

Standing Committee

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Standing Committee met nine times face to face during the last triennium. Meetings commence with dinner on Friday evening and conclude at 4.00pm on Sunday. The Friday evening agenda begins with a service of worship including Holy Communion. Prayer and worship shape the work of the Standing Committee. Over the last triennium the Standing Committee has been very conscious, and grateful, that it has been supported by the prayers of many members of the church and is convinced that this support has been reflected in the spirit with which its work has been undertaken and the outcomes of its deliberations.

1.2 The venue for meetings has been the Chevalier Resource Centre at Kensington in suburban Sydney.

1.3 Membership of the Standing Committee has continued as elected by the Eleventh Assembly. As provided for in the Regulations the Synod General Secretaries participate in the meeting, although they are not voting members of the Assembly Standing Committee. The participation of individual members of the ASC is presented in the table below.

1.4	Member	Attendance
	Gregor Henderson	9
	Dean Drayton	8
	Alistair Macrae	9
	Terence Corkin	9
	Vince Ross	7
	Shayne Blackman	2
	Bruce Binnie	7
	Chris Budden	9
	Sue Clarkson	7
	Isabel Thomas Dobson	9
	Bev Fabb	8
	Kate Fraser	8
	Sue Gormann	9
	Mata Havea	3
	Elise Honey	9
	Andrew Johnson	9
	Jason Kioa	8
	Stuart McMillan	9
	Jim Mein	8
	Heidi Stabb	9
	Allan Thompson	9
	Jan Trengove	6
	Liva Tukutama	5
	Robert Watson	9

1.5 In addition to the Associate General Secretary and National Consultant for Theology and Discipleship, who attend as per the Regulations, this triennium the ASC has commenced the practice of inviting a theological listener to assist its work. There have been a wide variety of contributors who each bring their own style and focus to their reflections. The role of

the theological listener is to assist the Standing Committee to be conscious of the theological issues that are present, or not present, in its conversations and to assist it to be consciously theological. The outgoing Standing Committee has continued to refine this aspect of its meetings and has committed to the process until the end of 2009 when the new ASC may make its own decision about whether to continue to make use of this resource.

1.5 The Standing Committee meetings are shaped, so far as possible, around the rhythm of the Manual for Meetings. Members of the Committee spend significant time on Friday evening in worship and in forming the community. Saturday usually begins by addressing some of the larger themes and issues facing the church or the ASC in the deliberative phase. Proposals are not before the ASC at this time. Then there is a time where reports from the General Secretary, Agencies, working groups, etc are considered which is part of their accountability to the Standing Committee for their work. The determining session then takes place where the matters requiring resolution are brought to a conclusion. It is unfortunate that there are many in the church who consider that consensus decision making is only about orange and blue cards. The Standing Committee has found from its experience that worship, forming community, listening with an open mind and then seeking the mind of God through consensus is a whole process and commends it to the church. At some of the later meetings in this triennium as the workload of returning work has grown and it has been necessary to have significant involvement from persons who are not members of the ASC it has proved more difficult to maintain this rhythm completely.

1.6 Business for the Standing Committee is generated by referral from the Assembly, Assembly agencies, synods, presbyteries, and from Standing Committee members, including the President and General Secretary.

1.7 A significant amount of time in meetings has been focused on addressing the major constitutional issues that were referred by the 11th Assembly. This work has led to a number of important proposals in relation to the Constitution of the Church, and recommendations to the 12th Assembly that further substantial work be undertaken during the next triennium.

1.8 Standing Committee minutes are circulated to all presbyteries, synods, Assembly agencies and Standing Committee members, and are available on the Assembly's web-site (<http://nat.uca.org.au>). A summary of the main business items and decisions is always printed in Assembly Update. There

is no more transparent and publicly accountable Council / Committee in the UCA than the Standing Committee of the Assembly.

2. UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF THE ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

2.1 There were sixteen pieces of unfinished business from the 11th Assembly that were referred to the ASC for determination (Assembly minute 06.43). In addition there were a significant number of decisions that required action by the ASC.

2.2 **Guidance re policies related to sexuality.** Proposal 51 from the Presbytery of Central Queensland encouraged the Assembly that statements on sexuality and leadership be accompanied by practical guidelines for implementation. The Standing Committee resolved to note the request and to advise the Presbytery that it would take into account the request when statements were made. (ASC minute 06.55.02)

2.3 **Impact of “resolution 84” on ecumenical relations.** This business was held over from the August 2006 meeting of the ASC in order to invite the proposers of Proposal 52 to attend and speak at the meeting. The proposers subsequently advised that the proposal was withdrawn. (ASC minute 06.91).

2.4 **“New Humanity in Christ”.** The Standing Committee received the document presented in Proposal 58, from the National Working Group on Doctrine and it was noted that the Working Group, over the next triennium, will undertake further work on these theological issues. (ASC minute 06.67).

2.5 **Membership of Presbytery to allow for additional appointments from larger congregations.** Proposal 60 from the Synod of NSW was referred, along with a number of other matters related to governance in the church, to an ASC appointed Task Group. Subsequently the ASC determined to support a change to the relevant regulation (ASC minute 08.27.04).

2.6 **Regulations relating to the placement of interns.** The ASC supported the intention of Proposal 61 and requested the Legal Reference Committee to prepare regulations relating to the placement and / or termination of a placement in which a candidate is serving to ensure that they clearly apply to interns (ASC minute 06.69). The Legal Reference Committee, in response to this referral, recommended to the ASC that the matter be addressed through the Guidelines for the Third Phase of Ministerial Education, rather than regulation changes. The ASC passed on to the MEC a request to review the Guidelines and take into account the

advice of the LRC in undertaking that task (ASC minute 06.99.02). The results of that referral will be addressed in the report and proposals from the MEC.

2.7 **Classification of Property as being for missional use.** Ongoing work has been undertaken by an ASC appointed Task Group on the issues raised by Proposal 70, including discussion with the Synod of NSW that brought the original proposal. The task group brought a final report to the last meeting of this Standing Committee. Given the proximity to the 12th Assembly the Standing Committee determined that it was appropriate to allow the Assembly to address itself to this issue rather than act on the authorization that it had received from the 11th Assembly. A proposal is included in the papers for the 12th Assembly.

2.8 **Lay Presidency.** The Standing Committee referred the discussions proposed in Proposal 74 to the Doctrine Working Group and the Christian Unity Working Group (ASC minute 06.93). In March 2007 the Doctrine Working Group advised the ASC that this work was continuing. Unfortunately the task slipped down the priority list for these Working Groups and has not yet been addressed. The CUWG is keen for the work to continue and the work will be undertaken as soon as possible in the next triennium.

2.9 **Membership of the Assembly Standing Committee.** Proposal 79 from the Synod of Western Australia was referred to the ASC established Governance Task Group (ASC minute 06.38.02). Subsequently a proposal was developed in consultation with the Legal Reference Committee. As the proposed direction requires a Constitutional amendment a proposal is being brought by the ASC to the 12th Assembly.

2.10 **Operation of Regulation 3.4.15(e).** Proposal 82 from the Presbytery of South Australia was referred to the ASC established Governance Task Group (ASC minute 06.38.02). Subsequently the ASC supported the proposal and amended the Regulation (ASC minute 07.55.05).

2.11 **Competency in English.** After extensive consultation with the Assembly Reception of Ministers Committee and other parts of the church the ASC resolved not to support Proposal 91 because it considered that the resources that it was proposed to produce are already available through church and community sources (ASC minute 07.22.14).

2.12 **Defence Force Training Scheme.** Proposal 95 requested that advice be provided to the church on whether accepting Defence Force funding for the training of Ministers would unhelpfully restrict future placement of such Ministers.

After consulting with Church Polity and the Ministerial Education Commission the advice provided by these bodies was that with certain conditions, funding from this source was not out of order. This view was passed on to the synods for their information (ASC minute 07.43.10).

- 2.13 **Implementation of the decision “Dignity in Humanity”.** The Standing Committee supported the implementation of this decision of the 11th Assembly by passing resolutions in the terms proposed by Proposal 96 (ASC minute 06.75.01), and has used these decisions as the basis for advocacy by the UCA on a number of issues.
- 2.14 **Reception of Candidates from other Churches.** After consultation with the Legal Reference Committee, the Standing Committee resolved not to support Proposal 100 to amend Regulations 2.3.5 – 2.3.7
- 2.15 **Aspects of the Ministry of Pastor were referred to the ASC for decision.** The intention of these clauses of Proposal 105 were generally agreed and incorporated into the wider decisions related to the implementation of the ministry of Pastor.
- 2.16 **Transitional arrangements for the Specified Ministry of Pastor.** The ASC supported the proposal for not requiring the Period of Discernment in these cases, being flexible and granting recognition of prior learning for persons seeking to transition from one of the current lay Specified Ministries to an Ordained Ministry, as sought in Proposal 106. Steps were put in place to develop transitional arrangements that enabled this to be implemented across the Church (ASC minute 06.42.01)

3. **ARISING FROM THE 11th ASSEMBLY**

- 3.1 All resolutions of the 11th Assembly where the Assembly resolved to undertake certain action were put into effect. Those matters that were referred to the ASC for implementation are reported in the following section of the report.
- 3.2 **Basis of Union and how it operates within the life of the church.** The 10th Assembly referred a decision on this matter to the ASC. The ASC reported to the 11th Assembly that the Task Group it had appointed was unable to fulfill its task and that a new Task Group would be established in the forthcoming triennium. Theology and Discipleship attempted to reconvene this task and in November 2006 brought a report to the ASC in which it recommended that the ASC not continue with its original decision (ASC minute 04.34.01). The ASC accepted this advice and subsequently resolved to develop resources to assist members of the church

to engage with the *Basis of Union*, facilitate the translation of the *Basis of Union* into as many community languages as possible and to seek to do this in time for the 30th anniversary of the UCA (ASC minutes 06.88.02 and 06.88.03). These decisions were subsequently implemented and opportunities for further translation continue to be sought.

- 3.3 **The relationship with the UAICC (Congress) and the development of that relationship.** This issue was a key concern of the 11th Assembly. The Standing Committee was requested to provide for the publication of the foundational theological statements that were received by the 11th Assembly in a way that was accessible to the church. Synods, presbyteries and agencies were encouraged to explore their relationship with Congress. The Standing Committee was to undertake discussions on the covenant relationship with Congress and to bring any necessary recommendations for changes to the Constitution and Regulations to the 12th Assembly (Assembly minute 06.07). The Standing Committee produced, published and in 2007 distributed free of charge to all Church Councils and Ministers in placement a copy of the discussion book *Building Partnerships*. It was for sale through Mediacom and is accessible free from the Assembly website <http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/26-covenanting/140-buildingpartnerships.html> Councils of the church have been encouraged to explore the nature of their relationship with their local Congress and the Standing Committee has received reports on these discussions. The Standing Committee also appointed a “Renewal of the Covenant” Task Group to provide a context for the exploration of issues relating to Congress and the wider church. This group met two or three times a year. Within this setting the structural relationship between Congress and the wider church was a regular part of the dialogue. These meetings also informed and assisted the ASC Task Group looking at governance matters. As a result of the work of both groups proposals will be brought to the 12th Assembly by the Standing Committee recommending changes to the preamble of the Constitution such that the place of indigenous people and the UAICC is more fully recognised.
- 3.4 **Assembly Key Directions** (Assembly minute 06. 08). The 11th Assembly determined Key Directions that were to serve as markers and directions for the work of the Standing Committee and Agencies in the current triennium. The Assembly anticipated that the ASC would exercise oversight of the implementation of its decisions. This was done and is reported on more fully in section five of this report.

3.5 **Amendments to Regulations.** Following the many decisions of the Eleventh Assembly for amendment of regulations, the Legal Reference Committee worked long and hard finalizing the wording and returning them to the ASC for final adoption. After the substantial drafting work required for the Regulations relating to the Ministry of Pastor the next most substantial piece of work related to the way appeals are handled in the church (Assembly minute 06.34). As a result of that work a totally new part (Part 8) has been added to the Regulations to deal with appeals that arise in certain circumstances. Continuing on from work that was commenced prior to the 11th Assembly the ASC concluded its review of the Alternative Regulations for Korean Congregations. The revised Alternative Regulations were approved for implementation from 1 September 2007 (ASC minute 07.37.04). These Alternative Regulations are next due to be reviewed no later than 2012 (Alternative Regulation 3.6.47). Due to the large amount of work involved in drafting new regulations during the last triennium it was not possible to issue a new edition of the Regulations until the second half of 2008.

3.6 **Code of Ethics.** The ASC was authorized to establish a Task Group to review various aspects of the operation of the Code of Ethics (Assembly minute 03.13.02). The Task Group was appointed and its terms of reference established (ASC minute 03.43). A report will be brought to the 12th Assembly.

3.7 **Constitutional Change.** The 11th Assembly had before it a number of substantive proposals that proposed major changes to the Constitution and related regulations. The 11th Assembly referred some of these matters to the Standing Committee, either for action or as unfinished business. The Assembly determined to review the Constitution (Assembly minute 06.22); to review the operation of Clause 39 – “Matters vital to the life of the Church” (Assembly minute 06.33); and to review the way in which the membership of future Assemblies is established. (Assembly minute 06.39). The ASC established a Task Group on the Church’s polity and governance, which made many reports to the Standing Committee over the last triennium. A significant amount of work has been undertaken in this area. The Standing Committee will bring proposals arising from this work. A separate Task Group was established to deal with Clause 39 and the proposed directions have already been subject to extensive communication with synods and presbyteries. A separate report will be presented on this matter.

3.8 **Justice in employment relations.** The Standing Committee responded to the affirmations and referral in Assembly minute 06.20.02 by appointing a Working

Group that could bring together the various views in the church on the employment and justice issues that were of concern as the Commonwealth Government’s “Work Choices” legislation was unfolding (ASC minute 06.40). This group sought to bring together the work that had already been done in this area through the justice agencies and the UnitingCare network. It proved to be a demanding task to gather these streams together – especially within a social context where there was an enthusiasm in some quarters to act quickly to take advantage of the new legislative provisions provided by “Work Choices”. The dialogue fostered by the Working Group was constructive in shaping and enriching the perspective of both sectors of the church around this issue. However the complexity of the task and the polity challenges of identifying how to “sign off” on any agreements proved problematic. Some higher level values / commitment statements (“The Uniting Church as Employer, a Statement of Principles” and a number of key theological affirmations) were able to be made (ASC minute 08.14.02). This document was circulated to the Synod General Secretaries for distribution throughout the church and its community service agencies. The passage of time and the change of government at the end of 2007 meant that the need for this work was removed and so it was not considered a particular disadvantage that the work did not result in a policy statement being adopted.

3.9 **Port Augusta Visit.** The Congress requested the President to lead a delegation to Port Augusta and to take action on the Lake View Transit Accommodation facility (Assembly minute 06.19.01). The President accompanied by Vince Ross (the National Chairperson of Congress), Ken Sumner (SA Congress Chairperson), the Assembly General Secretary, Graham Vawser (Moderator of SA) and support staff from the Assembly, Synod and Congress visited Port Augusta from 20 – 22 November 2006. A wide range of meetings was held with local government representatives, indigenous communities and service providers. A special time during the visitation was meeting with the Congress Faith Community at Port Augusta and receiving their hospitality and witnessing their ministry to the local community. In March 2007 the ASC received the report of the delegation. The report was also widely distributed to the media and the persons who participated in the consultation. It was also made available on the Assembly website:

<http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/28-reports/417-2006portaugusta.html>

The Standing Committee committed to making representations to the three levels of Government about the issues identified, advocacy and awareness raising through church and secular media and invited

Congress to join in a delegation to the Federal Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the South Australian Minister of Indigenous Affairs (ASC minute 07.09). The commitments in the minute were fulfilled and the two meetings took place. The meeting with the Federal Minister, Mr Mal Brough, occurring, ironically, on the day prior to the announcement of the Federal intervention in the Northern Territory.

- 3.10 **Property sharing in cross cultural settings.** In response to a proposal submitted by Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry the 11th Assembly requested that the ASC establish a Task Group to consider a range of issues around how property is shared in cross cultural settings (Assembly minute 06.14.03). The ASC appointed that Task Group (ASC minute 06.105.05 (a)). The report of that Task Group will come to the 12th Assembly.
- 3.11 **Role of National Conferences in the life of the Uniting Church.** In response to a proposal submitted by Multi Cultural and Cross Cultural Ministry the 11th Assembly requested that the ASC establish a Task Group to consider how the voice of migrant communities might be more effectively heard in the life of the UCA (Assembly minute 06.14.02). The ASC appointed that Task Group (ASC minute 06.105.05 (b)). The report of that Task Group will come to the 12th Assembly
- 3.12 **Sexuality and Leadership in the UCA.** Assembly minute 06.41 addressed the struggles of the church in relation to sexuality and leadership and determined that several actions should be taken. The Standing Committee was aware over the course of the triennium that there are mixed views in the church about the decision of the 11th Assembly. Particularly in the first year after the 11th Assembly the Officers of the Assembly and the ASC undertook a number of pastoral visits and received and responded to correspondence from various quarters. The Reforming Alliance wrote on several occasions to present its view that the decisions of the 10th and 11th Assembly in relation to sexuality and leadership were irregular in terms of the law. Legal advice provided to the ASC disagreed strongly with this view and ASC is confident that the church acted legally. The Standing Committee set in train a number of steps following on from the decision of the 11th Assembly, including the holding of colloquia around the theological issues that remain unresolved in the area of sexuality and leadership (ASC minute 06.105.03). In doing so it sought to consult with theologians within the UCA about the matter of Sexuality and Leadership. This process has confirmed that there remain strong theological differences on this matter. The Doctrine Working Group has developed material on a theology of the

human person and on Biblical Hermeneutics. It will continue to work on the nature of the human person, theological hermeneutics and 'theological diversity'.

- 3.13 **Specified Ministry of Pastor.** The decision of the 11th Assembly to close the Specified Ministries of Community Minister, Lay Pastor and Youth Worker to new applicants and to introduce the new lay Specified Ministry of Pastor (Assembly minute 06.17) was the most far reaching and demanding decision of the last Assembly. The 11th Assembly decision was substantial in the principles it adopted but left a great deal of the detail to be worked out in the ensuing months. The church should not underestimate the significant amount of work that this decision generated for the Ministerial Education Commission, the Assembly Legal Reference Committee, the Secretariat, the ASC and its various Task Groups, not to mention synods and presbyteries. One consequence of the workload required of the ASC and others was the decision to defer the implementation of the Ministry of Pastor for six months from the date anticipated by the 11th Assembly, ie until July 1 2008 (ASC minute 07.66.02). At the request of the Synod of NSW / ACT the implementation was further delayed until January 1 2009 in the case of that Synod alone (ASC minute 08.55.04 (d)(i)). The church owes a great debt of gratitude to the significant number of people who under significant pressures of time voluntarily fulfilled very complex tasks with grace and skill.

4. RELATIONSHIP WITH CONGRESS

- 4.1 One of the Assembly's Key Directions was to continue our walk with Congress. In many ways this is a way of life but like any shared life there are always new experiences that raise new issues for discussion and exploration.
- 4.2 As mentioned earlier the Standing Committee appointed three of its members (Terence Corkin, Sue Gormann and Stuart McMillan) to a "Renewal of the Covenant" Task Group. The National Chairperson (Vince Ross) and the National Administrator (Shayne Blackman) and other Congress members complete the group. The terms of reference for the Task Group were established by ASC minute 07.39.02.
 "... the terms for reference ... be to
- a) provide a context in which the partners to the Covenant can raise and discuss experiences and issues that cause encouragement and concern over the operation of the covenant relationship across the church;
 - b) consider ways in which Congress and the wider church can further develop their

- understanding of, and commitment to, the Covenant; and
- c) continue the unfinished work from the previous General Secretaries' based Task Group on the Covenant;"
- 4.3 The Task Group was a reference group for the development and use of *Building Partnerships* (See section 3.3 of this report). The Group also discussed the way the booklet had been used in the church and explored ways of promoting its use.
- 4.4 As was reported to the 11th Assembly there have been long and detailed conversations between representatives of Congress and the wider church about the way in which the two parts of the church interrelate and the nature and range of their respective authority. The Renewal of the Covenant Task Group provided a significant and ongoing context in which it was possible to explore with a high level of trust and openness the issues and ideas that were open for consideration. Some very constructive work was done in this regard which resourced the separate meetings of the UAICC National Executive and the ASC's Task Group that was reviewing the Constitution.
- 4.5 A good deal of work has been undertaken in relation to a revision of the preamble to the Constitution so that it might acknowledge that we are a church placed in the lands of "first peoples" and the place of Congress in the life of the UCA. Proposals will be brought in relation to this matter. However, notwithstanding this substantial body of work, the Congress and ASC have not yet reached the stage where it has been possible to develop a set of proposed changes to the Constitution and Regulations that meet the various needs of Congress and the wider church.
- 4.6 One of the most demanding times for the national relationship with Congress in the last triennium was at the release of Presidential Ruling #25, in July 2007. The request for the Ruling came from Congress in order to clarify the extent of the authority of Congress to discipline Ministers serving in Congress placements, when such Ministers were subject to a complaint under the UCA's *Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice*. Presidential Ruling #25, confirmed by the Assembly Standing Committee, stated that Congress did not have the authority to undertake the discipline processes initiated under the *Code of Ethics*, in contexts where the Regional Committee of Congress is not a presbytery or has not received specific delegations for this purpose. This clash between the polity and Regulations of the church on one hand, and the expectations and aspirations of Congress for oversight and discipline of the Ministers and ministries under its charge on the other, was a painful experience for Congress. It was also a time of distress within other

parts of the church. This experience added urgency and energy to the ongoing discussions about the way the Congress and wider parts of the church express their structural relationship.

- 4.7 At the 11th Assembly some slight changes were made to the business procedures in order to facilitate the fuller participation of Congress. There was also a service of worship acknowledging the 21st anniversary of the establishment of the Covenant and additional opportunities were provided for the participation of the National Chairperson of Congress in leadership of the meeting. These developments were very much affirmed by Congress and so the ASC will be recommending the same changes to the business procedures, Congress will also lead a service of worship celebrating the Covenant, and the involvement of the Congress National Chairperson in the meeting of the 12th Assembly shall once again be carefully considered.

5. EXERCISING OVERSIGHT OF ASSEMBLY AGENCIES AND COMMITTEES

- 5.1 In adopting a set of Key Directions the 11th Assembly was seeking to add another way in which it can exercise leadership in the life of Agencies and Committees of the Assembly, alongside the Mandates that it establishes for Agencies and through specific resolutions.
- 5.2 The Assembly resolution required that Agencies establish "SMART" goals as a way of making concrete the more general Key Directions. They also were meant to serve as a way of monitoring whether or not Agencies implemented the goals. All Agencies set some goals within the relevant Key Directions. However both the ASC and Agencies found that they were not an especially valuable tool.
- 5.3 At each meeting of the Standing Committee attention was given to hearing reports on the way in which Agencies were implementing the Key Directions in the course of their work. The ASC also reflected on its work in the light of the Key Directions.
- 5.4 When reviewing the experience it became clear that set alongside the Mandates and Assembly resolutions the Key Directions can serve a worthwhile purpose in sharpening the focus for both Agencies and the Standing Committee as priorities and new opportunities are considered. While all saw that the Key Directions made a constructive contribution there was less valuing of SMART goals. It is not that goals are not set or valued but this framework is not a particularly constructive contribution to planning or accountability mechanisms.

- 5.5 The Standing Committee reviewed the Key Directions during the latter part of the triennium and, in another paper, will bring a proposal for Key Directions for the next three years of the Assembly's work. The directions are a simplification and sharpening of the existing Key Directions, which the ASC considers have not yet exhausted their usefulness.
- 5.6 All Agencies report regularly to the Standing Committee and consult prior to the establishment of new policies and directions. Agencies very much appreciate and benefit from this exchange.

6. PRESIDENTIAL RULINGS

- 6.1 Presidential Ruling #25 addressed the question of the authority of the UAICC to undertake discipline procedures for Ministers in placement with Congress. The President ruled that unless a Regional Committee was also a presbytery, or had received a delegation of authority from an appropriate Council of the church, then the discipline of Ministers in placement with Congress are the responsibility of the relevant Council of the Church. The Presidential Ruling was confirmed in July 2007 (ASC minute 07.45.02).
- 6.2 Presidential Ruling #26 addressed the question of whether a synod could impose a requirement upon congregations or Church Councils to relinquish manses without their consent. The President ruled that synods lacked such a power. The Presidential Ruling was confirmed in March 2008 (ASC minute 08.31).

7. ASSEMBLY FINANCE

- 7.1 Standing Committee is grateful to synods for the consistency in their financial contributions to the Assembly for each of the three years of 2007 - 2009. This support has been given at times when the resources of some synods have been under particular stress.
- 7.2 It is not a new point to make but apart from those agencies that have the capacity to access significant funding from government sources and donations the proportion of Assembly funding that comes from synod grants remains very high. Approximately 84% of funds into the Assembly Fund come from synod grants. This leaves the Assembly very vulnerable to the changing financial circumstances experienced by the synods. In the second half of 2007 the Assembly began (in fact reactivated a previous conversation) with synods about alternative ways of establishing and supporting the church's funding of the Assembly. As events unfolded it became clear that this was not a propitious time for such a conversation. The level of uncertainty in the global financial markets, and the economy more widely, meant that synods were not in a

position to consider new ways of financing the Assembly.

- 7.3 The Assembly budget has been managed very tightly over the last three years and has not operated at a deficit in any of the past three years. Among the strategies being employed to manage the Assembly's tight financial circumstances are strong cost controls and budget processes; careful management of the Assembly's modest asset base and the expectation that where recipients of Assembly funds are able to be more self reliant then they be expected to do so. This has been the case for Uniting Church Overseas Aid and the Northern Synod. The timing and quantum of any reduction in funding from the Assembly Fund is subject to annual review and negotiation.

8. EXEMPTIONS FROM THE OPERATION OF REGULATIONS

- 8.1 From time to time Standing Committee is asked to exercise its authority under Regulation 3.6.34 to approve alternate Regulations and / or exemptions from Regulations for particular bodies. Exemptions have been granted to a number of synods to allow them to appoint extra persons to their Committees for Counselling; the Synods of Victoria and Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia to ensure that membership to the 12th Assembly matches the numbers who attended the 11th Assembly and various other minor matters, all of which have been reported in the ASC minutes.
- 8.2 A particularly significant exercise of authority under Regulation 3.6.34 (a) was to grant an exemption to the Synod of Western Australia so that it could create a constitution for a Congress community services body and allow the powers under Regulation 3.5.17 (j) to be referred to the National Chairperson of Congress (ASC minute 07.46.02). This is an example of where the Standing Committee has sought to use the current capacity within the Regulations to support Congress' desire to have effective oversight of ministries under its care.
- 8.3 Over the last triennium there have been an increasing number of requests from synods for exemption to the operation of particular regulations. Often it is because the regulation in question is very specific, for example the number of persons who can be on certain committees; or that the situation of a synod where there is only one presbytery is not readily accommodated by the regulations. The 11th Assembly established as one of its Key Directions that the church would "critically evaluate its polity ... with a view to reducing the level of prescription and ... enhancing the capability of Councils of the church to hear and respond to current missional initiatives." (Assembly minute

06.08 (e) (i)). Standing Committee has taken this direction seriously and will bring proposals in support of a major review of the Constitution and a separate proposal that the ASC be authorized in the next triennium to review and amend the Regulations with a view to addressing these aims.

9. AGENCY ARRANGEMENTS

- 9.1 During the last triennium the Standing Committee has had to address a number of matters that affect the operation of Assembly Agencies in a variety of ways. Under the leadership of the Associate General Secretary the operational arrangements for the various Agencies and work areas grouped under the team "Uniting Faith and Justice" have been clarified, strengthened and further developed. Uniting International Mission's own report will speak more comprehensively to these matters but suffice to say here that its further developments and the introduction of more systems to support the work of Uniting Church Overseas Aid (now Uniting World – International Aid and Development) has required significant oversight from the Standing Committee. Also Uniting Care Australia has recast the role and membership of its National Reference Committee and clarified and strengthened the role of its Executive.
- 9.2 The major change in Agency arrangements since the last meeting of the Assembly has been the discontinuation of Coolamon College as an Agency of the Assembly. The reasons, progress and outcomes of this decision will be covered in the report of Coolamon College. The decision for the Assembly to move away from delivering distance theological education was not fundamentally a financial one, although the financial situation had been deteriorating over the course of the triennium. Rather the financial indicators were pointers to other issues, not least of which was the significantly increased capacity of the synods to deliver theological education by distance – both through their theological colleges and strengthened lay education institutions. In the light of these developments the Standing Committee resolved to discontinue Coolamon College as an Agency of the Assembly from 31 December 2008, and to negotiate with the Synod of South Australia to continue many of the aspects of the Coolamon College ministry. (ASC minute 08.43.03 and 08.43.04).

10. NATIONAL YOUTH ACTIVITIES REFERENCE COMMITTEE (NYARC)

- 10.1 With the decision to disband Uniting Education as an Agency of the Assembly (taken in 2005) it became necessary to

develop new systems and methods of oversight for the national youth activities that are auspiced or overseen by the Assembly – National Christian Youth Convention (NCYC), About FACE and the Order of St Stephen. The work of this Committee and staff sit within Uniting Faith and Discipleship.

- 10.2 The Standing Committee adopted the strategy of establishing a national reference committee comprising suitably qualified and experienced people from across the church (ASC minute 06.31) and the appointment of some staff support. The Committee reports directly to the ASC once a year.
- 10.3 The new arrangements will be reported on more fully elsewhere. At this juncture it is noted that while some of the work undertaken by the staff person is directly related to fulfilling ongoing responsibilities of the Assembly towards national youth activities, the decision to appoint a full time person to the role was the Standing Committee's response to the Key Direction adopted at the 11th Assembly which encouraged the Assembly to "support and nurture ... discipleship formation and leadership development with an emphasis on spiritual development and faith sharing" (Assembly minute 06.08 (d) (i)). This has enabled greater attention to be given to the way in which young adults can be encouraged and supported in their vocation and faith development through accessing either uniquely Assembly opportunities or through enhanced networking.

11. ASSEMBLY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- 11.1 In November 2006 the Assembly adopted a statement on climate change, "For the Sake of the Planet", submitted by the National Director of Uniting Justice (ASC minute 06.101.02).
- 11.2 In response to adopting this policy the Assembly has undertaken a carbon audit to establish a benchmark and is working at developing a sustainability policy. This work continues.

12. CODE OF ETHICS FOR LAY PREACHERS

- 12.1 Representations were made by the National Committee of the Lay Preachers' Association to approve a Code of Ethics for Lay Preachers. The Code is modeled on the *Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice* applicable for persons in the Specified Ministries. The ASC approved the Code (ASC minute 07.20).

13. PALESTINE / ISRAEL

- 13.1 In December 2007 the President and General Secretary visited Israel and Palestine with Australian Church leaders under the auspices of the National Council of Churches.
- 13.2 Subsequent to that visit the NCCA adopted a series of resolutions on the issues that so affect that area of the world and made commitments for itself in the days to come.
- 13.3 In March 2008 the Standing Committee adopted a series of resolutions that were substantially the same as those adopted by the NCCA (ASC minute 08.29). These decisions have been the basis of regular public and private representations by the President and staff of the Assembly over 2008 and 2009. This commitment to peace in Israel and Palestine continues.

14. GUIDELINES FOR MINISTERS BENEFIT ACCOUNTS

- 14.1 At the request of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania the ASC reviewed the 1999 edition of the Guidelines for the Operation of Minister's Benefit Accounts. The decision was made to revise the Guidelines to enable expenditures to be drawn for a wider range of expenses than the quite limited 1999 Guidelines. The new Guidelines are more closely consistent with the language of the relevant legislation, and of course adhere to it (ASC minute 08.68).

15. NAME CHANGE FOR A SYNOD

- 15.1 At the request of the Synod of NSW, the Standing Committee approved the change of the name of the Synod to the Synod of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory (NSW / ACT) (ASC minute 08.27.03).

16. STAFF MATTERS

- 16.1 In 2008 Rev Dr Lee Levett Olson accepted a call to be Principal of Nungalinya College in Darwin. Rev Jo-Anne Fulton was Acting Principal from July 2008 to the end of the year. As a result of the decision to discontinue Coolamon College as an Agency of the Assembly Rev Jo-Anne Fulton and Ms Margaret Wyatt discontinued their service with the Assembly after five years. Rev Helen Richmond concluded her term as National Director for Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry to undertake Doctoral studies. Rev Dr Rob Bos concluded his term as National Consultant of Theology and Discipleship after eight years. Rev John Mavor undertook an important supply ministry as National Director for Uniting International Mission prior to the

arrival of the new National Director. Mr Gavin Melvin concluded his employment with the Assembly as Senior Communications Manager.

- 16.2 Senior staff appointments that have commenced since the last Assembly have included Rev Dr Kerry Enright as Director of Uniting International Mission, Rev Dr Tony Floyd as National Director for Multicultural and Cross Cultural Ministry, Rev Dr Chris Walker as National Consultant for Theology and Discipleship, Rev (Deacon) Sandy Boyce as National Consultant for Faith Development and Discipleship and Ms Penny Monger as Senior Communications Manager.
- 16.3 During the last triennium the ASC conducted reviews for Rev Elenie Poulos (Uniting Justice) and Rev David Thiem (Associate National Director, Frontier Services) and resolved to offer extensions to each. In accordance with contemporary Human Resources practice the ASC no longer conducts end of term reviews for a lay person serving as a National Director. Such persons are regarded as permanent appointments and are managed through annual performance appraisals and other mechanisms.
- 16.4 In the first half of 2008 the ASC undertook a review of the Assembly General Secretary with a view to considering whether an extension should be recommended to the Assembly. The Review Group comprised Rev Gregor Henderson, Ms Sue Clarkson, Mr Jim Mein, Mrs Jan Trengove and Rev Liva Tukutama, with the President as the convenor. Areas explored during the review included: performance against job description, scope of the job description and its adequacy and views concerning the future of the placement. Comments were sought from the Assembly staff reporting directly to the General Secretary, Moderators and Synod General Secretaries (at least one per Synod), the UAICC, the Ex-President, the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) and members of the ASC. Meetings were also held with Terence Corkin. As a result of this process the ASC is recommending to the Assembly that Rev Terence Corkin be reappointed as General Secretary of the Assembly from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2012.

17. BUSINESS PASSED TO THE NEXT STANDING COMMITTEE

The Standing Committee is in the process of undertaking a review of the "Guidelines for Complaints of Sexual Misconduct Against Lay Persons". This work is in the hands of a task group appointed by the ASC and it is anticipated that once a draft will be sent through to presbyteries and synods for comment later this year. It is hoped that the revised policy will be

submitted to the ASC in August 2009 for adoption.

The church's practice of Lay Presidency was an issue that was referred to the current Standing Committee. However it was not possible to complete that work, mainly due to staff changes and vacancies in Theology and Discipleship, and so a commitment has been made to continue with that work this triennium.

During the course of the triennium the Standing Committee began addressing the issue of the Assembly's carbon footprint. The Standing Committee resolved to develop a sustainability policy and is currently undertaking this work through the engagement of a consultant. It is anticipated that the new Standing Committee will receive a report on this matter early in the next triennium and this will establish a platform for concrete action to be undertaken in order to reduce the carbon footprint of the Assembly.

18. FUTURE MEETING DATES

- 18.1 The incoming Standing Committee elected by the Twelfth Assembly will hold its first meeting in Sydney on 28-30 August 2009. The second meeting is 20 - 22 November 2009.

Rev Terence Corkin
General Secretary