



PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE

APPRECIATION

My first word of appreciation must be to the Nominating Committee of the U.C.A.F. Committee of the S.A. Synod who in 1999 nominated me to lead the UCAF National Committee for 2003/2006. It has been a lot of work but an experience I have thoroughly enjoyed and one I would have hated to have missed.

In preparation for the position, and knowing that I would be invited to conduct and preach at a number of Church Services during my term, I enrolled at the S.A. Theological College where I gained Certificate 2 in Ministry (Lay Preacher Studies) and in 2003 was accredited as a Lay Preacher in the Uniting Church. That experience alone, where I was confronted, challenged, uplifted, enthralled and had my faith deepened and enriched, as well as experiencing all the blessings I have received from preaching, would be sufficient to say thank you to the Nominating Committee.

Meeting and having fellowship with thousands of UCAF Members right around this country has been a wonderful blessing and a great privilege.

The National Committee 2003-2006 is comprised of a multi-talented group of people, and has been a joy to lead and serve. It has been a very happy Committee, to which each member brought his or her own special gift and talent. During our term we have spent a lot of time together, prayed together, fellowshiped together, shared in each other's up times and down times and have all become good friends. I want to thank each one of them for the time they have given, for their commitment and efficiency to their tasks, and for their loyalty and friendship.

Thanks to the National Assembly and especially the General Secretary, who has always made himself available to give advice and leadership. I met him in his office twice and he has visited the Committee on several occasions. The Assembly Staff have also given great support and encouragement, and we have been given \$500.00 each year towards our funds. It was good to be asked to give a written report about UCAF for "National Matters", a publication which went to all the Synods in 2005, invited to report to the Assembly Standing Committee in November 2005 and to be asked, on behalf of UCAF, to write an article for publication in the 2006 Mission Prayer Handbook.

For our term the S.A. Synod and latterly the Presbytery and Synod of South Australia provided us with an office, equipment and technical support, for which we are extremely grateful. We appreciate the support and encouragement we have received from each staff member and for the financial help we received from "UCInvest".

THEME

In 2001, when we were meeting as a de-facto national committee, we decided that the theme for our term would be "Cloud of Witnesses" and we commissioned a logo to depict it. This logo has been used on all our letterheads and publications and the theme was used in all the worship sessions as well as the decorations at the National Celebration. A "Cloud of Witnesses" hymn was composed by a fellowship member in South Australia, and has been sung on many occasions.

NATIONAL CELEBRATION

During its term each national committee is obliged to arrange and organise a national conference, now called a National Celebration. In April 2004 people from overseas as well as every State and Territory in Australia attended the National Celebration held at Lincoln College, North Adelaide, with the theme "Cloud of Witnesses". Rev. Dr. Andrew Dutney of Adelaide was Bible Study Leader and Mrs. Janet Wood of Victoria the Keynote Speaker. A highlight was the day trip to the "Copper Triangle" at Moonta and Moonta Mines. Buses and private cars took over 1,200 people from across South Australia to the Celebration Service, filling the Moonta Mines Church, at which the Assembly President, Rev. Dr. Dean Drayton, was the preacher. After the Service the local fellowship groups rose to the challenge by providing a Cornish pasty lunch at Moonta. After lunch many tours of historic sites in the area were arranged.

To enable indigenous and ethnic people to take part in the Celebration several Synod Committees generously agreed to sponsor people from Ambon, P.N.G. and the indigenous Australians who were able to be present.

VISITING

In July 2003 I was a Representative to the 10th National Assembly in Melbourne. I was a Delegate to two ACW National Conferences, one in October 2003 in Perth and the other in October 2005 in Sydney. In 2003 I attended the 50th Anniversary Federal Conference of the Presbyterian Women's Association of Australia in Sydney. At the business meeting of that Conference it was interesting to note that this Association decided to withdraw from Bridgebuilders International.

The national committee remains a member of the President's Table and the National Secretary and I have attended each President's Table function held in South Australia during the triennium.

In February 2003 I attended the live-in conference of the UCAF Council of Victoria and Tasmania and in March 2005 the Annual Women's live-in camp of the Presbytery of Mary Burnett at Luther Heights, North of Brisbane.

I had expressed a wish that when invited to visit the various Synods that I be given the opportunity to meet groups in rural and country areas and in most Synods this was able to be arranged. I met many thousands of members, informally and formally. Although most were over 60 years of age it was encouraging to note a number of younger people among them. There appeared to be an air of optimism about the future in some groups and pessimism in others. In the latter groups there was resistance to any change and a belief that people should "want to join them just as they were".

On a number of occasions I met groups which were growing because male members had joined, other groups were bemoaning the fact that the men of the church were diffident about joining, whilst I met other groups where the men wanted to join but the female members would not condone it. I believe that this latter attitude is a huge problem in some areas and although I tried to address it I believe in most cases it fell on "deaf ears".

I was impressed by the number of groups, small and large, witnessing through UCAF. The love, care, support and concern which takes place has helped people to come to faith, others to have their faith renewed and deepened, whilst others have been won back and returned to the life and witness of the Church through the non threatening environment of a fellowship group. It was noticed that although in some instances the local Minister of the Word was a great encourager and regular visitor at meetings, unfortunately this did not generally happen. Many groups are "left to their own devices" except for an occasional visit at Easter or to chair the A.G.M. Some still have an annual Fellowship Church Service, but others have had this curtailed by the local Church Councils. It was observed that

although some synods do give exit students an overview of adult fellowships, this is the exception, rather than the rule.

It was apparent that most fellowship groups hide their achievements and just get on with their work and witness without any advertising. In many congregations they are almost invisible, yet I believe they are the best educated people in our Church about mission, which they passionately support with their prayers, money and time. The reality of today's UCAF is very different from the view held by some that it is nothing more than an elderly women's group only interested in a cup of tea and a nice chat. Although the majority of members are elderly women, (as is our Church), it is pleasing to note a number of men and younger people joining groups.

Several groups which had dropped to just a few members had experienced growth in membership when they changed the meeting time and style, particularly if it was preceded by either lunch or dinner. Most groups find it difficult to have their activities reported in church newsletters and Synod Magazines, whilst many don't see the availability of the website as an asset. Although one Synod Magazine gives its UCAF Synod Committee access to half a page each month, other groups find it difficult to have their activities reported or advertised, most only advertising their activities in their own UCAF magazines, which is really preaching to the converted; thus UCAF tends to remain invisible to the wider church.

When we came to office we inherited a number of tea towels and we have endeavoured to sell them locally and throughout Australia. After a group in Queensland turned the tea-towels into aprons we have promoted this idea and sales have increased. Wearing aprons with the logo when catering is an excellent way of advertising UCAF and a great way of making our organization less invisible. A number of badges with our logo have been sold during our term and it is pleasing to note more and more members wearing a UCAF badge.

I believe that visiting the various Synods was worthwhile in promoting the national committee, as very few members seemed to know about the UCAF Network, history of the national committee, our relationship to the National Assembly, our links with overseas Bodies, or even our Logo.

Everywhere I went I was warmly welcomed, sometimes the welcome was overwhelming, especially in the country, where people were so pleased to know that they had not been forgotten or overlooked. The more I saw of UCAF in this country, the prouder I became of it.

SYNOD COMMITTEES/COUNCIL

The Synod Committees/Council operate quite differently. Some relate and report to their Board of Education and some direct to their Synod. Some are given Synod representation as full members, some are co-opted, while others are invited to only give a written report.

The Northern Synod has no Synod Committee, Tasmania works as an executive through the Presbytery, Victoria & Tasmanian's peak body is called a "Council" whilst all others are called Committees. Most leaders are called "President", although one is called "Chairperson".

Some Synod Committees have a dedication service each year, while another has this only when a new President takes office. Fellowships Day in the Synods is also celebrated in various ways. Sometimes it takes the form of a full day's meeting, including A.G.M. and Financial and other Reports, sometimes it takes the form of a half day, with hardly a mention of the activities of UCAF, sometimes it is a half day promoting UCAF, while at other times it is a Dedication/Communion Service only. In some synods Fellowships Day is held centrally and in others it is held in a near country region. One Synod Committee has

their own annual Consultation Day, preceded by Holy Communion, when reports are given, but this is only advertised to members of that Committee and sub-Committees.

All the Synod Committees engage in many activities, all voluntary. Examples include running a cafeteria at an Annual Royal Show, the awarding of an Annual Pastoral Theology Prize, awarding Octogenarian Certificates to all Uniting Church members in their Synod, supporting multicultural and ethnic groups, providing finance for chaplaincies, arranging bus tours, gatherings and rallies, financially supporting Frontier Services, outback and Indigenous Communities, providing home made biscuits each week to Baxter Detention Centre, giving medical aid to West Papua, providing resources for Sunday Schools in P.N.G. and Bougainville, supporting Dilkusha Home and the Fijian Methodist Church, publishing magazines, devotional resources, hymns, songs and plays, collecting and selling used postage stamps, corresponding with people in mission situations, supporting Shalom and Nungalinga Colleges, retired missionaries, Uniting Church Partner Churches and "Partners in Mission", as well as providing delegates to various ecumenical and secular committees and organizations. Nearly all the Synod Committees now have male members.

On the local level those groups in the congregations which are affiliated with the several Synod Committees raise millions of dollars each year. Beside raising all this money they support not only their local church and community but also engage in many outreach activities, locally, within their Synod and overseas. In each Synod the amount of voluntary work given and the amount of energy expended by fellowship members is quite breathtaking and I believe that they will continue to live up to the description given by a former assembly officer as "the lifeblood of the Uniting Church", that of an ex-moderator as "the engine room of the Uniting Church" and by Kennon Callahan as the "marathon runners" in the Church.

There are many groups in the congregations (eg. craft, Bible study, social groups) who are not affiliated with their UCAF Synod Committees. These groups have been encouraged to affiliate because when they do their horizons are broadened and they often become better educated in the mission of the church, by receiving publications and information relating not only to the life and work of the Uniting Church but that of our Partner Churches and the wider church. The majority of these small groups, however, do not see any advantage in being made aware of the "bigger picture" and becoming part of a world wide network. We continue to stress, however, that any adult group in the church meeting for fellowship can be called an Adult Fellowship.

WEBSITE

Our website address is <http://assembly.uca.org.au/agencies/adultfellowship/>

We are grateful that in 2005 the Assembly Communications Unit took over responsibility for maintaining the website and for all the help given by the Assembly Communication Officer Mr. Gavin Melvin. Prior to that, in addition to the web site we inherited from the previous National Committee, we designed a new site and had two different webmasters. I am sure that with the Assembly Communications Unit now overseeing this site continuity will be easier to maintain.

We have been encouraging all Synod Committees and groups to use the site and it remains one of my great disappointments that this has not been happening. I am sad that most UCAF members do not see the wonderful potential of using this facility, but continue to just use their local UCAF Synod Magazines to advertise, report and publicise events and resources when this could also be done on the internet without charge, and with very little effort, thus informing the world of the great things UCAF is doing.

NATIONAL CONSULTATION

At the end of its term each National Committee is obliged to arrange a National Consultation, the business meeting of U.C.A.F. Australia wide. It is my hope that this will be a great time of sharing of ideas, of fellowship, encouragement, faith sharing and learning. We will review our Mandate and Working Procedures, the Assembly will send consultants and each of the Synod Committees/Councils will send three representatives, whilst Tasmania will send two. Unfortunately the Northern Synod is unable to send a Representative to the 2006 Consultation.

As part of the Consultation programme a spit roast dinner will be held at Adelaide West Uniting Church, during which the Assembly General Secretary will speak, the new National Committee introduced, and Reports from the President and the Ecumenical Liaison Member given.

At the end of the Consultation a Commissioning Service will be held at Wesley Church Kent Town, at which the National Committee elect, led by Mrs. Alyson Madsen, will be Commissioned as the UCAF National Committee for 2006/2009. The wider church has been invited to attend both of these functions.

CONCLUSION

It has been a joy to serve the National Church, to meet and have fellowship not only with each member of the Committee, but with so many other people all around Australia, many of whom had been names only. When I was invited to lead the UCAF National Committee for three years I was overwhelmed by the responsibility entrusted to me but knew then, and have been reassured since, that with God nothing is impossible and that those whom God calls are empowered and sustained. It has been a joy, honour and privilege to serve my Lord, my Church and Adult Fellowships through the UCAF National Committee 2003-2006

Joan Kelley