

Arise and Shine: carrying the threads home:

A reflection from President Rev Charissa Suli following the 15th World Assembly of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.

Returning home from the 15th World Assembly of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women in Aotearoa New Zealand, I carry far more than memories of the gathering.

I carry stories, questions, and the voices of women from across the world. And I also carry a renewed sense of what it means for the Church to arise and shine in this generation.

For some in the Uniting Church, our connection with the World Federation may be less familiar. Australia has a longstanding relationship with the Federation as part of its South Pacific Area. When the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship (UCAF) National Committee concluded its ministry in 2024, the 17th Assembly determined that responsibility for maintaining this relationship would transfer to the Assembly.

I was grateful to share in this Assembly alongside women from the Uniting Church who continue to nurture this relationship within the Federation.

Women gathered from nine World Areas under the theme, **“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you”**.

We came from different cultures, languages, generations, churches and circumstances, carrying stories shaped by poverty and conflict, migration and displacement, gender-based violence, climate change, and the hopes and questions of younger generations.

Yet we gathered around one Christ and one purpose: To know Christ and to make him known. Our unity did not erase our differences. Rather, our differences helped us see more fully the breadth and beauty of Christ’s body.

The light begins with God

I had the privilege of [preaching at the opening worship](#) of the World Assembly, drawing on Isaiah 60:1–5 and Matthew 5:14–16.

I kept returning to these words: “Arise, shine; for your light has come”. The order matters. Isaiah speaks to a wounded people who know devastation, displacement and loss. And it is precisely there that God speaks. Arise. Shine.

Not because the people have found enough strength within themselves. Not because everything has been repaired or because they have finally become ready. They can arise because God has come to them. Their light has come.



That matters, especially when speaking to women. “Arise and Shine” must not become another demand that women work harder, carry more, fix everything, or prove themselves. Women already know a great deal about carrying. The gospel begins with grace.

God acts first. God’s light comes first.

Our arising is a response to what God has already done, and our shining reflects the light we have received from Jesus Christ.

The President of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, Dr Te Aroha Rountree, developed this beautifully in her keynote, using the image of dawn. Light does not always arrive dramatically. Sometimes it comes slowly and faithfully – a wounded heart beginning to heal, a new generation finding its voice, a church learning again how to listen.

It made me wonder how often we wait for dramatic transformation while overlooking the places where God’s dawn is already breaking.

We need one another’s light

Another strong thread running through the Assembly was our relationship across cultures and generations. Dr Rountree drew on Māori understandings of whakapapa and whanaungatanga — identity, relationship and connectedness — to remind us that none of us stands alone. We stand because others stood before us – mothers and grandmothers, elders and teachers, ministers and lay leaders, women who prayed, preached, served and sustained communities when faithfulness was costly.

And now we stand alongside one another.

One of the most powerful moments was hearing people from different generations say: “We need your light”.

Our elders carry wisdom and memory. Those in the middle generations often carry out the work of bridge-building. Younger women bring imagination, questions, energy and gifts the Church needs now – not at some undefined point in the future.

I was particularly encouraged by the intentional investment in young women through mentoring, leadership development and the Helen Kim Memorial Scholarship program. Within our South Pacific Area, young women spoke about being trusted with responsibility and supported by women prepared to take a chance on them.

This is more than succession planning; it is discipleship – one generation recognising God’s grace in another and saying: Your gifts are needed. Your voice matters. Take your place among us.

This raises a question for us in the Uniting Church:

Are we genuinely making room for the gifts God is already giving the Church through younger generations?



Faith must become action

Across the nine World Areas, we heard of women supporting survivors of violence, responding to human trafficking, providing education, advocating for climate justice and strengthening their communities.

Across these contexts, a common conviction emerged: Faith must become action.

The Federation's engagement with the United Nations deepened this conviction for me. Through its representatives, including engagement with the Commission on the Status of Women, Methodist and Uniting Church women are connected to wider conversations about poverty, health and wellbeing, gender equality, climate action, peace and justice.

Eventually, global advocacy must come home. What we discuss globally must become visible locally.

What does our commitment to the dignity of women and girls look like in our congregations?

What does climate justice ask of us in relationship with our Pacific neighbours, and what does Covenant ask of us as we walk together with First Peoples?

What does our concern for younger generations look like in the opportunities we actually share?

Our public witness and our common life cannot be separated.

Is the Church a safe place?

One session on safeguarding turned that question back on the Church itself.

Women reflected honestly on experiences of serving while exhausted, remaining silent to avoid conflict, and finding it difficult to question leadership. People can deeply love the Church and still have experiences in which the Church has not felt safe.

We were reminded that safeguarding is more than policies, forms and procedures. Those things are essential, but safeguarding is also about the culture we create.

Policies and procedures are essential, but safeguarding is also about the culture we create – the way we exercise power, respond to vulnerability and treat one another says something about the gospel we proclaim.

Who is forming our young people?

The Church should be a community where human dignity is not merely spoken about but experienced. Who is shaping our young people?

One of the most provocative Bible studies was led by Rev Jenny Pathmarajah of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, who guided us through the story of Samson and Delilah.



Rev Pathmarajah challenged interpretations that have too easily demonised Delilah while overlooking male violence and power, offering a confronting reminder that “God does not reward male violence”.

From there, she brought this ancient text into conversation with a deeply contemporary concern: the online “manosphere” and digital voices that can normalise misogyny, coercion, dominance and harmful understandings of masculinity. One sentence has stayed with me: “The manosphere doesn’t succeed because it is persuasive. It succeeds because it is present”.

That is a serious challenge for the Church. Algorithms and online influencers are present in the lives of young people every day, offering answers about identity, belonging, relationships, gender, power and what it means to succeed.

This is not about treating boys and young men as a problem to be solved. It is about taking seriously the forces shaping our young people and asking how the Church accompanies them towards relationships characterised by dignity, mutuality and love.

So, who is forming our young people? And where is the Church?

Formation lies at the heart of discipleship. In Jesus Christ, we encounter a different understanding of strength and power. Jesus teaches service, not domination. He draws near to those pushed aside, challenges abuses of power, makes room at the table, washes feet, and gives himself in love.

Our young people need communities where they can wrestle honestly with identity, belonging, relationships and faith, and encounter an alternative vision of human relationships shaped by the life and love of Jesus Christ.

The threads we receive

Throughout the Assembly, I kept noticing the language and imagery of threads. It naturally resonated with the theme I have been carrying during my Presidency: **“Threads of Love: Weaving Christ’s Love Across Cultures and Boundaries”**.

But the Assembly added another layer to that image for me. I have often spoken about the threads we each bring: culture, story, faith, experience and gifts. In Aotearoa, I became more aware of the threads we receive from one another.

Women arrived carrying the stories of their own communities. But after worshipping, listening, praying, eating, laughing, grieving and learning together, none of us left carrying only what we had brought.

A story from Africa becomes part of what a woman from the Pacific carries home. The wisdom of an elder becomes part of a younger woman’s leadership. The courage of a woman confronting injustice in one place strengthens someone serving Christ elsewhere.

We do not simply meet one another – we become part of one another’s stories.



Our relationship with the World Federation is one expression of our belonging to the wider body of Christ. It offers women of the Uniting Church a place to connect with Methodist and Uniting Church women around the world – to receive their witness, wisdom and challenge, and to share our own faith, experience and gifts in return.

Across cultures, generations and churches, those threads are woven together, deepening our understanding of Christ's Church and reminding us that we belong to one another.

In Christ, we learn to receive one another as gifts. My light does not diminish when yours shines. We need one another's light.

Anointed and sent

The closing worship brought the Assembly full circle with Luke 4:16–22. Presiding Bishop Pumla Nzimande of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa reminded us that anointing is not about status but about mission.

Christian leadership is never ultimately about office, title or influence. It is about participation in God's mission.

One invitation remains with me: "Arise and be the answer to someone's prayer".

And a necessary warning: we are called to be answers to someone's prayer, not the reason for someone else's prayers and tears.

The credibility of our Christian witness is inseparable from how we treat people.

Carrying the threads home

As women left Aotearoa to return home to communities around the world, I wondered what God will weave from all we have received.

I return inspired by women around the world who, often with limited resources and in the face of violence, poverty and exclusion, make the love of Christ tangible through service, justice, compassion and courageous leadership.

I also return with questions for us as a Church:

Where is Christ calling us to arise?

Whose voices have we not yet heard, and whose gifts have we failed to recognise?

Where does our common life need to change so people can flourish in dignity and safety?

Whose prayer might God be inviting us to help answer?



Perhaps arising begins with refusing to look away – from violence, racism and injustice; from climate-related suffering; from unsafe cultures; from the experiences of people whose voices have been ignored; and from the questions younger generations ask us.

But Christian hope does not leave us staring into darkness. “Your light has come”. Our hope is in Jesus Christ. We do not manufacture the light; we receive it. We trust the Holy Spirit, already at work, weaving threads we cannot yet see into the life of Christ’s Church.

The darkness is real, but it does not have the final say: Christ is our light.

So, arise and shine, Church – not in our own strength, but in the grace of the One who has come among us and, in love, sends us into the world.

For our light has come!

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