



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Introducing the Vision and Mission Principles

**Information and exercises
to help focus on God's mission**



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



I am pleased to commend this introduction to the Synod's Vision and Mission Principles.

Recognising the faithful and hopeful ways God is moving among us, all parts of the Church across the Synod are invited to faithfully explore ways in which the Vision and Mission Principles might assist our discernment of the renewing work of God's Spirit throughout the diverse contexts of our life as Church.

May we pray together that God's Spirit will be our ever-present companion and guide, as we seek faithful participation in God's mission of love for all creation.



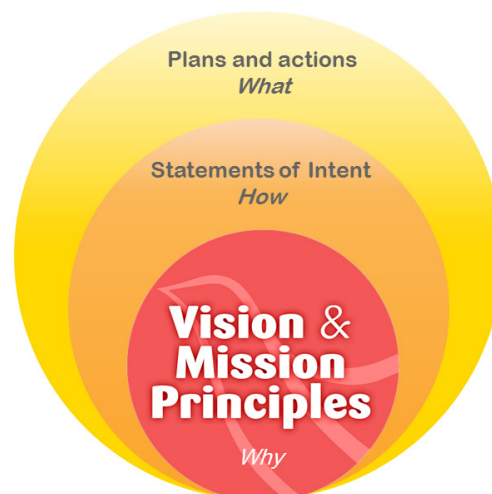
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This booklet is a brief introduction to the Synod Vision and Mission Principles. It invites discussion, provokes questions and gives an intentional focus for discerning the renewing work of the Spirit in our day.

This introductory book contains information about how and why the Vision and Mission Principles have been created, invitational reflections, as well as exercises you might like to use—either personally and/or with your particular church community or group.

In time, continuing engagement with other parts of the Synod's Strategic Framework will be given focus, including:

- statements of intent
- strategic priorities



A call for openness to the renewing work of God's Spirit in our life as a Church

'Together, the Vision and Mission Principles answer the 'Why' of Church the Movement—providing a focus and guiding our ongoing conversation about mission.'
- MSR report to the June 2016 Synod

In June 2016, the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania acknowledged the new and hopeful ways in which God is working. The Synod discerned a call for the Church to move in new and renewing ways to continue to participate in this work.

As a primary aid for faithful discernment and a focus for the Synod over the next three to five years, the **Vision and Mission Principles** were adopted. These statements help enable an intentional and coordinated focus on the mission of God.

Together, the Vision and Mission Principles represent the **'who'** and **'why'** of our life as God's church. They point toward our identity and our purpose. As a church, we find our

life in God's mission in the world. This is true for the whole Church: our diverse gathered communities, our presbyteries, our synod-based ministries and operations, our schools, agencies and institutions.

In some sense, this is nothing new. However, what is new is that our Church is called to give expression to our participation in God's mission **in our present day**. The Uniting Church 'stands in relation to contemporary societies in ways which will help it to understand its own nature and mission' (Basis of Union ((BOU)), #11). This is an ever-new and renewing call to embody Christ's mission in the changing and unique contexts in which the Spirit of Christ leads us.

The Vision and Mission Principles seek to invite discussion, provoke questions and provide focus for discerning the renewing work of the Spirit.

**Following Christ,
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God in Christ is at mission in the world and sends the Church in the Spirit to:

1. share the Good News of Jesus Christ
2. nurture followers of Christ in life-giving communities of reconciliation
3. respond in compassion to human need
4. live justly and seek justice for all
5. care for creation
6. listen to each generation and culture so as to live out the Gospel in fresh ways
7. pursue God's mission in partnership

This is your invitation to joyfully wrestle with this privileged call to new and renewing life in mission

We will need to take time to:

- Revisit our purpose as a people called by the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Explore questions of our life together as communities of Christ reaching out to engage our diverse contemporary contexts
- Open ourselves to the renewing work of God's Spirit in our life as a church that lives to participate in God's mission
- Enable a continuing conversation that is embedded into our ongoing way of life.

We invite one another to a journey of deep listening —

faithfully searching for God's word to us,
and sharing in communities of trust with one

another. It will take time. There are unlikely to be any simple solutions. It will take mutual commitment from those who come seeking God's will in our day. It may be affirming and challenging, surprising and disturbing. It may lead us to discerned choices and renewed commitments. It may draw us to times of repentance. It may cause us to leap for joy.

Above all, we seek to honour God's mission —

a journey initiated by divine grace that is worthy of our greatest desire. It is not our mission, rather it is God's mission of love for the world in Jesus Christ. That unfolding mission calls us into being. It draws us into a continuing work in fellowship with the Spirit.

Reflection: a calling of the Spirit

'This is a time we believe that the Spirit is calling us forward to new things and back to the hope in the gospel of Jesus'.

- MSR report to the June 2016 Synod

How can a church be called forward and back?

This call, to things forward and back, invites a creative and life-giving tension—one reflected in a relationship between our identity and our purpose. It is a dynamic tension woven through the vision of our Basis of Union.

- **Looking back in acknowledgement**, the Basis of Union declares that our Church 'lives and works within the faith and unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church' (BOU #2). It treasures the received faith of the Church found in scripture, creed and reformation witness (BOU #5, 9, 10). We are a church 'built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ' (BOU # 3) as a result of God's decisive work of grace in the history of creation.
- **Looking forward as a fellowship of the Holy Spirit**, the Church is to be 'a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal ... a pilgrim people, always on the way toward a promised goal' (BOU #3). In Holy Communion, the people of God are 'strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world, and rejoice in the foretaste of the Kingdom which Christ will bring to consummation' (BOU #8).

Looking back to (anchoring into) the Gospel is a re-discovering of the hope that calls us forward. The echo of this vision is reflected, and sought out, in the gathered and sent character of our church communities, in that:

- **We gather** to recall the stories of faith, to hear again the gospel, to acknowledge again Jesus as Lord, and to gather around the table as a reconciled community. In this way, we are repeatedly anchored by God's grace to the gospel of Christ Jesus and the faith of the universal church.
- **We are sent** to continue our pilgrimage as God's people on the way, to serve the world God loves, and to walk in the way of the Servant King. In this way, we are called again and again to engage the world as a sign of and witness to the message of God's love and hope, and to enter more fully into God's mission of love for the world.

So today, in this present call as the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania:

- ***We look back to the hope in the gospel of Jesus.*** We refresh ourselves, anchor ourselves, and ultimately find our life in the Gospel, taking time to receive again that inheritance in the faith that is by God's grace.
- ***We look forward to new things.*** We faithfully anticipate with open hearts that God's Spirit will always be leading us to new and renewing expressions of life as Church to make us alive as 'an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself' (BOU #3).

we live in the time between God's already and not yet. 'The Church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring' (BOU #3); between the proclamation and victory of the in-breaking reign of God that Christ has already achieved, and the not yet of the day when, in joy of divine fulfilment, the reign of God will be 'on earth as it is in heaven'.

The Spirit is calling us forward and back, for

Consider the ways your community or group:

- 1. Finds identity in its inherited history and foundations – in its stories and sacred texts, its gatherings, its activities;***
- 2. Strives to be continuously open to a future shaped by the new and renewing work of the Spirit of Christ.***

Why might this back/forward tension be so important to us?

What happens when one element is ignored?

How and why has the Vision Statement been created?

'Our Vision Statement articulates the passion and desire for the future direction of the Synod expressed by people across the Church in Victoria and Tasmania. It is a statement of who we are It is the story we are living as a pilgrim people on our way'.

- MSR report to the June 2016 Synod

The Vision Statement is a faithful attempt to support a coordinated, intentional focus on God's mission, and our part as the church of Christ in that mission. Our efforts to articulate our purpose are critical in helping us faithfully navigate this period in history together.

Over the years of the Major Strategic Review, in meetings with people from across the Church, an openness and excitement at the possibilities of new and renewing expressions of life and mission were clearly evident. Overwhelmingly, people expressed their continuing inspiration in a Christ-centred vision that:

- Confesses Christ as the supreme authority in the church
- Lives by the grace of God made tangible in baptism and communion
- Seeks a servant participation in the mission of God to, and for, the world
- Is inspired by the biblical witness as the testimony to a loving and just God

There was a sense of thankful celebration for the journey so far, while also a recognition that much change has occurred and is still to occur.

Together with the complementary Mission Principles, we seek to articulate the 'why' of the church in our day. All parts of the church across the synod are invited to share in an ongoing conversation that the Vision Statement seeks to encourage and provoke about our participation in God's mission.

Our Vision...

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

*Either alone, or with your group/community...
give some time to personally explore the Vision.*

After a time of prayer or quiet pause:

- 1. Read the Vision Statement — read it once aloud, sit quietly with it for a few minutes, then read it aloud a second time.*

In your own space, without sharing with anyone else:

- 2. What word or phrase would you wish to affirm most? Think why this might be.*
- 3. What word or phrase surprises you most— a question, an uncertainty, a concern? Think why this might be.*

Groups could now take time to share reflections.

Listen collectively for what your group's discoveries might say to you and to your group's own vision.

If alone, note your discoveries and perhaps share with a friend.

Some beginning reflections on our Vision...

Following ... Walking ... Seeking ...

These three words shape our Vision and reflect a sense of dynamic movement and life. Reflecting our denominational name, Uniting Church, following, walking, seeking embody an openness to both the present and the future. They point to the vision of our Basis of Union: 'The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end' (BOU, # 18).

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

Following Christ

The Basis of Union acknowledges that the Church is 'built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ' (BOU #3). Our Vision complements this critical foundation. Following is the response of faith by those who have heard the call of Christ. The beginning of the Vision is not us, not from within our human capacities, but rather begins with God's grace expressed as an initiative of love for the world.

1. In your own words, try to explain to someone who is new to Christianity, why "following Christ" is critical to who we are?

2. What are some of the ways followers of Christ learn to be better followers?

Walking together as First and Second Peoples acknowledges in confession and lament the burden of recent Australian history. It demands a response from us all to walk respectfully with First Peoples. It further reminds us that God is always calling and drawing us into community— healing the barriers that divide us. Walking together speaks of the hope we have for reconciliation with God, and with one another, that we might experience fullness of life lived in companionship.

Read Luke 24:13-35 about two friends walking together. Imagine the journey, the talking, the learning, the discoveries. Share your reactions with someone else. In what ways might this be a good image for seeking reconciliation in our nation?

Further reference for exploring the background to the Vision, see the paper *Theological reflections on Vision and Mission Principles* at:
<http://www.victas.uca.org.au/aboutus/Pages/Vision-Mission.aspx>

Seeking ... for all creation. The Church is called to have God's promised future as its goal. 'Here the church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come' (BOU #3). And so we seek 'that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation' (BOU #3). The whole creation is the object of God's love. And we as Church are gathered into that loving purpose by following the way of Jesus Christ and seeking the leading of the Spirit. Not as ones who have all the answers, but as ones who repeatedly misunderstand and

struggle. We trust the Spirit of Christ to guide us that we may not lose the way.

We seek specifically, but not exclusively, three characteristic signs of this way:

- **community** — growing, challenging, loving, arguing, discerning, surprising
- **compassion** — vulnerable, tears, grace-full, breaking barriers, healing
- **justice** — right relationship, peace, hope, generosity, tending all creation.

1. What are the things that ignite a 'seeking heart' in you? How does the inspiration of following Christ and walking together inspire such seeking in you?

2. How would you describe the 'seeking' in your community of faith? In what ways does the seeking of community, compassion and justice affirm or challenge your community?

Our Mission Principles ...

Our **Mission Principles** seek to capture God's big purposes for the loved creation and the mission of the Church within those purposes. The New Testament vision tells of a loving, gracious and merciful God who desires a living relationship with the whole of God's creation. The Church, empowered by the Spirit, is called to serve as ambassadors of that reconciliation accomplished in Jesus Christ.

Together, the Vision and Mission Principles provide a focus and guide for ongoing conversation and discernment about our participation in God's mission.

God in Christ is at mission in the world and sends the Church in the Spirit to:

- 1. share the Good News of Jesus Christ**
- 2. nurture followers of Christ in life-giving communities of reconciliation**
- 3. respond in compassion to human need**
- 4. live justly and seek justice for all**
- 5. care for creation**
- 6. listen to each generation and culture so as to live out the Gospel in fresh ways**
- 7. pursue God's mission in partnership**

The Mission Principles have been derived from Scripture. They draw inspiration from the *Basis of Union* and the mission principles from the Anglican Communion's "Five Marks of Mission". The last five are essentially derived from the first two.

Our Vision articulates our passion and collective inspiration as the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania. Our Mission Principles seek to capture God's ongoing story of love, grace and mercy known to us through Jesus Christ.

As a result, the two are inextricably linked. When we focus on and explore the Vision, we will discern the presence of the Mission Principles. When we attend to the Mission Principles, the passion of the Vision will be also be evident.

Consider the 7 Mission Principles ...

- 1. Choose one that most resonates with you. What does this principle mean in your context? How is this made real in your group or community?**
- 2. Now identify the principle that you find most challenging, disturbing or difficult. Consider what meaning this principle could have? What ways might it invite new questions or discussion?**

Which of the quotes on the opposite page sparks conversation for you?

'Mission is not optional or secondary to the Christian community, but is at the heart of its calling in the power of the Spirit to follow Christ'.

'This is the nature of Christian maturity, the following of Jesus Christ to those marginalised and oppressed'.

'It is proper that God's Church works in partnership with all people of good will to fulfil God's purposes'.

'Mission describes the very nature of the Christian life in all its communal, liturgical, institutional, spiritual and service dimensions'.

'The Church must always be looking to listen to each generation and culture so as to live out the Gospel in fresh ways'.

'In following the witness of the First Peoples, the Church is called to care for God's creation'.

'The life of the church community is a witness to reconciliation as barriers are overcome and all find a place at God's table'.

Above quotes are from the paper *'Theological reflections on Vision and Mission Principles'*. For further background to these principles, see the link at:
<http://www.victas.uca.org.au/aboutus/Pages/Vision-Mission.aspx>

Discerning our way as God's people

The Vision and Mission Principles have been adopted by the Synod to encourage and enable our way forward—helping us to discern the leading and renewing work of the Spirit in our life as Church. God's people approach this crucial way of discernment with humility before God and before one another.

'Seeking to discern the Spirit is an ongoing task in our changing world'.

- 'Discerning the Work of the Holy Spirit'
Assembly Doctrine Working Group, 2011

The Basis of Union affirms the Holy Spirit is the primary guiding presence of the Church. We are a fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and we have the gift of the Spirit that we may not lose the way (BOU #3).

Discerning the leading of the Spirit—the One who nurtures our participation in God's mission— is an ongoing task for God's people. The way of discernment is a way of life. It is always dynamic because life is experienced in changing contexts, changing life stages, and movements involving diverse endings and beginnings. God's mission is

also constantly unfolding, and the Spirit blows as a wind that we cannot presume to control. With faithfulness and trust, we seek to discern where God is at work in mission in the world, and what might be the Spirit's call that invites our participation and guides our way.

Personally and communally, we discern our way by drawing on a range of tools, skills, and Christian disciplines and practices.

It will take time, faith and love to discern our way.

- 1. Think of a significant decision you have had to make. Try to unpack the process, the key movements, that led you to a resolution. Did it involve others, take time, have struggle?***
- 2. Discernment can be described as a way of life in which God is a central person in life's ongoing conversation. List and share ways we can nurture this 'God' conversation: (i) in our personal life, and (ii) in our gathered communities.***

Your thoughts and feedback

This booklet is a brief introduction to the Synod Vision and Mission Principles that invites discussion, provokes questioning, and gives an intentional focus for discerning the renewing work of the Spirit in our day.

Additional resources and support will continue to be developed. Engagement

with other elements of the Synod's Strategic Framework will also be encouraged, including the *Statements of Intent, strategic priorities and areas of focus*. Such support will be developed through ongoing feedback and dialogue with various parts of the Church.

Your feedback, ideas and/or comments are important.

- In what ways have the Vision and Mission Principles invited discussion, provoked questions and encouraged discernment?
- Do you discern signs of hope and life in your Church community?
- What stories of the 'discerning the renewing work of the Spirit' do you have that you would be willing to share with the wider church?
- What ideas do you have for future resourcing or support?
- What images or photos capture the Spirit's call upon our life as Church?

Please take some time to forward any thoughts or images to

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Further information can be sought via

<https://www.victas.uca.org.au/aboutus/Pages/Vision-Mission.aspx>



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Helping enable an intentional focus on God's mission

