

## **Presbytery Standing Committee**

<i>Chairperson</i>	Rev Steve Francis
<i>Chairperson-elect</i>	Rev Lorraine Stokes
<i>Secretary of Presbytery</i>	Rev Dr Ian Tozer
<i>Members</i>	Kalo Fotu
	Travis Windsor
	Dr Elaine Ledgerwood
	Rev Nalin Perera

### **Role**

Within the Uniting Church, the Presbytery exercises a vital ministry of oversight. Our purpose is, through the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, to serve the Congregations' and the Presbytery's worship, witness and service.

The Presbytery Standing Committee (PSC) acts for the Presbytery between meetings, exercising Presbytery responsibilities and overseeing Presbytery bodies.

When Presbyteries meet regularly, it is possible for them to exercise oversight and make decisions at their own meetings. Then Standing Committees only need be a reference for office-bearers and to deal with urgent matters. However, when meetings are held twice a year, most Presbytery responsibilities need to be delegated.

Under the old W.A. Uniting Church structures (joint Synod and Presbytery), the body responsible for general oversight and exercise of Presbytery responsibilities between meetings was the General

Council, which acted as both the Presbytery Standing Committee and the Synod Standing Committee.

Thus the Presbytery Standing Committee is the lineal descendent of the General Council now that we have returned to the Regulations and, in most respects, the separation of the Synod and Presbytery has come into effect.

### **Meetings**

The Rules require meetings of the PSC to be held not less than once every three months. The current Standing Committee determined it would normally meet bi-monthly. After its election on 5 November 2016, PSC met on 30 November 2016, and 31 January, 21 February, 7 March, 14 March and 9 May 2017. The need to deal with pressing and emerging issues has hampered the "routine" work of the Committee. Indeed, every meeting has had matters carried forward.

## Membership

It has been particularly valuable to have as members Dr Elaine Ledgerwood and Travis Windsor, previously members of General Council and not only because of their gifts and experience. This provided continuity of knowledge about decisions of General Council. Both were elected to serve one year. Having Kalo Fotu and Rev Nalin Perera as continuing members also serves the purpose of maintaining continuity.

## Nominations

Changes to committee (or other bodies') membership were reported and updated on the website as they were received.

## Major issues before the meetings

Decisions of the Presbytery Standing Committee regarding **First Third ministry** will be reported directly at the meeting by the chairperson-elect.

**Theological Education** has also been on the Agenda. Synod powers relating to the Ministerial Education Board were referred to the Presbytery in 2009, when the Commission for Education in Discipleship and Leadership (CEDAL) was formed.

In December 2016, the Assembly – through its Standing Committee – adopted new Standards of Theological Education for Phase II candidates for Deacon and Minister of the Word [see: <https://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/ASCMinutes/2016/16.11Minutes-Attachment-B-Standards-for-Theological->

[Education-Formation-Phase-2-2016.pdf](#)].

The implications of the Standards are still being worked-through; however, they will require us to re-think. The Standards require the Church to take very seriously the training it offers to Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) candidates, to those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and to those who present with a variety of qualifications and educational needs.

The Standards acknowledge that there is a need to offer a range of “pathways” towards ordination; the current pattern of degrees offered in university settings may not suit all candidates; there has been a radical change in the contexts in which ministry is offered in the Church; particular attributes are required of both candidates and those who “teach, supervise and mentor” them; and the need for co-operation across the national Uniting Church in theological education.

Noting the 2016 decision of the General Council not to proceed with the appointment of a Lecturer in Systematic Theology, the Presbytery Standing Committee had to deal with the matter. Presentations were made about what might be required in theological education for the whole church, given the Standards and the diverse needs of candidates, by the Director of Education and Formation, Rev Dr John Squires. In the light of the new Standards, the PSC resolved not to appoint a Lecturer in Systematic Theology at this time. This decision will stand for the foreseeable future as a number of matters need to be resolved, including how the current arrangements for joint

appointments with Murdoch University might conflict with the Standards. The decision was communicated to the Anglican Administrator (Acting Archbishop) and the Perth College of Divinity (PCD), through which Perth Theological Hall of the Uniting Church relates to Murdoch University's theology programme. This decision is a cause of major concern for PCD and the members of the Joint Faculty of Theology.

Discussion with Anglican members of the Perth College of Divinity about a range of matters is underway, including the future of theological education and ministerial formation in W.A. now that the Standards require the Uniting Church to offer a range of pathways and raise other questions. They acknowledge: that current degrees in a University setting may not be suitable for all candidates, the need for special consideration of UAICC and CALD candidates, and that attention must be paid to the attributes required of candidates as well as teachers, supervisors and mentors of candidates. These are matters of vital importance to the Church.

In the light of the strategic directions adopted by the Presbytery in 2015, the PSC has determined that a high priority needs to be given to investment of its resources in education that aims at leadership development across the whole Church.

### **Other matters**

A variety of **Rule changes** have been proposed, some very significant, primarily about membership as a result of a review

by the various Presbytery committees and bodies. The PSC considered several that relate to Presbytery itself. All of the changes proposed were considered by the PSC after the Church Law committee had reviewed and re-worked them.

For instance, the Rules stated that the Presbytery would hold its Annual Meeting in November (although this had been reported as planned for May meetings, which was an oversight in the version brought in November 2016). That would have caused a particular problem this year because Regulations require that Presbyteries appoint or elect confirmed lay members of the Synod, after having invited congregations to submit nominations [3.3.7 (iv)]. This has happened for this meeting and the proposed Rules put this in place.

The Rules for the Liturgy Committee need review in the light of the changes to structure and a separate Chair of Presbytery. The various worship services will be divided between the two councils, with the majority being Presbytery services.

The Rules concerning Presbytery Regions have been breached in most regions for years now and this will be the subject of a proposal to be brought to the meeting.

Proposals are to be brought to the meeting in relation to property matters and Rules for the Property Committee (a body required under the regulations) after the Presbytery decisions will also be brought.

Naturally, Rules are always subject to review. This is all-the-more likely during a

time of major change. However Rules are important as the guidelines we have put in place to guide our corporate life.

The PSC also **co-opted a number of people to the membership of the Presbytery** itself. This allows their names to be included in the election process for Synod membership (Regulation 3.3.7 (a) (iv)].

The Rules before this meeting propose that the Presbytery Standing Committee **confirm the minutes of Presbytery meetings** (rather than the practice of appointing a separate group to do this.) The PSC had already resolved that it was desirable to move from the practice of having an appointed group do this for the Presbytery. The Rule makes this a firm practice.

The need for a **review of regions** before the PSC has received no attention, due to the pressure of other matters. The PSC proposes that the requirements of the Rules regarding Regions (P2.3) be suspended. This does not exclude people in the existing regions from meeting if that is desired.

The **Presbytery Property Committee** was hampered by the lack of a convenor and, despite requests for nominations, none has been received. Several meetings of members were held, convened by the Secretary, at the request of the PSC.

The purpose of the Standing Committee has been kept in mind at all of our meetings as we have prayed that we will

act in accordance with God's will and committed our work to God.

**Rev Dr Ian Tozer**  
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