



Report from Uniting Communications

Context

Uniting Communications is the communications, marketing, fundraising and research department of the Queensland Synod office. Our mission statement is: In serving God, Uniting Communications will inspire, resource and engage in conversations across all parts of the Uniting Church in Queensland, making mission and belonging possible.

Uniting Communications gives a voice to and connects diverse ideas, people and churches within the broader Uniting Church in Queensland. We manage the reputation of the Queensland Synod both within and beyond the church.

We maintain the professional and cohesive face of the Synod office as well as Alexandra Park Conference Centre, Raymont Lodge Residential College and Trinity College Queensland.

We help congregations to maximise their communication opportunities to their local community.

We help the church and the public understand the role of the moderator and the church in society.

We raise money that makes mission possible.

Participation in ecumenical, inter-Synod and Assembly networks continues to be an encouraging and productive part of our work.

Current staffing:

Director – Mardi Lumsden (four-days-per-week) and Jane Moad (one-day-per-week)

Marketing and fundraising manager – Raushen Perera

Cross-platform editor/producer – Ben Rogers (started 4 April 2016). Rohan Salmond left the role in March 2016).

Advertising and digital media manager – Ashley Thompson

Graphic designer – Holly Jewell (part-time)

Writer – Dianne Jensen (part-time)
Research officer – Sue Hutchinson (part-time)
Research officer/Green Church liaison – David Weddell (part-time)

The Communications team thanks Bruce Mullan who was acting director for 10 months in 2015 while Mardi Lumsden was on maternity leave. Bruce's service in this role and his previous role as research officer/Green Church liaison has been an asset to the church.

Rohan Salmond finished as cross-platform editor/producer in March 2016 after almost three years in the role. The team commends his service and significant contribution to *Journey*, Uniting Communications and the wider Uniting Church.

Report

Uniting Communications uses the eight identified priorities to underpin much of its work, from *Journey* stories to fundraising initiatives. Below is a list of core areas of work.

Synod office communications

The general secretary's e-newsletter Uniting News goes to around 1300 people each Tuesday and enables communication of administrative responsibilities and services for congregations as well as useful news.

The Synod social media sites continue to grow in engagement with a particular focus on our most engaged audience on Facebook. As at 15 April 2016 the Queensland Synod had 1651 likes on Facebook, 601 followers on Twitter, 26 followers on Google+ (with 69,118 views) and 92 followers on LinkedIn.

The Synod website (ucaqld.com.au) and JourneyOnline.com.au provide a number of entry points to information and the church. These will both be reviewed and refreshed before the next Synod in Session.

Christmas and Easter campaigns assist congregations to communicate with their local community by inviting people to reconnect with churches during key religious holidays.

2015 Christmas campaign: 33 congregations (including nine outside Queensland).

2014 Christmas campaign: 42 congregations (including eight outside Queensland).

The 2015 and 2016 Easter campaigns were online resources only, with the 2016 campaign moving away from postcards and designing an invitation template for people to invite people they know. This was accompanied by a focussed social media campaign designed for content sharing. The Easter 2016 page on the Synod website had 326 unique views with people spending an average of three minutes on the page.

The 2016 Synod calendar did not sell as well as expected so we are rethinking the value of this product.

The team ran three Communications [road shows](#) (Sunshine Coast, Brisbane and Rockhampton) in 2015. The aim of the road show is to share the knowledge within Uniting Communications and to inspire and resource congregations to use their own communications channels in the best way. If you are interested in hosting a Communications road show [email](#) Uniting Communications.

Editor Rohan Salmond attended the 14th National Assembly (July 2015) as part of the media team.

Journey

The eight identified priorities have been explored through feature stories, theological pieces and the moderator's column, usually with one focus per edition.

Synod Standing Committee approved the terms of reference for an editorial and communications advisory panel in late 2015. The panel first met in February 2016 and now meets regularly. Members are Dr Janice McRandal (chairperson), Rev Fa Matangi, Rev Peter Armstrong and Dr John Harrison with ex-officio members Mardi Lumsden (Uniting Communications director) and the cross-platform editor/producer.

Communications proposes instigating a voluntary role of presbytery correspondent for *Journey*. It is always difficult to get stories from across the state. It is hoped that there would be a correspondent from each presbytery who would submit stories and/or photos to JourneyOnline and pitch story ideas throughout the year. This continues to put the 'our' into *Journey*.

A revised JourneyOnline website was launched in February 2015. Further work will be done on the website in the next 18 months.

Writer Dianne Jensen travelled with moderator David Baker to Longreach in May 2015. This trip has proved invaluable in gathering stories from the area.

Marketing

The Trinity College Queensland marketing campaign launched in November 2015 resulted in over 38 new enrolments in 2016 in the areas of adult faith education, chaplaincy and pastoral care, graduate study and postgraduate study.

Marketing plans were created and implemented for the Queensland Synod's mental health resources *Called to care* and the moderator's ecumenical initiative One in Christ.

The ongoing marketing for Raymont Lodge Residential College and Alexandra Park Conference Centre has resulted in revised websites and new e-newsletters, a video, print collateral and social media sites.

Our marketing manager sourced corporate sponsorship for the 31st Synod in Session in 2014 to the value of \$9000 in cash and the 32nd Synod in Session in 2016 to the value of \$9000 in cash.

We have created and implemented the marketing campaign for the 32nd Synod in Session's Unchained event.

Making mission possible

Uniting Communications is focused on the continued rejuvenation of the Uniting Church Foundation as the active giving arm of the Uniting Church in Queensland to make God's mission possible. To this end, the following campaigns have been active since the 31st Synod meeting in 2015.

Work is in progress to define the advisory group who will determine the specific strategic mission areas and fundraising projects to enable successful fundraising. The following work has been done since the last Synod in Session:

- \$10 for 10 appeal in the mission area of Indigenous Education
Appeal launched in August 2014. Two grants awarded at \$1500 per grant to Indigenous students in early 2015 for the purchase of study resources and the cost of course fees for courses in digital imaging/photography and hairdressing/retail services.
Two grant applications have been received in February 2016 (at \$1500 and \$4100 respectively) for grants to two Indigenous students for the purchase of study resources

and the cost of course fees for courses in child care and information processing and technology. Disbursement in progress.

- Easter Madness appeal in the mission area of Faith and Families
Appeal launched in October 2015. Fundraising proceeds were raised to sponsor 27 young adults from rural and remote Queensland @ \$340 per person. This covers registration fees per person for the four-day residential camp over the Easter weekend in March 2016. Thirteen applications were received (including two leaders) so these people were granted camp registration and a full travel subsidy to attend the camp.
- Reach Out appeal in the mission area of People in Crisis
Appeal soft-launched in August 2015 in collaboration with the Brisbane Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support network (BRASS). Fundraising proceeds will support asylum seekers in Queensland with emergency food, medical or travel expenses.
- Deductible gift recipient (DGR) status is being explored for the mission area of Indigenous Education. This may lead to tax deductibility for donations to specific appeals.
- Online giving was launched in early 2015 on the [Foundation website](#) via a secure PayPal gateway.
- Gifts in Wills drive and direct marketing for new bequests rolled out in 2015.
- Stewardship Sunday service resources for churches across Queensland in 2014 and 2015 (first Sunday in October).
- Christmas Book Drive for Indigenous students in Far North Queensland in 2014 and 2015.

Research

In response to the 31st Synod resolution 14.65 (b) and (c), in 2015 Uniting Communications produced a suite of resources related to mental health entitled *Called to care* available [online](#) and in print. These resources have received very positive feedback.

The [Reach Out Speak Out](#) e-newsletter is released fortnightly (to 123 subscribers) for those who seek to be informed about current social responsibility issues and opportunities for action.

The [Uniting Green UPDATES](#) e-newsletter is released on the alternate fortnight (to 252 subscribers) for those who strive to live sustainably and to exercise responsible environmental care as a legitimate expression of their Christian mission.

As per the 31st Synod resolution, there is now a Social Responsibility Reference Group to help inform the moderator. This group had their first meeting in October 2015.

The biggest areas of focus have been asylum seekers, mental health and the environment.

Professional communications

In March 2016 a suite of Safe Ministry with Children resources and a new section of the Synod website was created. These resources were edited and designed by the communications team in close consultation with Lynette Drew, Safe Ministry (Children) administrator.

Key achievements/initiatives

Successful fundraising campaigns: fundraising and giving continues to make mission possible as the Uniting Church Foundation has reactivated focus on key mission projects. Online giving is now an option. Fundraising targets were exceeded in the \$10 for 10 and Easter Madness appeals.

Mental health resources *Called to care*: we have received very positive feedback.

We are particularly happy with the outcome from the marketing campaign for Trinity College Queensland.

ARPA awards: Last year *Journey* magazine's editor Rohan Salmond won a silver Australasian Religious Press award for his feature on interfaith activists, [Love your neighbour](#).

There has been continued growth in engagement on social media, especially Facebook, developing an engaged online Uniting Church community.

In 2016 the Easter campaign was changed to be a personal invitation rather than a postcard drop of the whole suburb. This change was as a result of feedback and the ability only to provide digital resources given the timing of Easter and print deadlines. A range of resources were made available free-of-charge on the Synod website as well as a social media campaign designed for sharing on personal social media platforms. We hope this change proved useful and we will reassess future campaigns based on the outcome of this initiative.

Challenges/risks as we progress

Sharing faith online

With increasing postage and printing costs of a print magazine we need to plan the move to a digital-first model, which will require a new business model, new revenue streams and a different staff focus.

Journey was and is designed to be an adjunct to faith sharing. As we move to a digital first model, how does it enable faith sharing in a digital way?

Video focus

More and more video is being used to tell stories and communicate. While videos have been produced in-house in recent years, the capacity to do this in addition to current workloads is limited. If there is a marked increase in the need or desire for videos there would be a budget implication.

Communicating to the right people

There is an ongoing challenge of ensuring contact details are updated in the Synod database. People who hold roles of responsibility within the Queensland Synod are required to receive Uniting News and we are aware that these lists are not yet up-to-date. Also, in the changeover to a new system a number of subscribers have been removed from this list. Our challenge is to ensure we use every channel possible to get messages through to the people who need them while still being focussed on environmental sustainability, people's privacy, timeliness of information and wise use of resources.

Fundraising priorities

Clear direction is needed on specific fundraising projects for the Foundation that have defined outcomes and people who will deliver the projects.

Contact for report questions:

Name: Mardi Lumsden

Position: Uniting Communications, director

Email: mardi.lumsden@ucaqld.com.au

Phone: 3377 9795