

## President's Report

### **Give Spiritual leadership and encouragement.**

#### *Indonesian National Conference*

It was a joy to attend the Indonesian National Conference on Larrakia land in Darwin in October. About 30 people travelled to Darwin to join with the Indonesian congregation who were celebrating their 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Indonesian Conference is a diverse group, coming from many parts of Indonesia with different cultures, and from many different Christian churches, many of whom are our partners, but not all of them. What unites them is their faith, their language and the home they have made in the Uniting Church. I gave an address on their theme blessed to be a blessing speaking about how God's blessing and the blessing of others often meets us in our most difficult places when it is hard to see or God and God's goodness. Such blessing is a gift of grace that brings us home to God's love and helps us share this blessing with others.

#### *Bush chaplains' retreat*

I was able to attend the first two days of the Bush Chaplains' retreat on lands of the Peramangk people. They are a creative group of people ministering in remote parts of Australia whose practical and pastoral ministry witnesses to the love and compassion of Jesus.

#### *Greeting for military chaplains' retreat*

It has been good to catch up with several military chaplains and talk with them about their ministry at Synod meetings. At the request of Kaye Ronalds, I recorded a greeting to be played at the retreat for full time chaplains. Each chaplain I have spoken to has a deep sense of call to the ministry of defense force chaplaincy, an awareness of the moral and ethical dilemmas they and those they care for face and a sense that they feel on the margins of the Church. They are always grateful for appreciation and encouragement.

#### *Guardian article on suicide grief.*

When I was offered the opportunity to write an article for the Guardian on how my faith has helped me with an issue in my life I chose to write on how I have made some sense of the death of my partner Michael Symons by suicide 10 years ago.

[Losing a loved one to suicide can cause immense grief and anger. But the truth can set you free | Sharon Hollis | The Guardian](#)

### **Represent the Church**

#### *Advocating for The Voice*

As part of the Uniting Church's advocacy for the Voice I chaired An Interfaith Day of Prayer in Support of the Voice on Noongar country in Perth, hosted a webinar with Noel Pearson, spoke at an Interschool Justice forum on Wurundjeri Country in Melbourne and attended a meeting with other faith leaders and the Prime Minister and opened the National Prayer Vigil on the eve of the referendum.

The result of the referendum was heartbreaking. As a Church we committed not just to supporting the Voice but to examining our own life and to reflect on how well we are living the Covenant. We must not allow our disappointment at the result to distract us from the work of living the Covenant more faithfully and fully. There is much work to do in the Church.

#### *Fijian Methodist Church Annual Conference*

As previously reported, there has been some difficulties in the relationship with the Methodist in Church in Fiji which was impacting Fijian-Australian members of the Uniting Church. Along with Dr. Sureka

Goringe and Vinnie Ravetali I attended the 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Fijian Methodist. We received very generous hospitality. In an address to the General Assembly I was able to both restate our commitment to the longstanding relationship and the hope that the Methodist Church of Fiji will continue to see the Uniting Church as their partner in ministry both in Fiji and Australia, even when we disagree at times. Sureka and I were also able to meet with the Australian High Commission to Fiji and

#### *Micah Women leaders delegation*

Each year Micah Australia organise a delegation of women church leaders to meet with Federal politicians about the aid and development budget. Mata Havea Sureka Goringe and I represented the Uniting Church. The group met with over 40 politicians in small groups as well a meeting with the Hon. Pat Conroy, Minister for International Development and the Pacific who spoke about the new international development policy. I was one of three people to give a response. I spoke about the how the vision of God's reign guides our advocacy for justice and that this gives us both holy patience and holy impatience in our advocacy for justice for our most vulnerable global neighbours.

#### *Christian Conference of Asia*

I very much regret that Covid prevented me from being a delegate at the Christian Conference of Asia. I was pleased that Rev Prof Vicki Balabanski was able to replace me as a delegate, as she was attending to give a bible study. The Uniting Church's other delegates were Ms Joy Han and Rev Mark Kickett.

#### *Statements we supported*

On behalf of the Uniting Church we were a signatory to a Public Statement on Palestine and Israel by the National Council of Churches ([NCCA Public Statement - NCCA](#)) which will be sent to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the shadow minister and Green's spokesperson and a civil society statement marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of nuclear testing in mainland Australia organized by International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, Australia ([Civil Society Statement: The Black Mist and the Ban - ICAN Australia \(icanw.org.au\)](#)).

#### *Greetings to partner churches.*

I have sent greetings to the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka, GMIH (Church of Halmahera) Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Te Hahi Weterianan o Aotearoa (Methodist Church of New Zealand) for their Annual Conference or General Assembly and greetings to the new General minister of the United Church of Christ (USA) Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

### **Such other things as may be requested or advised by the Assembly.**

#### **Other**

##### *President's Conference*

Over 70 people gathered on Gubbi Gubbi land at Redcliffe for the President's Conference Wednesday-Friday afternoon were for ministry agents while Friday evening and Saturday were for the whole church. It was a time of rich reflection, engaged conversation and It was that the ministry agents appreciated the opportunity to meet, reflect and learn with colleagues from across the Uniting Church. Many of them commented how rare this sort of opportunity is.

##### *Religious discrimination*

A new religious discrimination bill is likely to be introduced to Parliament in the quarter of next year with consultation to occur before this. We are looking for opportunities to be involved in the consultation process. This is an issue where we often take a different position to most other churches as it is important that we are ready for this bill.

*A brief reflection*

The state of the world is bleak. Wars including the war in the Holy Land, along with the rise of racism against Indigenous people and anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Australia. I've been pondering the line in a Brian Wren hymn about God that says God is 'wiser than despair.' I find it hard not to despair at moment and long to be drawn into the wisdom of God. In a way that seems contradictory I both turn from the news and yet find myself drawn to the news not wanting to turn from what I need to know. In this I seek Jesus the Sophia of God whose suffering and death is part of God's wise ways with the world, particularly those who are suffering today. So I pray for all of us to know wisdom that helps us be wiser than despair.

Sharon Hollis

30/10/2023