

Presbytery Minister Report * Synod 2019

'All the members of the body, though many, are one body: so it is with Christ' (1 Cor 12:12)

Calling

My job is 'Intentional Interim': I am doing Presbytery Minister work to keep things going, but also looking for ways to improve. When this Placement is filled I want everything ready to work well for our churches, in a team that is moving forward, keeping the Covenant between our two presbyteries strong and healthy.

Good things

It is good to learn how we are different from other Synods: I love getting to know our congregations and leaders, visiting where they live and hearing how we can help them follow Jesus better. Worship is never the same: different prayers, very different songs, different kinds of leaders, even different languages. I enjoy them all! People have made me very welcome, even when I bring different ways of reading the Bible.

When I meet our leaders for a proper talk and a meal or a cuppa together I hear their bigger story: where they come from, family matters, what keeps them going, why they think the way they do. God has blessed our Synod with strong and faithful leaders, even in churches without a minister. I want to support them as they support others.

I also work with a great team of people in the Synod office, and at our many meetings. We don't always think the same, but we try hard to work well together, pray together, and keep strong in God in spite of hard times at home or health problems or loss. It's a privilege working with people who really do care about serving God.

Holding us back

In my role I have to deal with problems and arguments that trouble the Body of Christ. Across the Synod I have seen some things that hold us back from giving our best witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ:

Identity The UCA tradition was formed by the apostles (which ordination helps remember), from Protestant roots (protest is in our DNA), here on Australian land in Covenant with First Peoples, along with others from many cultures and languages.

This long Christian heritage was passed to us from ancestors, and we must pass it on to those who follow us. *Communication is critical*: we need better online services where people share with each other across distances. We need strong NRCC partnerships, so both presbyteries learn and worship together, and even share administration. And we need to help our congregations get to know each other and our presbytery face to face.

Laws of love Out of love, God gave Law - to Hebrew people, to Aboriginal people in Australia and Indigenous cultures everywhere, and to the church. Law gives our love meaning and muscle. 'Disciples' need 'discipline' just like sports stars!

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We have church rules too. Baptism joins us to the family of Christ. The Uniting Church supports baptism by other churches and they support ours. Only baptised people are meant to share in Holy Communion or vote in church meetings; but do we honour this in Pilgrim Presbytery? Do we offer baptism and confirmation regularly in church life?

Safe Church means making sure no one will be hurt or abused by the church; but do we honour this carefully enough? The Basis of Union commits all Uniting Church people to "the serious duty of reading the Scriptures" and expects leaders to support that; but do we always honour this duty? 'The worker deserves proper pay,' and the tithe is God's way to make sure the poor live well; but do we support ministry by tithing in money and in kind?

Forgiveness We often say the Lord's Prayer but forget what Jesus said after: "If you do not forgive others, God will not forgive you" (Matthew 6:15). When we hold on to grudges or past hurts from others, we not only disobey Jesus but wound Christ's Body the Church. Do we believe that 'every person in Christ is a new creation'? If 'the past is finished and gone' (2 Corinthians 5:17) why do we let it keep influencing how we act towards others? Our Synod is such a treasure of gifted people, if only we find ways to honour Christ in our neighbours and those who challenge our comfort zones.

Taking us forward

When we lose our way - forget our identity as UCA people - God does not leave us: "we have the gift of the Spirit" in our pilgrimage together. Maybe we need to return to wisdom from the past, guided by the Spirit into a transformed future. Part of my role is to dream, with others, how the church can go forward renewed.

Our Covenant kinship is deepened by the Preamble. This Synod can embody our faith that 'God was in this place' with the First Peoples, speaking through the land.

At this Synod meeting we want to empower the Standing Committee to work out practical transformed structures. We want to begin training church people in Bible Study, sharing good news, and servant leadership. We want to learn *together* - PPNA and NRCC in partnership - in ways that fit our Synod. We want to learn 'online' and 'on country', knowing that the Holy Spirit will keep us 'on track'. We want to deepen our sharing, not just in churches but in each others' homes and workplaces. We want to show that Christ's reconciling of creation is happening now, in this place, through us.

Pray for us

Please pray with us, and for us. Pray for those set aside to help this transformation; pray that it may genuinely support the faith and service of Christians. Pray that forgiveness, love, and respect may guide all we do. Pray that God, who has blessed us with good people, may guide and use their gifts well. And pray for all the Councils that unite us - Assembly, Synod, Presbytery, Congregation. **'Strive for the greater gifts, and I will show you a still more excellent way ... the greatest of these is love'** (1 Corinthians 12:31, 13:13).