



SYNOD 2008

Address given by the Rev. Harry Herbert when presenting the Report of UnitingCare NSW.ACT

I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and pay respect to elders past and present.

There is plenty of information available about the work of UnitingCare. You can find it on our website and the connected websites. We produce annual reports for our work and you can either access them on the website or ask for hard copies. Material about us is available at our display at the Synod. We want the members of the Church to know as much as they wish about the work that we do. In your Synod papers there is the report prepared using the template provided by the Synod Standing Committee, and it gives the perspective of how UnitingCare is playing its role as a Board of the Synod. So, with all that information I don't want now to go over the same ground again. Rather, I would like to speak about some of the issues that arise with UnitingCare as a Board of the Synod and as an important part of the life of the Uniting Church in the Synod of NSW and ACT.

UnitingCare has been involved in a very large change management process, which began with the new governance arrangements that were approved in 2003. Sometimes people refer to 2003 as the time when we "regionalised aged care" but this is a misunderstanding of what really occurred. The regionalising of aged care was only one part of what happened in 2003. The most important change in 2003 was the formation of the three Service Groups – UnitingCare Ageing, UnitingCare Children's Services and UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families - and the decision to form UnitingCare into one single and unified organisation. That is the task we have been undertaking for the past 5 years. We have formed ourselves under the one Australian Business Number; we have begun the task of organising ourselves as an efficient and effective organisation, responsible to the Synod for social justice advocacy, community services and chaplaincy.

We serve God through the delivery of community services and advocacy for social justice and UnitingCare does that without fear or favour.

At the recent opening of our new Payroll Services Centre at Parramatta, Karen Gerard from KPMG who had helped us form the business case for the Centre, commented that we were 5 years into a large change management process and were probably about half way. We are building an IT

infrastructure that will serve our needs; we are developing the one remuneration policy; we are taking an overall approach to property development; we are rolling out a new sophisticated IT based care system in our aged care centres; we are starting to think and work as one integrated organisation.

The staff of the Board are very well aware of these changes. They affect us every day. From the nursing aide in Lismore who now signs on to work with a finger scan which automatically helps organise her roster and her pay, to me in 222 Pitt Street where my job today is very different to the job I did before 2003, everyone in UnitingCare knows we are a changing and growing organisation.

However, we also realise that these changes impact on those around us, especially the membership of the Church. I appreciate that we need to make sure that the membership of the Church understands what is happening, and sees that the changes we are making are all for the good, particularly for the people we serve. After all, what we are doing in UnitingCare is a good news story.

This next segment is a preview of a TV community service announcement which headlines our without fear or favour awareness campaign and web site that UnitingCare will be launching in the coming months. We think without fear or favour sums up our organisation.

The changes we are making in our organisation arise in large part because of the changes in our environment. The competition from private operators is now much more intense, Government funding arrangements have changed, and accountability and regulation are now much more strict. But most importantly, the views and expectations of clients are changing.

This is especially true in the area of Ageing. How many people here today are hoping to spend their last years in a nursing home? All the surveys show very few people want to do so. Some of us will have to, because it will be the only option, but community care will become a bigger and bigger feature of aged care services. Our UnitingCare Ageing system is currently very focused on residential care, and we are in the process of shifting its emphasis more to community care. We have started this process somewhat late and thus there is even more urgency about it. As in this and the other areas of our work, we cannot just keep doing the same things in the same old way.

We recognise the heritage we have received from the past. We know that UnitingCare is like it is today because of the tremendous contribution from many people of strong commitment in the past. We are building on that heritage. For example, we are already planning for the centenary in 2011 of the establishment by Sir James Burns and the Presbyterian Church of UnitingCare Burnside. Those people set out to provide a better system of care for children. We are doing the same today. But, the cottages they built at North Parramatta, as important as they were as a social advance at the time, no longer house any children. We do things differently today, but the original

vision of caring for children in a progressive way remains UnitingCare's focus. Surely we don't want to be like the servant in the parable of the talents, who was so scared to use his own initiative, and so afraid to be bold, that he took the one talent he was given and hid it in the ground.

In my view our links with the rest of the Church are as strong as ever. Indeed, even stronger. Look at the examples I have given in my Synod report about the links that have been forged by UnitingCare Ageing with congregations. They are only examples, and there would be many more across the whole of UnitingCare and its services. Indeed, I believe that on any objective basis the links today would be much stronger than in the past. All the Regional Directors of UnitingCare Ageing are required to report to Presbyteries as part of their performance agreements. In the past we thought that the link to the Church was through participation in management. Now, we rightly see that the link is through participation in mission. And look at our work in chaplaincy, an area where we have made significant advances in the last few years, and an area where we have certainly committed significant resources. You will now see a segment about some of our Chaplaincy and Pastoral Care

UnitingCare NSW.ACT is a Board of this Synod. It cannot, as some people suggest, drift out of the Church or leave the Church. It is an integral part of the Church. However, we will need to seek help outside the Church in order to ensure that the organisation is well managed. After the changes in 2003 UnitingCare advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald for people to serve voluntarily on our Boards. We were delighted with the response and a number of very talented and committed people from outside the Church were appointed to various boards. These people are only putting themselves forward because they want the opportunity to serve and they want to help UnitingCare in its tasks. Some are from business, some are from community service backgrounds. They include people like Michael Fraser, the CEO of AGL and Nigel Spence the former Director of the Association of Child Welfare Agencies. I value the contribution which they make. This is really nothing new, as we have always welcomed such people into our organisation, well before the changes of 2003. We must recognise that the Uniting Church is going to continue to struggle to recruit its own members for some tasks and we must remain open to receive help from other people of goodwill.

Similarly with staff. Surely we don't believe that the mission of the Uniting Church can only be accomplished by members of the Uniting Church? We have such a vague notion of membership these days, that many claiming membership are not really members and some who are members who don't know they are. I have no idea how many Uniting Church members are among the some 6,500 UnitingCare staff. We don't apply religious discrimination. I would guess, however, that is something like 50 to 100. We undoubtedly have more staff who are members of other Christian churches. I know from conversations that we have many people who are Catholics, one senior staff member is a Seventh Day Adventist, and we have some people who attend AOG churches. When people challenge me as to why we don't have more Uniting Church members, I can only respond by saying that it is rare for UC

members to apply for positions. And if you look at the age profile of the UCA it is not hard to know why. But, why is this an issue? The Christian service we are providing stems from our establishment and maintenance of the organisation as a service arm of the Uniting Church and is not dependent on the individual who performs the work. Who is our neighbour? The Samaritan in Jesus' parable was neighbour to the man in need because he provided the care, not because he was of the right religion.

Another comment that is sometimes made is that UnitingCare has become a corporate entity detached from the mission of the Church. At a meeting a few months ago a Presbytery Chairperson stated that the Inspire Strategy of UnitingCare Ageing could be adopted by any corporation. I sent copies of the Strategy to all members of the Synod Standing Committee to ask people to read it and tell me whether that could possibly be the case. Of course no one responded because it isn't true, and anyone can see that the Strategy is firmly rooted in the faith and life of the Church.

Are we a corporation run by bureaucrats? Not at all. The staff leadership of UnitingCare are people with enthusiasm, passion, and a commitment to social justice who want the organisation to be the very best that it can be. They are committed to the care of our clients and residents and, after all, our clients are our first priority, ahead of the Church. It is true that our staff are careful administrators and highly skilled in the service industry in which they work. When you are caring, for example, for some 15000 elderly and frail people you need a good bureaucracy and meticulous administration. I am not going to apologise for that. And, of course, there are elements of business within UnitingCare. While we are not a business we must operate UnitingCare in a business-like way, that is our responsibility. If we don't manage our finances and our assets responsibly we are not carrying out the task which the Synod has entrusted to us. This next segment features Director of UnitingCare Ageing, Gillian McFee talking about Efficient use of Resources relating to Ageing's Code of Ethical Behaviour.

When we reshaped UnitingCare in 2003 we adopted a structure that we now realise was impossibly optimistic. We established it with 12 boards. Two regional Ageing boards have amalgamated, giving us now 11 boards within UnitingCare. It is a structure designed for conflict and disagreement. When Chairpersons of the Regional boards in UnitingCare Ageing complained to us last year about the structure, we set in place a process for attempting to resolve the problems. The work of the consultant, Mr. Ted Woodley, left us in no doubt that the one thing on which everyone agreed was that the structure was not working. The Board of UnitingCare established a Steering Committee which has worked assiduously on the task and, finally, at the August meeting of the Board a proposal was adopted to attempt to deal with the problem. The one thing we heard loud and clear throughout the Review process was that the Regional boards provided a vital link to the Presbyteries and Congregations. An alternative proposal by the Board, called the Active Linking Program, which involved UnitingCare providing finances to Presbyteries to take on staff to provide the linkages across the whole of UnitingCare - not just Ageing, was rejected by the Presbyteries. They have

stated to us that the Regional Boards of UnitingCare Ageing are the key link between themselves and the work of UnitingCare.

In the light of this we have re-shaped the role of the Ageing Regional Boards to concentrate on that aspect, and have given the power to nominate to the boards exclusively to the Presbyteries. While we recognise that these changes will not be universally welcomed, the Board believed that it had a responsibility to act to resolve the problem. From the beginning of this process it has been the strong view of the Board that the problems resulted from the structure and were not the result of people or personalities. That remains our view. The management of an organisation with 8 Boards within a larger structure of a further 3 Boards is a governance structure that has proved impossible to operate. The Board of UnitingCare has consistently maintained that this is not a people problem, either in the UnitingCare Board or the Regional Boards. All the Board members have contributed to their best ability, but the structure has been against them.

Right across Australia in the UnitingCare network, changes are occurring in regard to governance. In UnitingCare Queensland, some 3 ½ years ago they moved to a single Board, despite being some 50% larger than ourselves. Their Chairperson, Heather Watson, an active member of the Church spoke to me recently and said how effectively their new structure was working and how it had helped their relationships within the Church. In Western Australia, they have formed UnitingCare West out of some former 8 different agencies with one Board and one CEO. In the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania they have an active program of amalgamations of separate organisations. What we are doing is nothing different to what is happening in other parts of the Uniting Church.

And in the midst of this are we giving enough attention to social justice? Yes, our commitment to social justice advocacy remains as strong as ever. All senior staff in UnitingCare are guided by our Social Justice Charter and there are many fine examples of work in this area that all members of the Church can be justly proud. We have covered this in our report. But let's not forget that the work of social justice is much more than Synod resolutions, media releases, submissions to government enquiries, even than demonstrations or marches. This final DVD segment is a vodcast that will be on our Without Fear or Favour website and is entitled 'Speaking Out'.

Now let me give you some specific examples of social justice.

Some of the most disadvantaged people in our community are those with disabilities and/or mental illnesses who live in licensed boarding houses. These establishments are run by private operators who charge residents their pension for room and board. With a few exceptions, they are not nice places to live. Some time ago the NSW Government established a Reform Program and allocated funds to attempt to improve the situation, and I serve on the Expert Advisory Committee which advises the Government, and I also serve on the committee of CASA which is a lobby group established to promote reform. Last year a staff member from the Department of Disability, Ageing

and Home Care, announced that one of these boarding houses was closing [with one month's notice] and asked if anyone had an idea about where to house 30 people on a temporary basis, while better accommodation was located. Some of the people had lived in the boarding house for more than 20 years. Happily I was able to suggest that UnitingCare could open up a former nursing home in Leichhardt and we could look after these people and help work out new and better futures for them. Although the old nursing home was not great accommodation in my opinion, to the former boarding house residents it was great. Also, we gave them a new freedom. Some starting to learn to cook their own simple meals, one started a vegetable garden, and others learnt how to use the washing machines. As of last month, all had been re-housed in better accommodation in accordance with their own wishes and aspirations. And we are preparing to receive another group who are leaving their boarding house because the Department has prosecuted the owners and is closing it down. - This is social justice in action. - We are working with Government to improve the lives of people with disabilities and working to make sure that all people currently living in boarding houses get a better deal. We are also lobbying Government to do something about the rights of people in boarding houses, whether licensed or unlicensed. There are no rich people living in boarding houses, but residents have no tenancy rights at all and can be thrown out at a moment's notice. We want to see new legislation which protects the rights of boarders and lodgers.

Another example is the fantastic fundraising work undertaken by the Bridge for Asylum Seekers, made up of people from inside and outside the Uniting Church. Under the umbrella of UnitingCare they have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to provide direct payments to people on bridging visas who have been unable to work or participate in the Medicare or social security system.

UnitingCare has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to become a corporate leader in Indigenous Employment and I am pleased to announce that the first of two Indigenous Employment Coordinators has started work with UnitingCare this month. UnitingCare and the Uniting Church have always advocated for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and will continue to do so.

We have also just established UnitingCare Disability with the aim of growing services in the area and being the voice of UnitingCare and the Uniting Church on disability matters.

Is there nothing wrong with UnitingCare? Of course not. Any organisation with 6,500 staff will fail in its duties from time to time, our links with the Church could sometimes be better, some issues won't be adequately addressed, and some telephone calls and emails will go unanswered. I cannot guarantee perfection in performance. However, I can guarantee that UnitingCare will always be a part of the Church, that it is one of the most valuable assets and resources that you have, and that while it is a Board of this Synod you will continue to be one of its main stakeholders.

By all means, try to improve us, tell us where we could do better, prod and poke us as much as you like, but do it not as enemies but as fellow travellers. We are in this together, not to serve the Church, not to serve ourselves, but to serve the world for which Christ died.

End.