**Minute of appreciation and farewell for Peter Jones**

**on the conclusion of his position as Synod General Secretary**

Peter Jones has lived and worked within the bounds of the Northern Synod for all but one year since 1977, the year of the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia and hence the Northern Synod. In all that time, he has been actively and significantly involved in the life of the church, most recently serving for 11 years as the General Secretary of the Synod.

After two years as a Primary School Teacher in Canberra, in 1977 he came to teach at the Maningrida School in middle Primary, as a Teacher-linguist and as the Assistant Principal. His eight years in Maningrida involved support for improved education and social outcomes for Aboriginal people. He also served in the congregation as Treasurer and Secretary over that time.

He returned to Canberra for one year undertaking course work for a Master of Education and evaluations for the ACT Schools Authority. Fortunately for the north, he returned to Darwin to work as Principal Education Officer for Bilingual Education with NT Department of Education. He became Manager of Aboriginal Education Programs and then Director of the Schools Policy Branch which included responsibility for Independent Schools. An agency restructure saw Peter move to the NT Department of Justice where he was Director of Community Policy for Liquor, Private Security, Kava and Escorts pursuing Social Policy development.

In 1985, when Peter came to Darwin, he became a member of the Casuarina Uniting Church. He served as Chairperson for the congregation for 12 years. Since living in Palmerston he has been a member of the Palmerston congregation. He joined the Pastoral Relations and Placements Committee of the Synod and Pilgrim Presbytery in 1987 and has served on it for 31 years. For three years from 1999, he served as Chairperson of the Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia. In 2007, on retiring from the Northern Territory Public Service, he was approached by the Northern Synod to take up the position of General Secretary. His pastoral heart, and his qualifications and experience, particularly in the north, made him an excellent candidate for the position. He commenced as General Secretary in 2008. He was commissioned as a Pastor in the position.

As General Secretary, Peter has served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Synod taking responsibility for the many aspects of the life of the Synod. He was able to bring about a change in the Assembly regulations which define the work of a Synod General Secretary. These now recognise the considerable responsibility a General Secretary carries both in the Church and in the wider community for ensuring the legal and administrative requirements of a Synod are met. Peter is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. His passion and experience in driving the reform of governance processes in Indigenous social policy and education has carried over into his work with the Uniting Church.

Peter has led the implementation of the Synod’s strategic directions in his capacity as Secretary of the Synod Standing Committee. This includes supporting the two presbyteries and the congregations in their ministries and mission. When Peter commenced as General Secretary, a key challenge for the Synod was its financial survival. The Assembly was gradually withdrawing its financial support. Peter was able to negotiate with the Darwin Congregation a distribution of the income from CBD Plaza that has benefitted the congregation and the whole of the Northern Synod.

He has patiently engaged in conversation over the years to secure income for the Synod into the future from its property assets in Darwin, Alice Springs and Broome. He has served as the Secretary of the Synod Finance and Property Services Committee.

Peter has played a key role in the governance of the Schools and Agencies of the Synod. He was the Chair of the Board of Directors of Kormilda College through the transition of the College from the ownership of the Anglican and Uniting Churches in the north to Haileybury Schools based in Melbourne. This was necessary due to inadequate Commonwealth funding for indigenous boarding at the College. He has also been a key member of the Board of St Philips College in Alice Springs as it transitions from a Church School to an Independent School. He has been the Uniting Church Synod representative, with the Anglican and Catholic Bishops, on the Board of Nungalinya College serving on the Executive committee and for a time as its Treasurer.

Peter has guided the governance of ARDS through their transition from an Association under the NT Associations Act to an Aboriginal Corporation under ORIC. He has been a specialist member of the Board. He has also assisted the process of finding ARDS a permanent home in a property in Winnellie when NRCC decided to lease the property on the Stuart Highway where the ARDS office had been.

The demise of the community services work of Frontier Services engaged Peter in intensive negotiations to ensure the work continued. This work is extensive in the Northern Synod particularly in Aged Care. He has often expressed his appreciation to Uniting Care Queensland for establishing Australian Rural and Remote Community Services to take up responsibility for the work. After some years of adjustment, the Synod is seeing the fruit of that hard work in an expansion of Aged Care services in remote communities through ARRCS. Peter has also supported the work of Somerville Community Services keeping in contact with the CEO.

Peter strongly advocated for national support for what was called Patrol Ministry within Frontier Services because of the Synod’s reliance on that support for ministry to large areas within its bounds. The Assembly Standing Committee appointed him the Convenor of the Remote Areas Ministry Task Group. He also served as a member of the Uniting Church’s National Task Group for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and chaired the Synod Task Group. His work with the Assembly has meant he has had to frequently travel to meetings in the south. His work has meant also frequent travelling within the Synod. The Synod thanks his wife Kaye for her forbearance with Peter’s frequent absences required by his responsibilities.

Peter’s passion for indigenous languages and bible translation has made him a keen supporter of and advocate for Co-ordinate and its activities bringing the scriptures to members in their first language. He has expressed his belief that this is one of the most exciting aspects in the life of the Northern Synod.

The Northern Synod owes a tremendous debt of thanks to Peter, particularly for his service as General Secretary over the last 11 years. So much has changed and much of the change has been sensitively and expertly guided by Peter. May God bless and keep Kaye and Peter as they transition into the next phase of their life as faithful servants of Jesus.

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