



Moderator's Report

Moderator Rev Steve Francis

One of the constant challenges of being a Christian leader is thinking deeply, prayerfully and theologically about the kind of leadership that our context demands. We need to learn fresh insights from a growing body of contemporary research and look back and learn from the ancient wisdom of the past. Recently I have been drawn to the words of Ephesians 4 where the writer reminds us that “to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it...it was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. So the body of Christ may be built up”. This fivefold leadership matrix forms an acrostic APEPT; Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers. The Apostolic function reminds us that we are sent, we are missional, sometimes pioneers. The Prophetic function calls us to discern the spiritual realities and communicate them in clear and fearless ways. The Evangelistic function communicates the gospel of Christ that leads to repentance, faith and discipleship. The Pastoral function shepherds the people of God by leading, nurturing, protecting and caring for them. The Teaching function communicates the revealed wisdom of God so that the people of God learn to obey all that Christ commands. These five functions help to guide the church into health and maturity. As you read your Synod reports try and be mindful of these ministries and whether or not we are actively pursuing them. Where are we strong, where are we failing, where is the Spirit leading us?

Over the past twelve months since we last met as a Synod there have been many blessings, challenges and some laments. Most Sunday mornings find me in a different Uniting Church congregation. I have been in this Moderatorial role for five years and to my surprise I continue to receive many invitations. I love sharing in the life of a worshipping community, experiencing their joys and listening to their struggles. There is more diversity in the Uniting Church than we tend to imagine. Every congregation has its unique story, ministry and mission. At our recent Presbytery meeting it was wonderful to hear story after story of what God is doing in congregations, suburban, rural and remote. Generally speaking we are aging and slowly declining but that must not blind us to the fact that there is plenty of life in us. God has not given up on us. There are many joys and yet it must also be said there are many difficult issues before us. The property issue has been very confronting for a number of congregations who have serious building deficiencies. In a few cases buildings have been temporarily closed and the viability of the congregations' future is under threat by the cost of repairing aging buildings. In last year's report I hoped that relations between the Synod and Presbytery would “keep moving forward, avoiding the twin sins of duplication and rivalry.” I expressed the hope that “we would work in a collaborative and cooperative way being very careful our frustrations don't lead to personal attacks or exaggerated negativity.” I believe progress has been made but we need to continue to be open, respectful and work together for the common good.

I have been particularly pleased that Mission Shape Ministry (MSM) has been increasingly recognised as a valuable training tool for equipping the church to explore fresh expressions of church and new initiatives in mission. I have enrolled in the course and found the first training weekend stimulating, insightful and practical. I commend the course to all congregations and ministry agents. I am also very encouraged by the way that we have rebadged our three key strategic bodies. Thrive, Care and Equip



are great ways to remind ourselves of our core business. Our Strategic Plan (2018-2021) calls us to “Open Communication, faith formation and faith sharing, community engagement and training for ministry leadership”. These four strategic directions need to be more fully owned, articulated and embraced by all of us across the life of the church.

I have also been encouraged by the healthy developments in our church schools. The appointment of Rev Andrew Syme, a former school headmaster, has greatly helped in building stronger relationships. Unlike in some Synods, I feel confident to say that in WA our schools are growing closer to the Uniting Church. I recently spent a day with a school council in planning and considering the future. I did not feel like an outsider or a visitor. I felt very warmly received and at home. Similarly with our agencies, Uniting Care West, Juniper and Good Samaritan industries. These communities are well managed and greatly appreciated in the wider community. I have personally been involved in sharing prayers and blessings on their premises and have been inspired by their professionalism, compassion and vision. May they be continued to be valued by all of us, they are part of us. I am also hopeful that our relationships with UAICC (Congress) are strengthening. I serve as the co-chair of Covenanting Commission and we continue to wrestle with what that covenant looks like and how it can help us move closer in reconciliation, walking together and in closing the gap. We are still seeking to understand what “sovereignty” means in practice. Part of these means that we become more culturally aware and receive the training we need to enable this.

In closing I want to record my thanks for the extraordinary privileges I have had to represent this church in all kinds of places. I am the chair of the WA Heads of Churches, and continue value working alongside sisters and brothers from other churches. We met with the Premier twice a year. I was invited to the induction of our new Governor (Kim Beasley), breakfast with the Prime Minister and the IFTAR dinner at Parliament. Each year I go to at least three Anzac services. I have participated in worship services at St Mary’s and St George’ cathedral. I gave a paper at the Bethanie Pastoral Conference. I attended an Army Chaplains dinner, met with Prison chaplains and attended a hospital chaplain’s graduation service. I was very thrilled to visit West Papua and see first-hand the work being done by Uniting World and the Black Pearl network. I also was able to attend the Presidents Climate change conference in Fiji reminding me of the need for eco-conversion, as part of my discipleship. Through all these events and many more I have been wonderfully supported by my wife (Rev Kim Francis), my son Joel and the General Secretary, Rev David de Kock, and my mentor Rev Ken Williams.

As many of you know the past twelve months has been a very challenging time for me during the illness and death of my precious daughter, Dr Sarah Francis. I feel her loss deeply every day. I broke my leg in January and broke my heart when she passed away. She was a faithful servant of Christ and an active member of the Uniting church all her life. I am very grateful for every expression and kindness and support I received, from cards, letters, flowers, prayers and hugs. “God is my refuge and my strength”. (Psalm 59 v16, 17).

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