**Uniting Church in Australia - Assembly**

**Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry – National Reference Committee (MCM-NRC)**

***Framework for the setting up of a Covenant/Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)***

**Background**

Additional assistance in implementing the UCA Assembly Policy on Property, in particular concerning Regulation

***4.13.5*** *A Synod may determine policies and processes to assist Presbyteries, Church Councils and faith communities in the implementation of this Regulation. Where there is more than one Presbytery, they shall determine the manner in which the responsibilities of the Presbytery under this Regulation will be exercised by one or both of them.*

The MCM-NRC had a significant conversation concerning this part of the new Regulations in light of the intent and core values of respectful relationships, justice and equity expressed in the accompanying Property Policy.

It was agreed by consensus that the most helpful assistance a Synod could offer would be a simple framework for the drawing up of appropriate and local Covenant/Memorandum of Understanding.

An agreed and standardised ‘framework’ that encourages local adaptation and ways of expressing the partnership/relationship is greatly to be preferred over a single ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. The latter diminishes the richness and deepening of relationships that can grow out of in-depth conversations and the struggle to own both what is said and the decisions represented there.

Such a mission and gift focussed document also more closely reflects the UCA understanding of mission at the heart of congregational life and ministry, and the Church Council as exercising oversight of that mission and ministry.

**Notes**

* The foundations for this framework and the language/imagery in which such an MOU would be written are the biblical experience and stories of Covenant.
* Language communicates culture as well as particular meanings. The use of the same words does not mean shared understanding of those words. So the actual process of developing a MOU in the kind of framework offered here is a critical stage in building relationships of respect and understanding between the partners to the MOU. Such a document must be drawn up in the first language of each of the partners – on the same document and NOT separately (See the Property Policy).
* The growing numbers of regional networks for ministry and mission, including non-geographic presbyteries bring added complexities in developing covenant based agreements and need particular attention in the development of culturally and missionally appropriate MOU’s

**Shape of such a ‘Framework’**

**1. A simple, brief introduction or preamble** that sets out in the language and imagery of the partners:

* The mission focus and goals of the each of the partners separately,
* The agreed shared mission focus and goals together

**2. An expression or description of the relationship between the partners** and how that relationship will be represented structurally – for example Joint Committee, Task Group. This should include

* The form of the ‘group’
* The method of appointment and/or election,
* Reporting process and accountability to the body/Council with oversight of the mission and spiritual life of the whole (e.g. Church Council, Presbytery, Synod and Faith Communities
* The duration of appointments to the ‘group’

**3. Agreed guidelines for the use of all property involved** including a realistic assessment of actual times needed for various activities including for example: food preparation/cooking, set-up and clear up from worship and other activities, practices and rehearsals

**4. A description of how the responsibilities for the care and maintenance of the properties will be undertaken** including:

* How financial contributions from all parties will be assessed
* Ways in which ‘in kind’ gifts will be valued and contribute to the carrying out of these responsibilities
* The process of decision-making concerning the use of all property income proceeds

**5. A description of an agreed process for monitoring progress** including

* The appointment of cultural interpreters who will walk with each community and assist each community in growing in their understanding of the culture, values and practise of the other[s], and to assist in the journey into and in the UCA
* A time frame for regular review and reassessment of the details and effectiveness of the Covenant/MOU – it is strongly recommended that the Covenant/MOU be reviewed and renewed annually by the parties involved.

**6. A clear and simple process for dispute resolution** recognising that many disputes arise out of simple misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Any dispute resolution process to include:

* The use of appropriately gifted and trusted mentor[s]/mediators to assist with clarifying and naming issues/concerns and guiding any required working through and renegotiating relevant aspects of the MOU
* Clear and realistic time-frames for discussion and culturally appropriate ways of working through matters before any escalation of the intervention– 30 days for the initial conversations involving mentors/mediators, then an additional 90 days for intentional working through
* An agreed process for the termination of this covenant/MOU

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