



## Summary of the newest Act2 Report

This is a summary of a new report by the Act2 Project called '*In Response to God's Call*', published in June 2023. It is the first report since the Assembly decided in June 2022 that the work of Act2 would continue, and created the Act2 Project Unit and Steering Committee.

The current Act2 process has three steps, or 'phases'. The first phase is called the Exploration Phase, which ran from November 2022 to May 2023 and is now finished. This phase has been about the Act2 team listening deeply to people across the Uniting Church to understand their joys, challenges, and what issues we need to look at so our Church can have a life-giving future.

The new report, '*In Response to God's Call*', focusses on this work. This present document is a slightly adapted summary of the full report. You can find the full report [on our website here](https://act2uca.com/act2report) (act2uca.com/act2report).

In the full report, you can read:

- All the things we did, and what we heard, during this first 'listening' phase.
- A theological reflection about some of the things we heard, and where we are as a Church at the moment.
- An introduction to the next phase, the third and final phase, called the Collective Discernment Phase (running from June 2023 to November 2023).
- Some directions (ideas to affirm) for *Workstream 1: Local Communities of Faith and Discipleship*.
- Four different options (models) for *Workstream 3: Governance and Resourcing*.

The areas of work we are focussed on are called 'Workstreams'. There are four Workstreams in total. As above, this report mainly focusses on Workstream 1 and Workstream 3. Alongside those ones, the other two are *Workstream 2: National Identity* and *Workstream 4: Theological Culture and Education*. We will keep working on all these.

## What we did

- We directly contacted 1,672 Uniting Church local communities of faith.
- We heard directly from 187 Church Councils, responding to six questions we asked them.
- We held 10 focus groups with local leaders.
- We directly contacted all 33 Uniting Church Presbyteries and met with 22 of them (either in person or online).



- We visited every Uniting Church Synod to meet with Synod leaders, leaders of Uniting Church agencies and leaders of Uniting Church theological colleges. In these visits we had 45 meetings with over 100 people.
- We attended the National Conference of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress where there was a session on Act2.
- We read 46 written submissions from individuals, agencies and councils.
- We looked at lots of data about the Uniting Church, including from the National Church Life Survey and data from other churches who have run processes like Act2.

Altogether we have talked about Act2 with over 400 people. Around 1500 people have given us feedback about Act2.

## **What we heard**

*You can find more detail about all of this in Section 2 of the full report.*

### ***Workstream 1: Local Communities of Faith***

- In the Uniting Church there are around 1,672 local communities. In a typical week, around 28 people attend these communities. The average age of Uniting Church members is 68 years old.
- Worship and pastoral care are at the heart of our local communities and we value them highly. People in the Uniting Church believe their communities offer a strong sense of belonging and are inclusive.
- Uniting Church communities want to connect with their local community.
- Discipleship is very important to us, but also something we need to work on. We want to be better at sharing our faith, inviting people to belong and growing disciples of Jesus.
- The energy and capability in our Church has gone down, while the need to be an ethical and compliant Church has grown.
- Local communities generally feel supported by the wider Church, like Presbyteries and Synods. They appreciate Presbyteries for their pastoral care, particularly in times of transition. Synods are valued for their help with administration.
- Local communities of faith sometimes become frustrated and confused when they try to get support from other parts of the Church.
- Local communities see that they make contributions to the wider Church in two main ways, by giving their money and offering people for councils and committees.
- Lots of local communities now make money off their property, but many of our properties are time consuming and expensive to maintain.
- Some people in the Uniting Church are experimenting with church plants and fresh expressions communities. Some of these communities have grown, but most are



small. We shouldn't expect them to replace existing communities, and they don't want that.

- It is now very common for our local communities to work together in clusters and networks.
- Both Presbyteries and Synods are very busy working on: closing or joining local communities, and helping local communities sell property.

### ***Workstream 2: National Identity***

- There is still deep love for the Uniting Church and what it represents.
- People still value the Basis of Union, our founding document. People mentioned it often during our meetings with them.
- We are still very committed to our Covenant with Congress, to being multicultural and seeking justice.
- Some people feel the Uniting Church doesn't have a clear public 'face' or identity.
- Lots of people are proud that we have tried to be an inclusive Church, holding together even though many of us are very different.
- People appreciate the way we make decisions, with everyone in the room to seek consensus, and nobody excluded.
- We are committed to being part of the wider community. We are very proud of our community service agencies.
- Some people are very sad and hurt about some of the decisions we have made. Some of our communities have been badly impacted by some of these decisions.
- Some people feel our National Assembly has become weaker in areas like our public voice for justice, and our relationships with churches overseas.

### ***Workstream 3: Governance and Resourcing***

- People generally think the principles and values which shape the way we govern our Church are the right ones.
- Most people feel our Church 'system' is not working for us anymore.
- We can't rely on a ready pool of volunteers anymore to do all the roles we need done (like council members, board members, committee members). We don't have enough people.
- The way our councils currently work together is leading to lots of confusion, inefficiency and slow decision making.
- We have various principles that guide how we govern our Church: things like making decisions as councils, making decisions as individuals and how we exercise oversight. Some people are getting frustrated by how all these things work together.
- Some of our councils don't have the money or people they need to do their job well.



- Property is a really big issue for us. We have lots more property than we have money in the bank. We are seeing lots of contest and some conflict about things like property sales and how money from property sales should be used.
- There are lots of pastoral, theological and ethical things for us to think about in our use of property.

#### ***Workstream 4: Theological Culture and Education***

This Workstream has a bit more of a targeted audience (like our theological colleges), so is running on its own track.

- People agree its good for us to focus on our theological culture.
- In this conversation we need to include the many different theological perspectives in the Uniting Church.
- Theological education, through our colleges and our ministry formation, helps to shape our theological culture. It needs to support the many different things we're doing in ministry, mission and discipleship.

#### ***Core Commitments***

The Church has affirmed the three core commitments we have named: our Covenant with Congress, being a multicultural Church and meeting our legal, ethical and social obligations. These are essential and need to be part of our conversations in all four of the Workstreams.

#### ***What's next?***

The first phase has now ended, and we are beginning the second phase. This phase is called 'Collective Discernment' and will run between June and November 2023.

This phase has begun with Uniting in Prayer, an intentional time of prayer across the national Uniting Church. During this time we have been praying for our Church and for each other. Uniting in Prayer runs from 28 May – 22 June (the Uniting Church Anniversary).

After this, we will move into a time of serious discernment about this report and the directions and options we have offered at the end of the report. We want to consider specific ideas and opportunities which will help us address our challenges and make use of the best of what we are.

In Section 5 of the full report you will find a set of directions relating to *Workstream 1: Local Communities of Faith and Discipleship*. These are designed to help with the oversight of local communities and to help local communities live out their calling to discipleship and mission.

In Section 6 of the full report you will find four different options relating to *Workstream 3: Governance and Resourcing*. These are to help us consider the best way forward to foster



healthy, sustainable and effective councils of the Church that can support local communities.

We will be asking the whole Church to be part of this discussion. In particular we will be asking the councils of the Church to make time to discuss and discern about the directions and options.

From the end of Uniting in Prayer, we will have lots of opportunities to discern and feed back to us about the options and directions. You'll be able to do this until the end of November 2023.

After this, we will move into the third and final phase. This is where we will prepare recommendations that will go to the 17<sup>th</sup> Assembly in July 2024. We will draw on all the discussion about the report and the directions and options to help us shape these recommendations.

Not everything in this report is easy reading. We have a lot of challenges, but also many, many good things we can use to face our challenges. We will need to have courage and work together. The report is offered by the Uniting Church for the Uniting Church, in a spirit of deep love for our Church, hope for our future and faith that in his own strange way Christ “constitutes, rules and renews his Church” (Uniting Church Basis of Union).

*The Act2 Project Unit is made up of: Andrew Johnson (Project Lead), Rev Erik Lennestål (Project and Research Officer), Bethany Broadstock (Communications Officer), and Rev Cyrus Kung (Administration and Engagement Officer). [Meet us here](#), along with the Act2 Steering Committee.*

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