



Faith Foundations



Mission Statement

The Mission of UnitingCare Australia is:
**to voice the Uniting Church's
commitment to supporting individuals,
families and communities through
advocacy and the enhancement of
community service provision.**

Part A In the Context of the Uniting Church in Australia

The *Basis of Union* is the foundational document that guides the theological understanding, life and policy of the Uniting Church in Australia. As a national agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church, UnitingCare Australia's direction is shaped by the framework of faith, vision and values set out in the *Basis of Union*. This theology is informed by Biblical witness and historical teachings making known the Christian tradition which *lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church*¹.

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated...

The church is a fellowship of the Holy Spirit under Christ, living as a pilgrim people, and moving towards the promised goal of salvation.² The Uniting Church in Australia shares in the Judaic-Christian vision of a restored creation and a united humanity, a vision of a just and participatory society under God, in which all people, no matter their age, gender, sexuality, ability, class, colour, creed or cultural origins, are treated justly as one people. Essential elements of this fellowship are worship, witness and service.

*The Word of God on whom salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church.*³

UnitingCare Australia lives in the light of a vision of the social good, which emerges from the foundation outlined above. That vision gives rise to foundational concerns, defining characteristics and specific roles which are explored and developed in the context of Biblical and theological reflection. Twelve areas summarise this vision and are outlined in Part B of this document. Part C identifies Biblical references and consequent commitments.

Vision Statement for Community Services in the Uniting Church

The Uniting Church in Australia proudly shares the tradition of the Christian Church. It traces its origins to the call by the God of Abraham and Sarah, honours the Hebrew Scriptures and bases its confessions in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in the documents of the New Testament. The Church exists to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Uniting Church believes that God's action in Christ is the declaration of a new creation and involves the transformation of humanity, within a restored natural world.

The Church seeks to make known the meaning and claim of this decisive action of God, and challenges us to be a fellowship of reconciliation.

*The Church's call is to serve that end...to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building of the whole.*⁴

¹ *Basis of Union*, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1977

² Merritt, D.R., *Understanding the Uniting Church in Australia*, pp 6-7

³ *Basis of Union*, Paragraph 5

⁴ Uniting Church in Australia Inaugural Statement to the Nation, 22 June 1977



Part A

In the Gospels and through the work and teachings of Jesus Christ, the foundations are laid for the Church's understanding of its mission in community services. Jesus's ministry challenged people to give more serious attention to the nature of service to one another.

We witness God's love extended to all people, with no discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, sexuality, ability, class, colour, creed or cultural origin.

The Church is a fellowship of a pilgrim people journeying into the future:

*The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in life, will bring it into deeper unity with other churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord.*⁵

Engaging the Church with the world through community services provides us with opportunity to live out the Christian vision. The Christian vision is inclusive, all encompassing, and looks for the equality of opportunity for individuals, communities and peoples.

This equality of opportunity assumes

- authentic human relationships in all dimensions and at all levels of shared life;
- equal access to information and knowledge;

- equal access to resources;
- equal participation in decision making; and
- shared responsibility.

At the inaugural Statement to the Nation by the Uniting Church, our Christian responsibility to society was affirmed:

*We are conscious of our responsibilities within and beyond this country....we affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles...the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, community religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.*⁶

⁵ Ibid, p. 18

⁶ Uniting Church in Australia Inaugural Statement to the Nation, 22 June 1977

Part A

Core Values

UnitingCare Australia, in expressing the Christian vision of a restored creation moving towards its fullness, holds the following core values:

- No matter their age, gender, sexuality, ability, class, colour, creed or cultural origins, each person in Australian society is to be treated justly, accorded dignity and have their basic rights protected;
- Australian society must be guided by a commitment to justice, full participation by its citizens in its shared life and a particular concern for those who are most disadvantaged and marginalised;
- Decision making on national policy must operate in a truly democratic way involving and empowering the greatest number of people wherever possible; and
- The church as part of society, must devote itself to worship, witness and service to give greater expression to unity of God's love for the world and the church as a loving agency, a church that cares and works together for justice.

As the national body for community services of the Uniting Church in Australia, UnitingCare Australia is committed to:

- Promoting best practice in service delivery for children, young people, families, people with disabilities and older people;
- Advocating for those most disadvantaged in society;

- Seeking a just and participatory society through engagement with government and partnership with all churches and other agencies of a similar purpose; and
- Undertaking research and innovative practice that supports and gives focus to its work at both the level of policy and practical outcomes in the multiple environments its mandate covers.

UnitingCare Australia is the national secretariat for the work of the Uniting Church's community services in the 21st Century. UnitingCare represents a collaborative framework to give greater expression to the unity of God's love for the world and the Church as a loving agency; and a church that cares and works together for justice. This network provides the opportunity to present the Church as an integrated structure cognisant of diversity but committed to collaboration and creative change. It represents a nurturing, healing and caring church, working not only in partnership with itself but also with the community. It presents a powerful vehicle for a unified public voice to defend justice, the need for good governance, and investment in the common good.



Part B The Twelve Commitments

UnitingCare Australia is guided in its community service by the commitments that follow which rest on the above basic affirmation of faith, identity and purpose.

The Twelve Commitments	1. Foundational Concerns
	1.1. The Common Good
	1.2. United Australia
	1.3. A Just Society
	1.4. One World
	2. Defining Characteristics
	2.1. Human Rights
	2.2. Social Good/Natural Harmony
	2.3. Pluralism
	2.4. Reconciliation
	3. Specific Roles
	3.1. Advocacy
3.2. A Prophetic Voice	
3.3. Service	
3.4. Shared Responsibility	

Part B

1. Foundational Concerns

1.1 The Common Good

To accept responsibility to contribute to the common good

Christians share with all citizens a responsibility for the wholeness and stability of social life. This responsibility includes a concern for all dimensions of human existence, political, economic, social and cultural, as well as religious. This commitment involves UnitingCare in advocacy work challenging ideologies, policies and practices which threaten justice and equity.

.... and to participate in achieving sound government and order.

In its engagement with society, UnitingCare Australia will advocate an open process of consultation and discussion, seeking always to responsibly become involved in the issues of the day. This will engage the Church in calling upon its tradition and accepted patterns of actions to identify key social values and to uphold civic virtues, so that ethical governance and moral practice distinguish all corporate decision-making.

1.2 A United Australia

To hold before government, community and church alike a vision of a united Australia, representing a confederacy of nationalities...

The multicultural nature of Australian society commits UnitingCare Australia to the honouring of racial, ethnic and cultural difference. Its aim is the creation of a united Australia, that recognises the huge contribution of many nations to its vitality, style and quality of life. Because of this diversity, Australian self-identity is viewed in respect of its multicultural heritage.

... and to call all Australians to the personal and social costs such unity requires.

UnitingCare Australia recognises such unity does not come without a cost. Therefore, among its own people and in the wider community, it will press for tolerance, openness to and acceptance of difference. This goal will require time, money, energy and commitment. A commitment to transformative action, of persons and community alike, for the greater good, will guide its life and practice.



Part B

1.3 A Just Society

To create an equitable society of justice and peace.

No society can tolerate injustice without the inevitable loss of its peace and security. In a society where the gap between rich and poor widens and groups and sectors of the community are disempowered and discriminated against, all stand to lose by the breakdown of the social order. The commitment to justice and peace by UnitingCare Australia arises from its own sense of God's intention, and the recognition that no-one benefits for long in conditions of injustice and conflict.

Disagreement on the social and economic ends to be pursued and the means to attain those ends, may necessarily involve opposition to groups and programs that operate in the name of justice and peace, but which diminish community and perpetuate individualism to the detriment of social good. Challenge to economic and social policy will occur where the interconnectedness of the human community is threatened. As far as it is able, UnitingCare Australia will affirm and support all genuine human attempts to attain a just, participatory and sustainable society.

1.4. One World

To search always for the signs of the times that point to new beginnings, new tasks and possible new futures.

In a world of rapid social, economic and technological change, increasing complexity and uncertainty, UnitingCare Australia commits itself to discerning those forces that are for good. In this task, it will seek to support and establish new initiatives that promise a universally more beneficent future for all, and blend what is new, creatively and constructively, with established practices and patterns that deserve preservation.

In all of its life and practice, UnitingCare Australia will affirm international harmony, celebrate one humanity and work for global peace and unity. In this task it will live out of its hope for one world under God.

Part B

2. Defining Characteristics

2.1. Human Rights

To honour the dignity and freedom of all who live within Australia...

UnitingCare Australia affirms the declarations of human rights as stated by the United Nations, which recognise that by virtue of their creation, human beings have the right to basic freedoms including free speech, food, shelter, education, health, work and safety, and the right to worship in their own way. UnitingCare Australia will seek to uphold these rights in order to honour the dignity of all human beings.

... and to enable the expression of their hopes and dreams.

The need for open and free expression in a democratic society is recognised by UnitingCare Australia as a desirable goal so that the hopes and dreams of all Australians may have a chance of fulfilment. Such free expression should be in the best interest of the body politic, and be allowed to reflect the rich diversity that is the strength of Australia.

2.2 Social Good - Natural Harmony

To offer its time, gifts and resources for the achievement of social well-being and the nurture and restoration of the natural world...

In its commitments, UnitingCare Australia through its networks, offers the many resources of its own life in order to maintain the health of individuals and communities. In this it works with many groups at all levels of society for the sake of the common good. By persisting in this commitment, UnitingCare Australia lives out the theology of new life.

... including cherishing the land, our mother.

In a time of land and water degradation and increasing pollution of the air, UnitingCare Australia joins with those who seek a restoration of land, water and air.



Part B

2.3. Pluralism

To affirm the civic pluralism of Australia ...

UnitingCare Australia acknowledges and celebrates the pluralism that characterises Australian society. In its work with ethnic communities and congregations and its covenant with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, UnitingCare Australia affirms, in its policies and programs, the rich harvest of cultural diversity present in Australian society. This commitment includes working with Aboriginal people in the quest for reconciliation.

... and to nurture a plurality of cultures and religious expression.

Included in its affirmation of pluralism, is a commitment to be open not only to other Christian Churches as the *Basis of Union* requires, but also to those of other traditional faiths and world religions. In this, UnitingCare Australia will, as far as it is able, offer help and support, where such help is needed and requested.

2.4. The Restoration of Broken Relationships

To work for the restoration of broken relationships at all levels...

In its service and justice work, UnitingCare Australia commits itself to caring for individuals who suffer oppression and deprivation, as well as support of communities, many of whose needs stretch beyond the geographical boundaries of Australia. As opportunity affords, UnitingCare Australia will act cooperatively to heal broken relationships at national levels of our shared life, in order to sustain the fragile networks that are essential for the maintenance of the Common Good.

...including social, political, economic, cultural and religious dimensions.

This commitment to restoration extends across all dimensions of social experience, including the domains of the political, economic, social, cultural and religious. In affirming this all-inclusive perspective, UnitingCare Australia gives expression to its faith that no dimension of human affairs falls outside the boundaries of God's care and love.

Part B

3. Specific Roles

3.1. Advocacy

To speak out for people who are voiceless, and to stand in solidarity with people who are poor, marginalised, have a disability or are dislocated members of our community...

The fragmented and unequal nature of our society impacts on individuals and groups so that many need help and support. In its social action, UnitingCare Australia stands alongside and in solidarity with those who suffer disadvantage in any way, seeking to restore and empower where possible. Equally, UnitingCare Australia commits itself to the transformation of the social fabric, speaking against injustice and seeking to overthrow structures and systemic dysfunction that are destructive and oppressive. Such work will also build on the strengths of people, groups and families as it seeks a restored community.

...and to affirm their full participation in the life of Australian society.

In its advocacy, UnitingCare Australia will press for the inclusion of all people in the benefits of society, acting in the best interests of those who seek its services to enhance the opportunity for all people to have access to full participation in society.

3.2. A Prophetic Voice

To be a prophetic voice, where such a role is required...

UnitingCare Australia is part of the prophetic tradition of the Church, and does not hesitate to speak out against injustice and oppression, wherever it occurs, whether in church or community. Not only will its work be directed to lifting up and restoring those marginalised and disadvantaged by social and economic processes, but equally it will seek to transform those conditions that create social disease in the first place. Preventive strategies will be as critical in its action as remedial strategies. Research and program evaluation, consultation and communication with various groups will also characterise its prophetic task.

... to remind all citizens of that unifying vision whose end is an inclusive and reconciled community.

In its prophetic role, UnitingCare Australia will test present circumstances against its vision of the common good and its hope for a just society. Part of its task will be to protest when that vision is eclipsed, and to give affirmation to those individuals and groups who work unceasingly for the attainment of a unified community and nation.



Part B

3.3. Service

To be unceasing in its commitment to offer care and hospitality to friend and stranger alike...

Following its foundational commitment, UnitingCare Australia will continue to give care and hospitality to those who have become victimised and hurt by their involvement in Australian society. In this, UnitingCare Australia offers its services to all, making no limitation on who can receive care and no judgement on their right to receive what can be offered, if their need is clear. This commitment includes protection, safety and nurture for those who require it, whether short, medium or long term.

... and to be diligent in the renewal of its own life, conserving that which is good and developing new and innovative responses to the challenges of the present day.

In offering service, the continuing task to examine the motives and quality of its programs is always before UnitingCare Australia. It seeks to be flexible in its own life, willing to respond to change and take hard decisions including the closing-down and redistribution of resources in its own programs in the face of changed circumstances. Its watchword is *semper reformanda* (constantly under reform).

3.4. Shared Responsibility

To participate with governments, agencies, structures and networks in the struggle to empower all Australians within a culture of shared responsibility...

The service provision of UnitingCare Australia is directed to the areas of welfare and includes a concern for health, education, work, leisure, worship and community building. In these initiatives, the goals of empowerment and participation are held to be fundamental to the work of restoration and transformation, including self-help, artistic expression, relative self-sufficiency and interdependence.

... through education, work, leisure, worship and community building.

In undertaking its work, UnitingCare Australia seeks to be ecumenical, joining with other church and community agencies to maximise the impact of change and development. This commitment springs from the defining vision of UnitingCare Australia and characterises its concern for dialogue and openness at all levels of life.

Part C **Some Significant Biblical References**

The commitment of the Uniting Church in Australia to community service flows from its understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament and the responsibility for social action and justice they contain. Key parables of Jesus, and episodes in his life and teaching, highlight this understanding:

The Parable of the Great Feast

(Luke 14:15-24) (Matthew 22:1-10)

In this story, Jesus makes it clear that those invited to the feast will include unexpected guests, gathered from the highways and byways. The key to the parable is the intention of the host, which is to gather all who will come.

The story of the Great Catch of Fish in John's Gospel with its symbolic number of fish caught, corresponding to the nations, indicates the universal nature of the Gospel *(John 21:4-11)*.

UnitingCare Australia, therefore, commits itself:

To accept responsibility to contribute to **the Common Good** and to participate in achieving sound government and order.

To search always for the signs of the times that point to new beginnings, new tasks and possible new futures, and to continue to hold up that hope of **One World** which arises out of the Christian confession.

The Parable of the Great Judgement

(Matthew 25:31-46)

Those gathered to the Great Judgement are all the nations. The test of the nations is whether they have given food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, visited those in prison. The responsibility to the most oppressed and suffering members of society is clearly laid before the nations. Specifically, it is a responsibility of the church.

UnitingCare Australia, therefore, commits itself:

To hold before government, community and church alike a vision of **a United Australia**, in a confederacy of nations, and to call all Australians to the committed action such unity requires.

To be unceasing in its commitment to offer **care and hospitality** to friend and stranger alike and to be diligent in the renewal of its own life.



Part C

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

(Luke 10: 25-37)

Our neighbour is not who we choose, but given to us by virtue of his or her need. Jesus again points to the boundless nature of God's love, and places before the church an example to be followed.

The parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son underline again the Divine intention to seek that which is lost, those in need, those who need to be brought again into the embrace of a community.

UnitingCare Australia, therefore, commits itself:

To honour the **dignity and freedom** of all those who bear the name Australians and to enable the free expression of their hopes and dreams.

To **speak out** for people who are voiceless, poor, rejected or marginalised, people with disabilities or who are dislocated members of our community, and to make possible their full participation in the life of Australian society.

The Magnificat

(Luke 1:46-55)

Before Jesus was born, Mary his mother gave thanks to God. In her outpouring of gratitude, Mary foreshadowed the ministry of Jesus. When Jesus began his public ministry, he did so by announcing what he saw his work to be. He did so in the words of *Isaiah 61:1-2*, which he repeated in *Luke 4:16-19*. In this declaration, Jesus sets before the Church an agenda which it must fulfil in its ministry, to proclaim, to liberate, to heal.

UnitingCare Australia, therefore, commits itself:

To create an **equitable society of justice and peace** and to affirm, wherever possible, the human struggle for meaning and fulfilment.

To be a **prophetic voice**, where such a voice is required, to remind all citizens of that unifying vision whose end is an inclusive and reconciled community.

Part C

The Feeding of the 5,000

(Luke 9:10-17) (Matthew 14:13-21) (Mark 6: 30-44)

The universal nature of God's care for all people is demonstrated in the feeding of this vast company of people: men, women and children, Jew and Gentile, clean and unclean. From its own meagre resources, the church is able to feed those who have need. This miracle points beyond history to the reconciliation of all in God's Kingdom, and is celebrated each time the bread and wine are shared in the Eucharist.

UnitingCare Australia, therefore, commits itself:

To affirm the **civic pluralism** of Australia and to nurture a plurality of cultures and religious expression in its own life.

To participate with governments, agencies, structures and networks in the struggle to empower all Australians through education, work, leisure, worship and community building within a culture of **shared responsibility**.

The Beatitudes

(Luke 6:20-37)

Jesus in this gathering of his teachings, underlines again the pattern of service that has guided the church since his time. In spelling out those who are blessed, he includes those who hunger for justice and righteousness, the peacemakers, the seekers after God, and those who care for neighbour and enemy alike.

UnitingCare Australia, therefore, commits itself:

To offer its time, gifts and resources for the achievement of **social well-being** and the **nurture and restoration of the natural world**, including cherishing the land, our mother.

To work for the **restoration of broken relationships**, whether at individual, family, community or national levels, including political, economic, cultural and religious dimensions.



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