

23 SEPTEMBER 2014

UNITING CHURCH OUTLINES FIVE REQUESTS FOR ONGOING SUPPORT OF ACCESS ministries

The Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has resolved to issue five requests to ACCESS ministries, and if not satisfied with evidence of a positive response, will withdraw as a Supporting Church from 1 July 2015.

The consequence of the Synod decision is that ACCESS ministries has 8 months to demonstrate positive responses to the following requests in order for the Church to retain its Supporting Church status:

1. A commitment to changes in the governance practices and structures that facilitate the full participation of members of the Council of Christian Education in Schools (trading as ACCESS ministries) in the policy development and direction setting of ACCESS ministries.
2. Increased and transparent communications with the General Secretary of the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.
3. An inclusive and consultative approach to the development of the Special Religious Instruction (SRI) program materials, a commitment that these materials will be theologically broad and pedagogically sound and that this is reflected in the training of SRI instructors.
4. The removal of the compulsory nature of the Partnership Program payment.
5. A conversation with the UCA Centre for Theology and Ministry (CTM) about the possibility of the CTM's involvement in the training of SRI instructors.

The Synod also sought to affirm, acknowledge and thank Uniting Church members whose dedication over many years has contributed to the work of ACCESS ministries and its predecessors as CRE teachers, members, Council members and Board members.

Uniting Church SRI instructors will continue to be affirmed and supported by the Church.

The Uniting Church is deeply committed to ongoing engagement with other faith traditions and for young people to be exposed to a well structured pedagogically sound general religious education program in the Australian curriculum. As a result, the Synod, in the same resolution, also resolved to request two bodies within the Church (the Commission for Mission and the Centre for Theology and Ministry) to actively work for the inclusion of General Religious Education (GRE) in schools.

This resolution is the culmination of three years of investigation by a task group of the Church, examining a number of aspects of Christian education in schools, with particular focus on the governance, SRI program materials and instruction and communication by ACCESS ministries.



Media release

The Church was informed that under the new leadership of ACCESS ministries there had been indications of a willingness to engage more openly with the Uniting Church's concerns. The timeline in the Synod resolution provides for ACCESS ministries to formally demonstrate a positive response.

In its presentation to the Synod, the Task Group summarised its five main concerns and each of these are picked up in the list of requests made by the Uniting Church of ACCESS ministries.

Moderator Dan Wootton said the Synod meeting approx. 300 members wrestled with these decisions over three days of the five-day gathering. He said the final resolution demonstrated the commitment of the Uniting Church to ecumenical relationships, and also captured the Uniting Church members' deep concerns with the current policies and practices of ACCESS ministries.

Mr Wootton said the Synod Standing Committee, which acts as the Synod of the Church between the 18-monthly meetings, will be responsible for following up with ACCESS ministries on the five nominated issues.

If there is no indication of positive formal responses in relation to the requests by 31 May 2015, Mr Wootton says that the Uniting Church will withdraw as a Supporting Church of ACCESS ministries on 1 July 2015.

The Synod meeting of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has been meeting at the Union Theatre of La Trobe University since Friday 19 September. The meeting concludes tomorrow.

END RELEASE

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