



ASSEMBLY REPORT TO THE SYNOD OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA 2024

Introduction

It has been a very busy period in the life of the Assembly since the last Assembly report to this Synod. Most notable during this time was the 17th Assembly meeting, which took place in Parramatta in July. One important outcome of that meeting was the appointment of Mr Andrew Johnson as the new General Secretary of the Assembly. Andrew will have commenced at the beginning of the week in which this Synod meeting is being held.

There have been several other staffing changes since the last report to this Synod. In August of 2023, the Assembly welcomed Raúl Sugunanathan as Assembly Justice and Advocacy Officer (Part-time). Sadly, we said goodbye to Raúl in May of this year as he moved on to a full-time Community Organising role with the Sydney Alliance. In late 2023, two new National Consultants, Rev Dr Sunny Chen and Rev Kath Behan were appointed to the Assembly Resourcing Unit. The end of 2023 also saw the resignation of Ms Colleen Geyer as General Secretary as well as the end of a short-term appointment of Mr Chris Barnett as a National Consultant (Next Generations). Following the 17th Assembly, Ms Rebecca Beisler completed her time as National Manager Media and Communications to pursue a new vocation as a school teacher, and Ms Bethany Broadstock was promoted from within the Communications Team to the role of National Manager.

Following the resignation of Colleen Geyer, Rev Lindsay Cullen was appointed as the General Secretary (Interim). Lindsay has served in that role from the beginning of 2024 until the commencement of Andrew Johnson as the new permanent General Secretary. Lindsay will continue to serve the Assembly in his previous role of Associate General Secretary.

Highlights

The Assembly comprises a number of different units and agencies. The Assembly Resourcing Unit (ARU) is made up of the Mission and Ministry Team, the Communications Team and the Finance and Admin Team. During the past 18 months, two primary foci have shaped the work of the ARU. The first was the Voice Referendum, for which the Assembly advocated a 'Yes' vote. It coordinated and worked collaboratively with a wide range of partners, including justice focussed staff in Synods as well as Synod and Assembly Agencies. The second was the holding of the 17th Assembly which required an enormous effort of preparation by Mission and Ministry, Communications and Finance and Admin staff within the Assembly alongside the excellent work contributed by the host NSW-ACT Synod.

The Assembly also includes the Act2 Project Unit which undertook an enormous amount of work in the 18 months prior to the Assembly meeting, running an extensive collective discernment phase and developing its final report and recommendations to the Assembly.

There are also three national agencies within the Assembly structure.

Frontier Services

Frontier Services' purpose is to 'offer service and ministry in the name of Christ to remote Australia through compassionate care, justice and nurture of the spirit'.

Highlights during the last reporting period include:



- Strengthened relationships with Synods and Presbyteries relating to Bush Chaplains,
- Strengthened and broadened fundraising, and
- Strengthened and expanded work with UAICC.

UnitingCare Australia

The national body for the Uniting Church's community services network. It is one of the largest providers of community services in Australia and is a national advocate for social justice. UnitingCare Australia celebrated 30 years of service in late 2023.

Highlights for UnitingCare Australia have included:

- Launch of the 3rd Child Social Exclusion Report in collaboration with the University of Canberra and six organisations in the UnitingCare network
- The highly successful trial of the Escaping Violence Payment Program by the UnitingCare Consortium (8 members of the UnitingCare Australia network led by Uniting VICTAS), which paved the way for the \$900 million Leaving Violence Program announced in the Federal Budget
- Working with the wider UCA and UAICC to support the referendum on a Voice to Parliament, and
- Holding the Annual Leaders Forum in September in Canberra with leaders from across the UnitingCare Australia Network and across the Church

UnitingWorld

UnitingWorld works for a world where lives are whole and hopeful, free from poverty and injustice, and as a channel for connecting Uniting Church people to God's work in the wider world.

UnitingWorld highlights include:

- The adoption by the Methodist Church in Fiji of groundbreaking disaster and disability policies having been resourced by the UnitingWorld project, 'Resilient, Inclusive and Safe Churches and Communities'
- Continuing work in supporting Pacific women to build a movement for dignity and equality, and
- Development of the 'UnitingWorld Sunday' concept with resources for promoting and running an opportunity to connect with our partner churches and to hear about and support the work of UnitingWorld.

The 17th Triennial Assembly

One of the most important events since our last report to the SA Synod was the exciting 17th Triennial Assembly, held in July this year. The Assembly was, as always, an opportunity to gather together and celebrate our Church, and on this occasion, the installation of Rev Charissa Suli who is the Church's youngest President and first person of colour to hold that role. The installation service was held at St Stephens Uniting Church in Sydney's CBD and was a wonderful, exciting and moving service of worship. The Assembly also elected President-Elect, Rev Dr Paul Goh from the Synod of South Australia, and the new Assembly General Secretary, Mr Andrew Johnson.

A primary piece of business for the 17th Assembly was the passage of many parts of the Act2 proposals, which will be addressed later in this report. Other important decisions made by the Assembly include:

- Two resolutions proposed by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC): A Task Group to Revive the Covenant, and a commitment to implementing relevant principles from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) within the Church.
- Receiving three 'Continuing Witness' documents: 'The Confession of Belhar', 'The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification' and 'Laudato si'. These are a new category of statements or confessions of faith from other churches from which we might receive and learn from.
- Supporting and extending the work of the Net Zero Emissions Steering Group in collaboratively supporting and reporting on our whole of Church response to the call of climate justice, and
- A proposal seeking to affirm, welcome and honour the life and faith of transgender, intersex and gender diverse people in our Church.

We look forward to 2027 when this Synod will host the 18th Assembly, including the installation of Rev Dr Paul Goh as the President.

The President's Movements

Since Rev Charissa Suli's installation as President at the 17th Assembly, she has represented the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) in a variety of national, ecumenical, and international forums. Her leadership reflects the values of inclusivity, justice and love central to the mission of the UCA, as she engages with diverse communities and global religious partners.

Global Ecumenical and Partner Church Engagements

World Methodist Conference and Council Meeting

The eight-yearly World Methodist Conference took place in August, in Sweden, gathering the global family of Methodist and Uniting churches. The President's participation alongside a Uniting Church delegation was a powerful representation of the UCA's role in global ecumenical dialogue. The conference was an important opportunity to engage with faith leaders on critical issues such as theological education, climate change and the diversity of God's church.

Methodist Church in Fiji Conference

The President attended the annual conference of the Methodist Church in Fiji in August, an expression of the UCA's ongoing commitment to Pacific partnerships. The adoption of significant policies related to disability and disaster management during this conference reflected the shared mission of empowering communities to thrive.

Assembly Meeting of the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Presbyterian Republic Church of Korea

The President spent time in South Korea in September, strengthening the partnership between the UCA and the Presbyterian Church of Korea as we advocate for peace and justice together. This visit was a testament to the deep and lasting relationship between our two churches, particularly in addressing challenges facing the Korean peninsula.

90th Anniversary of the GMIM Indonesia Church

Celebrating this significant milestone with GMIM in North Sulawesi highlighted the enduring partnership between the UCA and GMIM. The visit reflected the shared mission of supporting one another through fellowship, solidarity, and mutual growth in Christ.

WCC and New Zealand Methodist Church Consultation on Indigenous and Pacifica Perspectives

This consultation was co-hosted by the World Council of Churches and the Methodist Church of New Zealand and focused on transformative discipleship and care for creation. UAICC National

Chairperson Rev Mark Kickett accompanied the President to ensure Indigenous voices were central to the discussion. The outcomes of this gathering will provide valuable resources for the global church community.

Pastoral Leadership and Advocacy

Assembly Standing Committee and National Leadership

The President chaired her first Assembly Standing Committee meeting in August.

She took media interviews related to the Multifaith Week of Action in September, advocating for urgent climate action and emphasising the need to transition to sustainable energy sources. This reflects the UCA's commitment to the stewardship of creation and to supporting communities most affected by environmental degradation.

Domestic and Family Violence Conference, Melbourne

This ecumenical conference was organised by the Anglican Church of Australia, bringing together faith leaders and communities united to prevent gender-based violence. Following the conference, [the President reflected](#) on the church's critical role in addressing domestic and family violence and the responsibility of faith communities to shape positive societal attitudes and create safe spaces for healing and safety.

UnitingCare Australia Leaders' Forum, Canberra

The Leaders' Forum brings together leaders from the UnitingCare network and Uniting Church along with thought leaders in politics and the media. The President addressed the gathering and led the gathering in prayer, affirming the UCA's commitment to social justice and to meaningful collaboration for change.

WA Synod Meeting and Mid North Coast Presbytery Gathering

The President attended the 48th Synod of Western Australia and was privileged to preach at the opening worship. Her sermon focused on the Synod theme, 'Weaving Christ's Love in Our Ministry'. The gathering shared stories of faith, resilience, and dedication, expressing a strength of community despite the isolation often faced by churches in the West. The Synod was a powerful testament that the Uniting Church, its leaders, schools, and agencies remain interconnected in their shared mission.

Additionally, her time at the Mid North Coast presbytery gathering affirmed the critical importance of maintaining deep connections and a pastoral presence in regional areas.

50 years Anniversary of the Sydney Korean Church in Strathfield, NSW

On the momentous occasion of its 50th anniversary, the Sydney Korean Uniting Church marked half a century of worship, witness and service. It was a vibrant testament to the church's enduring legacy, which began its life as the first Korean church in Sydney in 1974, providing a sanctuary for Korean migrants.

Significant contributions during the service included a sermon by NSW-ACT Moderator Rev Mata Havea Hiliau and celebratory messages from the Chairperson of the Korean National Conference and a local MP. Retired Minister Rev John Brown was acknowledged for his enduring support and for the pivotal role he played in the church's founding and as a missionary in the Presbyterian Church of Korea. The President had the privilege of offering the closing blessing and benediction.

UCA National Conferences

Korean National Conference

The President attended her first National Conference with the Korean National Conference (KNC) in Canberra, where the focus was on the 17th Assembly theme. The gathered community reflected on the past, present, and future of the KNC and engaged in discussions that explored the KNC's journey and aspirations in light of the Assembly's vision.

Fiji National Conference

The President will attend the Fiji National Conference (FNC) in Katoomba NSW in mid-October. The theme for the conference is 'Irrepressible Love' and is inspired by the President's 'Threads of Love' theme for the 17th Assembly and triennium. President Suli will preach at the opening worship and will focus on God's boundless love and its significance for the FNC community.

Pastoral Statements

The President's full schedule has provided her with opportunities to offer pastoral leadership and service as a prophetic voice for the Church in the public square and within the Church community. The opportunities highlight the influential role of the Assembly President and underscore the importance of our presence in key national and public forums, affirming our collective commitment to justice, reconciliation, and peace.

Links to the President's pastoral statements are provided below:

- Religious Discrimination Laws Shelved: President Suli expressed disappointment following the Government's decision not to reintroduce revised religious discrimination legislation <https://uniting.church/religious-discrimination-laws-shelved-2024/>.
- Sixth Anniversary of the National Apology: On the sixth anniversary of the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, the President shared reflections and reaffirmed the church's commitment to healing and justice <https://uniting.church/sixth-anniversary-national-apology-2024/>
- Calls to Prayer for the Middle East: the President called the Uniting Church to a Week of Prayer for Peace in the Middle East, addressing ongoing conflicts and urging solidarity with affected communities <https://uniting.church/week-prayer-peace-middle-east-2024/>
- Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) [Multifaith Week of Action led by ARRCC](#)
- Older Persons Sunday and Intercultural Sunday: These communications highlight the UCA's focus on inclusivity and respect across generations and cultures [Read about Older Persons Sunday](#) and [Intercultural Neighbouring Sunday](#), and
- Season of Creation: In the Assembly's 2024 Season of Creation resource, the President highlighted the connection between our Assembly theme and the imperative of caring for the Earth, underscoring that environmental stewardship transcends all human divisions [Explore the Season of Creation resource](#).

Act2 — Where to from here?

The 17th Assembly resolved to accept the overall vision proposed by the Act2 final report as well as the vision statements for each of the three workstreams: (A) Local communities of faith, (B) A National Network for Theology, Formation and Leadership, and (C) Ordering and resourcing of the wider Church.

Additionally, the Assembly approved resolutions concerning the substantive parts of Streams (B) and (C) including the creation of two Commissions, principles to guide those Commissions and a commitment to investigating the feasibility of three or four council structures consistent with the vision and principles approved by the Assembly.



A number of parts of the original proposals, especially those related to Stream (A), were not determined by the Assembly due to lack of time, so the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) meeting on 30 August – 1 September approved the proposals related to Stream (A) as a basis for the ongoing work in this area.

The ASC also appointed members of an Act2 Transition Committee which will guide the work of creating Terms of Reference for the two Commissions and consulting with the breadth of the Church including Congress, other councils of the Church and agencies regarding these draft Terms of Reference. The Transition Committee will also develop a process for receiving Expressions of Interest from those wishing to offer themselves as members of Commissions.

Conclusion

Many things have been achieved in this busy period for the Assembly, and the life of the Church nationally has been resourced and celebrated in meaningful ways. It is a pleasure to share reports of our work with Synod meetings to gain insight into the particular strengths, joys, challenges and uniqueness of the Synods of our Uniting Church.

Lindsay Cullen
Interim General Secretary

Charissa Suli
President