



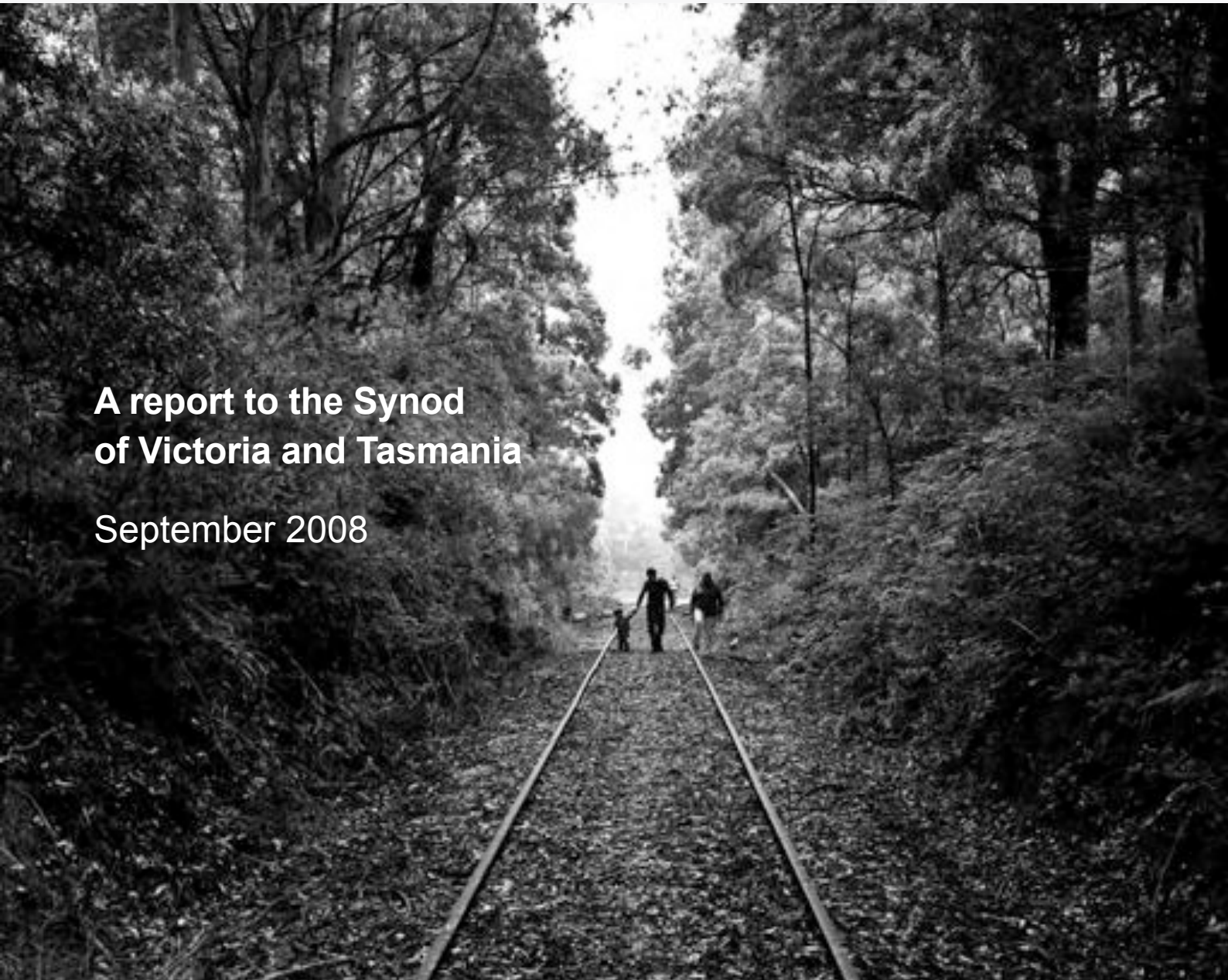
Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

On the Way Together

Report on a Spirited journey towards the future

**A report to the Synod
of Victoria and Tasmania**

September 2008



On the Way Together **Report on a Spirited journey towards the future**

On the Way to Together is a special project of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. This project has been developed in response to a requirement of the Synod meeting 2007 that the General Secretary provide to the Synod meeting of 2008 a Synod strategic plan.

The On the Way Together project leadership team includes:
Rob Brown, Raoul Spackman-Williams, Robyn Batten, Kim Cain, Adrian Pyle and John Emmett.

Author: John A. Emmett
Editor: Alan Austin
Art and Design: Redfish Bluefish Creative
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Report to the UCA Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Synod meeting

September 2008

Foreword

The 2007 Synod meeting affirmed the development of a new strategic plan for the Synod. A small Synod Strategic Plan Team has been working since to design the project.

The approach has involved presbyteries, church councils, congregations and other UCA bodies in Victoria and Tasmania, along with the Synod.

On the Way Together – A Spirited journey towards the future is the approach designed to address the Synod's decision. This approach posed two key questions:

- Who are we?
and
- What are we called to?

then added a third:

- Who is our neighbour?

These questions are explored with a guiding metaphor and four movements.

The guiding metaphor is pilgrimage. This practice helps disciples rediscover their *way towards the promised goal*. A pilgrimage is an intentional journey. It enables observation and reflection, refreshment and inspiration.

The journey requires us to set aside time for observation, reflection and

conversation. Pilgrims listen to stories, share testimonies and contemplate. These practices hold us in an abiding relationship with God.

Pilgrimage is also a time of walking together. The shared journey is as critical as the destination. We are accompanied by the Spirit of God. We pray that God's Spirit will embrace, inspire, enthuse and encourage us as we go.

Four movements characterise our pilgrimage. They are:

- inquiry
- imagination
- innovation
- implementation.

Inquiry

We took our first steps together, listening for stories of where and when God's life had been realized amongst us. We recognized these experiences as times when the church was most wholly about God's calling to be a sign, foretaste or instrument to God's mission. Our first steps led us into an exploration of who we are. Data received from the *Spirited conversations* revealed that ours is a fluid tradition. We identified five life-giving themes to help us consider our future. Now we rejoice and give thanks for the identity we have through Jesus Christ.

Imagine

Our pilgrimage will take us into places rich with imagination. We may adopt the five life-giving themes and their descriptions. Then we can discern the strength and timeliness of these themes for the continuing journey. We ask *Who is our neighbour?* This helps us know the culture and context with which the gospel will interact. We are freed to imagine new ways to be true to our identity and to our calling. We extrapolate from the best of having been a sign, foretaste or instrument of God's mission to imagine what might be. We rest with our proposals in contemplation. We imagine a future as if it were already real.

Innovation

Now the pilgrimage takes each group on a more particular and immediate pathway. Innovation requires us to engage with what we have imagined. So we plan ways to put the imagined scenarios into effect. We rest for a while to meditate. We discern how God's resources, available to us through the Spirit's gifts and resources, can be applied in particular settings and relationships.

Implementation

Our pilgrimage pathway becomes more personal and sometimes more difficult. This happens when we are true to our identity as the people of God. We will embrace our distinctive history as the Uniting Church in Australia. To join with God in bringing about the imagined future, we become a missional church. Our plans are 'strategic' because they indicate how we might align our lives with God's mission in the world. They are plans for faithful, loyal and trusting discipleship.

Our journey so far

The journey began in March 2008. Between March and May various councils, agencies, commissions and other bodies of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania participated in *On the Way Together Spirited conversations*. These began the **Inquire** stage. Processing the data collected then occurred during June and July. Five themes and their descriptions resulted. These are recommended to the Synod in this report.

The second stage of the *On the Way Together journey – Imagine* – was trialled with various groups. The results are in the *sample provocative propositions* and *sample provocative proposals* included in this report. The groups and councils which read them may wish to adopt them or find others that better represent their particular calling and life.

Where to next?

Should the Synod meeting adopt the proposals – the five life-giving themes, theme descriptions and action recommended – then church councils will explore them further. While the themes give direction each council must determine its own response to God's calling in its context. Neighbourhoods vary tremendously. Characteristics of some will be absent in others. The church finds diverse ways to be a dynamic presence in specific contexts. So, the **Imagine** stage is designed to be engaged by the various councils and the Synod.

The **Innovation** stage occurs within each of the church's councils. Agencies, commissions, committees or projects of each council may also develop specific plans. If so, these will reflect both the influence of the Synod wide themes and the particular provocative proposals of the council to which these bodies are accountable. The Synod's *On the Way Together* leadership team and consultant

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will provide assistance and resources to help councils through the **Innovation** stage.

The **Implementation** stage occurs within the day to day life of the councils of the Church. Implementation of plans will take account of their priorities, resources and relationships. At this point *On the Way Together* hands over to the usual processes by which councils make decisions and support other councils.

The planning team and consultant trust that this pilgrimage will be truly refreshing and inspiring to the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania's vocation as a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's mission in the world.

Rob Brown
General Secretary



Summary

Key theological affirmations – at a glance

The following are the key assumptions in developing *On the Way Together*. These are discussed in greater depth in the appendix *Planning to consider future directions for a missional church* (See Section **Appendices**, p48).

- The whole church is God's and its future is in God's hands.
- The Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania (UCA VT) is called into being and sustained by God to be a missional church.
- God's purpose for the church is to be *the sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God*. Put another way, it is to
 - *to witness to the reign of God*, as embodied in Jesus Christ, by acting (faithfully as a people sent) in the public sphere;
 - *to be the apostle to the world*, bearing a distinctively Christian worldview into an alien landscape;
 - *to cultivate communities of the Holy Spirit* whose members bear the particular marks of Christian values, language and commitment to the reign of God.

From The BOMAR Theological Framework, and Preamble to *On The Way Together*. The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania 2008. (Text in braces added for clarity of meaning.)

- The UCA VT has experienced God through 'grace upon grace'. Therefore our responses are gratitude, loving faithfulness, trust and loyalty.
- *The UCA Constitution and Regulations* describe the church as a body of interrelated councils. We have an interconciliar polity of interdependence of councils. Yet

each council has responsibilities within its bounds.

- The UCA VT commits its councils to a consensus approach to decision making, set out in *The manual for meetings*.
- UCA polity means councils may discern together, but each council must make decisions within its jurisdiction.
- The Synod may call councils to discern and agree together about broad future directions of the church. Each council must then adopt plans particular to its context.
- God calls us to creativity and repentance. Creativity requires curiosity, listening and imagination. Repentance requires self assessment, confession and forgiveness. It requires also the intent to turn from that which has been the church's 'stumbling block'.
- Having experienced God's grace, we are free to be freshly curious about our context and seek the Spirit's insight to inspire our imaginations about changing lives and communities.
- The church is a called out people of particular vocations. We listen for God's calling to places, people and structures. We join with God as partners in God's movement towards a new creation.



4

Implement

People are recruited to particular projects, programs or tasks set out in the **plans to be a missional church**. The people put the plans into action. The plans give particular attention to sustaining the relationship with God that nourishes *worship, witness and service*.

Adding details and activities such as:

- attending to our Christian spiritual practices
- deepening our faith
- extending our discipleship
- making practical arrangements
- gathering and allocating the resources
- administrating the programs, projects or tasks
- nurturing the relationships that grow
- building on our strengths
- joining supportive networks
- evaluating the plan and activity in the light of being a *sign, foretaste and instrument of God's reign*

contributing to being a missional church

2

Imagine

Considering themes and **theme descriptions** in relation to our call to be the people of God and our vocational callings to mission

Adding:

- information about our context
- information about our culture
- information about our neighbour
- God's good news

contributing to Provocative Propositions and Provocative Proposals

3

Innovate

Groups work from the **provocative proposals**, developing detailed plans to bring about the envisioned future
Adding

- Christian spiritual practices to sustain and inspire us to be a people *sent* to join God's mission in the world.

and information about:

- people and neighbourhoods
- locations
- time
- relationships
- resources
- funds

contributing to plans to be a missional church

Sometimes known as strategic plans, these show our goals, methods, resources, relationships and assessment processes. The plans reflect our understanding of being a *sign, foretaste and instrument of God's reign* in all creation.

1

Inquire

Spirited Conversations inquiring into the values and activity of the church when it has been its most whole as a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's reign...

contributing to Themes and Theme descriptions

On the Way Together

Four Movements "at a glance"

On the Way Together Five Life giving themes

On the Way Together uses the metaphor of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage sets aside the concerns of daily life to take an intentional journey. In the first step we reflected, listened and testified to our experiences of being the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania. More than 40 responses were received from the conversations of more than 1500 people.

Five themes emerged from the conversations:

- Encountering Christ in community
- Living God's transforming story
- Spirited listening, giving voice
- Liberating stewardship
- Engaging diversity.

Each contributes to the next steps of our pilgrimage.

How might we encounter Christ in community? Perhaps this will come as we witness and serve in the name of Christ. Maybe it will come in the faces and lives of our neighbours or the stranger. As we invest in experiences with others, God's grace will become clearer. We are the body of Christ, the 'In-Christ' community. Participating in the worship, witness and service of Christian congregations or faith-based communities is often where we encounter Christ. As we journey, let us watch and listen for Christ. Let us celebrate being the In-Christ community in all that we are and do.

Living God's transforming story is about how the ordinary becomes extraordinary. It is about living every day aware of the love and grace of God. One tradition names this 'practicing the presence of God'. This theme reminds us that pilgrims attend to the practices of daily life in a spirit of inquiry and interpretation. Pilgrims learn from scripture. We are formed through the personal disciplines which become the rhythms of our life. We mind how we walk this pilgrimage, alone and together.

Spirited listening, giving voice reflects our Christian character. Jesus' life and ministry shapes our listening disposition. We listen and speak as Luke's gospel tells us Jesus listened and spoke. We are to *be good news to the poor, to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the time of the Lord's favour.* We listen with Christ's ears, we watch through his eyes. Our pilgrim disposition is to listen and speak out of God's love and grace. Our attitude and practice are of extravagant compassion and liberating reconciliation. Pilgrims communicate, listening to the other's story, speaking God's love and grace in response.

Engaging diversity celebrates the reality of our life as the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania. This theme calls us to engage and embrace ever more fully the diversity of God's creation. On the pilgrimage we meet many people. We hear their stories, sing their songs, dance their steps and enjoy their food. How does this hospitality feed us? What might we learn and how do we benefit from engaging with neighbours and strangers? We are reminded that through hospitality we may entertain God's messengers unaware. Pilgrims engage diversity because doing so teaches, nourishes and uplifts. We discover new relationships. The promise of the gospel is realised in the communion at the heart of diversity.

Liberating stewardship reminds us that our resources are not for our benefit. They are to enable God's work in the world. When our resources are liberated, they bring healing, reconciliation, peace and new life. When they are withheld, we lack generosity, we are inhospitable and exclusive. Our Uniting Church is blest with incredible resources. We see these in the diversity of people, their gifts and strengths, our funds and properties and many other assets. We are rich in highly valued relationships with governments, institutions and neighbours. Travelling

Section One: Summary

pilgrims are marked by their hospitality and generosity, and for the ways they respond to the hospitality and generosity of others.

What happens next?

We have completed the first *On the Way Together* movement,

INQUIRE

resulting in five life giving themes and their descriptions. These reflect our experiences of the church when it has been at its most whole or most closely fulfilled its purpose.

We have engaged the second *On the Way Together* movement,

IMAGINE

resulting in the first set of provocative propositions and proposals.

We are now aware of the context and cultures within which the church functions. We are also aware of the Spirit of God's direction and inspiration into the future.

The next *On the Way Together* movement to engage is

INNOVATE

getting ready to take initiatives that will express our vocation, joining the mission of God where we are called to be.

You can find out more about **INNOVATE** in Section Four of this booklet, p 42.

What practical assistance is available?

Phone and email

Contact John Emmett:
john.emmett@victas.uca.org.au
or (03) 9251 5404

You will be directed to a website, resource or person who can assist.

Websites

www.victas.uca.org.au
or www.onthewaytogether.org
provide resources for download, podcast and MP3 audio files to assist with *On the Way Together*.

People

Informed people are available to agencies and councils finding difficulty with *On the Way Together*.

Some of these people comprise a reference group to the pilgrimage process. This group is composed of at least one person from each presbytery and major cluster of agencies. The Mission Participation Resource Unit also has facilitators available.

Presbytery ministers have access to applicable resources and are a source of practical help.

Following the 2008 Synod meeting, the Synod's CTM and CFM staff teams will develop resources from time to time. These will be available from websites for download.

Books

A list of resources is included in Section Four of this booklet.