

Listening, Leading and Responding to God's Continuing Call

President Rev Charissa Suli

In recent days, I have had the privilege of joining Presbytery Ministers from across the Uniting Church in Australia for their national gathering in Tasmania.

Presbytery Ministers play a vital role in the life of our Church, accompanying ministers and congregations, encouraging local leaders and supporting communities as they participate in God's mission. Much of their ministry happens quietly, yet it is foundational to the life and witness of the Uniting Church.

It was a privilege to spend time with these leaders – to worship together, learn from one another, share meals, and reflect on the opportunities and challenges before us. My sincere thanks to the Presbytery of Tasmania, especially Rev Rohan Pryor, for their generous hospitality in welcoming leaders from across the country.

Our gathering began on Palawa Country, where we were warmly welcomed by Leprena UAICC Regional Council Elder, Aunty Alison, alongside Ayla and Grace.

Walking on Country reminded me that listening is more than a leadership skill; it is a spiritual practice. As Aunty Alison said: "We're not just an 'us and them'... we're becoming more and more 'an us'". Those words reminded me that reconciliation is not simply something we speak about – it is something we are continually learning to live as we grow together in Christ.

Across the gathering, we explored leadership, navigating change and what it means to lead faithfully into the future. We reflected on how people experience change, considered the opportunities and challenges facing the Church, and received an update on the Act2 process from the Commission for Governance, Resourcing and Administration's Chair, Rev David Fotheringham and Executive Officer, Dr Paul Minty; as well as the Assembly's General Secretary, Andrew Johnson and Director of Faith and Theology, Rev Dr Sunny Chen.

As part of the gathering, I was invited to reflect on leadership and change, sharing observations from the unique perspective of the President's role. The invitation was to encourage Presbytery Ministers and reflect on what I have been hearing across the Church, what I have learnt through my travels in Australia and around the world, and what the Uniting Church is becoming as we respond anew to God's continuing call.

Over the past two years I have been welcomed into congregations across Australia and around the world, learnt from First Peoples, worshipped alongside our multicultural communities, spent time with younger generations, shared with ministry agents, Elders and lay leaders, and seen Christ's love embodied through our schools, agencies and community ministries. Every community is different, yet wherever I go I meet people who love Jesus Christ, care deeply for the Uniting Church, and long to see their communities flourish in God's mission.

My thoughts kept returning to the people at the heart of our Church's life: our congregations, schools, agencies and community ministries, together with the ministry agents, Elders, lay leaders and volunteers who faithfully serve Christ every day across Australia.

As we continue to discern the future of our Church, I kept coming back to one simple conviction: any changes we make should strengthen the life and witness of our congregations, schools, agencies and community ministries. They should help people grow as disciples of Jesus Christ and support those who faithfully lead and serve every day.

It also reminded me of why our Assembly Strategy matters. It exists to strengthen the Church's participation in God's mission. Its commitments to Christ-centered discipleship, Covenant with First Peoples, intercultural belonging, younger generations and God's mission are lived out every day through our congregations, schools, agencies and community ministries.

As I travelled home from Tasmania, I found myself reflecting less on individual presentations and more on the spirit of the gathering.

I left encouraged by the generosity with which people engaged one another, the willingness to wrestle honestly with difficult questions, and the deep pastoral commitment Presbytery Ministers continue to show as they accompany congregations, ministry agents and communities across our Church.

National gatherings like this remind me that, while our contexts differ across Australia, we are strengthened when we make space to pray, listen and learn from one another, and discern together where Christ is leading us next.

But most of all, I left Tasmania with hope. Hope because I spent time with leaders who care deeply about the future of the Uniting Church, who remain committed to strengthening congregations, nurturing disciples and seeking God's wisdom together as we respond to God's continuing call.

May we continue to encourage one another, strengthen the life and witness of our congregations, schools, agencies and community ministries, and together respond with faith, courage and hope to God's continuing call.

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