



GENERAL SECRETARY

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the resignation of Ms Colleen Geyer as General Secretary, the President of the Assembly, pursuant to Regulation 3.6.4.4 (c), and on the advice of the November 2023 Assembly Standing Committee, appointed me to be the General Secretary of the Assembly from 1 January 2024 until the Assembly elects a new General Secretary and that person commences in the role.

As members of Assembly may appreciate, the past few months have been intense, interesting and stretching. When I was briefed that I would need to step in as Interim General Secretary for a period of at least seven months, one of the first things I considered was whether it would be feasible or appropriate to engage a supply or interim provision for my regular role of Associate General Secretary. Unfortunately this seemed a difficult issue given the circumstances. Firstly, this is a role which requires a fairly detailed knowledge of the Assembly and its Agencies, its relationships with other Councils of the Church and its ecumenical relationships. It seemed a very difficult ask to find someone external to the Assembly with that kind of knowledge and experience and who would be available to take up a seven month appointment. In most cases an internal appointment might be a better option – asking someone to ‘act up’, however in this case, the most obvious options, being members of the ARU Mission and Ministry team, were all very new to their roles, a matter of 1 to 3 months. The security and stability of this new team was another factor in determining that it would be optimal if I could continue to be their team leader for the interim period. So I made the decision that I would need to cover both roles to the extent possible, looking for every opportunity to offload parts of both roles that could (at least for a time) be done by others.

Some months in, I believe that this was the correct decision, but it has not been without cost. I am sure that I am not performing in either role to the capacity I would like to do so. I am also aware that other staff have very graciously been trying to ensure that they support me in this time and I am grateful for the wonderful work done by all of the Secretariat/ARU staff, especially Leo Iosifidis, Jenny Bertalan and Anna Catliffe. We will all survive the next months until a new permanent General Secretary can begin, but we are also eagerly look forward to that time!

It is also worth specifically noting, given the above, that many of the accomplishments and much of the work done by the Assembly over the past triennium has been ably headed up by our former General Secretary, to whom much thanks and appreciation must be due.

2. MAJOR FOCUS AREAS

Clearly one of the most important tasks undertaken during this triennium has been the extraordinary work of the Act2 Unit, who have criss-crossed the country, hosted innumerable webinars, organised times of collective prayer, and pored over hundreds of response forms, submissions and theological essays. The unit has been helpfully guided by the Act2 Steering Committee, whose commitment to this task, time, energy and careful thinking have been outstanding. The fruits of this significant work by the Assembly can be seen in the final report and recommendations found in “B5E – Act2: The Gift of the Spirit”.

The Assembly has continued to be guided by the Strategic Plan (2020 – 2023), and the ASC saw the wisdom of extending that Strategic Plan up until the 2024 Assembly, after which decisions of the Assembly can be integrated into a new Strategic Plan. The five pillars of the Strategic Plan — Responding to the Church, Being Intercultural, Being Intergenerational, Being Innovative and Strengthening Our Identity are helpful touchpoints in all of the varied work of the Assembly.



The 'commitments' section of the Strategic Plan reads:

Affirming our faith in the Risen Crucified One, who constitutes, rules and renews the Church, we will live out our covenant as First and Second Peoples, our commitment to be an inter-cultural and inter-generational Church, our commitment to the mutuality and equality of women and men in ministry, valuing the participation and ministry of all the people of God, oriented towards justice, valuing scholarly enquiry and an informed faith, engaging constructively with ecumenical and inter-faith partners and providing a safe place for all people.

I continue to find this to be a wonderful summary description of the 'dna' of the Uniting Church, and I use it regularly when I have opportunities to preach and share about the work of the Assembly.

The seven Assembly Circles of Interest continue to be a significant form of engagement, with hundreds of members of the Church connecting with each Circle and with a committed core of Panel members generating liturgies and resources, responding to ASC requests, and enabling conversations, occasionally debates and the dissemination of information about their area of focus to the wider Church.

Further information regarding many of the key aspects of the Assembly's work through Task Groups and Circles will be found in the ASC (B3) and ARU (B4) reports.

3. ASSEMBLY SYDNEY OFFICES

At the previous Assembly, we reported on the relocation of the Assembly Offices to 262 Pitt Street, which happened just at the time of COVID lockdown in NSW. So this triennium has been the opportunity to live into our new home, which has confirmed that this has been a good move for the Assembly.

In the second half of 2023, Frontier Services was in the position of reconsidering their location in Parramatta. At the same time, the Assembly became aware of the fact that the tenant utilising one part of the third floor, was concluding their lease.

We determined that the extension of our lease to encompass the whole of the third floor, would enable us to have an appropriately large meeting room for the use of Agency Boards, Assembly Committees and staff meetings and social occasions. Further, some slight modifications to the fourth floor would allow us to add eight additional workstations, and given the current usage patterns, would enable Frontier Services to join with Assembly Secretariat staff on the fourth floor.

As a result, we moved ahead with that plan – fit out work was done over the 2023 Christmas break and in early 2024, we welcomed Frontier Services staff to the building and began utilising our new larger meeting room, the Charles Harris Room. It has been wonderful to have a busier office and to be able to connect more frequently and face to face with Frontier Service people. The possibility of re-starting staff social gatherings using the large meeting rooms has also been a welcome addition to office culture.

4. CONCLUSION

One of the joys of this current period acting as General Secretary has been the privilege of working with a group of staff, volunteers and leaders who are so committed to the vision of reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation.





This includes the wonderful Secretariat staff as well as the many members and Chairs of Committees and Boards who give time and energy to contribute to the work of the Assembly. It also includes our Assembly Agency staff who are so ably led by the National Directors, Claerwen Little, Sureka Goringe and Rob Floyd. They, along with Leo Iosifides form the Executive team which has been such a helpful backstop and sounding board for me as I have navigated this period.

It has been a particular pleasure to work with the President, Rev Sharon Hollis over past months. Sharon's wisdom, insight and incredible commitment to the life and mission of the Uniting Church have been a blessing to me and she has been a key person resourcing and supporting me in my current role. I have also greatly appreciated working with our President-Elect, Rev Charissa Suli in the preparation for this Assembly.

This Assembly will make decisions which will reverberate through the years to come, and my prayer is that we will be courageous and wise as we consider those decisions, always looking to the gift of the Spirit given that we may not lose our way.

Lindsay Cullen
General Secretary (Interim)

