

PROPOSAL 4

Affirmation of New Directions in theological education

That the Presbytery of Western Australia:

affirm the new directions being taken in theological education in WA noting that they implement the strategic directions of the Presbytery and enable our adherence to the Assembly National Standards for ordinand courses.

Rationale

In May 2015 the Presbytery of WA adopted four key strategic directions. All of the Commissions and Committees of the church were asked to consider how they could assist in implementation of these directions. It was soon clear that CEDAL was responsible for implementing one of these, namely “Developing and /or promoting relevant education, training, and leadership development resources, programs and projects”. However CEDAL also has a role in implementing two other strategic directions, namely “increasing the church’s capacity for community engagement” and “promoting a culture of faith formation and faith sharing”.

Since that time CEDAL has worked hard to respond to these strategic directions, and in the last two years much has been achieved, though much more needs to be done. In the past most of our education has focussed on provision of university-based education for a small group of candidates and lay people. In recent years CEDAL has put a priority on development of education in congregations and regions which equip our members and ministers for ministry and mission. As a result there have been significant developments in lay education and continuing education for ministers.

As well as implementing Presbytery Strategic Directions, CEDAL is accountable to the Assembly to ensure that National Standards in relation to Theological Education are met. In the Uniting Church the Assembly determines National Standards for Theological Education and all UCA accredited theological colleges in Australia are required to adhere to them. Failure to implement the National Standards could result in the accreditation of a college being withdrawn by the Assembly.

New National Standards for ordinand courses came into effect on 1 January 2017. The new Standards make clear that we must produce ordinands equipped for missional leadership in a multi-faith, multi-cultural 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 might mean that candidates prepare for ministry by, for example, completing diplomas, undergraduate (bachelor) degrees or post graduate studies (such as Masters of Divinity). The Standards no longer require candidates to complete a degree prior to ordination. This will allow a much wider range of candidates to undertake study, especially those from Congress, CALD communities and those without undergraduate degrees.

Those who teach or mentor candidates must also display a mature Christian faith, grounded in the UCA. Interstate collaboration between UCA colleges is encouraged, to reduce duplication and enable sharing of expertise between colleges.

Implementing these Standards will require changes in our process of formation of candidates for ordained ministries in WA. As Murdoch University can currently only offer post graduate theological studies, this means that from now on, many of our candidates will need to be referred to interstate UCA theological colleges for their academic studies. This does not mean the closure of Perth Theological Hall, but rather a re-shaping of it. The plan is to maintain a strong learning community in WA, where candidates will be formed for ministry, engage in supervised field education, have face to face tutoring in relation to their academic studies, and engage with a wider cohort of theological students and staff from around Australia through participation in intensives and on line learning communities.

Moved: Rev Bev Fabb

Seconded: Rev Dr John Squires