

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### *Connections*

I have spent time with and brought greetings to the following congregations: Broome and Mowanjum (in WA), Darwin Memorial and Living Water in the Northern Synod; Cherrybrook, Bankstown and Balmain in NSW-ACT Synod; Benalla in the Vic-Tas Synod; Port August both the town congregation and the UAICC congregation in the SA Synod. I have also spent time with individual ministers in Qld, Vic and NSW.

In February I travelled with the SA Moderator to Port Augusta for a young people's round table. A model of engagement I've encouraged Deidre will share with the whole church. I was able to bring greetings to both congregations and to preach at the Commissioning of Paul Glazbrook in the Parkin Sturt heartlands patrol. There were many of the faithful Frontier Service supporters from Adelaide who travelled up for this worship celebration, another step in the journey of healing and moving forward.

For the months of December and most of January I worked out of the Assembly offices in Sydney, supporting the Acting General Secretary and extending the pastoral concern of the ASC to all our staff during a time of significant transition. This time also proved to be a valuable opportunity for me to connect with a wide range of people.

### *Communications*

There have been three specific video messages: the Christmas message 'God with Us; the Survival Day message for 26<sup>th</sup> January, and the embargoed Easter message - 'Renewed Hope'. The Christmas message generated a good deal of media including breakfast television ABC News 24. Survival Day also attracted fair media coverage with the call to have a national conversation about sovereignty and treaty. We have filmed the Easter message from Ikara Wilpena in the Flinders Ranges, whilst 'Walking on Country' with Rev Denise Champion, Candace Champion, Denise's sister, Ian Dempster, together with the SA Moderator and husband Lawrie, Rev Jon and Kathryn Button from Port Augusta, and Ps Paul and Robyn Glazbrook. Denise shares the message with me, which I hope models something for our Church and the nation.

Sanctuary and the #LetThemStay initiative have been one of the major foci in both our internal and external communications, and has been an especially big load on the Uniting Justice Australia team. Our church is amazing! Having said that I note that for some congregations this movement is difficult and they are confused.

I've done interviews for the NSW-ACT, SA, QLD and WA Synod publications on a range of matters. With Dennis Corowa we have responded to the closing the Gap report and with the Multi Cultural Cross Cultural leadership we have spoken about our passion for the Church to become truly intercultural.

I was interviewed by The Australian on our Resolution from the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly regarding Palestine and Israel. This created some heat, with our friends in the Jewish community and the Palestinian community together with some of our ministry agents, groups, individuals and it played out international through social media. I have valued the wisdom of many especially the relations with other Faith Chair Rev Dr Michael Barnes and Rev Dr Matthew Wilson.

Many of you will be aware of the difficulties with respect to the 'defined benefit' fund members and changes in Government legislation. These are reported on for this meeting. We continue to be pastoral sensitive and to seek to bring clarity for all our faithful ministers and their spouses who have been adversely affected.

It was good to sign the pledge along with other Australian and global faith leaders to end modern slavery. I signed as did some other leaders separately and Mark Zirnsak from the Vic-Tas Synod sign at the ceremony in Canberra the following day. I have also taken the opportunity whilst in Sydney to meet with Carolyn and Fuzz Kitto who represent 'Stop the Traffik', which we through Uniting World are members of.

*Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*

This has been an important ongoing focus of my time, attending National Reference Group Meetings, reading materials and in February attending a very useful two day training conducted by the Vic-Tas Synod internal Counsel and Director of Communications. The scenario based training conducted as a formal hearing into the Uniting Church and dealing with schools and 'out of home care' was relevant and instructive. It highlighted for me some gaps in our policy and processes which I have taken up with the Executive Officer of the Task Group.

#### *Other Areas of Ministry*

You will know that in this triennium one important focus for me is to raise the profile and the voice of the National Reference Committee for Multi Cultural Cross Cultural Ministries. This has me attending their meetings and building relationships through National Conferences and with the Synod based consultants. I have been meeting with the National Directors of MCCM and Uniting World and leaders from within the Uniting Church Middle Eastern communities. The General Secretary was able to join us just last week for another meeting as we work towards the first National Middle Eastern Conference (MENC) in September. We are also exploring new and creative relationships with the Christian Church in the Middle East.

Given the global conflicts, people displacement and refugee concerns together with the ensuing national issues that these tensions and conflicts create it is, for us, a very important opportunity to gather the wisdom and understanding of our Middle Eastern members.

There are two other areas I will comment on briefly. I am pleased we are receiving the work of the General Secretaries conversations at this meeting. I have spent a significant proportion of my time since the last meeting on matters of finance, governance and leadership. For me as President it is about supporting conversations and relationships which will help us to enhance the Uniting Church's capacity to contribute to the mission of Christ to the world.

Finally, whilst there is a good deal of media around the issues of same gender marriage, a possible plebiscite and the call of some to suspend parts of the racial discrimination legislation, we are faithfully seeking to carry out the resolution of the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly. Particularly to facilitate respectful conversations within the rich theological and cultural diversity that is the Uniting Church. This is why we have chosen to not make public comment.

It is an immense privilege to be invited into people's lives as a minister, which continues for me as President. Now I'm blessed to participate in the communities of the wonderful cultural diversity of our Church and of our ecumenical and international partners. I am also valuing the creativity, wisdom and sensitivity of the new General Secretary.

Stuart McMillan  
10<sup>th</sup> March, 2016