



Uniting Church in Australia
The Congregation of Mark the Evangelist
Incorporating UnitingCare Hotham Mission

ABN: 78 610 435 089



12 June 2015

To: The MSR Team and the VicTas Synod Standing Committee

Re: The MSR Community Services Summary Report

Response by UCHM Board to the MSR Community Services Network Review Summary Report

As a Parish Mission and agency of UnitingCare, who see ourselves as an organic part of the worshipping community of the Uniting Church in Australia, we, the Board of UnitingCare Hotham Mission, are compelled to make this response to the MSR Summary Report (the Report) to Standing Committee for its consideration. We have participated in all the meetings that have been set for the review process – both for Board members and for CEOs. The Board at its meeting on 11/6/2015, the first time we had been able to discuss the Report, unanimously endorsed this response from the whole Board.

1. We support the Response prepared and endorsed by Kildonan UnitingCare, UnitingCare ReGen, South Port UnitingCare, UnitingCare Ballarat, UnitingCare Werribee Support and Housing.
2. We challenge the complete absence of any adequate theological or faith understanding in the Report, and its failure to ensure that such understanding informed its work. There are so many examples of this throughout the Report. One is its discussion of risk. What would have been the ‘outcome’ if Jesus had adopted the risk approach of this Report? A risk approach would have most certainly avoided the crucifixion, and thus the basis of our faith would never have been established. The absence of a coherent theological foundation renders the entire Report inadequate as a basis for change, or for the kind of change that is needed. If we can’t be “Church” in our analysis, we won’t be “Church” in our solutions – as indeed the proposed models illustrate.
3. We deplore the Report’s lack of sophisticated analysis of history, context, and culture of the current UnitingCare agencies, both large and small, and its simplistic view that change should ignore these elements.
4. We question the Report’s evidence base: it makes many assertions but provides very little evidence, of either a qualitative or quantitative nature. It is therefore not possible to trust the report as a basis for decisions about the future.

5. We acknowledge the important role of Christian stewardship of the church's resources. However, we challenge the adoption of a business, commercial model as providing both the rationale for change, and the model for a new structure. If this is the only basis for change and what we need to change to, the Church should close its doors, because it is no longer advocating the 'culture' (or faith) of the Triune God: it is merely adopting the reigning culture of current Australian society.

6. The models presented do not reflect or present any thoughtful or creative options. The Response by the five agencies that we support provides one such option. The Report shows no understanding of Parish Missions as agencies or of how faith informs mission. Option One comes closest to doing so, but ignores the possibility of Parish Missions as agencies. The Report does not understand the governance of Parish Missions, as shown on p.28 "As per the current system, Parish Missions would be accountable to Parish Mission Boards that would report directly to Synod". UnitingCare Hotham Mission, and at least two other Parish Missions we know of (Church of All Nations and South Port) all have governance structures that tie them closely to their originating and sustaining worshipping congregations. None of the models allow the possibility of the Church using the Parish Mission model, as outlined in the Model Constitution for Parish Missions, signed by us, South Port and Church of All Nations, as a way of developing creative responses to need across Victoria and Tasmania.

7. The timelines for consultation between board members have been far too short to enable robust and informed discussions to take place. The report was distributed one week before the meeting of Board representatives from all agencies, allowing no time for discussion with Boards themselves, unless they called extraordinary meetings, or their meeting happened to fall in that week.

8. The broader church, including Ministers of the Word, Church Councils and Presbyteries should be consulted on a report of such wide ranging import.

9. We are unable to comment on agencies who want to compete for government funding in order to survive, which appears to be the main driver of the Report. In our contexts we collaborate fully with congregations of other denominations – seeing this as part of our ecumenical responsibilities. We see no point in competing against Anglican, Catholic and other Christian denominational churches for state funding – but perhaps others have a theological and faith basis for doing so. The Report does not provide any such basis. We note that there is a model for very large, bureaucratic agencies operating from a faith basis: that provided to us by the Catholic Church. Catholic agencies articulate a set of guiding values, founded strongly in the Judeo-Christian tradition. They publicise and pronounce these in and on their buildings, their public documents, and all responses to Tenders, Submissions, etc. They claim and announce the Christian nature of their organisation and service, while making clear their services are available to all, regardless of race, culture, religion, etc. The Uniting Church could insist that all agencies bearing its logo take this approach.

In conclusion, we present our Vision and Mission statement as a model of one way in which the Church might think about part of its life in and contribution to the world.

UnitingCare Hotham Mission Vision statement

In joyful response to what the triune God has done and is doing within the worshipping community that is Hotham Parish, Uniting Care Hotham Mission (UCHM) is committed to be worshipful, creative, caring, thriving, informed, engaging and resourceful.

In confessing that Jesus is Lord over its life, UCHM hopes and desires to actively participate in the Mission of God through prayer and discernment in the Holy Spirit.

Its hope is that its programs, in service to the world, will be personally and communally inclusive, reconciling, transformative and restorative for all involved in them.

UnitingCare Hotham Mission Mission statement

Out of the goodness of God's creation and in response to God's continuing acts and promises to all, our vision is for abundant life in which our mission may be restorative and transformative, constantly responding to the gospel hope of cosmic reconciliation.

Our mission is therefore to express our Christian faith through development of programs from our own resources and in partnership with others, to fight exclusion and marginalization within our community, and to work for reconciliation and social inclusion. These ideas form the basis for programs that we hope will promote inclusion and participation, and relieve poverty, suffering, sickness, disability, helplessness and distress. Our efforts will be focused on those who are most marginalized and in need in our community.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Gaye Champion,
Chair of the Board, UnitingCare Hotham Mission

Kindly note:

The Rev Dr Craig Thompson has provided a response under separate cover to reflect the views of the Congregation of Mark the Evangelist incorporating UnitingCare Hotham Mission, and is a whole Parish Mission response. This response the unanimous response of the Board of UnitingCare Hotham Mission.