried the level of racism that was demonstrated during the Referendum campaign. As a member of the Covenanting Committee the Director, UnitingCare SA has committed to highlight more the issues associated with racism, in all its forms, that Australia needs to address.

2.2.3 Public Theology and Mission

As part of the Mission Review conducted by Angel Wings for the Mission and Leadership Development Board (MLDB) in 2023, the consultants recommended that Social Justice and UnitingCare SA should be aligned more and not be seen to be structurally separated in the SA Synod. As a result of this, it was agreed that the Public Theology and Mission (PTM) Committee to the MLDB would become the formal point of contact for reporting and dialogue between UnitingCare SA and Mission Resourcing. In addition, informal meetings will be held with relevant officers to share information and social justice issues.

The PTM has also been a point of reporting for the burgeoning Community Connections movement in the Uniting Church. Growing the church in the public square and meeting the community at their point of interest or need is central to the principles of Community Connections. The mission of Jesus in the street as well as Strengths based community development are the driving forces in Community Connections. It is a bit like the deacon and the Community Development worker combined.

As part of advocacy for a Human Rights Framework in South Australia, the PTM joined with the Moderator, the Covenanting Committee and Scots Church in making submission to the South Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Potential for a Human Rights Act for South Australia. The PTM focused upon the rights concerns faced by people who experience mental health issues. This added to the case for the rights of those seeking affordable housing, the homeless, those seeking food relief, Aboriginal peoples and international students being exploited in employment.

3. Fundraising Appeals

3.1 Pancake Day

In 2024, a concerted effort was made to promote the UnitingCare Pancake Day Appeal commencing with a launch event on Pirie Street outside the Synod Office. LifeFM broadcasted from this site interviewing the Moderator, the Director of UnitingCare SA, one of our Relief Centre coordinators and the Principal of the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology. This resulted in some more congregations and organisations support the fundraising efforts.

About 30% of the fundraising events are held by groups that are not associated with the Uniting Church, such as Girl Guides, childcare centres, businesses, and public and independent schools.

It is pleasing that many of the regular fundraisers were keen to support UnitingCare SA again this year. Our mascot, Penny Pancake was a big hit, visiting four events to raise awareness, as well as funds. \$15,374 was raised in this year's Pancake Day fundraiser season. These funds will be distributed among 18 UnitingCare SA organisations and relief centres.

We would like to recognise and thank our major sponsors for this event – Northpoint Toyota, Seed and Stone Café, LifeFM and of course our wonderful volunteers who cooked and served delicious pancakes throughout this event.

3.2 UnitingCare Emergency Relief Fund

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

\$11,714 was raised to support relief centres during the period 01 April 2023 to 31 May 2024. Approximately one quarter of the funds was directed to specific centres by the donors. The remaining funds were allocated equally to all relief centres.

3.3 ACHA – UnitingCare SA Hamper Packing Day

The staff of the Adelaide Community Healthcare Alliance (ACHA) across their three private hospitals contributed to food and financial donation for the 2023 Christmas Appeal. Memorial, Ashford and Flinders Private Hospital staff joined Relief Centre and Synod staff volunteers to pack 120 Christmas hampers that were then distributed to six participating Relief Centres.

The extent of the goods gathered and the generosity shown by ACHA staff brought smiles to many people's faces at Christmas time.

4. 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 SA Synod is represented on the UnitingCare Australia Board by the Director, UnitingCare SA, Mr Mark Waters. The Board has advocated on aged care funding and workforce issues, First nations peoples and the ability for people to address cost-of-living pressures. In addition, a Consortium of UnitingCare organisations has run a national pilot for the Escaping Violence Payment. Successful lobbying has seen this program expand to the Leaving Violence Payment which will be put out to tender as a program in late 2024.

5. Staff

With the Director of UnitingCare SA, Mr Mark Waters entering into his second year of the role, the following staff changes have been made to the team:

- **Ann Cotton** **PA/Admin Officer to the Director - Full Time (now retired)**
Ann continued in this role until retiring 30 October 2023. During 2022 and 2023, she supported the Interim Liaison Officer, the new Director, UnitingCare SA, Synergy operations, the 2023 Synod meeting and fundraising appeals.
- **Helene Neilson** **Support Officer 0.6 FTE**
Helene commenced in this role on 31 July 2023. She has been a great encouragement to relief centre coordinators. She moved into the Events and Administration Officer role in the Engagement team on 30 May 2024. Highlights of the year were:

 - the coordination of Packing Day 2023 where Christmas Hampers were packed in conjunction with Adelaide Community Healthcare Alliance (ACHA) for Relief Centres
 - the Launch of Pancake Day on 13 February 2024 featuring an outdoor pancake kitchen on Pirie Street.
- **Johanne Manning** **Administration Officer 0.9 FTE**
Johanne commenced 1 September 2024 as the Administration Officer taking over from Ms Ann Cotton. Johanne previously worked with Mission Resourcing and Uniting College for Leadership and Theology. Johanne brings extensive Administration experience to the team.

6. Governance

6.1 Reports to Synod Standing Committee

In the reporting period May 2023 to 31 August 2024, 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	100
Organisations / Entities	Relationships, Changes of Key Staff, Not-For-Profit Sector Results	11
Royal Commissions	Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse [including National Redress Scheme], Aged Care, Disability,	2
Other	ERC Working Group, Launch of Pancake Day, Inquiry into Human Rights Act	5
Administration	Changes to UnitingCare SA Staff	3

121

6.2 Recruitment of Board Members for UnitingCare Organisations

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. Board positions may also be filled by the Moderator or their nominee. 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 requirement is becoming increasingly difficult and 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 are encouraged to make contact with UnitingCare SA.

The team has been developing a higher profile website to streamline Board Member recruitment for church members. This feature will assist with the recording of people who are interested in serving on one of the UnitingCare SA entity's boards by recording their skill base, faith and interests.

6.3 Constitutions

Whether large or small, all organisations are governed according to their constitution, rules and regulations or by-laws. During 2023 and 2024, the Synod Standing Committee approved changes to the governing documents of four organisations, namely Lincoln College, Pilgrim School, Helping Hand Aged Care Inc, UnitingCare Wesley Bowden. UnitingCare SA staff consulted with each of the organisations as they discerned the changes to be recommended to the Synod Standing Committee for approval.

The Emergency Relief Centre Review instituted by the Synod Standing Committee in March 2023, explored the viability and sustainability of Emergency Relief Centres within congregations. The option to separately incorporate small local Boards was investigated and was not adopted. A model of central oversight was preferred supported by resource allocation to participating relief centres. This finding was consistent with the review into the UnitingCare Taperoo Relief Centre which also did not proceed down the path of individual UnitingCare programs within congregations incorporating.

7. Conclusion

Much of the past year has been focused upon getting Relief Centres organised for a more sustainable future.

The next emerging issue that has been identified by Synod Standing Committee is housing as it relates to affordable rental, cost-of-living issues, availability of social and affordable housing and homelessness.

At the national level a Consortium of agencies have successfully piloted a program for the Australian Government called the Escaping Violence Payment. UnitingCare Australia has achieved the roll-over of this program into the budget from the middle of 2025 onwards (a \$900m investment) and so our organisations will be tendering to keep this program in our suite.

The South Australian Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence is also highlighting these issues.

The need for connections in the community, social isolation and loneliness keep arising as issues affecting mental health in our society.

UnitingCare SA has spearheaded a survey into Mission and Informal Chaplaincy across congregations. More will emerge in 2025 from results that have been gleaned from this survey. As well as the incredible work done by staff across all organisations in association with the Uniting Church in SA, it is recognised that there is another layer of informal service that is provided week in and week out.

Missional objectives alongside partnerships with UnitingCare organisations can only enhance the outcomes for people in need.

In conclusion, UnitingCare SA honours the role of volunteers across all services. Red Dove, aged care and community service volunteers add value to our formal services. The Relief Centres operate almost entirely upon unpaid coordinators and volunteers who do a remarkable job in supporting visitors to their centres. Without the faithful volunteer work of church and community members, these services would not be able to operate. Service and informal caring is in our DNA as well.

Mark Waters

Director, UnitingCare SA

30 August 2024



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia