



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

I write this letter on the Monday of Holy Week with the words and music of Palm Sunday and Holy Week services echoing within me. In the context of bushfires, the global financial crisis, floods and other disasters that are in the media at the moment, it is obvious that the message of Easter is as critical for us today as it has ever been. Our world can be a dark place. Beyond the darkness, however, there is light, resurrection, new life for all God's creation including ourselves.

In this letter I want to make brief mention of two issues that you will find below. You will also note, however, that I have attached a document that provides for you brief summaries of issues addressed and decisions made at the meetings of the Assembly and Synod Standing Committees in recent weeks.

Bushfire Appeal

Thank you for the wonderful response to the Uniting Church Bushfire Appeal. Over \$1.2 million has been received for the appeal and this has enabled a helpful short-term response to the needs of victims and survivors. It has also enabled the Church to put in place some longer term ministry options to assist in the processes of restoration that will be undertaken within the communities affected.

Australian Presbyterians in Korea

This year marks the 120th Anniversary of the first Australian Presbyterians to work in Korea in what is now the southern city of Busan. The Rev Joseph Henry Davies and his sister Mary went to Korea in 1889 to found a mission for the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. A program is being developed by the Korean community here in Australia to celebrate the 120th Anniversary of Mr Davies' arrival in Busan, Korea. This will involve events in Melbourne and Sydney commencing on Friday 2 October and running through to Monday 5 October. More information will be available from UnitingWorld (formerly Uniting International Mission) during the year.

With every good wish, yours in ministry together,

Rev Rob Brown
General Secretary

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ATTACHMENT 1:
Notes from the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Standing Committee
(4 April 2009 meeting)

The Synod Standing Committee met on Saturday, 4 April 2009. A primary issue that was addressed was the impact of the global financial crisis on the Synod Mission Support Budget.

Budget matters

The impact of the financial crisis on the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania is that there must be a reduction in expenses of approximately \$3 million (or corresponding increases in income) for the synod to achieve a balanced Mission Support Budget by 2011. The current total of the budget is approximately \$13 million and so a change of this magnitude is a major issue for the synod.


A number of decisions were made by the Standing Committee to address this issue. They can be categorised as follows:

- 1 *Big-picture financial goals, including:*
 - the development of strategies to encourage schools and colleges to invest in UCA Funds Management;
 - Contact with other synods about the possibility of investment of other synod funds in UCA Funds Management.

- 2 *Policy decisions to be addressed by the Standing Committee, including:*
 - changes to the handling of Ministers Benefit Accounts (ie Ministers salary sacrificing);
 - changes to the use of funds currently available to support ministers with financial needs;
 - changes to the method of funding the removal costs associated with ministers who change placements;
 - the review of ecumenical and Assembly grants;
 - the review of changes to BOMAR policies concerning property sales proceeds and leasing arrangements;
 - a review of the structure, purpose and membership of committees.

- 3 *Other operational issues that were reported to the Standing Committee but which are for decision by the Senior Leadership Team or other appropriate bodies. These issues include:*
 - changes to staffing arrangements (synod operations staff have already been invited to express interest concerning a number of possibilities);
 - the review and possible renegotiation of existing service contracts;
 - increases in Crosslight advertising revenue;
 - establishing a revenue stream from the synod's Registered Training Organisation through developing and offering a range of training programs.;
 - the review of a number of operational policies and practices;
 - reviews of the use of savings on self-insurance and of the use of bequests;
 - the extension of shared service agreements;
 - the divesting of some synod owned properties.

The implications of the Standing Committee deliberations are widespread. They will involve the whole church in a process of change. The next milestone in the timing of this process will be the 10 June meeting of the Synod Standing Committee. At that meeting the Standing Committee will finalise those plans that relate directly to their oversight and the Committee will also be given an update on progress with regard to the operational decisions that are being made.



Amongst other issues addressed, were the following:

Risk Management

The synod's Risk Management Committee reported to the Standing Committee concerning the major risks currently confronting the synod. These risks result from weak governance structures, regulations and policies that work against the sale of properties and subsequent redeployment of capital, the lack of strategic plans and priorities across the synod, damage to the church's reputation through inappropriate actions being undertaken, and the inherent risks that arise through the mission of our agencies with vulnerable people within our community. The Standing Committee has acknowledged these risks and is working to address them.

Constitution Review

A response has been prepared to a paper circulated by the Assembly Task Group that is developing proposals for the Assembly to change the Preamble and Constitution of the UCA. The changes envisioned acknowledge the place of the First Peoples of this country and give detail about the place of the First Peoples within the church.

Doctrine and Liturgy Committee

Leadership of the Centre for Theology and Ministry (CTM) in areas of doctrine and liturgy has formally been acknowledged. The former Doctrine and Liturgy Committee has been disbanded to enable this work to continue within the CTM.

On the Way Together

Initial reports were received from various committees reporting how the On the Way together process is being applied within those committees. Further reports from presbyteries will be received in August.

Ministers Benefit Accounts

The Assembly Guidelines for these accounts has changed such that ministers with these accounts will be able to apply them to a much broader range of expenses. Another significant issue related to these guidelines is the clarification that the funds are the property of the synod rather than of the individual ministers and hence the accounts should not be treated as bank accounts. The implication of this is that the accounts should NOT be allowed to build up. The money is paid into the MBA to enable expenses to be met and should not accumulate. Related to this is that interest earned on the MBA remains the property of the synod and not the ministers involved. The Standing Committee has acknowledged that this is the case and has resolved that interest in the MBA will not be paid to ministers after the mid-year interest cycle. Those ministers who use the MBA facility will receive detailed advice of these changes.





ATTACHMENT 2:

Notes from the Assembly Standing Committee (March 2009 meeting):

The Assembly Standing Committee met over the weekend of 20-22 March 2009 for the final meeting before the 12th Assembly meets in July. Issues dealt with included:

12th Assembly meeting

Plans are well in hand for the meeting. A number of proposals were finalised to formally address issues referred to the Standing Committee by the previous Assembly. The first Assembly mailing will arrive during April.

Ecumenical affairs

The Standing Committee received the Uniting Church's draft response to the World Council of Churches document, "The Nature and Mission of the Church" which had been sent to member churches for comment.

Uniting Church members were appointed to the first General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The UCA through Jill Tabart, Gregor Henderson and Terence Corkin has had significant input into the meeting processes of this organisation by way of the introduction of aspects of consensus decision making. The Rev Alistair Macrae, the Rev Charity Majiza and Ms Judi Fisher (all currently from within the VicTas Synod) are amongst those appointed.

Beneficiary Fund

The Assembly heard that the Beneficiary Fund has suffered from the financial crisis. The revaluation of investments has meant that the Vested Benefit Index has been sufficiently reduced that a capital injection is needed to ensure that the index is restored to a satisfactory level. This index is effectively the amount of capital that the fund needs to have to ensure that all members could be paid out if they all left the fund on the same day. Whilst this is highly unlikely, the fund needs to have this level of capital to be able to continue its business. Synods are now looking at how to restore the appropriate level of capital.

Constitution

Proposals to change the Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church to acknowledge the relationship of the church with the First Peoples of this country will be taken to the Assembly. Changes to the Constitution itself may also be proposed. The Standing Committee received a report of progress in preparation for this process.

