

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a forest with tall, thin trees and dense foliage. A semi-transparent green filter is applied over the entire image, creating a monochromatic green effect.

# *renewal*

**SYNOD 37**

## **R00 The Moderator's Report**

37th Queensland Synod



FAITH FOR A NEW SEASON ▪ SYNOD 37

# Report from The Moderator



## Summary

I present the following report not only to show the many ways in which the role of the moderator engages right across the church and community, but also to show the ways in which the church continues, sometimes in the face of adversity, to promote the gospel imperative to go out into all the world to show the love of Christ through word, deed and action. Fortunately, after the first part of my time as moderator was restricted due Covid-19, I was able to travel to some of the most remote communities to show the human face of the church and the ongoing care and support that we have as a church for all people especially those on the margins. Engagement with communities over the past 18 months has been a rewarding experience, one that I will take with me as move into the next season of ministry. A big thank you to all those people who welcomed me into their communities and to all those who helped get me there. Here is but a snapshot of some of those engagements across the last 18 months.

God Bless.

Andrew



## Context

### Presbyteries

I have visited all the presbyteries numerous times over the past 18 months. I have participated in their presbytery meetings and always received a very warm welcome. The work of the presbyteries is a tireless task that is undertaken by passionate volunteers who answer a call of God to fulfil the roles and responsibilities that are set before them.

One of my great joys was to travel through many of the remote presbyteries, with special trips to the gulf country and up to Thursday Island with Rev. Garry Hardingham, out to the Western Downs with Rev. Yvonne McRostie and the Frontier Service Chaplains, through Central Queensland with Rev. Scott Ballment on a road trip to Longreach. I have also had a chance to visit numerous congregations a little closer to home from Bundaberg to Beenleigh, from Toowoomba to Tewantin, Indooroopilly to Ipswich, and Glasshouse country to the Gap. Celebrating everything from anniversaries, Moderator's Medals, Ordination anniversaries, and of course celebrating a God who is faithful and continues to walk alongside all of us no matter where we find ourselves in this vast state.

### Presbytery Synod Interface (PSI)

The PSI Team, continues to operate in a spirit of cooperation and unity. The Presbytery Ministers, Moderator, General Secretary, UCQ Director of Mission, Executive Officer Corporate, and the Principal of Trinity College Queensland, meet monthly to hear each other's stories and share each other's burdens as we seek to understand the issues of the church and help to find solutions together. This is quite unique across the life of the UCA and the envy of other Synods. While this body has no authority in and of itself, its role in communication and support is invaluable. A few highlights from the term include:

- The PSI meeting in Warwick on the 16<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022. Time was spent in Spiritual retreat, formal business, visiting the local churches at Warwick and Freestone and a murder mystery dinner, in which my character Sherlock Tracie was tragically murdered. This was an important time of team building, hearing local stories and getting some time to do a deep dive into some important items on the agenda including Mission Collaboration & Coordination Committee (MC3), Synod operations and a host of other issues facing the church. These offsite meetings are vital in engaging the wider work of the church and hearing the voice of the churches across the state.
- The PSI retreat in February 2023 where we spent two days with Patrick Oliver who encouraged us to think about our spiritual giftings through the Enneagram processes. This was also a good opportunity to create community through worship and prayer and to catch up with the members of the PSI after the Christmas season break.
- PSI support to Presbytery Ministers who were having time off for medical reasons, long service leave support, or finishing their placement. I also want to acknowledge the support shown to me during my time as Moderator and thank the PSI Team for their ongoing commitment to their calling to these roles.

### **Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC)**

The UAICC has been very active during this term. A gathering in Darwin in April 2023 saw 40 delegates from across Australia, including seven from Queensland, meeting for the first time for a national gathering since 2018, due to Covid restrictions impacting their scheduled meeting in 2021. The meeting heard from across the regions with state-based reports. Qld UAICC representatives voted for the Queensland regional council to recommence with Rev. Roberta Stanley elected as Qld Regional Chair. National UAICC agreed on a process to elect a new chairperson, with Rev. Mark Kickett to continue in interim role until election slated for October. A lecture by Dr. Anne Patel-Grey focussed on the work of Rev. Charles Harris, and Don Brady and their contribution to the life of First Nations people in Australia and their creation of UAICC.

The commissioning of Rev. Aunty Roberta Stanley as the new Chairperson of the Qld Regional UAICC council took place on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at Cairns Emmanuel Uniting Church. This was a great time of celebration for the newly re-formed regional council.

The UAICC and Queensland Covenanting committee supported a stall at the annual NAIDOC week celebrations in Musgrave Park in South Brisbane. The commissioning of Pastor Sono Leone as the interim Pastor at Zillmere Uniting Church took place on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2023. The commissioning which was carried out under the oversight of Rev. Roberta Stanley and the Moreton Rivers Presbytery, was held outside due to the huge interest shown by the community.

The Queensland Regional UAICC gathering was held in Cairns from 21<sup>st</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> August. Thirty First Nations people attended the three day gathering and talked about issues such as prison ministry, ACT2, local congregational ministry, first national mental health, governance and oversight, and ongoing training. It was an important time for community building and strengthened the agency given to our First Nations people to make decisions for their ongoing future.

### **Moderator's Convocations**

Two convocations have been held for anyone in a specified ministry placement across the church. The first was titled **"A Pastoral Response to Voluntary Assisted Dying"**. Held at Mon Komo conference centre at Redcliffe on 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Ninety ministry agents from across many sectors of the church including Hospital Chaplaincy, Aged Care Chaplaincy, schools, police, presbyteries, and congregations came to learn and participate in the two day workshop focussed on how Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) will impact pastoral care, and our responsibilities in that space. It was well resourced by experts in the new VAD laws and very interactive with a great dinner panel including a pastoral care specialist, palliative care doctor, medical lawyer, first nations support worker, and Rev. Dr. Adam McIntosh who has taken the lead on the church's response to VAD. Thanks to all those who helped make this event happen.

The second convocation held this year was **"Fit Your Own Oxygen Mask First"**, on 14<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at the Wesley Hospital. Approximately 65 ministry agents attended with the theme focussing on the wellbeing of ministry agents across all forms of ministry. Speakers offered their expertise on practical ideas to keep well in ministry, mental health first aid, the role of supervision in wellbeing, and ways to access Sickness And Accident Prevention Plan (SAAP) and other Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) to help in times of difficulties. Feedback from participants was very positive and the

guest speakers were well received. Convocations are a great time for ongoing training for ministry agents around current topics as well as a chance to build collegiality amongst ministry agents.

### **Moderators Advocacy and Social Justice Team (MAST)**

MAST supports the Moderator in systems advocacy on social justice issues to: write submissions to government consultations on policy and legislation; collaborate with other Synods and UnitingCare Australia on a range of social justice issues; attend forums and roundtables with government and community stakeholders and speak on social justice issues to the life of the church and the general public.

This year we have engaged broadly to survey social justice priorities across the Synod and to draft The Queensland Synod Advocacy Framework. A broad range of social justice issues have been addressed such as: youth justice and raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT), substitute decision making for vulnerable adults, anti-discrimination legislation, and the Voice to Parliament referendum. Highlights from this work include:

Youth Justice: The Synod is actively involved in the Queensland Raise the Age Leadership Group and the national Raise the Age alliance, to advocate for raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 10 years of age to 14 years of age.

Social and affordable housing: The Synod attended a roundtable that was hosted by several Directors-General of the Queensland government, to discuss social and affordable housing with faith-based organisations.

Anti-Discrimination: The Synod attended a meeting with the Queensland Attorney-General as part of a delegation from faith-based organisations, about the new Anti-Discrimination Act that is to be drafted by the end of this year.

Substitute decision making for vulnerable adults: As Moderator I was interviewed by the ABC for a two-part series of the 7.30 report, aired the week of 19<sup>th</sup> June. The subject was the ongoing human rights issues for vulnerable people placed under financial administration with the Public Trustee of Queensland. An article was also published on the ABC's website with quotes from the interview.

The Synod was asked by the Queensland Attorney-General for feedback relating to particular recommendations made by the Public Advocate Queensland's report - *Preserving the financial futures of vulnerable Queenslanders: A review of the Public Trustee's fees, charges, and practices*. The Synod prepared a submission with UnitingCare Queensland and Wesley Mission Queensland.

OPCAT: The Synod co-signed a letter to the Queensland government in collaboration with independent government bodies and community stakeholders, highlighting the Queensland government's responsibilities under the OPCAT.

Voice to Parliament: The Queensland Synod hosted a talk by Thomas Mayo, one of the signatories to the Uluru statement to the heart and has continued to promote the importance of the referendum to both First and Second Peoples through public statements and a variety of stories and resources shared with the life of the church in Queensland.

### **Memorial Gardens – Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Program**

It was a privilege to be part of the unveiling of the memorial gardens dedicated to those who have been abused by the church and to offer again a heartfelt apology to those survivors of child sexual abuse who joined us on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2022 for the opening of the memorial gardens at the front of the Synod office building. Mr. Bob Atkinson the Chair of the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Task Group spoke on the importance of ongoing recognition and apology and two survivors of Institutional abuse also spoke of their experiences and healing journey.

### **Ecumenical**

With the closing of the Synod Ecumenical Resource Committee and Synod Interfaith Resource Committee at the 36th Synod this work has been in a time of rejuvenation and renewal. Now under the Transforming Committee Reference Group as part of Project Plenty, this important work will need to develop a new identity within the life of the church and allow fresh eyes to imagine a new ecumenical and interfaith future. Many ecumenical and interfaith activities continue right across the life of the church particularly at the local level, and I congratulate all those congregations, presbyteries and agencies who continue to work with other church groups and other faith groups to further the work of being a people of God together. I have engaged in the following wider ecumenical endeavours.

### **Heads of Churches**

Meeting bi-monthly, a spirit of cooperation exists amongst the heads of churches that has seen the group work together on a number of important issues over the past term including a joint submission to the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry on VAD, and a full joint submission funded by the churches together, to the Queensland Parliament's inquiry into the Anti-Discrimination Act Review. There have been ongoing talks around the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) and how it affects agencies of the church and their ability to deliver welfare. This group continues to be concerned about the soul of the state and continues to advocate for the rights of all Queenslanders.

### **Queensland Churches Together (QCT)**

The Synod continues to be a member of Queensland Churches Together. The QCT has set its strategic framework in three themes - Collaboration, Capacity Building, and Community. It resources its member and non-member churches to collaborate on issues of mutual Interest. Examples of that are submissions to government on Legislative reviews, and other matters, including the Commonwealth Government's Redress Scheme, Disaster Response Chaplaincy opportunities, and the Qld Churches Environmental Network. QCT resources the churches in Capacity Building by offering courses and resources in Family and Domestic Violence awareness, and pastoral care training courses. It runs and sponsors activities that bring the churches together to reflect on our call to unity, as the prayer of Jesus to the Father explicated in John 17, that we may be one as He and the Father are one, that the world may know. This includes activities such as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and the Michael Putney Memorial Lecture. QCT is engaging more regionally, supporting ecumenical endeavour across Qld.

In this past year, the Executive Committee has commissioned a review of QCT, with a vision for a more broadly based body that is focussed on building unity at a State and regional level, and

resourcing the churches' collective action on issues of mutual concern. QCT has facilitated submissions to the Australian Law Reform Commission's Paper on Religious Schools, and the State Government on proposed changes to the Anti-Discrimination Act. For more information, see [qct.org.au](http://qct.org.au), or contact David Baker on [gensec@qct.org.au](mailto:gensec@qct.org.au) or 0418 880 601.

### **Christian RI Alliance in Qld**

The Queensland Synod is a member of this body that provides general oversight of the Christian Religious Instruction (RI) sector and liaises with other faiths delivering RI in state schools through the Multi Faiths RI Network.

The Alliance has delivered training modules for RI instructors, organised reviews of curricula – for Christian programmes and other faiths – and continues to engage with a wide range of stakeholders to build confidence in the RI program.

It has deployed nine regional development officers across the state to support local coordinators and encourage churches to engage in this ministry. For more information contact [chair@christianri.org.au](mailto:chair@christianri.org.au)

### **Queensland Community Alliance (QCA)**

The QCA continues to promote issues that affect civil society in a way that reflects the common good. It has been an increasingly hard time for the alliance to find funding in a space where many community groups, faith based groups and unions are feeling their own financial constraints. Our representatives to the QCA, both to the board and the leaders meetings, continue to offer a constructive approach to the work of the QCA on behalf of the church and I pray that this important engagement with civil society will continue into the future. I was fortunate to attend the two day leaders workshop in February where we agreed on a refocused effort to concentrate the work of the alliance on local organising. This renewed focus I believe will help support local congregations who are looking for ways to connect with the needs of their local community.

### **National meeting of Moderators and President**

The President and the Moderators from across Australia have gathered a number of times during this term both online and in person. It is an important time to connect with each other and share issues from the Synods and the Assembly. Issues discussed included the financial strain that many Synods are facing, ongoing property costs, decreasing contributions from congregations, sharing of resources across Presbyteries. Other topics included the "Voice to Parliament", and the UAICC national gathering in Darwin. In more recent meetings we had some extended sessions around ACT2 and the results of the initial conversations and how our Synods will need to engage with this process. The Queensland Synod took our turn to host from 31<sup>st</sup> July – 2<sup>nd</sup> August. This was an opportunity to gather and talk again and to support each other. Four of the Moderators are concluding their term in the second half of 2023, and we said our farewells. This group has also been a great support to me, and I thank those who have been part of that journey and continue to pray for those new Moderators who have just taken up their position or are about to take up this role in the life of the church, along with the President and the President Elect.



### **Mission Collaboration and Co-ordination Committee (MC3)**

This year has seen us begin work in earnest on the establishment of the Mission Collaboration and Co-ordination committee. This group is comprised of representatives from all presbyteries as well as from the mission team of UCQ and from Trinity College Queensland.

It is fair to say that it has taken us considerable time and discussion to get a collective understanding of how we can best serve the church in the area of mission. We have now settled on several focus areas from our charter which include providing thought leadership in the area of mission, empowering and enabling people with missional skills and knowledge, as well as providing funding and resourcing for new cross synod mission projects. We have agreed to the process for supporting and funding new initiatives and look forward to engaging the wider church around this opportunity in 2024.

### **Transforming Communities Reference Group (TCRG)**

In our collective journey towards a flourishing future, TCRG has overseen several significant milestones as part of the Queensland Synod's ongoing efforts. We have worked with MAST members to draft the "Queensland Synod Advocacy Framework" to respond to social justice issues and supported the development of clear position statements and communication strategies for Voluntary Assisted Dying, Raise the Age, and Voice to Parliament. We are progressing implementation of the "Flourishing Creation: Queensland Synod Action and Advocacy Plan", which offers various environmental sustainability pathways and options. We've also initiated vital projects such as the "Friendly Spaces" Wellbeing and Mental Health pilot.

Through the Covenanting Working Group we have supported the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) regional leadership council and the "Voices of Our Covenant" storytelling project, reinforcing our resolve to share and celebrate the rich stories of First Peoples' faith and culture.

In preparation for the upcoming referendum, we've liaised with MAST to host the "Uniting for the Voice" live-streamed event, furthering our efforts to engage with the broader community. Our involvement with the Queensland Conservation Council's "Cost of Living Climate Coalition" and endorsement of the "Power Together" campaign demonstrates our commitment to renewable energy and climate advocacy for vulnerable communities. We are also working towards better supporting the interfaith and ecumenical efforts of the Synod, acknowledging the work in this space across Presbyteries, and the many local expressions of interfaith and ecumenical relations in Toowoomba, Maryborough, and Southeast Queensland and elsewhere across the state.

### **Boards and Committees**

#### **UnitingCare Queensland (UCQ) Board**

It has been a privilege to work alongside women and men who bring their considerable gifts and skills to bear on the complex organisation that is UnitingCare Queensland. Their service in the face of many challenges in our society shows their commitment to the values of this important work of the church. I want to thank them for supporting me in a huge learning curve and pray for them in this important work going forward.

### **Wesley Mission Queensland (WMQ) Board**

I joined the board of Wesley Mission Queensland as it transitioned into an institution of the church and joined them in their meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> July. It was a good opportunity to meet the board members and hear about the ongoing work and concerns of WMQ as it starts its new journey as an institution of the Queensland Synod.

### **Synod Standing Committee (SSC)**

The SSC has had much to deal with which can be read in their report. I have found this group to be highly engaged and prepared to take hard decisions when needed. In a time of increasing pressure of accountability in governance the SSC has risen to the challenge, and I look forward to engaging with them as the ex-moderator in the coming term.

### **Executive Leadership Team (ELT)**

I have been extremely impressed by the commitment of the members of the Synod's ELT. This team are deeply committed to the flourishing life of the church and go above and beyond in their service to the wider church. I thank them for the way they have included me in their team, and I shall miss the comradery of this group as they support each other to work through the issues that confront the modern church.

## **Contact for report questions**

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The Uniting Church in Australia  
QUEENSLAND SYNOD