

Synod of Western Australia

The Uniting Church Synod of Western Australia serves an area of two million square kilometers. Our northern-most congregation is Port Hedland, and our most southerly is Esperance, which shares its minister with the West Nullarbor Frontier Services Patrol. To the east is Kalgoorlie; the minister there, Rev John Whaley, is 400 km, or half a day's drive from his nearest Uniting Church colleague. Across this vast geographical area, we have 155 congregations and faith communities formed by our 6,000 members.

Within the depth and breadth of this context the Uniting Church in WA seeks to faithfully serve in living and vital ministry, witness and mission. Over this past triennium the Church has courageously taken steps to respond to its ever changing context and channel its resources in new directions. A new structure of one Presbytery has been established with a General Council overseeing both Synod and the Presbytery. Since the formation of the single Presbytery, with the same geographical boundaries as the Synod, the Uniting Church in WA, as a pilgrim people, has been in transition, seeking to understand the implications and benefits, responding to the challenges of new directions.

In January 2007, we hosted the National Christian Youth Convention (NCYC), with the theme of 'Agents of Change'. Alongside this youth event, we held the first ever Adult Convention, at which NCYC speakers participated. These events were a great source of inspiration and encouragement. Altogether, almost 1000 young people, team members and adult volunteers attended NCYC07, with many West Australians involved in the organizing of the event. A challenge post the event was the on-going support of our young people.

A major new initiative has been the establishment of the "First Third" ministry designed to initiate, resource and promote ministry with people under 30 in congregations throughout the Presbytery. This initiative followed a cry for help from our young people at Synod 2007. Establishing this new ministry has generated much energy and enthusiasm. A working group was established with the key task to develop a forward plan which can harness these sparks of energy. This has resulted in the establishment of a First Third ministry team, which has a membership of four working north of Perth and in the rural South West.

NCYC also saw the launch of The Transit Lounge, an online publication the Synod of WA produces in partnership with Assembly which aims to reach young people throughout the community and provide the opportunity for the Christian community to speak to issues that are close to its heart and connect with people's lives.

The Presbytery and the Synod have grappled with ways to best provide support and resources to congregations and faith communities. Emphasis has been given to our rural congregations which are

often very small, yet faithfully living out the ministry of Jesus. Many of these congregations while struggling to maintain viability and ordained ministry are seen as valued and significant communities of faith. A rural resourcing ministry team has now been created to support and resource these congregations. We look forward to further growth in this ministry.

An exciting development in 2006 was the formation of UnitingCare West, a community services agency, which was the result of a merger of some or all of the programs and services of eight Uniting Church agencies and congregational missions. This has given an increased capacity to offer service and program development to the most marginalized in our community, a very integral part of the Uniting Church.

We now have four agencies belonging to the national UnitingCare network: Good Samaritan Industries (GSI or Good Sammy's), UnitingCare Crossroads WA, UnitingCare West and Uniting Church Homes. We are seeing these agencies working closely together, seeking to respond to community need in ways that can enhance and enable a strengthened society. Together with over 60 smaller congregation-based projects, these agencies continually seek to be the hands and face of Jesus to those most in need. We are now seeing the agencies and congregations connecting in new ways to our schools.

We have seven Uniting Church schools and colleges that offer quality education in a Christian environment, from Kindergarten to Year 12. Trinity Residential College offers a nurturing living environment to university students.

A major challenge for the congregations, the Presbytery, the Synod, schools, colleges and Unitingcare agencies is to build relationships and interconnections which are able to generate on-going learning and inspiration.

Another great area of excitement has been the establishment of Beananging Kwuurt Institute (BKI) as a community service agency of the WA Regional Committee of Congress. BKI is a Nyungar name: "Beananging" means part of the day when the sky is becoming light, but before the sun has risen; Kwuurt" means "heart". This was the culmination of transforming what was once the former Sister Kate's Children's Home. BKI is Aboriginally controlled and separately incorporated under the provisions of the Uniting Church in Australia Act 1976 (WA). BKI aims for social justice and empowerment to deliver child and family services, education and conference services, and employment and training services.

The Western Australian Synod has maintained its emphasis on working with the Indian Ocean rim countries and continues its support for partners in East Timor and West Papua whilst developing new relationships with churches in Burma/Myanmar.

The social justice emphasis in Western Australia has continued its work on the environment by producing the Green Church Handbook and

resources for sustainable September and working together with Congress for the preservation of the ancient rock art on the Burrup Peninsular. We have also made submissions on such matters as the WA Human Rights Bill, worked on prison reform in a variety of forums and continued to work ecumenically in all areas possible. A key priority is to work for change on refugee policy in the name of the Uniting Church and through our partnerships locally and nationally.

Following on from the success of the Adult Convention, an annual Christian education event, called "Summer Spirit", is now an important part of the Church calendar. The WA Uniting Church is focused on building up and connecting the Church and community. Education and learning are a key component, with 2010 designated to be the "Year of Learning".

Summer Spirit and the Web of Learning, which draws together a variety of Christian education opportunities, have contributed to a renewed sense of the importance of Christian learning. The WA Uniting Church Lay Preachers Association has recently been re-vitalised, with a launch occurring in March 2009. This will enable lay preachers, worship leaders and others involved in leadership of the worship life of our congregations to meet together with increased learning opportunities.

In responding to the changing needs of the Church in Western Australia, the staffing structures of the Synod have undergone major changes. In May 2007, the WA church office moved into the new Uniting Church Centre on the edge of Perth. Since then, a lot of work has gone into reviewing staffing roles. We now have four Associate General Secretaries to support the work of the General Secretary: these cover the areas of Mission Support, Resources and Pastoral. A new integrated team, the Congregation Mission Support Unit (CMSU), offers support to congregations for their lay education, training, mission planning, ministry resources and includes the members of the first third and rural team.

Throughout the next triennium imaginative and pragmatic opportunities will be sought which continue to see the Western Australian Uniting Church people focus on building relationships which strengthen their continuing faith and faithfulness. This will mean continually seeking God's wisdom, working together collaboratively, pastorally caring for those congregations who will close, encouraging new and diverse ministry, building a system that is enabling and empowering, using our human and financial resources wisely, and continuing to build partnerships with our neighbours locally and overseas. In all this God's grace and peace will sustain and guide us.

Mrs Kay Dowling
General Secretary