

Presbytery Report - Youth and Young Adults Resource Worker

Surrender

I supported four young people from West Arnhem in attending the Surrender Conference in Melbourne in March this year. These young people stepped up and helped lead in a variety of ways during Indigenous night, and engaged with ideas, people and experiences that wouldn't have otherwise encountered.

From the Surrender website:

Surrender Co holds two main conferences. One in Melbourne and one in Adelaide. The conferences are unique in Australia, focusing on social justice, radical discipleship and incarnational mission. The conferences hosted by a number of missional communities and organisations working amongst the poor and marginalised, and run in relationship with Indigenous Australians. The conferences run for three days with more than 1200 people, consisting of main sessions, Bible studies, workshops, music, conversations and great food.

One of the newer hosting partners of the Surrender conference in Melbourne is the Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, and as a result there were a number of youth and young adults from Uniting Churches around Melbourne there, as participants and volunteers. Rev Dr Sef Carroll was one of the keynote speakers. There were also a number of young people from the UAICC nationally, as Surrender is a supporter of the Grasstree Gathering, a gathering of emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian leaders, including young Congress people.

As there are currently no national Uniting Church youth or young adult events on the immediate horizon, I would like to suggest that Surrender, while not specifically a Uniting Church event, by virtue of its values (which you can learn more about at <https://www.surrender.org.au/about-surrender>) and specifically its centring of Indigenous people and its links with the VicTas Synod, is an appropriate and interesting event for young people from the Northern Synod to take part in.

NYCC

In May I attended NYCC (National Youth, young adult, Children and families Coalition) in Melbourne with Mel Quilliam, from Alice Springs Uniting Church. NYCC is the gathering of Synod workers in children, family, youth and young adult ministry areas, however there are usually others in the room. This year the 'others' included Rev Charissa Suli and Rev Lindsay Cullen from the Assembly Resourcing Unit, Virginia Lavaki and Sione Hehepoto from the Tongan National Conference 2nd Gen team, and of course Mel, who brought the reality of remote and rural ministry with young people to the table, along with the Frontier Services perspective, which was new in that space.

One of the outcomes of the meeting was that there was a clear desire from my colleagues down south to support us in our ministry up here. One tangible way they were able to provide was the possibility of running training in something like Messy Church or Godly Play, hosted by a church or the Presbytery. If your church would be interested in hosting a training in a particular model of ministry with young people, please don't hesitate to get in touch, and I will explore whether we can facilitate a training or taster here in the PPNA.

Reference Group

This year I have been working with a small reference group, made up of Helen Richmond, Lauren Merritt, Liusem Mauboy and James Hughes. It has been really helpful to have a small group to work and reflect with, and they are full of excellent ideas. One outcome of this group has been the Testify services.

Testify is an experiment. Over the last four months of 2019 we are inviting young people to come together on the first Sunday of the month, at a different church each time. There they will hear other young people share stories about where they are at in their life and faith. It's about checking in and sharing, creating a space for conversation and connection, and joining for a meal. The first Testify service was held at Casuarina, with the theme of Journey, and 40 people took part. Three young people from Casuarina led the service, and the conversation afterwards was buzzing. It was a great night, and fantastic to see people from many of our churches gathered together.

The next service will be held on October 6th at Darwin Memorial, with the theme of Call. I'm looking forward to seeing what stories we hear and who turns up. As we travel through these services we are looking forward to engaging with feedback about what has worked and what hasn't, whether this is a format to continue with or whether it needs to be reshaped or renamed. As young people journey with us towards December and give us a sense of whose needs are being met and what needs are remaining, we will get an idea of what next year's ministry with young people might look like.

Other things that have come out of this group are Young Adult dinners and Young Adult bible studies. During Synod we will have a Young Adult dinner with Deidre Palmer as part of her Presidents Roundtables with young leaders around the country.

UnitingWomen

As of July, one day a week of my Presbytery role has been committed to supporting the UnitingWomen project. So far this has looked a lot like working on the website and promotions, making flyers, acquiring access to social media sites, and collaborating with Win, the graphic designer from the Synod of SA. Now that the website has been launched and registrations are open, my responsibilities will include creating and distributing posts on social media, and seeking out groups of women who will be able to bring their stories to the UnitingWomen conference. Some of those stories will be our 'keynotes', and others will be shared in more intimate settings. The particular challenge in this for me is finding groups of three related women - related through family, friendship or experience - mostly from different generations, to share their stories together in such a way that God's greater story is laid out before us. These women and their stories need to reflect the breadth and diversity of our Synod, with it's wide range of cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences. I'm looking forward to getting to know the women of our Synod better, and through them, being better connected with our congregations and their needs, particularly regarding children, youth and young adults.

What are your needs?

As always, I am keen to know what your congregation's needs are, and to start working on how to help resource you in your ministry with young people. Please let me know what areas you are wanting support with by emailing me jemma.whittaker@ns.uca.org.au or calling me, either at the office or on 0409 907 688. I'm always happy for a chat or a catch up, and keen to know how my work can benefit the ministry of our congregations.

Jemma Whittaker