



On the Way Together

Frequently Asked Questions

Use this file to find
answers to some
of the questions
people, groups or councils
might have
about picking up
On the Way Together

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The Synod has commended the *On the Way Together* five life giving themes and process to other councils, commissions and agencies of the Church.

How can we pick up *On the Way Together*?

The Synod asked for a simple and easy to use resource to assist other councils, commissions and agencies to implement *On the Way Together* in their own setting.

On the Way Together ENGAGE is a resource to help councils, commissions and agencies

- Become familiar with the *On the Way Together* process
- Understand and adopt, or modify the five life giving themes so that they reflect their own the values and calling to God's mission
- Prepare to implement *On the Way Together* in their own setting.

On the Way Together ENGAGE suggests that a small working group be asked to bridge the gap between the *On the Way Together* resources provided by the Synod and the realities of life in the local setting.

On the Way Together ENGAGE gives the working group some straightforward advice about the nature of *On the Way Together*, as well as three session plans for its meetings.

Each working group session will require about 30 minutes for pre-reading, and around an hour for the session.

The *On the Way Together* Engage session plans have all the information the working group will need. This includes instructions about which resources to use, when and how to use them, questions to consider and small tasks to complete.

The Working Group will need a capable leader – someone who is used to leading a small group and getting through an agenda efficiently. Of course, it will be important for the leader to get to the end of the session with everyone in the group 'on board' as well!

Perhaps it will be useful for the group that facilitates the *On the Way Together* journey to prepare its own *On the Way Together* map, drawing on the one page A4 Map and the group's own wisdom about what will work best in the local setting.

Do you remember the childhood question asked on almost every journey? Yes, that's it! "Are we there yet?" Whichever map you use – the *On the Way Together* Map or your own map – make sure that you keep the map in front of you. And let other people know as often as you can about where you are up to on the journey. The more people know about the journey, the more they can pace their participation and expectation.



On the Way Together ENGAGE sounds as if it will be a practical guide for us. But is there any resource to help us get the big picture about what needs to be done if we pick up *On the Way Together*?

There is a one page document on the *On the Way Together* website that provides the big picture. This file is titled the *On the Way Together* MAP file. This file is presented as a map. The map sets out the *On the Way Together* journey as a series of tasks.

If a council, commission or agency follows the map, it will travel the *On the Way Together* journey.

Sometimes we like to take detours. When we do, our journey is longer and uses more resources. But sometimes our journey is more interesting, and more enjoyable. Detours often bring diversity to our understanding. Detours can broaden or give depth to our appreciation of the journey.

So, while the map sets out the *On the Way Together* journey in a series of ordered and sequential tasks, be aware that your particular group might want to take a detour.

There is also practical guidance in the *On the Way Together* Report. Section five - appendices also includes an article titled, Implementing an *On the Way Together* journey in a local setting.

And there is an article in Section five that explains why *On the Way Together* is a journey worth taking. The article is titled, 'Planning to consider future directions for a missional church.'

If big picture thinking is important to you, there are two more articles in the *On the Way Together* Report, Section five – appendices. The first is by Rev Randal Prior. Randal writes about the huge changes that have impacted the Church – the change from Christendom to post-Christendom. Randal points how significant it is that the Church is faithful to God's calling.

The second article is by Dr Ruth Powell of the National Church Life Survey. Ruth points out how the aging nature of the UCA raises questions about future directions as well as how to minister to a church in rapid and significant decline. Together, these two articles paint a big picture against which getting involved in *On the Way Together* begins to make a lot of sense!



The *On the Way Together* Map sets out 12 tasks. Is *On the Way Together* going to take a lot of time and energy? Because we do have other things to get on with you know!

The *On the Way Together* Map does list 12 tasks.

However, when you look at the map you will see that the tasks are grouped into three categories.

The first set of tasks is for one person. They involve gathering the materials and becoming sufficiently familiar with them to be able to lead a working group through three sessions of about an hour each. This will take about a week.

The second set of tasks is for a small working group of about 3 to 6 people. They involve preparing a pathway to be proposed to the council or board that is anticipating engaging with the *On the Way Together* journey. This will take about 2 to 3 weeks.

The third set of tasks is for the congregation or council or board, commission or committee. These are the actual tasks of the *On the Way Together* journey itself. These tasks will take between 6 and 24 weeks, depending on how they are scheduled and how productive they are.

So, short answer – *On the Way Together* takes ‘as long as it takes.’

And yes, *On the Way Together* can happen while the other things happen as usual. *On the Way Together* will require some meetings, some reading, some reflection, and some time for discernment, some deciding and eventually some changes of direction.

On the Way Together is **not** about trying to add something to an already busy schedule of programs and activities.

On the Way Together **is** about listening for God’s calling to join God’s mission in our neighbourhood. *On the Way Together* **is** about responding faithfully to God’s calling.



What are the *On the Way Together* five life giving themes, where did they come from, and how are we going to use them?

The *On the Way Together* life giving themes came as the result of around 1500 people participating in some 40 or so spirited conversations. In these conversations people reflected on their experience of the Uniting Church when it has seemed to be at its best – when it has been at its most whole or most faithful. You can see the three types of spirited conversations in a pdf file on the website. The file is titled *On the Way Together Spirited Conversations*.

You can see some of things people talked about during these spirited conversations. They are written into the dot points or theme descriptions in the *On the Way Together* Report book, Section two.

Each theme is a short statement that sums up the reflections of spirited conversation.

Each theme has a call to action. The themes are not passive. They are not labels.

Each theme focuses attention on one big aspect of faithful Christian living in our neighbourhoods and wider world.

Each theme lifts us above the nitty-gritty of our church experience to see the vision the *Basis of Union* describes as being on the way to the promised end – the Kingdom or reign of God in action.

Each theme issues a call, a challenge if you like. Will we faithfully listen for and respond to God's invitation to a partner in God's mission in the world?

Each theme can become a rallying point for our listening, discerning, deciding and acting into the future.

So, our first challenge is to become familiar with the themes. *On the Way Together* ENGAGE – also available from the www.onthewaytogether.org website, is a resource that provides practical ways to become familiar with each of the themes.

Some people might say, "These themes are not written in our language. This is not the way we talk about our experience of the Church." And that might be true...

As I said, the first step in the *On the Way Together* journey is becoming familiar with the themes. You can do this by reading the theme descriptions for each theme. As you do so, reflect on them. Discuss them with other people in small groups. Do the ideas presented in the dot point theme descriptions relate easily with your experience of faithfully being the Uniting Church?

Use the themes in worship. Raise the themes in Bible studies. Use the themes to provide a focus for devotionals at church meetings, and to guide personal prayer. Begin to use the themes to group stories and categorize sections of reports. Use the themes to design meeting agendas, guide prayer and inform Bible study topic and passage selection.

The more you use the themes, the more familiar and more deeply meaningful they will become. Keep at it until the themes resonate deeply and easily with you.

You might want to re-write some of the theme description dot points in your own words. Or to add some more. That's great! The themes will only work when you make them your own.

We are going to use the five life giving themes as a stimulus and focus to our imagination. The second stage of the *On the Way Together* journey is Imagine. You can read about Imagine in the *On the Way Together* Report book, Section three - Imagine.

We will use one or more themes, alone or in any combination, to help us listen for God's calling and to imagine what responding to God's call might involve.

The themes can work to stimulate our imagination, so that we see in our minds eye the future as if it is already happening. We are searching for imagined stories. Scenarios of what is happening. In our imaginations we are looking to see who is involved, what is happening, where this is taking place... We are especially looking to see what impact is occurring because of the story or scenario we are imagining.

When we use the five life giving themes in this way, to see with our imagination, the themes work like lenses. They focus our attention, brings clarity to our vision and direction to our action.



What are provocative propositions and provocative proposals? Where do these come from?

The *On the Way Together* Report book introduces provocative propositions and provocative proposals in Section three – Imagine. These propositions and proposals are about using our imagination. Of course, we will be using our imagination to respond to God's calling to join God's mission in our neighbourhood and wider world.

And the *On the Way Together* five life giving themes will provide lenses through which we can focus our imagining.

The propositions and proposals are provocative because they provoke the future. Imagine prodding a sleepy relative or animal with a stick. That's what we mean by provocative. We are using our imaginations to put ourselves into the future, where we can imagine, or see, what is happening, who is involved. Most importantly, we see through our imagining what is happening because we, the church, are being faithful to God's calling.

Provocative propositions are short statements about the future we have imagined. Perhaps as few as 2 or as many as 5 sentences. No details. Just statements. Have a look at the *On the Way Together* Report, Section three – Imagine – pages 30 and 32 or if you are using the version from the *On the Way Together* website – p 28-30. There are 11 sample provocative propositions listed here.

Typically, an Imagine workshop might produce anywhere between 3 and 20 provocative propositions.

So you will need a way to refine these further.

That's one of the tasks involved in the next step - writing provocative proposals. A provocative proposal expands a provocative proposition into a developed story. Section three – Imagine offers a simple way to make this transition – from proposition to proposal.

Usually, it takes a small group to at least discuss a provocative proposition and tease out its many aspects into a story. Then perhaps one or two people might work together to take all of the ideas and combine them into a story. Usually the story will be about 500 to 1000 words long, or one to two sides of A4. By the way, if there are current ministry or mission programs or activities that the group senses a strong call to continue, re-write these as provocative proposals, too. They can be added to the new provocative proposals and tested in the same way.

Section three – Imagine has three sample provocative proposals on p 33-39 or page 31-37 in the pdf version. Your proposals, once tested using the two tests offered in Section three –Imagine, p 28 and 29 provide the basis for the next step – Innovate.

When the proposals have been tested and selected, its time to step back. Now its time to contemplate the work that has been done so far. p 29 or p 27 in the pdf version suggests some questions to guide your reflection, study and prayer.

We have become familiar with the *On the Way Together* themes and we now have some provocative proposals. How do we get from proposals expressed as stories to a plan that we can implement?

The *On the Way Together* report book, Section four – Innovate provides some practical suggestions to help you move from a story to a plan. You can find these suggestions on p 42 to 46 or p 40 to 44 in the pdf version.

First, read through the story searching for any clues as to what equipment, material, human resources, funds, rooms or spaces, relationships with other bodies or organizations or institutions might be mentioned.

Make a list. Then read the story style provocative proposals again. This time look even more deeply for the things you missed the first time round. These will be things that are a little harder to see lurking in the story. They will not be stated in an obvious way, but they will be there by implication. Dig deep. Add these to your list

Second, work out what sort of plan or at what level the planning is required to be done in order to implement each of the proposals.

Some proposals might only need formal permission and a blessing to proceed. Others might require a carefully developed plan. *On the Way Together* Report book, Section four – Innovate offers several options for planning. Choose the most appropriate level and style of planning. Remember that the aim of the plan is to make happen what has been proposed. The plan itself is merely a tool so try not to let the planning side of things dominate your vision. Keep asking, “Why are we doing this?” And find your answer in the provocative proposals you are working with.

Third, when you have your plan, submit it to the relevant group or council for adoption and permission to proceed.

Make sure that you are absolutely clear about the resources that will be required to make the plan work. Ask the group or Council or Board to set these aside for the plan.

Four, get started on the implementation of your plan.

Set up a schedule to time and sequence the development of the plan in action. Pace the work or ministry according to the plan. Revise the plan as necessary.

Assess progress with implementation of the plan. Adjust where necessary, seek additional resourcing, recruit more people, and arrange for training if that is needed. Look to the impact of the ministry or mission on the neighbours you have become involved with. Check the impact against the original provocative proposal. At this step, you might also report on your progress to the appropriate Council or Board.



What guidelines or principles can you offer to help us as we take the *On the Way Together* journey?

Guiding principles are useful when they are few, brief and to the point. On the Way Together ENGAGE sets out some critical guiding principles. These are:

Understanding

One cannot teach what one has not first learnt. Read the materials. Get to know them thoroughly before you introduce them to other participants.

Careful preparation

“A stitch in time saves nine,” reminds us of the value of taking care to prepare. As a ‘rule of thumb’, each of the three *On the Way Together* ENGAGE sessions will require an hour or so of preparation.

Redundancy

It takes somewhere between 18 and 22 times for a person to hear, experience and play with a new idea or word or practice before there is sufficient familiarity with it to use that idea, word or practice.

A wise leader will make sure that there are at least 25 opportunities for participants to encounter the materials before he or she can expect the participants to begin using the *On the Way Together* language, ideas and practices.

A wise leader will patiently provide many opportunities for language and ideas to be explored, clarified and explained.

Working out how to use every possible opportunity to create positive encounters with the *On the Way Together* ideas, language and practices ensures effective communication.

Patience

It ‘takes as long as it takes’ to deeply embed the *On the Way Together* language, ideas and practices. There’s no way around this.

The first indicator that participants have grasped the *On the Way Together* ideas, language and practices will be the easy and natural use of *On the Way Together* language in group meetings and conversation.

Readiness

Wise teachers know that an adult learns only when she or he is ready and free to do so. This is especially the case when learning for significant change. The best engagement with *On the Way Together* will occur when your local church or particular Uniting Church Council shows a readiness to engage with *On the Way Together*.

Some of the signs of readiness might include people:

- Deeply concerned about the Church’s neighbours and the neighbourhood, rather than about the future of the Church;
- desiring a refreshed congregational profile in relation to the neighbourhood;
- voicing opinions about the needs of various generations in the neighbourhood and in Church;
- noticing that the neighbourhood and the church demographics no longer reflect each other;
- noticing that the strong and lively links between the neighbours and the Church people are in decline or missing altogether;

- recognizing that we are part of the issue that most disturbs us;
- listening and talking frequently about 'reaching out' to the neighbours;
- expressing their passions about God's calling to mission with a refreshed clarity;
- excitedly sharing some new opportunity for ministry and or mission.

Saliency

A significant opportunity to introduce a new idea or practice assists its acceptance. Pushing a snowball uphill on a hot day is hard work. We often try to work against the reality of our situation. The resistance we encounter is discouraging and disabling. Saliency means that we watch and wait for the right time. The right time occurs when there is an obvious need or opportunity. This could come through a dilemma or crisis. Equally, the right time might arrive as a culmination of discernments or decisions.

If these principles are sustained, then it is highly likely that the experience of *On the Way Together* a journey into Christian vocation will be positive and rewarding.

