

## NSW SYNOD MEETING 2003

### SUMMARY: THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP & DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION: Ways forward in the NSW Synod

#### Introduction

Like all Synods within the Uniting Church, the NSW Synod is facing significant challenges to its ability to provide appropriately formed people to meet the ministry needs within the Synod.

The paper seeks to outline some of the issues and to suggest things that need to be taken into account as we move forward. It offers some suggestions of ways we might respond within the NSW Synod.

Three situations provide the context, which forms part of the basis for this paper.

- We have a variety of leadership needs in the NSW Synod, and that not all of these can be met at the present.
- The need to deal with the impact of living in a post-Christian and post-denominational era.
- The reality of reduced financial resources.

The issue of the formation of people for Ministry arises from two concerns in the church's life.

- A central task of the church is to ensure that there is oversight of the faith and unity of the church, to ensure that the church is apostolic in the sense that it adheres to the faith witnessed to by the apostles.
- The church has sought to provide educated people to offer leadership in the life of local congregations.

A significant section of the report ("The place of theology in ministerial education and discipleship formation") reflects on the importance of theology for the church and its Ministry. Members are encouraged to carefully read that section of the report.

As we think and act theologically about ministerial and theological education, there are some important factors that must be taken seriously in any consideration of new structures. The following list identifies some of those key factors:

1. How do we draw upon the inherited traditions [the word means 'to hand on, hand over'] of faith for the sake of the future? [We need to know from where we have come in Christ].
2. In a society where many now have no long history in the Christian faith, let alone the Uniting Church, there is a pressing concern for exploring Christian identity. Some theologians would argue that this is critical insofar as each one of us inhabits a wide range of communities and it is not always clear how our Christian identity is formed and expresses itself in the midst of so many competing allegiances.
3. We live in a society of increasing cultural diversity. We belong to a church that sometimes divides along competing theological and ethical understandings. In the circumstances it is recognized that we are called to learn how to handle difference. Those in positions of leadership must have not only a passionate faith themselves. They should be able to understand how Christ comes like a stranger to us, in the experience of difference, in the other, as our guest and host.
4. It is critical for us to develop an ecclesiology that recognizes who we are as a church, incorporating an acknowledgement of the church's shadow side. We live in a society where many people have been hurt and traumatized by the church.

5. There is need for further thinking on the mission of God in its totality. Any understanding of mission must be predicated on the *Missio Dei*, in which the goal is the enabling of abundant life for all people (including those who seek asylum, experience war, abuse, violence, oppression).
6. The present ecological condition of the world should lead to a faith that is able to articulate this condition in language that incorporates both faith and ecology.
7. There is a need for those 'hyphenated' leaders who understand from a theological perspective what it is like to have migrated, to be second-generated, and be able to cross cultures for Christ's sake.
8. There is an urgent need for a faith seeking understanding, which is alive to a raft of new ethical issues so that the people of God are not always reacting too late to issues.
9. There is also an urgent need in our world for the church to be able to account for the hope in which it stands. A church situated within a secular context requires strong biblical and theological literacy of all its people to enable a passionate faith to be shared.
10. In a time of great change there is a need for an organizational theology of the church, lest the way in which the church understands and organizes itself becomes more like a business [corporation] rather than the body [a corpus] of Christ.
11. Given the demography of the church there should be further support given to a theology and pastoral practice of youth and ageing.
12. In view of the society in which we find ourselves there is a developing need for Christian leadership at a local level, as well as from within the synod. We need people, who can speak into the public forum on the basis of the public significance of Christian doctrines. There is likewise a need for an increasing familiarity with the nature of other faiths that inhabit our neighbourhoods.
13. This vision can be summed up in the question that haunts all contextual theologies: who is Jesus Christ for us in this place today?

The report continues with an overview of the work which is currently done within the Centre for Ministry, and how this work is delivered to the church.

### **Goals for the future of ministerial, theological and discipleship education**

The following are the goals, which we believe should shape the Synod's provision of ministerial, theological, missional and discipleship education:

#### *A. Goals concerning commitment and acknowledgement*

1. Commitment to the theological basis and framework for ministerial, theological and discipleship education within the Synod of NSW as set out in this paper
2. Commitment to the provision of educational excellence for ministry, theology, mission and discipleship within the Synod of NSW
3. Acknowledgement of the important and developing work of the ELM Centre, the School of Continuing Education and United Theological College and a commitment to continue to develop this work.
4. Affirmation of the role of the teaching staff of the theological college as people who work in three publics (church, community and academy), seeking ways in which they can better serve the church as teachers within its life.
5. Commitment to share resources with other Synods
6. Affirmation of the commitment to the delivery of tertiary theological education and at the same time other levels of education.

#### *B. Goals concerning re-structuring*

7. The integration of the present schools at the Centre for Ministry to form one school/center/institution for ministerial, theological, missional and discipleship

education and formation, which allows for an overall and integrated approach to education for lay people and those in specified ministries.

8. The building of a hospitable learning community
9. The development of a community where people are able to share faith and can grow in discipleship
10. An openness to new ways of re-structuring UTC, including the possibility that it be re-constituted by the Synod as a College of the Church.
11. Consideration be given to the way in which the MEB function can be located within the structures and councils of the church.

*C. Goals concerning formation for leadership*

12. The formation of people for specified ministries to give priority to preparing people for new ministry contexts or for renewing existing situations.
13. Education for specified ministries, which develops the gifts of each person through an individually structured, multi learning context learning and formation program. Significant amounts of time to be spent in ministry 'placements' with a focus on action-reflection learning and formation.
14. Formation of leaders who are competent to assist people to develop faith and discipleship, and to share their faith.
15. Establish the school/center/institution as the focus for discernment and resourcing opportunities for faith formation for all

*D. Goals concerning learning and teaching*

16. Further development of online and distance resources, learning groups, emphasis on professional development and electronic publishing.
17. To ensure academic excellence through utilizing the resources from within NSW Synod and beyond and making the school's resources available to other institutions.

*E. Goals concerning resourcing the whole church*

18. Resourcing of congregations and practical education needs of the church
19. Commitment to provide field staff members, whose prime roles are to educate across the Synod
20. Work with Presbyteries to resource their goals and programmes with congregations
21. Provide education that is appropriate for the needs of all who wish to learn
22. Rebuild a base of biblical and theological literacy

A number of bodies would be impacted on by any decision and these are listed in the full report.

### **Some questions for the Synod**

The task group supports these goals and would seek to implement them.

The proposals attached to this report suggest ways in which the work can be carried forward. The suggested Working Group requires direction on the following issues:

1. Does the Synod agree with the goals and direction of the paper?
2. Does the Synod consider the "one school" proposal a good idea?
3. Should "one school/center/institution" be
  - a. developed as an extension or development of one of the present schools
  - b. formed as a new school with new structures
4. Where might the MEB sit in the church's structures?
  - i. Should the governing body of the school be the MEB? OR
  - ii. Should the MEB sit within the church structures outside the school  
OR

- iii. Should the MEB sit outside both College and Church to challenge and inform each other? OR
  - iv. ....?
5. Where might the Board of Ministerial Formation<sup>1</sup> be located?
- i. Should the BMF responsibilities lie with the one school? OR
  - ii. Should the BMF be a committee of the MEB? OR
  - iii. Should the BMF tasks be Synod responsibilities, or Presbytery?
  - iv. OR.....

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<sup>1</sup> The Board of Ministerial Formation is a Board of UTC and is responsible to the Council of the College for the formation and assessment of candidates in their education for ministry. Membership of the Board includes Principal and Vice Principal, Dean of Candidates, CSM and Council elected members as well as faculty and student representatives. The Board works in cooperation with Presbyteries (through the annual interview panels) in the assessment of candidates' progress towards ministry.

## NSW SYNOD MEETING 2003

### THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP & DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION: Ways forward in the NSW Synod

#### Preamble

At its June 2003 meeting, the Council of Synod received a report from the UTC/CSM Task Group on Ministerial and Theological Education<sup>2</sup>. After some discussion in table groups, the Council of Synod resolved to

- i. receive the report
- ii. encourage the Task Group to continue its work
- iii. request the Task Group to develop a theological rationale prior to developing new structures
- iv. request the Task Group to bring a report to the Synod
- v. encourage the General Secretary and the Executive Director Board of Education to explore within the Task Group the directions suggested during the presentations<sup>3</sup>

This report is the Task Group's response to clause iv.

#### Introduction

Like all Synods within the Uniting Church, the NSW Synod is facing significant challenges to its ability to provide appropriately formed people to meet the ministry needs within the Synod. These challenges arise from:

- Changes in the gifts and skills needed to respond to a post-denominational, post-Christian, post-modern world. The Christian church in Australia exists in a culture that does not easily recognize the language and symbols of the church, and where the church is constantly working both cross-culturally and across sub-cultures as it seeks to share the gospel.
- Changes in the people making themselves available for Ministry, and the way this impacts on the ability of the church to provide for certain types of ministry (e.g. establishing new congregations).
- The increasing difficulty of providing the funding needed to sustain the present approach to ministerial formation and the support of students.
- The increasing need to rely on lay leaders and lay leadership teams for the provision of ministerial leadership in local congregations and faith communities.
- An increasing tendency for congregations and denominations to retreat into models of like-mindedness and survival. The self-understanding of the church and its relationship to the Kingdom of God is arguably shifting without actually being prized open as to how, why and is it 'true'.

The following paper seeks to outline some of the issues and to suggest things that need to be taken into account as we move forward. It offers some suggestions of ways we might respond within the NSW Synod.

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<sup>2</sup> UTC Council had initially set up this Task Group with the purpose of enhancing the work of the College in its delivery of ministerial and theological education. Members of the Task Group included UTC Council, Faculty, Student representatives as well as the Chair of the Commission for Specified Ministries, the Executive Director of the Board of Education and the General Secretary of the Synod of NSW. From the very start, the Council recognised the inter-relating responsibilities of the Synod and the Council in the provision of theological and ministerial education within the NSW Synod. After the first meeting of the Task Group, both UTC Council and the Commission for Specified Ministries resolved to recognise that the work of this task group was properly the work of both bodies.

<sup>3</sup> Resolution 104/03C.

While United Theological College must continue to review the way it meets the needs of the church, it is the church's responsibility to be clear about what its needs are; that is, what we expect from theological education and ministerial formation.

Three situations provide the context which forms part of the basis for this paper.

### *1. Presbyteries and ACOMP*

The first context is that which arises within the experience of Presbyteries and the Placements Committee. It is clear that we have a variety of leadership needs in the NSW Synod, and that not all of these can be met at the present. In particular, there is a need for:

- People who offer leadership in fairly stable congregations, and who provide many of the leadership gifts the church has expected for some years.
- People (lay and ordained) who can provide new forms of leadership in areas that are struggling to support ministry, and who need to change their approach to being church.
- People who can begin new congregations and faith communities among people who have little connection with or understanding of the gospel and church, or who can provide ministry in tertiary institutions which challenge people to explore a meaningful and challenging faith for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- People who can grow new ministries alongside existing ministries and/or transform existing ministries into a more community oriented mission base.
- People who offer specialized ministries such as University chaplaincies, youth ministries or those ministries filled by Deacons, which seek to bring church and community into creative relationships.

As well, there is a need for leaders who are able to offer oversight to Ministers and Congregations to ensure that we remain within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

### *2. Post-Christendom*

The second context is the need to deal with the impact of living in a post-Christian and post-denominational era.

One of the marks of the large denominational church is that it built a vast institutional system of ministry that promoted a standardised, organisational program in all congregations. The unity of denominations is not found in being a social community in a common geographical area, but in having shared programs and structures (and, at times, celebrate particular denominational events and people as the heart of their faith story). Denominations provide a way to manage numerous congregations by providing them with a common purpose and identity, and assume that the centre of the church's life is the denominational centre. The centre provides common resources, sets common standards of worship, Christian education, mission planning, etc for all congregations, and develops ways to ensure that there is 'quality control' for those who exercise ministry. One of the ways this is done is to provide set standards and requirements for those who are ministry agents.

This means that denominations focus their life around planning, organising, structuring and managing. This gives necessary order to the organisation, but may not leave much space for the necessary missional focus of the church. Those who serve in ministry will also represent the denominations concerns and priorities.

The Uniting Church has continued within a tradition that has assumed two things of importance to the way we prepare people for ministry:

- i. that ministers have major responsibility for oversight, and this responsibility has a significant impact on the people we select for ministry and the way in which people are educated for this ministry.
- ii. That, in terms of Ministers of the Word, the Church has a limited view of the ministry it will recognise and prepare people for. This is a ministry revolving around worship, pastoral care, teaching and leadership within the congregation.

We do little to identify and encourage people's ministry gifts, except as these fit the ministries we recognise. Rather, we establish ministries, set standards of education for those ministries, and control the ways people can enter the ministries. We seek to be clear that these are ministries of the church, rather than the church providing support and encouragement for people to be in ministry as servants of Christ.

As we struggle to come to grips with the changing cultural context of the church we need to identify the gifts of people who are able to offer leadership in a post-Christian context – i.e. in a context where people no longer understand the symbols and central beliefs of the Christian faith, or the actions of the church. People need to be formed in ways that give them a better understanding of how they move in and out of diverse sub-cultures, and in ways which do not make them less able to relate to the non-church culture.

### 3. *Financial Constraints*

The third context is the reality of reduced financial resources. The relative wealth of the church in the last 30 years has allowed us to grow programmes, without necessarily considering the overall missional needs of the church. Our present context of lessening financial resources provides an opportunity to consider the way in which resources are made available to ministerial and theological education and propose some new alternatives.

### Two concerns

The issue of the formation of people for Ministry arises from two concerns in the church's life.

1. One of the oldest and most central tasks of the church is to ensure that there is oversight of the faith and unity of the church, to ensure that the church is apostolic in the sense that it adheres to the faith witnessed to by the apostles. There has always been a process whereby certain people are identified as having responsibility for that ministry. In *episkopal* churches bishops have this task within a diocese, and entrust the task to priests in local areas. In the UCA we entrust such oversight to councils. One of the roles of those in Ordained Ministry is to exercise oversight on behalf of the wider church within a local community. Preparation for this task is a significant feature of formation for Ministry, and involves an understanding of the traditions and teachings of the church.
2. The church has sought to provide educated people to offer leadership in the life of local congregations.

There needs to be a re-consideration of the skills required for ministry, to enable witness in a post-Christian community, church planting and the building of new forms of church. There is a need for people who not only have skills to analyse but also to strategise.

As well as a need to prepare people for specified ministries, the church is in a situation where significant numbers of paid and unpaid leaders are lay people. These people need new and innovative ways to develop an understanding of faith, to grow in their

personal life and sense of vocation, and to develop skills for ministry. They need to do this apart from full-time study.

As the Synod has developed its goals and directions it has become increasingly clear that a major priority is enabling people to understand and share their faith, and to become more mature Christians. Partly this will mean preparing leaders who can assist this learning, and partly it will mean the provision of resources and people to assist the church to meet this great need.

## **The place of theology in ministerial education and discipleship formation**

This section of the paper responds to the Council of Synod's request (Minute 104/03C) for a theological rationale<sup>4</sup>.

### Preamble

We live in a time of great change. For us in the Uniting Church this should come as no surprise, for we are a 'pilgrim people' on the way. [*Basis of Union*] The ability to discern the will of God in the midst of change is both part of our inheritance and our vision.

Within this changing context, there are many disciplines that can help us determine what that future might look like. In the 'economy of God' they have a role to play but these disciplines whether they be manifested in the form of sociology, organizational theory or economics must be in a critical dialogue with theology<sup>5</sup>. The church may be tempted to bypass its own language of theology, assuming this is implicit in all that it does and, instead, call exclusively on the language of management, finance or organizational theory to assist to develop structures that are more efficient, economic and effective. However, in so doing, it may neglect the importance of its own "theological capital" which has such an important role in the task of renewing and transforming people's lives.

The church has an institutional life and also one that transcends the way in which we organize ourselves. Theology recognizes this distinction and explores the tension between how the church presents itself and what it is called to be. No other discipline does this. No other human discourse has this task and vocation as its reason for being. In a time of change, in a time when the church considers its reorganization, there must be a theological vision. It must be present out of necessity, given the very nature of the church<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> There is some debate about the appropriateness of the word "rationale". Some would argue "vision" or "framework" might be more useful terms. Clive Pearson explains "the idea of a theological vision is integral to the contemporary theological debate. The link is with language of the 'imagination' which permeates a range of biblical and theological literature these days and is designed to remind us of our Christian identity and vocation over and against the paradigms of the present [which is suggested more by the term rationale]. Very few working professionally in this area would have opted for rationale. The more creative, the more theological term, is 'vision' leading into the 'theological' and 'ecclesial' imagination. This is not a slight matter." However, the Task Group was unable to reach agreement on which term was most appropriate. We therefore use the word, which comes from the Council of Synod resolution.

<sup>5</sup> The reason for this claim lies in the article of faith that the church is more than a visible institution to be ordered and organized like any other society, corporation or business. The very word church is taken from a Greek root meaning 'to be called'. It is called into being through the purposes of God. It is called to be the body of Christ

<sup>6</sup> In her reflection on theological education, Dorcas Gordon reflects on the work of Parker Palmer's three models of community within which learning takes place: therapeutic, civic and marketing (Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998, pp. 90-94.) Gordon writes "What his analysis helps me to understand is that we must be clear about where truth(s) and meaning are determined within theological education. I'm sure you have felt as I have the temptation, in light of the heavy pressure of financial constraints, to give in to a marketing model that judges meaning and truth solely in terms of consumer i.e. student or denominational satisfaction. Or a therapeutic model that concerns itself with what is individual and intimate to the neglect of the world out there. Or a civic

The early church made great use of the term 'the economy of God'. It described God as the divine economist. The word economy here means 'the law of household management'. Our present use of the word economist is a reduced usage of this classical theological term. The household in question was the whole of God's creation. It presupposed that we live in response to this life-giving God. Failure to construct a theological vision for how a church changes – or for theology to become an appendage to decisions already made – would sit most uneasily with how the church thinks of its very being. Failure to incorporate a theological vision conceivably runs the risk of further compounding the secularization of the church.

It is by no means clear that the church of today understands the theological and biblical traditions to which it adheres and we cannot assume that the church can or will speak theologically. The paucity of deep theological reflection within the church and the burgeoning interest of lay people in theological education point to the need for us to recapture the heart and mind language of the faith so that church and society may be re-focused on God, renewed by Jesus Christ, and refreshed by the Holy Spirit. When the language of theology takes primary place in the conversations of change, new possibilities will emerge that enable the Word to be heard in creative and vibrant ways.

The purpose of this statement of theological rationale and vision is, ostensibly, to respond to a Council of Synod request. At a much deeper level, though, it arises out of a deep and passionate concern for the very nature of the church, the *missio dei* [the mission of God] and the 'economy of God'.

### What is theology?

We live in a time when the word theology is not always well understood. Sometimes it attracts negative associations – much like the word 'religious' or 'Christian' can do in the wider society. In the circumstances it becomes important to take some bearings.

The word 'theology' means 'God talk' or 'the study of God'. The classical definition of theology often takes the form of 'faith seeking understanding'. These two basic definitions stand inside the biblical call to love God with one's heart, mind, soul and spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Theology is a 'critical' way of knowing.<sup>8</sup> It concerns itself with 'evaluating' our claims about God and the work of God in this world. Part of its purpose can be seen, then, as a way of 'discerning the Spirit'. In recent years theology has also recovered its sense of being a form of wisdom. Seen from this perspective theology has a concern for a way of knowing that seeks to be moral, compassionate, spiritual, and just. It must be so for Christ's sake.

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model that would allow a majority vote to determine truth and meaning in the theological enterprise.”  
“Theological Education Curriculum in Context: The musings of two principals” Dorcas Gordon & Sarah Mitchell, *Ministerial Formation* No. 97, April 2002: 61-70.

<sup>7</sup> In the Greek language the 'heart' has more of a connection to the intellect than we often assume in English. The biblical call represents the wholeness of our being – the accorded an important place. These definitions also stand inside the epistles' call for us to be able to give an account of the hope that is within us and say things about our faith that are intelligible to the stranger.

<sup>8</sup> It is sometimes said that theology is the church's own language. No other discourse, however helpful and necessary, fulfills this role. The history of the church testifies to the underlying conviction that it is possible to speak in an intelligible and understandable way. It has often been noted that no church 'renews' or 'reforms' itself without a theological vision.

The theological disciplines are not static<sup>9</sup>. They seek to strike up a dynamic conversational encounter with the living and present God, which transforms and renews us. In this theological encounter, people seek to understand their beliefs and the doctrines of the church so that they can see, reflect upon and talk about what God is doing in our world and thus understand Christian identity and discipleship within a post-Christendom world. This process is an ongoing one as people reflect on their daily lives in relation to God and discover new insights, which continue to enliven their faith.

Over the past quarter century we have learned the importance context plays in our theological knowing. We live in a time of exciting new theological insights for we have become more aware of the role culture, gender, and age, for example, play in how we understand faith. Seen from this contextual perspective the underlying theological question facing us in this synod is how we respond to the never-ending question: who is Jesus Christ for us today? All our mission and church talk, our administration and our governance reflect and reveal what we think in reply to that question. We may not be aware of that, but we are always 'giving off' theological messages, defective or otherwise. Even our reports and proposals do that.

### Why do theology?

The question of 'why do theology?' is one that is the subject of much global discussion. It is not a peculiar concern for us in this Synod. There are several ways in which we can answer this question. We will attempt to provide some of the possible answers to this question, in the section below. Some of those reasons are subjective. They are tied to that earlier mentioned intention of seeking to understand our faith.

#### 1. We "do theology" as a part of our discipleship

It is now recognized in societies like ours that we inhabit a multi-cultural, multi-faith, secular democracy. We live in a time that is sometimes looked upon as being one of post-Christendom. It is a common theological perception in such societies that these times require our best thinking, not what we think we can get away with. This conviction is expressed at every point across the theological spectrum. It is not the province of one section of the church.

It is sometimes said that 'to do theology' [to 'talk about God' in a way that seeks understanding] is to live out our baptismal vocation. We cannot do otherwise. This does not mean that everyone has to be a theological expert. It simply means that we should seek to understand as best we can who this God is for us. Theology furnishes us with a series of disciplines that seek to assist us in this Christian endeavour. When society faces many difficulties and much change, this search for meaning is essential. At such times, we need our very best theological thinking. If we fail to provide such thinking, there will be a theological vacuum and other ideologies will surely flood in, making renewal and appropriate transformation impossible.

#### 2. We "do theology" because of our heritage

As a church of the Reformation, the Uniting Church does not have the option of whether or not to "do theology". At the heart of the Reformation is a passion for God who is understood through the way in which God has been revealed through the scriptures. The Reformation view of scripture (that scripture is, and contains, truth as promise about God and the world) and our "inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry" shapes our understanding of ministry. This Reformation view is reinforced in the *Basis of Union*, which acknowledges the importance of "faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture"

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<sup>9</sup> To think of theology as a static, abstract study is to misunderstand how theology involves each one of us in our desire to understand faith and act accordingly.

and “gives thanks for the knowledge of God’s ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith” (#11).

### 3. We “do theology” to be part of the church

This importance of exercising disciplined and sustained scholarship within the faith community has recently (July 2003) been reiterated by the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, where it was agreed to

Request congregations to affirm the role of each congregation as a centre of theological education which takes seriously its teaching ministry and recognises each minister as a theological teacher in the local context.

This resolution of the Assembly presupposes that part of the task of ministry in today’s circumstances is to help members of the church find theological meaning in a complex world.

This call to “do theology” is an imperative, from which we cannot turn away. It is as vital to Christian life as breathing is to living. Jesus’ call to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27) demands an integrated and holistic response to God. This total passion and commitment requires us to think, feel and act theologically in the whole of life and not in any optional extra and add-on way. A “post-it” theology, added after decisions have been made, and which can fall off without trace, is not authentic to this call of Jesus<sup>10</sup>.

The issues at stake include the need to re-think our Christian identity in such a world, where “who we are” is often determined by an ever-increasing range of loyalties, commitments and specialized forms of professional knowledge. We are also faced with a whole range of new ethical issues for which we have not previously been prepared. This situation is so serious that many leading Christian thinkers today believe that one of the most critical issues facing any contemporary church is to develop further its theological literacy for the sake of the mission of God. This is not doing theology for the sake of doing theology; nor, is it the narrow sense, a case of simply doing theology for the sake of the church. Rather, the issue at stake is doing theology for the sake of its proper partner, the reconciling God of Jesus Christ whose Spirit is at work in the whole of creation.

### Theology in relation to ministerial formation<sup>11</sup>

From its beginnings, the Uniting Church has recognised how important it is for its members and ministers to be theologically literate<sup>12</sup>. In preparing people for the Specified Ministries, theological education must ensure a high level of theological literacy fully integrated into the thinking and acting of the minister.

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<sup>10</sup> We inhabit public cultures that are well used to the habitual exclusion of God and consigning religious matters to individual choice and enclaves of the like-minded. Even in the community of faith we often utilise frameworks of understanding which MacFadyen argues assume the practical irrelevance of God. We make use of a range of disciplines that shape the way in which we live in our contemporary culture and organize our institutions. We might then just append what MacFadyen calls a 'Post-It® label theology'. Some God-talk is added but in such a way that is not really necessary. It makes little difference to the description whether it is stuck on or removed. MacFadyen concludes that 'it adds precisely nothing at the level of explanation and understanding to baptise and bless conclusions arrived at by secular means for secular reasons'.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry formation is a highly respected area of scholarly research, earthed in the life of the church and its needs. It is the subject of considerable international debate. Over the past decade, for instance, it has become a recognised discrete programme of the Association of American Theological Schools, which is like a worldwide powerhouse in the oversight and recognition of the theological education and ministry formation.

<sup>12</sup> “The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant” (*Basis of Union* #13) and the *Code of Ethics* requires ministers to “have responsibility to represent accurately the teachings of the Scriptures and of the Church.” (3.2).

Within the international discussion on ministerial formation, it is widely assumed that the underlying intention of ministerial formation is the practice of integration. This practice presupposes a creative tension between doing and reflecting. The various threads that need to be woven together include spiritual formation, academic formation, the practical skills of ministry, a recognition of ethical responsibilities, and a balance of missional and ecclesial formation. In recent times there has emerged an increasing concern for character formation and Christian identity. Each one of these threads is there for a purpose.

Over the past several years UTC has explored what it does in theological education and ministry formation in the light of what is done by other Uniting Church colleges in Australia and also by other denominations in New Zealand. It appears that what is done in NSW is already more intentional and integrative than elsewhere; some other sites have asked for further information about what we are already doing because its status is recognized. Several members of faculty have been asked on occasion to deliver key addresses on these themes in the wider ecumenical church beyond Australia. Some have international reputations in the field. This does not mean that we have necessarily 'got it right', or that we cannot improve things. It does mean that UTC has been striving to address in theory, in study and in practice what is involved in the theological education for ministry formation in a more rigorous, sustained way than is found in the great majority of churches<sup>13</sup>.

The particular place of theology within the task of ministerial formation is multifaceted. It is difficult to unravel a single thread like this one, for it is interwoven in and through, above and beneath all that is done. In this context, theology is more than a tool, an instrument, a skill. It is a craft. It is a way of doing, a way of seeing and hearing, a way of thinking and seeking to understand. It is more than a 'head' exercise, although that remains important. The task of theological education for ministry formation has been called the vocation to 'renew our hearts and minds' and to create 'makers of Christian meaning' in a complex, post-Christendom world. It is ultimately concerned with 'grace and truth'. The language of skills and tools, values and outcomes<sup>14</sup> has a place in helping us shape the nature of theological education's commitment to ministerial formation, but it does not do justice to this fundamental vocation in the life of the church.

In the narrower sense of the word, theological education can refer to academic study. The separate disciplines, within this study, are not lightly chosen. They are concerned with how we understand the Bible, the Christian tradition, various doctrines of the church and their contemporary significance, pastoral care, how we worship, how we understand the call to mission, the purpose, nature and practice of Christian education and engage with evangelism. These disciplines lie at the heart of the Christian faith both in terms of how this faith understands itself and how it is practised.

That the church has seen the need for such formation indicates that an individual's call to ministry and mission is insufficient in and of itself. The New Testament churches knew well the need for a 'discerning of the Spirits', a 'maturing' of the mind, a capacity 'to give an account of the hope that is within you', 'edification', 'instruction', the handing on of 'wisdom' and the importance of those who teach. All of this was recognized in more straitened times than those in which we find ourselves.

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<sup>13</sup> For example Sarah Mitchell, Christine Gapes, Doug Purnell, Jione Havea and Clive Pearson have all presented examples of the work of UTC at international conferences. Rhonda White's doctoral dissertation is in the field of integrating theological and ministerial education.

<sup>14</sup> While there is a place for this language, it is not the language which is used 'on its own' in the international debate on the future of ministry in our times. It represents a reduced understanding.

## Reflecting theologically in the construction of a vision for the future

We live in a time when our future options often seem to be constrained by practical realities: funding, a declining and ageing membership, competing understandings of what is the gospel and how it relates to culture etc. These situations are concrete realities that cannot be ignored in the construction of a theological vision. The relationship between a theological vision and the practical realities needs to be teased out in such a way that neither side of this equation is lost.

A theological vision is concerned with the imaginative heart of the Christian faith. It looks to the foundations of who and what we called to be in Christ and to the eschatological quality of this hope. It is not wholly bound to the present and the short-term future, because the very nature of the Christian faith looks towards the future fulfillment of the purposes of God. On the other hand, a theological vision is also concerned with our here and now. It looks for intimations of that future hope and its realization in the present. The seeds of that Christ-bestowed future lie before us waiting to be discerned. It is a vision constructed in faith for faith.

To construct a theological vision presupposes what is called theology's 'ecology of responsibility'. What this phrase means is that our God-talk must engage with a range of conversation partners and concerns if it wishes to be faithful to the integrity of its calling and the mission of God. It is now recognized that there are three primary partners: church, academy and public domain.

### *The church as conversation partner*

Theology is the church's own language of the heart and mind in a way that no other discourse is. The church here does not refer to a particular denomination. It is the 'one holy, catholic and apostolic church' described by the Basis of Union. It is the universal church in time and place, past, present and future. Theology will seek to serve a particular denomination with its utmost conviction but, at the same time, will seek to resist the temptation to be constrained by passing fashions in thought and politics.

### *The public domain as conversation partner*

Another partner is the public domain. The beliefs of the Christian faith have always possessed a public relevance or significance. The doctrine of creation, for instance, is an article or confession of faith and is not shared by everyone in society. But for Christians to claim that God is creator means that God is not just creator for those who so believe and may attend church on a regular basis; it has a conviction and significance for the whole of humankind and the created order. In the past this public domain was assumed, but its importance has become increasingly important in a post-Christendom, multi-faith, secular democracy. The tendency observed has been for churches to become more introverted, more congregational, and individual Christians to become more concerned with their own private, individual beliefs. A public theology is designed to remind Christians that they are called to be the people of God, the followers of Christ, in the whole of creation, not just the religious bits. It is designed to overcome the temptation for many Christians to compartmentalize their faith. Their faith may be alive and active in their private devotional life, but it is not allowed to address the way in which they act in business, sport and communal life together. This challenge flows from the question Jesus posed before he asked the disciples 'who do you say that I am?' That question reads 'who do people say that I am?'

### *The academy as conversation partner*

The academy, the university, the world of thought is also a partner in this conversation. The Christian faith has always been committed to being thoughtful and

able to express its hope in a world of many ideas and opinions. In our day some theological writers warn against the risk of opting for a 'thought-less' faith or what has been branded 'religious simplism'. To take this option would mean turning one's back on the history of the Christian faith and open up the suggestion that the Christian faith can no longer be defended and advocated as a serious intellectual option.

These three conversation partners or lines of responsibility should not be separated but be maintained in creative tension. They cannot be unraveled without damage to the whole. They weave in and out of one another. As a result, some churches are beginning to organise their theological education and ministerial formation around the question of how to equip the Christ's followers for a public ministry in a world of increasing individualism and pluralism.

In this kind of setting a theological vision is not concerned with furnishing right answers before the practical work of ministry can be done. The familiar complaint that it looks as if we have to get our theology 'correct' before we can do anything is not true to the manner in which this vision is built. The issue is more about 'funding the theological imagination' for the future work of faith. Funding here is not a narrow financial, statistical term. To fund a theological vision means having a concern for the theological 'capital' of the people of God: what ideas, values, practices need to be stimulated in the imagination of a church. What are the issues already present in the midst of the community? Which issues, in faithful attendance to the mission of God, need to be teased out; and which, if overlooked, represent a serious falling from the community's calling?

This vision is not the work of one person. It is named, explored, imagined by the body of Christ. It strives to be alive to the presence of a reconciling God in all facets of life. It will be an ongoing process.

Therefore, within our present context, as we think and act theologically about ministerial and theological education, there are some important factors that must be taken seriously in any consideration of new structures. The following list identifies some of those key factors:

1. How do we draw upon the inherited traditions [the word means 'to hand on, hand over'] of faith for the sake of the future? [We need to know from where we have come in Christ].
2. In a society where many now have no long history in the Christian faith, let alone the Uniting Church, there is a pressing concern for exploring Christian identity. Some theologians would argue that this is critical insofar as each one of us inhabits a wide range of communities and it is not always clear how our Christian identity is formed and expresses itself in the midst of so many competing allegiances.
3. We live in a society of increasing cultural diversity. We belong to a church that sometimes divides along competing theological and ethical understandings. In the circumstances it is recognized that we are called to learn how to handle difference. Those in positions of leadership must have not only a passionate faith themselves. They should be able to understand how Christ comes like a stranger to us, in the experience of difference, in the other, as our guest and host.
4. It is critical for us to develop an ecclesiology that recognizes who we are as a church, incorporating an acknowledgement of the church's shadow side. We live in a society where many people have been hurt and traumatized by the church.
5. There is need for further thinking on the mission of God in its totality. Any understanding of mission must be predicated on the *Missio Dei*, in which the

- goal is the enabling of abundant life for all people (including those who seek asylum, experience war, abuse, violence, oppression).
6. The present ecological condition of the world should lead to a faith that is able to articulate this condition in language that incorporates both faith and ecology.
  7. There is a need for those 'hyphenated' leaders who understand from a theological perspective what it is like to have migrated, to be second-generated, and be able to cross cultures for Christ's sake.
  8. There is an urgent need for a faith seeking understanding, which is alive to a raft of new ethical issues so that the people of God are not always reacting too late to issues.
  9. There is also an urgent need in our world for the church to be able to account for the hope in which it stands. A church situated within a secular context requires strong biblical and theological literacy of all its people to enable a passionate faith to be shared.
  10. In a time of great change there is a need for an organizational theology of the church, lest the way in which the church understands and organizes itself becomes more like a business [corporation] rather than the body [a corpus] of Christ.
  11. Given the demography of the church there should be further support given to a theology and pastoral practice of youth and ageing.
  12. In view of the society in which we find ourselves there is a developing need for Christian leadership at a local level, as well as from within the synod. We need people, who can speak into the public forum on the basis of the public significance of Christian doctrines. There is likewise a need for an increasing familiarity with the nature of other faiths that inhabit our neighbourhoods.
  13. This vision can be summed up in the question that haunts all contextual theologies: who is Jesus Christ for us in this place today?

It is imperative that this theological vision set the framework for the conversations about curriculum, structures, and finance. Any attempt to re-shape the delivery of theological and ministerial education must take into account the complexity and essential nature of such a vision

### **A brief overview of the work at the Centre for Ministry**

In the previous sections we have tried to indicate some of the contextual issues surrounding discipleship formation and ministerial and theological education, and to indicate the importance of theology and theological education for the church's life. In this section we would like to indicate:

- The range of work dealt with by the present schools at the Centre for Ministry
- A comment on the ways teaching and learning is delivered

#### The current situation

Presently there are four separate schools within the Centre for Ministry: Institute for Mission, ELM Centre, School of Continuing Education and United Theological College. The initial vision of the Centre for Ministry was a federation of partner bodies (Board of Education, Board of Mission, Assembly, UTC Council) working together to enable the provision of education for the Synod and governed by the Centre for Ministry Council. The reduction of funding to education and the ensuing re-structuring of the Centre for Ministry in 1998 deleted the Warden's position, removed the Centre for Ministry Council and brought the management of the Centre within the Board of Education. The restructuring also eliminated funding for the Director of the Institute for Mission. The Board of Mission has continued to maintain some presence within the Centre but the overall result has been a depletion of the initial vision of partnership.

### The range of activities

There are a number of schools or activities within the Centre for Ministry: UTC, ELM, Continuing Education, Camden Theological Library, Institute for Mission and the Dean of Candidates. Between them they provide:

- Theological education for candidates for specified ministries and lay people
- Pastoral care and financial support for candidates
- Opportunities for personal, ministry and mission formation
- Continuing education
- Opportunities for learning in discipleship and leadership formation
- Support for congregations, elders and church councils and other groups
- Aboriginal leadership education
- Worship
- Spiritual formation
- Support for Period of discernment
- Pastoral support for congregations and leaders
- Residential (short and long term) accommodation and conference facilities

### How is this delivered?

- Teaching on site at the Centre for Ministry (including Expos, Seminar Week & Lectures)
- Field Education in local placements, including congregations
- Resources provided and response to phone enquiries about material available
- Library resources available on site and by mail
- Field staff provide resources, learner-based learning in local communities
- Distance education
- Off-site learning and teaching in local churches
- Bookshop

### ***ELM (Education for Life and Ministry) Centre***

The ELM Centre aims to offer education opportunities for all lay people that increase their ability to articulate their faith to others, find ways of making authentic connections with people in their wider communities and enrich the life of their faith community. ELM also works cooperatively with a number of NSW and National agencies such as the Board of Mission, Rural Ministry Unit, Continuing Education, UTC, Coolamon College, and ecumenical bodies such as ICCOREIS (Interchurch Commission on Religious Education in Schools). ELM offers ongoing contact with people and congregations as they continue their lifelong journey with Christ.

The ELM Centre has been remarkably successful in its delivery of lay ministry programs both within and beyond the Uniting Church<sup>15</sup>. The people ELM serves include those who traditionally are not served well by centralised educational institutions. Why? Because ELM:

- Provides skills/needs based learning;
- Assesses the needs of the specific group and provides education based on those particular needs;
- Delivers training where the people are;
- Provides short courses which address the limitation of time poor congregational members;

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<sup>15</sup> The ELM Centre Review Report, Hughes, K p 3

- Provides education and training at very little or no cost to the congregation or participants (where necessary) but using Synod funds. It is at some cost that ELM avoids the user pays system;
- Provides education and training that is appropriate to all learners and is grounded in everyday language and experience;
- Offers mutuality in learning – that is a recognition that both learner and facilitator bring skills, experience and theological understandings all of which can contribute to the whole learning group.

### ELM – Evaluation and Planning

ELM has taken a multi-faceted and comprehensive approach to its evaluation, strategising and planning for the future, all of which takes seriously feedback of the numerous clients and stakeholders.

A comprehensive review of ELM was conducted in 2001. The review drew on the insights of people from all the councils of the church in NSW, and provided some valuable insights into the place and value of the ELM Centre. Some of the key findings were:

- ELM symbolises the UCA's commitment to lay education
- It's (ELM's) adaptability
- ELM provides education initiatives in local congregations when ministers are unable

An additional Associate Director has been employed at ELM specifically to respond better to the needs of congregations in rural and remote congregations. Funded for 3 years, the Associate Director Education for Mission has, since February 2003 visited every Presbytery in NSW at least once, providing a range of consultancy services, education and training. Similarly, ELM's Director and Associate Director Registrar and Administration have also undertaken a number of congregational visits both in the metropolitan area and rural presbyteries.

The ELM Centre also constantly reviews and assesses its programs, events and training in order to provide not only good quality education and training, but to provide it in ways that are helpful and meet the needs of lay people in NSW. Constant review and assessment also requires being in touch with people in their congregations, societal trends, and issues that affect the lives of people giving their time freely to their local congregation and presbytery. At the same time, ELM staff work to ensure that the education opportunities they provide within congregations and presbyteries build upon the Synod goals and directions.

### Responding to the needs of the church

It has become increasingly evident that the church is becoming much more reliant on the ministry of lay people, particularly in the large number of places where there is no longer a Minister in placement.

An increasing number of congregations can either no longer afford the cost of a full time ministry agent, or have not been successful over a long period of time in having one placed. Therefore the church is relying on the ministry of lay people and consequently on ELM to provide education and training for the lay people who find themselves both running the congregation and leading worship. However, this education and training must be offered in ways that are appropriate to the situation many lay people are placed in. In general, lay people:

- are time poor (work, business, family, church & community responsibilities). This means that education and training for lay people needs to be:

- largely provided on-site, or within 60-90 minutes of the church site;
- be over a short period of time;
- have sensitivity to local work situations eg. Able to schedule workshops around factory schedules, business hours, or milking/shearing times;
- open to the significant 'hospitality' component ELM events involve. This has the added benefit of developing learning communities rather than just classes for learning.
- have had a range of educational experiences, some of which are quite negative. In keeping with effective adult learning practice ELM:
  - aims to encourage and empower learners by affirming their existing skills and theological understandings then work together to learn more;
  - offers participants a safe environment for learning. There is no pressure to be someone you're not, life experience and skills are respected and affirmed;
  - is sensitive to learners who are not tertiary educated. In fact, some of those who seek education and training with ELM have not been formally educated past Intermediate Certificate or Year 9 – 10. Others struggle with basic English or literacy in general;
  - provides learner based learning rather than attainment based teaching.
- are unable to afford costly education programs. Despite lower fees than most higher education institutions any people cite the expense involved as a reason for not doing the Lay Preacher Accreditation course through Coolamon (6 units x \$130). In direct response, the ELM Centre offers Lay & Occasional Preacher training across the Synod. This provides at least a small amount of training for those leading worship and preaching without the full Lay Preacher Award. ELM keeps the cost of this support to a minimum. Reserves are being used to employ current staff however upcoming budget cuts will ensure huge reductions to ELM's current levels of training.

It must be noted here that unlike those being educated for the specified ministries of MoW, Deacon and Youth Worker, Lay Preachers and Lay Pastors receive no financial support as they educate themselves to serve the church.

### ***School of Continuing Education***

#### Introduction:

Continuing education is part of the life-long learning movement. The School of Continuing Education works to help those in specified ministries remain passionate, effective and satisfied in ministry through continual re-equipping and renewal. We seek to help people develop in their ministry in "heart, mind and hand" (personal character, knowledge and skills). Such development occurs in a range of modes and is characterised by following the minister's own learning goals, which in turn grow out of contextual mission and ministry goals. Not only is this vital to the life of the church as a matter of principle, such intentional learning was made mandatory by the 1997 Assembly.

The School of Continuing Education is also committed to helping the NSW Synod become a learning organisation, in which learning by individuals is not just valued for its own sake but also released as a resource for the mission and ministry of the church as a whole.

#### Activities:

One important area of continuing education is degree-based. However, this only represents a minority of each person's continuing education during the course of his or her ministry. Further, such forms of learning do not suit all individuals personally, nor

their contextual learning goals. Additionally, such programs are becoming increasingly burdensome financially as fees escalate. The School of Continuing Education works to provide resources from within Synod funding, only charging ministers on a cost recovery basis for actual consumables, such as accommodation and catering.

Our distinctive activities include:

Email lists: The Director of Continuing Education operates 28 email lists oriented to specific areas of learning covering a wide diversity of Biblical, theological, missional and pastoral learning needs. These lists inform subscribers of significant resources, recently published or newly acquired by Camden Library, as well as courses, conferences and seminars.

On-line forums: Having identified the capacity to develop and sustain lay ministry teams as a key learning area for specified ministers, the School has recently initiated an on-line forum to support congregations and ministers as they work in their own contexts. We will develop other on-line forums as we discern further learning needs.

"Ministr-e" journal: A new venture that the School is preparing to appear in 2004 is an electronic journal (e-zine) titled "Ministr-e". It is focussed on practical learning growing out of ministry contexts. Each quarterly issue will have a unifying theme. For 2004 these will be:

- a. The Anglican-Uniting Church dialogue in local contexts, and with specific attention on the Ministry of Deacon.
- b. Inter-faith dialogue, with specific focus on ethnic groups with a high representation in the UCA and of significant numbers of people from the same country but of a different faith (eg Hindu, Buddhist, Moslem).
- c. Cross-cultural ministry with second generation migrant communities.
- d. Local congregational social programs, eg homelessness projects and drop-in centres.

Peer learning groups: The School is working to develop a network of intentional peer learning groups. Initially, these are focussed on leadership development for people in two key periods in ministry:

- a. Young, emerging leaders, particularly those with responsibility for the development of other young leaders.
- b. Ministers in mid-career who have already displayed leadership gifts in congregational and wider settings, and who wish to develop their gifting to a high degree.

These and other leadership development activities are being conducted in close cooperation with the Board of Mission. As other learning needs are identified, the School will host other groups on areas such as worship and preaching.

Personal consultation: A very major, but almost invisible, role of the Director of Continuing Education is to consult with individual ministers about their ministry development. This is at a creative point of intersection between education and pastoral care for ministers. Ministers value having the opportunity to reflect with an independent and objective person on how best to fulfil their learning goals, and which programs and institutions most meet their needs if a formal program of study is appropriate.

Ministry Development Workshops: This year the School of Continuing Education has developed a program of workshops which assist ministers to reflect on past ministry and learning, and from this to dream dreams about future ministry, allowing them to develop learning plans which help them to minister with the greatest possible level of effectiveness and satisfaction. These workshops have been conducted with a number of presbyteries and as an elective at the annual lay pastors' conference.

Intentional Interim Ministry: The School of Continuing Education is the Australian provider for the course accredited by the Interim Ministry Network. This course is a sustained program, including two week-long residentials and a project over one year, which equips ministers with the skills and insights to be able to lead congregations in periods of transition. This is an area of critical need in the life of the church.

Occasional short courses: In the past these have included programs such as "Leading Change in the Congregation", "Preaching with Imagination", Biblical study evenings

based on coming lectionary passages, workshops on worship with children, workshops on including people with disabilities, and ministry reflection days. Future planned programs include Biblical story-telling, supervision in ministry, and life-stage reflection days for ministers.

Scholarships: While extremely limited in amounts, the School of Continuing Education administers the BOE's continuing education scholarship funds, including advising individual ministers on their applications. Recently, the Director has worked to identify significant learning needs for the church and to focus funds to meet the needs of the church more effectively.

Research database: Recognising that research undertaken by ministers in their continuing education is rarely disseminated throughout the church, the School is developing a database of research projects allowing the learning of individuals to become learning for the whole church. This is at present limited to San Francisco Theological Seminary DMin projects, for whom the School has records, but will be expanded to other research degree projects once the database is accessible from our website.

#### Cooperation with other CFM partners:

ELM: ELM and the School of Continuing Education are developing closer links as we work together to foster lay ministry teams in the Synod. It is imperative that those in specified ministries develop both the personal attitudes and educational skills to be able to develop and support such teams. It is important that this is done in cooperation with ELM's unique focus on lay ministry training. Accordingly, as well as working to equip those in specified ministries in these attitudes and skills, the Director works with ELM in lay education, such as lay preachers' days.

Institute for Mission: With relatively recently appointed directors of both this Institute and the School of Continuing Education, relationships are being developed. Current cooperation includes promotion of Institute programs to those in specified ministries, provision of resources such as book reviews to the Institute for publication, and presentations on ministry development at multicultural events.

Dean of Candidates: The Director of Continuing Education and the Dean of Candidates jointly conduct retreats for ministers, one year after completing their college studies. This fulfils a need for reflection in a safe space at this critical moment in ministry.

UTC: The School of Continuing Education cooperates with the United Theological College in a number of ways. Administratively, the School organises supervision and examination of San Francisco Theological Seminary DMin projects, including payments, as well as secretarial support for UTC's Advanced Studies Committee. Academically, the Director teaches in a number of areas, including ministerial professional development as well as the current Director's specialist area, New Testament. In terms of specific programs, the most significant area of cooperation is in the annual joint program, Seminar Week. In planning for this event, the School of Continuing Education provides insights necessary to keep the program as focussed as possible on ministry development needs. The School also undertakes the bulk of the practical arrangements for Seminar Week, such as publicity and catering, as well as all enquiries and registrations.

#### Conclusion:

The School of Continuing Education fulfils a unique role in assisting ministers to reflect on their faith and ministry development, and from this to undertake learning experiences in modes most suitable to their needs. By supporting ministers in their life-long renewal the School plays a strategic role in developing the church's capacity to minister and be at mission in a rapidly changing world and a variety of contexts.

## **United Theological College**

The past ten years have been a time of much change within the College and the context of the theological education. This change has been evident in strategic planning and visioning, responding to the church, the academy and the community.

### **1. Strategic Planning and Visioning**

The visioning process, through strategic planning over the past five years, initiated a range of ongoing changes designed to take into account the changing climate. Within this process, UTC considered issues of vision, mission, core business and funding. The result of this process was an opening up of our horizons to the cross-cultural milieu. We have explored ways in which we can be truly Australian within the Asian/Pacific context and have sought to develop an ethos in which this is an ongoing focus. We have had to consider what ministry and the mission of God might look like in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **2. Responding to the Church**

There have been two major Assembly reviews on ministerial and theological education in the past ten years. UTC has taken these reviews very seriously and has made significant and considerable changes to its programmes as a result of these reviews. Change has been the constant as we have listened for the voice of the church, in its various councils. Members of faculty participate widely in the life of the church – in congregations, presbyteries, synods and assembly.

The Board of Ministerial Formation process, something unique to this Synod and widely commended to other synods through the Ministerial Education Commission, is a joint project of the College and wider church, which seeks to provide an ongoing discernment process in the matching of leadership abilities with the needs of the church.

The newly initiated program of Integration Studies will ensure that candidates are better able to integrate practical ministry, theological thinking and spiritual formation, which will become part of their ongoing ministerial experience.

### **3. Responding to the Academy**

The invitation from Charles Sturt University to participate in the School of Theology postgraduate and research programme has meant that UTC faculty members have been on the cutting edge in developing professional ministerial continuing education. The research expectations of the university, ensure that faculty members keep up to date in their fields and can provide the very best in scholarship in their teaching within the college and in the wider church.

The development of UTC Publications and the journal *Uniting Church Studies* has provided a valuable resource for the theological academy and is also valued within the church.

### **4. Responding to the Community**

There are significant issues within the life of the global/local community, which the college considers an essential part of the formation of people for ministry, mission and discipleship. These matters form some of the content of classes and practical placements. For example:

- understanding identity and difference in a multi-faith, multi-cultural world
- living with diversity
- speaking ethically within society, business, internet, science
- responding publicly to abusive and oppressive powers
- living responsibly within the whole of life
- acting justly through being in solidarity with the poor and with a commitment to the well being of the whole of creation

As a result of these various developments, the past five years have seen significant growth at UTC. There have been new courses developed, new ways of teaching and

new understandings of ministerial formation. The faculty and student body have become more multi-cultural and the formation programme has become focused on the needs of the church and the importance of integration. In the past five years student numbers have more than doubled despite a decrease in the number of students preparing for specified ministries.

Funding for UTC, from the Synod budget has not been able to keep up with the needs for theological education. More than 25% of the UTC budget<sup>16</sup> now comes from external sources: from individual private student fees and from external university funding for the provision of post-graduate degrees through Charles Sturt University. Recently the Council for World Mission (London) has made available funding to pay for a new faculty member in cross-cultural awareness<sup>17</sup>. UTC has attempted to become less dependent on the Synod for its funding<sup>18</sup>.

The church benefits greatly from the growth and development at UTC:

- a. more lay people within the church are being theologically educated
- b. a growing number of ministers are doing continuing education and integrating rigorous thinking with their practice of ministry
- c. candidates for the specified ministries participate in classes with people from a variety of background and experience
- d. the growing number of students from non-English speaking background bring new insights and developing understanding of how to live and work together as cross-cultural community
- e. the ever-growing research culture within the College means that faculty members (as well as the research students) bring to the church a depth of theological understanding that can enable a growing competence in theological thinking within the synod and beyond.
- f. Without the external funding, it would not be possible to employ as many UTC faculty members<sup>19</sup>. If UTC was solely dependent on Synod funding, there would be a significant reduction in the offerings of subjects and courses for specified ministries candidates, ministers and lay people as well as reduced number of “teachers to the church” available.

More details about each of these schools and their programmes may be found in the Board of Education report to Synod.

### **Goals for the future of ministerial, theological and discipleship education**

The following are the goals, which we believe should shape the Synod’s provision of ministerial, theological, missional and discipleship education:

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<sup>16</sup> Presently UTC receives \$799,542 for its running costs and \$23,000 for asset replacement from the Synod Fund. The budget for 2003/2004 includes other income of a further \$280,243.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. Dr. Jong-Sik Chang, from the Presbyterian Church of Korea will be taking up his appointment as the Director of the *Communitas* Programme as soon as his visa formalities are finalized.

<sup>18</sup> In the college Strategic Planning exercise, very little support was given by respondents to the proposal that UTC become less dependent on the Synod for its funding. The policy that 50% of surpluses must be returned to the Synod fund means that any money brought in by student fees, over and above what is already budgeted for, is counted as surplus. The College was unsuccessful in its request to retain these fees within a Development Fund. It has been hoped that such a fund would, in the long run, reduce the College askings on the Synod Fund.

<sup>19</sup> Currently, the amount of money coming in from external funding supports the equivalent of one third of the teaching faculty positions (i.e. 3 of the 9 full-time positions)

*A. Goals concerning commitment and acknowledgement*

1. Commitment to the theological basis and framework for ministerial, theological and discipleship education within the Synod of NSW as set out in this paper.
2. Commitment to the provision of educational excellence for ministry, theology, mission and discipleship within the Synod of NSW
3. Acknowledgement of the important and developing work of the ELM Centre, the School of Continuing Education and United Theological College and a commitment to continue to develop this work.
4. Affirmation of the role of the teaching staff of the theological college as people who work in three publics (church, community and academy), seeking ways in which they can better serve the church as teachers within its life.
5. Commitment to share resources with other Synods
6. Affirmation of the commitment to the delivery of tertiary theological education and at the same time other levels of education.

*B. Goals concerning re-structuring*

7. The integration of the present schools at the Centre for Ministry to form one school/center/institution for ministerial, theological, missional and discipleship education and formation, which allows for an overall and integrated approach to education for lay people and those in specified ministries.
8. The building of a hospitable learning community
9. The development of a community where people are able to share faith and can grow in discipleship
10. An open-ness to new ways of restructuring UTC, including the possibility that it be reconstituted by the Synod as a College of the Church<sup>20</sup>.
11. Consideration be given to the way in which the MEB function<sup>21</sup> can be located within the structures and councils of the church.

*C. Goals concerning formation for leadership*

12. The formation of people for specified ministries to give priority to preparing people for new ministry contexts or for renewing existing situations.
13. Education for specified ministries, which develops the gifts of each person through an individually structured, multi learning context learning and formation program. Significant amounts of time to be spent in ministry 'placements' with a focus on action-reflection learning and formation.
14. Formation of leaders who are competent to assist people to develop faith and discipleship, and to share their faith.
15. Establish the school/center/institution as the focus for discernment and resourcing opportunities for faith formation for all

*D. Goals concerning learning and teaching*

16. Further development of online and distance resources, learning groups, emphasis on professional development and electronic publishing.

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<sup>20</sup> United Theological College was established on July 1, 1974 and therefore constituted prior to Union. Although the College was not constituted by the NSW Synod, it is recognized by both the Assembly and the Synod as a teaching institution for preparing students for ministry in the Uniting Church (Assembly resolution 77.30 and Synod resolution 292/78S). The College is under the oversight of the NSW Synod, amendments to its constitution are approved by the Synod which appoints 12 members of the governing Council.

<sup>21</sup> The regulations of the church require that each Synod appoint a Ministerial Education Board or designate an appropriate body or bodies to exercise the responsibilities of a Ministerial Education Board. The MEB is responsible for the oversight of theological colleges, faculty candidates and continuing education. (see Regulations 2.2.19-20). Regulation 2.2.21 refers to the NSW situation, where the MEB function is limited to those responsibilities not otherwise legislated for in the constitution and by-laws of United Theological College. Because UTC's constitution covers most of the responsibilities of the MEB, the Commission for Specified Ministries has a limited role in fulfilling the MEB functions within this Synod.

17. To ensure academic excellence through utilizing the resources from within NSW Synod and beyond and making the school's resources available to other institutions.

*E. Goals concerning resourcing the whole church*

18. Resourcing of congregations and practical education needs of the church
19. Commitment to provide field staff members, whose prime roles are to educate across the Synod
20. Work with Presbyteries to resource their goals and programmes with congregations
21. Provide education that is appropriate for the needs of all who wish to learn
22. Rebuild a base of biblical and theological literacy

**The bodies that may be impacted by any decision**

Any decisions to re-structure the work of education within the NSW Synod will have far reaching effect. Those whose work will be influenced include:

- United Theological College and Council
- ELM Centre and ELM-New England North-West
- School of Continuing Education
- Library
- Institute for Mission
- Centre for Ministry
- Boards of Education and Mission
- Presbyteries and Congregations
- Student Association
- Commission for Specified Ministries
- Commission for Lay Ministries
- Ministerial Education Board
- Ministerial Education Commission
- Coolamon College
- Sydney College of Divinity
- Charles Sturt University
- Dean of Candidates
- Other Synods
- Other educational providers

**Some questions for the Synod**

The task group supports these goals and would seek to implement them.

The proposals attached to this report suggest ways in which the work can be carried forward. The suggested Working Group requires direction on the following issues:

1. Does the Synod agree with the goals and direction of the paper?
2. Does the Synod consider the "one school" proposal a good idea?
3. Should "one school/center/institution" be
  - a. developed as an extension or development of one of the present schools
  - b. formed as a new school with new structures
4. Where might the MEB sit in the church's structures?
  - i. Should the governing body of the school be the MEB? OR
  - ii. Should the MEB sit within the church structures outside the school OR
  - iii. Should the MEB sit outside both College and Church to challenge and inform each other? OR
  - iv. ....?

5. Where might the Board of Ministerial Formation<sup>22</sup> be located?
- i. Should the BMF responsibilities lie with the one school? OR
  - ii. Should the BMF be a committee of the MEB? OR
  - iii. Should the BMF tasks be Synod responsibilities, or Presbytery?
  - iv. OR.....

**Proposals:**

That Synod

1. receives the report
2. adopts the theological basis and framework for ministerial, theological and discipleship education within the Synod of NSW as set out in this paper.
3. affirms the “goals for the future of ministerial, theological and discipleship education”.
4. affirms the development of a single school for theological education, ministerial leadership and discipleship formation
5. expresses appreciation to United Theological College Council for its initiating the work of the task group.
6. thanks and discharges the Task Group and invites UTC Council to continue its involvement in these processes
7. Establish a working group to continue the development of a single school.
8. Appoint the members of the Working Group as follows: Membership of the working group to be: General Secretary of the Synod, Executive Directors of Board of Education and Board of Mission, Chairperson of Board of Education, Principal and one other member of UTC, One representative from UTC Council, One representative from ELM, Peter Hobson, two presbytery representatives (one of whom will be lay and the other from a specified ministry), an independent chairperson.
9. Request the Executive Committee to appoint the two presbytery representatives and the chairperson.
10. In light of the comments of members of Synod, and further work it will do, the working group be asked to bring a progress report to the November Council of Synod and a proposed model for the way forward to the March 2004 Council of Synod.

**Sarah Mitchell**  
Principal, UTC

**Chris Budden**  
General Secretary

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<sup>22</sup> The Board of Ministerial Formation is a Board of UTC and is responsible to the Council of the College for the formation and assessment of candidates in their education for ministry. Membership of the Board includes Principal and Vice Principal, Dean of Candidates, CSM and Council elected members as well as faculty and student representatives. The Board works in cooperation with Presbyteries (through the annual interview panels) in the assessment of candidates' progress towards ministry.