



B15 UNITING CHURCH ADULT FELLOWSHIP

1. INTRODUCTION

The Uniting Church Adult Fellowship has had a productive time in the last three years. At times it has been a very different and sometimes difficult one due to COVID. We have had cancelled Celebrations and a Consultation that has been deferred. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit we have still been able to accomplish much.

2. ASSEMBLY AND MANDATE

Uniting Church Adult Fellowships work across Australia to develop, encourage and strengthen its members in fellowship, knowledge and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through this to minister prayerfully and practically, in outreach to others. The members of fellowships bring diverse gifts, are extremely loyal and committed to service within the Church. Each group is a coming together of men and women for spiritual, social, educational and recreational service to support mission activities.

We encourage the work of mission through UnitingWorld and Frontier Services and locally supporting people that are serving overseas.

3. THEME AND PROJECTS

In the last three years our theme has been “Your Word Lights the Way” and we have been working on two projects supporting “Women in Ministry” through UnitingWorld and Bush Chaplains in Frontier Services. The first project has enabled us to support women in Pacific to obtain Scholarships to attend training. Sixteen women in five countries have completed theological education. Our scholar in Fiji came top (Dux) of her class. Many of these women are serving as ministers or leaders in their community. Sixteen female scholarship recipients graduated with a Diploma of Theology. Through our work we have been able to be part of this.

Funding for Bush Chaplains' Remote Areas. Specifically, there is a need for ancillary items to be provided to families, indigenous communities and people on properties. These could include items such as blankets, warm clothing, gloves (work gloves and others); Children's reading books and other educational items. Bush chaplains are best placed to make calls on what is required in any given situation.

4. CONFERENCES – SOUTH PACIFIC AND WORLD

We are part of a much bigger picture than just Australia. We are part of the South Pacific Area of nine nations which is part of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Women and that is seventy one nations with over three million members.

The Weaving Together Programme that preceded the South Pacific Area Seminar was facilitated by three World Officers, and attended by Joy Jino, Area President, Ilaisaane Kapani, Area Vice-President, Tepuola Waqainabete, one of the Helen Kim Memorial Scholars, and Unit representatives from Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and the Solomon Islands. Participants were able to discover more about the World Federation, share reports on their Unit activities and identify priorities for future action. Unfortunately, the Tonga Unit was not represented as the event clashed with their Methodist Conference. In an Area business meeting, the next Area Officers were elected ready for ratification and commissioning at the 14th World Assembly in Sweden in August 2021.

The Seminar was held in the Shangri-La Holiday resort where there was plenty of room for the 500 plus delegates. The theme was 'Chosen people: called to proclaim with hearts on fire' and our hearts were indeed warmed as we enjoyed worship and presentations led by each Unit over the three days. Two thought-provoking Bible studies were led by Rev Dr Seforosa Carroll. The first focussed on the resurrection story of Mary Magdalene, showing how (through moving through despair to conversion and on to being commissioned), she became the first to meet the risen Lord Jesus and the first to proclaim the good news. The second Bible study, entitled 'God's chosen outsiders', explored how the Syro-Phoenician woman transformed the perception of Jesus so that he realised his mission of salvation was indeed inclusive – to the whole of creation – and not only to the Jews. Sef asked 'Are we prepared to listen to the voices of those who are different from ourselves?' She urged us to avoid exclusivity, and to 'share the gift of life' and 'be sowers of the seeds of hope'.

Other able speakers guided us through varied topics. We learned that the International Labour Organisation (ILO) functions through a tripartite representation from Governments, Employers and Workers to maintain international labour standards, social dialogue, establish gender equality and non-discrimination in the workplace, and a just transition to environmental stability. Rev Jeremiah Waquinabete, General Secretary of Methodist Church in Fiji, spoke on Climate Change under the title 'The voice of God in Climate Change and Global Warming'. He urged us to work on our relationships with others treating all as equal and to be accountable to God, seeking to bring heaven into the world through responsible stewardship and care for the whole of creation.

A highlight for many was to hear Mrs Lorini Tevi speak about her life. She identified 6 pillars that had guided her through her life journey as a woman of faith. She inspired each of us to think how we are Christ's ambassadors wherever we are. She challenged us to see how many of us are biblically literate but theologically weak and that we are called to be a redemptive community of faith and social justice, willing to speak out against injustice and be in partnership with God and ecumenical partners in the ongoing process of creation.

Workshops were varied too, including plenty of opportunities for song, dance and drama as well as informative topics such as stewardship, YWAM and trauma healing. It was especially encouraging to see how the Area Vice President, Ilaisaane, is building on her experience as a previous Helen Kim Memorial Scholar; how Teps, the current HKMS from Fiji contributed so much to the smooth-running of the Seminar, and how patiently and efficiently Sina Pupulu took on her role as official photographer. A special thank you to all these three younger women as well as Deaconess Sala for her organisational skills!

What stood out for me was the hospitality and generosity of the South Pacific people; the creativity and enthusiasm of both younger and older women; the unity in diversity of the islanders; their faith in the face of various challenges; their commitment to addressing gender discrimination. We need to pray for Samoa, where women lay preachers are being prevented from leading worship, for the Solomon Islands, powerless against rising sea levels, for Papua New Guinea, and the current COVID Crisis for the church in Australia and New Zealand, experiencing falling numbers of worshippers, for the women of Tonga who sadly missed out on sharing in this Seminar. Thank you, South Pacific Area for setting our hearts on fire in Fiji.

The South Pacific Area leaders met in New Zealand in 2020 to look at how we are working with the Millennium Development Goals that were set by United Nations in 2000. We also were able to encourage and support each other as we move to the future under new leadership.

Plans were under way for the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Women conference to be held in Gothenburg Sweden in August 2021, which has been deferred until 2022 and may change again due to COVID.

5. ECUMENICAL/INTERNATIONAL LIAISON

This position holds responsibility for keeping in touch with similar organisations within partner churches and international bodies with which the Uniting Church has links.

We continue to be affiliated with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Women and receive the publication Tree of Life from the WGM&UCW. This publication keeps us up to date with activities of the many partner churches as well as the situations and needs of communities in underdeveloped countries throughout the world. A lot of our communications are now on line.

Although many of our groups are now not fund-raising entities it continues to astound me that millions of dollars are forwarded for mission. Groups are responsive to appeals for specific needs of neighbouring countries. Synod Committees engage in many activities and all on a voluntary basis.

In 2018-2019 South Australian Synod Committee had a passion to support Women in Ministry in the PNG/PACIFIC area. They made the church aware of how difficult it was for these women to be empowered in ministry and therefore to get training. The church caught on and they were able to send \$35000 to UnitingWorld. Also the Committee were able to support a Frontier Services Bush Chaplains Conference which enabled all Chaplains to be refreshed and restored for further ministry in the outback.

Many other projects, too extensive to list, are a great witness to the various communities, which receive their assistance. Just as Jesus' ministry challenged people to give more serious attention to the nature of service, the 'volunteer' programme is renewing our commitment to Jesus' service.

We have very close connections with a number of ecumenical groups such as World Day of Prayer, Australian Church Women, National Council of Women and Acts for Peace. Through these groups we are able to hear about the needs in other countries and support that can be given.

6. WORKING PROCEDURES

For a number of years we have been looking at the operations of National Committee for Adult Fellowships. We have been operating as a State Based Committee, but at the 13th National Consultation in Hobart in 2018 it was acknowledged that we could no longer raise a committee from each state. The South Australian Committee was to be the last and a working group was set up to follow through on a decision that we would have an elected Executive and two representatives from each state and to set up new Working Procedures that will be presented at our 14th National Consultation in April 2021.

7. NATIONAL CONSULTATION

The 14th National Consultation is to be held in Adelaide at the Ibis Hotel 28th April- 1st May 2021. The new Executive will be elected and all members nominated by states to be part of the new National Committee will be commissioned at the end of the Consultation.

We usually hold a Celebration during the triennium but after one deferment and then a cancellation due to COVID-19 restrictions this has been referred to the new National Committee for a decision as to when and where it will be held.

One of the questions that we are always asking is what is the future of Fellowships. Many of the groups are left on their own within their own local church and get on with their work and witness

without much publicity. One of the things we have tried to encourage people to do in the last three years is not think about what the group is called but to think about the relationships that are being built, the fellowship that happens from which comes the Mission of God.

During the last three years, as President I have enjoyed my travel opportunities that I had in NSW, NT and QLD. It was good to be able to look at the work of the Uniting Church and how Fellowships are contributing to this work. May it be running a pantry, serving cups of tea, recreational, awarding recognition of people at 70,80,90's and spiritual times that were being had. I thank the people that provided hospitality and transport to be able to witness these opportunities of fellowship. While in Darwin there was a time of sharing with the indigenous community and how they fellowship with each other.

8. THANKS

There are many people for who we are thankful to:

- ✚ The Assembly President, General Secretary and the Assembly Staff for the support and encouragement received.
- ✚ Mission Resourcing Team, SA Synod. We have appreciated the many forms of assistance given to us.
- ✚ The Working Group that was set the task of looking at the new Working Procedures for Uniting Church Adult Fellowships as we move forward.
- ✚ To the Committee for their hard work during the triennium, much has been asked of them.

It has been a privilege to serve the Church across Australia and see how many people work together to serve God and his mission in our Church and the wider community overseas.

Fellowship is alive in many ways and so much of it is unseen and unspoken about as continue to serve. Let us encourage each other as we have been encouraged by the Word of God.

*Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path."*

Janet Woodward
Chairperson
Uniting Church Adult Fellowships
National Committee 2018-2021

We would like to thank all Synods and Assembly for the support that has been given in many ways over the last three years and into the future.