



Engaging in intentional, open community connections and partnerships

PRIORITY DIRECTION E:

Engaging in Intentional, Open Community Connections and Partnerships

Executive Summary

Framework

- Foundational to this group is the core belief that, as people on The Way, we are sent into the world, and in particular our community, to continue the mission of Christ by bringing, in word and deed, the good news of inclusion, justice, hope, wellbeing, and the restoration of all creation.
- Engaging in intentional, open community connections and partnerships will require *'cultural change'* in terms of how, as a whole church, we understand and approach engaging with our communities as partnerships rather than as 'charity'.
- Significant in this cultural change is the understanding that such engagement does not necessarily need to be branded as 'Uniting Church' nor does it have to be a Uniting Church initiative (nor 'controlled' by the UC.) Learning from and/or accessing wider community understandings and approaches is also important.
- We believe that just as we have had the ecumenical question and the youth question on our agenda, community engagement should be on the agendas of every Council of the church.
- We believe that there are already great stories of the church involved in community engagement that can inspire and excite other groups. Initial energy can be spent in gathering these stories so that they can be shared.
- Community engagement involves the interlocking processes of see, judge, act, reflect (evaluate, celebrate)



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Challenges

- Initially the focus should be towards congregations. Agencies are already 'in' the community.
- Our diversity as a church has often led us to be competitive rather than cooperative.
- Our theological history and diversity has sometimes lead to the view that engaging with communities is about bringing people into the church building, rather than being with them in their situation.
- Defining the principles of community engagement that are *acceptable* across the diversity of the church
- Community engagement is about relationships not programs. Congregations have often seen the way forward as providing programs.



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Overall Direction of Proposals

1. Sharing experiences
2. Learning
3. Sustaining congregations in mission

Specific Objectives

1. Sharing of Experiences

1. By 2013, implement processes for *gathering* and sharing of information of how congregations are engaging in intentional, open community connections and partnerships. *These will be both related to the institutional structures of the church and to the informal movements of the church*

2. Learning

2a. By 2013, across there will be a clear understanding of, and commitment to, model/s of community engagement based on principles which are theologically sound and consistent with UCA Ethos, and integrated with the other 4 priorities (A, B, C, D).

3. Sustaining

3a. By 2013 development of supporting resources will have been undertaken:

- Theological resources which inform how the Church engages with communities at whole/individual levels
- Educational resources to challenge the Church (congregations and agencies) to engage with community

3b. By 2013 develop models which allow, partnerships between community service 'providers' and congregations (providers may be UnitingCare, WMB, government agencies, schools, ecumenical etc)



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Rationales and Recommended Next Steps for Each of the Specific Objectives

Sharing of Experiences

OBJECTIVE By 2013 implement processes for *gathering* and sharing of information on how congregations are engaging in intentional, open community connections and partnerships. *These will be both related to the institutional structures of the church and to the informal movement of the church.*

RATIONALE

We believe that there are already many stories to be told, of groups within congregations who are making relational connections within their community. Sharing these stories will encourage the storyteller and the listener.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

- During Synod, either at table groups or in small groups, invite people to share ONE story about the way they, or others are connecting with their community in meaningful relationships (reflect on the common principles in these stories).
- Build networks of communities/groups who will encourage each other, sharing their experiences, and help each other to reflect/evaluate and celebrate,
- Create a blog where these stories can be told



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Learning

OBJECTIVE By 2013, across there will be a clear understanding of, and commitment to, model/s of community engagement based on principles that are theologically sound and consistent with UCA ethos, and integrated with the other 4 priorities (A, B, C, and D).

OR

By 2013, across there Will be a clear understanding of, and commitment to, principles of community engagement that are theologically sound and consistent with UCA ethos, and integrated with the other 4 priorities (A, B, C, and D).

RATIONALE

What do we mean by the terms that are being used in this Focus Group? (engaging, open, community connection, partnership?) So that we are together on the way, it is imperative that we are all using the same language, and understanding the same concepts. These need to be articulated clearly and have a sound theological framework consistent with the UCA Basis of Union and resonating with the work of the other focus groups.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

- Identify and communicate principles of community engagement which are theologically sound
- Train ministers in assessing assets (social) of congregation in order to build to capacity.
- Encourage and equip congregations to see a need and respond with passion.



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Sustaining

<p>OBJECTIVE</p> <p>3a. By 2013 the development of supporting resources will have been undertaken:</p> <p>a. Theological resources which inform how the Church engages with communities at whole/individual levels Educational resources to challenge the Church (congregations and agencies) to engage with community</p>
<p>RATIONALE</p> <p>Theological and educational resources are very important tools, but they can be a distraction to action. Consequently this objective is placed in the last position</p>
<p>RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate and promote theological underpinnings of this approach based on the community of the Trinity who invites us to participate • Encourage congregations to study Dave Andrew's "Be Attitudes" and/or "Compassionate Community Course"



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Sustaining (cont.)

<p>OBJECTIVE 3b. By 2013 develop models which foster partnerships between community service 'providers' and congregations (providers may be UnitingCare, WMB, government agencies, schools, ecumenical etc)</p>
<p>RATIONALE Many of our community service providers have the experience and expertise to encourage and equip congregations as they engage with their community.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish a working group to explore and develop this area.