



Uniting Church Schools in Queensland Ethos Statement

As Approved by the Schools Commission
25 November 2013







Foreword

The Uniting Church in Australia is called to be part of God's mission of reconciling and renewing the whole of creation. We believe that all people are created in the image of God.

Education is a lifelong journey by which we develop the ability to participate in society and to lead creative and compassionate lives.

Uniting Church schools and colleges have been established as one way of delivering our mission and values to society through the education, nurture and support of young people and their families and communities.

The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod has oversight of the colleges, schools and other institutions within the Uniting Church¹ in Queensland. It is committed to upholding and articulating the ethos of the Uniting Church within these organisations, and supporting them as they seek to apply Uniting Church regulations².

This ethos statement has evolved from the broad principles and guidelines contained in the National Education Charter³. It has drawn upon various Uniting Church and other documents and has been developed in consultation with school leaders.

The Uniting Church believes that we are brought into a right relationship with God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This means that, in faith, we can:

- live in a close, loving, personal, dynamic relationship with the living God
- participate in the worshipping, caring and serving community of Christians
- receive God's gifts so that life can be what God means it to be—loving, purposeful, joyful, eternal, and
- tell others of this good news and live it out in acts of compassion, service and justice in the community.

I commend this document to you.

Rev Kaye Ronalds

Moderator, the Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod

¹ Responsibilities of a Synod 2.5.12(g)

² *Governance in Uniting Church Schools and Residential Colleges*, page 3

³ <http://assembly.uca.org.au/education/resources/item/718-national-education-charter-2002>

Introduction

The *Uniting Church Schools in Queensland Ethos Statement* provides a context within which Uniting Church school communities can articulate and develop their identities as Christian schools grounded in the tradition of the Uniting Church in Australia. It will assist schools to develop policies and programs which reflect the ethos of the Uniting Church and its commitment to bear witness to the transformational love of Christ.

This document is intended as an important resource for school board members and school leadership teams.

Individual communities and the nation as a whole are more likely to build a tolerant society when their members are literate in their own religious traditions and have an understanding of the religious traditions of others.

A Syllabus for Religious Education for Catholic Schools





The Uniting Church in Australia

The Uniting Church in Australia was born in 1977 when the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian denominations responded to God's call to unite and came together to form a new Australian church.

Theologically, the Uniting Church draws upon the witness of the Reformers to the grace which justifies us through faith, the centrality of the person and work of Christ, and the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture. It is called to be a fellowship of reconciliation, acknowledging the diverse gifts of its members and believing that there is no gift without its corresponding service.

The *Basis of Union*⁴, the Uniting Church in Australia's foundational document, commits members to preach the crucified, risen Christ, to bear witness to the unity of faith and life in Christ, and to engage in prophetic ministry which honours God's will for justice and peace.

The Uniting Church was not simply the merger of three previous denominations but came about in response to what was believed to be God's will for them. They came together "seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church".

Rev Dr Chris Walker, National Consultant for Theology & Discipleship

Rev Dr Chris Walker⁵, offers the following description in his discussion paper: *A Church for Australia in the 21st Century*

The Uniting Church in Australia is a Church that is meant to be more of a movement than a denomination. It is ecumenical for it came about as a result of the coming together of three Churches and is open to further union with other Churches. Nevertheless, while it is very ecumenical, even more so than the three previous traditions, the goal is not simply organic union as Churches, a bigger and better denomination, but to serve God's missional purposes. It seeks to be in line with the movement begun by Jesus of ushering in the reign of God and living by its values as a witness to God. It is to be a sign and instrument through which Christ may continue to work. It is given the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way (Basis of Union par 3).

As a broad Church, the Uniting Church holds together people with different theological positions and approaches to Church: from conservatives to progressives, from charismatics to those who prefer a more formal style, the majority being in the middle.

As a new church created in a uniquely Australian social and historical context, forged in the spirit of reconciliation and renewal, the Uniting Church is committed to reflecting the radical inclusiveness demonstrated by Jesus Christ.

⁴ *Basis of Union*, (1992), page 5 uca.org.au/basisofunion.htm

⁵ National Consultant for Theology & Discipleship (UCA Assembly)

The Uniting Church in Australia is also committed to a covenanting relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) which fosters just, inclusive and equal relationships, recognising the place of First Peoples in Australia.

The *Covenant Statement* (1994) commits the Uniting Church and its agencies to work with Congress towards national and state policy changes, to build understanding between people in every locality, and to build relationships which respect the right of Indigenous people to self-determination in the Church and in the wider society.

This acknowledgement places the foundation of our relationship in truth ... For the first time, our covenantal relationship is founded on truth and not the lingering denial of our historical past. This is our story.

Chairperson for the UAICC Rev Ken Sumner

The Uniting Church is committed to embracing diversity, respecting differences and promoting inclusivity. It is a multi-cultural church and includes people of many and varied cultural backgrounds.

In addition, the Uniting Church is committed to dialogue and cooperation with other churches and encourages its members to explore the implications of living in a multi-faith community.

Governance

The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils which each carry different responsibilities and oversight: local churches, regional presbyteries, state synods, and the national Assembly.

In terms of Uniting Church ecclesiology, the congregation is the primary expression of the Church for it embodies “the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ”⁶.

The Uniting Church is committed to a conciliar process, and seeks to determine direction using a consensus model of decision making.

The Uniting Church is committed to being open to reform and renewal. It seeks to take a proactive approach to complying with external requirements, endeavouring to go beyond compliance to ensuring that efforts are directed towards implementing best practice. In our schools this is to be reflected in the approach to the care of children. Where there are shortcomings, we commit to acknowledging these, seeking resolution and working towards improving our processes.

⁶ *Basis of Union*, (1992) paragraph 15.

Future directions

Openness to reform is basic to the Uniting Church's ecclesial identity.

The 27th Synod in 2008 resolved to encourage the Uniting Church in Queensland to enter into a ten year period of discernment to develop a shared vision for the future.

The process has enabled the Church to identify priority directions which reflect its foundational ethos: *Uniting in Christ: acting with love, living with hope, witnessing in faith, working for justice.*

The Vision 2020 *Together on the way, enriching community* document sets out the rationale, challenges, and specific objectives which will guide the Uniting Church in Queensland in the next stage of its growth.

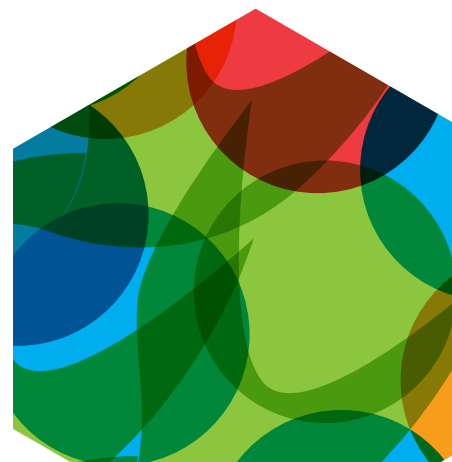
In the community

The Uniting Church in Australia is one of the largest non-government providers of community services in Australia.

In Queensland, through the mission of the Queensland Synod, **UnitingCare Queensland** (Blue Care, UnitingCare Community and UnitingCare Health) provides services such as aged care, community health care, acute health care, children, youth and family support, disability support services, drug and alcohol counselling, emergency relief, chaplaincy, disaster recovery, housing and indigenous aged care and drug and alcohol rehabilitation services. **Wesley Mission Brisbane** also provides community services in and around Brisbane. **Frontier Services**, an agency of the National Assembly, provides children and family services in remote areas of Australia.

UnitingJustice works to communicate our vision for justice, human rights, peace and the environment to government and within the public forum.

UnitingWorld has partnerships with churches in the Pacific, Asia and Africa and works to link projects and people to congregations, agencies and schools in Australia. Such projects are wide ranging and include micro loans, young ambassadors for peace and gap year programs.





Uniting Church schools

The Uniting Church in Queensland values its relationship with a diverse set of schools and colleges with varying ownership structures, fee scales and individual identities.

As a community of faith, we embody and promote the discipline and practice of education.

Uniting Church Schools are committed in their diversity to living within the faith and unity of the Church to provide an educational experience and learning community that offers young people spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical growth.

Our commitment is to the lifelong education of the whole person and to nurturing personal and communal responsibilities, including a reverence for the environment, a sense of social justice and an openness that celebrates difference.

We believe that incorporating the values of the gospel, and faith experiences that affirm that commitment, into tailored learning frameworks will result in the best educational outcomes for students.

The Church's confession leads it to uphold a value system based on love, social justice and compassion within which morality is defined. In this way, the Church seeks to help its members shape both personal and community attitudes, behaviour and decisions according to gospel values and the traditions they have received.

National Education Charter

The Uniting Church is committed to the provision of quality education that is accessible to all, in which its schools demonstrate inclusiveness of students with special needs and acceptance of students who belong to other faiths.

The Church expects school boards and councils to design sustainable fee structures that as far as possible make our schools accessible to a wide section of the community.

The Schools Commission is the body established by the Uniting Church in Queensland to be the link between the Church and its schools. Its members seek to encourage and support Uniting Church affiliated schools to further the mission of Christ in that context.

National Education Charter

The Uniting Church in Australia National Education Charter⁷ provides the following guidelines for education generally within the Uniting Church.

⁷ The full document is available at <https://assembly.uca.org.au/education/resources/item/718-national-education-charter-2002>

A theology of education

The practice of learning is embodied within the community of faith, both through its commitment to ongoing learning about faith, but also in ongoing learning that allows for responsible participation in society.

A commitment to lifelong learning

Lifelong education is a journey that allows each person to participate fully in society in ways that are life giving and sharing.

A recognition of our rights and responsibilities

Education equips us to participate in society. It encourages the development of skills in community participation, promoting integrity and critical thinking.

Access to equitable and quality education

The practice of equitable and quality education requires a commitment to a variety of learning models and contexts; respects the needs of individual learners, especially those whose ability requires special education provisions; and directs resources to areas of greatest need.

Valuing the diversity of educational expression

Education occurs in many ways and embraces many traditions and experiences, including those of the indigenous people of Australia, those with special education needs and those from rural and isolated areas of the continent. Education requires the experience of safe places, the opportunities to explore new ways of expressing faith, and encourages a sense of belonging and participation within and across communities.

Valuing teaching and research

Our commitment to education is expressed through valuing those involved in the discipline of teaching, and in our celebration and affirmation of this gift to our community.

The importance of families in education

Integral to nurturing creative learning environments and responsible communities, a commitment to education recognises the importance of families, in their diversity of expressions, as essential to the active task of learning.

Provision of pastoral care and chaplaincy

As an organisation concerned with faith and justice, we are responsible for ensuring that pastoral care and chaplaincy in Government and non-Government institutions are generously provided and freely available.

Schools expressing faith

Worship

The people of the Uniting Church look for a continuing renewal in which God will use their common worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all people⁸.

Regular worship and prayer is central to the identity of Uniting Church schools. Through worship and prayer the school community acknowledges that it is part of the Uniting Church and that it draws its spiritual sustenance from God.

Worship within the Uniting Church occurs in a variety of ways, as each worshipping community develops a style suited to its own context. Uniting Church schools regularly provide faith experiences where:

- worship experiences are ordered but flexible
- students, teachers and clergy are actively involved in the leadership of worship
- the Scriptures are read and proclaimed
- various styles of music are used to enhance worship
- creative arts such as drama and dance enrich worship
- corporate and individual prayer is offered through praise, confession, thanksgiving, and prayers for others.

Participation in worship is a core element of a Uniting Church school, and all students and staff are expected to participate.

Worship is an action where we seek to express our inner surrender to the mystery, beauty and wonder of God. When we worship we acknowledge God's ultimate importance for us and all of life. We orientate ourselves to God and we address ourselves directly to God .

Rev Jenny Tymms

Witness

The Uniting Church in Australia believes that all Christians are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries⁹.

As places where staff, students and their families experience the mission and outreach of the Uniting Church in Australia, Uniting Church schools nurture the development of faith.

This happens in such contexts as timetabled Christian Education¹⁰ classes, lunchtime groups, times of prayer and reflection, as well as opportunities to give practical expression of Christian faith through active support of justice and environmental causes. Where possible this is integrated with key curriculum learning areas, in the desire to offer a holistic education to students.

By modelling communities based on God's call to live with justice, compassion and humility,

⁸ *Basis of Union*, paragraph 1: The Way to Union

⁹ *Basis of Union*, paragraph 2: Of the Whole Church

¹⁰ Schools will use a variety of names for these programs

in which faith is accorded relevance and dignity, schools are themselves witnesses to a life in Christ. They acknowledge the spiritual needs of every member of their community, and foster a sense of the sacred.

They develop the capacity of staff and students to witness to their faith by:

- encouraging staff to undertake theological studies
- encouraging an informed understanding of Scripture
- providing small group support
- developing an ethos of faith sharing
- encouraging staff to mentor students and other staff.

Service

In the *Statement to the Nation* made at its inaugural Assembly in 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia promised to “actively participate in Australian society and engage in public debate” and outlined the beliefs and commitments on which it would base such engagement:

“We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.”

This commitment to service is underlined in the *Basis of Union* statement: “that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ’s Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service”¹¹.

Service is regarded as integral to the life of the Uniting Church. It does not stand alone, but exists in conjunction with worship, witness and community life as qualities that are central to the embodiment of the Church.

In their programs and policies, Uniting Church schools reflect a theology of education which nurtures personal and communal responsibility to work for a just society that promotes integrity, sustainability and liberty for all. Stewardship of the world and the development of respect for and inclusion of all people are key tenets of the Uniting Church approach to social justice.

Through engagement primarily with Uniting Church agencies, Uniting Church schools are expected to seek opportunities to be informed about and to engage with social justice issues at a local, national and international level.

¹¹ *Basis of Union*, paragraph 13: Gifts and Ministries

Schools modelling the life of Christ

Uniting Church schools recognise that they are communities blessed with the gift of the Spirit and shaped by the values and beliefs of the Christian church.

They seek to create harmonious and nurturing school communities in which these principles are lived out. Through personal and organisational relationships based on compassion, forgiveness and service, schools provide positive and enriching learning environments for leaders, staff, students and their families.

Uniting Church schools endeavour to help shape personal and community attitudes, behaviours and decisions according to gospel values. As learning communities, they seek to encourage excellence through the recognition and development of our God-given gifts and talents.

Leadership

Leadership in Uniting Church schools is guided by theologically informed decision making which reflects the Uniting Church's confession of Jesus Christ as "Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity".¹²

Uniting Church school policies including governance and discipline are grounded in an understanding of and commitment to the core values and beliefs of the Uniting Church in Australia.

Leadership teams will continually strive to develop a culture that is underpinned by a value system based on love, social justice and compassion. School leaders are expected to ensure that policies and processes within the school reflect the values of the Uniting Church and are consistent with any public positions taken by the Church.

Leaders and teachers will seek to model servant leadership. As stewards of their school's human, financial and physical resources, they will achieve excellence through giving priority to the needs of those whom they serve.

It is expected that school leaders will witness to a personal Christian faith and seek to develop an attitude of theological reflection on their own practices.

Pastoral care and values education

Uniting Church schools base their approach to pastoral care and values education on the Biblical injunction in Micah 6:8 to "act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" .

Pastoral care is an expression of the nature of the relationship between God and his people. Through taking on the role of servanthood in response to the suffering of others, we make known God's loving care for every person¹³.

Pastoral care and chaplaincy are fundamental to a Christ-centred approach to education, and are an integral part of Uniting Church schools. As separate and distinct programs, they each support and nurture the whole person and provide pastoral oversight of our school communities. By being aware of others in our care, we are able to monitor their wellbeing and ensure that our schools are safe places for all.

Intentional pastoral care programs provide a structured approach to supporting social and emotional growth in students in all areas of school life.

¹² *Basis of Union*, paragraph 3

¹³ *Basis of Union*, paragraph 16



Schools as learning communities

Faith formation

Faith formation in Uniting Church schools is approached intentionally, using age-appropriate pedagogies to deliver a biblically-based Christian education curriculum focussed on issues related to faith and life.

The Uniting Church places a strong emphasis on being informed by respected theological scholarship.

Faith formation takes place not only in formal Christian education settings, but also in the context of worship and service opportunities within and beyond the school community. In so doing, greater opportunities are presented for students to gain an integrated faith, with the praxis of spiritual reflection sitting alongside the practical outworking of faith.

At its best, faith formation seeks to integrate the story of God through scripture and Christian tradition, the student's own life and contemporary issues.

Christian ethos or character includes that behaviour which reflects a practical grasp or understanding of the implications of the Christian story for our lives today.

Rev Dr Wendi Sargeant, The Lakes College Christian Education Policy Statement

Academic curriculum

The Uniting Church values excellence in scholarship in all fields and this is reflected in our school communities.

Uniting Church schools need to be mindful of the words in the *Basis of Union*:

(The Uniting Church) gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith. The Uniting Church lives within a world-wide fellowship of Churches in which it will learn to sharpen its understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought ... it prays it may be ready ... to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds.¹⁴

While academic curricula must be designed to meet the guidelines set at state and national levels, it is expected that implementation frameworks in schools will be consistent with Christian teaching and the *Basis of Union* and will reflect the guidelines of the Uniting Church in Australia **National Education Charter**.

The Uniting Church expects teaching professionals to design and deliver age-appropriate pedagogy, informed by current research, in which every effort is made to meet the needs of all students regardless of their abilities and interests.

Uniting Church schools are expected to provide adequately for the resourcing and professional development of all staff involved in the faith formation of their students.

¹⁴ *Basis of Union*, paragraph 11

Co-curricular and extra-curricular programs

Co-curricular and extra-curricular programs are those non-academic activities that are available to support student learning in the areas of Christian community-building, the performing, spoken and visual arts, outdoor education, sport, recreational activities and community service.

In addition to the academic and spiritual development of students, a comprehensive program to support the physical, social and cultural development of students is encouraged. Thus, Uniting Church schools are encouraged to include a range of sporting, service and cultural activities to suit the particular communities they serve where the focus is on participation, teamwork and fair play. While striving for excellence in such activities is encouraged, it should never be achieved at the cost of personal or school integrity.

Uniting Church schools are encouraged to forge links with Uniting Church agencies working in the areas of mission, service and justice.



Resources

The following are some resources for school leaders to reference when articulating the Uniting Church ethos. Where possible links to these documents can be found on the Schools Commission website: schoolscommission.ucaqld.com.au

National Education Charter

Basis of Union

What does it mean to be Church? 2011 Doctrine Working Group

Together on the way, enriching community

Statement to the Nation, 1977

Introducing the Uniting Church in Australia - Andrew Dutney

Nature and Shape of Worship – Worship video - Jenny Tymms

Governance in Uniting Church Schools and Residential Colleges

Uniting Church agencies:

- UnitingCare (unitingcare.org.au) provides community services and advocacy for children, young people, families, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and older Australians. Agencies include Blue Care, UnitingCare Community and UnitingCare Health. Wesley Mission Brisbane is part of the UnitingCare Queensland network.
- Frontier Services (frontierservices.org) is a charity and national agency of the Uniting Church that grew out of the pioneering work begun in 1912 by the Rev John Flynn. It is now a major provider of family and community services and pastoral support in remote Australia.
- UnitingJustice (unitingjustice.org.au) is the justice unit of the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, providing leadership in national matters of social and economic justice, human rights, peace and the environment.
- UnitingWorld (unitingworld.org.au) is the Uniting Church in Australia's agent for purposeful, effective partnerships between churches and communities worldwide. Through partner churches, UnitingWorld engages in peace building and relief and development programs, and advocates for justice. Volunteer Experience Placements and InSolidarity Exposure Visits provide short-term opportunities for people to engage with and learn from international partners.

ucaqld.com.au

P: 1300 822 753 P: 07 3377 9777

GPO Box 674 Brisbane QLD 4001

The Uniting Church Centre

60 Bayliss St Auchenflower QLD 4066



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

