



Greetings Members of Synod 2021,

I am writing on behalf of the Synod Business Committee to outline for you some of the ways in which our processes will work in the days ahead. Keep an eye out for an email reminder of various aspects of your engagement with and through the Synod 2021 portal from the Moderator and General Secretary which will arrive shortly. For now, though, I want to explain some of the logic behind our chosen process and pattern to enable you to most fully participate in our discernment and decision-making processes.

Once the Synod Standing Committee determined that Synod 2021 would be held online the Synod Business Committee did a survey of Uniting Church members across the ACT and NSW to gauge their reaction. There was a very strong message of support for attempts to move the Synod meeting online and significant trepidation about the idea of '3 or 4 days in a row on Zoom' and the resulting screen-fatigue it would create for Members. This resulted in our attempts to redesign the timing and process for an online Synod meeting with both the 'Member experience' and 'UCA meeting protocols' in mind.

We started with the last phase of every decision-making moment in mind – the seeking of the mind of the Synod on a particular question through what we often refer to as 'the consensus method'. Many of us are well used to sitting in a room with hundreds of others as the Moderator asks for a show of cards and we are used to looking around and seeing how the room is feeling. We are used to listening to question and speeches and reacting and responding. How, on earth, could we make this happen online – not just in a technical sense, but in a 'how we are used to discerning in community together' sense?

In our assessment as a Business Committee, the limitations of an online meeting to the communal/presence aspects of our usual meeting procedures would need to be overcome by stretching out the process into distinct phases. Our model for 2021 begins based on the following logic:

1. Proposals/Reports must be released to Members for pre-reading weeks in advance of our gathering online;
2. Members must be given the opportunity to ask Questions for Clarification prior to our gathering online;
3. The authors of a proposal or report must be given the opportunity to respond to Questions for Clarification prior to our gathering online

<https://nswact.uca.org.au/media/10030/letter-to-members-of-synod-2021-synod-business-committee-chair.pdf>



These first three parts of the model are predicated on the idea that we cannot take time when we are online together in council on these essential but early parts of the consideration by the Synod of any matter before it. To do this all online would take too much time and create the fatigue at the decision-point we are seeking to avoid.

What this requires, then, is that every Member of the Synod must engage with the papers well before any online session of Synod 2021. We need your Questions for Clarification for the authors/proposers, so that they can publish their responses to all Members through the portal prior to our first gathering online. For those with a detailed knowledge of the Manual for Meetings, I am describing a way for the Information Session (item 3.3 in the Manual) to happen prior to our gathering online in order to better facilitate our subsequent Deliberative and Decision Sessions as the most essential uses of our 'screen time'.

When we gather on Wednesday the 7th of April we will gather online to worship, to do some essential general business, to table and present the reports/proposals and then to launch directly into Discernment Groups. It would be highly counter-productive to our intentions to reduce the total screen time for Members to begin processing their thoughts and feelings about each report or proposal on the night, or even just prior to April the 7th.

To be clear, each Member must be ready to participate in Discernment Groups, well across the materials and ready to discuss and engage with other Members, on Wednesday the 7th April. To facilitate this, please ensure you have submitted any Questions for Clarification by 4<sup>th</sup> April to the authors/proposers via the following email address: [synodmeeting@nswact.org.au](mailto:synodmeeting@nswact.org.au). This will enable the questions and their responses to be made available to all Members.

Following our Deliberative Session on the Wednesday nights of each Synod in Session, the Synod Business Committee will collate the feedback from each group and will present a report back to Members by lunchtime each Friday. This is designed to assist the Decision Sessions which will take place on the Saturdays of each Synod in Session, which, as you will recall, we have identified as the most difficult to translate from a communal space into an online space. Our model created this way for Information and Deliberation Sessions to happen prior to these Saturday gatherings, specifically to minimise any interruptions to the main focus of testing the mind of the Synod on a particular matter amidst the strengths and limitations of meeting online.

Thank you for reading this message and for the prayerful and faithful work you will do both in preparation and in participation in this important moment in the life of the Uniting Church in NSW and the ACT. There are major decisions to be made this year. The Synod Business Committee will do our best to serve you as you bring your best to this vital work.

If you have any questions or feedback on the process as outlined please email [synodmeeting@nswact.org.au](mailto:synodmeeting@nswact.org.au).

Warm regards and every blessing.

Rev. Kent Crawford  
Chair, Synod Business Committee