



Report from **Multi-Cross Cultural Reference Group**



Context

Since the 31st Synod, our name has changed from the Multi-Cross Cultural Committee to Multi-Cross Cultural Reference Group. We made this request to Synod Standing Committee to signal that we are not a group that 'does' the multicultural work for the Synod. Instead, we aim to assist congregations, presbyteries and Synod as together we seek to embrace the gift and the challenge of fulfilling our stated calling to be a truly multicultural church.

As a reference group, we seek to be a resource, enabler, advocate and bridge; to help to build relationships; to be a catalyst for events; and to bring expertise and encouragement to situations where cultural diversity offers particular challenges and opportunities. We also seek to support

culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, congregations, leaders and ministry agents in their life within the church.

We will both initiate proposals and respond to requests, drawing on the gifts and skills of our members and the wider culturally diverse communities of the church.

The reference group has identified 40 multicultural groups in the Synod (congregations, faith communities or culturally-based worship groups within congregations) from 12 cultural backgrounds, worshipping in 13 languages other than English. This is second only to NSW-ACT Synod. In addition, there are at least eight intentionally inter-cultural congregations. These provide a significant context for our work. However, most congregations have a diversity of cultures among their worship attenders, and all would have cultural diversity in their surrounding community. The ensuing challenges this brings to church life, ministry and mission provide the broader context for the reference group's work.

The reference group in this period has comprised 12 members, four ordained and eight lay, drawn from ten different cultural backgrounds.

Report

We have had three major focusses since the 31st Synod.

We are a multicultural church

The 30th anniversary of the 1985 Assembly statement, *We are a multicultural church* was marked by holding a forum at Broadwater Road Uniting Church in June 2015 on the theme, *One Body, Many Members: Make It Happen!* Its purpose was to assess the Synod's progress in living out that calling, and identify areas needing further attention. It was a stimulating day of stories, singing, discussion and worship. The day identified such needs as more cross-cultural exposure and events in the church; recognition of the reality of racism and its impacts; more culturally-adaptable teaching styles and training pathways for ordinands; more training across the church in cultural awareness and cross-cultural ministry; recognising cultural diversity as a context for evangelism; and a focus on building quality relationships rather than tasks and time-frames in engaging culturally diverse communities in the church's life and mission. An evening of multicultural worship celebration followed.

Strategic priorities

The development of strategic directions for 2016–17 and beyond, at the invitation of the general secretary, built on the outcomes of the June 2015 forum and was designed to allow the reference group to propose its agenda and resource needs so these could be incorporated into the broader Synod strategic planning and resource allocation. A consultant assisted us in this process.

Based on three pillars of connecting, equipping and resourcing, the five areas identified as our priorities for the next couple of years are:

- Help develop stronger links between CALD faith communities/congregations and the Uniting Church (primarily through presbyteries and the Synod MCCR), to enhance the mission of the church
- Establish a Synod-wide next generation CALD leaders network and development program
- Create cross-cultural experiences of worship and fellowship which, among other things, foster and showcase the leadership and gifts of young people and women in our CALD communities

- Establish effective platforms of communication to connect people across cultural groups and encourage wider Uniting Church cross-cultural engagement
- Foster awareness of biblical, theological and ministry resources from different cultural perspectives, and encourage greater reflection of cultural diversity in congregational worship and study.

A preliminary report was presented to Standing Committee in November 2015, and the final proposals were to be completed by mid-March 2016. We have been grateful for this opportunity and support from the general secretary and Standing Committee.

These two priorities have meant that the reference group has spent considerable time reflecting on present challenges and preparing the ground for new and coordinated strategies.

Engaging with CALD communities

The third focus has been a renewed focus on engaging with the church's CALD communities by committing to holding two of our meetings each year in multicultural churches. Two of these have been held: December 2014 at Park Tongan Uniting Church, Highgate Hill, and October 2015 at Kenani Uniting Church, Banyo (the 19 June forum served this purpose for the first half of 2015). These were widely advertised, with an open invitation for anyone interested to join us for a time of worship, cultural learning, hospitality and discussion on issues relating to the Uniting Church's commitment to being multicultural. They were well-attended and led to excellent discussion and sharing of stories and insights. This remains integral to our strategic priorities through 2016–17.

Two further significant opportunities for cross-cultural engagement arose when Brisbane hosted a meeting of the Assembly's National Reference Committee for Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry, 22–25 February 2016. The evenings at Kenani and Sunnybank churches showed the vitality and variety of the Uniting Church's diverse cultures, and offered two models of inter-cultural ministry which the national reference committee members found very enlightening. The Synod has two elected members on the national committee, Beatriz Skippen and Moses Leth, with David Busch attending as a presbytery/Synod staff consultant.

National conferences

South-east Queensland has hosted several Uniting Church national conferences: the Vietnamese conference over December 2014 to January 2015; the inaugural South Sudanese conference in September 2015; the Samoan leaders' conference in October 2015; and the Fijian *koniferedi* (July) and the Niue conference (October) which will be held later this year. These conferences, held every 1–3 years, provide important opportunities for language and culture groups to network across the whole Uniting Church for fellowship, worship, study, celebration and discussing issues relating to their life and mission.

Code of Ethics

We are grateful for the careful and consultative work that Sue Crittall has undertaken to better engage our CALD ministry agents and congregations with the Code of Ethics. This work has yielded a new study resource, *Considering the Code of Ethics in a multicultural context* (available on the [Synod website](#)), and plans are progressing towards holding a half-day forum for ministry agents in multicultural contexts.

Synod Bible studies

Following the decision of the 31st Synod to make space for multicultural theological voices in the next Synod program, the reference group has been given the opportunity to offer the daily Bible studies for the 32nd Synod. Rev Lu Senituli has worked hard on arranging themes and speakers,

and we anticipate these sessions will make a rich contribution to the Synod meeting. We propose adapting this material for group study in congregations.

Next-generation leadership

Empowering CALD young adults for leadership, both in their own communities and in the whole church, remains a paramount goal. It is wonderful to see how some cultural groups are giving significant leadership opportunities to their 'next-gen' leaders in their national conferences. At least six CALD people attended the Uniting Church National Young Adult Leaders Conference (NYALC) in Sydney in December 2014 and found it a transformative experience. We are encouraging more leaders to attend the next NYALC at Burleigh Heads in July 2016. The reference group is developing this as a strategic priority for 2016–17, including the establishment of a CALD next-gen leaders' network and an inaugural camp.

Training pathways

The reference group has begun discussions with Adult Faith Education at Trinity College Queensland about ways to improve lay training subjects and pathways for CALD students. We look forward to developing this in consultation with the Board of Christian Formation. The cross-cultural ministry unit being taught at Trinity College in Semester 1 2016 is a very welcome development, and we are grateful for the opportunity our members were given to be guest presenters. CALD people continue to comprise a significant proportion of people undertaking the Period of Discernment as they seek ways to exercise their ministry in the Uniting Church. New immigration requirements from 1 July 2015 have narrowed the eligibility criteria for religious ministers from overseas wishing to apply for Permanent Residency; this has given new urgency to supporting Australian-trained ministers for our CALD congregations.

Other matters

Among other highlights have been:

- Organising a Synod pastoral service, led by the moderator, for the victims of Cyclone Winston in Fiji on 20 March 2016, including a collection for the UnitingWorld disaster appeal
- Drafting a submission, on behalf of the moderator, to the Queensland Parliament on the Multicultural Recognition Bill 2015
- Meeting with Sue Hutchinson and David Weddell to discuss the implications of the church's cultural diversity for how social justice materials are researched, written and published. The discussions focussed on recent work on youth justice, mental health and domestic violence
- Farewelling the Assembly's previous director for multicultural and cross-cultural ministry, Rev Dr Tony Floyd, and welcoming his successor, Rev Dr Apwee Ting
- The invitation by *Journey* magazine to assist them in highlighting multicultural stories and people; and the newsletter *Multiculturalism Matters* published by South Moreton Presbytery in 2014-15, which in 2016 adopted a Synod-wide focus and is being distributed through all presbyteries.

Membership

The reference group extends its deep appreciation to Rev Sandra Jebb and Rev Hohaia Matthews whose terms have expired since the 31st Synod and who have not renominated, and to Dr Gewa Au who concluded his term as co-opted member in September 2015.

Challenges/risks as we progress

Challenges:

- Faith education and formation for CALD people
- Developing next-generation and women in leadership
- Developing strong relationships and coordination between MCCRG and Synod and presbyteries
- Keeping the Assembly statements and commitments before the whole church
- Creating space for grace to engage in inclusive, respectful conversation for the whole church about same-sex marriage (Ref. the 14th Assembly and the President's pastoral letter, 12 August 2015).

Risks:

- Burnout among CALD leaders in the Uniting Church in Australia.

Issues to be addressed

Cultural diversity in our councils

We are grateful for the time given by the moderator and general secretary to meet with the reference group in the past 18 months to discuss concerns and identify future needs and opportunities. One matter raised was the need for greater cultural diversity among elected members in the councils of the church such as Synod Standing Committee and key Synod boards. There is a challenge to encourage and equip suitable CALD people to stand for election, and for these people to be seen by the church as having an important contribution to make. People from CALD backgrounds do not 'represent' their culture, or the multicultural church, but they bring their own perspectives, insights and experiences which contribute to the discernment exercised by those councils on behalf of the whole church. Apart from the cultural diversity of members, church councils are urged always to be mindful of the particular resources and strengths, as well as the particular needs, within the diverse cultures of the church when decisions are made.

CALD context for programs and resources

The provision of programs and resources by Assembly and Synod needs to be undertaken with awareness of the particular dynamics within our various cultures. This is especially so for such programs as making churches safe for children, and resources such as those on mental health and domestic violence (as noted above). This is as much a matter of approach in the writing and presenting of material as it is of translation. Reference group members have appreciated working with Synod staff in these areas, but there is much more to do and it will remain a growing challenge.

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