

Formation of the Education for Ministry Working Group

1. FORMATION OF THE EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY WORKING GROUP

The 13th Assembly determined that “the Ministerial Education Commission be replaced by an Education for Ministry Working Group, at a date to be determined by the Standing Committee, to advise the Assembly on the standards of formation, education and training for the ministry of the Word, ministry of Deacon, ministry of Pastor and ministry of Lay Preacher” (12.08). The Assembly also gave Standing Committee a series of authorisations to follow through on this decision. The Standing Committee established a Task Group to prepare for a transition from the Ministerial Education Commission to an Education for Ministry Working Group (ASC 12.32.01). It made sufficient progress for the Education for Ministry Working Group to be appointed by the Standing Committee in November 2013 (ASC 13.62).

Since its formation the Working Group has consisted of: Jenny Byrnes, Seforosa Carroll, Rosemary Dewerse, Andrew Dutney (chairperson), Bev Fabb, Sharon Hollis, Amelia Koh-Butler, Lee Levett-Olson, Anita Munro, Jeff Savage, Steve Taylor, Denise Champion, Murray Muirhead and Grant Finlay. For different reasons Seforosa Carroll, Rosemary Dewerse, Anita Munro and Murray Muirhead have resigned from the Working Group.

The Education for Ministry Working Group (EFM) held its first face to face meeting in July 2014. It has also held several teleconferences. Without an established meeting pattern and with a committee membership with a very diverse range of responsibilities in the church it has been difficult to create a satisfactory schedule of meetings. This has been a source of frustration to members and the chairperson. However, it has been possible to allocate specific tasks to members of the Working Group so that its work can

proceed while the issue of meetings is resolved.

At this stage EFM has a threefold agenda. The first is to identify and maintain those administrative tasks of the MEC that need to be continued, including, issuing certificates of completion of Phase 2 requirements for candidates ready to begin placements and be ordained, collecting annual reports, and ensuring that there are the necessary guidelines in place in relation to each specified ministry for the responsible bodies within Synods to do their work. EFM was pleased that the MEC made arrangements, prior to its last meeting for the biennial Theological Educators’ Conference to take place in December 2014 and the biennial National Deacons’ Intensive to take place in February 2015. Both took place in Adelaide with the support of the SA Synod and Uniting College for Leadership & Theology. The second agenda focus is to develop a shared vision, goals and principles for theological education in the Uniting Church, taking into account earlier work of the Assembly and the MEC, including the Statement adopted by the 13th Assembly, “One Body, Many Members – Living Faith and Life Cross-culturally” to guide the future work of EFM. The third is to gain an overview of the work ahead for EFM and to plan that work. EFM understands that the Assembly expects a refreshed approach to ministerial education and is open to innovation and strategic change arising from the advice it receives from the Working Group in the future. Recognising that it will take some time for a complete review of this area of the church’s life to take place, the Standing Committee determined that the standards, procedures and rules contained in the MEC Information Booklet shall be those of the Assembly until such time as they have been replaced by equivalent Assembly rules (ASC 14.0804).

2. SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND MINISTERIAL FORMATION

EFM has spent some time investigating the apportionment of responsibility for different aspects of theological

education and ministerial formation, finding consensus on key matters:

- 2.1 **The Assembly** has responsibility for standards of theological education and ministerial formation. It exercises this responsibility by making national policies and procedures for theological education and formation, and by accrediting educational institutions as places of training for the specified ministries of the Uniting Church. It has established EFM to provide advice and other assistance in exercising this responsibility. EFM believes that in the current and emerging situation of great diversity and change in theological education and formation, and especially in the light of the need to develop innovative ways to design and deliver curricula that will serve the needs of the church, the Assembly's responsibility needs to be exercised in a way that is less "gate-keeping" and more "permission-giving". A key role for the Assembly, assisted by EFM, will be to collate and promote best practice in a variety of settings around the church, and to encourage cooperation and collaboration.
- 2.2 **The Synods and UAICC** have responsibility for the delivery of theological education and ministerial formation. This responsibility is normally delegated to MEBs. On behalf of the Synods and UAICC MEBs have oversight of theological colleges and their faculties. MEBs oversee the formation of candidates for specified ministries, liaising with the candidates' Presbyteries and the relevant faculty. MEBs report on behalf of the Synods and UAICC to the Assembly on the delivery of theological education and ministerial formation.
- 2.3 **Colleges and their faculties** have immediate responsibility for teaching the courses and administering the other educational and formational programs that are delivered by the Synod through them. It is primarily the colleges and their faculties that facilitate and participate in those personal relationships through which members of the church are educated for specified ministries.

Colleges and their faculties are accountable to the Synods that established, appointed and resource

them. The Synods are accountable to the Assembly for the colleges that have been accredited by the Assembly and for the education and formation of candidates for the specified ministries.

The Standing Committee has amended the Regulations to make this pattern of accountability clearer, including 2.4.1, 2.4.8(c)(i), 3.7.4, 3.7.4.3(c). In practice, these changes give Synods and the UAICC, through their MEBs, significantly more scope to shape education for ministry in ways that are sensitive to the particular context, challenges and opportunities for mission in each case. It also means that the primary channel of communication between the Assembly and the Synods/UAAICC is between EFM and the MEBs; rather than between the MEC and Colleges as was formerly the case.

3. A NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON THEOLOGICAL COLLEGES

EFM has played a key role in resourcing a national consultation on theological colleges (ASC 14.08.06). On the recommendation of EFM the Standing Committee facilitated the convening of a meeting of the Synod Secretaries, one person with responsibility for ministerial education from each Synod, UAICC representatives, the last MEC chairperson and the current EFM chairperson. At the time of writing this report, two consultations have been held; in May and November 2014. A third is scheduled for March 2015.

The consultation was convened to consider a series of issues raised by the Synod of NSW and ACT Standing Committee, i.e. to:

- a) evaluate current activities and relationships in ministerial/theological education;
- b) assess the church's capacity to continue to resource ministerial/theological education on the existing models;
- c) consider the number and location of theological colleges and their associated staffing issues;
- d) explore and evaluate alternative models of ministerial/theological education.

At the first consultation each Synod and the UAICC provided information and commentary on (a) and (b); (c) and (d)

were addressed in general discussion. The former MEC chairperson added information from the MEC meeting of July 2013, including the outcomes of a discussion between the MEC and the Assembly's Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry unit, and a series of proposals on models of national cooperation in theological education.

The meeting heard from each of the Synods and the UAICC about its requirements in theological education (the "non-negotiables"). Several common themes emerged which would have to be accommodated in any future model of national cooperation. These included:

- a) the need to integrate lay education, discipleship formation, ordinand training and continuing education;
- b) the need to have colleges that are in active partnership with the Synod in serving and leading the church;
- c) the need for education and ministry training to be contextually sensitive and appropriate; including, the provision of strong and accessible support for learners from all parts of our culturally and linguistically diverse community to help them succeed in a higher-education environment;
- d) the need to be able to train candidates for ordained ministries in situ – close to the communities from which they have emerged and within the bounds of the Synod in which their application was accepted.

The meeting agreed that the current models of delivering theological education are financially unsustainable for a number of Synods. It agreed both that the identification of a single provider of theological education would enable more effective cooperation and that the maintenance of multiple campuses is necessary to provide the Synods and UAICC with the theological resources and leadership they need. The idea of a national college with multiple campuses was discussed and the meeting agreed to write to all Synods and the UAICC with the following invitation:

"Theological education providers within the Uniting Church in Australia are invited to submit proposals outlining how they might conduct the operation of a multi-campus, national college providing

face-to-face, online and distance delivery of courses. Individual Synods or providers may offer proposals, or Synods/providers may make joint proposals. The scope of such a national college needs to encompass VET sector and Higher Education sector awards (Cert IV, Diploma, BTh/Min, MTh/Min, DMin/PhD). The college needs to take into account the church's need for an educational ministry that integrates lay education, discipleship formation, ordinand training and continuing education."

The second consultation, having received and considered submissions from five Synods, agreed that although a move towards a single UCA college and/or single provider remains a long term prospect, the Synods are not now ready to act on that together. However, there is an urgent need for much better communication, cooperation and collaboration between the several Synod colleges. To prepare for this, the meeting has asked EFM to provide it with a national map of:

- a) faculty members and their disciplines
- b) core courses for candidates
- c) non-academic formation programs
- d) intensive courses
- e) on-line courses in lay education

The meeting has also asked the Queensland MEB to provide a report on possible national collaboration between UCA theological libraries.

The second consultation also recognised that there are no impediments to Synods negotiating Synod-to-Synod agreements to cooperate in theological education. Neither are there impediments to a Synod, through its MEB, sourcing all or part of the academic course for candidates from another Synod while retaining the non-academic formation program.

Andrew Dutney
Chairperson
Education for Ministry Working Group

EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY WORKING GROUP

MANDATE

RESPONSIBLE TO:	The Assembly
REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS:	The Assembly and the Assembly Standing Committee
VISION STATEMENT:	<p>Education for ministry in the Uniting Church will:</p> <p>foster the centrality of the Scriptures in the life of the Church and the work of ministry; as described in the Basis of Union;</p> <p>inspire the participation of the people of God in the mission of God revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit;</p> <p>strengthen resiliency, passion and competence for ministry in the 21st century;</p> <p>stimulate lifelong learning and formation in the Christian life for all people;</p> <p>celebrate the shared ministry of people of God</p>
MISSION STATEMENT:	To advise the Assembly and the Assembly Standing Committee on the standards of formation, education and training for the ministry of the Word, ministry of Deacon, ministry of Pastor, and ministry of Lay Preacher in the Uniting Church.
KEY RESPONSIBILITIES	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Advise the Assembly on:<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ policies relating to standards of formation, education and training for the specified ministries in the Uniting Church, including continuing education, professional development and supervision;➤ requirements for the recognition of an approved centre for training for ministry.2. Facilitate regular national consultations of the faculties of approved centres for training for ministry and synod lay education and leadership development agencies, including maintaining awareness of federal government requirements for the higher and vocational education sector and how Synods manage the relationship for the sake of ministry3. Facilitate cooperation and the sharing of expertise and resources for education for ministry between the synods and with ecumenical partners.4. Encourage regular national networking of key leaders in formation, theological education, continuing education for ministry, lay education and leadership development, including MEBs and other Assembly agencies.

MEMBERSHIP

- A Chairperson appointed by the Assembly
- 10 people, appointed by the Standing Committee, who have a balance of academic and practical experience and with specific expertise in
 - Strategic, innovative thinking about the future of the church
 - Theology
 - Missiology
 - Ministry Practice
 - Formation for Discipleship and Ministry
 - Higher Education
 - Vocational Education and Training
 - Distance Education
 - Culturally contextual education
 - Practice of theological educationincluding one person from each Synod, and reflecting the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Uniting Church.
- Two persons appointed by the UAICC
- Up to 4 co options

Approved by Assembly Standing Committee, November 2013