

A section from the
On the Way Together
Report
September 2009



inquire imagine
innovate implement

appendices



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.

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Appendix 1

Implementing an *On the Way Together* journey in a local setting

Significant things to consider

when setting aside time and resources for an *On the Way Together* journey include:

- Total time required – about 3 months
- Number of public workshops – 3
- Number of movements – 4: Inquire, Imagine, Innovate, Implement
- Number of interviews – 10 to 15; more if you intend to speak with people not associated with the inner church, but with whom you sense a call to God's mission
- Number of themes – 1 to 6
- Number of provocative propositions and proposals – 1 to 10
- Number of times *On the Way Together* journey, themes and propositions or proposals are communicated – endless!
Redundancy as a principle suggests at least 20 times before people really 'get it'!

*Note: For practical purposes, the Spirited Conversations of the Inquiry state of *On the Way Together* may occur in a preliminary workshop, using small groups.*

Alternatively, the conversations can be conducted as an inquiry using several interviews with selected people. If interviews are used, the data arising from these can be collated and reported. This data can be added to that arising from the First Workshop, or used to develop themes and descriptions without running the first workshop.

People and stuff you will need:

- **An *On the Way Together* facilitation group** – 4 to 5 people, good with process, 'intuitives' by nature, skilled interpreters of information
- **Theological capacity** – *On the Way Together* is a process that requires theological reflection at each movement. We bring our awareness of the purpose of the church and being the UCA (*The Basis of Union*), our particular traditions and practices to the journey. It is about much more than developing a plan! *On the Way Together* is about clarifying our call to God's mission, finding our vocation as the people of God in this place and time.
- **A 'map' of the journey** setting out critical dates. These include:
 - Interview dates and times - Inquire
 - First public workshop – Inquire
 - Facilitation group report to the church council and congregation
 - Responses to the themes and their respective descriptions. Individuals and groups invited to respond do so by a set date
 - Second public workshop – to use the themes to develop provocative propositions.
 - Ministry groups meet to progress relevant provocative propositions into provocative proposals. And then shape the initiatives required to implement the necessary steps towards fulfilling the proposals' scenarios.

- Third public workshop
 - Innovate – bringing together the work of the various ministry groups to sort out priorities for each and the resourcing allocated, etc. This is the more usual planning stuff. You might also set up assessment criteria to keep each initiative on-target
- **Information about your mission context –**
 - Who are the neighbours with whom you are seeking to establish relationships?
 - What do you know about these neighbours?
 - Can these people be included in the interview process, or even in the first public workshop? This could help you understand how the church is regarded or help you see God already in their midst?
 - The NCLS and/or Christian Resource Association can provide demographic data about your region for a small cost, usually about \$100. This draws on ABS and regional data.
- **Information about your church –**
 - NCLS data (2001, 2006) will provide a snapshot, probably a little out of focus, but useful none-the-less.
 - Arising from the 10 to 15 interviews taken in the Inquire movement.
- **Information about the culture of your region, neighbourhood and church.** By this we mean culture in its wider sense of the ways in which the people live their lives. This might include prevailing attitudes and dispositions, as well as behaviours. Or: what makes the place tick?
- **The *On the Way Together* publications and website –**
www.onthewaytogether.org or
www.victas.uca.org.au/onthewaytogether
There are podcasts, audio files and documents for download.

Appendix 2

On the Way Together

Planning to consider future directions for a missional church

John A Emmett
OTWT Consultant

The design of the *On the Way Together* planning process has incorporated various theological ideas. These are discussed briefly in the following.

The processes included in *On the Way Together* are tools – simple instruments adapted from disciplines other than theology and forged in communities different from the church. Are these tools adequate? Yes, and no.

When we consider the mission of God, no human planning can be perfect or complete. For Christians, there is always a sense in which planning – a forward looking and ‘futuring’ process by which we set out to achieve certain ends – is presumptuous. We must avoid any manipulation that would take over what is rightly the work of the Spirit among us and our neighbours. On the other hand, the faith-filled exercise of our responsibility as stewards of the gospel requires that we use all our human faculties. The overall design of *On the Way Together* has attempted to hold a radical tension between human planning on the one hand and the guidance of the Spirit on the other.

The foundations of the approach in *On the Way Together* arise from understanding the church as a participant, called by God. It is not so much that the church itself has a mission. Rather, God has a mission and the church is God’s inspired, spirited companion. The focus is not on the church, but on its vocation. By vocation we mean the identity of the church, its call to be the people of God. God has called

us to be agents of grace to the world in particular contexts and times.

Through *On the Way Together* we inquire into the God’s particular callings. We are inviting an exploration of the sent-ness of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania. Our church is called into this world, where God’s mission awaits the church’s partnership. The shorthand way of stating this concept is to use the term *missional church*.

What do we mean by missional church?

A missional church is clear about its vocation. It understands it is set aside to be the people of God, now, in this place. This means discerning our particular callings. How will the church engage with the God’s mission in a given context?

How does such clarity and discernment come?

First, in worship. *“Worship helps us to understand that God is missional, that is, that God enters the world in love and grace, and sends Jesus, the Holy Spirit, churches, even kings and asses into the world so that the world might know and be drawn to life and allegiance.”*

Second, by inviting, discerning and engaging with God’s callings.

Theologian Darrel Guder suggests we consider the marks of the missional church by reversing the order of traditionally stated marks of the church. Thus, the marks become *apostolic* (sent), *catholic* (universal), *holy* (God created and inspired) and *one* (united across all of its generative diversity).

Gary Simpson suggests that the marks of a contemporary missional church include *promise, confession, communion, communication* and *vocation*. Simpson and other writers in the Gospel and our Culture Network (GOC) refer to the theological insights of Karl Barth. They

recall his understanding of three great movements of God's grace – justification, sanctification and vocation. Some GOC theologians suggest the church has paid attention to the first two of these but not to the third.

Third, through sustained inquiry.

A missional church persistently seeks to know where God is at work in our context and culture, and how. The call to a missional church is to join with God in that place and time. Remember, missional churches have both a vocation or identity, and callings or an 'agency' or purpose. Each missional church is called into being by the Spirit of the resurrected Christ. The calling to discipleship, initiated in baptism and sustained through attending to the spiritual life, is always to a particular context and time. *On the Way Together* seeks to provide ways to sustain our inquiry into the call and callings of God.

Fourth, by taking heed of God's purpose.

When Lesslie Newbigin described the purpose of the missional church, he said it is to be 'the sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God.' Richard Bass, summarizes the missional church's purpose as

- *to represent the reign of God, to be a people sent... to act faithfully on behalf of the reign of God 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.*

The three styles of spirited conversations in the *On the Way Together* pilgrimage help us listen to stories of having been a missional church. These are important elements of our tradition and memory, although they are not the only stories we

have to tell. Hopefully, over time more stories will be told. Each one asks: *Where is God in this story? What deep resonance do we sense between this story and the call to be the people of God on the journey to the promised goal?*

On the Way Together does not end with the conversations. Nor does the pilgrimage end with the synod meeting at which broad themes might be adopted to guide us into the future. Every expression of the UCA in Victoria and Tasmania must continue to worship, discern, inquire and take heed. When we do so, alone or in concert, we truly are 'a people on the way together with God'.

This is why *On the Way Together* includes three articles in addition to the presentation of themes arising from spirited conversations. These will help us understand the context and cultures of the many communities and bodies that comprise the UCA synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

We might also continue to ask questions such as "whose voices have we not yet heard?" and "which voice have we heard but not yet heeded?" Or "where and when is a positive discrimination warranted by the call of God?"

How has the process of *On the Way Together* applied these insights?

On the Way Together is a pilgrimage. The journey does not end with a planning exercise. There are several broad stages to the journey. Each one invites us to put down our burdens, rest a while, reflect on our past, present and future unhindered by everyday concerns. At each stage, it is up to the participants to decide how to avail themselves of God's grace that comes through worship, discernment, inquiry and taking heed. So in many ways *On the Way Together* is what each participant makes of it. The pilgrimage is defined, but not limited; it makes use of some tools

but invites the discovery and application of others; it has direction but is open to tangents and wandering.

To begin the pilgrimage, the synod and the general secretary have invited the participating councils, agencies, commissions and boards of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania to reflect on the experiences of having been '*a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's reign*' in the past.

To do so the initial spirited conversations offered three styles of conversation to help us look back and walk forward. We asked two questions: Whose are we? and What are we called to? Through recalling our memories of living the Christian life, the church can hear about times when it has been faithful in responding to God's call.

If we are to continue in obedience, we must listen for God's voice, as well as giving attention to defective memories, repentant hearts and willing spirits. We cannot do less if we are to be a movement (*The Basis of Union*) '*on the way to the promised goal*'. God's voice may be heard in our past, as well as in our present and future.

After the 2008 synod meetings we will introduce the next broad stage. This will involve each of the participating groups within the synod considering their own callings. Each may decide how to do so, and with whom. Each can consider the place for confession and celebration. Each can develop theological understandings to guide the specific planning that emerges. *On the Way Together* will continue to provide guidance, tools and processes that each of the participants may find helpful. Hopefully, resources developed by one participant might be made available to others.

Why focus on aspects of our past and present that we appreciate?

The first step of the *On the Way Together* pilgrimage is to accept that we are God's

called people. We often forget that our relationship with a gracious, loving and faithful God is initiated and sustained by God. We fall short of God's perfection. Like the early church, we experience disputes, dissension and unexpected interventions. Nevertheless, we can also tell stories that point to the divine in our midst. We share these stories because they reflect the vitality and life-giving joy of the Spirit of God. Telling these stories is a powerful experience, not because they might be positive, but because they remind us about, and re-member us into, the grace of God we have known in our own faith community. Gratitude is the appropriate response.

On the other hand, we are also aware of the many pathologies that are caught up into our history as the people of God. Confession and lament, repentance and reconciliation are equally aspects of our story. In Christ, we know ourselves to be made whole. This incredible gift from God is both a past and present reality, in spite of our brokenness and disease. Wholeness is an element of the promised goal to which we journey. When we engage the stories of our experience of God's wholeness, we are liberated to explore further how God's healing and reconciliation are available. Each story evokes a pondering of God's grace, love, compassion and liberty. And we ask, '*where is God extending God's gifts?*' so that we might join with God in this experience.

Listening for the Spirit of God

The first Christian communities developed their participation in mission as much by conflict, disruption, interruption and surprise as by planning. From scripture we see that the church grew in grace and numbers, in influence and impact by the Spirit's presence and power. Often there was no strategy in place and no plan predicting direction. The church, and in particular each faith community had to '*engage in faith / discernment to sort out issues related to the changes taking place in their (particular) contexts.*'

The prophets of the Jewish scriptures urged God's people to lift their heads and hearts. They did so by describing the society and relationships into which God might lead the people as if they were present day realities. 'Forth-telling', creating scenarios of stories yet to be experienced, was a favored form of proclamation for Judaic prophets. Today we recognize this activity as prolepsis.

On the Way Together invites every body comprising the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania to enter into the same experience. What propositions can we form about the future, now, in the present? The invitation is to engage our proleptic imaginations, to see as God might see. What is happening in our context in five, ten years time? How is the church, the people of God, incarnating God's good news to the people of the neighborhood? What is the new society into which God has called his people? How has the church's vocation influenced the context and culture that surrounds it? When the themes emerging from the *On the Way Together* pilgrimage are released into our proleptic story-telling, how does God speak to us?

Will the synod's strategic planning dictate the direction of other councils and congregations?

While there is a sense in which God calls the church as a whole, God's call also comes to each expression of the church. This means that each congregation and Christian community is to be listening and responding to God's calling. The synod cannot discern the calling of a particular congregation, and vice-versa. Each entity must be free to hear and

respond to God's calling in ways that are connected to the context and culture in which the people find themselves. There is not a reduction at work here, one that suggests or supports a model in which the synod can know the context for all. Each congregation, agency or commission must be acutely aware of the context and culture within which it lives.

However, our Uniting Church conciliar polity commits each council to connectedness between councils. One way to maintain this, yet honor the freedom to respond to God's call is to work to broad themes. Within our context and cultures there are sufficient commonalities to allow themes that enable connectedness, yet also foster particularity. Hence the work of *On the Way Together* continues after the 2008 synod meeting. Each faith community, congregation, presbytery and the synod itself, will engage with the *On the Way Together* themes in exercises to refine the guiding propositions or provocative proposals into clear planning to bring those proposals to reality.

Sometimes, this work might require the congregation or other council of the church to stop and reflect on its error and willfulness. Then, as always, confession and reconciliation are necessary. At times, the church might discover healing and reconciliation in compassionate acts of forgiveness. *On The Way Together* does not limit or restrict such activity, because it is essential to wholeness. It begins with rehearsing the stories of God's grace and expressing gratitude for them. Only in this light is the realization of the human condition able to be reckoned with.

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- i Mark Lau Branson, *Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church*, p 110, *The Missional Church in Context*, Craig Van Gelder (Ed). Eerdmans, 2007
 - ii Darrel Guder – in an essay titled, *Walking Worthily*, Princeton Seminary Bulletin, 2007 and in discussions with John Emmett & Adrian Pyle at Princeton, May 2008
 - iii Gary Simpson – in an essay titled, *A Reformation Wasted is a Terrible Thing*, from *The Missional Church in Congregational Context*, Craig Van Gelder (Ed), Eerdmans, 2007. Comment is supported by Darrel Guder (ibid) and others.
 - iv Richard Bass, *Being Drawn into the Missional Church*, Alban Institute, 2006
 - v Darrel Guder, *Missiology and the Missional Church*, P 31; *The Missional Church in Context*, Craig Van Gelder (Ed) Eerdmans, 2007.

Appendix 3

The following article, Gospel, Culture And The Future Church? by Randall Prior responds to a request for an article that focuses on an understanding the 'era shift' our Church is experiencing. The article provides as a contextual consideration to the UCA Synod of Victoria and Tasmania when with respect to future directions.

Gospel, Culture And The Future Church?

Randall Prior

1. The Contemporary Context of the Uniting Church

There have been very significant cultural changes in Australia over the past few decades. Attitudes, behaviour and beliefs in the present are not the same as those in the past. This is because we have experienced major cultural changes over the last few generations. An attempt to explain some of these in a clear form is given below.

i) The Wider Cultural Context – “God at the Centre” (Christendom)

In the past era, there was a general assumption about the existence of God: that God is at the centre of our world, and that all people believe in God, or will come to believe in God, where ‘God’ is understood in Christian terms. This era is sometimes referred to as ‘Christendom’. Some people trace its origins back as early as the 4th century when the Christian Faith became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

God at the centre implies ... the church at the centre, so that ...

- Everyone believes in God and feels as though they belong to the church even if they are not committed attenders of weekly worship
- Christianity is the only public faith and the society is considered to be Christian

- The church is central to all people and to society: Sundays are Sabbath days, rites of passage (rituals to do with birth, marriage and death) belong to the church; politicians are Christian and operate with Christian values; loyal members attend church with regularity and everyone attends at Easter and Christmas; the church runs social and sporting groups for all ages
- The authority of the church extends over its members, and is a powerful influence in society
- Every local community has a church. In fact, for every community there are a number of churches, one for each of the established traditions
- Sunday worship is well attended by all age-groups, with services in mornings and evenings, and with large Sunday Schools and youth groups. Lay leadership is plentiful.
- There is an assumed permanence about church structures, buildings, liturgy, and the future of the church and its place in society is assured.

Note: It is this past era which is the living memory and heritage of contemporary Australian churches and which has given general form to Australian church life.

ii) The Wider Cultural Context – “the Thinking Individual at the Centre” (Modernism)

The past era of ‘Christendom’ has been fast disappearing, replaced by an era which we call ‘modernism’. The main assumptions of this modern era are contained in the statement ... ***I think, therefore I am.*** Now ‘the human self’ is at the centre and God is ‘omitted’, or pushed to the edge.

The ‘thinking individual’ at the centre and God on the edge implies that the church is on the edge, so that...

- Individuality and rationality become the main commitments of the society; individuals are free to make their own personal choices and 'do their own thing'; and nothing is accepted as true unless it can be proven to be true by rational means
- Any external authority (e.g. the authority of parents, school teachers, police, and church) is challenged while the authority of people over their own lives increases ... it is now the human person who decides what is good for herself or him self.
- The human person is now manager of creation and in control of its destiny
- Politicians are no longer assumed to be Christian and the society distances itself from a Christian milieu and Christian values; there are civil birth rites, civil marriages, civil funerals; Sunday is now a day with many options apart from going to worship
- The church is no longer at the centre of people's lives; fewer people choose to belong to the church; there is optional and irregular attendance at worship, and optional involvement in the church; The Christian faith becomes a matter of personal choice alongside many other possible choices
- Because you cannot prove, scientifically, the existence of God, then Christian belief is relegated to the realm of private and subjective belief, over against matters of public and objective fact
- Denominational choice means denominational diversity and a wider array of churches

Note: It is the era of modernism which has had the most powerful influence on recent generations of Australian life. As the

past era of Christendom disappears, and modernism emerges, much of the form of church life of the past is undermined and disintegrates. As a result, many people regard the church as old-fashioned, belonging to the past. The consequence of the decay of Christendom, at local congregational level, is the existence of small, ageing congregations, unable to sustain the inherited structures of Christendom.

iii) The Wider Cultural Context – “Searching for a personal spirituality” (post-modernism)

The era of 'post-modernism' is the most recent development in our Australian cultural history. Sometimes dated from the loss of confidence in modern western culture that followed the Second World War and the Holocaust in Germany, this cultural movement questions scientific rationality and looks to uncover diverse voices and perspectives as sources of authority equal to any other traditional authority.

Within post-modernism, there is a recognition that human beings are not only 'rational' but also 'spiritual' beings; in fact, post-modernism encourages the irrational, honours the validity of feelings and experience, and accepts the reality of transcendence. The making of choices, the value of difference, and the search for a meaningful personal spirituality have become markers of post-modern cultural identity. The Church is thought to exist for the sake of satisfying the individual's search for authentic life and meaning in a self-authenticating society

The era of post-modernism presents both difficulties and opportunities for the Christian churches. On the one hand, the Christian Faith is considered to be the faith of the past, the era of Christendom, and the assumed familiarity of the Christian story leads people to search for meaning elsewhere. Gone are the days when the Christian story can claim any special privileges or authority in our society.

On the other hand, Post-modern acceptance of the public validity of religious belief, of diverse truths, and many ways of knowing, makes more room for religious belief in general, and therefore for Christian belief in particular. We are now in an era which is marked by the common search for a personal do-it-yourself spirituality. It is a culture of options, with belief in God as one of many possible and acceptable options. Also, familiarity with the Christian story is fading from social memory, and the Gospel may be heard with new ears.

3. Rediscovering what it is to be the Church

The present era is one in which it is important to rediscover what it means to be the Church. What is the Church's unique purpose and role in the world?

Properly understood, we can only speak about the role of the Church after we speak about the meaning of the Christian Gospel, because the church has its foundation and purpose in the Gospel. There are many different ways of expressing the Gospel; however, the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church provides language and insights by which the Uniting Church may continue to understand and speak of the Gospel in today's world.

The Gospel

The Uniting Church, living and working within the faith and unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, declares that, in Jesus Christ, God has acted decisively to overcome the power of sin, evil and death, and to reconcile the whole of creation. In Jesus, God's promised rule of grace, righteousness and love has come in order to bring about a new beginning for the world. The whole of the life of Jesus, including his teaching and miracles, and climaxing in his death and resurrection, mirrors the presence of this promised rule.

Through the Holy Spirit, this victory of God in Jesus Christ is made effective in the lives of people, giving a foretaste of God's gift of reconciliation and renewal which is the destiny in view for the whole of creation. (*The Basis of Union*: para. 2,3)

The Church

The Church is the community of people founded on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, renewed and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The Church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection, and the final fulfilment of God's Easter victory for all creation. In its life in the world, the Church has the unique privilege of celebrating, embodying and witnessing to the new way of life, which is God's gift and promise in Jesus Christ. Thus the Church, in its life in the world, points the world to, and anticipates the final coming of the rule of God. The Church is sustained and renewed in this by the work of the Holy Spirit. (*The Basis of Union*: para. 3,4)

The Meaning and Content of Mission

The word 'mission' refers, first of all, to the nature of the Triune God who reaches out in love to the world, to overcome all that dehumanises or destroys the world, and to draw the world into communion with God's self. This missionary God has acted decisively and uniquely in Jesus Christ to accomplish this victory. God calls and sends the Church into the world to celebrate, embody and witness to this victory in Christ. All that the Church is and does is therefore 'apostolic' or 'missionary', pointing the world to the missionary purpose of God. It is not that the Church carries out the mission of God, but that God, in reaching out in love to renew the world, embraces the Church in that missionary purpose.

In this light, it is not helpful to say that

'mission to the world is one of the many aspects of the Church's life (along with worship, pastoral care, learning the faith)',

but rather that

‘all that the Church is and does (including worship, pastoral care, learning the faith) belongs to the mission of God in and for the world’.

The word ‘church’ represents a new way of being in the world, and this new way is expressed in the local church community’s gathered and dispersed life, in worship, learning, fellowship, pastoral care, in the family and employment life of its people, etc.

4. Anticipating the Forms of the Church in a Post-Modern Society...

It is not a simple matter to anticipate a future shape of the church but the indications are that

- the church’s place in Australian society will be as one faith group in a society of several faiths and religions
- the church will be marginal to the main interests and activities of our society (from the point of view of the society)
- local congregations may be increasingly dependent on lay leadership
- there may be little interest among church people in denominational loyalty
- there will be fewer material and person resources to maintain the structures and activities and buildings which we have known in the past
- there will be a diversity of forms and styles of church life, and for some church communities, there may be only a loose connection with buildings

Note: Whatever forms of church life emerge in the future, the validity of that

form will rest on its faithfulness to the Christian Gospel, and the centrality of the Gospel to all it is and does. Not all new forms will necessarily be faithful forms, and the continuing forms from earlier generations will continue to have an important place in faithful worship.

Strategic Planning in the Church

The church doesn’t need to have a ‘strategic plan’ in order to be the church. In fact, there are significant matters to consider in using this language and embarking on this road:

1. The language of ‘strategic plan’ is the language of management rather than the language of the Christian faith. Does this language suggest that the church is able to plan, manage or strategise the work of God, the Gospel of Christ, the movement of the Holy Spirit?
2. The language of ‘strategic plan’ is the language of ‘modernism’ where it is assumed that the destiny of the world is in the hands of the human person, and life can be managed by human agents. In the church context, this can be done by church members of councils, ‘with God’s help’ of course.
3. The language of ‘strategic plan’ may helpfully be replaced by what is more clearly important for the life of the church in any age, namely ‘the discernment of what is faithful’. This is the ongoing task of all Christian communities.
4. The proposal for a strategic plan suggests an agenda of self-consciousness, self-justification and self-preservation about the life and witness of the church. In all three senses of ‘self’, these are radically opposed to the very heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which

liberates us from self-consciousness, which justifies us by grace, and which, radically, calls us to die to ourselves in order then to receive life

5. For much of its thirty year history, the Uniting Church has been occupied with matters of self-concern, with restructuring, with redefining, and with strategic planning (called 'five-year plans' in the '80s). All of these are a detour from the calling of the church and have been inclined to be talk-fests without much consequence. May this current process possibly be similar in effect? Can the Church in its many forms use *On the Way Together* to initiate ways to engage in deeper theological reflection about the purpose and calling of the Church? To do so will be to engage in much more than talk fest.
6. The Synod of Vic-Tas, at its meeting in 2000, adopted a vision under the umbrella heading of 'lifelong education for ministry for the whole people of God'. This remains an urgent priority. No strategic plan is needed to identify this.
7. The proposal for a strategic plan has the character of a 'theology of glory' in which the church seeks a sense of calculated self-importance, a desire to retrieve or enhance its effectiveness in society, and to recover a relevance in the world (a legacy of yearning from the culture of Christendom). The Christian Gospel declares that the most powerful act of God, which achieves the wholeness of the world, is embodied in a crucified and forsaken Jewish man. The call of the Church is to be 'cruciform', to uphold 'a theology of the cross', in which the marks of faithfulness, relevance and effectiveness will look foolish in the eyes of the world. This is what is implied in *The Basis of Union* when

it says (in para.3) that 'in his own *strange* way, Christ rules and renews the Church'.

Understanding key words

1. What do we mean by 'vocation'?

The word '*vocation*' simply means '*calling*'. (It comes from the word '*vocare*' in Latin, meaning 'to call'.) The primary calling of all Christians is the call to discipleship. For each person, this includes the whole of their life, all that they are and do, and it takes unique forms for everyone.

We sometimes use the word 'call' to refer to the particular role of some people in the life of the church community, for example, the call to be an elder, or the call to be an ordained minister; we may also speak of a person's call to their form of employment, or to marriage. This is really a particular way in which the church identifies a role for one of its community of disciples.

We may also use the word 'call' when referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are given to all Christian people. Gifts of the Holy Spirit (e.g. in 1 Corinthians 12, 14) may be gifts of teaching, preaching, healing, administration, etc. The apostle Paul says that everyone has a gift of the Holy Spirit, and that all gifts are to be used in the building up of the church community and its life and witness.

2. What do we mean by 'God's call'?

We believe that the call to discipleship comes from God in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, and it leads to Baptism into Christ and his community (the Church). The call may come in many and varied ways, but it is always the call of God in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit.

3. What do we mean by 'missional church'?

The term '*missional*' was first coined by the Gospel and Culture Movement in the United States in order to reclaim the meaning of the early creeds of the

Church which declare that the Church is 'one, holy, catholic and **apostolic**'. The intention of this word is to explain that the church, in its essence, in all that it is and does (whether gathered for worship or dispersed in local community or family commitments, etc) , is 'apostolic' or 'missionary', sent into the world to bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The word 'missional' was coined as a new word because it was thought that the word 'missionary' had become too strongly tied to a narrow and unhelpful meaning of mission (namely, people who do overseas mission work, or church programs of outreach, or to mean just one part of many parts of a church's life). See also the explanation about Mission in the above statement.

4. What do we mean by emerging / emergent churches?

'*Emerging church*' doesn't mean 'any form of church life which is emerging today'. This term originated with the Fuller Community in the United States and referred to new Christian communities who saw themselves as 'apostolic' communities in a non-Christian western world. The Emerging Church movement which has evolved from this origin has stood outside the mainstream or traditional church denominations and has been very critical of these forms of the church.

5. What is the purpose of the Church?

The purpose of the church is defined in the statement above. It is called into being by God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, with the unique purpose of being the community of people in the world who celebrate, embody and witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

6. What is the most essential thing for the church to do?

The one thing for the Church to do is to celebrate, embody and witness to the Christian Gospel, in response to what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ and in anticipation of the fulfilment of God's purpose for the whole of creation.

This presupposes certain matters of importance, what might be called 'marks of the church', for example, worship which is focused around Word and Sacrament, learning the faith, fellowship, supporting one another in Christian living, sharing the sufferings of Christ in the world.

7. What are the marks of an 'effective' or 'vital church'?

The National Church Life Survey identified four marks of the 'vital' church some years ago to be meaningful worship, a sense of belonging, an owned vision and a commitment to learning the faith. We may endorse these four 'marks', recognising that they refer to significant aspects of the life of all Christian communities: the centrality of worship which is focused on Jesus Christ, the living Word of God – in Scripture, preaching and sacraments, the fellowship and mutual care and support of the Christian community, a sense of being a pilgrim people on the way to God's promised End for all creation, and a commitment to learning the faith of the Church. Along with these, the *Basis of Union* would also want to speak of the importance of sharing the sufferings of Christ in the world.

Note that in the above statement, the effectiveness of the Church is not measured by or decided by the world or by the society, and it is independent of numbers of people, financial resources, its social or political power, and its growth or decline in membership.



Appendix 4

Generations Come and Generations Go

NCLS Research, Ruth Powell.

The *On the Way Together* Leadership Team notes with appreciation the contribution of Dr Ruth Powell of the National Church Life Survey to this report. Dr Powell's article is in response to a specific request for an overview of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania, arising from the NCLS data of the 2006 survey.

On the basis of the data, Dr Powell has suggested some matters for the attention of the Church as it contemplates the future.

The *On the Way Together* Leadership Team respects the work of the NCLS, and the opinions expressed by Dr Powell. These reflect particular assumptions concerning the purpose of the Church, implicit to predicting future actions. However, the leadership Team notes that the data can prompt a variety of responses, especially when different assumptions about the purpose of the Church might be brought to the data.

The Leadership Team recommends the NCLS article to readers, and suggests readers reflect on the data presented using the following questions.

1. Having read the article, what are you most curious about?
2. What in this article stirred your highest imagination about the Church as a sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God?
3. In your imagination, explore the image of the Church and its neighbourhood enjoying in a very different relationship to that suggested in the article.
4. What might the Church need to attend to in order to convert that which you have imagined into reality?
5. What image, or vision, of the Church at its most whole do you sense the Holy Spirit planted within you during these reflections?
6. With whom will you persistently share this vision?
7. What do you suggest you do together to make the vision a reality?

Note: This can easily become a provocative proposition or provocative proposal.

Generations Come and Generations Go

A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.
Ecclesiastes 1:4 NRSV

The Old Testament describes life in terms of the ebb and flow of generations. This paper uses a generational perspective to present issues for reflection by the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. It is only one perspective and, of course, cannot explain everything. Yet, as the Synod considers its future, the impact of changing generations may provide insight that proves useful.

In this paper, four generations of church attenders are given a voice through their responses to the 2006 National Church Life Survey.

- Generation Y: Born 1977 to 1991 and aged 15- 29 in 2006
- Generation X, born 1962 to 1976 and aged 30 to 44 in 2006
- Baby Boomers born 1942 to 1961 and aged 45 to 64 in 2006
- Builders born before 1942 and aged 65+ in 2006.

Whose voices can we hear?

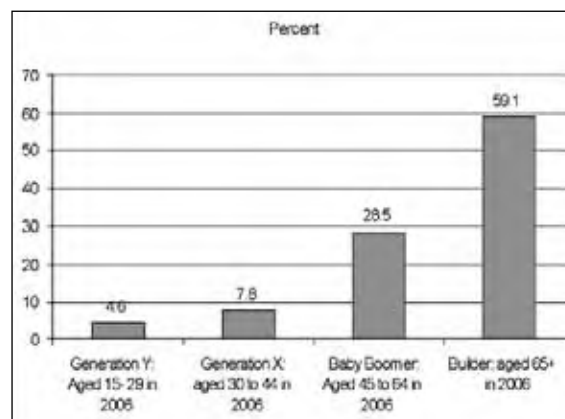
When Uniting Church attenders in the Synod speak, you are most likely to be listening to the views of the Builder generation. Some 59.1% of attenders in the Synod were 65 years and over in 2006 and 28.5% were Boomers, aged 45 to 64 years. Generation X, aged 30 to 44 years only makes up 7.8%, and Generation Y, aged 15 to 29 years make up less than 5%. The Synod's profile is one of the oldest age profiles in the Australian church.

Was it always this way? No.

Around forty years ago the age profile of church attenders matched the wider community.

Percent of four generations in the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

Source: 2006 National Church Life Survey



Through the 1960s and 1970s, in the midst of profound and widespread social change, young baby boomers began to leave the churches. Older generations thought they would return – with children in tow – as every previous generation had done.

Not only did most baby boomers never return, but each successive generation is missing to even greater degrees.

Many churches missed what turned out to be a vital moment, and have never caught up. This extreme imbalance of generations, means that the Church of today is unavoidably shaped by the hopes, concerns and needs of the Builder generation. They make up the majority of attenders in congregations. They remain in positions of leadership – often simply due to the lack of other options. They effectively set the agenda, whether or not they wish to.

What generations value and hope for

What do church attenders in each generation in the Synod value about their experience of church life and what do they hope for? (See Table 1 for responses in the 2006 National Church Life Survey).

When asked what they believe their congregations should focus on in the next 12 months, both Builders and Boomers

Main survey results relating to what attenders value and hope for				
	15-29 yrs in 2006 %	30-44 yrs in 2006 %	45-64 yrs in 2006 %	60+ yrs in 2006 %
Aspects of church most valued				
Wider community care or social justice emphasis	23	32	32	24
Reaching those who do not attend church	6	8	7	8
Traditional style of worship or music	17	21	31	52
Contemporary style of worship or music	30	29	22	10
Sharing in Holy Communion/the Eucharist/Lord's Supper	17	20	34	49
Social activities or meeting new people	31	19	15	15
Sermons, preaching or Bible teaching	24	26	31	24
Bible study or prayer groups, other discussion groups	17	13	14	13
Ministry to children or youth	32	36	15	7
Prayer ministry for one another	11	9	13	12
Practical care for one another in times of need	21	28	39	40
Openness to social diversity	18	16	11	6
Presence of a church school or pre-school	4	6	3	3
Aspects of church that should get more attention				
Small groups focused on Christian growth	24	23	24	16
Worship services that are nurturing to people's faith	25	32	38	44
Building a strong sense of community within the congregation	18	26	29	33
Creating a clear vision for the congregation's future	18	23	27	29
Encouraging the people here to discover/use their gifts here	30	29	30	26
Encouraging new approaches to ministry and mission	19	16	19	12
Supporting social action and aid to people in need	18	23	21	20
Encouraging the people here to share their faith or invite others	19	15	16	12
Ensuring new people are included well in church life	20	22	25	30
Ministry to children and youth	35	39	25	21
Growing into a larger congregation	23	17	18	20
Starting a new church or mission venture	6	2	3	2

NOTE: Attenders could select up to three options, so percentages may not add to 100%

Table 1: What Uniting Church Synod of Victoria & Tasmania church attenders value and hope for

Source: Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania attenders in the 2006 National Church Life Survey (n = 10 340) – NCLS Age Comparison Profile.

most often select 'worship services that are nurturing to people's faith'. What they most value about their church experience is traditional styles of worship and sharing Holy Communion, which must shape their hopes for the future.

However, this emphasis is not necessarily shared by the two younger generations, where the highest proportions hope that their congregations will give attention to ministry to children and youth in the future. This is also what they most value, along with a greater emphasis on contemporary styles of worship.

Similar to the national trends, older attenders in the Uniting Church (VicTas Synod) are more likely to:

- attend worship services weekly

- prefer traditional styles of music in worship services
- spend regular time in private devotional activity
- have a strong sense of belonging to their denomination
- be involved in church-based community service, justice or welfare activities
- be involved in community-based service, care or welfare activities

The younger the attender the less likely they are to share these characteristics.

However, while similar in these ways to other younger church attenders, those in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania do

not share some other characteristics of younger generations in the wider church. As a general trend across all Australian churches, and indeed, across at least some other Uniting Church Synods, younger attenders tend to be more involved in small groups, feel that their gifts and skills are encouraged, have helped others in a range of informal ways, value outreach, be involved in evangelistic activities, and actually invite others to church.

However, on first inspection these patterns are simply not as distinctive or marked in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. Younger attenders in the Synod are much more similar to their older counterparts on these matters, and the characteristics outlined above are less evident.

One explanation for this pattern is that those younger attenders who are left in the Synod are the ones that most closely resemble the numerically dominant older generations. Perhaps those that have left the churches were those most different to the older majority group. This initial impression certainly deserves more detailed analysis to confirm.

Generations will go...

At the time of union, Builders were aged 35 plus. They were the key leadership of the time. Now they are aged 65 plus. Shaped by their post-war and depression experiences, they are committed to the building of society. They are idealistic and willing to serve; their values include a sense of obligation, duty and loyalty. They expect that people will work toward a common goal because it the 'right thing to do'. They have a communal focus, rather than individual focus.

Although the cycle of generations has always been a part of life, the current circumstances for the Uniting Church are unusual. The Builder generation, who represent the largest group in the church

are now reaching the end of their lives in increasing numbers.

This is not a comment about the capacity and long-term committed contribution of older church attenders. The issue is about a real loss of people. The significant numerical loss - which has already commenced and may accelerate - represents a loss in knowledge, wisdom, experience and practical action. This will be felt at personal level, as well as in congregations, and other councils of the church.

As the Builder generation 'goes', the church faces a widespread expression of grief. This is likely to be accompanied by the many associated stages of grief, including denial, anger and bargaining, as well as acceptance.

We also face the associated systemic stress that reduced numbers place on existing church structures, leading to the closure or disappearance of places, buildings, congregations, and even ways of doing church that have had meaning for many years. This is not just an issue for the congregations directly involved, but also to the Presbyteries that will have to resource and oversight the painful and difficult processes that will be triggered as congregations age, shrink, amalgamate or disband.

Some will grieve the lost opportunities of finding ways to effectively share the gospel with current generations. Some will grieve the lack of trust and willingness to hand on power and responsibility from one generation to the next.

The Uniting Church is like a family who face the passing of their elders and for whom it is time to have some very difficult conversations. If 'mum and dad' are going to die, how do we speak with grace and compassion of this impending death? What is in place to guide us in the management of affairs? Is there a will? Do we know what is desired for funerals and memorials? Do we have the resources to

handle the expense of the funeral? Can we celebrate the life and achievements appropriately? Are we ready to grieve?

Will generations come?

As a generation passes, who will follow? Who is attending to the hope and possibility of 'generations that come'.

It is of interest that across a range of indicators, younger generations were more positive in their assessment of church life than the same age group was five years earlier. (See NCLS *Age Comparison Profile* for the Synod).

What is the nature of the inheritance that might be entrusted to future generations? This inheritance is partly about access to assets such as property and finances. But it is also about passing on the 'faith inheritance'. What more can the churches do to hear the stories of faith from the elders, those who have a lifetime of experience to share of the reality and faithfulness of God?

It could be argued that, the next two decades are a crucial period in the Uniting Church's short history. The period will mark the passing of the largest generation within the church: one which has shaped the denomination to date. Older and younger generations will find themselves in ongoing negotiations about the future of the church.

Who will lead the transition?

There are many issues that will require leadership in this transitional period.

Many current leaders are part of the baby boom generations. At the time of union, they were aged 15 to 35 years. Baby boomers who remain in the Uniting Church are somewhat unusual because, unlike their contemporaries, they did not 'vote with their feet'. Now aged 45 to 64 years and, having waited perhaps longer than previous generations for their turn, many

find themselves in leadership positions in the church.

Some examples of questions that leaders in the Synod, Presbyteries and congregations may have to address include:

- What is in place as pastoral care for those who are experiencing grief and loss?
- Who is taking the big picture perspective and planning for the future?
- What is being done to resource Presbyteries to deal with congregations that are increasingly in crisis or moving toward closure?
- How are assets to be released and for what purposes?
- How will the Synod co-operate with other Uniting Church Synods who face similar issues?

These issues require a variety of approaches, including theological, practical polity and pastoral responses.

Vision, empowering leadership and innovation

NCLS Research has studied tens of thousands of congregations in Australia and internationally. Some of the key characteristics that healthy and vital congregations have are that they:

- have a clear and owned vision for the future
- have leaders that empower and mobilise attenders to use their gifts and skills
- are open to new possibilities and flexible innovation.

If the church is to connect more effectively with the wider community, and in the process, address the generational gap, it will need to ensure a clear and owned

vision and empowering leadership. It will need to innovate and find new ways to make the worship, witness and service life of both congregations and community services more relevant and engaging.

Generations go and generations will come. The Uniting Church faces an unusual period of generational transition as it begins to lose the key generation that brought the church through union and which currently continues to fill most congregations. Grief and loss need to be tempered with hope for the future.

The Uniting Church has an ethos, theological environment and community service presence that has the potential to be profoundly relevant to the wider Australian community. This is the great possibility that sits alongside the challenge of the existing generational gap. Will we, together, work towards a future that seeks to realise the vision of all that the Uniting Church can be?

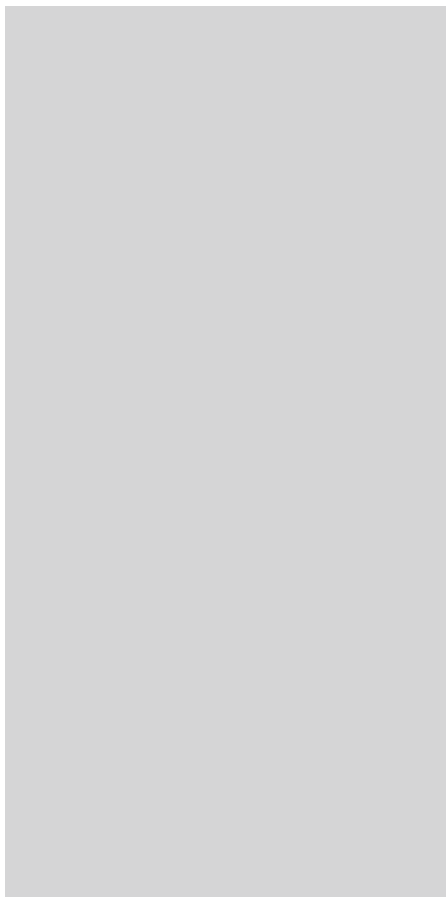
Ps 145:13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds. NRSV

Dr Ruth Powell
Director
NCLS Research

This paper draws from the NCLS Age Comparison Profile, prepared for the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

NCLS Research is a joint project of ANGLICARE (NSW), Uniting Church in Australia Board of Mission (NSW/ACT) and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The National Church Life Survey has been carried out on four occasions in Australia: 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2006. Twenty-two denominations participated in the 2006 NCLS. Some 10 340 attenders in the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania completed survey forms.





On the Way Together

– a spirited journey towards the future

Report to the UCA Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

In response to the 2007 Synod's requirement for a strategic plan, *On the Way Together* has engaged various UCA councils and bodies in spirited conversations.

The *On the Way Together* approach has posed three key questions:

- Who are we?
- What are we called to?
- Who is our neighbour?

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

In this journey we are reminded that the church is the community of people founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ, renewed and sustained by the Holy Spirit. The church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final fulfilment of God's Easter victory for all creation. In its life in the world, the church has the unique privilege of celebrating, embodying and witnessing to the new way of life, which is God's gift and promise in Jesus Christ. Thus the church in its life in the world points the world to and anticipates the final coming of the rule of God. The church is sustained and renewed in this by the work of the Holy Spirit. (*The Basis of Union*: para. 3.4)