

**CONGREGATION OF CANBERRA CITY  
2025 ANNUAL MEETING AND ANNUAL REPORT**

**REPORT FROM UNITINGCARE CANBERRA CITY MANAGEMENT  
COMMITTEE**

This was another year in which the EMC has seen its numbers increasing. While this is evidence that the services we provide are needed and valued, it's disappointing that the need for these services is not diminishing. The visible numbers of people in Canberra who are homeless or who have uncertain housing appear to be increasing. The provision of food through breakfasts and lunches remains popular, especially the Feel Good Feeds which are being provided by an increasingly diverse range of community groups.

***UnitingCare Canberra City Management Committee***

The *UnitingCare* Canberra City Management Committee met nine times in 2024/25 with the Annual General Meeting being held on 12 September 2024. Office bearers elected at the AGM were Margaret Watt as Chairperson, Richard Scott as Secretary and Graeme Lowe as Treasurer. We noted with gratitude Anne Buttsworth's inspiring 19 years as Chair and recorded our appreciation for her work, especially with the Policy and Procedures Manual and other governance documents.

As indicated in the last three reports, succession planning remains at the forefront of our minds. We need to find willing successors for those committee members who have served for many years, particularly our Treasurer. We remain grateful for the support of all our ongoing committee members.

**Finance**

Thanks to the grant from the ACT Government and the generous financial support of many donors, the EMC remains in a financially stable condition. The trading result for the 2024/25 financial year was a surplus of \$31, 621.16. We have a long-term funding agreement with the ACT Government for our week day openings. The present term of three years ends on 30 June 2026 with an option of up to a further three years and then a second option of up to another four years.

Following the provision of extra government funding, the EMC has been open at weekends from 17 July 2021. In June 2025 the Director received confirmation that this funding would continue for another four years.

**Staff and Volunteers**

Our long term staff member John McDonald retired in March 2024 and died on Monday 23 June 2025. His funeral was held in City Church on Monday 30 June and we were thankful that it was led by Rev. Dr Paul Chalson and Rev. Ivan Roberts. John was important to many people, not just those at the EMC, and the service was a celebration of his life and of all the work he had done which had positively affected so many people.

We were fortunate that staffing was relatively stable during the year though various illnesses (influenza A!) provided some challenges. The Management Committee is very grateful to our staff who continue to support our guests through difficult times, especially Nicole Wiggins, our Director, and Cherie Styles, our Assistant Manager.

The EMC could not operate without the support of our volunteers. There has been a good supply of new volunteers over the year and we currently have a volunteer waiting list. The total number of volunteers supporting the EMC during the year was approximately 90.

### **Guest numbers**

Numbers are growing and weekday breakfast numbers at 9,952 have now exceeded pre-Covid levels. (Weekday breakfast numbers were 9,021 in 2019/20, 5,593 in 2020/21, 5,554 in 2021/22, 7,242 in 2022/23, 7,662 in 2023/24 and 9,952 in 2024/25). Attendance at the Community Hub (20,759) continues to be strong because of the opportunity to access phones, crisis food packs, computers and showers and to interact with other service providers. Weekends also have significant numbers (8,187). As well, over the seven days of opening, 3,744 food packs were handed out.

### **Potential relocation of the EMC**

Pilgrim House Policy Committee has established a working group to look at the potential relocation of the EMC and the refurbishment of Pilgrim House. The EMC Management Committee has two representatives on this working group, Graeme Lowe and Malcolm Leslie. Our Director and Assistant Director are also being consulted.

### **Celebration of 20 years**

The EMC held an evening event on Monday 7 July to celebrate its 20th anniversary. Approximately 80 people attended, including representatives of various services, volunteers and supporters. Speakers at the event were:

Yvette Berry, Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Homes and New Suburbs;

Bill Shorten, UC Vice Chancellor and new EMC Patron;

John Hargreaves, the former ACT MLA who originally opened the centre;

Jack, an EMC guest, who gave his personal story of homelessness; and

Paul Chalson, who spoke on behalf of City Uniting Church.

Feedback from the event was extremely positive. The Director was interviewed on ABC radio as was Jack.

The EMC also held a lunch for guests on Monday 7 July to celebrate the 20th Anniversary. It was attended by 59 guests who enjoyed pizzas, desserts and lucky door prizes.

### **Outreach**

One of the EMC's aims is to work cooperatively as part of the social welfare community in Canberra. The Director regularly attends meetings with other agencies including the ACT Government's Community Services Directorate.

### **EMC Business Plan**

The Management Committee is presently in discussions with a consultant who will review the current business plan and help formulate a new plan for the next five years. The current Business Plan groups activities for the EMC round five strategies:

- Better experience of homelessness with access to essential services
- Better physical and mental health
- Better life skills
- Better social connections

- The EMC as a sustainable organisation.

These strategies have guided the work of the EMC for the last few years, especially through the services available in the Community Hub. The Community Hub also provides an opportunity for guests to build social connections for our guests. Some just like to come in, have a hot drink and chat to the staff and other guests. Others participate in activities such as trivia quizzes, art and craft groups and the current affairs discussion group. Morning teas are held to mark special occasions. Regular Feel Good Feed lunches are held and, as noted, the community support for this activity is growing.

Pets in the Park continues to be held on the third Sunday of each month and dog and cat food is also available through the EMC. We know that pets are an important part of many guests' lives.

The guest Christmas party was held on 16 December 2024 with 50 guests attending. The hot meal was provided by Green Hills and the Christmas hampers by Helping ACT and the Egyptian Coptic Church. Door prizes and gift vouchers that were provided as donations were given to guests.

### **Moving forward - the EMC as a sustainable organisation**

We are very grateful for the ongoing financial support of many regular donors as this gives us confidence in our financial situation. Donations come from many different sources, from generous individuals in CCUC to other faith groups and local businesses and service organisations. We have also had two major appeals: the Hands Across Canberra Giving Day appeal for Canberra Day and our annual End of Financial Year Appeal. Both of these appeals have been very generously supported.

As well as our financial donors, we are also very reliant on our regular donors of goods such as items for the emergency food packs, clothing and blankets, especially in winter.

Supporters receive quarterly newsletters about the work and activities of the EMC. These newsletters are also sent to everyone on the mailing list of Canberra City Uniting Church and the members of the Pilgrim House Policy Committee. We have an active Facebook page and our website is updated regularly with news and events.

The continuing support from our staff, volunteers and guests is very much appreciated, as is the work of the other services that attend the Community Hub.

Finally, my grateful thanks goes to Canberra City Uniting Church, the ACT Government and the members of the EMC Management Committee.

Margaret Watt

Chair, September 2025

