

Moderator's Report

1. Introduction

The Joy of the Gospel: Joyfully Serious, Seriously Joyful Living in Christ

In a time marked by uncertainty, fatigue and profound global challenge, I continue to encourage the Church to embody the deep joy at the heart of the Gospel. We continue to be confronted by natural disasters, climate anxiety, social fragmentation and conflict. In such a context, joy can feel fragile, disrupted or even inappropriate. Yet, the joy of the Gospel continues to be a resilient, faithful response rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This joy is neither naïve optimism nor manufactured cheerfulness.

Our faith has been characterised as one that is uniquely defined by joy, which is not dependent on circumstances, but grounded in relationship. As Jesus teaches in John 15, joy flows from abiding in him: remaining in his love and living in trustful obedience. It is an internal reality shaped by the presence of the Holy Spirit, not an external pursuit of happiness or pleasure. It is an act of resistance against despair, and thus coexists with grief, suffering and lament, rather than denying or suppressing them.

I believed that, living as disciples of Jesus is therefore to be **joyfully serious and seriously joyful**. It is to hold together honesty about pain with confidence in God's faithfulness; to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. This joy is not escapism but an act of spiritual resistance and a refusal to allow fear, despair, or injustice to have the final word.

The joy of the Gospel calls us to witness through practices that are countercultural and grounded hopeful through worship, prayer, generosity, justice-seeking and compassionate presence. It is not a seasonal or optional expression of faith, but a foundational thread woven through our identity, formation and mission.

As we reflect on our life together as Church, I continue to invite our Synod to reclaim joy as an essential expression of faithful, courageous discipleship — so that Christ's joy may be in us, and our joy may be complete (John 15:11).

2. Out and About

In offering this report I highlight a number activities and events in which I have been involved, along with the key Governance responsibilities the Moderator holds. I so doing, I want this to be more than lists and travelogues, as within each of the activities there are stories, connections and relationships being lived out across the life of our Church.

I was recently reminded of the photograph in the Synod Calendar for the month of April. Yes, it's a group of people, in red shirts, standing in front of the new Church building which was opened in

Oodnadatta just 12 months ago. This group represents our UAICC, Assembly (President Rev Charissa Suli), Frontier Services (Chaplains, Staff and Outback Links Volunteers) Synod and the unseen generosity and support of many communities across the country. The week I spent in Oodnadatta involved physical labour as we cleared the plot of land beside the church and built a community garden. This was a rich time of ministry, as we worked and shared over meals and worship (led by Pastor Julia Lennon) each evening. It was also a time of understanding community connections and the esteem in which Julia is held within the community and the deep impact of the ministry offered by the church. Many of these stories have been captured and told through New Times, UCFaMS Together Newsletter, and our Frontiers Services updates from Chaplain 'Sunny'. The opportunity to represent the Synod at Oodnadatta was a great privilege and deeply rewarding.

It was also a privilege to spend time with the Frontier Services Chaplains earlier this year as the met in Adelaide.

Since the Synod last met (October 2024) I have attended meetings with the President and Moderators hosted here in Adelaide, as well as in Sydney earlier this year which also enabled us to meet as a group with the General Secretaries.

I have also attended the meeting of the Northern Synod (May 2025) President's Conference in Tonga (November 2025).

The General Secretary and I have managed two road trips. We spent 5 days travelling around the Eyre Peninsula (2025) and 4 days in the Southeast (2026). Each of these trips gave us the opportunity to connect with local congregation leadership teams and to also participate in worship. We were keen to hear about that which is working well in the various communities alongside the presenting challenges.

This past Easter, I visited two Easter Camps on Good Friday being Seeds Camp at Cornerstone College and Hope Valley's Camp at Adare. I have also sought to accept invitations to State Youth Convention and this year's Emerging Leaders Retreat (Re-Kindle). In attending these events I have been warmly received, and value the opportunity to connect with youth and young adult leaders across our Synod. In doing so, my hope is that this part of our church feels seen and celebrated.

On Easter Saturday I had a great time connecting with church and community members at the Campbelltown Congregation's Easter Family Fun Afternoon and worshiped with the Village Church Alberton on Easter Sunday.

Throughout the course of the last 20 months, I have participated in multiple church anniversaries and am always encouraged by the stories of faithful witness and trust in God's faithfulness on each occasion. At times, the celebrations are tinged with uncertainty of what the future holds, however there is still the strong threads of hope in many of these communities.

3. Governance

I continue to exercise Governance responsibilities across a variety of committees and councils of our Church and am always grateful for, the commitment of many people serving through the life of Presbyteries, Synod and Assembly.

Along with my responsibilities in Chairing the Synod Standing Committee, I am member of the following Boards/Committees:

- Property Trust and Resources Board,
- Mission Leadership Development Board (MLDB),
- Justice Mission and Theology Management Team and Subcommittee (MLDB)
- Synod Placements Committee,
- Covenanting Committee (co-chair)
- John Lodge Trust Fund

As a part of the Governance relationship with Uniting Church Schools, Lincoln College and St Andrew's Hospital, there is provision for the participation of the Moderator (or nominee) on their Boards/Councils. I currently sit on the Boards of Scotch College and Pilgrim School and maintain nominees on the remainder.

In relating to each of our associated organizations I have been able to represent the Synod at Speech Days, Valedictory Services, Gradations, Academic Awards Dinners, Anniversary Events and ANZAC Remembrance Services.

With the support of the UnitingCare SA Team, I have hosted breakfast meetings for the Principals of the Schools and Lincoln College. In addition to these meetings, we also hosted a conversation with a wider group of leaders on Anti Racism. This was generously resourced by Tanya Hosch who has held National and local leadership roles in sport, the arts, social justice and public policy

4. Inductions / Commissioning / Conclusions

I have had the opportunity to facilitate services of Induction and Conclusion of Placement for a number Synod ministry positions. These include Inductions of Rev Dr Cathie Lambert (Director of Pastoral Theology and Ministry Practice) Rev Mark Dickens (Chaplain, Ashford Hospital). Conclusion of Placement Services were conducted for Rev Aunty Denise Champion, Rev Dr Tim Hein and Rev Dr Sean Gilbert.

Within each of these services I have relied upon, and been grateful for, the engagement and collaboration of each of the Ministry Centres involved. This goes to the planning, participation in the services, along with the hospitality that is provided each time.

5. Wider Church

As previously reported, along with the General Secretary I attend meetings of the Leaders of Christian Churches (LoCCSA). I am currently co-Chair with Bishop Andrew Brook (SA/NT District Bishop, Lutheran Church) and with a small Reference Group we provide leadership within LoCCSA in the preparation for meetings and matters that may need to be addressed between those meetings.

I have been developing deeper ecumenical relationships in South Australia and have had significant opportunities to represent both our Synod and LoCCSA at ecumenical services and events. Most significantly I was asked offer a prayer at the Interfaith Service at St Francis Xavier Cathedral in response to the Bondi Shooting. I also attended the Day of Mourning Service hosted at St Peters Cathedral earlier this year.

Each year LoCCSA is invited to plan, and participate in, the service of worship for the beginning of Parliamentary year. This service is facilitated by the South Australian Parliamentary Christian Network.

If possible, I attend Services of Installation of key denominational leaders along with significant farewells. Since the last Synod Meeting such services have included

- Farewell Bishop Denise Fergusson (Anglican)
- Consecration of Bishop Sophie Relf-Christopher (Anglican)
- Farewell Archbishop Geoffrey Smith (Anglican)
- Installation of Salvation Army District Leaders Captains Scott & Natalie Frame

6. International Partnerships

At the time of my last Synod Report, I was about to travel to South Korea with 12 young adults, along with Rev Naomi Duke, Rev Lawrie Linggood and Adrian Duke to meet with Partners in the Iksan Presbytery (Presbyterian Church Republic of Korea). This was a great time of connection and learning within our Partnership. Last year, a group from Iksan was hosted and I look forward to reporting at the Synod Meeting experiences of this year's Partnership Visit (15-27 May) to South Korea which has 11 people making up the group.

The accounts of each of these trips have been communicated broadly through New Times and other newsletters.

We are currently seeking to reengage with Partnership with the United Church of Christ Philippines (UCCP) about which I reported to the Synod in 2024. The General Secretary, along with Rev Cyrus Kung will represent the Synod as visitors to the UCCP Quadrennial Assembly at the end of May 2026. I will therefore leave further discussion and reporting from the General Secretary.

7. 50th Anniversary Celebrations

We have begun thinking and planning for different ways in which we can celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Uniting Church (22 June 2027). At this stage we are looking into ways in which we can capture the written history along with the celebration of key events and ministries of our Synod over the last 50 years. Some of these will hopefully include a Celebration Service (20 June 2027), a 'Picnic Afternoon' celebrating KCO/SAYCO, a celebration of Adult Fellowships, and a celebration of music and the arts. I am currently working with a Dr Deidre Palmer, Rev Leanne Davis and Clive Conway as we seek to bring these ideas to life. The 50th Anniversary must not be only nostalgic reminiscence but a reminder of God's faithfulness and acknowledgment of the many people who have led and continue to lead within the life of the church. At the same time, it will cause us to think about future hopes and dreams whilst acknowledging the difficulties of the past.

8. Supervision / Support / Chaplains

I continue to value the three essential layers of support. As per the requirement of all Ministry Agents, I have regular Professional Pastoral Supervision. I am also required to have a Support Group

appointed by the Standing Committee, of up to six (6) but no less than four (4) persons. The makeup of this group is 'up to three (3) persons nominated by me, and at least half the members being current members of Synod Standing Committee' (Bylaw 12.1.26). Rev Beth Seaman, Rev Simon Dent, Andrew Telfer and Rev Elissa Ingliss are the current members of this group.

As a group, and as individuals, they fulfil their purpose to support, challenge, encourage and call me to be reminded of my role as representative of the Synod (Reg. 3.6.3.2) as noted in Bylaw 12.1.27. I thank my Support Group for their care, encouragement and ability to challenge me with their reflections and insight.

I thank Rev Gary Stuckey, Rev Nathan Whillas, and Rev Leanne Davis for their support as my Chaplains. In similar manner to my Support Group, I value their thoughts, care and support.

Along with structured support, I am aware that many people pray regularly for myself and the Synod Leadership Team. For those whom I know, and those who are the unseen praying ones, I cannot thank you enough.

9. Conclusion

In concluding his report, I thank the entire Synod Staff Team. I am grateful for their wisdom and support as I navigate the many and varied opportunities and demands as Moderator. It is indeed a ministry of steep learning curves and great privilege and responsibility. As a Synod, we are blessed by the giftedness and commitment of all our staff, however I have relied especially upon the experience, knowledge and collaboration with the Executive Leaders and their immediate teams.

I also thank our ex-Moderator and past Moderators for their respective prayers and support, along with their willingness to represent the church on occasions when I have been unable to do so.

As we prepare to elect the next Moderator, I offer my prayers and encouragement for each of the Moderator nominees. May we all be found in God's love and embrace as we discern together.

This report is by no means comprehensive; however, I trust it provides a suitable level of insight into the breadth of my experience since my installation (June 2023) as I continue to seek to serve our church.

I continue to pray that within our communities of faith and witness, we will take the opportunity to honour and celebrate the achievements of individuals, significant events, or seasons within the church, and that we will always be renewed by God's love, peace and hope within us.

May we be continually enlivened through being 'seriously joyful and joyfully serious', living in the Joy of Jesus Christ.

Rev Peter Morel

Moderator

25 June 2026