



# INFORMATION ON UNITING CHURCH STRUCTURE

MAY 2019





Every organisation needs a way of developing a vision for its core business and a way of making and implementing decisions that relate to that vision. We broadly call this governance and if you have worked in any organisation you would have some understanding of the governance of that organisation.

The Uniting Church is different from a business in that it does not exist to make a profit but:

To worship and grow as disciples of Jesus;

To preach Christ the crucified and risen one and confess him as Lord;


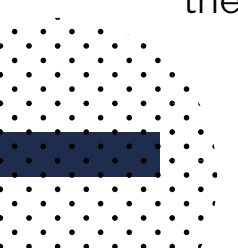
To recognise, treasure and use the gifts of the Spirit given to all God's people for ministering;

To live out our discipleship by sharing our faith, working for justice and peace, standing alongside the oppressed and poor, and by caring for God's creation.

The Uniting Church is also different because the councils of the church are not hierarchical. In business the councils are usually hierarchical so the highest council can control the business of all the other councils. In the Uniting Church the councils are interrelated, but each council has specific roles and functions. All councils have lay and ordained and male and female members.

According to the church's foundational document, The Basis of Union, the Uniting Church "recognises that responsibility for government in the church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them. The Uniting Church therefore so organises its life that locally, regionally and nationally government will be entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of the Church".

The church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his church, and that he may speak to it through any of its councils. Every council is therefore expected "to wait upon God's Word, and to obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight".





## The councils of the Uniting Church are:

### **1. Assembly** – the national body

The national assembly gathers every three years and is chaired by the president. Members are elected by the state Synods.

The Assembly Standing Committee meets three times a year between Assembly meetings to conduct the business of Assembly. Its 18 members are drawn from throughout Australia taking into account ordained and lay members, representatives from all states and territories and ensuring the voice of young members is also clearly heard. The Standing Committee is elected at Assembly meetings.

The Assembly is responsible for:

Doctrine – confessional statements - what we believe

Worship – orders of worship for general use like communion

Promotion of the church's mission

Code of Ethics for ministers

Standards of theological education

Links to ecumenical and other bodies

Determining the number of Synods

### **2. Synod**

The six Synods bring together representatives from the presbyteries under their control. The six Synods are New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, Northern Australia, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Victoria & Tasmania. The roles of the Synod are:

Encouraging the mission of the church

Forming, naming or varying Presbyteries within the Synod

Electing members to Assembly

Cooperating in the selection of candidates for ministry and Ministry of Pastor applications

Receiving ministers from other denominations

Overseeing colleges and institutions within the bounds of the Synod


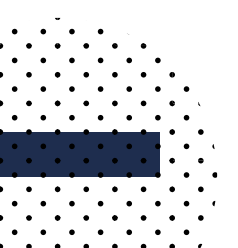
Placements committee that oversees placement of ministers and pastors in congregation and non-congregation placements

Supervision of theological and ministerial education

Oversee property matters within the bounds of the Synod

Electing a Standing Committee (which meets between Synod meetings)

Management of Synod funds





## **Presbytery**

Currently there is one Presbytery in SA. Most states have more than one presbytery. The roles of Presbytery are:

Oversight of ministers – supervision, training, discipline

Oversight of Congregations – including formation and dissolving of congregations, consultations into the life and witness of congregations

Promoting the wider aspects of the work of the church – e.g. establishing agencies, mission and service fund

Selection and oversight of candidates

Ordination, accreditation and recognition of specified ministries (minister of the word, deacon, pastor)

Oversight of lay preachers

Placements of specified ministries

## **Congregation**

Officially this is what we are:

A Congregation, as the embodiment in one place of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, shall be those members and adherents who worship, witness and serve as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ, and who meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world, and who are recognised as a Congregation by the Presbytery. Some of the roles are:

Bearing witness to Christ

Building up the members in faith and love

Discipline

Pastoral oversight


Appointing elders and church councillors

Providing resources and facilities to support the work of the congregation

Maintaining relationships with the Presbytery and other councils and bodies

Arranging to call a minister in accordance with the regulations

Sharing responsibilities with any related congregations and fulfilling the ministry of the church in and to the wider community



## Church Council

This council is elected by the congregation to:

Share with staff in mission, pastoral care and spiritual oversight including the appointment of leaders

Assisting the minister(s) in the conduct of worship and the administration of the sacraments

Make decisions about baptism

Determine times of public worship

Manage finances, administration, property, membership rolls

Prepare an Annual report

Delegation of matters to presbytery as prescribed

## Staff

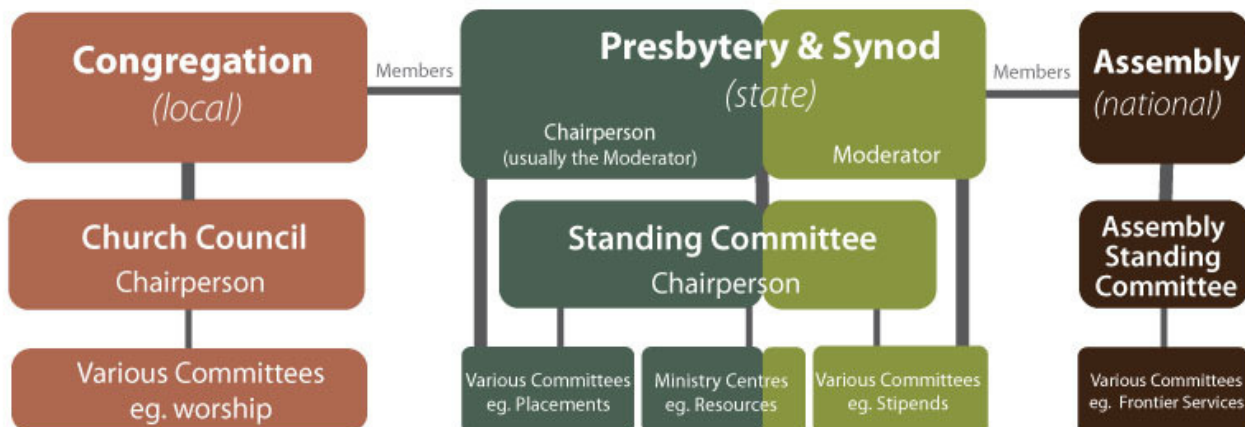
In larger congregations such as Seeds the staff assist in the running of the ministry of the church and see to the implementation of the agreed vision of the church.

## Mission Networks

In South Australia there is an additional structure that is not in the regulations. In 2005 Mission Networks were formed. Some of these were formed on theological grounds and others on geographical areas. The number of networks has reduced overtime but there are still eight within our Synod. Congregations can choose which Network they belong to. One of the reasons for the introduction of Networks was to reduce conflict around theological differences. Networks will cease to exist from July 1st 2019.

## Our Structure in SA

Inter-related councils and council heads of the Uniting Church in South Australia:



# TRANSITIONAL PRESBYTERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



## What is it?

The Transitional Presbytery of South Australia will be formed by 1 July 2019 as a result of decisions made at the November 2018 Presbytery and Synod meeting. At that meeting, voting members agreed that the existing structure of one Synod and one Presbytery in South Australia (existing since 2006) be modified to allow for more than one Presbytery. The meeting further agreed to form a non-geographic Presbytery (NGP) by 1 July 2019. This Presbytery will be called Generate Presbytery. The Transitional Presbytery of South Australia will exist from July 2019 to November 2019. During that time, work will be done to discern the further shape of Presbyteries in South Australia. It is likely that two geographic presbyteries, with a mix of urban and rural congregations will be formed out of the Transitional Presbytery of South Australia. It is called the Transitional Presbytery of South Australia because that describes the nature of the presbytery – it will transition from the current structures into new presbytery structures, probably based on geography.

The purpose of the Transitional Presbytery of South Australia is to:

- “have such oversight as is necessary to the life and mission of the Church in the area committed to it; it shall stimulate and encourage the Congregations within the bounds, providing them with opportunities for counsel in the strengthening and assistance of one another and in their participation in wider aspects of the work of the Church”. (Paragraph 26 of the UCA Constitution)

There will be further work needed in the second half of the year to discern the shape of the presbyteries that will emerge from the Transitional Presbytery of South Australia. The Restructuring Task Group will provide leadership working with congregations and ministry agents in this discernment.

**It is an exciting time to reflect on our life as a church and to imagine and discern together how we are being led as we worship God, witness to Christ and serve God and our neighbour through the Uniting Church in South Australia.**

Any queries or concerns may be directed to:

Rev Felicity Amery, General Secretary [gensec@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:gensec@sa.uca.org.au)

Rev Sue Page, Associate General Secretary [spage@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:spage@sa.uca.org.au)

### **Why does the Generate Presbytery exist?**



1. To vigorously pursue the Great Commission
2. To strongly encourage effective mission and discipleship that leads to conversion growth, disciples being made, leaders being empowered, churches being planted and churches being renewed and growing.
3. To passionately stimulate Gospel renewal in the Uniting Church, starting with congregations, who are the embodiment in one place of One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church (B of U Para 4 and 15(a))
4. To hold the position that marriage is the covenantal relationship of one man and one woman while at the same time recognising the integrity of each minister and / or congregation/church council to make its own decisions on this matter.

### **What will the Generate Presbytery be responsible for?**

The Generate Presbytery will be responsible for everything the regulations allow it to be responsible for except what the Generate Presbytery Task Group agree it should delegate to the Synod.

### **Why are we doing this?**

We believe that God is calling us to form this new Generate Presbytery primarily to enable us together to more effectively and vigorously pursue the Great Commission to make disciples. While the Assembly decision (see below) prompted this move, the Generate Presbytery is not primarily a reaction to the Assembly decision but is a proactive move towards exponentially ramping up our engagement in mission together that leads to conversion growth, disciples being made, leaders being empowered, churches being planted and churches being renewed and growing. The decision of the 15th Assembly marked a significant turning point with which the Uniting Church had been wrestling with for 30 years or more. It was about more than marriage. The Assembly accepted that there are [at least] two very different understandings of marriage and with those understandings, [at least] two very different theological, missional and ecclesiological frameworks in the Uniting Church. These were named as "mutually exclusive."







# GENERATE

The broad evangelical framework which we believe is at the heart of the Basis of Union is one of those frameworks. Those who believe they have received that revelation of the Gospel, after significant prayer and discernment, agreed to do three things:

1. Stand firm in the worship, witness and service of the broad evangelical faith we have received.
2. Stand aside from other theological, missional, ethical and ecclesiological frameworks that are beyond the broad evangelical faith in the basis of union.
3. Move forward in obedience to Jesus Christ's great commission central to the evangelical faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Out of the decision to stand firm, stand aside and move forward came the proposal to form a non-geographic presbytery that, while not able to or wanting to prescribe an individual's or congregation's faith, mission or ethic; would enable a fruitful collection of congregations within the polity of the UCA to express their witness, worship and service in an uninterrupted and broad evangelical expression.

## **Why now?**

The decision of the 15th UCA Assembly has come at a time of significant concern at the lack of baptisms and conversions in UCA congregations. In addition, we have been confronted with the reality of 30% of Australians [50% + of Australians under 40] responding as a "none" when it comes to religious and specifically Christian faith. In the light of the Great Commission and the urgency of people's need to hear and know Jesus Christ, we believe the time is now to act. If not now, when?

## **What about rural congregations?**

The Generate Presbytery being a non geographical presbytery can encompass both rural and urban churches who will choose to join together in order to enrich our mission to our communities as we seek to see people come Christ and grow in their faith. Suggestions and ideas are beginning around how we ensure strong relationships across the breadth of the presbytery and when it is formed there will be an emphasis on how we structure and resource ourselves to ensure that rural congregations are supported.