

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

1. Living out a Joyful Faith:

A significant way the diverse cultures within our Church, celebrate and fellowship is through their national conferences of which there are 12. In the period since our July meeting I have attended: South Sundanese (Melbourne), Niuean (Sydney), Samoan (Melbourne), and Middle Eastern (Sydney) conferences. The opportunity to hear hopes and dreams, to build relationships, to worship and learn, to share the life and witness of the wider Uniting Church and to break bread together have been for me a priority.

Rev Dr Andrew Dutney in his retiring address to the 14th Assembly on 12th July 2015 said: *"It really concerns me that the traditional mainstream of the Church is so mesmerised by its own decline that it can't lift its eyes to see the wonderful thing that the Spirit is doing in gathering the Church afresh – from the edges."* *"God is calling us to be a Church which is culturally and linguistically diverse at its core. Not essentially British with add-ons from other cultures."*

I have made the Multicultural Cross Cultural Ministry National Reference Committee (MCCM NRC) a priority from the time I was President-elect. Rob Floyd and I met with these leaders in October in Sydney. Our Church is becoming a truly intercultural community and the MCCM NRC leadership group has played a significant role in bringing to the fore contextual understandings and experiences, offering leadership and insight to the Church. They also have a great time together – they live out a joyful faith.

Finally I need to just mention that in early October I gave a talk and preached at the 200th Anniversary Celebrations of the first Methodist place of worship in the southern hemisphere, Castlereagh, near Penrith in Sydney, at the foot of the mountains. A place that has seen continuous worship, training and community connection for these 200 years, they have lived out a joyful and fruitful faith. It was great to be with my dear friend Rev Dick Udy.

2. Growing with God:

I reported on Ecumenical relationships to the Christian Unity Working Group in October at their gathering in Melbourne about the actions I have taken over the past 27 months. I was surprised when I developed a list from my diary entries, how much I have been engaged with in this important fundamental work for us.

With the other National Church Leaders (NCL) in September I attended the opening of the new Coptic – Eporo Tower in Melbourne and the gala dinner for His Holiness Pope Tawadros II. The NCL group then met in Melbourne at the Victorian (VCC) and National (NCCA) Council of Churches offices in Melbourne. The General Secretary of the NCCA will be finishing in the role and a recruitment process is underway for a new leader.

You may have seen that I met again with the Grand Mufti of Australia and Rev Dr Michael Barnes in September over a meal. This relationship brings a growing understanding between our faiths but more importantly embodies the way of peace which enables us to offer leadership to our community that counters fear and hate.

As I have quoted the Mufti "For the sake of humanity", we both have addressed the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar. I have written a faith column which speaks to our interfaith relationship with a Christmas message for the South Sydney Herald an initiative of the local UCA congregation with a readership of 30,000.

A significant engagement with our international partners since we last met was in Indonesia in August. Meeting with the Council of Churches (PGI) leadership in Jakarta and gaining fresh insight into the political circumstances and how these play out in West Papua; and for the Islamic and Christian faiths living together harmoniously.

In Kupang, West Timor Uniting World held a workshop with all the Indonesian partner churches present together with Timor Lesté and the Philippines. The topic for theological and social engagement was a theology for community organising. A great two days together learning so much from one another. Our partners play a very significant role in the communities they are part of.

An issue arising out of conversations with key leaders was modern slavery. Some very tragic stories were shared. Some of the women at the gathering met with survivors. There is a real need to enhance the Churches ability to care in a trauma informed manner. Additionally I have been in contact with the person who is the international connection for the Global Freedom Network to connect out partner in West Timor with a cooperative effort gathering police, government, faith leaders and NGO's to develop a highly collaborative network to address this growing concern in Indonesia.

Finally, I have noticed in the National Conferences of the culturally diverse communities of the UCA and in our Synod meetings that we are recognising the great young leaders in our midst and encouraging them to offer their leadership. I have been blessed to see this change in the five plus years I have been an Assembly Officer. We must continue and enhance our resourcing, mentoring and encouragement of these fabulous young leaders.

3. *Being a Voice for Justice:*

The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to walking together with First Peoples and Congress particularly, to explore what sovereignty and treaty might mean for the life of the church. Our conversations together are important as we seek to move beyond words and into action. We have encouraged every Synod to reflect on the discussion paper and study prepared by Rev Dr Chris Budden. We hope many congregations will also engage with this document. Moving around the country it's become clear to me we need something visual to help congregations, schools, agencies and our offices to remember the covenant. This poster has been prepared for congregations and the pull up banner is able to be order by any part of our Church. Colleen and I are gifting them to Synod offices.

I'm reminded of the word in the letter James: "faith without action is dead". When we come to next year's Assembly it will be a time for action!

Here are some of the action questions I think we might discuss:

How might the UCA truly resource the development and documentation of First Peoples theologies and spirituality?

What forms of reparation are important in our covenant journey together?

How can we resource UAICC leadership development?

What kind of Church might we imagine together, what structures are appropriate for an authentic Australian Church?

I have renewed the call at Synod meetings for us to erect a church building for the people of Mapoon. We were complicit in the destruction of the previous building and taking the people from their land and relocating them, in order that a mining company could use the land – they never did. We now have an opportunity to right a wrong and correct this injustice.

I will be asking the Councils of our Church, Synod's and the large Uniting Care agencies to give significant funds which will enable us to speak to the Qld Government, the mine trust and the Presbyterian Church because we have dug deep first.

In the period since we last met I have also had meetings or spoken to a number of congregations, para-church ministries and presbyteries about the sovereignty conversation. At the time of writing this report I'm preparing to spend some time in North Queensland with Congress, including filming the Christmas message from Mungalla near Ingham.

4. *Journey as One UC:*

In every period since becoming President-elect I have had involvement with our work responding to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This has only intensified throughout 2017. In the period since the last meeting of ASC there have been two National Task Group Meetings where the work continues to ensure our whole Church puts into operation the most effective policies and procedures to safeguard the children in our care and ensure they have every opportunity to thrive.

The Executive Officer will report on the work with Synods and the Commission on the data provided to the Commission in Case Study 56. There has also been two meetings with Government and others and another two meetings with the ecumenical group focussed on development of a truly nation equitable, just and effective response for survivors through redress.

My second President's conference was piggy-backed onto the Uniting Leaders (UL17) conference in Adelaide in August. Over 100 enrolled for the President's and another 100 plus for the UL17. A great gathering #AllOfThisIsUs indeed!

In October I participated with Moderators, General Secretaries, Executive and Board leaders in the Uniting Care Leaders conference in Sydney. There is a wonderful appetite to collaborate and create together in our shared calling to serve the mission of God in community.

I have attended since June five Synod meetings, four of these with Colleen and we will together attend the SA Synod later this month.

Our commitment is to model shared leadership, to attend if possible all synods together and be there for the full time. This has been invaluable to us as national leaders in the UCA, which we share with all moderators and general secretaries. These are opportunities for Colleen and I to be available to members and attentive to the learnings we gain about the life and vitality of our Church.

Finally, Peter Andrews and I completed a scheduled performance review for the General Secretary in August, in which we commended Colleen for what she has achieved and noted what will be needed for the goals set in the next 12 months.

I draw your attention to the new team in the Assembly which will be complete in January when Rev Charissa Suli commences as a National Consultant in the ARU team. The Assembly staff team is starting to look like the UCA, a culturally diverse fellowship of reconciliation. Thanks be to God!