



Moderator's Report

Fed up or fired up?

Tim Costello (former World Vision CEO, lawyer and church minister), in one of his books confesses, "I often feel fed up with the church".

I wonder if you have ever had that feeling. Being a two term Moderator has been an enormous privilege. I have been doubly blessed and massively honoured to work in this role. I am hugely grateful. I thank God regularly. At times it has felt a heavy load and a scary responsibility. Just when I am starting to feel a little fed up with the church, with its slowness to act, its complex bureaucracy and its factions and fights, God seems to break in and remind me that God's loves this community and that Christ died for it. For all our failures and frustrations we are "ekklesia", (church) the gathered and called out ones of God. At a recent church office staff devotions I reflected on the importance of focusing on core business rather than more peripheral issues. I sighted the work of Prof James Dunne, an excellent New Testament scholar who spent decades studying first century rabbinic literature. His conclusion was that most of the rabbi's work was directed towards the rather secondary matters of circumcision, dietary laws and the use of the Sabbath day. Dunn points out the tragedy of this, for at the core of Judaism is loving God and obeying God's law with a heavy stress on the care of the widow, foreigner and poor. Dunn's point is that religious people can focus far too much energy on administrative and governance issues rather than on the core essentials of the faith, hope and love.

The moments when I have been fed up with the church is when we have spent huge hours talking about by-laws, regulations and church structures. They are important but they are not core. We are a community called by God to worship, witness and serve. We have a commission to make disciples, we have a great commandment to love God and our neighbour, and we have a Kingdom orientation to be agents of love, justice, healing and truth in our broken world. Jesus' great strength was his focus on the core issues of love, justice and truth. The Pharisee's great weakness was that they loved by-laws and rules, and the outward show of ceremony and status (robes and tassels). Please don't misunderstand me, the church needs good governance, but beyond that we need hearts and minds fired up with the love of Christ and the mission of God. We need congregations, faith communities and Presbyteries where we are light and flexible as an organisation, and prayerful, imaginative and bold in seeking to spread the gospel in word and deed. In a post denominational world we need to talk less about our denomination and more about how with connect the good news of Jesus Christ with our secular and fractured world.

As you read the Synod reports I hope you will be struck by the huge spectrum of our work as a church. From remote regions to inner city, from rural faith communities to buzzing suburban congregations, from impressive schools to deeply caring agencies. Diversity is one of our strengths. It is my conviction that we need each other. Schools and agencies need congregations and faith communities and vice versa. We are so much stronger when we learn to collaborate and explore synergies between us. Too easily we devalue one part of the body to make us feel more important. We have a constant struggle to stay united and uniting. I think of a number of emails that I have read that have been rude, self-opinionated, and lacking in generosity and grace. We are struggling everywhere to be a "community of reconciliation". It is also a temptation to almost unconsciously draw on one's "inner Pharisee" rather than to humble ourselves, "each other's needs to prefer" (Servant Song). We face a mountain of challenges; the age of many of our congregations and clergy, smaller financial resources and dated property.



We are closing more churches than we are opening. There are signs of decay but thank God also signs of life. The difficult decision to leave Murdoch has shown to be a good move, with more integration of Theological studies and formation in the life of our church. Thrive and C.E.D.A.L committees are energetic and creative. The Mission Shaped ministry and Fresh Expressions training are very valuable tools for mission. Our CALD, migrant congregations are dynamic and I admire how most congregations navigated Covid-19 with skill and grace. As a church through the Social Justice Unit and Commission we are still playing a prophetic role in our community. We have outstanding school chaplains, school principals and school chairs of council. I have deeply valued working with them.

I have loved being based at the Church Office and have found the staff invariable most helpful and supportive. I think it is fair to say that I have worked well with the General Secretary and deeply appreciate his hard work and dedication to the challenges before us. The Synod Standing Committee is first class. I have been frequently encouraged by their leadership, vision and maturity.

So all that remains is to say some big thank you's. To every congregation and faith community that has offered me welcome and hospitality; to all the schools and agencies who have included me in their life; to the other Synod Moderators around the country for their advice and support, to our wonderful President Dr Palmer for her unfailing encouragement and leadership. And finally to my long suffering wife Kim and son Joel who have been constant encouragers and have borne with me the weight of grief over our daughter's Sarah's death. I am so blessed. May God by God's Spirit fire each of us up with his grace and peace.

Rev Steve Francis

Moderator – Synod of Western Australia

steve.francis@wa.uca.org.au