

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I received an email this week that began with:

"There has been a lot of water pass under the proverbial bridge since we met you on the way to the Assembly." And I could say amen to that! It is only six weeks today since the Assembly meeting concluded.

On Wednesday night, I was at the Ordination service at the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Fiji in Suva. They ordained 17 ministers and 3 deaconesses. The preacher, Bishop Minerva Carcano from the United Methodist Church in the USA preached on the text Mark 4: 35-41- Jesus stilling the storm. She preached this in keeping with the theme of the Methodist Conference "Keeping the Methodist Drua shipshape".

She encouraged the church through noting: when the storms come our way as the Church - Jesus is in the boat - and will calm the storm. We need not be afraid - place our trust in the living Christ.

I began to see a water theme emerging, and I also heard her word speaking to our situation in the storms we experience as the Church - Jesus is in the boat calming the storm.

As I noted last night, I came from the Assembly with a deep sense that God had guided us and brought us to the decisions we made.

I know that we have a particular opportunity to review the Assembly, and it is mentioned in the finance report and the General Secretary's report, but I want to briefly mention that I am conscious of the remarkable, wide ranging, detailed and intense work that goes into planning an Assembly meeting and the many people involved in the planning and implementation. The image of the Body of Christ with all the various gifts contributing to the faithful working of the whole is the prominent image that comes to mind.

Thank you to the many people who contributed to the Assembly meeting.

There were thanks at the meeting and thanks communicated since the meeting.

I wanted to highlight:

Geoffrey Grinton, as Business Manager and Chair of the Local Arrangements Committee, Geoffrey's enormous support in running the meeting - the detailed green sheets, the instructions on screen, his deep commitment to the UCA and our processes.

The Local Arrangements Committee and the Synod of Vic/Tas. We know what time and energy goes in to planning this national event and they did it with grace and such high levels of skill.

Jenny Bertalan, who prepared all the reports/papers, ensured we were communicating all that was needed to Assembly members, and worked tirelessly at the Meeting and now afterwards to ensure we are prepared to continue on the work of the Assembly.

To the General Secretary for her oversight of the program, budget, logistics, the writing of various reports and the way she worked with me as I chaired the meeting.

To the Business Committee - the way you worked throughout the meeting to ensure the processes of the Assembly worked well.

The facilitation team, so ably led by Heather Watson.

My chaplains, Felicity Amery, Rob Brown and Charissa Suli, their care and prayers and practical support, kept me focused, calm and centred in Christ.

Communications team - Matt and Shane and the whole team, including Comms staff from Synods. Matt was up early and into the late hours of the night, working on media releases and other communications.

I am grateful for Matt's guidance throughout that time for me - drafting media releases, guiding me through media interviews - thank you.

The Assembly staff - I am so glad to be working with this team

It has felt at times over the past six weeks that there have been some stormy moments or troubled waters around us, but in the midst of the various responses to the Assembly meeting, I continue to have a deep peace that Christ is with us, ruling and renewing our Church. Christ has not abandoned us as some correspondents have suggested.

Christ is present - calming the storm, offering us peace and hope.

One of the Responsibilities of the President is to represent and promote the decisions of the Assembly to the Church.

1) Our decision on marriage.

We have received people's feedback about the decision to hold two distinct and equal views. Some are joyful about our decision, some from different points of view have described it as a wise decision. Some people are distressed.

Some of my reflections on the marriage conversation post Assembly.

It was very helpful to meet with Moderators, General Secretaries and Assembly Officers in regards to the pastoral response to the Assembly decision on marriage.

They and Presbytery ministers and staff, have pastoral responsibilities that have them responding to various responses in the contexts they know well and through the relationships they have as part of their ministry. Their work in communicating the decision, reassuring congregations and continuing to hold the church together has been outstanding,

The proposal was not what people expected. As we know there were those who thought they could predict what would happen.

This was a clearly discerned decision - it was supported by a broad-based number of Assembly members.

My hope coming out of the Assembly was that people would accurately represent the Assembly's decision and treat the Assembly members with respect in the way they conveyed the decision or responded to it. By and large this has been the case.

But there are those who have misrepresented the Assembly's decision.

I was hopeful that we would be able to live together- while recognising our differences.

I am concerned that when we keep in silos and don't listen to or spend time with people who have other perspectives than our own, we risk failing to understand the other as a faithful disciple of Christ.

It is easy to write an email or post on Facebook declaring our outrage and/ or describing the other as apostate, but I think it is harder to say those things in the face of another human being.

I think passionately disagreeing with one another is not unusual in the church, if we are passionate about following the way of Jesus. I am saddened when we are not willing to see that the other may also be a faithful disciple of Christ in their understanding of the Bible and theological foundations, even though it is not our own.

One of the good things that has arisen is that we have engaged in theological discussion and in conversation about Scripture.

This is for another day and another conversation, but through an educational/formational lens, we need to continue to strengthen our efforts in growing people in discipleship through deep engagement with Scripture and theology. It is also important that we engage people in communal contexts where they hear other people's perspectives.

There were other significant decisions that we made as an Assembly and I have had opportunity to engage with people about some of these.

2) I have spoken in a number of contexts about Domestic and Family Violence and our Church's response. I had the opportunity to talk about our decision at the South East Asian Regional office' Workshop in Bali that had as its theme gender Justice theology.

I spoke about the various ways we are encouraging our Church to respond to domestic and family violence

- Through UnitingCare agencies,
- through theological colleges equipping people in ministry in responding to domestic violence.
- Through workshops in congregations.

Our Uniting World program coordinator in Bali, Dr Deborah Murthy spoke of A safe house for women and children escaping domestic violence.

This week the Methodist Church in Fiji reported on a project of building 40 apartments that will be used to provide housing for women and children escaping domestic violence.

I will be heading to the Presbyterian Assembly of Vanuatu on Tuesday. Some of you have met Deaconess Martha who has been a leader in encouraging women in developing their gifts and offering leadership. They also are working on programs that are addressing domestic violence and its impact on families and communities.

3) For the Whole Creation

This resolution is an affirmation and continuation of the Assembly's work and advocacy for many years about the healing and renewal of creation.

We know addressing the impacts of climate change is a major ongoing issue for us, and in particular with our partners in the Pacific.

I met up with James Bhagwan in Fiji this past week and spoke with him about the church's work in addressing climate change. The Methodist Church in Fiji and the Fijian government are taking a lead on addressing the impacts of climate change and ways to overcome it.

James set up a meeting with the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner's office in the Pacific and their representative, Dr Chitralekha Massey

We had a wide-ranging conversation, including both internal and external migration matters in response to climate change.

I will host my first President's Conference in Nadi, Fiji, from July 13 to 17, 2019. The conference will focus on – the theme of "For the Whole Creation" - addressing climate change. We will also explore two other themes - Christian education/formation and gender justice.

4) Our decision affirming the Sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders- acknowledging their spiritual connection to the land.

My preparation for Assembly included Walking on Country on Ngarrindjeri Country with Sean Weetra. Sean is Chair of UAICC in SA.

Sean is deeply connected to his country. He learnt the Ngarrendjeri language from his grandma. He was a member of Assembly and deeply engaged with encouraging young people in their leadership.

You will have seen the Dusty Feet Mob dance at the Installation. Wanita Calyun and her partner Robert , who was a member of Assembly and a member of the National Executive of UAICC, are encouraging children and young people through the arts. I think one of the ways we can express our Covenant relationship is investing time and resources in these young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. I look forward as President to working with UAICC in encouraging these young leaders.

I have enjoyed connecting with Assembly Staff and working on particular projects or meetings together.

Assembly Resourcing Unit

Meeting with National Conference Leaders with Apwee Ting and Rob Floyd on August 7 - as I mentioned last night - one of those signs of hope.

I have been working with the Assembly Resourcing Unit in developing plans for NYALC, the National Young Adult Leaders Conference to be held at Nunyara Conference Centre in Adelaide from January 17-20,2019. We are hoping to encourage Young Adults who were Assembly members to attend and for them to encourage others to attend.

Uniting World

Participating in the South East Asian Regional Workshop in Bali (see report in Assembly Update.)

Connecting with projects of Uniting World in Fiji and Vanuatu and exploring ways we can express our partnership in mutual and effective ways.

Frontier Services - promoting the Great Outback Barbecue and going to Alice Springs in September to be part of the work party at the John Flynn Memorial Church.

Representing the UCA at Leaders of Churches meetings

Prior to the Assembly I represented the President at an Ecumenical conference, celebrating the 70th anniversary of the World Council of Churches.

NCCA Forum and a meeting of Leaders of Churches in September

I have had some very good ecumenical conversations with the President of the Lutheran Church, Anglican and Catholic colleagues and conversations with United Methodist colleagues in the United States of America.

Meeting regarding Advocacy – with Sureka and Claerwen, and will meet with Rob Floyd.

Meeting with new Group Manager of Redress scheme

Listening to people's stories of faith and discipleship, a source of joy to hear the many ways Uniting Church members are following the way of Jesus in their daily lives.

President's Conference in October 2020 – on Christian Vocation

Various strands – for people expressing their Christian discipleship through various work settings, professional bodies, parenting, ordained ministry

Focus on every member ministry - exploring God's call to various expressions of Christian discipleship

I hope these reports will give you an overview of what my responsibilities as President have included. As the council to which I am accountable, I will seek to give you a picture of what I am seeing of the national view of our Church. I look forward to your feedback, wisdom and insight in response to these reports.

I am deeply grateful to God for upholding me in grace and pray that God will continue to equip me and give me wisdom in serving Christ and the Church as President.