

MINUTES
UNITING NETWORK AUSTRALIA
BI-ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Held on Zoom following the Daring 2022 Conference, Saturday 11 June 2022.

In Attendance: Nicole Mugford (Co-Convenor), Jason Masters (Co-Convenor), Peter Grayson-Weeks, David Landis-Morse, Ken Moala, Melissa Krollig (Treasurer), Wendy Hendry, Rev'd Amanda Nicholas, Damien Stevens-Todd (Website/Membership), Rev Comrade Rowley, Cathy Snell, Delia Quigley, James Ellis, Rev'd Richard Telfer, Warren Talbot, Russell Hoile, Alex Pittaway, Marelle Harisun, Thalia , Georgie , June

Apologies: Rev'd Dr Robert Stringer (Archivist), Vicki Aitkens

1. Open

The meeting was opened by Co-Convenor Nicole at 4:15pm with prayer and a welcome extended to all.

2. Minute secretary

Due to there being a secretary vacancy, Nicole called for a volunteer for minute secretary. James Ellis volunteered and took minutes.

3. Co-Convenors Report

Co-Convenors Nicole and Jason presented their report on behalf of the executive committee. A written report is attached. Report summary:

- Following the last Online Dare conference in 2020, there was some uncertainty as to the next 2 years
- The committee has dealt with a large number of LGBTIQ+ issues that have been in the wider media
- A number of resignations and vacancies arose on the executive committee.
- Highlights for Nicole especially had been engaging with younger LGBTIQ+ people in the church, and the emergence of the UnitingQueers gathering; the Uniting Network float at Midsommar Festival, and the Uniting Vic/Tas Rainbow Tick.
- Jason reported he had been out of action for much of the last 18 months due to serious injury and recovery.
- Jason has worked on a number of extensive submissions on the proposed religious discrimination bills and formed links with Equality Australia.
- A submission into the NSW Legislative Council enquiry into the "Parental Rights" bill sponsored by One Nation. Uniting Network (UCA?) was excluded from being witnesses.
- Nicole reported she has also worked on advocacy in the area of anti-conversion practices.
- Nicole and Jason thanked members of the executive, especially Mel for her work on the Daring Conference, Damien for website maintenance, and to Peter as our long-standing archivist.

The report was received by consensus.

4. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer, Melissa, presented the treasurer's report.

Current figures reported as: Balance: \$6,642.23 (from \$4,824.09)

Costs of the conference still to be finalised.

A reminder to pay for your membership fees ASAP.

The report was received by consensus.

5. Election of the National Executive Committee

Co-Convenor Nicole, who was not seeking to serve on the incoming executive committee, ran the election with the following results:

- Co-Convenors: Rev'd Amanda Nicholas & Jason Masters
- Secretary: James Ellis
- Treasurer: Melissa Krollig
- Webmaster: Damien Stevens-Todd
- Archivist: Rev'd Dr Robert Stringer
- Synod based Members:
 - NSW/ACT Synod: Delia Quigley (ACT); Cathy Snell (NSW)
 - Queensland: Ken Moala
 - Vic/Tas: Elliot Nicholas (Victoria); Peter Grayson-Weeks (Tas)
 - Northern Synod: Vicki Aitken
 - SA: To be filled
 - WA: Wendy Hendry

- Open and Affirming Congregations Lead: David Landis-Morse

6. Venue for Daring 2024

James Ellis and Delia Quigley invited the meeting to consider Canberra as the location for the next conference. This was supported by members present. To be discussed further and planned by the incoming executive committee.

7. Close

Nicole thanked those who had attended and particularly thanked the outgoing committee members. Nicole was likewise thanked by those present for the hard work she had done during her term as Co-Convenor.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 5:15pm.

Appendix 1

UNA Co-convenors report

When we last met for our bi-annual general meeting, we had just finished an online Daring conference, the first time we had attempted that and we were still trying to get our heads around what Covid was like and had no idea how long it would go for. Like everything in our world, the last two years has been shifting, unpredictable, online, and with the need to pivot and adapt quickly. It has been a difficult couple of years. No less difficult by the huge amount of LGBTQIA+ issues that have been put into the media and on the political agenda.

The Uniting Network Executive has had many vacancies over the last two years, Jenki stepped out of the co-convenor role and Nicole stepped into, Warren our long time secretary retired from the role which was very much deserved, and unfortunately we have been unable to get that filled, so Nicole also stepped up where she could and other roles and tasks were left unattended in the chaos of life, pandemic and prioritising.

Nicole's personal decisions to join the Uniting Network Executive was because she wanted to help resource and connect younger people. It has been recognised that that UNA has not been connecting wells with the next generation of younger people and Nicole was actively seeking to address this issues. She created spaces that look different to that which currently exists in UNA. There are exceptions to that of course, but in general, most younger people haven't felt engaged or connected with the work of UNA. Seeking to address this, she created a new space that has connected younger people from across the country, with other 50 people aged 18-40 connected digitally in community, this is the next generation of young leaders and ministers within the church. This has created a model that will provide useful input into the broader Uniting Church in the new COVID+ digital age and also what does it mean around supervision and pastoral oversight of such communities, not only in our context, but as other communities emerge using this as a starting model.

She has organised a Uniting Church marching group over the last 2 years at Midsumma in Melbourne, joining with Uniting and it has been a rich connection to start conversations. Nicole was also invited to meet with the Uniting VicTas LGBTQIA Advocacy group, led by Kaye, it was a good opportunity to hear about their work in rainbow accreditation and to share with them.

In Nicole's role as co-convenor, she as have felt supported and have regularly engaged with the UCA and particularly the assembly officers, who have sent on resources, opportunities and connections when they come across, including speaking with the President, General Secretary and Assembly Resourcing Unit to help build bridges with Uniting Network. Nicole believe it is vital for the executive to continue to connect with the UCA and offer insight and seek guidance where appropriate.

For Jason, the last two years has been personally difficult on March 23, 2020, the first day of the NSW lockdown, in his one hour out to exercise, whilst walking, he has a walking accident, that lead to a trip by ambulance to Royal North Shore Hospital, 6 operations on his shoulder leaving him with a permanent disability in his left arm, other non operative procedures that had him in ICU for several days, complications that had him hospital twice

for 7 weeks and an out patient at the Royal Rehabilitation Hospital for six months. As you may imagine all of this has had some significant mental health impacts that have flowed on to his university aged kids living with him.

Neither the less, where he has had the capacity, he has continued with his co-convenor role, even joining some meetings from his "office" in his hospital room. Jason has lead a lot of the advocacy work of Uniting Network both nationally and for NSW/ACT.

Jason Prepared four extensive submission to various federal government inquiries into the former Federal Government's proposed Religious Discrimination Bills. As part of this Jason regularly met with Equality Australia briefing sessions and other community groups, to gain insights into some of the particular technical and legal issues in the legislation. The support from and relationship with Equality Australia and the Public Interest Advocacy Centre has proved very valuable.

We were called as witnesses to the Federal Parliament Joint Houses Committee on Human Rights. This was jointly with the Uniting Church. This provided a very powerful voice to the Committee. The President, the Head of Uniting Care Australia, Jason Masters and Elliot Nicolas were the speakers at the hearing. We understand that Elliot is the youngest person to ever speak at that the Committee, and was the only transgender person to speak at the Committee, which was very disappointing since much of the debate was around transgender children in schools.

Jason also prepared a significant submission to a NSW Upper House Inquiry into the NSW One Nation "Parental Rights in Education Bill", which essentially allowed parents to within draw their kids from any class in public schools they didn't agree with, but more drastically could erase transgender and gender diverse kids in NSW Schools. The most draconian aspects of this legislation would have lead to the dismissal from any public school in NSW of any staff (cleaner, counsellor, office staff, nurse, teacher etc) who provided any support to a transgender or gender diverse student, and if the staff mean their teacher's license would be revoked.

The witnesses to the inquiry were biased to those supporting the legislation, and the four submissions from Christian organisations/individuals opposing the legislation were excluded from being witnesses. Fortunately the Green's member on the Committee asked many witnesses to provide a response on notice to the summary recommendations on our submission.

Nicole has actively worked on conversion practice advocacy, working with WA people on bringing a proposal to their Synod, with SA groups on advocacy, and closely with on Victorian legislation. UNA also put a submission in for the Tasmania Law Reform for conversion practices drafted by Nicole and Jason.

Nicole brought a proposal to the UCA Assembly on preventing harm from SOGICE which was passed by consensus in a closed session. I hope this will lead the church to listen and understand the impact and harm and ensure their practices do no further harm to people. We have also worked on a number of issues about trans rights and safe sex education in schools and have advocated and spoken with moderators and school principals in UCA

schools where these issues were coming up and making news. Some of these matters we have worked more behind closed doors to try to bring about change without shaming. We want to thank the members of the executive for their continued work, and especially want to mention Mel, who has worked tirelessly to bring Daring Conference into reality in an ever changing world. Damien who keeps our website and emails going and appears with wisdom at all the right moments, Robert who has for many years been the archivist for Uniting Network and been on the Executive, plus Ken, Peta, Richard and new member Vicki for their insights.

As said at the beginning of the report, we have had many vacancies over the last two years, and this continues with many of the executive taking a well earned rest. Nicole will be stepping out of the co-convenor role, in order to focus on her next steps in the UCA. We believe we need to consider the strategic next steps for the Uniting Network and what it can be into the future. We are at a time in life where we need to consider the next generations of leadership what issues and needs, they face, and we believe we need to spend a time focusing on trans and gender diverse issues within the church space. The election has showed how easily transgender people can be used so negatively for political purposes, and those following what is happening in the USA, probably more than half of the states are legislating the exclusion of transgender children in so many ways. With Rev Jo Inkpin's arrival at Pitt Street Uniting in Sydney it has exploded in our eyes just how unfriendly much of our liturgy is for transgender and gender diverse people.