

Synod '24



Moderator's Report

I am often asked what inspires me, or gives me joy, as Moderator.

One of my responses is to highlight the many and varied ways in which people respond to the Joy of the Gospel through worship, witness and service in their congregational and non-congregational settings. I give thanks for the Leaders/Ministry Agents within our congregations, whilst also acknowledging the many hours given by the whole people of God in a voluntary capacity.

I also wish to highlight the spiritual care/chaplaincy that is offered across our hospitals, aged care organisations, schools, and prisons. These are ministries that can, at times, go unnoticed however they are vital expressions of the care, comfort, and compassion we receive through the ministry of Jesus Christ.

It is a great joy to see the generosity and care being offered, through each of our associated organisations, for those who are vulnerable and in most need within our community. I have been able to gain further insight into the day-to-day challenges of these organisations, as I have met with each of the CEOs and Chairpersons across the aged care and social services sectors.

It has also been a privilege, and joy, to participate in School Valedictory Services, Speech Days, Year 12 Induction Ceremonies, Anzac Commemorations, Easter Services, and more recently the official opening and blessing of a Farm and Food Enterprise. I am inspired by the energy and passion of our Schools in their commitment to the education and formation of their students.

I recently had my first experience of being a volunteer at the Red Dove Café, whether it be food preparation, dishwashing, cooking or serving, it was amazing to be a part of a joyful band of volunteers from the church, the local community and Westminster School. I celebrate this part of the church's mission along with many other activities supported through the networking of Uniting Church Fellowship and Mission Support (UCFaMS). I thank all who have supported them in fundraising for chairs for the church at Oodnadatta and the provision of grants which are supporting 12 young people with the planned visit to our partner church, in South Korea (PROK, Iksan Presbytery). Also, I cannot forget the faithful Sally Stamp Team, who quietly go about their work each Monday morning in the Synod Office.

Governance

As I participate in a variety of committees and councils of our Church, I am constantly aware of, and am 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 an ex officio member of Property Trust and Resources Board, a member of: Mission Leadership Development Board

(MLDB), Synod Placements Committee, Public Theology and Mission Committee (subcommittee of MLDB), and co-chair of the Covenanting Committee.

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 two of these Boards and have nominees on the remainder.

Wider Church

Along with the General Secretary I attend meetings of the Leaders of Christian Churches (LoCCSA). I am also a member of the LoCCSA Reference Group which gives leadership within LoCCSA in the preparation for meetings and matters that may need to be addressed between those meetings. As such, I have been developing deeper ecumenical relationships in South Australia. I have also had the opportunity to represent LoCCSA at some ecumenical services and events.

It is significant that we are invited to participate in the service of worship for the beginning of each Parliamentary year. This service is facilitated by the South Australian Parliamentary Christian Network.

I have had the opportunity to attend the Installation of new Moderators in the NSW/ACT and Queensland Synods as well as having time to be at their Synod Meetings and hope to attend the Installation of Rev Dr Michelle Cook as the next Moderator in the Northern Synod (April 2025). Earlier this year, I hosted the Moderators, President, President Elect and UAICC National Chairperson for two days in Adelaide. Each of these occasions gave me the opportunity to build and strengthen collegial relationships, as well being able to gain a broader understanding of challenges we face in common.

Recently, I was able to attend the UnitingCare National Leaders Forum in Canberra. This was a significant opportunity to connect with senior leaders and board members from across the UnitingCare network, whilst hearing of the challenges the various agencies and organizations are currently facing.

Referendum – Voice to Parliament

One of the significant issues for our Church, since my Installation, has been the Referendum. At our last Synod Meeting (June 2023), we resolved (by Agreement) to 'support the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution to empower First Nations People to have a greater say in policy and legislation which govern their affairs'.

Since then, I have witnessed, and been part of, many discussions representing diverse, and differing, points of view within both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Communities about the 'Voice'. The leadup to the Referendum, and the subsequent result was a time of great struggle and conflicting responses within our church and wider community.

Our Synod Resolution reflects the long-standing commitment we, the Uniting Church, have in our Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal Islander and Christian Congress (UAICC). We continue to be challenged with what it means to be a church that embraces justice, love, equity, and mutual respect

and how, as the whole Uniting Church we can honour and live within this covenant relationship. As I wrote in my Pastoral Letter (1 Sep 2024), 'We are being asked to walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country. Our Congress leadership is asking us to be part of this journey, in response to the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, from those gathered at Uluru. This is a journey that has been decades in the making. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are invited to walk together, not only as First and Second Peoples, but as a family living in Christ'. In this letter, I also called our Church to pray for our nation, for our church, for local communities, family, and friends with an attitude of blessing in the name of Jesus Christ, regardless of differing points of view.

The support for the 'Yes' campaign saw me meeting regularly with a subgroup of the Covenanting Committee, known as the 'Referendum Planning Group'. This group included Graham Brice (Covenanting Officer), Rev Dr Aunty Denise Champion, Rev Uncle Ken Sumner, Mark Waters and Rev Jenni Hughes. From our work, we were supported by the Engagement Team who poured heart and soul into designing, producing and delivering multiple resources which were often called upon at short notice.

At Aunty Denise's invitation, a group of us visited Port Augusta for a Prayer Vigil and Community Forum in which there was significant conversation within the Aboriginal Community from different points of view on the 'Voice to Parliament'. These conversations were robust and at the same time were conducted in a respectful manner.

I was also privileged to be a part of the Prayer Vigil on the eve of the Referendum, held at Brougham Place UC, which was live streamed as a part of the National Prayer Vigil. Many thanks to Dr Deidre Palmer, Rev Jenni Hughes, Dr Joanna Palmer and Rev Linda Driver for preparing the worship and prayer resources for our part in this vigil.

Throughout the leadup to the Referendum I received many letters and emails in response to the Synod's decision supporting the 'Voice to Parliament'. Whilst I acknowledge and affirm people's individual rights to have different opinions, the way some people expressed their deeply held points of view sadly reflected the polarisation in the church and wider community.

At the same time, I am humbled by the friendship and grace of those with whom I sat, in difficult conversations, in which there was need for deep listening and reconciliation. This was poignantly reflected in an afternoon, post referendum, of lament and yarning (Yanakana) at Yarthu Apinthe (Brooklyn Park), where we had the opportunity to gather around the fire, food and to share in Holy Communion.

Since the Referendum, focus shifted to conversations and planning for the 30th Anniversary of the Covenant with UAICC and the 15th Anniversary of the Preamble to the Constitution. These have been significant moments to acknowledge what has been achieved whilst also acknowledging there is much more to do within our covenant relationships.

In Memoriam

As you read the 'In Memoriam' Proposal, there have been several Ministers who have died since the Synod last met. It has been my privilege to send out Pastoral Notes, based on the Records of

Service, as well as being able to attend several services. I am constantly encouraged, and amazed, in reading the ways in which God has called people into ministry, the many and varied responses and, the dedication of many years of service for the church and wider community.

Inductions / Commissioning

I have had the opportunity to lead services of Induction and Commissioning for a number Synod ministry positions. This includes the General Secretary, Associate General Secretary Placements and Safe Church, Lecturers at Uniting College, Yorke Peninsula Parish Mission Leaders and Hospital and Aged Care Chaplains.

General

Last year, I had a weekend visit to the Riverland, with a Regional Service in Berri, along with a tour around flood affected areas. I also took a 10-day journey across the Eyre Peninsula which enabled me to meet with Leaders in ministry placements, as well as communities without a Minister. As ever, the rural sector feels the pressure of changing weather patterns, increasing costs and reduced profit margins. I am always amazed at the hope and resilience of our primary producers, particularly amidst many factors that are beyond their control.

It has been a pleasure to accept invitations to preach in a variety of services across the State. This has included the opportunity to share in several Anniversary Celebrations. I was also invited to lead daily reflections at last year's Frontier Services 'Bush Chaplains Retreat' in Hahndorf.

The General Secretary and I are hoping to visit more parts of South Australia in the coming year.

I have also had the privilege of hosting the annual Retired Minister's Day. This is an occasion to connect through food, worship and, also have some input from the Mercer Fund.

Supervision / Support / Chaplains

It is a privilege to have at least three layers of support. As with the requirement of all Ministry Agents I have regular Professional Pastoral Supervision. I had originally sought to establish a supervisory relationship with an interstate supervisor, however we both encountered difficulties in managing the challenges of long-distance supervision. Since early this year, I have been meeting regularly with a South Australian based supervisor. Apart from being able to meet face-to-face, it has been important to be able to have supervision beyond my immediate connections within the life of our Synod.

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). I currently have Rev Beth Seaman, Rev Simon Dent, Andrew Telfer and Elissa Ingliss as the 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 inside and as a representative of the Synod (Reg. 3.6.3.2) as noted in Bylaw 12.1.27. I value my Support Group for their care, encouragement and ability to challenge me with their reflections and insight.

Lastly, I have the benefit of having three Chaplains (Rev Gary Stuckey, Rev Leanne Davis and Rev Nathan Whillas) each of whom I can call as needed. It's also good when I have been able to have the occasional catch up for a coffee.

PROK Partnership - Iksan Presbytery

Earlier, I mentioned our Partnership with the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK, Iksan Presbytery). In the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding at our last Synod, we acknowledged several areas of concern and common interest including:

- The impact of Colonisation on First Nation Peoples
- The struggles for reconciliation, reunification and justice and peace
- The impact of climate change and other environmental issues in the Asia-Pacific area
- Opportunities for intercultural learning from one another through exchange visits involving mission partners, youth and ministry candidates

I am looking forward to travelling to South Korea later this year, with 12 young adults, along with Rev Naomi Duke, Rev Lawrie Linggood and Adrian Duke. We are well resourced by our local Korean Ministers as we prepare for this time with our partners in Iksan.

It is with sadness that we were recently informed of the death of Rev Dr Lee Dae Hyun. Tributes from our local PROK Partnership Team, have acknowledged the importance of Rev Lee to the partnership we have today.

Rev Lee had several visits to Adelaide and had also accompanied young people to the Uniting Church National Christian Youth Convention. Rev Lee is remembered for his gifts of hospitality and friendship and for the way in which he always ensured that 'everyone was well looked after'. For many of the trips to Korea, along with visits to Australia, he was the main translator for the partnership, blessing all with his excellent understanding of English language.

We continue to commit ourselves to this partnership with deep listening, mutual respect and prayer.

Philippines Partnerships – Middle Luzon and North Luzon

I thank Rev Christa Megaw for the following summary of these partnerships.

The partnership between the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) North Luzon and the Uniting Church in South Australia (UCSA). This partnership was originally signed in 1992 and renewed in 2007. It is a partnership that reflects mutuality, advocacy, theological insights and friendship.

Through partnership, the goal has been a mutual process of transformation across all areas of life (spiritually, socially and materially).

At the South Australian Presbytery/Synod meeting in November 2013, it was endorsed that the UCSA develop a new partnership with the UCCP - Middle Luzon Jurisdiction. This developed

due to an invitation from the UCCP in 2010, when the North Luzon Jurisdiction was split up into two areas – North and Middle Luzon.

Some of the ways in which the hopes of these partnerships have been enacted include:

- *Praying for each other and for the peoples of the Philippines and Australia*
- *Sharing resources, information, liturgies and priorities*
- *Encouraging and facilitating exchange visits between our two churches in the form of exposure programs and study trips*
- *Focussing on theological partnerships through the mutual exchange and theological development of students and staff*
- *Addressing critical issues in both the Australia and Philippine context; particularly:*
- *The struggle for self-determination and land rights for our Indigenous and tribal communities*
- *To lobby our governments for the safety and security of UCCP members*
- *To encourage our church communities to develop awareness, and to live responsible lifestyles that do not contribute to the oppression of the suffering poor of the world nor increase the devastation of our natural environment.*

Over the years, several Moderators and groups have visited the Philippines and been hosted by the UCCP – North Luzon. The most recent visit was in 2019 when a group of young people who were part of the Intern program at Uniting College, together with Rev Mark Schultz and Rev Mike Wardrop, visited our partner church and learned of the poverty, human rights abuses and environmental and mining challenges in the Philippines.

The UCSA has also hosted several visits to South Australia by Bishops and others from our partner church in the Philippines.

In February 2021 as members of the Synod gathered, we watched an appeal by Bishop Joseph of the UCCP – North Luzon. In his testimony, the Bishop spoke about on-going harassment of Christians in the Philippines. In May 2021, the Synod of South Australia received new pleas through the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania to support another UCCP Pastor who had been harassed and arrested. Uniting Church members were urged to join a letter writing campaign to support our partners within the UCCP.

In October 2023, while in the Philippines for a Diakonia Asia Pacific Conference, Rev Christa Megaw, Rev Sandy Boyce and Rev Judy Knowling were able to meet with Bishop Joseph Agpaoa. Bishop Joseph expressed concern that the relationship between the UCCP and the UCSA had become distant, due to minimum active contact being made by the UCSA.

It is my hope therefore, that in the coming months, I will be able to work with a small team to revisit the history of these partnerships and look to creating new Memoranda of Understanding in which we will recommit ourselves to support this partnership. In doing so we will reinforce the bonds of mutual faith, generosity and friendship. To further this work, I believe it will be important that we plan an official 'Partnership Visit' in 2025.

Conclusion

In the recent New Times, I asked whether we enjoy a good celebration. Well, I believe we have much to celebrate through the ministries we offer.

I highlight again, the amazing celebration of the Installation of our National President, Rev Charissa Suli as well as sharing the joy and celebration of the election of Rev Dr Paul Dongwon Goh as our next President.

In writing this report, I once again give thanks for the entire Synod Staff Team. I am grateful for their wisdom and support as I have been navigating one of the steepest learning curves I have experienced for several years. As a Synod, we are well served 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.

This report is by no means comprehensive; however, I trust it has provided a suitable level of insight into the breadth of my experience since my Installation, as I continue to seek to represent our church.

I continue to pray that within our communities of faith and witness, we will take the opportunity to celebrate. Whether we are honouring and celebrating the achievements of individuals, significant events, or seasons within the church, may we find a renewing of 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

20 September 2024



The Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of South Australia