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SPECIAL EDITION

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New Directions in Theological Education

Last Friday, 30 June 2017, the Presbytery Standing Committee gave notice of its intention to withdraw Perth Theological Hall (PTH) from the Perth College of Divinity (PCD) on 30 June 2018. The PCD is a joint Anglican/Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) body which oversees the theological program at Murdoch University.

The decision to withdraw was made, with regret, after long and considered deliberations. The Presbytery Standing Committee came to the conclusion that the UCA would better be able to meet the *Assembly Standards for Theological Education and Formation: Phase 2 for Ordained Ministries* and respond to the needs of the church, if it withdrew from PCD.

The new Standards, which came into effect from 1 January 2017, make it clear that we must produce ministers equipped for missional leadership in a multi faith, multicultural Australia. They also require that there is not just one, but multiple pathways to ordination, which take into account the educational needs of candidates, and allow for flexibility and recognition of prior learning and experience. This will allow a much wider range of candidates to undertake study, especially those from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities and those without undergraduate degrees.

PTH will continue, but in a new form. The staff of PTH will focus on lay education, continuing education for ordained ministers, and the formation of candidates for ordained ministries. A learning community of staff and students will meet regularly in Western Australia, to tutor, mentor and support candidates. It is hoped that the new approach will encourage more people, especially those who are younger, to offer as candidates for ordained ministries. The Basis of Union commitment to an 'informed faith' will be maintained.

The focus of lay education will be on equipping members to connect with their local communities, develop and implement plans for mission, share their faith with others, enable people to grow as disciples of Christ, provide spiritually discerning leadership in congregations and establish new forms of church.

The high levels of interest in Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses being offered in rural and urban areas indicates a hunger for theological education which both deepens faith and develops ministry skills. This will be expanded in coming years. Education is being offered in both city and regional areas, and use of technology makes it accessible to those in remote locations. Rev Dr John Squires, Director of Education and Formation, has lay education as his top priority and new staff will be appointed to strengthen this area.

During this time of change and renewal, please pray for all concerned, particularly PTH staff, our ecumenical partners and Murdoch University.

For further information, please visit <http://unitingchurchwa.org.au/news-notes>.