

Synod '24



Engagement Ministry Centre

This report outlines the challenges and successes of the Engagement Ministry Centre over the past year since the 2023 Synod meeting.

1. Engagement Activities

The Engagement Ministry Centre tends to be a 'reactive' area of the Synod in that we need to provide responses, information, design services and a range of other materials often at short notice and in a timely manner.

We receive and manage communications on behalf of a diverse range of clients including congregations, Synod office, National Assembly initiatives and associated Uniting Church agencies – these all feed into Engagement.

Requests for communications come in on a constant basis.

Similar to last year's Engagement Ministry Centre report, the percentage activities for Engagement broken down into specific areas have not altered. Our principal activities fall into the following main categories:

Engagement Activity	%
Synod website	15%
Congregational Website Program	10%
Graphic design requests	50%
Social media	5%
New Times	15%
Miscellaneous	5%

In addition to the above categories, we also receive regular requests to develop and support church-related activities with specific campaigns and one-off requests; some of which are further detailed in this report.

1.1 Budget

The Engagement Ministry Centre's budget includes a component related to generating income for communications services provided by the Synod to congregations and organisations associated with the church. In 2023 our total income across a calendar year was \$68,920.

The 2024 income budget is set at \$59,800.

We continue to review everything we do in terms of both adding value, and in seeking to bring some new ideas and concepts that may better serve the church into the future. We are working on some new ideas with the intention of making these available in 2025.

1.2 Fee Structure

The fees charged for Engagement Ministry Centre services are much lower than market rates for similar services. In 2024 I reviewed all of our fee structure as prices had not increased since 2020. The previous fees and new fee structure are listed below:

Item		Previous Fee	Updated Fee
Graphic design		\$70 per hour	\$80 per hour
Congregational Websites	One-page	Set-up \$150 Annual maintenance fee \$150	Set-up \$200 Annual maintenance \$200
	Pre-set	Set-up \$300 Annual maintenance fee \$300	Set-up \$350 Annual maintenance fee \$350
	Custom	Set-up \$800 Annual maintenance fee \$400	Set-up \$850 Annual maintenance fee \$450
Logo design	Per item	\$600	\$800
Video Production	Per item	\$300	\$500
Positions Vacant advertising	Per item	\$70	\$80
Name badges	Per item	\$15	\$20

1.3 Staffing

At the start of 2023 we welcomed new staff members Emelia Haskey (Engagement & Communications Officer) and Lucy Wiseman (Events & Promotions Officer).

Unfortunately, both have now left their roles, with Emelia Haskey being offered candidacy in the Uniting Church, and leaving to take up part-time roles with Clayton Wesley Uniting Church and Brougham Place Uniting Church. Lucy Wiseman resigned around the same time as Emelia as she had decided to move back to Western Australia to live.

In April of 2024 we offered the Engagement & Communications Officer role to Dat Nguyen, a graduate of Flinders University; and in June we offered the Events & Administration Officer role to Helene Nielsen. Helene's appointment was internal, as she moved from UnitingCare into Engagement.

The Engagement team is now made up of the following:

- Alex Gatley (3 days per week – Senior Graphic & Digital Designer)
- Azi Parvandar (3 days per week – Graphic & Digital Designer)
- Dat Nguyen (4 days per week – Engagement & Communications Officer)
- Helene Nielsen (26 hours per week – Events & Promotions Officer).

2. Current Initiatives

2.1 Congregational Website Program

The Congregational Website Program provides affordable websites to a range of clients including congregations, Synod-specific areas of operation e.g. Safe Church; and organisations associated with the church. Websites are built in WordPress and three types are offered:

- One-page website
- Pre-set (using a standard template, with up to 5 pages)
- Custom (according to client needs and up to 20 pages).

(Refer to the table in 1.2 for fee structure).

We charge an annual fee which is invoiced every October. In 2023 program fees generated \$21,490 in income (for the 2023 Calendar year). The annual fee covers the following items:

- Updates of premium software licence renewals (plugins and other add-ons) to guarantee the system’s security and compatibility
- Regular website back-ups
- Daily monitoring of the website system for any security updates
- Same-day updates of any security issues
- Full regular website system updates (WordPress content management system, theme, plug ins) – this is a few hours process that includes making a copy of the website on a testing server, updating of all components, testing with fixes of any possible comparability issues, and recovery of the fully updated website to the live server)
- Hosting of the website on our UCASA platform.

We have had some congregations exit the program in 2024. When congregations choose to exit, we have them sign an Exit form and then we remove the site from the Internet. We retain it in our archive, rather than completely deleting any of our sites.

UnitingCare SA is the most recent new website added to the Congregational Website Program, and in spite of some withdrawals, we still have 64 websites in the program at present.

We regularly offer training to congregations that have websites, so that they can undertake updates and basic actions at the local level.

Our external website platform is supported by South Australian company Edynam. Last year we moved the platform from an interstate company and transferred it to Edynam. At that time, we expanded the amount of space available on the platform, and Edynam also provide technical support as needed, when we are faced with issues we cannot troubleshoot ourselves within the Engagement team.

2.2 New Times

In 2024 New Times moved from 5 publications per year to 4 publications printed on a quarterly, seasonal basis.

The first issue of the year was the summer edition. Over 2023 and 2024 we have had some advertisers drop out, however when we introduced the quarterly edition format we received more advertising enquiries than previous.

The three issues to date have generated the following advertising revenues:

- Summer New Times \$3,474.80
- Autumn New Times \$5,774.80
- Winter New Times \$3,914.80
- TOTAL TO DATE: \$13,164.40

The Winter edition of New Times featured a summary of the Assembly meeting, and key decisions and actions. We are currently working on the Spring edition of New Times, which will be out in November. This issue will include a summary of the decisions and actions arising out of the SA Synod Meeting being held in October.



This final issue of the year also includes details of the Moderator's Christmas theme and the 2025 Synod Calendar.

The print run for the magazine has remained stable at 6,200 printed copies per print run. However, we were recently informed that our usual printer Graphic Print had gone into receivership, and we were then advised that they had restructured and are now called Access Print Pty. Ltd. Their head office is also based in Sydney.

I have my concerns about the restructure and so have embarked upon obtaining another quote from another print company based here in Adelaide. This new print company have already provided a competitive price per issue, and we are currently working through the packing and dispatch part of the print production process.

It is likely that we will move to the new printer in 2025, if the overall pricing structure can be agreed upon.

Information about New Times, including a flip-book of the latest issue, advertising rates; and publish dates are available at this link: [UCA SA - New Times print edition](#).

2.3 UC-enews

Other than over Christmas and early into the New Year, the UC-enews electronic newsletter is prepared in Campaign Monitor and published every Tuesday at 4.30 pm.

UC-enews is an opt in / opt out subscription service, different to other databases contained in Campaign Monitor, which are fed from the CRM system and so not strictly opt in / opt out in nature.

Items are continually received into the Engagement Inbox, including details about key South Australian based initiatives, events, activities, national initiatives etc. The preparation of one e: news is extremely labour intensive and can require up to 1.5 staff members for a full day to prepare, check and schedule, as the process involves a variety of digital platforms, links, creation of original promotional images etc.

2.4 Synod Website

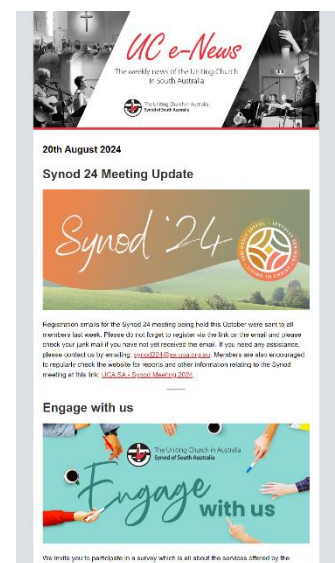
The main Synod website located at: <https://sa.uca.org.au/> is built in a program called MODX. The site houses over 15,000 items and although the platform is robust it is time for a review.

After submitting a detailed report on the website to the Executive Officers' meeting in December 2023, which included some historical notes and some options for consideration going forward, I was tasked with creating an internal Working Group to consider next steps.

The first meeting of the group was held in May of this year, and the members of the group include:

- Sue Page
- Astrid Kuivasaari
- Matt Booy (IT Manager)
- Engagement Team Members:
 - Alex Gatley
 - Azi Parvandar
 - Dat Nguyen
 - Bridget Ransome (Chair).

From this first meeting, I was then asked to conduct two surveys – one for external organisations that use the website on a regular basis (i.e. congregations); and another survey for internal staff to fill out, as to their impressions of the website, and what they may need from any new site.



The surveys closed on Monday, 26th August, 2024 and the information is currently being compiled with a view to calling another meeting of the Working Group to determine next steps.

A capital amount of \$50,000 has been allocated to this project.

2.5 Annual Calendar

Each year we produce a Uniting Church in South Australia calendar publication. It is always a well-received item. The 2024 Calendar was based on food and hospitality from across the church and it generated \$12,318.22 in income.

Planning is underway for the 2025 Calendar publication. The theme is 'Through their Eyes.'

2.6 Intranet

The Engagement Ministry Centre has also been asked to take on a project on behalf of IT to upgrade the current Intranet. The Intranet contains information relevant to staff of the Synod and the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology and is relatively outdated in appearance and content.

The upgrade will essentially provide all departments with their own space on the Intranet via a Sharepoint platform, and the proposed new format will be designed and populated by Engagement. We will then train departments to continue to update their sections as needed, so information remains relevant and up to date. This will also be rolled out in the coming months.

2.7 Promotional Events/Activities

The Engagement Ministry Centre is often asked to provide a range of resources, design, printed materials, photography, videography etc. across a range of key event. In 2024 we were involved in a number of major events and activities, including the following:

2.7.1 Pancake Day

This event sits with UnitingCare, however Engagement provided significant support in the form of:

Print

- A2 Poster
- A4 Poster
- A5 flyers
- Vinyl Banner
- Colouring in Competition
- Corflute sign (not used).

Digital

- Web banners (Campaign Monitor & Synod website)
- UC e-News images
- Social Media Tiles
- Synod Web Homepage square
- School, Child Care and Community Group Resources (new cover)
- Photography.



Other support provided by the Engagement team included:

- Lucy Wiseman (prior to her departure – event logistics support)
- Creation of original designs
- Regular updates across website, social media and UC-enews
- Media coverage in the form of 4 x on-air radio interviews on the day of the event and press releases sent to all major outlets leading up to the event.

With Helene Nielsen moving into Engagement and previously working on Pancake Day with UnitingCare, we have agreed to take on the logistics for future Pancake Day events within our Engagement portfolio.

2.7.2 Synod Disability Taskforce

Engagement was tasked with receiving and editing a range of 6 videos which were then uploaded onto the Synod website and promoted across all channels.

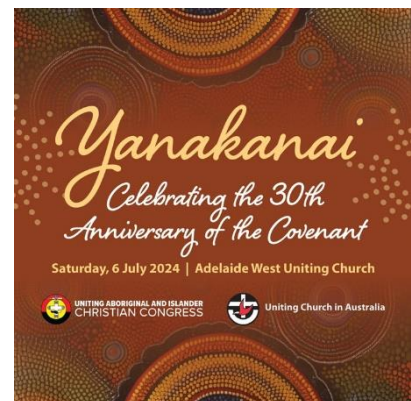
2.7.3 Bart Bruehler Commissioning Service

Engagement videoed this service and edited the video for use within the Synod Disability Taskforce video series.

2.7.4 30th Anniversary of the Covenant

Engagement was heavily involved in the 30th Anniversary of the Covenant worship service held on 6th July at Adelaide West Uniting Church. This included:

- Creation of an original promotional design
- Design and print of promotional bookmark
- Publicity across social media and UC-enews
- Photography and videography on the night of the worship service
- Event catering and event support
- Summary article featured in the *Winter New Times*.



2.7.5 Uniting College for Leadership and Theology

The Engagement team now attends a monthly marketing meeting at the college. As a result of this, we have worked on a number of initiatives specifically for the college including:

- Updating the college website as required
- Designed and created a set of 7 x promotional postcards for a Student Welcome Pack
- Designed and printed a UCLT college presentation folder
- Semester 1 and Semester 2 promotional graphics design and posting on social media
- Other activities for the college supported by Engagement included:
 - Preamble 15th Anniversary
 - ANZAATS Conference
 - Awaken Adelaide
 - Adelaide Careers Expo (including design and printing of promotional tattoos).



2.7.6 Mission Resourcing

Engagement has provided significant support to the activities of Mission Resourcing, which has included some or all of the following: the creation of original graphic designs, social media, event logistics, videography, photography, merchandising, posters, evaluation surveys etc. Events have included:

- State Youth Conference (2023 and 2024)
- Mental Health First-Aid courses x 2
- 30th Anniversary of the Covenant event
- Awaken Adelaide
- Social Justice newsletters
- 90-page Worship Guide.

2.7.7 Placements and Safe Church

This year we designed a new logo for Safe Church and carried this logo through to all of their promotional materials and their website within the Congregational Website program.

I created a communications strategy to support the new branding promotion.

Engagement also provided video production and photography resources for the recent Minister's Day event conducted at Burnside Uniting Church.



2.7.8 Uniting Foundation/UC Invest Grants Program

Engagement developed a brand for the Uniting Foundation/UC Invest Grants Program and then used the branding to provide the following:

- 4 x documents designed and formatted
- Fillable PDF grants application form
- Online website grants application form
- Word document grants application form
- Introductory video
- Social media
- Updates to the relevant Synod website pages in relation to the grants program.



2.7.9 Other one-off activities completed by Engagement have included:

- 5 x videos for Nelson Varcoe including on-site filming, editing and graphic design
- Creation of a YouTube account for Nelson Varcoe to promote his songs
- UC Invest quarterly newsletters
- Positions Vacant advertising
- Uniting Venues various videos and social media graphics
- Name badges (for congregations)
- Pastoral Notes (various)
- Designed new template for organisation policies
- Designed new template for bylaws
- MediaCom electronic promotional newsletters
- Property brochure
- Moderator's Christmas and Easter themes and marketing collateral for congregations
- Vines outdoor signage.
- Synod website updates (daily)



- Synod Meeting 2024 (event logistics, graphic design website support, social media).

3. Communications Platforms

3.1 Campaign Monitor

Campaign Monitor is the software platform that we use to compile and send out a range of emails and notices across the church. Engagement provides graphic design services to departments requiring a masthead and email template within the software program; and we often prepare the correspondence as required.

The system also houses a range of databases and these database draw down from the CRM, except for UC-eneews which is a subscriber only database.

Currently the following emails are sent out on a regular basis by Engagement:

- UC-eneews (weekly)
- Dollars & Sense (quarterly)
- Congregational Website Program
- Financial Services
- Letter from the General Secretary
- Letter from the Moderator
- Pastoral Notes
- Positions Vacant
- MediaCom eneews
- Social Justice eneews.

We have also supplied logins for new users and trained staff in how to use the program so that they are empowered to produce their own emails and to send them out as needed.

3.2 Hootsuite

Hootsuite is a planning and scheduling platform for social media. We can prepare social media posts and arrange for them to be published at specific times and days on an automatic basis.

Within the Hootsuite platform we manage the following social media accounts that we are able to post to:

- Uniting Church in SA (Facebook & Instagram)
- Uniting College for Leadership & Theology (Facebook & Instagram)
- UnitingCare Pancake Day SA (Facebook)
- UnitingCare SA (Facebook)
- UC Invest (Facebook).

3.3 Eventzilla



Eventzilla is the platform we use to create event registration activities. We design appropriate banners for each event and set-up the details within the platform. Once an event is created it is made live, and the event registration link is then promoted across various platforms to generate ticket sales.

Some of the events from last year's Synod meeting to this year's Synod meeting have included:

- State Youth Conference 2024 – What is Love?
- State Youth Conference 2024 x 2 online webinars
- Mental Health First-Aid x 2 courses
- Synod 24 Member registrations
- Yanakanai – Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Covenant
- Awaken Adelaide
- Commissioning Service for Rev Professor Bart Bruehler
- Mike Frost. Mission is the Shape of Water?
- Black Rain: Healing Intergenerational Trauma and Family Violence
- Induction of General Secretary Rev Philip Gardner
- State Youth Conference 2023 (and many more events).



3.4 Automation

We have three automated forms to capture key information, which reduces the length of time going back and forth to seek clarification of information in relation to specific requests. These forms are as follows:

- **Graphic design** – our automated request form allows us to capture as much information as possible so we can appropriately quote the work and the anticipated timing required for each job, which helps to organise priorities and overall workflow between team members. We have also included a section within the form that will make it easier for us to invoice clients once a job is completed. <https://ucasa.org.au/design-services/>
- **New Times** – the online submission form is designed to gather information and articles for each issue. The form guides potential contributors through a range of key criteria that we require for publication of potential articles e.g. word count, whether we have permission to reproduce photographs etc. It also gives us key contact information for follow-up purposes: <https://ucasa.org.au/new-times/>
- **Positions Vacant** – this form sets out all of the information we need in order to post a position vacant. We currently offer this service for \$80 per position, which includes a listing on the Synod website; social media post; and advertising in the weekly UC-enews. The automated form allows us to capture all of the information we need to effectively promote a role, without going back and forth to the client when details are missing: <https://ucasa.org.au/positions-vacant/>

4. Challenges

4.1 Synod Website Project

This is a complex project that will take some time to navigate and to determine the best replacement solution going forward.

We have conducted two surveys recently – one for external participants and one for internal staff to provide their perceptions of the current site, and what we may need to feature in any new site build.

The external survey also included questions about the current overall activities of the Engagement Ministry Centre, and how we can improve our service delivery offerings overall.

Both survey results are currently being compiled and will be shared with the next meeting of the Website Working Group.

4.2 Staffing

A significant challenge to daily operations has been a fairly consistent movement in staff turnover which has meant that the team is constantly in a ‘forming’ stage, as new staff come up to speed on our workload and the digital platforms and systems we use on a regular basis.

When Emelia Haskey and Lucy Wiseman left, we were presented with a significant workload which then was left to the remaining staff to pick up and manage.

Also, as new personalities come into the team, all team members are impacted as we are constantly going through adjustments in team dynamics, and this presents us with some challenges.

5. Other

5.1 National Assembly Meeting

Both Helene Nielsen and I attended the 18th National Assembly meeting held in Sydney from 11th – 16th July 2024.

Helene’s attendance was to observe and spend time investigating how this major event was managed and delivered given Adelaide will be hosting the 18th Assembly in 2027.

In my role as Executive Officer Engagement, I worked with the National Communications team during the Assembly, assisting in delivering daily communications updates. My attendance at the meeting also gave me considerable insights into the communications resources and staff that will be needed to deliver the meeting in Adelaide.

A summary of key decisions and activities of the Assembly was also written up in the Winter edition of *New Times*.

5.2 Media Relations

In the past year media attention for the Uniting Church in SA has been fairly consistent. Each time there is an issue, I am required to research and prepare responses for the Moderator, as the designated person responsible for speaking to the media on behalf of the church.

Some items come direct to me, as in journalists contact me to let me know they are writing on a specific topic and they wish to obtain a response from the church; or we are featured in the news by association with organisations connected to the Uniting Church e.g. private schools, aged care etc.

Preparation of responses and appropriate wording can often be time consuming, especially if an issue is considered particularly controversial.

I have recommended that we also consider subscribing to a media management service, so we do not miss any item whether across television, newspaper or online, as currently we only receive daily Executive Officer updates from *The Advertiser*.

6. Conclusion

The broad purpose of the Engagement Ministry Centre is to:

‘Strategically develop and encourage effective engagement within the Uniting Church SA, and between the church and the community; recognise the changing needs of the church; and promote the life and work of the Uniting Church in SA.’

We do this on a daily basis, and we try to do it to the best of our ability; given the limits and challenges as indicated in this report.

I am grateful for the expertise of the Engagement team and their ability to strive for excellence in all that they do.

We are also grateful to the Synod staff, congregations, and the wider church for their on-going support as we all continue to contribute to the life of the Uniting Church in South Australia.

Bridget Ransome

Executive Officer Engagement

30th August 2024



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia