



# #realunitingchurch

## Report from the **Moderator**

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### Context

The Synod sits within a network of inter-related councils of the Uniting Church in Australia. Its responsibilities according to the constitution are to “have general oversight, direction and administration of the church's worship, witness and service within its bounds. It shall exercise executive, administrative, pastoral and disciplinary functions over the presbyteries within its bounds ...” The role of moderator is to chair the meetings of the Synod, including the Synod Standing Committee, and as expressed in the regulations and variously over the years in reviews and resolutions, to give “pastoral and spiritual leadership to the life of the church in Queensland”.

This is expressed by engaging with the presbyteries on matters such as resourcing, collaborating, and reflecting on strategic direction in terms of the congregational expression of the church's life. The moderator also is involved in UnitingCare by being an ex officio board member and supporting the work of the directors of mission of UnitingCare. The church's ministry in education and residential colleges is an important aspect of our life, and the moderator is a significant contact point for schools and colleges with the wider church along with the Schools and Residential Colleges Commission.

The moderator's context of ministry includes inter-faith liaison and ecumenical relationships. Both these roles are supported by a Synod committee.

The other main area within the moderator's ministry is in dealing with matters of social justice and public interest.

# Report

## **Presbyteries and congregations**

There have been a number of aspects in my engagement with presbyteries and synods over this Synod term.

- Visiting congregations and presbyteries to encourage them in their mission, speak on the wider work of the church, and encourage reflection on the Synod-discerned priorities; supporting them in times of crisis.
- Encouraging people in placements to continue formation and development, and help the determination of scholarships for the Graduate Certificate in Ministry and Mission.
- Encourage congregations in ecumenical and inter-faith endeavours – using the “Covenant to Pray” initiative.
- Working closely with the presbytery ministers in building collaborative leadership relationships so that there are significant pastoral care opportunities; through the Presbytery/Synod Interface meeting, the presbyteries and Synod are engaging closely on managing the life and mission of the church.
- Engaging with and supporting the multicultural life of our church.
- Offering leadership in exploring new models of presbytery funding and placement of ministers.
- Chairing Joint Nominating Committees for presbytery ministers. We have seen three new presbytery ministers called since last Synod – two to take up placement in 2018. These new presbytery ministers – David Busch (South Moreton), Rev Dr Kerry Pierce (Central Queensland) and Rev Chris Crause (Mary Burnett) offer every evidence that they will work collaboratively and offer encouraging leadership to their respective presbyteries. They are all deeply committed to the life and ministry of the Uniting Church in Australia.
- I thank Rev Alan Robinson, (South Moreton), Rev Bob Harriman (Mary Burnett), and Rev Brian Gilbert (Central Queensland) for their leadership and faithfulness in the roles they fulfilled in their presbyteries. I’d also like to acknowledge the role of Rev Dr David Mackay Rankin in his chairing of South Moreton Presbytery.

## **Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress**

The UAICC is represented in Queensland by the Calvary Presbytery. This presbytery is now strongly engaged with the other presbyteries and the Synod. This has meant that there have been significant opportunities for sharing of resources, life, and mission. I have been a regular attendee at events at Shalom Christian College. UnitingCare Queensland has shown tremendous leadership in embodying the church’s commitment to the covenant by ensuring the ministries begun under Calvary presbytery’s oversight are continuing and are effective.

## **Community service ministry of the church**

I was provided opportunity to represent the wider church at a number of Wesley Mission Queensland events; anniversary celebrations and the opening of Hummingbird House, a significant achievement for families with children who have life-limiting conditions.

Most of my participation in the community services ministry of the church has been through UnitingCare Queensland. Ex officio membership of the board has given me opportunity to become more aware of the deep commitment of the UnitingCare board and staff and the significant challenges facing their work. It has been a privilege to journey alongside them. The new director of mission team has settled in well and the changes in the roles of the team are bearing fruit. The environment of this “apostolic ministry” of church continues to be challenging as we also deal with major changes in leadership.

I’ve had the opportunity to present to the board on the mission of the church and to executive orientation workshops. I have also made a number of visits to sites for events and for deeper appreciation of UnitingCare’s work.

### **Schools and Residential Colleges**

Aspects of engagement

- Visits on special occasions and inductions
- Supporting the commission in its work, particularly in seeking board members
- Engaging with boards and principals
- Engaging with partner churches
- Supporting the placement of chaplains in schools.

### **Ecumenical relations**

The report of the committee is to hand.

I have participated in

- Queensland Churches Together (QCT) assemblies
- heads of churches gatherings
- Being Church in Rural Queensland retreat
- Religious Instruction in Schools meetings to advance oversight of this ministry.

The ecumenical environment is both challenging and a place for opportunity. The formal structures of ecumenical relations have lost a lot of energy, but on specific issues such as ecology there is strong collaboration and much fruitful work. The place of the Uniting Church in Australia is in some ways unique in that our story witnesses to the joy of union; yet it is a joy for which there does not seem to be either interest or appetite in these days. But we continue to bear fruit of our union.

One particularly challenging area is in rural Queensland. There has been substantial decline in the mainline denominations and some growth in emerging Christian networks, yet institutional barriers to deeper cooperation remain.

Queensland Churches Together has given leadership to the challenges around Religious Instruction in state schools and fruitful collaboration is occurring with churches which are not members of QCT.

The capacity of the churches in Queensland to engage government and the wider society is constrained to some degree by the absence from QCT of some traditional denominations and

the emerging networks. The heads of churches and QCT recognise this, and some inquiry as to the possibility of a broader group is being pursued.

In April this year I had opportunity, via Mary Burnett Presbytery's Dostana group, to visit the Diocese of Amritsar, part of the Church of North India. This was a wonderful ecumenical visit, giving insight into how other churches worship, witness and serve in their particular context.

I thank the Ecumenical Relations Committee, particularly the leadership of Rev Dr Clive Ayre, in helping advance and bear witness to the ecumenical imperative.

### **Interfaith relations**

While not specifically stated in the By-laws, the moderator inevitably becomes a significant connection point in this area.

The committee's report is to hand; my participation has been to encourage ministers and lay leaders to meet with leaders of other faiths, share stories of life and hope, and build bridges of understanding.

The Catholic Archbishop, the general secretary of QCT, and myself meet regularly with leaders from the Muslim community.

I have represented the Uniting Church in Australia at a number of interfaith gatherings and in gatherings with the state government.

I thank the committee, and particularly Rev Heather Griffin. Her enthusiasm for this work is inspiring.

### **Issues to do with the life of Queensland**

The Social Justice Reference Group has met twice since the last Synod. There have been challenges in finding representation, particularly a UAICC representative.

Representations to government have been made regarding the following matters:

- Coal seam gas exploration
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Youth justice processes
- Abortion law reform.

Informal collaboration with interested parties has occurred regarding a potential Bill of Rights for Queensland.

I have been significantly involved in the leadership of the Queensland Community Alliance. This is an alliance of faith groups, community groups and unions to build and advance civil society. The alliance's community organising processes provide a wonderful opportunity for congregations to be involved in significant ministry in their communities alongside other community organisations.

## **Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

The Queensland Synod has been heavily involved in the church's response to the commission. The Interim Redress Scheme has involved me in a number of meetings with survivors to hear people's experiences, offer apology, hear feedback on the scheme, and to speak of what the church is doing now to ensure that child sexual abuse never occurs again.

## **Board for Christian Formation**

As an ex officio member of the board I have journeyed with the chairs, Rev Peter Lockhart and Rev Stuart Cameron, as the ministries it oversees (Trinity College Queensland, the Synod Selection Panel) have gone through significant transition.

## **Synod office**

Rev Heather den Houting's appointment as general secretary has seen the Synod office go through a major review of its operations and a restructure so that it is of better service to the life of the church in Queensland, and the Synod Standing Committee. Heather has provided consistent, disciplined, and innovative leadership through these changes.

# **Challenges/risks as we progress**

## **Presbyteries and congregations**

To build and support healthy Christian communities living the mission of the kingdom is a profound challenge; yet it is part of our core business. Presbyteries are experimenting with different models; the Board for Christian Formation is seeking to form leadership for this challenge. The cost of planting new ministry is substantial. The challenges of being church in rural and remote Queensland, finding models that are fruitful and sustainable in the context of reduced ecumenical engagement are significant; the work of the rural and remote task group will go on through the Presbytery/Synod Interface meetings.

We remain with the major risk that our congregational decline will continue. One underlying strategy is to provide presbyteries and congregations with greater flexibility so that they can exercise initiative to respond to their context. Presbyteries will need to continue to develop their capacity to lead, to initiate change, to redeploy resources if transformation and innovation are to be realised.

## **Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress**

The geographic location of much of UAICC's ministry in Queensland means that personal encounters are not easy; yet this is a prime means for each to understand the other. Another significant challenge is to develop leadership to serve across the UAICC's ministry. As we continue to journey with the First Peoples, we will be confronted with truths in our story that are challenging; we have all been caught up in the mission of God in Jesus Christ, which Paul described in his letter to the Corinthians as a ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation with the First Peoples, and what that will mean, is a journey we must take as disciples in the gospel. As we take this journey, in faith, it will ultimately be a story of hope and joy for our life as a nation. Initial discussions between Synod and UAICC leadership in Queensland have occurred to scope out a framework for deepening our covenant.

## Ecumenical relations

- Re-energising traditional ecumenical organisations
- Provision of quality Religious Instruction across the state
- Building an effective voice for the churches in Queensland
- Bearing witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and his will.

## Interfaith relations

- Building effective relationships locally and regionally to counter isolation and fear.

## The “common good” in Queensland

- Governments need our help to be just, fair, and to build the common good; they need the support of a committed, engaged, organised citizenry and community organisations whose values are informed by the gospel.
- Our community service agencies are under profound change; they need the support of the church to continue to deliver services which give practical effect to the good news of God's love for us in Christ.

## Royal Commission outcomes

- While the financial challenges of the outcomes of the royal commission are substantial, the challenge to “bear fruit worthy of repentance” is ours to do. It is about how we order our lives, it is also about a confidence that God is at work in God's world; it is about being “as gentle as doves and as wise as serpents”; that our spaces are safe for vulnerable people.

## Leadership and formation

- Growing leadership that is grounded in the gospel; that can “understand the times”, know its context and act accordingly.

## Synod office

- Building the capacity to provide relevant information to the Synod Standing Committee and the wider church on our context and the fruit of our mission.

The New Testament church's ministry could be broadly described by three dynamics:

- *Kerygma* – the proclamation of the gospel
- *Koinonia* – the building of gathered community and discipleship
- *Diakonia* – the offering to the world of acts of loving service to others.

The challenge of our life is that these three dynamics flow with each other; each need the other for the gospel to be proclaimed and encountered.

# Proposal

It is proposed that the 33rd Synod receive this report.

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