

Covenant

Wesley Church Melbourne and Uniting Vic.Tas



Background – Our Missional Purpose

Wesley Church Melbourne and Uniting Vic.Tas are part of The Uniting Church in Australia, which seeks to give contemporary expression to the ancient Christian tradition in ways that bring God's life and hope to communities and individuals. Its Basis of Union commits the Uniting Church to participate with God 'in the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation.' The 'Great Commandment' of Jesus (Matthew 22: 35-40) provides a clear framework for Christian identity and mission: we discover who we truly are when we give ourselves in love and service of God and neighbour.

The Uniting Church is therefore committed to helping people in their spiritual growth through worship, prayer and service. Linked with the spiritual disciplines is our commitment to give clear expression to God's reconciling work in Christ. This is the basis for our commitment to seeking deeper partnerships with other churches and all people of goodwill; our involvement in community services; and action and advocacy for a just society.

Wesley Church is the spiritual heart of the Wesley Place site. Its congregations are rich and diverse in culture, heritage, worship style, theological emphasis and socio-economic makeup, united in common worship, witness and service to the city of Melbourne.

Uniting Vic.Tas is a contemporary expression of the Uniting Church's commitment to social justice and community care. Formed in 2017, Uniting Vic.Tas brought together 25 Uniting Church community services agencies, including Wesley Mission Victoria.

Wesley Mission was started by the Wesley Church in April 1893 to provide services for poor and vulnerable people and to advocate on their behalf. Uniting Vic.Tas embraces this legacy and through a range of programs and services, responds to people's diverse needs to inspire people, enliven communities and confront injustice. These programs and services enable us to honour Christ's invitation to serve humanity by working for an inclusive, connected and just world.

Uniting Vic.Tas also seeks to confront injustice by challenging the structures in our society that contribute to disadvantage through policy, research and advocacy.

Shared History

Throughout our shared history we have held together worship and service, word and deed, believing the two are inextricably connected. A change in relationship in 2001 which resulted in the incorporation of Wesley Mission Victoria and the separation from the Wesley Church was a sadness for many members of the Wesley Church who valued highly the historic partnership in worship, witness and service as a Parish Mission. However, the relationship has been strengthened through intentional relationship via a Covenant (2014), a strong partnership in the redevelopment of the Wesley site including a Memorandum of Understanding relating to Wesley Church having a suite of offices within Uniting's floor, shared worship events; and excellent interpersonal relationships between leaders of the two communities.

Appreciating the Present

The historic olive tree on the Wesley Place site (reputedly planted in 1875 from a seed from an olive tree from Jerusalem) serves as an apt metaphor for the longevity, resilience and continuity of the church's presence on the site. Uniting Vic.Tas considers also that the 'flourishing tree' symbolises what it is today – a well-respected organisation that delivers a diverse range of valued community services – only exists because of the 'root system' that supports it.

This 'root system' comprises the strong Christian heritage of the organisation, the work of the early pioneers who founded and developed the ministry in obedience to God's call, and the ongoing development of values and vision driven by gospel imperatives to support the needy and marginalised in our community.

Uniting Vic.Tas and Wesley Church commit ourselves to a renewed covenantal relationship in order to provide a healthy and productive basis for living out the faith of the church in word and deed for generations to come.

Covenantal Relationships

A covenantal relationship is one of acceptance, loyalty and commitment between the parties. It is often contrasted with a 'contractual' relationship. While a contract is based in law, a covenant is grounded primarily in relationship, trust and mutual commitment.

Jesus modelled and promoted such relationships between believers when he said:

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

– John 13:34-35

The early church endeavoured to demonstrate this love in their communal life together (Acts 2:42-47).

Accordingly, our relationship with each other and the community will seek to demonstrate:

Affirmation – mutual encouragement of each other's commitments

Prayer – sharing in prayer for our common needs and unique missional commitments

Openness and Honesty – communicating respectfully, clearly and directly

Trust – honouring commitments made and observing appropriate confidentiality

Accountability – being accountable to one another on our mutual journey

Faithfulness – seeking to honour the commitments made in this Covenant; and seeking always to be faithful to Christ and the gospel in the exercise of our respective ministries.

The Desire for Covenant

Since its inception Uniting Vic.Tas has been on a journey of 'discovering' its identity and purpose as the community services agency of the Synod. Part of this journey has been the desire to identify more strongly with its Christian heritage and historical purpose.

The purpose of this Covenant is to express the genuine desire on the part of both Wesley Church Melbourne and Uniting Vic.Tas for a closer relationship, and to enable and stimulate cooperation in ministry and mission into the future. Both parties acknowledge that a Covenant has no force of law or corporate structure; however it is a 'higher calling' agreement that expresses a mutual desire to serve together in a way that brings honour to God through our shared worship, witness and service.

Given the Wesley Place redevelopment and the welcome to other Synod bodies to this site, we are open to this covenant being expanded to include other interested Vic.Tas Synod bodies who will have offices in the new tower complex alongside Uniting Vic.Tas and Wesley Church Melbourne.

Covenant Commitments

Wesley Church Melbourne and Uniting Vic.Tas commit to the following:

The two communities will:

- continue to support the development of The Wesley Centre for Ethics, Theology and Social Policy
- share resources, as appropriate, including prayer and worship, property, expertise and equipment
- co-sponsor public events of mutual interest
- develop effective ways of sharing information with one another
- work together in a spirit of respectful mutuality.

The Minister/s of the congregation and the Director of Mission of Uniting Vic.Tas will meet regularly for collegial support.

The Minister/s of the congregation, the Uniting Vic.Tas CEO and the Director of Mission will meet regularly to discuss leadership issues and cooperative initiatives; to communicate about activities and directions of the respective communities; and for prayer.

The Director of Mission or Mission and Ethos Partners of Uniting Vic.Tas will preach at Wesley Church on an occasional but regular basis, and report on the work of Uniting.

The CEO Uniting Vic.Tas will speak to the Wesley Church congregation about its work on an occasional but regular basis, by invitation.

Uniting Vic.Tas and Wesley Church Melbourne will be involved, as appropriate, in one another's discernment processes such as Joint Nominating Committees and Board selection.

Wesley Church commits itself to pray regularly for the Board, staff and clients of Uniting Vic.Tas and to provide worship opportunities at significant moments in Uniting's life.

The parties will review this Covenant every three years, or if required, earlier.



Uniting is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.



Uniting