

**The Uniting Church in Australia
Western Australia**



**Minutes of the Special Presbytery Meeting
of the Presbytery of Western Australia
considering arrangements for
theological education for ministry and leadership**

Saturday 19 August 2017

The following documents are included with these Minutes:

Attachment I – Attendance List

The Meeting was held at Kalamunda Uniting Church, on Saturday 19 August 2017.

OPENING WORSHIP

Rev Lorraine Stokes, Chairperson of the Presbytery of Western Australia (WA), led the opening worship, centred on the reading from John 3:8. The Call to Worship and prayer were led by Neryl McCallum. Hanamoā Vaitogi read Luke 4:14-22.

Jesus described his ministry as good news and those who heard his words noted them as words of grace, not judgement. They were words that upset people in authority and challenged those who were comfortable. The meeting was invited to consider how they heard those words and how they might shape the ministry to which they were called. The worship resources used were taken from 'Create' by Jennifer Hughes and the Centre for Music, Liturgy and the Arts in South Australia.

OPENING COMMENTS

The meeting opened with a reading from 'The Church Guide for Making Decisions Together' by Terence Corkin and Julia Kuhn Wallace (2017, pp. 50-52) on the attitudes and practices expected at a Uniting Church meeting. Special meeting may only deal with the business specified in the notice of the meeting. Therefore, for this meeting, discussion was restricted to "*arrangements for theological education for ministry and leadership.*" A Presidential Ruling had been sought regarding the authority of the Presbytery Standing Committee (PSC). The PSC at the May meeting had stated its understanding of its role, including making decisions on behalf of the Presbytery. It is hoped that the ruling will be available and further discussion held at the November Presbytery Meeting.

SPECIAL MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

Resolution I-SP2/2017

The Presbytery of Western Australia **resolved by consensus** to

1. adopt the Order of Business.
2. appoint Frances Stanley as Minute Taker.
3. appoint Cindy Gorton as Screen Manager.
4. appoint Matt O'Donohue as IT Support.
5. appoint Bruce Wilson as Timekeeper.
6. appoint Janine McDonald as First Aid Officer.
7. appoint Tom Stokes as chief scrutineer for the ballot with Ian Passmore, Margaret Johnston and Monica Pettersen providing administrative support as necessary.
8. appoint Rev Alan Jeffrey, Rev Ruth Vertigan and Kalo Fotu as Presbytery Meeting Chaplains.

9. appoint Reuben Edmonds and Ashley MacMillan as Youthful Members.
10. note that the Presbytery Standing Committee will be responsible for the confirmation of the minutes for the 19 August 2017 Special Presbytery Meeting.
11. re-affirm the membership of the Presbytery to include confirmed members appointed by bodies under the oversight of the Presbytery.
12. in the event of the meeting deciding to sit in private, determine that Ian Passmore, Monica Pettersen, Frances Stanley, Cindy Gorton, Matt O'Donohue and Alex Graham remain to facilitate the work of the meeting.

PRIVATE SITTING

It was proposed that the Presbytery of Western Australia resolve to sit in private for consideration of the matters related to “arrangements for theological education for ministry and leadership”.

Neither consensus nor approval by agreement was reached.

A time of deliberation and questions was entered. The Chairperson asked if it was necessary to reach a decision at that time.

Resolution 2-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** that it was necessary to reach a decision.*

Formal meeting procedures were then invoked. Decisions under formal meeting procedures require a simple majority in support of a proposal.

Another period of deliberation and questions was entered.

Resolution 3-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** to sit in private for consideration of the matters related to “arrangements for theological education for ministry and leadership”.*

The meeting returned to the consensus process.

REMOTE AND REGIONAL PARTICIPATION VIA ZOOM

Resolution 4-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved by consensus** to*

- accept members participating in the meeting via Zoom to be a part of the discernment process, accepting their right to indicate their responses and to vote.
- that such members must gather in the presence of at least one other member of Presbytery.
- nominate Rev Dr Ian Tozer as the person to receive and pass on the results of any secret ballot of Zoom participants to ballot scrutineers (0408 943 685).

PRESENTATION – Fulfilling the Presbytery Strategy for Education for Ministry and Leadership – Rev Bev Fabb

Rev Bev Fabb outlined a number of the measures implemented since the adoption of the four key strategic directions in 2015. CEDAL had played a key role in the delivery of many of these programs and had done so with a focus on serving the whole church and not just those training for ordained ministry. CEDAL's top priority was the continued development of education that helped all members and ministers in congregations prepare for ministry and enhance congregational life. As a result of the provisions made for culturally and linguistically diverse groups, the Samoan congregation had been recognised and other groups were working towards that goal. Intensives providing orientation to the Uniting Church for a group of ministers from other denominations had resulted in seven ministers being admitted as Uniting Church ministers. Other measures included two Schools of Ministry and a continuing education grant scheme to assist ministers to access inter-state continuing education events; a new program of training in the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practices; the establishment of a Phase 3 program to provide mentoring and support for ministers in their first three years after ordination; and the training of additional professional supervisors to ensure all ministers could have appropriate supervision.

The future needs to focus on: equipping congregational leaders for missional leadership so that they could engage with their local communities, share their faith; helping people understand congregational life-cycles; establishing new forms of church; training that enabled more lay leaders to be recognised and equipped as pastors; the deepening of biblical literacy through the promotion of congregational study materials and Holy Biblical cultural days; the expansion of Certificate IV training into new locations so that an increased number of people could access it; the development of peer groups for lay and ordained members; and training mentors for the improved support of people undertaking a period of discernment and candidature. CEDAL had adopted the principle that in the development of educational opportunities, priority would be given to education which grew the church rather than managed its decline. This would guide all of CEDAL's decision-making on education in the future as it sought to further implement the Presbytery's strategic directions.

PRESENTATION – The national Assembly Standards for Theological Education and Formation: Phase 2 for Ordained Ministers – Rev Dr John Squires

Rev Dr John Squires explained the importance of changes in the *National Standards for Education and Formation of Candidates for Ordained Ministry* and the implications for compliance for Uniting Church theological colleges. The Standards have a contextual focus that valued the formation of candidates in 'local' settings and advocates flexible pathways in formation through a range of study-programs meeting the needs of a diverse church. They have moved from a prescribed list of courses to a list of attributes that candidates must exhibit prior to ordination. The provision of multiple pathways to ordination, including the opportunity to undertake study at the level most appropriate for each candidate (whether Diploma-, Bachelor- or Master-level), is essential.

The Standards also encourage national collaboration between colleges and call for a sharing of information about intensives, staff, courses and an end to duplication of resources. Compliance meant that it was no longer possible for the Uniting Church to train all candidates through the existing program at Murdoch, as the only current pathway at Murdoch is post-graduate (Graduate Diploma or Masters) study. Murdoch did not have an undergraduate theology program that would allow candidates to fulfil the Standards' requirements.

Rev Dr Squires noted that opportunities exist to develop greater collaboration with interstate colleges – through the cross-crediting of units, the exchange of staff and participation in national intensives. He explained that Perth Theological Hall would continue to be a learning community that valued scholarship as set out in the Basis of Union. The development of online studies, supported by the continuation of regular weekly face-to-face programs for candidates in formation would continue, expanded by offering tutorial support for the academic studies. This means that local field education placements would continue and candidates from regional centres would be able to study *in situ*. The Uniting Church would maintain its firm commitment to theological study at a university level, supported and enhanced by a range of options through which students would be able to participate at a level and with a purpose fitting their local needs. Formation for ordination would sit alongside of education for mission in the congregations as a key focus for the future educational offerings.

PRESENTATION – What is the Perth College of Divinity (PCD) – Margaret Tyrer

Rev Tyrer explained that the PCD was a separately incorporated body, formed in 1985, to bring together the Uniting Church, the Anglican, Baptist and Catholic churches in collaboration with Murdoch University to support the theological education of ordinands. Murdoch University contributed 40% to the cost of delivering this education. Some of the changes and positive outcomes that had resulted from this collaboration over time were outlined. The current programs offered included a BA (Religion) with a number of graduate options for post-graduate study. The two remaining active members of the PCD are the Anglican and Uniting Churches. The denominational formation of ordinands for the Uniting Church was provided by the Perth Theological Hall (PTH), not the PCD. It was also noted that the PTH had also supported non-tertiary courses for lay people and others. Rev Tyrer expressed the view that the Uniting Church had been in breach of its agreement to provide a Systematic Theologian since 2015. She stated that the cooperative work of the PCD had allowed for the sustainable provision of theological teaching for Uniting Church ordinands. She noted the recognised high quality of research and publications by past and current PTH staff and the significant positions held by past Murdoch Theology Graduates.

PRESENTATION – The Challenges of the PCD – Rev Bev Fabb

In addressing some of the points raised by Rev Tyrer, Rev Bev Fabb focused on just one of the challenges faced in the partnership with PCD; that of the Systematic Theologian. In articulating the extended process by which the Uniting Church had chosen to try and fill that position, Rev Fabb noted that several weeks after Uniting Church comments on and priorities for the position description was forwarded to PCD, feedback was received stating that it was totally unacceptable to the university as the university would not allow any exploration of applicants' personal faith and church involvement in the appointment process; this would be in contravention of the equal opportunity law as a secular institution. The dispute about selection criteria between the Uniting Church and Murdoch had never been resolved and soon afterwards the filling of the position was put on hold. The issue of the Systematic Theologian position re-emerged earlier this year but by then new national standards had come into effect and they had quite specific requirements in relation to those who teach, mentor and supervise candidates. It became clear that the Uniting Church could not meet the national standards in relation to staffing in the joint lecturer appointments with Murdoch and that was the key reason why the Presbytery Standing Committee decided not to fill the Systematic Theologian position. Despite that decision, the Presbytery Standing Committee was clear that it did not want to leave PCD and they were keen to see the Murdoch Theology program continue. Recognising that the Systematic Theologian position was vital to the Theology program and as a sign of the Uniting Church's commitment to Murdoch, arrangements were made to appoint Rev Dr Chris Walker to a supply ministry role as Systematic Theologian in second semester, 2017, in the hope that arrangements could be made to make a permanent appointment from 1 January 2018.

Representatives of the Uniting Church met with representatives of the Anglican Church over a number of weeks to explore a range of matters, including how the position could be funded, other than solely by from the Uniting Church (as the Uniting Church has funded more positions than the Anglicans over the years). All alternatives related to how the courses to be offered could be funded, were rejected by both the Anglicans and Murdoch. The PCD wrote to the Uniting Church in the middle of June requesting that the Uniting Church either recommit themselves to the partnership and agree to fill the Systematic Theologian position or give formal notice of their intention to withdraw from PCD and that decision was to be delivered by 9am on 30 June 2017. It was in response to this letter that the Presbytery Standing Committee wrote giving the required 12 months' notice of intention to withdraw from Perth College of Divinity.

Due to the protracted discussion, a **procedural motion** was moved to extend the meeting by half an hour. The mood of the meeting was tested. The Chairperson asked if it was necessary to reach a decision at that time.

Resolution 5-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** that it was necessary to reach a decision.*

Formal meeting procedures were then invoked.

Resolution 6-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** to extend the meeting until 1.00pm.*

The meeting then returned to the consensus process.

NOTICE OF MOTION

It was proposed that the Presbytery, in making a decision about its relation to the Perth College of Divinity (PCD) for theological education in WA, note the explicit and implied misinformation in the anonymous document 'New Directions in Theological Education Background Information Paper,' and decline to be advised by it.

It was not possible to reach either consensus or consensus by agreement.

There was a time of deliberation, questions and discussion. The Chairperson asked if it was necessary to reach a decision at that time.

Resolution 7-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** that it was necessary to reach a decision.*

Formal meeting procedures were invoked.

Discussion continued.

Resolution 8-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved not** to disregard the information in the 'New Directions in Theological Education Background Information Paper' or to be advised by it.*

The meeting then returned to the consensus process.

AFFIRMATION OF NEW DIRECTIONS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

It was proposed that the Presbytery of Western Australia affirm the new directions being taken in theological education in WA noting that they implement the strategic directions of the Presbytery and enable our adherence to the Assembly National Standards for ordinand courses.

Neither consensus nor approval by agreement was reached.

A time of deliberation and questions was entered.

The Chairperson asked if it was necessary to reach a decision at that time.

Resolution 9-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** that it was necessary to reach a decision.*

Formal meeting procedures were invoked.

Deliberation continued.

Resolution 10-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** to affirm the new directions being taken in theological education in WA noting that they implement the strategic directions of the Presbytery and enable our adherence to the Assembly National Standards for ordinand courses.*

The meeting then returned to the consensus process.

NEW CEDAL PLACEMENTS

It was proposed that the Presbytery of Western Australia request the Presbytery Standing Committee and Placements Commission to act urgently to enable the appointment of new placements within Perth Theological Hall as requested by CEDAL in order to implement the new directions.

Neither consensus nor approval by agreement was reached.

The Chairperson asked if the meeting wanted to reach a decision on this proposal and leave subsequent proposals for another meeting.

The mood of the meeting was tested and they chose to continue with trying to reach a decision on all remaining proposals.

A **procedural motion** was then moved to further extend the meeting time to 1.30pm.

The Chairperson advised that it would be necessary to move in to formal meeting procedures for the remaining time if decisions on all proposals were desired.

Resolution 11-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** to further extend the meeting until 1.30pm to facilitate decisions by formal majority on all remaining proposals.*

Formal meeting procedures were then invoked.

The meeting returned to a period of deliberation and questions about the proposal about new CEDAL placements.

NEW CEDAL PLACEMENTS

A proposal to suspend further discussion on Proposal 5 was moved by Rev Gemmel Sherwood. It was then explained that the Placements Commission had not accepted the authority of the Presbytery Standing Committee to establish these positions and that it was necessary for the Presbytery itself to determine to establish the positions.

The Chairperson again asked if it was necessary to reach a decision about new CEDAL placements.

Resolution 12-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** that it was necessary to reach a decision.*

Formal meeting procedures were again invoked.

Resolution 13-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** that the Presbytery of Western Australia request the Presbytery Standing Committee and Placements Commission to act urgently to enable the appointment of new placements within Perth Theological Hall as requested by CEDAL in order to implement the new directions.*

ENDORSEMENT OF PRESBYTERY STANDING COMMITTEE DECISION REGARDING NOTICE OF WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PERTH COLLEGE OF DIVINITY.

It was proposed that the Presbytery of Western Australia endorse the decision to withdraw Perth Theological Hall from the Perth College of Divinity from 30 June 2018.

Neither consensus nor approval by agreement was reached. A time of deliberation and questions was entered. The Chairperson asked if it was necessary to reach a decision at that time. The mood of the meeting was to continue.

Resolution 12-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** that it was necessary to reach a decision.*

Formal meeting procedures were invoked. Deliberation continued.

To facilitate a decision, an amendment to Proposal 7 was suggested, "That the Presbytery confirm the Perth Theological Hall's membership of the Perth College of Divinity at Murdoch University for the provision of theological education in WA **for the short term.**" Short term was undefined but suggested as a term which would encourage and allow for further negotiation.

The mood of the meeting was not to support the suggested amendment.

Formal meeting procedures were again invoked.

Resolution 13-SP2/2017

*The Presbytery **resolved** that it was necessary to reach a decision.*

Resolution I4-SP2/2017

The Presbytery of Western Australia **resolved** to endorse the decision to withdraw Perth Theological Hall from the Perth College of Divinity from 30 June 2018.

The Chairperson asked whether the meeting was happy to fall from Proposal 7, given its last decision. The mover requested that the Proposal be put.

CONFIRM THE PERTH THEOLOGICAL HALL'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE PERTH COLLEGE OF DIVINITY

Resolution I5-SP2/2017

The Presbytery of Western Australia **resolved not** to confirm the Perth Theological Hall's membership of the Perth College of Divinity at Murdoch University for the provision of theological education in WA.

An acknowledgement of appreciation and thanks was extended to the Kalamunda people who assisted in setting up and supported the meeting, Geoff Ebell, Alex Graham (Sound), Rev David Tressler (Congregation Minister), Ruth Ebell, Elsa Harwood who assisted with refreshments, Rev Lorraine Stokes (Chairperson) and Frances Stanley (Minutes and Meeting support), Matt O'Donohue (IT support), Cindy Gorton (Screen Manager), Rev Dr John Squires (Music); Hanamoia Vaitogi (Bible Reading); Maggie Johns (Media), Tom Stokes and scrutineers, Bruce Wilson (Time Keeper), Alan Jeffrey, Kalo Fotu and Ruth Vertigan (Meeting Chaplains) and Rev Trevor Water (Closing Prayer).

It was noted that many – including some not able to be present – were praying for this meeting. This was communicated to all those present.

CLOSING PRAYER – Rev Trevor Waters.

The meeting closed at 1.30pm.

We confirm these Minutes to be a true record of the Special Presbytery Meeting held at Kalamunda Uniting Church on Saturday 19 August 2017.

Chairperson



Rev Lorraine Stokes

Secretary of Presbytery



Rev Dr Ian Tozer