

Speech at Synod October 7, 2006 in support of the Report

Moderator

I am pleased to present the report of the work of UnitingCare NSW.ACT over the past two years.

We last presented at the Synod meeting held in Tamworth in 2004. Although at that time we were on the way to implementing the changes which had been approved by the Council of Synod in June 2003 and June 2004, in the last two years we have made substantial progress and we are heavily engaged in the task of re-shaping UnitingCare NSW.ACT so that it is best able to meet the present and future needs. It is worth noting that in terms of financial turnover and staffing, on the recent BRW list of the top 200 charities in Australia, UnitingCare in the NSW Synod, on a total turnover including all the Parish Missions, was ranked the 9th largest charity in Australia, and UnitingCare NSW.ACT on which I report today, would be the 15th largest charity in Australia. Of those ranked above us, most were hospital or educational charities, and the only community services of larger size are UnitingCare Queensland, the Salvation Army, Red Cross and RSL Care, all on a national basis.

It is important to emphasise that we are a Board of the Synod and our work is undertaken on behalf of the Synod. I hope that members of the Synod will be proud of what is done by UnitingCare NSW.ACT in the name of the Synod. Our vision, our purpose and our mandate make all of that clear.

I met recently with Senator Santo Santoro, the Federal Minister for Ageing, and he asked me to explain the background to UnitingCare's opposition to accommodation bonds in high care, when the Government attempted to introduce them in 1998. The most important point I made to the Minister was that we would always take the broad view of what was in the best interests of aged persons, and not look only to our own interests as a service provider. We would have this in common with the Anglican and Catholic churches. The Minister agreed that this was an entirely proper position for a religious organisation to take. So, all of our work is framed by our commitment to social justice.

You have all had the opportunity to look at our report, which is in the papers and was circulated some months ago. What I want to do today is to give you an overall picture using the four main strategic priorities, which have been adopted by the Board of UnitingCare NSW.ACT.

Before I do that, I would like to acknowledge the presence of some of the Board members of UnitingCare NSW.ACT who are here today [list] and also some of our staff [list]. When there is time for questions at the end of the presentation, I will direct them to the relevant staff persons.

The four strategic priorities are:

- Social Justice Advocacy, Policy Development, and Research
- Excellence in Community Services
- Key Relationships with the Church and External Bodies
- A Strong, Unified, and Sustainable Organisation

Let me deal with each of those.

Social Justice Advocacy, Policy Development, and Research.

- Our work in social justice advocacy is meant to help keep church members better informed about issues and to influence the justice outcomes in our society.
- Our info-action bulletins are specifically designed to help congregations and church members put issues into the context of the faith. A recent info-action bulletin looked at the overall implications of three pieces of recent Federal Government legislation: Welfare to Work, WorkChoices, and Terrorism. It was headed “Where is Australia Going”.
- On the issue of WorkChoices we have been active in implementing the Synod decision of last year and have participated with the Assembly and assisted the President of the Uniting Church when he presented before the Senate Committee hearing. Ann Wansbrough has contributed a chapter entitled “Working Justice, the will of God and Democracy” to a recently published book on the WorkChoices legislation.
- During the past year UnitingCare has worked with the Board of Education to produce a proposal for the Synod on issues around the public funding of education and it is on the agenda of this meeting.
- UnitingCare also assists in providing educational opportunities around faith and social justice and in the past year staff have done this in both Newcastle and Armidale.
- UnitingCare is active in making submissions to various Government bodies and enquiries. A list of some of these is found on page C3. 38/39 of the papers. They include such issues as community sentencing options, the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy, the allocation of social housing, the funding of ESL courses in public schools. A comprehensive submission on the Macquarie Fields disturbances was made through UnitingCare Burnside.
- The UnitingCare Board has adopted a social justice charter to set the social justice standard for its work, and the Charter was published in a poster format for display in community service centres

- UnitingCare Burnside conducted a campaign against Child Poverty, which sought to draw attention to the plight of children in poverty in Australia. Part of this campaign included a television advertisement which many of you may have seen. At present, UnitingCare Burnside is working with a number of organisations on the “Every Kid Campaign” which I will be launching on 20th of this month at a Sydney Day Nursery Centre in Woolloomooloo. It is part of our work in lobbying the State Government for more opportunities for children.
- UnitingCare Ageing has established a process involving a large number of staff to work on their “Vision, Mission, Values” project.
- UnitingCare Children’s Services has published its policy on childcare on church property, which deals with the issue of private operators and other third parties providing childcare on church premises.
- The Investments Monitoring committee has reviewed and republished the Ethical Investment Principles and Procedures and through its consultant, Mr. Michael Walsh, researches changes in company arrangements that may have an impact on the ethical guidelines.
- Through its work in the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre, UnitingCare continues to promote the concept of harm reduction in regard to illicit drug use.
- Through the Bridge for Asylum Seekers, we are involved in raising money to support asylum seekers and refugees in a very practical way. In the last financial year, this committee raised some \$446,000 for this work and distributed \$358,000 to individuals. UnitingCare recently contributed \$10,000 from our Pancake Day proceeds.

Excellence in Community Services

- All of our facilities in aged care have received 3 year accreditation [?]. Our program of building replacements in residential aged care is continuing apace. Since the 2004 Synod we have opened new buildings at Singleton, Richmond, Normanhurst, Peakhurst, Springwood. UnitingCare Ageing is currently proceeding to establish new facilities at Shellharbour, Port Macquarie, and Nambucca Heads.
- To meet changing community expectations, UnitingCare Ageing is placing special emphasis on providing community care places and our plan is to provide 60% of our services in community care in the future. Presently it is 40%. Towards that end, in the past two years while our residential places have increased by 462, our community care places have increased by 1074.
- Our services for ageing people continue to be innovative. For example, Sydney Region Ageing has increased its existing commitment to work with ageing people who are at risk of homelessness by purchasing a new building in Alexandria, which will provide accommodation for such people as elderly boarding house residents. Northern Sydney region has recently commenced a respite day centre for working carers operating 8am to 6pm, 5 days per week. As community arrangements change it is important for UnitingCare Ageing to provide new and innovative services. A full list of what is

happening in the 7 UnitingCare Ageing regions is included on pages C 3.14 to C3. 17 of our written report.

- UnitingCare Unifam, in partnership with Relationships Australia, was successful in being chosen to operate two of the four initial Family Relationship Centres in NSW. While UnitingCare does not support all Federal Government initiatives, we do strongly support the introduction of the Family Relationship Centres.
- UnitingCare Burnside's NEWPIN program [New Parent Information Network] is doing groundbreaking work with disadvantaged parents and Burnside has helped other organisations across Australia to start up their own NEWPIN programs.
- UnitingCare Burnside has been successful in obtaining some \$6 million of new funds from the Department of Community Services under the Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy. One of those projects is a new style of child care centre at Wollondilly which will include family support services. They are also increasing their foster care work on the Mid North Coast.
- In May this year the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre completed 5 years of successful operation at Kings Cross. As detailed in the report at the time of this anniversary there had been 309,529 visits to the Centre by clients and 1752 overdoses were successfully treated at the Centre.
- UnitingCare Supported Living opened its new respite centre at Belfield. UnitingCare was able to purchase the house from a bequest and recurrent funding is provided by the Department of Ageing, Disability, and Home Care.
- UnitingCare Children's Services is now able to offer a direct management facility for Uniting Church child care centres. We also work closely with Centres to ensure a high standard of care for children. UnitingCare strongly emphasises the inclusion of education programs in children's services.

Key Relationships within the Church and External Bodies

- All church based community service organisations have to wrestle with the issues of relationships within the Church. UnitingCare is not alone in this. There is no one simple answer to this issue. I believe that it is a matter of being intentional and like all relationships they will wither if not properly attended to. UnitingCare is strongly committed to maintaining its proper place within the Church family.
- One important way in which UnitingCare relates within the Church is the provision of chaplaincy placements. There are currently 20 full time placements and 28 sessional chaplaincies within Uniting Care Ageing. In addition there is a chaplaincy placement within both the Children Young People and Families Service Group, and UnitingCare Supported Living. In the past year Rev. Geoff Dornan has been appointed the Director of Ministry and Mission within UnitingCare Ageing. In this position Geoff will be responsible for oversight of the chaplaincy

services in UnitingCare Ageing and also for providing theological leadership in regard to the Mission of UnitingCare Ageing.

- As well as chaplaincy within our own services, UnitingCare provides chaplaincy in a number of external settings. There are 4 chaplains working in the mental health system, 4 in general hospitals, 3 in corrective services and 2 in the NSW Police Service. All of these chaplains are working in an ecumenical and inter-faith context. Some examples of their work can be found on page C3.43 of the written report.
- In all there are 38 full-time placements in UnitingCare for ministry positions as well as many sessional and part-time arrangements.
- At no point do we relate more closely with the life of congregations than in the work of UnitingCare Children's Services. We have a network of 22 pre-schools, 23 child care centres and 19 other childrens services programs. Most are sponsored by congregations and most operate within properties controlled by congregations, and in some cases share the same space as the worship centre. In June 2004 the Council of Synod adopted a number of recommendations which arose out of a review of children's services within the Synod. No area of community services has been subject to more change than children's services. The decision of the Federal Government to remove operational subsidies to child care centres and to direct all payments through parents had a substantial impact in this area, with large numbers of community based organisations folding. The failure of the NSW Government until recently to do anything about the funding of pre-schools, together with competition from the private sector, have had significant effects. In addition to this we now have a much enhanced Government regulatory system to cope with and different arrangements in regard to Workers Compensation Insurance. The UnitingCare NSW.ACT Board has been committed to retaining these services not only as an important service to the community [we believe that the not-for-profit sector in childcare should be preserved] but also as an important way in which congregations relate to the communities around them. UnitingCare has committed \$600,000 of its own funds over 3 years to improve the services offered by UCCS. However, we also need to increase the contributions made by Centres. While most people acknowledge that we cannot go on as in the past, some Centres have failed to understand the new environment. Without a strong UCCS, the individual centres cannot survive. We believe that we are strongly supporting the work of the church in this program.
- Within UnitingCare Ageing there is provision for a levy on regional boards to go towards development projects in the presbyteries they cover. This was part of the changes brought about in 2003. UnitingCare Regional boards have been consulting with their presbyteries about the use of those funds. A recent report to the UnitingCare Ageing Board outlined some of the ways in which the Regional Boards are relating to the presbyteries in their areas of operation and all are providing written reports to presbyteries on a regular basis and are offering annual presentations. I note that on the North Coast, Kyogle, Mullimbimby, and Grafton congregations have all

received funding to improve disability access to their church buildings. Relating to the presbyteries and congregations is a part of the Performance Agreement for Regional Directors in UnitingCare Ageing.

- Through the 2% for Development Fund UnitingCare is able to support projects within the Church with small one off grants. Also, the 2% Committee has established special links with Fair Wear, AFTINET, and Asian Women at Work.
- One of the important tasks of UnitingCare NSW.ACT is to act as the peak and co-ordinating body for all community services within the bounds of the Synod. The Synod by laws have always given to UnitingCare [and previously the Board for Social Responsibility] a set of authorities in this regard. Also, this role for Uniting Care is a recognition of the importance of co-operation and co-ordination in the work of community services. Through our Community Services Consultant, UnitingCare maintains contact with, provides support to, and encourages the work of community services which are carried out by parish missions, congregations, and LifeLine centres. Indeed, the new constitution of Lifeline Australia recognises our role by providing for a permanent position on the Lifeline Australia Board for a representative of UnitingCare NSW.ACT. A similar arrangement exists in regard to UnitingCare Queensland. Congregations are encouraged to make use of the resources of UnitingCare in matters related to community services, social justice, and chaplaincy. The Community Services Consultant, Janet Scott, is a good first stop and she can bring other UnitingCare resources as required.
- Within the Synod UnitingCare works closely with the other Synod Boards. We have the closest relationship to the Board of Finance and Property with them undertaking a number of tasks and projects for UnitingCare. In developing an overall Synod approach to OH&S issues and to HR services, UnitingCare worked closely with BFP to achieve outcomes for the whole Synod. While UnitingCare is clearly the largest client of BFP, we are conscious of the importance of taking a whole of Synod approach.
- UnitingCare NSW.ACT participates actively in the work of UnitingCare Australia and contributes some \$150,000 to its budget. Through UnitingCare Australia we actively lobby Government and participate with Government on social service issues. As a Synod Director I am ex officio on the national committee and our other representative is Rev. Karyn Burchell.
- We also participate actively with many other organisations, both church based and non church based. In the former category Rev. Ann Wansbrough serves both the NSW Ecumenical Council and the National Council of Churches on their social justice committees. We are active members of the Civil Chaplaincies Advisory Committee, which is an inter-faith and ecumenical committee dealing with chaplaincy matters in NSW. We recently we provided funding to the Chain Reaction Foundation for a learning project in Mount Drutt, which was strongly supported by the Ecumenical Ministry Team there.
- Through the Every Kid Campaign we are working with NCOSS, Sydney Day Nursery, Shelter, and Family Services Inc. Jane Woodruff, Director

of the Children, Young People and Families Service Group is the Chair of the Association of Community Welfare Agencies.

A Strong Unified and Sustainable Organisation

- The changes heralded by the Council of Synod decisions in 2003 and 2004 were wide ranging in regard to the structure of UnitingCare NSW.ACT. Those changes brought into being 12 boards within UnitingCare. Under the main Board which is appointed by the Synod, there were initially three Service Group Boards: Ageing, Burnside and Children's Services, and under Ageing 8 regional boards were established. Since that time the number of Ageing Regional Boards has been reduced by 1 with the amalgamation of the Ku-ring-gai and Sydney North Boards. Such a structure requires a high degree of co-operation and goodwill in order to succeed. In order to overcome difficulties which arose in the early stages the UnitingCare NSW.ACT and the 3 Service Group Boards developed a policy on working together which has proved worthwhile. A Service Group Directors meeting comprising myself, the 3 Service Group Directors and the Business Operations Manager of UnitingCare, was established and this has become a key element of the new structure. At the same time, the UnitingCare Ageing Board recognised the need for more clarity in the relationship between itself and the 7 regional boards, and a special consultancy was retained in order to achieve this.
- During the past year it was recognised that further improvements could be obtained if the UnitingCare Burnside Service Group was expanded to include UnitingCare Unifam, WESTS tenancy service, and the Harris Community Centre. This has now been successfully achieved and a new service group, Children, Young People, and Families has been created. The Unifam and Burnside brand names will continue to be used.
- The changes in the past 3 years have necessitated many flow on changes in regard to regulatory, legal, accounting and other policy issues. One of the things that has been very clear in this period has been that the simple act of determining a new policy does not necessarily create a change in practice. Enduring change requires proper management systems and training programs. For example, although it was determined in 2003 to operate UnitingCare with one ABN number, this is yet to be achieved. However, a recent consultancy by Price Waterhouse Coopers has confirmed the importance of this strategy in order to protect the Public Benevolent Status of UnitingCare. It is now expected to be achieved within the next year. It will also help the process of consolidating policies and practices.
- The new structure of UnitingCare NSW. ACT has now been incorporated within the Synod by laws and the Council of Synod has approved them. When the new by laws for the whole of the Synod are approved the UnitingCare by laws will fit within them.

- It was recognised early in our change process that considerable work needed to be undertaken with our IT systems. This has been managed by the establishment of the CommIT committee, which is chaired by the Director of UnitingCare Ageing, Gillian McFee.
- Another area where different policies existed was in regard to the placement of chaplains. Following discussions with ACOMP it was determined that all chaplains within UnitingCare, including UnitingCare Ageing, would be Synod placements and would fall under the appropriate rules. Also, in order to properly facilitate all of the issues around chaplaincy placements in UnitingCare, an overall consistent policy has been adopted which is in line with existing Synod policies.
- One of the greatest areas of challenge in regard to this objective is in the Children's Services area. While UnitingCare respects the role of congregations in operating children's services, it is clear that this must occur within consistent policies and within a proper risk management framework. The changes to Workers Compensation insurance are but one example, recent changes to State Government legislation meant that child care centres could not maintain their own policies. Also, if there was not an overall management system, the invoices for some individual centres would put the centre out of business. The UCCS Board adopted an overall pool approach with poorly performing centres suffering some penalty but not so as to make them insolvent. The task of allocating the \$500,000 overall premium has been handled through the UnitingCare office and the threat to individual centres has been removed. Also, at the same time, through the UCCS office and the BFP, training and assistance in appropriate OH&S practices have been instituted with a view to obviating Workers Compensation claims in future. I give this as an example of the importance of co-operation. Some child care centre management committees do not as yet understand this, and we have more work to do in that regard. As previously indicated we can now offer a direct management service, but we acknowledge the need to develop proper protocols between ourselves and congregations.
- One of the successful projects of UnitingCare has been Pancake Day. As well as large numbers of Uniting Church congregations and organisations signing up to participate, many people in the community sign up also. The money we raise goes toward UnitingCare projects, some directly to local projects and some to other UnitingCare projects through our office.

I hope that this presentation, together with the written report, has given the Synod an adequate understanding of the work of UnitingCare NSW.ACT. A great deal goes on in an organisation the size of UnitingCare and I do not claim an encyclopaedic knowledge myself. Going back to the relationship between ourselves and the rest of the Church, I encourage you to find out more about our work. If we are working in your area, don't always wait for us to approach you, but approach us to find out more and see how you and your congregation can play a role. If we are not working in your area, maybe you have some ideas about what we could be doing and there are ways of dealing with that, even though we cannot promise to implement every idea.

