



Threads of Love at Eastwood: Weaving Belonging in a Divided World

It was a joy to worship recently with the people of Eastwood Uniting Church, where I was invited to preach and to share Holy Communion as the congregation celebrated its theme for the year, “TOGETHER”.

It was a fitting theme for a community that brings together English, Korean and Chinese-speaking worshippers, alongside people from many other cultural backgrounds and across generations.

I was warmly welcomed by Eastwood’s Minister of the Word, Rev Seungjae Yeon, along with his family, the congregation’s lay leaders and members. From worship to the shared meal that followed, there was a wonderful spirit of hospitality, participation and belonging.

As I travel across our Church, I continue to be inspired by our people – hearing about their joys and challenges and seeing how deeply their love for Christ shapes their discipleship and mission. I see people turning up for one another, serving their communities, and faithfully seeking to be places of hope and belonging for all.

Eastwood was another beautiful expression of that witness.

Here is a community learning what it means not merely to be *multicultural*, with different cultures sharing the same space, but to be genuinely intercultural – forming relationships across difference, receiving one another’s gifts, and discovering more deeply what it means to belong to the one Body of Christ.

This is not peripheral to our identity as the Uniting Church. Our *Basis of Union* calls Christians in Australia to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ that “transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries”. Since declaring ourselves a multicultural Church in 1985, we have deepened our understanding that cultural and linguistic diversity is not merely something to accommodate but a gift of God that enriches and transforms the whole Church.

It also speaks directly to our Assembly Strategy for 2026-2031 – listening more deeply to diverse voices, strengthening leadership across cultures and generations, and participating in God’s mission from the margins.

Leadership that makes room for others

I give thanks in particular for the ministry of Rev Seungjae Yeon and the faithful lay leaders who serve alongside him.



Intercultural ministry does not happen by accident. It requires intentional leadership, deep listening, hospitality and humility. It depends on recognising and releasing the gifts God has given to the whole people of God.

I saw this at Eastwood – ordained and lay leadership working together, people from diverse cultural communities contributing their gifts, and strong intergenerational participation in the congregation's life.

This matters for the future of our Church. Our intercultural identity will flourish when culturally diverse leadership is not merely present, but trusted, heard and able to shape the Church we are becoming.

A prophetic witness for Australia

What I experienced at Eastwood also made me think beyond the congregation to the kind of witness our churches can bear to Australia.

We are living at a time when social cohesion cannot be taken for granted. Racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, hostility towards migrants and refugees, discrimination experienced by First Peoples, and increasing polarisation strain the fabric of our common life.

In this environment, intercultural congregations have much to offer.

Week after week, people from different languages, cultures, migration stories and experiences gather together. We pray, hear Scripture, sing, listen, share meals and come to Christ's table together. We learn one another's stories and discover that difference need not become division.

At our inauguration in 1977, the Uniting Church described its coming together as "a sign of the reconciliation we seek for the whole human race". Almost 50 years later, that call remains urgent.

But social cohesion cannot simply mean avoiding difficult conversations or keeping the peace. Reconciliation in Jesus Christ calls us towards truth, justice and right relationship.

Perhaps one of the prophetic gifts the Church can offer Australia is not simply to speak about social cohesion, but to become communities where reconciliation can be seen and practised.

And that begins with us.

Cultural diversity does not automatically mean racism or inequality have disappeared. An intercultural Church must keep asking: Whose voices are heard? Whose gifts are recognised? Who leads and makes decisions? Who remains at the edges?



This is why becoming an intercultural and anti-racist Church belong together. Both are matters of discipleship.

In Australia, this journey must also honour First Peoples and our Covenant relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, calling us towards truth-telling, justice, self-determination and deeper relationship.

An unexpected gift from the Global Methodist family

And then, the picture widened even further with an unexpected gift that Sunday.

Rev Dr Siosaia Tu'itahi and his wife, Monalisa Tu'itahi, from The United Methodist Church in the United States, were looking for somewhere to worship when they happened to walk through the doors of Eastwood.

Siosaia serves as District Superintendent of the West District of the California-Pacific Conference, and is the first Pacific Islander to hold the role. After an earlier career with the San Diego County Probation Department, he responded to God's call to ordained ministry and has since served in congregational, conference and wider denominational leadership.

Monalisa is an immigration attorney and prominent lay leader who has served at every level of The United Methodist Church. She currently serves in several denominational leadership roles and has advocated strongly for Pacific Islander United Methodists, creating opportunities for first-generation leaders, youth and young adults to participate more fully in Church life.

I was particularly struck by her emphasis on “two-way learning” – the conviction that intercultural ministry is not simply about one community making room for another. The whole Church learns from and is transformed by the gifts each community brings.

That resonates deeply with our journey in the Uniting Church. Raising up younger, culturally diverse leaders must mean more than inviting people into structures others have already shaped. We must also make room for their wisdom, cultures and experiences to shape our future together.

There was something beautifully providential about Siosaia and Monalisa's presence at Eastwood. Two Tongan leaders serving Christ in the United States walked through the doors of an intercultural Uniting Church congregation in Sydney, led by a Korean minister. They came seeking a place to worship, and we recognised one another as family.

That simple encounter captured something of the Church I believe we are called to be.

Our *Basis of Union* places us within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and gives us a particular calling to relationships with churches in Asia and the Pacific. We belong to a global ecumenical family, and the Spirit continues to



weave relationships across cultures, churches and oceans.

One body in Christ.

Together, for the sake of the world.

My theme as President, *Threads of Love: Weaving Christ's Love Across Cultures and Boundaries*, draws on the Tongan practice of *lalanga* – weaving.

A *fala* is created from many strands. No single strand becomes the whole mat. Its strength and beauty emerge through the way the strands are woven together.

But weaving also sometimes requires unweaving – recognising and addressing the damaged strands of racism, exclusion and injustice that prevent the whole from flourishing.

That is why Eastwood's theme TOGETHER stayed with me.

Together does not mean sameness.

It means learning to belong to one another in Christ while honouring the cultures, stories and gifts each person brings. It means making room for voices different from our own, allowing ourselves to be changed by relationship, and refusing to be swayed by forces that tell us to fear or exclude one another.

As I left Eastwood, I found myself wondering: What if every Uniting Church congregation saw itself as a place where Australia's social fabric could be strengthened?

A place where strangers are received as neighbours. Where racism is named and resisted. Where First and Second Peoples walk together in Covenant. Where diverse and emerging leaders are trusted to lead. And where people who might never otherwise meet discover one another at the table of Jesus Christ.

The Basis of Union calls us to be a "fellowship of reconciliation". In a time of fragmentation, that call feels especially urgent.

This is part of our vocation as the Uniting Church: to show, through the way we live together, something of the reconciliation, justice and hope we proclaim in Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to God for the Eastwood Uniting Church community. In their welcome, worship, hospitality, and life together, I caught another glimpse of the Church we are becoming – many threads, woven together in Christ's love, for the sake of the world.

Rev Charissa Suli
President
Uniting Church in Australia

