

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

I began my message at the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly with the Yolŋu Matha phrase: “Bala limurr rojirr ŋorrangitjilil” i.e. “let us return to the white ash of the fire”. Hearts on Fire that was what God’s Spirit impressed upon my heart which the previous ASC affirmed as the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly theme. Preparing this reflection I have just been reading morning devotions from Revelation 2 where the letter speaks to the Church of Ephesus saying that Jesus has one thing against them, they have forgotten their first love. My devotional asks the question: “Have you become so busy doing things for the Church your personal relationship with Jesus lacks passion?”

It is our last meeting for this triennium and we will reflect on what the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly gave us as an incoming ASC to undertake and we’ll look at what we need to bring to the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly. We are an important community with governance responsibilities, and we are a community of Christ, we gather as Church. How have we attended to all of this during these three years?

I was impressed by my brother Ps Ray Minniecon at the UAICC National Executive Meeting recently naming the four strategic directions we have established in the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan: Live out a joyful faith; Grow with God; Be a voice for justice; Journey as one Uniting Church. I normally shape my report around these four directions however I want to reflect upon the areas that have occupied my heart and mind since we last met, indeed throughout this triennium. You might see some alignment with the strategic directions; I leave that for your discernment.

Our response to the Royal Commission into the Institutional Sexual Abuse of Children has, throughout these three years, been in my thoughts, prayers and daily work. John Cox will report on the work of the National Task Group, the final Report and Recommendations of the Royal Commission, the current position with regards to a truly National Redress Scheme and what we must embrace going forward to be a safe church for all people. The General Secretary of the NSW-ACT Synod has reminded us often this is not a matter of compliance, this is essentially missional.

I want to say how diligently and compassionately have the National Task Group in collaboration with the Synod Task Groups applied themselves on behalf of the Church firstly, for survivors and then, to ensure we have the right practices and policies across the breadth and depth of the Church. I preached and participated in a service of lament at Gordon Uniting Church here in Sydney on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2018. I commend to you the resource the ARU prepared which is online and affords congregations and others in worship the opportunity to acknowledge our failings and the effect upon the innocent, to lament and to corporately make a commitment to survivors, to the wider community and to the families and members of our Church.

We have been engaged with the conversation about honouring First Peoples as Sovereign and what that means for the practises of the Church. The 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly will be asked firstly to affirm the historical reality that First Peoples are sovereign. I have named this truth consistently throughout this triennium when I have publically undertaken acknowledgements to country, in media announcements and videos, and in sermons and writings. UAICC will ask the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly to adopt, as our friends the United Church of Canada have done, the United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous Peoples, as an instrument against which our practises, policies and legislation can be tested. This is not a hard thing to do, given the Australian Government formally endorsed the Declaration in 2007.

There will be other actions which flow out of our affirmation of First Peoples sovereignty which UAICC will bring to the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly, including the reaffirmation of the decision made at the 2000 Assembly to support a treaty with Australia’s First Peoples.

I have been delighted to engage with the wide diversity of the Church, seeking to hold a space for grace, whilst discussing our understandings about marriage, in deed more widely, our understandings of human relationships, creation and God. Sadly some of this conversation within the Church has been as harsh as within the broader community. However I have participated in conversations shaped with the Christian consideration and empathy which I believe Christ’s love compels us to afford one

another. At this ASC we will need to endorse a way forward which enables the best of who we are as the followers of Jesus to; rise the fore.

Throughout this triennium I have also prioritised each of the 12 national conferences together with the Multi-cultural Cross-cultural National Reference Committee. I have been seeking ways in which the office of the President might help the Church to recognise the gift of God within the wonderful cultural diversity of our Church. The Spirit is transforming our Church through the covenant with the UAICC and through the culturally diverse peoples of our Church. The challenge for us is to recognise what the Spirit is doing and move with the Spirit. This means significant changes to the ways we “do” things now.

For me personally these culturally diverse communities have enhanced joy in my faith journey and deepened my appreciation of the mystery of God. I pray that we will be transformed into a truly intercultural community and that we shall all grow through the encounter of God, glimpsed through culturally diverse lenses.

Given this is the final ASC for the triennium, I want to thank all the members of this Standing Committee, including those who are not here and those who have resigned for various reasons. You have undertaken a major change task set by the previous ASC together with enacting the decisions of the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly. We have, I believed, strengthened our governance oversight and enhanced collaboration, for we are a national Church. The alignment by all Synods with the National Safe Church Framework is a model for us, it represent “possibility”, beyond the sum of us.

Finally friends, I have sort to facilitate the national leaders of our Church coming together in a more focussed way; the Assembly Officers, the Moderators, the UAICC Chairperson and the Synod General Secretaries. Our individual jurisdictions, our inter-councillor councils, i.e. our structure has been referred to as a Christocracy rather than a democracy, demanding of us that we do everything in our power to seek the unity of the Spirit which Ephesians 4 speaks of, and in which Psalm 133 declares there is the blessing of God.

Let us continue friends, by the grace of God, to grow up into Christ and build the body up in love.  
Marrkapmirri, Stuart