

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I will use the 'priority directions' from the strategic plan for this report.

1. *Living out a Joyful Faith:* It is my immense privilege to be welcomed into some wonderful worshipping communities of the UCA and our overseas partners. Just this week the Korean National Conference has met just south of here. Their theme: *Your Story, Our Story* – captures something of the first President's National Conference held in Darwin which concluded last Sunday. It was a rich culturally diverse community. Our stories are part of God's story, and the Creator has given all peoples their unique and special understandings of the mystery of God.

The Church has celebrated our 40th Anniversary in congregations, small and large, urban and rural, presbyteries, agencies, schools and synods. There has been great joy and thankfulness for the visionaries who committed to this unknown way forward. The assurance that Christ constitutes, rules and renews his church is our sure and certain hope.

I was able to gather with many during a History Conference to launch the National Uniting Church Historical Society at a wonderful celebration held at Pilgrim Uniting Church, in Adelaide, South Australia.

Other communities filled with joyful faith that I have been part of since our last meeting have been: the Tongan National Conference; our Trans-Tasman Moderators gathering; the Pacific Methodist Consultative Council in Tonga; Darwin Memorial Uniting Church with the Fujita family, dedicating the *Pool of Reflection*, and Easter placing the propeller blade and stone from Mr Fujita's grave in Japan in the Church grounds in Darwin, to mark the relationship, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace; Forty Fit and Fired-Up, the national presbytery ministers gathering in Brisbane; Bankstown District Uniting Church's Community Centre with migrant new arrivals and refugees; Illawarra Presbytery gathering and Keira View Uniting Church.

2. *Growing with God:* the period straight after ASC was preparation for Hearing 56 of the Royal Commission into the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It is my belief that this tragic part of our history has enabled God to call us to account, to come together as a national church in a way we have not previously done.

Whilst our first concern and the underpinning of all policies and education initiatives has and will continue to be about survivors and the safety of children, this examination of us and the way we have responded has and is about the character God wants displayed by God's people. In this we have grown with God. Our prayer remains for those who have suffered may find healing and hope in life together with an opportunity in the process for forgiveness and reconciliation.

I met with the UAICC Executive in March also and there is a real maturing – growing with God as they tackle the sometimes difficult aspects of regional committee consultations. They are also seeking to develop leadership across the life of Congress through educational opportunities.

Very soon a group will visit Canada and spend time with First Nations Peoples there to learn together from their shared experiences.

3. *Being a Voice for Justice:* some have wondered how we will do this without the wonderful Rev Elenie Poulos to guide us and without a dedicated justice team within the new way of working, through the Assembly Resourcing Unit.

Well friends *justice is in the DNA of the UCA!* It's explicit in the Basis of Union and the whole Church will continue to respond for the Spirit of the Lord is upon us just as it was upon our Lord in the synagogue as recorded in Luke 4:18.

My Easter message came from the Community Centre in Bankstown because a primary justice concern for our Church has been and is the policies of our government and the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. Uniting Church people joined a large community who marched around the nation in small and large cities and regional towns in support of refugee justice.

We have been active in the advocacy for a Modern Human Slavery Act, a justice initiative undertaken at both the Assembly level and through various synod justice units. Particularly I want to acknowledge the work of Mark Zirnsak from the JIM Unit in the Vic-Tas Synod.

Just this week I spoke to The Australian about our concern at the systematic dismantling of the ABC's Religious Affairs work.

Through the media and communications team we have called the Church to prayer regularly for international concerns. Prayer is a vital dimension of the 'means of grace' and as such a vital resource for justice concerns.

4. *Journey as One UC:* I start with prayer. We have just completed 40 days of Prayer for the wisdom of the Spirit to lead us in the anniversary year and beyond and to correct that which is erroneous in our life. We began this by gathering in Melbourne, the national leadership of our Church together for 40 hours of prayer and for some fasting. We took the responsibility to show leadership, to evidence we are a praying people of faith and to do it together because we are one in Christ.

At the Northern Synod meetings just completed the Moderator Thresi Mauboy Wohangara preached at the opening service from John 17. We experienced the rich intercultural community we are becoming through the participation of Yolju, Anangu, Solomon Islander, Indonesian, Fijian, Tongan, and PNG, folk with others in the opening worship.

The significant way the Royal Commission has "snapped" us into a Godly alignment reminding us we are a national Church. We have much to do in this regard. We recognise amongst a variety of matters for collaboration, the importance of doing theological and faith based education more collaboratively and flexibly.

Collaboration, which I spoke about at the last ASC, is the way unhelpful jurisdictional barriers are being reformed. Our legal personalities don't override our fundamental personality as the one people of God. All of this movement known as the Uniting Church in Australia is us.

Thank you.