

Threads of Hope: Singing the Lord's Song Together

A Presidential Reflection on the 2026 Korean National Conference

“How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137:4)

It was a privilege to spend several days with the Korean National Conference, sharing in worship, prayer, fellowship and conversation with ministry agents, their spouses and leaders from across our Church.

I am grateful to Chairperson Rev Dr Kevin Kim, Secretary Rev Mike You, and all who worked so generously to host the gathering. The Korean National Conference continues to make an important contribution to the life and witness of the Uniting Church through its deep commitment to prayer, reverence in worship, investment in theological formation, hospitality, and a strong sense of collegiality and mutual care among ministry agents and their families.

As I travelled home, I found myself returning to the words of Psalm 137:

“How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?”

It is the song of God's people in exile, longing for home while learning to remain faithful in unfamiliar places.

For many gathered, these words were more than an ancient song of Israel. They echoed their own journeys of leaving home, building new lives and discovering that God remained faithful even in unfamiliar places.

As we reflected on this passage together, I was mindful that we were singing the Lord's song on Aboriginal land that was never ceded. The stories of migration we shared never replace the first story of this land. Rather, they invite us to listen more deeply to it. Our Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress reminds us that following Christ in Australia calls us to walk together in truth, justice and reconciliation.

There was also a quiet sense of loss throughout the gathering as the Korean National Conference gave thanks for the life and faithful witness of Rev Dr John Brown. He was remembered with deep affection for his commitment to the Korean National Conference, his enduring love for our partner churches in Korea, and his lifelong ministry of building cross-cultural relationships in the service of Christ.

I met women and men whose faith had been shaped by migration, sacrifice and perseverance. Their witness reminded me that the gospel does not erase who we are. In Christ, our stories are received, redeemed and woven into one body.

Jesus crossed boundaries others wouldn't cross. He talked with the Samaritan woman, welcomed strangers, and restored dignity to those on the margins. He met people where they were and invited them into new life.

When I was in my early 20s, trying to find my place in the Uniting Church, I often wondered whether there was room for someone like me. At times, I came to believe that if I sounded more like the dominant Anglo culture—more “white”—people might take me more seriously. I softened my accent, changed how I spoke, and tried to lead in ways that felt more acceptable than authentic.

Looking back now, I realise those expectations were never God's expectations. God was not asking me to exchange my voice for someone else's. God was inviting me to bring my whole self—my Tongan identity, my story and my faith—into the ministry Christ had entrusted to me. That realisation has shaped my ministry ever since.

That season of my life has made me more attentive to the stories others carry. Across our Church I continue to meet people carrying similar questions about whether there is room for them too. My hope is that every community of faith is a place where people discover they belong because they belong to Christ.

One of the greatest privileges of serving as President has been worshipping with communities throughout our Church's life. Whether with First Peoples, Korean, Pacific, multicultural, or rural communities, I continue to witness Christ gathering people from every culture, language and generation into one body.

The Basis of Union reminds us that we are called to "bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ that transcends cultural, economic, national, and racial boundaries."

What I witnessed throughout the Conference gave me hope for the future of our Church. Gatherings like this remind me that the Assembly's vision of *Uniting in Christ: Flourishing Faith, Thriving Communities and Liberating Justice* is not simply something we write about. It is something God is already bringing to life among us.

During the Conference, I found myself returning to the image that has accompanied me throughout my presidency—*Threads of Love*. The stories of faith, migration and perseverance shared throughout the gathering reminded me that Christ continues to weave our lives together across cultures and boundaries into one body.

As the Conference ended, one question remained with me:

"How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:4)

In Australia, that question also invites us to ask: *"How do we sing the Lord's song on Aboriginal land that was never ceded?"*

We sing it when we honour the First Peoples of this land.

We sing it when we choose to walk together in the spirit of our Covenant.

We sing it when we receive one another's stories, cultures and gifts as part of the rich tapestry God is weaving among us.

And we sing it every time Christ gathers us around one table, reminding us that before anything else, we belong to him.

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