



ASSEMBLY REPORT TO THE NORTHERN SYNOD 2025

Introduction

It has been a very busy period in the life of the Assembly since the last Assembly report to this Synod. One of the most significant happenings has been the holding of the 17th Triennial Assembly in Parramatta in July 2024.

There have been a number of other staffing changes within the Assembly during the period since the last report to this Synod. Sadly, we said goodbye to Raúl Sugunananthan as Assembly Justice and Advocacy Officer (Part-time) May 2024 as he moved on to a full-time Community Organising role with the Sydney Alliance. Following the 17th Assembly, Ms Rebecca Beisler completed her time as National Manager Media and Communication with Assembly to pursue a new vocation as a school teacher, and Ms Bethany Broadstock was promoted from within the Communications Team to the role of National Manager.

Lindsay has served in that role from the beginning of 2024 until the commencement of Andrew Johnson as the new permanent General Secretary. Lindsay will continue to serve the Assembly in his previous role of Associate General Secretary.

Highlights

The Assembly comprises a number of different units and agencies. The Assembly Resourcing Unit (ARU) is made up of the Mission and Ministry Team, the Communications Team and the Finance and Admin Team. The largest project for this team was the holding of the 17th Assembly which required an enormous effort of preparation by Mission and Ministry, Communications and Finance and Admin staff within the Assembly alongside the excellent work contributed by the host NSWACT Synod. The team has also been preparing for the Federal Election with a new edition of the Assembly's 'A Vision for a Just Australia' resource. The Assembly also includes the Act2 Unit which of course was pulling together a massive project in the final report which was brought to the Assembly meeting.

There are also three national agencies within the Assembly Structure. Frontier Services is one of these and its purpose is to 'offer service and ministry in the name of Christ to remote Australia through compassionate care, justice and nurture of the spirit'.

Highlights for Frontier Services during the last reporting period include:

- Held a successful conference with the Bush Chaplains from across the country in February 2024
- Strengthened relationships with Synods and Presbyteries relating to Bush Chaplains
- Strengthened and broadened our fundraising ('we fundraise all funds'), and
- Strengthened and expanded our work with UAICC

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network. It is one of the largest providers of community services in Australia and is a national advocate for social justice.

Highlights for UnitingCare have included:



- The highly successful trial of the Escaping Violence Payment Program by the UnitingCare Consortium (8 members of the UnitingCare Australia network led by Uniting VICTAS), which paved the way for the \$900 million Leaving Violence Program announced in the Federal Budget
- Holding the Annual Leaders Forum in September in Canberra with leaders from across the UnitingCare Australia Network and across the Church
- Preparing for the upcoming

UnitingWorld works for a world where lives are whole and hopeful, free from poverty and injustice, and as a channel for connecting Uniting Church people to God's work in the wider world.

UnitingWorld highlights include:

- Launching '40 for the Future', a companion campaign to Lent Event to share UnitingWorld's story with the wider community. Both the President and General Secretary are doing 40 for the Future if you would like to support them.
- Continuing work in supporting Pacific women to build a movement for dignity and equality, and
- Development of the 'UnitingWorld Sunday' concept with resources for promoting and running an opportunity to connect with our partner churches and to hear about and support the work of UnitingWorld

The 17th Triennial Assembly

One of the most important events since our last report to the SA Synod was the exciting 17th Triennial Assembly, held in July this year. The Assembly was, as always, an opportunity to gather together and celebrate our Church, and on this occasion, the installation of Rev Charissa Suli who is the Church's youngest President and first person of colour to hold that role. The installation service was held at St Stephens Uniting Church in Sydney's CBD and was a wonderful, exciting and moving service of worship. The Assembly also elected our new President Elect, Rev Dr Paul Goh from the South Australian Synod, and the new Assembly General Secretary, Mr Andrew Johnson.

A primary piece of business for the 17th Assembly was the passage of many parts of the Act2 proposals, which will be addressed later in this report. Other important decisions made by the Assembly include:

- Two resolutions proposed by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC): A Task Group to Revive the Covenant, and a commitment to implementing relevant principles from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) within the Church
- Receiving three 'Continuing Witness' documents: 'The Confession of Belhar', 'The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification' and 'Laudato si'. These are a new category of statements or confessions of faith from other churches from which we might receive and learn
- Supporting and extending the work of the Net Zero Emissions Steering Group in collaboratively supporting and reporting on our whole of Church response to the call of climate justice, and
- A proposal seeking to affirm, welcome and honour the life and faith of transgender, intersex and gender diverse people in our Church



The President's Movements

Since being installed as President at the 17th Assembly, Rev Charissa Suli has represented the Uniting Church in Australia across national, ecumenical, and international settings. Her leadership consistently upholds the UCA's core values—justice, inclusion, and faithful stewardship—as she builds relationships with diverse communities and global faith partners.

It is a privilege to bring this report to the Northern Synod. As we meet on Larrakia land, I acknowledge the sovereign First Peoples of this Country and honour their deep spiritual connection to land, waters, and community. I give thanks for the enduring witness of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and affirm that our covenant with Congress remains central to our identity and calling as the Uniting Church.

Walking Together in Covenant and Hope

Across the country, I continue to hear a deep longing: for connection, justice, and a Church that leads with courage. A young person recently said to me, “I just want to belong—to be seen, heard, and valued.” Their words stay with me. They remind me that our call is to shape a Church where everyone—every age, every culture, every story—knows they are part of the body of Christ.

The Basis of Union affirms that Christ alone is supreme in the Church and may speak through any of its councils. This calls us to deep listening—to God, to one another, and to the communities we serve. In these past months, I have been listening closely to our First Nations leaders, culturally diverse congregations, and global partners. Their wisdom, resilience, and faithfulness challenge us to reflect on who we are and who we are becoming.

Honouring Covenant and Seeking Justice

Earlier this year, I stood with First Nations leaders at the National Day of Mourning which was co-hosted by the QLD Regional Congress and the Assembly. It was a moment of truth-telling and lament, but also one of profound hope. I heard stories of pain, yes—but also strength, dignity, and fierce love for Country and culture. Our covenant with the UAICC must not remain symbolic. Structural change is needed—in leadership, in decision-making, in how we allocate resources. Justice for First Peoples is not optional; it's a gospel imperative.

In the Northern Synod—where Aboriginal leaders, communities, and congregations shape the life of the Church—this call is especially urgent. Are we walking together in truth? Are we responding to the voices of Congress when they ask for equity and representation? This is our work, grounded in Micah 6:8: to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Weaving Christ's Love Across Cultures and Boundaries

My presidential theme, **Threads of Love**, continues to be woven through my ministry. In the Tongan tradition, the *fala* is a mat made from many strands. It is a symbol of strength, beauty, and togetherness. This is how I see our Church: many cultures, languages, and generations woven together in Christ's love.

The Northern Synod is a living tapestry of belonging. Your communities—Aboriginal, Pacific, Asian, remote, urban—are all part of the vibrant witness of the Gospel. I have seen the Spirit moving in young leaders rising up in intercultural congregations, in worshipping communities on Country, and in the relationships, you nurture with churches across the Pacific and Asia.

But we must keep asking: how do we widen the *fala* so that every person who calls the Uniting Church home truly feels they belong—not just included, but shaping our theology, our worship, our mission?



Beyond the Church Walls: A Public Witness

The role of President invites me into public spaces—both to listen and to speak. Over the past months, I've responded to global events like the war in Gaza, the rise in antisemitism, and natural disasters, and offered prayers and solidarity to those affected. I've gathered with Bush Chaplains in the heart of the country, joined young adults in VIC/TAS for deep theological conversations, stood with communities affected by conflict, and engaged in ecumenical and interfaith dialogues.

All of this flows from one truth: we are a Church that belongs not only to ourselves but to the world God loves.

Looking Ahead

Later this year, we will gather for the President's Conference—a space to explore intercultural leadership, strengthen relationships across cultures, regions and the global church, and reflect on how the Spirit is shaping our Church for the future. I invite voices from the Northern Synod to be part of this. We need your wisdom. We need your stories.

A Call to Faithful Discipleship

Across the Church, I hear a shared longing—for justice, for transformation, for real belonging. These are not separate issues. They are threads woven through one fabric. They ask us to consider: What kind of Church are we becoming? Are we forming disciples who live with courage, who lead with compassion, who listen deeply and act boldly?

When we walk in step with the Spirit, we weave a tapestry that reflects the unity Christ prayed for in John 17: "that they may all be one." True unity is not uniformity. It is the beauty of difference held together by love.

So, to the people of the Northern Synod: thank you. Thank you for your faithfulness in hard places, your courage to speak truth, your openness to the Spirit. The journey ahead is not easy—but it is holy. And I believe that, together, we are being called into something deeply hopeful, deeply just, and deeply rooted in Christ.

Act2 — Where to from here?

The 17th Assembly resolved to accept the overall vision proposed by the Act2 final report as well as the vision statements for each of the three workstreams: (A) Local communities of faith, (B) A National Network for Theology, Formation and Leadership, and (C) Ordering and resourcing of the wider Church.

Additionally, the Assembly approved resolutions concerning the substantive parts of Streams (B) and (C) including the creation of two Commissions, principles to guide those Commissions and a commitment to investigating the feasibility of three or four council structures consistent with the vision and principles approved by the Assembly.

A number of parts of the original proposals, especially those related to Stream (A), were not determined by the Assembly due to lack of time, so the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) meeting on 30 August – 1 September approved the proposals related to Stream (A) as a basis for the ongoing work in this area.

The ASC also appointed members of an Act2 Transition Committee have guided the work of creating Terms of Reference for the two Commissions and consulting with the breadth of the Church including Congress, other councils of the Church and agencies regarding these draft Terms of Reference. The Transition Committee has also develop a process for receiving Expressions of Interest from those wishing to offer themselves as members of Commissions.



The ASC at its March meeting approved final Terms of Reference for the two Commissions. Over coming weeks the ASC will make appointments to the two Commissions which will see them start their work.

Conclusion

We have joined with you and the whole Church in grief for death of Rev Dr Michelle Cook last November. Michelle was a uniquely gifted person who brought passion, energy and insight to all her ministry. She will be missed by so many in our Church.

We face many challenges as a Church across our life. We need to be honest about those challenges as we have been through the Act2 Project and find ways to come together and support each other to continue to give expression to the mission to which God calls us. The Northern Synod has a unique place in our Church's life with its particularly expression of the Covenant which enriches us all.

Many things have been achieved in this busy period for the Assembly, and the life of the Church nationally has been resourced and celebrated in meaningful ways. It is a pleasure to share reports of our work with Synod meetings by attendance to gain insight into the particular strengths, joys, challenges and uniqueness of the Synods of our Uniting Church.

Andrew Johnson
General Secretary

Charissa Suli
President