



Piccadilly Court
Level 10, 222 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Australia
ABN 16 939 630 947

Tel +61 2 8267 4428
enquiries@nat.uca.org.au
assembly.uca.org.au

President
Stuart McMillan

General Secretary
Colleen Geyer

08: CG:JB

May 18 2017

To: Presbytery and Synod Secretaries

**Re: Appointment of members of the
15th Assembly: 8 – 14 July 2018**

Dear Colleagues,

Greetings! This is the first of many letters that I shall be writing over the next months as we begin our preparations in earnest for the 15th triennial Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. The 15th Assembly will meet at the Box Hill Town Hall, Melbourne from 2.00pm Sunday 8 July until 1.00pm on Saturday 14 July 2018.

The purpose of this letter is to share with you some important information about the 15th Assembly and to ask you to appoint the members from your Council.

The Assembly theme is *“Abundant Grace, Liberating Hope”*. Through images, worship and words we will be invited to engage with this wonderful theme.

Planning for this meeting aims to enable the Council to meaningfully connect with the work of the Assembly, experience significant worship and community building, reflect on the issues facing the Church at this time; and having sought to discern the will of God, make decisions that faithfully fulfil our calling as the people of God in this time and place.

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR ALL APPOINTEES

- Persons appointed to membership of the triennial Assembly are not there as delegates or representatives of their appointing body. The experience they bring from their background is important but they are to understand themselves as members of the Assembly.
- "Ministers" includes ministers of the Word, deacons and deaconesses. Note also that a minister of another church who is serving in an approved placement within the Uniting Church is eligible for election to membership of the Assembly – but check the wording of 2.9.5 (a) to see the conditions which apply to that eligibility.
- Regulation 3.3.8 (iii) (3) provides that “not fewer than one in every ten of the members shall be of a youthful age as determined by the Assembly or its Standing Committee”. In March 2011 the ASC resolved in Minute 11.22.16 that “in fulfilling its responsibility under Regulation 3.3.8 (iii) (3) determine that youthful age shall be 25 years of age at the commencement of the meeting of the triennial Assembly”. This decision is still operative.
- Appointed members of the Assembly are not required to be members of the Council that appoints them or even to reside within the bounds of the appointing Council. However, Presbyteries and Synods may wish to take into account the perceived capacity of its appointments to report back and to engage with the life of their Council following the Assembly. I am not aware of a Presbytery or Synod appointing “non residents” to membership of the Assembly. However it has been a little more common that people have moved from the bounds of their appointing Council after their appointment and still attended the Assembly as a member. There is nothing in the Regulations to prevent this and so it is a policy matter for each Council.



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- Presbyteries and Synods may appoint alternates, who can then keep the 2018 dates clear in case one or more of their initial appointments has to withdraw before the Assembly. But the Assembly (or Synod in the case of Presbyteries) does not need to know the names of these alternates unless they become appointments to the Assembly.
- Before appointing members to the Assembly please make clear the following information to people who are thinking of nominating:
 - ❖ Members are expected to be at all sessions of the Assembly for the whole week.
 - ❖ Members are expected to have read the papers and to be fully informed on all the matters that will be before the Assembly.
 - ❖ Members have the responsibility to inform the Assembly office of any changes to their contact details and to provide all necessary information in a timely manner.
 - ❖ If a person steps down as an appointed member of the Assembly it is their responsibility to inform the Presbytery (or their appointing body) and the Assembly office, and if at all possible to pass on to the new member any papers that might come to them.
 - ❖ Presbyteries must immediately advise the Assembly office when they appoint an alternate to a person who has previously been advised to the Assembly as a member.
 - ❖ There will be some costs that will be the responsibility of the Assembly members (see below).
 - ❖ Members will be accommodated in various types of accommodation.

MEMBERS APPOINTED BY PRESBYTERIES

Prior to the 13th Assembly there were major revisions to the Regulations in relation to the appointment of persons to the membership of the triennial Assembly. This was done in response to a decision of the 12th Assembly to address the number and manner of appointment of persons to the triennial meeting of the Assembly. These changes have had a significant impact on the way in which some Presbyteries appoint people to the Assembly.

I will provide below extracts from Regulation 3.3.8 but I will highlight here some key points.

Each presbytery will continue to appoint at least one minister and one confirmed lay member as per Regulation 3.3.8 (iii) (4). However the Regulation provides the capacity for the relevant Synod in full session to determine that one or more of the Presbyteries within its bounds may appoint more than the two persons provided for in Regulation 3.3.8 (iii) (4).

This option has the potential to affect the timing of appointments by Presbyteries. While it is possible for a Presbytery to appoint the two persons allowed for in the Constitution and Regulation 3.3.8 (iii) (4) prior to the meeting of its Synod, a Presbytery may not know whether there are other appointments available to it until after the Synod meeting. Therefore Presbyteries may care to wait until after their Synod determines the number for each Presbytery before appointing any members to the 15th Assembly. However the Assembly is open to receiving advice about two Presbytery appointed members once they are known and to receiving a subsequent advice of other names if that becomes necessary.

If Presbyteries wait until after the Synod meets then this will mean that the Synod appointments are made before the Presbytery appointments. While this has not been the historic pattern there is no regulation that determines the order in which appointments to the Assembly are to be made. However the practical requirement that the Synod appointments must ensure that there are no more ministerial than lay appointments and that the requirement for the appointment of persons of a youthful age does make it preferable that the Synod appoints after the Presbyteries.



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If there are any questions as to how your Synod may address itself to the possibility of allowing Presbyteries to appoint additional members please direct those inquiries to your Synod Secretary.

Presbytery Secretaries notify the Assembly and their Synod of their appointments to the 15th Assembly as soon as they are made but no later than 31 October 2017. Presbytery Secretaries are provided with two forms in this mailing to facilitate that communication. One form is to be sent to the Assembly and the other is to be forwarded to your Synod Secretary.

The second major piece of information that may affect Presbytery and Synod appointments to the 15th Assembly is the decision to provide, to the best of our ability, interpretation services into four languages. The intention is to provide interpretation into two indigenous languages (as agreed with Congress), Korean and Indonesian. These languages have been chosen because they seem to be the communities which are most likely to have people who are available to be appointed to the Assembly in sufficient numbers to warrant the service; but also in the case of Korean and Indonesian these language groups will have significant representation among our overseas visitors. Please note that it will not be possible to provide translation of documents, interpretation at all sessions or in the small group processes, so some functional English for getting around would be an advantage, but that is a local decision. Please make this information known to persons who are considering nomination. There is provision in the response forms to indicate whether interpretation is required.

The cost to hold a meeting of the triennial Assembly is between \$450,000 and \$500,000. **The Assembly** meets all costs for the meeting but **requests that a co – contribution be made by the appointing body.** The level for the co-contribution to the 15th Assembly is \$550 per appointment. Please advise potential nominees if the appointing body is not making this contribution. The provision of the co-contribution can be indicated at the time members do the registration process as well as at the time of providing names of appointees (see below).

After a Presbytery has appointed its members to the Assembly please pass on a copy of this letter to them so they immediately receive this necessary information about the 14th Assembly. It may be wise to have copies of this letter ready at the meeting.

MEMBERS APPOINTED BY SYNODS

Each synod is to appoint ministers and confirmed lay persons, under the provisions of Regulation 3.3.8 (iii).

- (iii) Ministers and confirmed lay members from within the bounds of each Synod appointed as follows:
 - (1) number of members to be appointed from within the bounds of each Synod:

Synod	
NSW and ACT	54
Northern Synod	10
Queensland	36
South Australia	34
Victoria and Tasmania	58
Western Australia	20

and in each case the Moderator and the Secretary of the Synod shall be included ex-officio in the members appointed by the Synod when they are available to accept appointment;



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- (2) equal numbers of Ministers and lay members shall be appointed;
- (3) not fewer than one in every ten of the members shall be of a youthful age as determined by the Assembly or its Standing Committee;
- (4) each Presbytery within the bounds of the Synod shall appoint one Minister and one lay member and may appoint such number of additional members as the Synod in session decides;
- (5) the Synod shall appoint the remaining members and shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with sub-paragraph (2) and (3) regarding the total number of members appointed from within the bounds of the Synod under this paragraph (iii);

After a person has been appointed please pass on a copy of this letter to them so they immediately receive this necessary information about the 15th Assembly.

Synod Secretaries are asked to notify the Assembly of Synod appointments as soon as they are made but no later than 31 October 2017.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A. Costs

The Assembly meets most of the costs of attending the Assembly including travel, accommodation, and most meals. The member is responsible for their lunch time meal.

Unless other arrangements have been made, appointing bodies are requested to make a co-contribution towards the cost of the Assembly. The amount set for the 15th Assembly is \$550 per person appointed. This contribution can be paid by EFT: Bank: Westpac; BSB: 032 014; Account Name: Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly; Account No.: 105379; Reference: 15th Assembly Contribution; Name of the Appointing Body and the Appointee. Please send a remittance advice to jennyb@nat.uca.org.au when the payment is completed.

B. Travel arrangements

The Assembly will only meet the travel costs when the travel is arranged as per the instructions provided through the Assembly Secretariat. Members of the Assembly will make their own travel bookings. Members will be reimbursed for either the cost of their ticket or the indicative amount for travel from their place of origin to Melbourne (as determined by the Assembly Secretariat), which ever is the lower. So if the tickets are booked too late then any difference needs to be borne by the member. It is greatly appreciated if Assembly members can book the least expensive tickets that are available as this can lead to significant savings for the Assembly budget (although we recommend that people do not travel with Tiger Airways). Assembly members may choose to travel by car or train, but they will receive reimbursement according to the casual travel rate of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, or the cost of the train ticket, but only up to the amount that has been approved for air travel. Full details will be given in the January mailing.

Assembly members may want to take the opportunity for a holiday in Victoria or Tasmania before or after the Assembly. That's fine; however Assembly members will be responsible for any extra travel and accommodation costs caused by the holiday arrangements. Only persons travelling from destinations, or for purposes pre approved by the Assembly Secretariat will have Assembly funded accommodation provided for them on Saturday 7 July.



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C. Venues

Most Assembly sessions will take place at the Box Hill Town Hall.

A range of accommodation options will be provided. Local Melbourne metropolitan members are welcome and encouraged to return to their own homes each night. Car parking will be arranged for those needing to drive in each day. Motel and apartment style shared accommodation will be provided at The Tudor which is a 5-8 minute walk from the Box Hill Town Hall. Transport will be arranged for those with mobility issues. Another option will be for members to be billeted in homes of nearby Uniting Church members and transport arranged to and from Box Hill Town Hall each day.

Members will be asked to nominate their preferred accommodation option/s and every effort will be made to allocate accommodation according to their preference. Members who request private accommodation will be charged an additional fee. It is important that members provide information on health and mobility issues when they register as this will assist in the allocation of accommodation.

The venue for the opening service of the Assembly, including the installation of Deidre Palmer as President, will be advised as soon as possible. This important event will take place on the evening of Sunday 8 July.

D. Child Care

The Local Arrangement Committee will be looking into the provision of childcare facilities for children of Assembly members who need care while their parent(s) are at the Assembly. This applies to children from babies to 5 year olds, and the Assembly will meet the costs, so that parenting responsibilities do not need to disqualify people from eligibility for election as Assembly members. However, the Assembly will not meet the airfare costs of members' children. The need for childcare **must** be advised at the time of registration.

E. Associated events

Frequently there are a number of associated events connected with the Assembly. Further information about these will be available in due course. Please note that there will not be an official Visitors' Program organised at this Assembly.

F. Theme

The theme of the 15th Assembly will be "*Abundant Grace, Liberating Hope*".

G. Agenda items

At this early stage it is not possible to identify specific issues that will be before the Assembly for determination. However plans do include creating time to engage with major issues facing the Church as they relate to Assembly responsibilities; more effective interaction with the work of Assembly agencies; and a major emphasis on worship, Bible study, prayer and community time.

Assembly members can look forward to a fascinating and demanding week of Christian community, spiritual enrichment, small group work, solid discussion and a serious exercise in seeking to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit. The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania is providing excellent support for the Assembly. It will be a great Christian event as well as a great Assembly.



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In the meantime I look forward to receiving notification of your appointments of members of the 15th Assembly by the deadlines specified in this letter.

In the service of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colleen Geyer'.

COLLEEN GEYER
General Secretary

Encls: Forms for advising Assembly and Synod of the persons appointed by Presbyteries to the 15th Assembly