

**Ministry update for Synod 2019**  
**Intercultural Community Development**

- **Introduction**

In May 2013, the Synod resolved to undertake a major strategic review (MSR). For over two years the MSR team worked across the Synod - prayerfully listening, worshipping, consulting, researching, analysing and discerning.

Out of the review, the Synod adopted this Vision Statement:

**Following Christ,  
walking together  
as First and Second Peoples,  
seeking community, compassion  
and justice for all creation**

The vision statement is a call to:

- Renew commitment to, and confidence in, following Christ;
- Follow practices that help us focus on both the “being and doing” of following Christ (including worship, witness, service, discipleship and evangelism);
- Follow Christ by taking personal responsibility for life-long learning, reflection and thinking about our faith;
- Have a good and just relationship between First and Second Peoples in this land;
- Commit us to seek hospitable community where people can belong and become;
- Seek to act compassionately in the world towards all creation; and
- Always seek justice.

And three Strategic Priorities are identified:

1. ministries which foster diverse gathered communities of renewal, Christian practice and mission
2. **culturally diverse mission and ministry;**
3. mission and ministry with children, youth, their families and young people.

Following MSR-related resolutions, the Synod’s ministries and operations have been consolidated into three major units: Secretariat; equipping Leadership for Mission; and Mission Resourcing. The role of the Intercultural Community Development sits under the equipping Leadership for Mission (eLM) Unit.

- **Intercultural Community Development**

Within the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania there are 22 CALD congregations and 19 Faith Communities. And the largest congregation in our Synod is the Korean Church of Melbourne in Malvern which has 800 members. These CALD congregations/Faith Communities enrich the lives of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. I was appointed to the new role beginning in April 2018. My central focus is engaging the CALD Congregations, CALD Faith Communities, Multicultural congregations, and Presbyteries within the Synod of Vic/Tas.

The key tasks of the Intercultural Community Development role are to:

- Foster the multicultural nature of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) through intentional engagement with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Congregations/Faith Communities in Victoria and Tasmania

- Work closely with other colleagues and teams within eLM to nurture CALD congregations/Faith Communities and develop their capacity for fully engaging in the life of the Presbyteries and Synod
- Work closely with the Intercultural Forum Committee (IFC) in affirming and demonstrating the multicultural character of the UCA
- Provide leadership, demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment across the life of the Church to foster integration, participation and new and renewing expressions of faith
- In partnership with Presbyteries and the IFC develop and implement an imaginative strategic plan that progresses the UCA's intention to be a truly Intercultural Church

Some of the key words for the role are: Advocate, Resource, Nurture, Engage, Facilitate collaboration, Build capacity, Build Networks and Educate.

- **Working on the Key Roles**

The key undergirding principle to achieving the above roles is working relationally. This way of working is often underrated and undervalued when the focus is on governance, processes, polity and results. A relational way of working focuses more on listening, understanding, respecting differences and collaborating.

- **Connecting with CALD Congregations and Faith Communities**

One of the ways of connecting with the wider Synod and particularly the CALD congregations and CALD Faith Communities is visiting when they gather for worship. The primary purpose is to listen to the challenges, concerns and needs of the CALD Congregations and CALD Faith Communities so that eLM can better resource and if need be advocate for them. When appropriate I write up what I hear and share with the wider church the challenges, concerns and needs through what I called Vignettes. If you are interested, please [email Sweet Ann](#) for copies.

Having the opportunity to preach God's Word in some of the CALD congregations and communities on Sunday mornings has enriched my connections with them.

The Assembly's 12 [National Conferences](#) enable the voices of different communities to be heard and make a distinctive contribution to the life of the Uniting Church. They provide opportunities for people of the same culture to meet together for worship, fellowship and development. To date I have attended the Chinese National Conference held in Wesley Gospel Hall in Melbourne and Indonesian Conference held in St Andrews in Gardiner. Attending and participating in these National Conferences have provided a deeper appreciation of the specific challenges, concerns and needs of each ethnic community.

- **"Introduction to Uniting Church in Australia" Workshop**

Within the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania there are 22 CALD congregations and 19 Faith Communities. These CALD congregations/Faith Communities enrich the lives of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

However, there are two areas of concerns related to the CALD Congregations/Faith Communities. One, many of the CALD Congregations/Faith Communities remain within their communities. Second, amongst the CALD Congregations/Faith Communities there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Basis of Union, the Structures, Regulations and Polity of the Uniting Church and the core values of the Uniting Church.

When the CALD Congregations/Faith Communities have a better understanding of the Uniting Church they are empowered, and benefit through fuller participation in the life of the Presbytery and Synod.

We have designed a workshop for the CALD Congregations/Faith Communities to equip them. The workshop will focus on three key areas:

- (a) The History and the Basis of Union
- (b) The Structures, Governance and Polity of the Uniting Church
- (c) The Core Values of the Uniting Church

The South Camberwell Gospel Hall is the first ethnic specific congregation which participated in this workshop. About 25 Council and Congregation members attended. It was translated into Cantonese and Mandarin when necessary. The feedback has been positive. My hope is that all CALD congregations and Faith Communities within the Synod of Vic/Tas will sign up for this workshop through the encouragement of their Presbytery. It's also possible that any group seeking to be part of the Uniting Church in Australia could be required to this workshop before the group is considered for reception into the Church.

- **“Living Together: Embracing Diversity in the UCA” Workshop**

Central to our Christian faith is a vision of life which calls us to a way of being and living together that respects every person as made in the image of God. Jesus Christ showed us that we have a responsibility to recognize and embrace the differences between and among human beings. The early church, in response to Christ's call, broke through the barriers of race, culture, class, gender and even faith. We are called to follow and live out God's will for reconciliation in the world.

Diversity is a gift from God to the world and also the church. The Uniting Church in Australia recognizes difference and embraces diversity. In our diversity we seek our unity in Christ Jesus. However, to embrace and live in diversity can be challenging at times. It doesn't happen naturally or easily. The aim of this workshop is to help us to embrace and live together in diversity so that we can truly be enriched and blessed.

This workshop will consist of five sessions:

- (1) Theological and Biblical frameworks of Living Together
- (2) Worldviews – Why do we think/do what we think/do?
- (3) Breaking Barriers
- (4) Practicing the diversity of Christ's Body – Tool Box
- (5) Engaging Diversity in your context

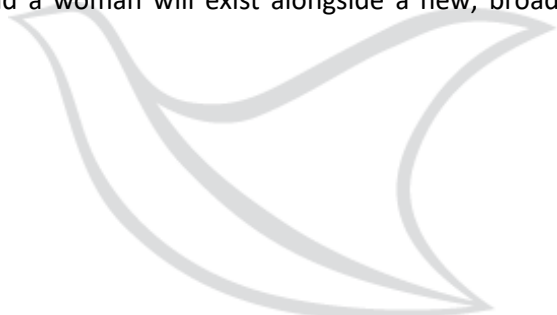
This workshop is a collaborative effort between my colleague in the Synod of NSW and ACT, and is a work in progress. We believe this is an important workshop for a diverse Uniting Church in Australia.

- **Assembly's Decision on Same-Sex Marriage**

The 15<sup>th</sup> National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia agreed to give individual ministers the right to decide whether to marry same-sex couples.

The 265-member Assembly approved two separate definitions of marriage, which it said will be "equal yet distinct".

The traditional definition of marriage between a man and a woman will exist alongside a new, broader definition of marriage between two people.



Not surprisingly many of the CALD congregations and CALD Faith communities didn't support this decision. My colleague Dev Anandarajan (Intercultural Leadership Development) and I work closely together to monitor the responses of the CALD congregations and CALD Faith Communities across the Synod of Vic/Tas. We connect with CALD ministers, CALD congregations and CALD Faith communities to explain the Assembly's decision on same-sex marriage and answer any questions.

Rev David Kim and I visited the HOBART CHEIL KOREAN congregation in Hobart after the Assembly's same-sex decision at the request of the Presbytery of Tasmania. David preached and we met with leaders and members in three separate occasions to best explain the reasons behind the Assembly's decision. The congregation feels supported and listened to. Some members did leave the congregation. A small group continue remain to meet for worship, supported by the Presbytery of Tasmania.

I wrote a reflection after the Assembly's decision and it was published in [INSIGHTS](#), Synod of NSW and ACT – "The Uniting Church said YES and NO to Same-Sex Marriage". In the article I reminded the readers that "We are a multicultural church - Which means we are multi-cultures, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual. We are also a multi-theologies church. It is a given!"

Post Assembly the challenge for us as a Body of Christ within the Uniting Church is, 'Can we live together whatever our theological persuasions on the SGM and act on Paul's injunction: "Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15)?

Can we be happy with those who support SGM even if we don't? And can we weep or be sad with those who we can't support SGM and are struggling? Or must we continue to fracture the Body of Christ?

- **The Journey Continues...**

I am still adjusting to the new role and discovering how I can best use my gifts and graces for the role that I have been given. As I continue to meet, listen and discern the challenges, concerns and needs of the CALD congregations and CALD Faith Communities I have discovered the importance of connecting and building relationships.

I am reminded that important work takes time. This expression – "**Rome wasn't built in a day**", functions as an injunction or plea for me and for us as a Church to be patient.

Some questions for the journey:

- (1) How can we flourish as a church that embraces and celebrates the diversity within our Church?
- (2) How might leaders from our CALD communities have been overlooked in our Synod and Presbytery?
- (3) How can we ensure greater diversity within all the Councils of the Church?
- (4) How can we name and begin to address together the obstacles to full participation?
- (5) How can we enable greater Intercultural competency amongst the leaders and members of the church?
- (6) What approaches and actions might we need to take to strengthen us as a true intercultural church.

Swee Ann can be contacted for questions, or to provide support for your Presbytery or Congregation / Faith Community

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