

# Synod of New South Wales and the A.C.T.

**“Moving with God, Transforming Communities: Courageous, Inclusive, Generous”** (Opening words of the Synod’s Vision Statement, adopted 2005)

## SNAPSHOT

Within the bounds of the Synod 651 Congregations faithfully engage in worship, witness and service in a variety of urban, suburban, rural, regional and coastal settings. These Congregations are oriented for mission and ministry by 467 Church Councils and supported by 13 Presbyteries, eight outside the Sydney metropolitan area and five within (or mostly within) Sydney itself. Prior to 31 December 2008 there were 14 Presbyteries. However, on 1 January 2009 the Central West and Darling Presbyteries merged to form the Macquarie Darling Presbytery.

A Korean Commission, established for a trial period of three years and renewed by the 2007 Synod for a further period of four years, exercises all the powers of a Presbytery except those to do with candidates for the Ministry and ordination. Following a consultation with the Commission in 2010/11, the 2011 Synod may authorise this Commission – which has 15 member Congregations – to take on the remaining responsibilities of a Presbytery.

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress has Ministry Centres in Armidale, Broken Hill, Lismore, Penrith, Tabulam, Tingha and Wellington. Broken Hill, within the Macquarie Darling Presbytery, is working in ecumenical partnership and is also funded by the Anglican Church Army and Anglican Bush Church Aid.

There are 431 Ministers, Deacons, Lay Pastors, Accredited Youth Workers, Ministers from other Churches, Community Ministers and Lay Ministers in active service, both within Congregations and beyond. The Synod has received a greater number of Ministers from other Churches since the 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly than the number who have resigned. Approximately 300,000 people are associated with the life of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT but only about 35,000 of these are regular worshippers.

Much of the Synod’s work is managed by four Synod Boards – Board of Education, Board of Mission, UnitingCare NSW.ACT and Uniting Resources. Approximately 10,000 staff serve in ministries of the Uniting Church in aged care, child care, a variety of community services, schools and local settings. This includes about 7,000 staff within UnitingCare NSW.ACT.

The 2006 Synod adopted the following **Strategic Directions** for November 2006 to October 2011:

1. To develop a vibrant faith in Christ and God’s mission by exploring, modeling, encouraging, enabling and resourcing discipleship.
2. To explore and respond to the searching for spiritual experience that is a profound impulse in the lives of many people in the Australian community.
3. To engage with integrity in actions of reconciliation, justice and peace for Christ’s sake.
4. To take initiatives and to work with presbyteries, new and existing congregations and faith communities in the hope of transforming communities.
5. To strengthen the integrity of the Uniting Church’s ministry.
6. To ensure sustainable funding and resources to enable mission.

## STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS

One of the most exciting developments in this Synod is the full participation of United Theological College in Charles Sturt University, beginning January 2007. UTC and St Marks (Anglican) Theological College now comprise the theological faculty of Charles Sturt. In 2007 the Synod decided to close the Council of United Theological College and the Commissions for Specified and Lay Ministries and replace them with a Ministerial Education Board within the Board of Education. This occurred on 1 July, 2008.

During 2008 the restructured Committee for Discipline heard its first case. The Committee for Discipline now has a retired judge as chair, a barrister as permanent advocate and a solicitor as advisor to the panels. The expedition, efficiency and thoroughness of process in this case showed a dramatic improvement over the handling of previous cases which is very pleasing.

Uniting Financial Services (UFS) has been managing the Church’s investments extraordinarily well in the face of the economic downturn. The income to the Synod has been ‘guaranteed’ by UFS for the next two years. After that, however, it may fall. The Synod Standing Committee is already looking at restructuring the Synod’s operations because all that we do now may not be sustainable in the future.

For 2008/09 the Synod Standing Committee approved a deficit budget for the Synod in excess of \$500,000. Not surprisingly, it also requested the Synod Fund Management Committee to balance the budget for 2009/10. This means that no recipient of allocations from the Synod Fund can expect its budget to be unaffected by the fiscal realities applying to that Fund. Costs are rising. There are stories in the press every day about the current investment climate. And ‘mission and service’ contributions from congregations have fallen to about 15% of the income of the Synod Fund.

The Synod Standing Committee and the Ministers Support Fund Committee have discussed the potential impact of the global financial crisis on the

ability of congregations to pay their ministers. Congregations are already doing it tough – ageing and shrinking congregations, drought in rural areas. The Ministers Support Fund Committee recommended a freeze on stipends. However, the Synod Standing Committee adopted a lower than expected increase of 2%.

The 2008 Synod was the first meeting of the Synod under the banner of 'New South Wales *and the ACT*.' The 2008 Synod was also the last annual Synod meeting. The Synod will meet next in April, 2010 and then every 18 months. The makeup of the Synod Standing Committee has also changed. When the Standing Committee met in November, 2008 it consisted of 36 members rather than 75. These changes are designed to create a skills-based body which will contribute to strategic thinking about the future of the Church. Synod and Presbyteries will share with each other their plans, ideas and commitments so that each retains its own integrity and its particular role to play within the mission of the Church. A meeting of Chairs and Secretaries of Presbyteries with the Moderator and General Secretary is held at least once a year. The most recent of these meetings was held in April 2009.

At the suggestion of younger Synod members, the 2008 Synod determined to trial an alternative model for the Synod gathering, paying attention to the balance between important business matters, the Synod's financial and legal responsibilities and the potential for such a large gathering to include training and inspiration for people to be encouraged in their mission and engagement in the world. Responses to what a changed Synod gathering might look like are being sought in an online survey and in focus groups.

At the request of the Synod, the Assembly Standing Committee agreed to delay the implementation of the new ministry of Pastor in this Synod until 1 January, 2009. In August the Assembly General Secretary attended the meeting of Presbytery Chairs and Secretaries with the Moderator and Synod General Secretary. Terence provided answers to many questions about the implementation of the ministry of Pastor. On 25 August the Board of Education announced the appointment of a Ministry of Pastor Consultant who will assist Presbyteries. The Synod is now in a better position to implement this new ministry. However, some legal issues regarding employment still need to be addressed.

An ongoing project over the last few years has been the revision and updating of the Synod By-laws. The by-laws had fallen considerably behind policy development over a number of years. A good deal of work has been put into this project by Malcolm Gledhill, the Executive Directors, Robert Key and myself. We have now got to the point where one major piece of work and a few small things remain to be done. But the by-laws are on the Synod web site. And they're reliable.

Two of the burdens on this Synod – and, I'm sure, other Synods as well – are, on the one hand, the legislative requirements surrounding heritage buildings and disabled access (the legislation for

each of which conflicts with the other) and, on the other hand, all the compliance and regulatory requirements of governments. The cost of meeting our responsibilities under compliance and regulatory requirements is becoming prohibitive.

In 2008 there was a review of the Synod archives. The review has highlighted the need for a re-structure of the Synod's archives in which the Synod would have responsibility for management of the archives and the Church Records and Historical Society would encourage an interest in Church history and in identifying and retaining historical records. The Uniting Church Records and Historical Society has welcomed this new arrangement. We now need to actually move the archives to a new location.

**Rev Paul Swadling**  
**Synod General Secretary**