

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT – March 12, 2021 Assembly Standing Committee** (with a focus on November 2020 through to March 12, 2021)

Over the past four months, much of my ministry has been exercised online via Zoom. I have recently travelled to Sydney for a number of in person meetings. I have been able to be part of, and lead a number of meetings in South Australia, where there is currently considerable freedom to meet face to face, within the COVID19 safety guidelines.

### **SYNOD MEETINGS**

The General Secretary and I have brought the Assembly report to the Synod of South Australia (February 7 and February 11-13) and the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (February 26-28), I brought the Synod report face to face in South Australia. I also attended the Celebration of Ministry Service held as part of the Synod meeting. The questions from Synod members of the report were focused on ACT2 and the Feedback from young people through the President's Roundtable and NYALC Online.

The Assembly report to the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania was pre-recorded, and the General Secretary and I were online to receive questions. Questions related to the ACT2 conversations, what feedback we are hearing from young people in the President's Roundtable and NYALC Online, and about our ecumenical engagement as the Assembly.

The General Secretary and I also participated in the online Northern Synod meeting at the end of November, 2020. As it was a shorter meeting, we did not give an Assembly report. This report will be part of the face to face Northern Synod meeting later this year.

### **EXPRESSING OUR COVENANT RELATIONSHIP. WALKING TOGETHER AS FIRST AND SECOND PEOPLES**

I have continued to work with Pastor Mark Kickett in expressing the Assembly's Covenant Relationship as First and Second Peoples. In November, Mark and I did a video introducing NAIDOC week. We filmed a conversation between Auntie Lucy Lester and Tarlee Leondaris, as part of NAIDOC week. We were not permitted to offer this resource publically on the Assembly website, but it is an excellent resource for the UAICC and Assembly. Auntie Lucy spoke of her faith journey, her art, her experience of the early beginnings of the UAICC, her life with Yami Lester, and the impacts of nuclear testing at Maralinga. Tarlee Leondaris spoke of the impact of her family being part of the Stolen Generation and her journey of connecting with culture, language and story.

It was a joy to be present at the Adelaide College of Divinity's awarding of Aunty Rev Dr Denise Champion's honorary doctorate, and then to join with the Congress in Port Augusta to continue the celebrations.

On January 24, Mark and I led a national Day of Mourning service, that was live streamed and recorded. We were welcomed to country by Frank Wanganeen. We were led in worship by Rhane Tsetsakos, Tarlee Leondaris, Sean Weetra, Jordan Sumner, Chelsea Size, Joanna Palmer and the Moderator of the Synod of South Australia. Nunyara, a Uniting Venue's site in Adelaide hosted us, and we were joined by a congregation of 40 people from the SA Synod, including the Moderator, General Secretary and Associate General Secretary. Thank you to Stuart McMillan, Uniting Technology and the Assembly Comms team and all the UCA congregations across the country who observed the Day of Mourning. I also deeply appreciated being invited by Jordan Sumner and Sean Weetra to be part of the Survival Day gathering at Tandanya, National Aboriginal Cultural Centre on Kaurna country in Adelaide.

## **DEVELOPING YOUNG UNITING CHURCH MEMBERS IN DISCIPLESHIP AND LEADERSHIP**

This is an important focus for the Assembly and other councils of our Church. My contribution to this key priority of our Church has included the President's Roundtables and NYALC.

Since the November ASC, I have hosted two face to face President's Roundtables – one in Adelaide in November and the latest one in North Parramatta on February 23.

Rev Charissa Suli and I have also hosted four NYALC online conversations.

These conversations with our youth and young adults have been ways of giving space for these members of our Church to speak about their journey with Christ, their joys, concerns, hopes and vision for their lives and the life of our Church. The online conversations have connected people from across the country, and built on some of the NYALC connections that have been nurtured over the years. I will bring a report of all these gatherings to the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly through and as an appendix to my Retiring President's address in our online Assembly meeting in July.

Into the future, it is important for us to be considering how we connect with young adults nationally, with a purpose of growing in faith, having a view of the breadth and depth of the Uniting Church, and strengthening a network of young Uniting Church members across the country? National Christian Youth Conventions have been significant gatherings for our Church, where people have experienced the multicultural nature and theological and liturgical diversity of our Church. NCYCs have encouraged: a broadening of horizons, a deepening of/ or a coming to faith in Christ for the first time; discerning God's call to various ministries and expressions of Christian vocation. In recent years, National Young Adult Leaders Conferences have been life-giving and transformative and have served some of the purposes of NCYCs as I have listed them above.

We have spoken about the importance and priority of developing young adults in discipleship and leadership, one of the questions into the future, is what are we prepared to invest in time, vision, energy, personnel, money and other resources to enable young adults to exercise their gifts and flourish in the Uniting Church and in our public witness?

### **MEETING WITH NATIONAL CONFERENCE CHAIRS – March 5<sup>th</sup>**

I have met regularly with National Conference Chairs. Most recently we met on March 5<sup>th</sup>. One of the highlights of my time as President has been the meeting with the National Conferences and their leadership teams. I have been blessed to share with the National Conference leaders our pastoral concerns for our Church. I am grateful for their wise leadership which has contributed so significantly to holding our Christian communities together in unity and love.

Thank you to Rev Dr Apwee Ting and Associate General Secretary, Rob Floyd for your ministry in connecting with the National Conferences, your commitment to our identity and practice of ministry as a multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural Church. Apwee and Rob have creatively and faithfully built relationships with the congregations, ministers and members associated with the National Conferences. I also thank Dr Sureka Goringe for the work she has contributed in sustaining the strong links between our partner churches and the Ministers and members of the Uniting Church, who maintain connection with our partners in the Pacific, Asia and Africa.

### **THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

I was part of a Heads of Colleges meeting online in November.

On February 24, 2021, I spent the morning and lunch with the community at United Theological College at North Parramatta. It was good to speak with candidates and meet with faculty and staff and to hear about people's stories of call, and their engagement in various ministry contexts.

It was good to talk with the Principal, Rev Dr Peter Walker and hear the inaugural lecture, that he gave.

Over several decades we have had conversations in theological education about a national view, collaboration across the nation in offering courses, formation for ministry candidates and drawing from the resources of faculty in each of our theological colleges. It's great to hear stories of some of this collaboration, and the benefits for the Church, students and faculty.

## **ADVOCACY**

### **RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE**

Arising from the resolution of the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly the Assembly Resourcing Unit have focused on ways we are responding to domestic and family violence, and resourcing the Church in our response. You will see the report on this work in our documents for this ASC. I have worked alongside Rev Charissa Suli in resourcing some of the Assembly work in this area.

Thank you to Rev Charissa Suli for her excellent work in responding to and progressing this resolution of the Assembly. Charissa has consulted extensively and drawn from people working with policy and legislation, frontline workers and people engaged in ministry with our agencies and in local congregations.

### **ICAN AND THE ENTRY INTO FORCE OF THE TREATY TO BAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

On January 22, the Uniting Church joined with ICAN and other peace organisations to celebrate the UN Entry into Force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Australia is yet to sign on to this treaty. I joined in a webinar hosted by the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom and another gathering hosted by ICAN to celebrate this occasion, and to hear plans for ongoing advocacy.

### **FOR THE WHOLE CREATION**

Colleen Geyer, Rob Floyd, Rebecca Beisler and I participated in media training with Climate Council's media advisor Kate Davies, hosted by the Anglican church in Queensland. It was a very good opportunity to hear key messaging in addressing climate change, and to practice our responses to various media scenarios.

We were approached as the Assembly by the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) to sign onto an international petition "Sacred People, Sacred Earth". While most of the petition aligned with decisions and statements we have made as the Uniting Church, there were parts of the petition, that were calling for some things, that we have not had an opportunity to discern and decide as an Assembly, so we have not yet signed onto this petition. There are a number of Uniting Church members who personally support this petition.

### **ASSEMBLY AGENCIES AND NATIONAL BODIES**

I have been part of the advocacy with Uniting World in the campaign to End COVIDforall sponsored by the Micah organisation, of which we are members.

Seven Days of Solidarity – this is a new event for Uniting World to be held in the Easter season (April 18-25). I was invited to record a sermon to be used as part of the resource for this campaign.

Media releases with Uniting Care Australia – including supporting the advocacy of UnitingCare in response to the Royal Commission report on Aged Care.

I attend the National Task Group responding to the Disability Royal Commission.

### **GOSPEL YARNING**

Gospel Yarning was a Conference organized by Rev Dr Ian Robinson and the NSW/ACT Synod, Uniting Mission and Education team. It focused on evangelism through a cross-cultural lens, asking the question “Who will contribute leadership to the cross-cultural Uniting Church to share the Gospel for a secular world? Rev Dr Ian Robinson had invited me in 2019 to be part of planning for this event, and to contribute. It was postponed from last year and we were delighted that we were able to meet face to face, as well as online from February 25-27 at the Centre for Ministry in North Parramatta. Eighty people attended in person and about a dozen online. Participants came from all Synods, the UAICC, Uniting Church schools, presbyteries, Uniting, congregations and parish missions. The format of the Conference was designed to promote conversation about the ways we are sharing the Gospel of Christ and to encourage people to share insights from their various ministry contexts. We used Open-space, small group conversation, key note presentations and electives.

### **PRESIDENT’S CONFERENCE – “Called by God”**

I look forward to hosting my President’s Conference from April 29 until May 2 in Adelaide at UCity. We are planning to meet face to face, with some speakers being both recorded and live streamed for some of the sessions. We will explore the key themes of God’s call, every member ministry and living our Christian vocation in our daily lives. The Conference is open to all members of the Uniting Church.

### **MEDIA**

I work closely with the Assembly Communications team in communicating the stories of hope, and our prophetic advocacy.

I have recorded a number of videos from home, as a way of communicating with the Church, sharing our stories, and offering pastoral encouragement.

I most recently filmed a video for International Women’s Day, with a focus on thanking God for the women who are contributing to our world, our church, government, and communities.

Christmas Message and Easter Message and any follow up media enquiries

I have written articles for:

Crosslight on Women in Leadership

New Times on The Church responding to Domestic and Family Violence

New Times on Youth and Young Adults ministry

Thank you to the Assembly Communications Team for your expertise and support. I particularly thank Matt Pulford, who concluded nine years of service as National Manager, Media and Communications in February. At the January meeting of the ASC, the ASC approved a letter of thanks to be sent to Matt. I communicated the following in a letter to Matt, on behalf of the ASC:

*“Thank you for the professional expertise, communication gifts and wisdom that you have brought to your work. You have exercised this ministry with passion and great dedication.*

*We are grateful for the many ways you have tirelessly worked to communicate the Uniting Church’s narrative of hope. Thank you for the ways you have encouraged us to engage in the*

*public space, so that the Uniting Church's voice is heard on matters of justice, equity and inclusion.*

*As you leave your role in the Assembly, and enter into a new season of life, may God bless you with peace and sustain you in hope."*

## **ACT 2 TASK GROUP**

I am a member of the Task Group looking at the future of the Uniting Church. I have participated with the President-elect and General Secretary in online conversations with Uniting Church members. (See the report on this process in "ACT2 Report, Document 26)

## **MEETING WITH MODERATORS**

I have had two online meetings with Moderators prior to this ASC: December 8 and March 10. We are planning for a face-to-face meeting at the end of April in Adelaide. Our last in person meeting was in 2019. We have used the online forum to stay connected with one another, to farewell two Moderators, Rev Steve Francis and Rev David Baker, and to welcome two new Moderators, Rev Susy Thomas and Rev Andrew Gunton.

I have deeply appreciated the collegiality I have experienced with the Moderators. We offer pastoral support to one another. We provide an overview of what is happening around the country in ministry and mission. We speak about common issues, that we are responding to publically. We share the narratives of hope that we see in our various ministry contexts.

## **ECUMENICAL GATHERINGS AND OUR GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS:**

Our ecumenical connections in Australia and globally are an important part of our identity and mission as the Uniting Church. I have had a number of opportunities to represent the Uniting Church and contribute to ecumenical conversations in the following fora:

Meeting with National Church leaders – November 11

Filmed support video for Micah – EndCOVID4All

WCC Webinar - speaker on "People on the Move: Solidarity and Advocacy - November 12

World Methodist Evangelism Committee – November 18

Asian Ecumenical Women's Assembly (AEWA) Reunion – November 27-28

Pacific leaders meeting online from December 1-3, 2020

Meeting with Lutheran and Anglican leaders - The President of the Lutheran Church in Australia and New Zealand, Rev John Henderson and the Primate of the Anglican Church in Australia, Rev Geoffrey Smith, are both resident in South Australia. We met in February face to face!. We discuss matters we share in common and ecumenical collaboration.

## **OTHER EVENTS AND GATHERINGS:**

Preaching at Dernancourt November 29, 2020 with Amel Manyon

Cyrus Kung's ordination at CityView UCA in Adelaide (November 29, 2020) – part of filming of Christmas message.

Out of the Box Christmas – December 19 at The Corner in Adelaide

Bushfire Memorial service – in the Adelaide Hills December 20

Meeting with Christine Gordon in Sydney -. Conversation about UCA History – February 23

Launch of Craig Mitchell’s book: Deeper Water - online March 2

Australian New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) Religious and Spiritual diversity – Guide – Christianity focus group (online)

Wayside Chapel - visit with Jon Owen - March 11

### **MARCH – JULY 2021**

In my last four months as President, I look forward to participating in a number of events, including:

**President’s Conference – April 29-May 2**

**Pacific Methodist leaders gathering – May**

**Visit to the Synod of WA**

Preaching at Wesley anniversary

President’s Roundtable – with young adults

President’s Table – all age gathering/dinner.

**UCA National History Association Conference – June 2021**

**Tongan National Conference - online June 2021**

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

In this my last report to the ASC, I give thanks to God for calling me to serve Christ and the Uniting Church through the ministry of President. I thank you for your support and encouragement as I have exercised my responsibilities. I have deeply appreciated the dedication and commitment that you have shown as the Standing Committee. It has been a privilege to share in ministry with you. I have many wonderful memories of our meetings at Mary McKillop and our last face to face meeting at the Castlereagh. I have particularly appreciated our worship and prayer together, and our focus on God’s call to live God’s Vision of peace with justice, love and reconciliation, through our work as the ASC. I have appreciated your engagement with the matters before the ASC, and your prayerful discernment of our response as a Council to the business and proposals before us. You have engaged in discernment with grace, passion, humour and with the best interests of our Church at the heart of your work. It has been a joy to serve Christ with you, through the Uniting Church.

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*Regulation 3.6.4.2 **Duties of the President:** “The duties of the President shall be to give spiritual leadership and encouragement to the Church generally, to represent the Church as appropriate, to give counsel as occasion requires and to do such other things as may be requested or advised by the Assembly”*

*Regulation 3.7.5.1 **Assembly Standing Committee Responsibilities***

*(k) (iii) Offer guidance to the President on priorities to be pursued, and the way in which the responsibilities named in Regulation 3.6.4.2 may be exercised, taking into account the particular gifts and graces of the President.*