

Thanks and Acknowledgement

Rosemary Hudson Miller

former Associate General Secretary (Mission and Justice)

The Synod of Western Australia wishes to record its deep appreciation for the ministry of Rosemary Hudson Miller, who served God faithfully over 17 years in the roles of Social Justice Consultant, Chaplaincy Co-ordinator, Associate General Secretary and Acting General Secretary.

With a life-long commitment to justice and advocacy for the marginalised and oppressed, Rosemary's skills in working with people were developed through her background in nursing and youth work. Her understanding of the Uniting Church developed through congregational life and the many voluntary roles she undertook for the Presbytery of Peel. Rosemary's faith commitment has shaped her view of the world and has been the driving force behind her efforts to work for change in the community. Rosemary's long-standing involvement and commitment to social justice also reflects her profound sense of calling to a prophetic role in both the church and in the wider community.

Rosemary began her paid ministry for the Synod of WA by taking on the part-time role of Social Justice Consultant in 1999. In 2000, she took on the additional role of Chaplaincy co-ordinator, and the Social Justice area expanded to include support for what was then Uniting International Mission, now UnitingWorld. It also included offering support to the Covenanting Commission.

A significant aspect of Rosemary's leadership has centred on the Covenanting relationship between the Uniting Church and the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress (UAICC). The UAICC holds a deep appreciation for Rosemary's commitment to upholding the Covenant relationship. Her journey of solidarity with First Peoples has been highly valued by Congress. Rosemary worked hard to raise the status of Congress at both a Synod level and with the wider church. This included her significant involvement in the progress of the Covenant nationally and her support for the revised preamble of the Uniting Church Constitution.

Particularly in the early years of her ministry, Rosemary was a strong supporter for the Church's move to more gender equality in ministry and in the way non gendered language is used in the worship setting. She gave leadership across the national church on human rights issues when gender discrimination was at play. She gave steadfast support for those in the church who were marginalized, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) members, at the time when the Assembly was dealing with controversial issues around sexuality and ministry in particular. Rosemary served on the Western Australian Government Equal Opportunities Commission steering committee which worked to provide support for young LGBTIQ people who were at risk and vulnerable whilst at school.

Rosemary is perhaps best known for her commitment to refugees and asylum seekers. In 2001, She was asked by the Uniting Church to serve as Acting National Director of National Social Responsibility and Justice (now UnitingJustice Australia). It was during the time that she, alongside President Rev. Prof. James Haire, led the Uniting Church's response to what became known as the 'Tampa Affair'. During this time, she developed the Assembly's first major statement on policies



relating to refugee and people seeking asylum in Australia, adopted by the Assembly Standing Committee in 2001.

Rosemary continued to advocate for justice for refugees and people seeking asylum throughout her ministry, and was often asked to speak for the national Church on this issue. Her advocacy has always been informed by her relationships with the many asylum seekers and refugees she has supported. She has visited immigration detention centres and supported chaplains and ministers who visited detainees. She encouraged Uniting Church members to care for asylum seekers and refugees living in the community, leading by example. She was a founding member of the Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees (CARAD), and through the relationships she has developed, the Uniting Church has been able to offer ongoing support to that organisation. Rosemary served as Chairperson of CARAD for eight years. Rosemary was also a founding member of CASE for Refugees, now The Humanitarian Group, and she continues to serve as their patron.

Rosemary led the Synod of WA to work with the National Assembly to prevent the forced deportation of Iranian Christian converts. Her relationships with lawyers, barristers and journalists were critical. This included offering office space to a human rights lawyer to enable him to carry out pro bono work at this perilous time. There are people who are alive now because of her work.

A hallmark of Rosemary's ministry has been her ability to build relationships across barriers of faith and culture. She has worked ecumenically, being an important player in the social justice landscape of Perth and enabling the Churches' voice to be heard. Rosemary also worked with people of other faiths and civil society. She built strategic and trusted relationships with Unions, journalists and community groups.

In 2006 Rosemary was presented the Premier's Multicultural Ambassador Award "for demonstrated excellence and innovation in providing leadership in promoting multiculturalism and advancing human rights and anti-racism in our community."

The Uniting Church engages in ecumenical chaplaincy in Western Australian prisons and hospitals, as well as in our schools and agencies. This has been a growing and increasingly complex area of work, in which Rosemary's nursing background was of great assistance. Rosemary has pastorally cared for people, giving the gift of time and a listening ear. She has also stood alongside chaplains as they have raised issues of concern. Sometimes these have been social justice matters that have often been brought to the Synod's attention through resolutions brought to the Annual Meeting or through advocacy campaigns.

Prison justice has been an important area of work, and Rosemary has, once again, built relationships and worked collaboratively in this area. The Institute of Restorative Justice brought together Church groups with universities and chaplains to highlight the need for a more holistic and less punitive approach to offending against our community. Rosemary enabled some important research work into the lives of women prisoners, and also into the experience of sexual abuse by male prisoners. This work was possible because of the positive relationships she developed with Universities and LotteryWest. In 2008 she was asked by the WA Government to chair the Corrective Services Advisory Council.



Under Rosemary's leadership, the Church's commitment to Environmental Justice has been given a strong voice. Involvement in Sustainable September is now an established part of the church calendar, and Green Church initiatives have been supported and encouraged within the Synod office and in local congregations.

Working alongside UnitingWorld, Rosemary steered the transition of this ministry from a 'missionary' model to a partnership model, with a focus on those partners who are our near neighbours around the Indian Ocean Rim. Over the years Rosemary developed many personal relationships with church leaders, and has supported local congregations to develop their own relationships with overseas partners. Rosemary travelled to East Timor after the independence vote, when the country was in turmoil, and worked with the World Council of Churches' Act for Peace project to bring the resources of the Australian churches to this struggling nation. She maintained her links with the organisations and people she met there, working along with them to improve health care and food security. In time, Rosemary led the Synod into its relationship with the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka. She has also been a steadfast supporter of the people of West Papua, again, leading the Church in the development of this relationship.

Often, Rosemary's work happened behind the scenes. In January 2013 a riot at the juvenile Banksia Hill Detention Centre resulted in young people being sent to the adult Hakea prison. As more evidence came to light, it seemed that bad government decision making and planning contributed to the riot. While offering support to advocacy groups including Deaths in Custody Watch Committee and speaking out publicly where possible, Rosemary attended the court hearings into the riot as a silent act of solidarity. This was simply 'something we do', and one example among many.

In 2005, with the transition to the single Presbytery of WA, Rosemary took on the additional role of Associate General Secretary (Mission Support). At this time, the new Congregation Mission Support Unit was created, and the Presbytery committed to a renewed focus on congregational life. For Rosemary, this included oversight of multicultural ministry, strategy and mission planning, congregational community services, rural ministry and the resource centre. In particular, Rosemary played a hands-on role in the development of the First Third Team. As her administrative duties increased, Rosemary empowered other members of staff to develop their own skills and take on more responsibility. Rosemary expected the Church to act fairly and flexibly as an employer, using wisdom and compassion to enable those working in roles in the Synod to work to their potential as professionals in their fields.

At numerous times, Rosemary stepped in as Acting General Secretary to cover annual leave, sickness and conflict of interest situations. From mid-2014 to December 2015, Rosemary took on the Acting General Secretary role at a very difficult time, and at great personal cost. She provided courageous leadership as the Synod was required to negotiate complex issues at the heart of the structure of the Church itself. At the same time, Rosemary took on oversight of the local arrangements of the 14th National Assembly Meeting, held in Perth in July 2015. Despite the ongoing local challenges, this was a time of great celebration, which reflected well on the local organizing committee and the Synod.



Rosemary has attended countless meetings, written policy papers, spoken at rallies, led worship, shared devotions, given media interviews and shared coffee. We give thanks for the work she has done, but more so, we give thanks for the person she is. Rosemary's ministry has been characterised by the gifts of hospitality, servant leadership and faithfulness.

Rosemary gave to many who were not part of the Uniting Church, the picture of the Church as she hoped it would become – courageous, empathetic, collaborative and relevant. She has also passed on that vision to many within the Church, who carry it into the future.

Rosemary's paid work within the Synod of WA has come to an end. Her faithfulness and prophetic ministry continue. Thanks be to God.

