



Report from the
General Secretary



This report has been updated as at 14 October 2020

Report

Luke 10:41

But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted about many things...”

I’ve always struggled with the teaching of this passage. As one who is always distracted and worried about many things, I find any interpretation which involves a rebuke to Martha and sympathetic reading toward Mary a frustrating experience. There are always so many things that present before us in our lives and getting as much done as possible to make life easier and equitable for all just seems to make sense to me.

Sometimes it feels as though the role of General Secretary is essentially the service ministry of Martha. Is the house safe and secure for guests? Has the food been sourced to prepare for the feast? Is the bedding laundered and the guests adequately accommodated? Do people know where to find us? Is information about how and where to gather appropriately circulated? Is the communal kitchen compliant with all work health and safety requirements? ... You get the drift.

This passage makes more sense to me if we do not read it as an either/or approach.

What if we stood gently in the space and understood that God loves the builder as much as the architect, loves the cleaner as much as the visionary, loves the reader as much as the author. This approach encourages us to reflect and understand that in all that we do, we are asked by Jesus to reflect the question, “who am I and who are we” as part of God’s good creation? Why are we here? What are we called to do? How do we return to the practice of sitting at the feet of Jesus? This doesn’t mean you have to put down activity. But it does mean you have to get the balance right.

The last eighteen months of Project Plenty has been such a heartening experience and delight to see unfold. This has been the church practicing this very skill. It has taken the time to ask itself the question about its nature and purpose and is a testament to the hope and inspiration we find through Christ.

It is only in the light of this glorifying and illuminating purpose, as followers of Christ, that the ministry of service can continue in a balanced way. This report will let you know of the activities of the General Secretary and the Synod office in overseeing, maintaining and operating this service ministry of the church, informed by discipleship to Christ.

The Synod Office

The Executive Leadership Team (ELT)

As General Secretary, I have constituted a team of people to assist me in delivering against the role and responsibilities of this position. This team meets weekly for reflection and support and to ensure we collaborate well around activities. Currently, this team consists of myself, the Moderator, our Executive Officer Corporate (Ms Kellie Broderick), the Executive Director of Shared Services (Ms

Janelle van de Velde), the Executive Director of Strategic Resources and Assurance (Mr Peter Cranna) and the Associate General Secretary (Rev John Ruhle). I am deeply grateful for their capacity and support as we have worked together over this last period.

Mission Impact report

Every year the General Secretary publishes a Mission Impact report. This is done after the close of the financial year and is a way of communicating with the broader church about the activities of the Synod office and Synod supported services. This report contains photos of the ELT and information about the structure of the Synod Office. You can find the report from the years 18/19 [here](#) and 19/20 [here](#).

Projects

We manage the things we do within the Synod office as either “business as usual” or “projects”. Projects help us investigate and test ideas to see whether they will work to improve our internal processes or will benefit the wider church. If the projects succeed at improving the function, then they become integrated into our “business as usual”.

Our projects over the last 18 months have been:

- Covenant Action Plan
- Records Management
- SharePoint Implementation and Migration
- Project Plenty
- Subdivision and Reconveyance of the Shalom Elders Village
- Child Care Development
- Finance System Implementation
- Plentiful Leadership Program
- Business Development Unit
- Volunteers CARE Initiative
- Chaplaincy Review
- Payroll System Review
- Congregation Accounting and Bookkeeping Services
- Queensland Synod Office Service Level Agreement
- Synod Office Culture Change Program
- Uniting Church in Australia Schools Strategy
- Disposal of the Shalom Christian College site
- Expense Management System
- Learning Management System
- Policy Framework
- Alignment of Placements and People and Culture administrative functions
- Safe Ministry with Children Training Modules
- Shalom Christian College (SCC) Staff and Student Transition

- SugarCRM Update and Enhancements
- Safety Management System Framework
- Cross divisional activities consolidation
- Uniting Leadership
- Enterprise website(s) redevelopment
- Net Gen Arise and Activate Co-ordination
- Digital Futures/Uniting Media
- Disability Royal Commission

The General Secretary herself

The Synod Standing Committee (SSC) asks the General Secretary to work toward a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and reviews her performance annually against these expectations. I am grateful for the guidance, encouragement and support the SSC provides in this process.

The current KPIs are:

- Build vision and strategy
- Communications and marketing
- Board and governance oversight
- Relationship management
- Contribute to Uniting Church in Australia national activities
- Strategic resource management
- Strategic people management
- Synod office operations
- Risk management

I also meet regularly with other General Secretaries for national collaboration and am a resource for the Assembly Standing Committee.

I am appointed to the Frontier Services Board, Wontulp-Bi-Buya College Limited Board, member representative to Uniting Church in Australia redress Ltd. and I am the convenor of the national Regulation Review Task Group

I find resource and sustenance from prayer, journaling, attendance at my local church, painting, my business coach and my spiritual advisor.

Sometimes things don't work well ...

Sometimes Synod office activities don't quite hit the mark. When this happens, we acknowledge this can cause distress and extra work for others. For example, we know that the APP for congregational returns, introduced early in 2020 did not work well. In 2019 our communications around transition to the National Insurance Program were not timely. We also know that our online learning platform has had a few bumps and bruises along the way.

In these and other matters, we appreciate feedback on the services we develop and are committed to working with people across the church to improve how we do things together.

COVID-19 and Business Recovery

COVID-19 has challenged all of our concepts as to how the church should operate. We have had to quickly adapt and then recognise that we are in this for the long run. To assist the church, the Synod office has undertaken the following activities:

- COVID-19 specific email address to manage all enquiries – covid19@ucagld.com.au
- Weekly COVID-19 Warden Catchups via Teams meetings
- General Secretary's fortnightly update open to the SSC, Presbytery Ministers and Chairs of Committees Commissions and Boards
- Weekly, and then as needed, Situation Reports across all agencies, schools and activities to share information
- Facilitated the FIP Board watching the liquidity of the Church and the implications of JobKeeper
- Facilitated redundancies for some Synod office staff when income dropped dramatically at the outset of COVID-19
- Instituted a Synod Office pandemic plan
- Facilitated access to resources to counter burnout and increased stress in members and ministry agents
- Transitioned Synod Office activities to work remotely as far as practicable
- Counselling and advised regarding cancellation, postponement or transition to online meetings of various Synod activities such as the National Lay Preachers conference, Easter Madness, Chaplaincy Affirmation Days, Project Plenty consultation, Synod in session, etc.
- Reduced travel and capital expenditure to reduce costs.

Supporting Congregations and Presbyteries in their Ministry focus

The Synod office has resourced many different activities, which make sense to be managed with a central focus. This has meant the continued focus and resourcing around:

- Hosting the Presbytery Synod Interface (PSI)—a monthly gathering of Presbytery Ministers and Synod Office staff established for information exchange and identification of pinch points between the business activities of the Synod office and Presbyteries
- Safe Ministry training and accreditation, resources for this can be found [here](#)
- Supported the disaster recovery work, especially with a focus on Trauma Informed Community Ministry
- Facilitated the Chaplaincy Commission Review
- Monitored and advised on Visas and obtained a Labour Agreement from the Federal Government
- Facilitated and improved and updated administrative system for Placements
- Hosted the Safe Church Network
- Facilitated appropriate information sharing and record keeping regarding Blue Cards

- Monitored International mission links to ensure they were compliant with the Federal Government’s anti-money laundering and anti-slavery legislation, and
- Provided administrative support and resourcing to the Easter Madness and Unite events.

Leadership development

As a key focus of the Synod, the development of leadership programs has continued. In particular:

- We concluded the last cohort of Queensland’s Graduate leadership program
- Nominated people to the Uniting Church in Australia’s Executive Leadership program
- Worked with the South Australian Synod to resources and facilitate the Uniting Leadership project which included a National Leadership Symposium and sponsored people to attend coaching and team development programs
- Developed and instituted a Women in Leadership program. Unfortunately, this was due to launch just as COVID-19 hit and as a result, the Women in Leadership program has been suspended for the time being.
- As a result of that, we concentrated resources on quickly instituting a Plentiful Leadership program, the aim of which was to provide peer to peer support and mentoring in the online space. It was determined this was a necessity in the COVID-19 environment to support and encourage leadership from across all activities of the church.

Business Development Unit (BDU)

The purpose of the Business Development Unit (BDU) is to identify and developing new sources of revenue with the potential to generate significant annual surplus for the whole-of-Synod. This is done in a way that demonstrates a capacity to be agile, sustainable and transformative across all Synod activities. Parts of the church have been asked to identify business development champions to collaborate on areas that require a whole of church approach. More information about the BDU can be found [here](#).

Some early success has been achieved with:

- the development of Uniting Education—early Learning which will consolidate, monitor and resources childcare activities across the State
- combined purchasing to identify savings in solar and renewable energy, UCare and other procurement opportunities
- Developed and provided information relevant centralised information on op shops
- Monitoring and assisting the church to access Grants
- Developing resources and then hosting a series of Bequest breakfasts (now suspended due to COVID-19).

Project Plenty Implementation team

The Synod office has been preparing for the implementation of any activity that requires project management and oversight in relation to the Project Plenty outcomes. To do this, we have created a small implementation team whose job it is to ensure that any activity that requires resourcing and coordination will have access to the implementation team. The purpose is to ensure that no proposal that eventuates from the Synod will “get lost” in the system. The Synod office staff are excited and

prepared to respond to any direction the church may give as to its future needs.

Royal Commissions

The church is currently subject to the activities of two Royal Commissions. UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission Queensland are both actively involved and managing the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

The Synod is managing the whole of church response to the Royal Commission on Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. As the church has been highly engaged in these activities, a holistic response from the Synod is required. Information about our current activities in this space can be found [here](#).

Legal matters and complaints

Current Legal Matters

The Synod Office manages most legal claims against the church. An outline of the legal matters that the church has dealt with over the last 18 months is attached [here](#). Of greatest note are the claims against the church from historical sexual abuse. The Queensland Synod, because of its activity in family group homes and community services has a significant case load of claims against us. People are still entitled to sue the church through the civil system, and these are noted as PIPA (Personal Injury) claims.

National Redress Scheme

We are also members and financially contribute to the nationally constituted body UCARL (Uniting Church in Australia Redress Limited). This is the body established to deal with claims against us arising through the National Redress Scheme. A report on the work of UCARL and the statistics in relation to claims against Queensland can be found [here](#). Of note is the fact that the national scheme has operated with a significant backlog of cases in the first half of this year. This meant that several claims are only being paid out in this financial year.

Redress Recovery Levy

All parts of the church should recognise that the operation of the Synod's Redress Recovery Levy will operate for at least the next ten years and continue to make provisions in their accounts. It is anticipated that we may begin to predict likely recovery amounts for future years as this scheme matures.

Frederick Marsden Youth Centre (FMYC)

Synod should note that a Supreme Court claim was made against the church by FMYC for an interest in the land occupied by it. Unfortunately, this activity, which is separately constituted to the Uniting Church in Australia, has a substantial number of legal and redress claims for historical abuse against it which puts their finances under strain. They were seeking to recover assets which might assist them to pay these claims. The matter was settled at mediation, with FMYC acknowledging it has a licence to occupy the land, but no legal interest in the land. We continue to work with FMYC as we navigate joint claims of historical abuse against us.

Complaints

The Synod office, through its Legal Counsel and the Associate General Secretary, advise and manage the complaints and discipline processes of the church.

Relationships across the life of the church

- The Synod office supports the Covenanting Action Plan and the covenanting group to maintain and develop our commitment to the covenant with First Peoples. We have also facilitated property developments in Aurukun and Mapoon.
- The Moderator chairs a Social Action and Justice Advocacy reference group. The Synod office resources this group in identifying and resourcing information, research and communication.
- The Synod office is the key point for Assembly activities including national collaboration activities such as safe church, national procurement strategies, leadership, etc.
- Ecumenical relationships are supported through grants, and appointments to ecumenical activities such as the Ecumenical Tertiary Chaplaincy Committee, Queensland Churches Together and Wontulp-By-Buya.
- We have maintained a close working relationship with the Presbyterians. This has been, specifically in relation to joint claims for historical abuse, the exit of the Presbyterians from Grace and Emmanuel Colleges and the joint relationship in the PMSA schools.

Governance matters

Supporting Committees, Commissions and Boards

We have attempted to improve the role and function of the Synod office in assisting committees, commissions and boards to do their work well. We undertake regular reviews of member needs and facilitate the charter reviews of all these groups. The charters of all the groups we support can be found [here](#).

Notable changes to By Laws

In the last term the Standing Committee decided to dissolve the Synod Legal Reference Committee. This was done after it became apparent that members of the Committee could not easily exercise their legal skill in a voluntary capacity without significant professional risk. When the type of advice that could be given was reduced to governance advice only, then the voluntary legal team did not have expertise in this area. It was determined that the Governance Secretary and the Synod's In-House Legal Counsel were very skilled at undertaking the activities required. The Assembly still has a regulated Legal Reference Group which can provide specialised advice on our regulations.

Risk framework development

In mid-2020 the SSC approved a Synod wide risk appetite framework that can be found [here](#). This helps the church decide whether it is running a sustainable and safe environment for mission activities. These key risks are the areas that will be monitored, managed and reported to the SSC and the Synod in Session. The key risks for the church identified in the framework are:

Key Risk	Risk Description
1. Financial Risk: Finance (including Liquidity & Funding, Credit and Market)	The risk of financial loss or disruption of business from a shortage of liquidity and funding, credit losses and movements in market rates (interest rates, FX rates, etc.)
2. Person/Child Harm	The risk of harm to children, youth and vulnerable persons due to inappropriate conduct by Church related staff, volunteers and third parties.
3. Work, Health and Safety (Employees, Third parties, Public, etc.)	The risk of physical and mental injury to all persons in relation to the Church.
4. Facilities and Assets (Fit for purpose, Availability, Reliability and condition)	The risk that facilities and other physical assets are not fit for purpose, are not available, are not reliable and of poor condition.
5. Information and Communication (Loss, Integrity, Availability of information)	The risk of loss, unavailability, erroneous data and/or communications, including digital and physical information but not including cyber risk
6. Cyber	The risk of loss, damage, exposure of data and/or the damage to systems and operations from cyber attack
7. ICT – Fit for purpose, Availability, Integrity of ICT	The risk of not having fit for purpose, available and high integrity ICT systems and resources.
8. Regulatory and Legal	The risk of not complying with regulatory and contractual obligations.
9. Our People (Quantity, Quality, Culture and Conduct).	The risk of not having sufficient quantity and quality of people resources including ministry agents, leaders, employees, members and volunteers. It also includes the culture and conduct of our people, development, growth and support of leaders and leadership to ensure appropriate governance across the Synod.
10. Business Disruption	The risk of major disruption to operations that would require invoking of the Disaster Recovery Plan.
11. Fraud – Internal and External	The risk of fraud (any wilful act in order to gain unfair advantage or cause damage) from both internal and external perspectives.
12. Inter-conciliar structure of church	The risk of failure in relationships and partnerships across the church and the contagion effect of those relationships.
13. Strategic and Project Risk (Conflict between objectives, Misalignment of objectives, Decision risk, Execution Risk)	The risk of not managing any conflict / trade-off between strategic objectives, the risk of misalignment of objectives across the church, the risk of making an erroneous / sub-optimal decision in relation to strategy and the risk of poor execution of strategic projects affecting time, cost and quality of execution.

Supporting Others

Grants to support people or activities

The General Secretary approves annual or one-off financial grants to the following people or activities according in accordance with Synod policy or formal agreements:

- Theological Students in need of financial support
- Retired Ministers in need through benevolent fund grants
- Ecumenical Tertiary Chaplaincy Coordinator
- Queensland Community Alliance
- RI Alliance
- Luminous Parade
- Mosaic Festival
- Refugee Council of Aust
- Assembly Disaster Recovery
- James Cook Multifaith Chaplaincy
- Chaplain Committee Scholarship program
- Wontulp-Bi-Buya Theological College

Essential Infrastructure

We have developed strategic pathways and implemented business improvements regarding:

- Information Technology and Cyber Security
- Workplace Health and Safety and information around obligations as of Councils who are recognised as “Persons Conducting a Business Undertaking” (PCBU)
- A timetable of regular property inspections including identification of property risks across the congregation and presbytery portfolio of property
- Our national insurance program and the negotiation of a comprehensive and high value portfolio of insurance cover
- A long overdue and improved internal finance review, resulting in updated finance software,
- An improvement in our People and Culture processes including a consistent expectation around staff wellbeing and management
- The introduction of online training programs
- Advice and adaption around the eligibility around Fringe Benefit Tax based on an ATO tax ruling
- The transition of Long Service Leave provisions to ensure there is portability of Long Service Leave
- A consistent approach to standard and accessible policy documentation
- A coordinated budgeting process, that has seen strategic oversight and direction, drive the appropriate direction of resources. Each annual budget has been met and is subject to a continual improvement process.

Synod enterprises

Raymont Residential College and Alexandra Park Conference Centre were both impacted by the COVID-19 crisis but are emerging strongly. The crisis has driven exciting new business approaches to

continually improve their services to our communities. The staff and capacity of these services are an outstanding testament to missional activities of the church.

You can find out more about these activities – [Alexandra Park Conference Centre](#) and [Raymont Residential College](#).

Resourcing and the face of the church in the future

We are constantly reviewing the way we can support and continue with essential services to the church.

- The MDF proposal is an example of the Synod office attempting to open significant resources to allow for the funding of new missional enterprises.
- We made the decision to cease the printing publication of Journey. Unfortunately, the cost of physically printing has become extraordinarily expensive as small publishing companies go out of business as a result of COVID-19. We will review this decision in the event the market for print product softens.
- We have reduced costs by minimising travel and face to face meetings. These changes are likely to be around for some time and as a result we will be reviewing our need and use of office space.
- It is important that the whole of the church operates with a shared understanding of how the church owns and holds property. In particular, the role of activities which hold Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) status and the law relating to specific trusts raises the question about how the church holds and manages property for the future. We are seeking legal opinion in this regard and will work across the church when that advice is received.
- The implications of COVID-19 mean that we must imagine a future where contact is restricted and constrained for some time. In addition, the reach of Uniting Church in Australia ministries through our online presence can resource people well beyond our imagining. A shared vision in this regard is essential.
- The role and expectations of those who are elected or appointed to our Councils, Commissions and Boards are increasing. This will require a consistent and reassuring governance induction for people who hold responsibility in our church.
- Our world is living and will continue to live in a state of ongoing trauma. The church is exceptionally well placed in our communities to continue to provide messages of hope and liberation. We have understood and should consistently approach our activities with a trauma informed approach. Some clues around this are the support of micro communities and the development of peer to peer support networks. If you think we are already doing this, you are correct. The question is how we can do this better for the sake of the world.
- The church, unlimited by political and time boundaries can offer ourselves as a deep and respectful gift to our community. Thanks be to God.

Proposals to the 35th Synod

It is proposed that the 35th Synod receive this report.

Contact for report questions

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