



Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

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Dear Uniting Church friends,

I am writing to inform you of a decision taken by the Synod Standing Committee (SSC) in December 2015, on advice from the Finance Committee, BOMAR and the Property Board, which is starting to impact on the life of the Church.

As you may be aware, as a whole of Church we have been living beyond our financial means – essentially our expenses exceed our income and we have an operating deficit. That was one reason the 2013 Synod meeting decided to establish a Major Strategic Review, which was tasked with forming a vision and plan for the future of the Church and undertaking a holistic financial sustainability review to support that vision and plan.

However, the MSR was future-focused, and it was clear from the advice of the key Synod reporting bodies noted above, that the financial difficulties had become immediate and urgent. The Finance Committee informed the SSC in December last year that the levels of proposed expenditure by the Synod were unsustainable. The Finance Committee said that the only way to address ‘the expenditure problem is for the Church to undertake a fundamental and painful change to the way it operates’. The SSC consequently resolved to reduce spending significantly for the 2017 Mission Support Budget, and if possible, make savings in 2016.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) of the Synod had already committed to reducing 5% operating costs from their budgets. It was resolved that a further 10% reduction be made in certain cost centres. The Finance Committee stressed that if these cuts were successful they would not make a noticeable impact on the core problems.

Over the last 6-7 months, Synod-based ministries and operations have been working on a range of measures designed to significantly reduce the \$2.7 million deficit forecast for 2017. It has involved staff consultations, staff identified savings and SLT initiated savings.

However, as you can understand, the largest area of cost for the Synod, as in any part of the Church, is in staffing. To honour the SSC’s resolution, along with many cost-savings initiatives that have been reported to the SSC and are being enacted by Synod staff, a number of ministries and service units of the Synod have made painful decisions in relation to staff. The Centre for Theology and Ministry has two ministry placements to be concluded at the end of 2016. The Commission for Mission has made two redundancies. The Property Unit has not replaced two key roles. Communications and Media Services made a role redundant late last year.

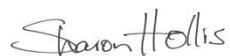
In making these savings the SLT has endeavoured to minimise the impact on the services the Synod provides to the broader Church whilst also being mindful that implementing MSR will bring further challenges and opportunities.



I seek your grace and understanding as together we navigate this time of significant change within the Synod-based ministries and operations and, further down the track, to Presbyteries. Some of these resolutions address issues of new approaches to financial sustainability. However, as these resolutions are enacted it is possible that further consideration of cost savings will be needed.

Please pray for our Church at this time for those whose roles are ending and for the committed Synod staff who serve us in a multitude of ways.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharon Hollis".

Rev Sharon Hollis
Moderator

