



## **International Partnerships & Development Commission** **(Formerly The UnitingWorld WA Commission)**

### **Commission Members**

<i>Chairperson</i>	Kerry Povey
<i>General Secretary</i>	Rev David de Kock
<i>Staff</i>	Geoff Bice
<i>Members elected by Synod</i>	Lee-Anne Burnett
	Rev Alison Gilchrist
	Kelly Crothers
	Lyn Callaghan
	Rev Brian Thorpe
	Alison Dyll

### **Introduction**

The International Partnerships & Development Commission (IPDC – formerly the UnitingWorld WA Commission) was particularly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. All of our international partner churches were significantly impacted and are only now beginning to emerge from the crisis. However, even though all international travel has ceased, connections are still occurring and our partners have been adapting to the new circumstances.

The IPDC is a Synod Commission under By-law S2.6. A key challenge for the Commission is meeting the requirements of the new External Conduct Standards which the Australian Government has mandated for all international operations and donations.

### **Country Reports**

The Commission has active engagement with four key international partners:

#### ***Sri Lanka***

At the 2013 Synod it was agreed that we, as a Synod, would support preschools operated by the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka (MCSL). There are 5 preschools we support across the North and East of the country in areas of particular need.

During the COVID-19 crisis all preschools were shut-down as a precaution however staff have remained employed. While case numbers in the more remote areas where the preschools operate have been low, there have been reports of other implications from the associated restrictions regarding access to food supplies.

We have been following our annual Letter of Agreement with the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka to provide funding of about \$16,000 to provide quality preschool education, including provision of nutritious meals while the children are at school. The signing of the 2020 Letter of Agreement has been delayed to allow the MCSL to recalculate its priorities and budget for the preschools program in light of COVID-19.

We have agreed to review the preschool program in collaboration with UnitingWorld and the MCSL in light of the challenges of maintaining our current funding commitments.

#### ***West Papua***

The Black Pearl Network conducted a visit to the Papua & West Papua regions of Indonesia in February 2020 just before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. The trip had been delayed from late 2019 due to civil unrest in the region at the time. Important progress was made to consolidate the governance structures of the Black Pearl Network in Papua and register them as an official organisation in



Indonesia. There was also progress towards the development of an English Language Institute in Papua in collaboration with our partner church GKI-TP.

All classes were suspended during COVID-19, although where possible some teaching was still occurring via the internet. In-person classes have begun again since late July. There are now nine active English language centres employing thirteen teachers across Papua.

The Australian Papuan Cultural Exchange Program (APCEP) was due to occur in 2021 but has been postponed due to COVID-19.

Pilot sites for clean rainwater capture and storage were unable to be built or monitored during COVID-19 but weekly online meetings have begun to progress their development.

### ***West Timor***

Connections with the local church in West Timor and the Christian University of West Timor (UKAW) through the Nedlands Uniting Church have also been disrupted with COVID-19. Lyn Callaghan visited in September 2019 to give greetings to the UKAW graduation and to provide English Teacher Training but all international travel has since ceased. To avoid the spread of COVID-19 the university attempted to conduct classes online. While they were largely able to avoid an outbreak in West Timor, there were experiences of food shortages and so we have sent special contributions to support students in particular need. The student scholarships are still continuing but the visits from Australian academics have had to cease.



Spreading information about Covid-19 to the society.

### ***Timor Leste***

Our partnership with Fundação Lafaek Diak (FLD) in Timor Leste continues to support their Mobile Health Clinic initiative visiting 16 villages that are spread widely in 5 sub-districts around the Baucau Municipality. The number of patients attending the mobile clinic for the last half of 2019 were 1,434 patients, at an average of 239 patients per month.

A Memorandum of Understanding and a Letter of Agreement have been signed outlining our shared commitments and expectations.

Precautions have been made to protect staff and patients with the onset of COVID-19, as best as possible with the limited resources available. FLD have been focusing their efforts on preventative education in the rural villages, to avoid the spread of COVID-19 emphasizing the importance of physical distancing, wearing masks and frequent handwashing, as well as setting up handwashing stands in the communities and distributing soap.

### **Key Focus Areas:**

- **Governance and risk management**

The International Partnerships & Development Commission has continued working to improve its risk management and governance procedures.

There is a greater burden of compliance required to meet the new External Conduct Standards from the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) which came into force in July 2019. All charities that operate or donate overseas must comply with the new Standards. The Standards cover:



COVID-19 donations to East Timor.

- How charities control their funds, goods and other resources
- The need for an annual review of overseas activities and record keeping

- Anti-fraud and anti-corruption guidelines
- Measures aimed at protecting vulnerable individuals

The Commission has been working with congregations to provide awareness of compliance requirements. The Commission ran a training event for congregations with UnitingWorld in December 2019 and has continued to follow up with phone calls and letters to congregations. All congregations will be required to report any donations made to international operations at the end of each financial year.

- **UnitingWorld National**

Regular communication with UnitingWorld continues to take place to ensure as much cooperation and coordination as possible.

Geoff, Kate and Brian Thorpe attended the Micah Network's Voices for Justice lobbying event in Canberra on behalf of the Commission at the invitation of UnitingWorld. They met with many federal politicians to advocate for improved funding for international development following the resolution of the Synod on the matter in 2019.

## **Key Challenges**

Some of the key issues the Commission is dealing with include:

- Risk management and compliance – as mentioned, the new ACNC Standards require a review of the Commission's operations and the donations being made internationally across the Synod.
- Staffing and membership – Since our last report Kate Leaney has finished in the role of Social Justice Officer and Gabrielle Nind has been appointed. Many thanks go to Kate for her dedicated support of the work of the IPDC in fundraising, administration and partner liaison.
- Fundraising – Due to the COVID-19 crisis the usual methods of raising funds were no longer an option so an appeal was sent to church councils requesting support for our partners. There is continued pressure to sustain our fundraising responsibilities across all our partnerships, but we will continue to explore different methods to meet our commitments now that the social distancing restrictions are being lifted.

## **Planning**

The Commission has communicated with all congregations requesting them to advise us of any international donations or support they provide.

The Commission will continue to review projects and advise on best practice approaches to comply with ACNC Standards.

The Commission will continue to support the development of sub-groups to focus congregational support for particular projects.

The Commission will continue to reach out to congregations and schools to engage support for the development work of our partners.

## **Acknowledgements**

The International Partnerships & Development Commission recognises and acknowledges, with thanks, the contribution made by Uniting Church members and congregations in support of our partner churches and organisations, in particular:

- **Sri Lanka**
  - Uniting Church in the City
  - South Perth Uniting Church
  - Mt Pleasant Uniting Church

- Applecross Uniting Church
- Gingin Uniting Church
- Kojonup Uniting Church
- Ross Memorial Uniting Church
  
- **West Papua**
  - Floreat Uniting Church
  - Wembley Downs Uniting Church
  - Trinity North Uniting Church
  - Uniting Church in the City
  - Applecross Uniting Church
  - St Kilda Uniting Church
- **West Timor**
  - Nedlands Uniting Church
  - Swan View Uniting Church
- **Timor Leste**
  - Foothills Uniting Church
  - St Augustine's Uniting Church
  - Melville Uniting Church
  - Swan View Uniting Church

## **Conclusion**

If you are interested in being involved in the work of the Commission or would like to explore ways for your congregation to engage with our international partners, please contact Geoff Bice [geoffrey.bice@wa.uca.org.au](mailto:geoffrey.bice@wa.uca.org.au) or any of the Commission members. Members of the Commission are always pleased to be invited to speak at congregations and other gatherings to share the work of UnitingWorld and our partner churches.

We continue to encourage congregations to consider supporting our Synod International Partners. For details on how to donate please read the following [article](#).

**Kerry Povey**  
**Chairperson**