

Ministry update for Synod 2021

Disability Inclusion Advocate

Federal Disability Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (DRC)

Standing Committee endorsed the establishment of a Synod Task Group (STG) to oversee the Synod's response to the DRC. A range of representatives from across the Synod bring their knowledge, experience and skill to this Task Group, which has met on 4 occasions in 2020. The Assembly has also established a National Task Group (NTG) with two STG members represented on it: Adrian Pyle as schools liaison person, and Andy Calder as Chair of the STG.

The major tasks undertaken to date are:

- Instigated an Incident Search of all records across the Synod dating back to 1 July, 2012
- In conjunction with Synod's Legal Services, supported the process of Notices to Produce required by the DRC of Uniting VicTas
- In conjunction with UCA Victorian chaplains, produced a response to the DRC's Criminal Justice Issues Paper, out of concern for prisoners with a disability
- Distributed a survey across the Synod seeking information about responses to/with people with disability. To be collated by the NTG for its final Submission.

The DRC has now issued its Interim Report. The work of the DRC is expected to continue until 2023.

Synod VicTas Disability Action Plan (DAP)

The 2019 – 2022 Plan was launched at Synod 2019 by Victoria's Public Advocate, Dr Colleen Pearce. It has also been produced in an Easy English format. The Plan provides a range of strategies and a matrix of actions to ensure people with disability are not excluded from participation in our congregations, presbyteries and Synod's Operations and Institutions. Included in the Plan is the Assembly's Statement of Access and Welcome, a Theological Background and a range of ways of developing a response. The Plan can be found at <https://victas.uca.org.au/ministry-mission/disability-inclusion/>

Mental Health

(i) Mental Health Kit

One of the DAP's actions has been to produce and distribute a resource for congregations in their support of individuals and families living with mental illness. The Kit was launched in late 2019 by Prof Alan Fels, Commissioner on Victoria's Mental Health Royal Commission. The Kit can also be downloaded at <https://victas.uca.org.au/ministry-mission/disability-inclusion/>

(ii) Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

An initial 2-day course was held in November 2019 for a range of ministry agents, to become inspired and promote this valuable Course throughout the Synod. To date there have been three presbyteries which have promoted and organised an MHFA course (on-line on account of COVID-19). Plans are developing for further roll-out during 2021.

‘Planning liturgy/ritual at times of community trauma’

Work is close to completion of a resource to support and equip leaders who find themselves, at times of natural disaster and traumatic incidents, needing to quickly plan and organise liturgy/ritual for/with their community. Information and suggestions provided can be used in both Christian and wider multi-faith contexts.

Uniting CPE – The John Paver Centre

Founded in 2010, and auspiced by the Synod, this Centre provides pastoral care education for participants in a range of community and clinical settings (e.g. congregations, agencies, hospitals, prisons.....). Participants are accredited according to the Standards of the Association for Supervised and Pastoral Education in Victoria (ASACPEV Inc.). In 2019 the Centre was re-accredited for a further 5 years, and in 2020 ran one program with 5 participants, including two UCA ministerial candidates.

Plans are under consideration for a program in 2021.

Pilgrim College

The academic subject ‘Pastoral Care/People with Disabilities’ was designed and facilitated in the second semester 2019 by Andy Calder. His PhD was conferred by the University of Divinity in 2020. The title of the study was: ‘Adults with intellectual disability and their spirituality: voices to be heard by faith communities and disability services in Victoria, Australia.

Assembly-related ministry

Emanating from Resolutions at Assembly 2018:

- (i) Collaboration in 2019 with Assembly’s Transforming Worship Circle to develop the liturgical resource ‘Called to be a Church For All’
- (ii) 2019 in conjunction with UnitingCare Australia, developed the Assembly document ‘Guidelines for Disability Access’

2020 commenced representing Synod on UnitingCare Australia’s newly-formed Disability Network.





Australian Research Council Grant

The Centre for Disability Studies, University of Sydney has been successful in gaining 3 years funding, commencing early 2021, for a research project: “NDIS: Rhetoric or Reality?” A consortium of six organisations, including Uniting NSW/ACT, Uniting VicTas and the Synod of VicTas, will collaborate with co-researchers with intellectual disability, and interview 100 adults across Australia who are in receipt of NDIS Plans. More information for potential participants will become available in 2021. One hoped-for outcome is recognition of spirituality’s importance when NDIS planners are developing Plans with individuals.

Road Trauma

The Synod has been an active collaborator with Road Trauma Support Services Victoria, Transport Accident Commission and the City of Greater Geelong, in a project to construct the first state-wide memorial for road crash victims. Completed in March 2020, a stunning sculpture called ‘Solace’ has been installed at LimeBurners Point, Corio Bay, East Geelong. Organisation of the 20th annual ‘Time for Remembering’ ceremony was held on-line in November.

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