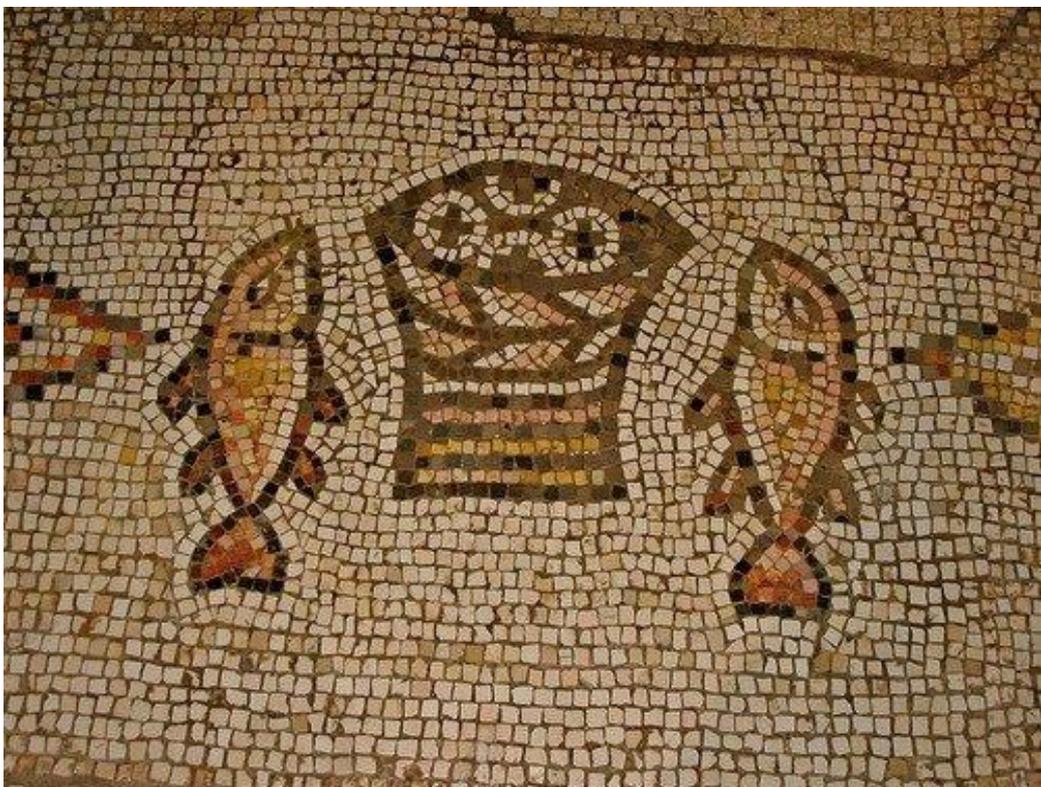




Report from

The Moderator



Report

I encourage the UCA in Qld to have confidence in the gospel; for all of us to bring our gifts of heart, mind, and strength to the work of being a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the coming promised kingdom of God, in all our broad and diverse opportunities of witnessing to the goodness of God in Christ. The Covid crisis has demonstrated how deeply committed our people are to the mission of God, and how adaptive and innovative leadership can be. Project Plenty is a tremendously encouraging message from our members that should give our leaders and councils in the church the courage to bring transformational change.

The Moderator's role has been summed up as giving pastoral and spiritual oversight to the life of the Synod, bearing witness in the public space, and leading the uniting church's engagement with other churches and the wider community. It involves several regulatory responsibilities, along with chairing the Synod Standing Committee, the body charged with giving general oversight to the life of the church between Synods in Session.

Focus since the last Synod

Ecumenical Relations.

- A highlight for me was my second trip to the Church of North India, with the Dostana group. The trip was organised by Andrew Solomon. Again, I saw a church that was active in ministry in so many places, ready to help and support poor and marginalised families; the diocese does manage to integrate worship, witness and service in a very holistic way. UnitingWorld supports some projects, but the prime purpose of our visits – hosting people from the Church of North India here, and visiting ourselves, is that we can build a friendship that sustains us, encourages us, and gives us joy in our Christian walk.
- The Synod Ecumenical Relations Committee has had changes in participation and leadership, and some renewed interest from younger leaders in the Synod. It is a valuable resource in keeping our ecumenical relationships across the life of the church supported.
- Heads of Churches gather once every two months, pray and worship together, and collaborate on a range of matters – responses to government inquiries, engagement with other faiths, and have supported the Religious Instruction in State School initiatives. It is a broad group, including the General Secretary of Qld Churches Together, Pentecostal, reformed, evangelical, and mainline denominational leaders. The UCA and Lutheran churches will be hosting a Heads of Churches gathering in September this year.
- Queensland churches Together (QCT) continues to be the main organisational venue for ecumenical relations. It has produced some excellent resources for informing churches on Domestic and Family violence, and supported an energetic group of eco-theologians. It also supports local ecumenical endeavours across the state.

- World Council of Churches. I participated in the formulation of the WCC's submission to the UN Human Rights Council's 3rd Universal Periodic Review of Australia's commitment to Universal Human Rights.
- Ecumenical partnerships in chaplaincy in institutions are facing renewed questions of relevance and worth. I have instigated with the chaplaincy commission, work on a refreshed rationale for our work and investment in this space.
- Denominational conferences. I was guest at the Qld conference of the Australian Christian Churches. It was an impressive time; 27 women and men were ordained into leadership roles. Also represented the church at the Lutheran District conference.
- Religious Instruction in State Schools (RI). The Christian Religious Instruction Alliance (Qld) was formed with 14 denominations signed up as members. I serve as Chair of the governing committee. The body has an annual budget of about \$350 000. It works to engage professionally with key stakeholders – political leaders, Education Qld, teacher and principal groups and other faith providers to support curriculum reviews and support regional RI coordinators.

Communal and Interfaith engagement.

- Presented papers and participated in several workshops with the Islamic traditions
- Worked with other faith leaders in representations to government during the Covid pandemic
- Co-chair of the Multi-Faiths RI network, and made representations to the political parties regarding RI in state schools.
- The Synod Interfaith Relations Committee also provides an avenue for the UCA to demonstrate our faith and our commitment to understanding and tolerance. The Group hosted and attended Iftar dinners during Ramadan.
- Qld Community Alliance. The Synod still supports this community based social justice initiative. It provides a wonderful means to strengthen our life and witness to the gospel in practical ways. Training in community organising is being offered; it gives great insight and strategies for communities seeking to address issues in their context.

Issues in the life of Qld

- Representations to government on:
 - treatment of asylum seekers
 - voluntary assisted dying inquiry
 - restrains on community-based organisations speaking regarding electoral issues
 - calling for better vilification and hate speech laws
- seminar on religious freedom legislation
- seminar and submission on state human rights legislation
- supporting the state government's response to communal issues at Aurukun

- churches' representative on the State Government's "Truth, Healing, and Reconciliation Task Force" – set up to advise Government on their response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
- Collaborated with Vic/Tas Synod on guest worker visa issues.

In the life of the church

UnitingCare

Gave support and encouragement to the board, executives and directors of mission in the important and challenging space of community services. I believe that there is strong confidence and support between the UnitingCare Board and the Synod Standing Committee (SSC). This has been developed through a range of engagement strategies – membership of the board by myself and the General Secretary, Presbytery/Synod Interface meetings including the Director of Mission, regular meetings between myself and the chair and CEO, as well as through a yearly meeting of the SSC and the Board. Rev Peter Armstrong and I toured parts of North Queensland and Western Queensland, helping congregational and agency leadership engage and collaborate. The board's vision and commitment to its 2030 vision is to be commended.

Schools and Residential Colleges

Represented the church and supported boards and executive. Note that there are significant opportunities here for the UCA's engagement with young people and their families. Rev Graham Cole finished a long and exceptional service to Brisbane Boy's College this year.

Congregations and Presbyteries

It is always an encouragement to be a part of congregational and presbytery life. While our communal life faces great challenges, it is proven to be resilient and innovative during this Covid pandemic. I am heartened that communities are exploring how the wider engagement that has occurred during this time can be translated into meaningful relationships.

Presbyteries face particular challenges around oversight and management. I have been keen to resource Presbytery Chairs in their role and Presbytery Ministers in ongoing development and formation. The Presbytery is the prime oversight body for congregations and ministers. The meme running through parts of our life that we are a non-hierarchical organisation has eroded many presbyteries' confidence in their important role of being a key keeper of the trust that our members place in us. That confidence needs to be strengthened so that we can live productively and harmoniously. I believe the presbytery leadership in place in Queensland is ready and able to give significant leadership to life of the church through the transitions ahead of us.

Synod Standing Committee and Synod Office

The Synod Office has gone through significant change and transition. This has been to make a more effective and efficient office for the whole church; so that it is a good steward of the resources it has allocated to it. It has been costly, but necessary change. Some of these changes have meant valued,

long term staff have left us. I am thankful for their service and have helped some of them find other employment.

The Synod Standing Committee has been very well served by the Synod Office; we have received high quality, timely advice, and have been well informed on the opportunities, issues and challenges under our remit. The current SSC model is recent and could well do with a review as to if it is the best model for such a diverse and complex galaxy as the UCA Qld Synod. Also, I would hope that in the new term, greater opportunities for training and development of SSC members may be initiated.

Our Covenant Relationship

Since the launch of the Covenant Action Plan (CAP), we have seen an increased interest in engaging with the First Peoples. A task group from across the life of the church has been operationalising the plan. The Synod Office has strongly supported this venture. The task group has identified several spaces in which the covenant can be lived out. There have been a number of “walk on country” activities, plus supporting congregations engaging with their local Indigenous leadership. *Please find the CAP plan attached.*

The formation of the Carpentaria presbytery has seen a closer relationship form between congregations in North Queensland and new initiatives in leadership formation. The church has also been strongly supporting Wontulp-Bi-Buya, the ecumenical college in Cairns and that support is bearing fruit.

Social Action and Justice Advocacy

The Synod Standing Committee approved the formation of the Moderator’s Social Action and Justice Advocacy Reference Group (SAJA). The group is representative of each part of the life of the church and is convened by Rev Dr Adam McIntosh. The purpose of this reference group is to resource, encourage and equip the Synod’s collaborative response to, and engagement in, issues of social justice and responsibility. This includes a focus on resourcing the Moderator’s responsibility to speak into the public space and advocate for the truths the gospel brings to our life together, as well as exploring local practical collaborative responses across the Synod, to identified priority issues, as an expression of the mission of the church.

SAJA provides a significant capability in broadening the capacity to hear what is happening across the life of Queensland and also bringing to bear resources to respond with a depth of understanding. SAJA is continuing to refine its collective prioritisation work on issues emerging out of the Project Plenty process, and issues impacting synod entities, with the view to outlining opportunities for collaborative, synod-wide and local implementation in 2021. *Please find the SAJA terms of reference attached.*

Lessons learned

What we have to keep an eye on is that we don’t let koinonia (our gathered life), kerygma (our proclamation of the gospel), and diakonia (our ministry of practical service to human need) – or in

the words of the Basis of Union, worship, witness and service - become detached from each other; each expression of the Kingdom will be the poorer if we do.

Project Plenty

I have encouraged Project Plenty to be framed in terms of what blessing we might bring to the life of Queensland, rather than a focus on ourselves, our needs. My experience is that when the people of God set out to make the world a better place, to bear witness to the Kingdom of God in concrete ways, while there's always resistance, there's also much that comes our way as encouraging surprises and blessings. I'm very impressed that our membership has spoken so clearly to the councils of the church about what they see needs to happen for us to be a fruitful church.

Challenges/risks as we progress

Greater change is required than what we are probably prepared for!

We will need to articulate a compelling purpose and develop quality accountability to be able to be good stewards of what Christ has called us to and good stewards of the trust our members and people we serve in mission place in us. We are building some accountability mechanisms – the Combined Presbyteries Mission Fund, better data collection, but we must use them well.

For consideration

Thank you for the opportunity to serve in this role. It has been a privilege to serve with people across the life of the church who have caught the vision of the gospel and bring their best to that vision. Our calling and life is based on the faithfulness of God in Jesus Christ.

“never fear, little flock, it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” Luke 12:32.

Proposals to the 35th Synod

It is proposed that the 35th Synod receive this report.

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