

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT – March 13 2020 ASC

*Regulation 3.6.4.2 Duties of the President: "The duties of the President shall be to give spiritual leadership and encouragement to the Church generally, to represent the Church as appropriate, to give counsel as occasion requires and to do such other things as may be requested or advised by the Assembly"*

In my November report, I spoke about our Identity as the UCA.

I continue to speak about this in various fora –

- a panel on Religious Discrimination, hosted by the Public Information Advocacy group here in Sydney, where I was invited to speak about the UCA's perspective on the Draft Bill, based on our submission.
- a presentation on "Arise and be awake to Renew Creation" at the Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly in Taiwan
- a discussion at the UnitingCare Leaders Forum about our identity and connections as Church and agencies.
- a Uniting Theology and Leadership Symposium with 60 people from different parts of the UCA. "Called by God – Christian leadership, expressed through the life and mission of the Uniting Church."

In many of the places I visit, I have opportunity to listen to peoples hopes, understandings and concerns about the Uniting Church. I have been moved by the voices of youth and young adults at the President's Roundtables that I have held in Hobart, Launceston and Adelaide. They have shared: "Their best experiences of the UCA; what they value about the UCA; the challenges they see us facing, and their hopes for our Church. I have also asked: "How would you like the Uniting Church to be engaged in the public space?"

I have seen healthy and vital congregations, and Presbyteries working well. I have been inspired by creative initiatives the Councils of our Church are engaging in to shape a life-giving, faithful embodiment of the Gospel of Christ, within our changing environments. Discussions continue around the best missional ways to use the resources we have – people, property, gifts of our members, and funds.

I have had pastoral conversations with ministry agents and members of local churches, Presbyteries and Synods, who have deep concerns about how we interact with each other, and in the worst-case scenarios, undermine the life and witness of the UCA, and diminish our participation in the mission of God in the world. People generally value the collaborative nature of our Church and highlight the importance of us working together lovingly and respectfully reflecting the way of Christ.

I want to highlight four gatherings that I have been part of and note the themes that have been part of my presentations, and that I have heard from others.

**Uniting Care Leaders Forum (November 2019 Canberra)**

**Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (November 2019 Taiwan)**

**Uniting Church Leadership And Theology Symposium (February 2020)**

**Three Roundtables (Hobart, Launceston and Adelaide)**

**Uniting Care Leaders Forum**

Theme of the Forum: "Unity in Purpose and Action – How we can work together to create a society of justice, trust and hope".

I highlighted our theology of incarnation – an embodied Gospel and how this is expressed through our agencies, congregations, schools, chaplaincies and other ministry contexts.

Charles Harris spoke of this holistic Gospel and a holistic evangelism with "three prongs":

1. "*Grass roots – loving people as they are and where they are*".
2. "*The whole Gospel*" – (related to all of life)
3. "*Stability – commitment to the local community*".

(Charles Harris, "A Struggle for Justice" by William W. Emilsen, MediaCom, p. 104)

Theology of death and resurrection and 'resistance and transformation' (Nyambura Njoroge – Kenya and World Council of Churches)

The forum and other collaborations of wider UCA and agencies contribute to the movement of the UCA and its agencies – toward a just, equitable, compassionate and hope-filled society.

**Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly**

Nov 21-27 2019 in Hsinchu, Taiwan. Two hundred and fifty women – three from Australia – Rev Amel Manyon and I from the UCA and Bishop Genieve Blackwell from the Anglican church in Melbourne.

The theme of the Assembly was: "Arise, and be awake to Reconcile, Renew and Restore the Creation." I spoke on the sub theme: "Arise and be awake to Renew Creation".

There were common themes among the churches, including our commitment to "the Renewal of the Whole Creation" and gender justice. Women from different countries also face distinct challenges: e.g. struggling for indigenous rights in the Philippines; persecution and exclusion in Pakistan; caught up in global politics in Taiwan.

Themes highlighted in my paper:

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“Women awake to renewal” – Biblical witness of women (Luke and John’s Gospel)

Small group conversation: who are the women who have shared their faith, the good news of the Risen Christ with you and contributed to renewal for you personally or in the lives of your Christian communities?

“Women Arising” – growing into their fullest humanity as women and men created in the image of God (this was echoed in the Uniting Church’s Fijian National Conference Theme this year in Adelaide: “Created in the image of God- who am I?”).

“Awake to the lives of others and the earth” – signs of the Spirit renewing the world, the church and the whole creation.

“Awake to the renewal of the whole earth” – I shared some of the resolutions of the Assembly and input from the President’s Conference, particularly from our Pacific partners.

“Partnerships in renewal” – working with UN, non-government agencies.

“Renewal in Australia’ – including recognizing the truth of our history, and addressing injustice and dispossession of First Peoples.

“Renewal” – being awake, listening deeply to one another and discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit among us. Intergenerational community. Encouraging people to tell their story. Hope and trust in the faithfulness of God to bring renewal.

**Uniting Church Leadership and Theology Symposium** – a number of people shared their perspective on the intersection of theology and leadership in the UCA and different models of leadership.

The paper I gave is available through the ASC portal.

There may be some points that you are interested in, or may like to talk with me about – via email or phone?

“Called by God – Christian leadership, expressed through the life and mission of the Uniting Church.”

Key points: Christian leadership arises from Christian discipleship.

Leadership in and through the UCA is shaped by core elements of UCA identity:

- Our understanding of being a movement of the Holy Spirit
- Our Christological centre
- Our holistic understanding of the Gospel and the nature of God’s mission
- Our ecclesiology – including our every member ministry and collaborative, egalitarian, mutual and intergenerational understandings of Christian community.

- Our leadership arises from God’s vision and God’s call to us as a Church to participate in Christ’s reconciling and renewing mission in the world.

Leadership in the Uniting Church is both personal and communal. Our interconciliar, collaborative models of decision-making and leadership call us to intentionally form UCA communities and leaders in ways that attend to discerning the Spirit’s guidance, being accountable for our responsibilities as councils and leaders, and exercising power consistent with our theology, polity and Christian praxis.

I invited participants to reflect on their best experience of the UCA, because this has been a question I have asked at the Roundtable, and I think there is a leadership component to this. Christian leadership arises from love - deep love for God, for people and for our world, and a love for the Uniting Church.

### **Three Roundtables**

I have now held 5 Roundtables: in Canberra, Darwin, Hobart, Launceston and Adelaide – in the next month I have one scheduled in Perth and another in Brisbane and I will hold three in Victoria in May. Other plans for rural Queensland and NSW are still unfolding.

There are sections to the evening.

Part three of the process I wanted to mention here, where I invite participants to place post-it notes on the four categories:

“My best experience of the UCA is..”

“What I value about the UCA is..”

“Challenges facing the UCA”

“I wish the UCA....”

Part four looks at how they would like the Church to be in the public space.

### **Draft of The Religious Discrimination Bill**

Since we last met as the ASC, the Assembly, in collaboration with UnitingCare Australia has made a submission on the Second Draft exposure of the Religious Discrimination Bill.

### **National Conferences**

Members of the Assembly Resourcing Unit and I have met with National Conference chairs and attended the Fijian National Conference.

The Fijian National Conference focused on Identity and Mental health, with the theme of “Created in the image of God – Who am I?”. This was organized by the Second-Generation team.

## **Our response to national and global disasters**

The various councils of our Church are working together in our response to the bushfires and continuing response to other disasters, including drought and floods, and coronavirus.

Rev Dr Stephen Robinson continues to offer excellent resourcing to the Church as we respond to disasters.

## **Our Ecumenical Engagement**

Globally, members of, World Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia, World Methodist Council, World Communion of Reformed Churches

ICAN – International Campaign against Nuclear Weapons

National Council of Churches in Australia – leaders' forum has just been postponed. They were negotiating a meeting with the Prime Minister.

## **Communication and Formation**

How do we communicate our narratives of hope?

Every member is called to share our narratives of hope that arise from the Gospel of Christ.

What are the lenses through which we view each other, our ministry contexts?

Working together as Councils and leaders.

Forming people in being Christians, reflecting God's abundant grace and liberating hope in how we speak, how we manage our emotions, how we negotiate differences,

How are we sustained in our ministries?

What is the dominant narrative we hear of the Church and in the wider society? What are alternative narratives?

Whose narrative is preferred?

What are the Gospel narratives that we need to raise up?

**Personal** – my Dad died on November 26<sup>th</sup>. His funeral was on December 9<sup>th</sup> – I greatly appreciated the Assembly General Secretary and President-elect attending.

## **FUTURE:**

**National Justice meeting – Developing a revised: “Vision for a Just Australia”**

**President's Conference – Oct 2-5, 2020 Called by God**

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The 2nd **President's Conference** will be held in Adelaide at Pilgrim Uniting Church and Uniting Communities in the centre of Adelaide - October 2-5 2020 Theme: "Called by God" - it will focus on living our Christian vocation in our daily life.

We will explore "every member ministry"- its many forms, from local churches through to Uniting Church agencies and schools through to faithful people serving in their profession and living out their Christian discipleship in their relationships, families, communities and daily living.

**Developing young adult leaders – National Young Adult Leaders Conference (NYALC)** will be held from January 21-24 2021 at Nunyara, Adelaide.