



Synod 2019

What to expect at a Synod meeting

What is the Synod?

The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation to both the Church and the world as designated by the UCA Basis of Union, Constitution and Regulations. Within the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania there are eight presbyteries and more than 500 Church Councils.

A Synod is formed by the Assembly in accordance with the Constitution of the Uniting Church in Australia. The Constitution states that 'Subject to the direction of the Assembly, the Synod shall have general oversight, direction and administration of the Church's worship, witness and service within its bounds'. (Part C, para 32)

Who can be a Member of the VicTas Synod?

The Constitution and Regulations also outline specific requirements and processes for Synod membership. Each of the eight presbyteries submits a membership roll for that presbytery two months prior to the scheduled Synod meeting.

These rolls include both ordained ministers and confirmed lay members. The total number of members per presbytery is determined by the number of ministry placements in the presbytery, with every presbytery being eligible to appoint at least 10 ministers and 10 lay people. The Regulations state that there cannot be more ministers than lay members from each presbytery as Synod members.

Synod membership also includes ex-officio individuals and others appointed by the Synod. At no stage can Synod appointees exceed the numbers appointed by the presbyteries.

What this means in plain English: If you are a confirmed member of the Uniting Church, you can be appointed by your presbytery to be a member of Synod whether or not you are a member of presbytery.

Meetings of the VicTas Synod

The VicTas Synod holds its meetings about every 18 months. The 2019 Synod will be held over four days and evenings. The opening service is on the evening of Friday 5 July, and the Synod business runs between 6 and 9 July

The following Synod meeting will be held in November 2020.

The meetings are held in Melbourne, in a location that can offer a large meeting area and numerous break out rooms, is accessible by both car and public transport, has good disability access and with reasonably priced accommodation close by. The 2019 meeting will be held at Box Hill Town Hall.



What to expect

The Synod provides an opportunity to come together with others from across all eight presbyteries to determine the policies and direction of the Synod and its agencies, to consider reports from the Boards and Commissions, Committees, Task Groups, Presbyteries, Synod Support Services, Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and other reporting bodies and to worship God. The members are challenged by daily Bible Studies and the Moderator invites the 300 plus gathered into a community to seek to discern God's will for the Uniting Church.

The Synod uses meeting procedures which are set out in the Uniting Church's Manual for Meetings (MfM). Consensus procedures are its preferred and primary method for decision-making. A presentation in the first business session of the meeting explains the Synod's business processes. Former Assembly General Secretary, Rev Terence Corkin, in the introduction to the 2009 revised version of the MfM, states that it provides the official standing orders and rules of debate for the Church:

The Uniting Church believes that we hear the voice of God in the councils of the church. Church meetings that encourage community, and listening to one another in a spirit of openness and humility, are more likely to discern the will of God. Terence Corkin

For the duration of the four days of the meeting, the members of Synod become a community, listening respectfully to each other as they seek to discern God's will. It is important you come open to the movement of the Spirit which leads to hearts and minds being changed, and the building up of a Godly community.

For this community to function at its best, its members need to commit to attending every session; to come fully prepared (more on this later); and to engage all the necessary skills in building communication: listening; assertion; conflict-resolution and collaborative problem solving (MfM 1.6).

Many people have affirmed the value and benefits of the consensus process, and the way that it can deal with both simple and more difficult issues. When the community is operating at its best, its members can fully experience a fellowship of reconciliation.

To foster community, the plenary sessions of the Synod are conducted with its members seated in table groups. You will be placed in a group and remain at that table for the duration of the meeting, in order to build a sense of community, to make and affirm friendships, and to ensure that each member of the Synod has a group of people with whom she or he can identify. At various times during the course of business sessions, the Moderator might ask the table groups to discuss a proposal that is before them. This enables members to voice concerns, ask questions, or seek clarification from each other.

Members are also placed in designated working groups of approximately 15 people. These groups meet for up to two hours several times during Synod, to work through significant business matters. A facilitation team receives the feedback from these working groups and will often reframe proposals to better represent the will of the meeting as expressed through this feedback.

Having a voice

The Synod meeting can be intimidating for a first timer. The Moderator chairs the meeting and wants to hear from a diversity of members. Your voice is as important as any other voice. In seeking to discern God's spirit, the smallest voice can effect change. Additional time at the microphone may be given to members for whom English is their second language. A hearing loop is also provided. Make sure you read the MfM and you will understand how you can engage effectively in the meeting.

Preparation

The Synod expects that you will have read all the papers prior to arriving for the first day of business. All reports and proposals are posted to the Synod meeting App (an application which is downloadable to your smart phone or tablet and which can also be used from a laptop computer), details of which will be provided closer to the time of the meeting.

Elections

At each Synod meeting elections for different committees are held. At the Synod meeting prior to the conclusion of a Moderator's term of office, an election is held to determine the next Moderator. This person becomes the Moderator-elect until installed at the start of the following Synod meeting.

The Standing Committee of the Synod is one of the bodies elected at every Synod meeting. It acts on behalf of the Synod between meetings. It is responsible for the governance of the Church and receives reports from its major bodies.

To serve on Synod Standing Committee is a significant responsibility and privilege. It is there that the significant matters before the Church are debated and prayed over. For our Church to continue flourishing, it needs a diverse range of people who are willing to step up and take on leadership roles. They will be prayerful, insightful people who are prepared to work hard to understand mission, ministry, strategy, governance, finance and the 'big picture'.

You will be asked to consider nominating other members for election to the Standing Committee.

As nominations are sought, please consider whether there are people who you believe will have the skill set and a willingness to serve the Uniting Church in positions that require prayerful discernment, preparation and time, as well as the satisfaction that comes from service. It will be helpful to talk to others before nominating someone for any position, and you should also ensure that the person you are nominating is willing to accept the nomination. Nomination procedures are published along with other Synod information.

Wondering how to juggle family life?

The Synod meeting will cover the costs of child care for a member who places their young child in care during the work week, but is unable to offer crèche facilities. Details are included in the member introduction pack.

Accommodation for regional members

There is hotel and apartment style accommodation close to the Box Hill Town Hall. If you would prefer to stay with a locally-based church member, billeting is also available. Again, more details will follow. Accommodation and meal costs are at your own expense. A travel allowance is provided for all interstate members and Victorian members who live more than 60km from the meeting venue.

Synod Business Committee

The Business Committee is responsible for the business of the Synod. It manages the program, the presentation of reports, the election process, and the logistics of the meeting. For the last two years, it has worked in partnership with a Synod Creative Design Team whose purpose is to consider and resource the implementation of interactive, engaging and creative strategies and processes in the life, work and business of the Synod meeting, in order to foster the increased and active engagement of participants.

We urge you to consider becoming a member of Synod and to contact your presbytery to understand the way that membership is determined. If you are still in need of more information, talk to someone in your presbytery who has been a Synod member in the past.

