

Synod of Queensland

The Synod of Queensland comprises eight presbyteries, seven geographical and one aboriginal and islander. Each of the seven geographical presbyteries has a full-time presbytery minister. The health and community care services are, in the main, provided through UnitingCare Queensland, a consolidated organisation under the oversight of a single Board. Wesley Mission Brisbane is the sole parish mission, following the Synod's decision to withdraw the status Wesley Mission Ipswich as a parish mission. The Synod is involved in church and church-related schools and colleges, University Colleges, and a wide array of chaplaincies

The population of Queensland is now more than 4.3 million and continues to grow at over 2% per annum. Two thirds of the population is located in south-east Queensland (Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, and West Moreton), and population growth in this region accounts for approx. 70% of the state's population growth. This growth presents significant challenges and opportunities to the Church in terms of establishing new congregations and also other expressions of mission such as the provision of community services.

The following are some of the challenges and highlights of the past three years:

1. RESOURCING CHRISTIAN FORMATION AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

- a. The Brisbane College of Theology, the ecumenical venture in theological education and ministerial formation between the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches that had its first intake of students in 1983, will come to an end in December, 2009. The Synod has approved and signed an Affiliation Agreement between Trinity Theological College (TTC) and the Australian Catholic University (ACU). 2009 is a year of transition to the arrangement with the ACU.
- b. **The Network for Christian Formation** commenced in 2008 with Rev Dr Rob Bos as the inaugural Director of the Pilgrim Learning Community (PLC), the lay training body with the Synod. The PLC and TTC together come under the oversight of the newly formed Board for Christian Formation which picks up the responsibilities of the former Ministerial Education Board. Significant interest across the Synod, together with the considerable experience of Rev Bos, has seen a growing number of opportunities for lay education being offered through the Network, building on the previous

good work done through the Trinity Regional Campuses.

2. RESOURCING RURAL MINISTRY THROUGH RURAL MINISTRY COORDINATORS

Funds were redeployed in 2008 from a Synod-based Mission Consultant towards the establishment of two Rural Ministry Coordinator positions based in rural presbyteries. These positions are available to resource those engaged in rural ministry across the Synod.

3. RESOURCING MULTI-CROSS CULTURAL MINISTRY

To ensure the Church's commitment to being a multicultural church, and to enhance opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities for inclusion and fuller participation in the life of the Church, the Synod has appointed a part-time advocate Multi-Cross Cultural Advocate to work with a newly constituted Synod Multi-Cross Cultural Committee. Significant opportunities continue to emerge for engaging with CALD communities of faith as they explore the possibility of belonging to the UCA. In addition, a significant number of persons within the CALD communities are taking up culturally sensitive training towards becoming Lay Preachers. This capacity building is a very encouraging sign of the life evident in migrant ethnic congregations and communities of faith.

4. RESOURCING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH THROUGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Synod-wide engagement with Church and church-related schools and colleges has been enhanced with the appointment of a part-time Executive Officer to the Schools Commission. There is a growing commitment to improving governance in terms of missional, financial and educational oversight. There have been particular challenges associated with debt-funded colleges and a joint venture. The Synod recently took over full responsibility for one of the colleges that had been part of a joint venture with the Anglican Church. The Synod is now working with that College and the relevant presbytery to ensure that the College is an integral part of the mission of the Church.

5. RENEWING THE COVENANT – THE JOURNEY THROUGH 2008 AND BEYOND

As a result of the process engaged in by the Council of Synod and Synod throughout 2008, a fresh commitment to the covenant has been made by the Synod. Some tough questions have emerged for the Church such as: Has the covenant process to date lead to separation and withdrawal? Why haven't the Protocols in relation to Reg. 3.6.40 enhanced the covenant relationship between the UAICC and the rest of the Church. Some positive steps have been taken by the Presbyteries of Calvary and North Queensland to give expression to the covenant relationship and the Synod has committed to further conversation on renewing the covenant.

6. CHAPLAINCY

Chaplaincy continues to emerge as an important ministry. A strong missional and financial commitment by UnitingCare Queensland ensures that chaplaincy is an integral part of the Church's community and health care services.

Joint placements involving ministry in both congregation and agency is an emerging trend. Effective oversight of such placements has necessitated the development of Joint Placement Protocols.

The training of chaplains continues to be a challenge. Training is available through the Hospital Ministry and Pastoral Care Course offered through the Wesley Hospital and the Chaplaincy Commission is exploring options for the provision of generic chaplaincy training. Explorations are ongoing in relation to resourcing mental health chaplaincy.

7. MINISTRY MATTERS

- a. **Candidates for Ministry of Word and Ministry of Deacon** There continues to be a steady number of people responding to the call to become either Ministers of the Word or Deacons with total candidate numbers in college varying between approx. 25 and 30 over the past three years.
- b. **Ministry of Pastor** The Synod worked intentionally to introduce the ministry of Pastor and has sought to resource Presbyteries in the process.
- c. **Transition to Ordained Ministry** There has been a strong response to the opportunity for Youth Workers, Community Ministers and Lay Pastors to transition to the ordained specified ministries. To

date, approx. 20 people have been through the process of discerning a call to the ordained specified ministry.

8. FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

As a result of impact of loans made through the Uniting Church Investment Service becoming impaired in 2007, there has been a substantial reduction in the level of income from that source into the Mission and Service Fund (M&SF). The response of the Synod was to reduce expenditure in the M&SF by approx. 20% by the end of 2009.

The unfortunate consequence of this reduction is that a number of important positions including Mission Consultants, the Youth and Children's Ministry Unit, and the Justice and International Mission Advocate, have been lost. Presbyteries also experienced cuts to their budgets. In addition, a significant number of staff positions in the Department for Financial and Property Services which have become vacant, have not been filled, with tasks either being reallocated or reprioritised. This has resulted in a substantial loss in the Synod's capacity to resource ministry and mission. The way ahead is not yet clear and the challenges for the Synod are to clearly define the core services that it needs to provide and the financial resources available to provide those services in an intentional and sustainable way, and to work strongly with Presbyteries to ensure alignment of visions for missions and the resources and systems to support those visions for mission.

9. MISSION THROUGH SERVICE

Directors of Mission and chaplains are active throughout UnitingCare Queensland services. As part of the executive, Directors of Mission play a vital role in supporting UnitingCare to ensure the mission and ethos of the Church is reflected in strategic and operational plans. They have a leadership role in the induction and orientation of staff and in maintaining relationships across the life of the whole Church. UnitingCare continues to strengthen its outreach to people and communities in more than 400 locations throughout Queensland. Of note has been its yearly growth in services for frail older people and people with disabilities, very significant growth in its services to vulnerable children and families, and family mediation services, and an increased role in community recovery following natural disasters. The current financial crisis, on top of the worsening personal debt levels in the community, prompted the strategic development of increased financial counselling services for people who are

struggling financially. Major capital investments are being made in the Church's hospitals and a number of residential aged care facilities have been re-built and updated.

UnitingCare is responding to many challenges. One major threat to service viability is the inadequacy of the government's funding model for residential aged care. Significant reform is needed, but the government is unresponsive to this critical issue. It is also apparent that UnitingCare and the Synod will need to consider options for responding to the limitations of the Regulations and Church's legal structure in dealing adequately and efficiently with the complexity of UnitingCare and the external environment in which it operates.

10. VISION FOR MISSION - ENCOURAGING NEW INITIATIVES IN MISSION

The Synod adopted a Vision for Mission in 2005 and allocated \$2million towards the funding of new initiatives in mission. The Vision has sought to encourage individuals, congregations and presbyteries to develop their own commitments to mission and has assisted, where possible in helping to resource those visions for mission.

Rev Douglas Jones
General Secretary

Rev Bruce Johnson
Moderator