



## Assembly Standing Committee

### 12 Appreciation of Rev Sharon Hollis

**That the Assembly resolve:**

**to record its thanks to God and its deep appreciation to Rev Sharon Hollis for her leadership as President of the Assembly from 2021 to 2024.**

In July 2021, the Uniting Church's experiments with videoconferencing reached a new height – or, depending on your perspective, a new depth – when we held the Installation service for Rev Sharon Hollis as President online. Sharon was at least away from the Melbourne lockdowns, on Turrbal and Jaggera Country, and was installed with just a small number of others physically present in the room.

That the Assembly able to pivot to an online meeting is in no small part thanks to Sharon's ability and willingness to rise to the challenge, along with Assembly and local staff who, in deeply challenging conditions, were able to make it all happen.

This was indeed a 'new depth', but in a positive sense. Even in the midst of sudden lockdowns against the spread of COVID, and with travel generally impossible, Sharon was able to lead the Assembly in engaging deeply together in faith and prayer and love.

Sharon adopted the theme of "Dwelling in Love" for the triennium. Preaching at her installation, she spoke of how the love in which we dwell, and the love to which we are called, is not mere sentimentalism, but is active, tough, resilient and long-suffering. In God, we are encountered by love that risks vulnerability, love that crosses boundaries, love that raises up the excluded, that endures the cross, and that rises again.

My point in expressing this is not to try to summarise Sharon's message, but to make this observation: Sharon has not just preached of such virtues; her very life and service for the church, for the people of this nation and for the whole creation reflect that kind of love; and so reflect something of God's love.

Sharon has brought both strength and willingness to rise to the challenge of the times, and also the vulnerability to do so with heart and soul. She shows deep respect and appreciation for those around her in the shared journeys, which often touch her deeply. Sharon has also brought the characteristics of wisdom, theological integrity, and personal depth, which have all been evident throughout the course of these last three years.

Having joined the Assembly Standing Committee at the start of the triennium, I've had the privilege of seeing close at hand how Sharon has enabled the Standing Committee in its discerning work, and I've seen plenty of examples of how she has encouraged other councils, leaders and individuals in the Church along the way.

The Position Description for the President includes that wonderful catch-all that we all love in a PD – "other duties as required". In a role where you can't anticipate everything that's going to happen, or what crises or opportunities may arise, it's rather important and could mean

almost anything. But in *this* duties list, according to the Regulations, the catch-all is qualified by the Assembly's authority as a Council of the Church. So the PD, in all of its brevity, reads:

*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 3.6.4.2).*

That last phrase underlines that the President is the servant of the Assembly, not its master, and Sharon has walked that line carefully and respectfully. And she has been diligent in reporting to the Assembly Standing Committee in terms of the duties asked of her – duties and work into which she has thrown herself with generosity and heart.

Sharon's *Spiritual Leadership and Encouragement* has been exemplary.

With her leadership, the Church as a whole has regularly been called to prayer, especially as we have entered into periods of deep discernment. Importantly, too, Sharon has been sure to maintain her own spiritual practices along the way.

Sharon has strengthened the voices of First Peoples. Even at her online Installation, the Biblical word was proclaimed in 11 First Peoples' languages. Sharon made the most of the opportunity of an in-person reconvened Assembly, on Gubbi Gubbi land in May 2022, to offer confession, prayer and commitment in a renewal of the Covenant between the Uniting Church and the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. I have already mentioned Sharon's strength and willingness to be vulnerable. Sharon's commitment to truth-telling within the Church and to the Church's Covenant with the UAICC reflects that, and her responses come from her heart.

Also proving that she was the person 'for such a time as this', recognising the changing context in which the Church finds itself, Sharon has championed the Act2 process, ensuring that the Church in all of its facets has been able to get involved in listening, reflecting, visioning, and preparing ways forward, for which we will be able to consider some clear next steps at this meeting. She has actively engaged with all parts of the Church in this process, to help the Church to chart the next steps clearly, wisely and faithfully in response to God's call.

Meanwhile, alongside those 'big-picture' highlights, Sharon has offered *Spiritual Leadership and Encouragement* in many other ways, of which I want to highlight two.

Firstly, Sharon's commitment as an ambassador for Thursdays in Black, the World Council of Churches project to speak out against gender-based violence. Sharon has been committed to standing in solidarity with those who face such violence, and invited people into conversation about the prevalence of gender-based violence and what we can all do about it. It has been a conversation and relationship enabler, and an encouragement for us all.

Secondly, also on that personal conversational level, Sharon has run what I assume is the first-ever Presidential Podcast: Dwelling. In her podcasts, Sharon has explored life and faith with people from all over the church, with one series based around Act2, one celebrating Uniting Church women, and one focused on diversity and inclusion. If you haven't kept up with them all, they're still available and well worth hearing; there is deep spiritual encouragement within.



In this, and many other ways, Sharon has *represented the Church* to itself.

Sharon has embraced the travelling life to *represent the Church*, which is another Presidential duty, and so we have much to thank her family for, as well as herself, recognising the time and impact that that amount of travelling involves. Sharon has been to many Synod meetings, 9 National Conference gatherings and engaged with the Circles of Interest and the UnitingCare Leaders Forums. She has represented the Church and assisted its representation to external bodies, including being a member of the Disability Royal Commission Task Group, attending the Faith Leaders Climate Summit, and making representation to members of parliament. She has travelled overseas several times, and indeed has just got back from the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Sharon has represented us in meeting with global partners and supporting the work of UnitingWorld, in ways that are both encouraging for our partners and which also lead us into deeper engagement, and she is now a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

It's a lot, and it's deeply relational. This relationality has also characterised all of Sharon's engagement. Sharon engages relationally, with respect, passion, hope and courage; and she works with the wider teams of the Uniting Church collaboratively, constructively, and with gratitude for the gifts, skills and experience that every member brings. 'Dwelling in love' has been her passion and her theme. For the way that Sharon has fulfilled the role of President with heart and strength, vulnerability and faithfulness, insight, wisdom and love, we offer our deep appreciation.

Proposer: David Fotheringham

Secunder: Mark Kickett

