

**NINETY TWO AND STILL GOING: A STATISTICAL NOTE  
ABOUT MODERATORS IN THE UNITING CHURCH  
1977 - 1994**

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Given the changes to the terms of office for Moderators in some Synods in the Uniting Church, it is opportune to attempt a basic statistical overview of some of the characteristics of the Moderators for the period from 1977 to 1994. By the end of 1994, 92 men and women had been installed as Moderator of a Synod of the Uniting Church. It will take at least twice the number of years to produce the same number of Moderators in the future.

This study will only highlight a few characteristics. It is certainly not meant to be the last word, but to be more a starting point for future research and debate on this particular area of leadership in the Uniting Church. This is a limited study, mainly owing to time and finances, but it is also limited because it only examines the *elected* Moderators. It would have been more comprehensive to include the people *nominated* as Moderator-elect, but this would have increased the difficulties. The focus is therefore on the chosen. A short note about Assembly Presidents will appear in the next issue of *Church Heritage*.

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A Basic Profile

TABLE 1:

MODERATORS IN THE UNITING CHURCH 1977-94

SYNOD	Clergy Male	Clergy Female	Non-Clergy Female	Non-Clergy Male	Total	Average Age
N.S.W.	14	1	2	1	18	59.1
Northern	9	-	-	1	10	52.9
Queensland	15	-	-	1	16	54.0
South Australia	8	-	1	-	9	52.2
Tasmania	10	-	1	2	13	48.1
Victoria	13	-	2	2	17	56.1
Western Australia	5	-	2	2	9	54.9
TOTALS	74	1	8	9	92	54.3

Note: Terms of office vary from Synod to Synod.

It is evident that the majority of Moderators have been male clergy (74/92). Only one female minister has been installed as Moderator (though, South Australia will install a woman minister as Moderator in 1995). Non-clerical Moderators represent some 18.5% of the total, with male and female numbers almost equal. While the number of "lay" Moderators may seem small, it is certainly a significant change to pre-union days, particularly for the Presbyterian and Methodists churches. Western Australia has the highest proportion of "lay" Moderators (44%), while Queensland (94%), the Northern Synod (90%) and South Australia (89%), have the highest proportion of ordained Moderators.

The age range<sup>1</sup> for Moderators at installation is significant, extending from 33 (Tasmania) to 68 (Northern Synod). New South Wales has the highest average age (59.1) and Tasmania, the lowest (48.1). To a large degree, this reflects the size of the Synods and the number of members, and in particular, the number of available ordained clergy. The overall average age was 54.3. In 1994, the average age of the Moderators still living was approximately 63 years.

Only two synods have never elected a woman as Moderator, Queensland and the Northern Synod. Western Australia has the highest proportion of women Moderators (22.2%), both of whom are non-clerical. Overall, women represent 9.8% of the total, with non-clerical women representing 8.7%.

Only 4 of the 92 elected Moderators are no longer living. Their Synod and Year of Office is in brackets. Graham Bence, only recently deceased - July 1994 (Northern: 1981-83), Rollie Busch (Queensland: 1977-79), Michael Sawyer (S.A.: 1983-85) and Ron Allardice (Victoria: 1977-78).

### **Clerical Moderators**

The most significant factor for the clergy is the length of time from ordination to the Moderatorial year.<sup>2</sup> The average time from ordination to installation as Moderator is 24.2 years, with the range being 5 years (W.A.) to 41 years (N.S.W.). N.S.W. has the longest average time (29.5 years), with Tasmania the shortest (16.9 years). This, of course, is consistent with the age profile, which shows that N.S.W. has older Moderators (58.6, compared to Tasmania's 49.7), but it is also related to the number of available clergy. The average age for the clergy was 53.8, a small decrease on the overall average.

**TABLE 2:**  
**CLERICAL MODERATORS - AGES AND YEARS ORDAINED**

<b>SYNODS</b>	<b>Clergy Moderators</b>	<b>Average Age</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Average No. of Years Ordained</b>
N.S.W.	15	58.6	50-67	29.5
Northern	9	52.8	41-68	22.7
Queensland	15	54.2	50-60	25.9
S.A.	8	50.6	44-59	22.9
Tasmania	10	49.7	33-66	16.9
Victoria	13	54.7	43-63	25.8
W.A.	5	51.2	44-61	18.4
TOTALS	75	53.8	33-68	24.2

The majority of Moderators were ordained in the 1950s or 1960s (75%). One was ordained in the 1930s (1939), five in the 1940s and eleven in the 1970s. Only two Moderators were ordained post-union, one in N.S.W. (1985) and one in W.A. (1984). It should be noted, however, that, when installed as Moderator, both of these people were actually older than the average age for a Moderator in their state.

Some states have experienced greater homogeneity than others.<sup>3</sup> Overall, some 63.3% of Moderators were ordained in the state in which they were later to become Moderator. Only 29.3% were ordained in states other than their own Moderatorial state and 9.3% were ordained overseas. Both Queensland (14:1) and Victoria (13:0) display a significant correlation between the Synod/state of

ordination and the state/Synod of Moderatorial election. The Northern Synod (1:8) and Tasmania (1:9) are the opposite. The latter statistics reflect the increased mobility of clergy in these areas. Clergy, particularly those who were ordained in one of the larger states/Synods, are more likely to take on a shorter term relationship with a smaller Synod. This is different from those ordained in N.S.W. or Victoria, where the person may spend their whole ministry in the same Synod. Another significant factor for Tasmania clergy was the circumstance of their ordination, particularly for those of Methodist background. As a single Victoria-Tasmania conference, based in Victoria, the Conference ordained all candidates together in Victoria (there was an occasional exception), and then sent the new ministers to their placements.

Of the seven Moderators ordained overseas, four were ordained in the U.K. (England (2), Wales and Scotland) and the others in Malaysia, Sri Lanka and South Africa. The first Aboriginal Moderator was Djiniyini Gondarra (Northern Synod in 1985). He was Minister in the United Church of North Australia before Union. Also, two ministers from Asian backgrounds have been elected Moderator, Tony Chi (N.S.W. - 1992) and Busby Arulampalam (Northern - 1989).



TABLE 3:

CLERICAL MODERATORS -  
WHERE ORDAINED AND SERVING

	Ordained In			Settlement		
SYNOD	Same Synod	Other Synod	Overseas	Parish	Synod	Other
N.S.W.	11	2	2	10	1	4
Northern	1	6	2	3	1	5
Queensland	14	-	1	4	7	4
South Australia	4	4	-	5	1	2
Tasmania	1	8	1	9	-	1
Victoria	13	-	-	8	3	2
Western Australia	2	2	1	4	-	1
TOTALS	46	22	7	43	13	19

From what sort of job in the Church did these clerical Moderators come? Though in some cases it is difficult to classify a particular person in a category, the following provides a picture of where our Moderators have come from. Most (57.3%) came from a Parish settlement, which in most cases continued, though usually on a very reduced basis. Synod accounts for another 17.3% and a widely grouped "other" accounts for the rest.

There are some significant differences among the actual settlements of Moderators (at the time of installation). In N.S.W. and Victoria, a Moderator is more likely to have been in a Parish position than

any other category. In some Synods, like Tasmania, the parish emphasis is due to the few positions available apart from Parish settlements.

The Northern Synod statistics reflect the diversity of church life, with more than half of the Moderators involved in non-traditional Parish settings. Of note here are Patrol ministries (through the National Assembly's Frontier Services) and chaplaincies/community-based ministries, which have a definite relationship to the church through the Synod, but also have a community emphasis.

It is worth examining the "other" group in detail. The breakdown of the nineteen reveals that five came from Presbytery positions. Most of these come from Queensland and Victoria, reflecting the history and wider role of Presbytery Officers and Ministers in these two Synods. Three had National Assembly appointments. This includes two Moderators from the Northern Synod who were Patrol Padres (Frontier Services) and one appointment in the World Mission office. Seven worked in Theological Colleges. Of course, in some Synods, these appointments are technically Synod appointments, but it is helpful to categorise them separately. Two were in Synod-cum-Community related positions, noted earlier, as the Northern Synod has such overlapping positions. One worked in a Church School, also technically a Synod appointment. One was retired, though this person had not long retired and continued an active supply ministry.

Other features of the clerical Moderators included that city-based clergy predominate, especially in New South Wales, a significant number have had extensive organisational experience in the church, including roles in Presbytery and positions on Synod committees and a large proportion of Moderators, particularly in Victoria and Western Australia, were influential figures in the first moves toward union. This is evident when the number of future Moderators attending the first Assembly is considered.

The Non-Clergy

All Synods have elected at least one non-clerical person as Moderator, though three Synods have only had one. Both the Northern Synod and Queensland elected "lay" men as Moderators and South Australia, a "lay" woman as Moderator. The first "lay" woman Moderator was Lilian Wells, the inaugural Moderator in N.S.W. Given their size, it is significant that the Synods of Tasmania and Western Australia have elected 41% of the total number of non-clerical Moderators.

The age range for a non-clergy person when installed as Moderator is 42 - 67, with the average age being 56.7. Women record a higher average age (59.4) than men (53.9). There is no significant difference between men and women in the age range.

TABLE 4:

NON-CLERICAL MODERATORS - OCCUPATIONS

SYNOD	NUMBER	OCCUPATION/EMPLOYMENT		
		CHURCH	OTHER	RETIRED
N.S.W.	3	-	1	2
Northern	1	1	-	-
Queensland	1	1	-	-
South Australia	1	-	-	1
Tasmania	3	-	3	-
Victoria	4	-	1	2
Western Australia	4	1	2	2
TOTALS	17	3	7	7



I have used only three main categories for a study of occupation/employment of non-clerical Moderators. The main factor which stands out is that males are more likely to have been employed by the church, while females are more likely to be retired (5:2). In fact one third of the men worked for the church. No women had a paid church position when installed as a Moderator, though one was a former Principal of a church school. These statistics reflect the fact that to date, men have dominated the senior positions in Synod departments, one of the main church areas that lay people have been employed.

Overall, 41% of lay Moderators had retired by the time they took up the position. Regarding those who were still employed, several lay moderators indicated to me that they had to scale back their own paid work during the lead-up to their time as Moderator and/or also during their term. An ordained person (or a lay church employee) has greater flexibility in terms of continuity of employment. Given the nature of the task, it seems clear that a lay person would either need to have a very flexible job or perhaps be retired, in order to take on Moderatorial responsibility. It will be interesting to gauge the effect that changes in the Moderatorial office in some Synods (e.g., to longer terms and full time) will have on the number of lay people being available for nomination.

The occupations of the "lay" Moderators varies considerable, reflecting the variety of people. Categories include: Farming (1), Legal (2), Medical (1), Tertiary (1) and Business (2). Of the three Moderators who were church employees, one was a Patrol Padre and the other two held or still hold senior positions in Synod departments.

Other significant factors for non-clerical Moderators include a long term involvement in the church, particularly in Synod committees and Presbyteries, for women, involvement in Women's church

organisations prior to union, being the spouse of a minister (three Moderators) and a lay preaching background. The last point features strongly with nearly all the lay people of Methodist background being accredited lay preachers.

### **Antecedent Denominational Background**

The statistics represent the church affiliation prior to union or to joining the Uniting Church. This last point is related to those Moderators who were ordained overseas. They usually came from a recognisable denominational background, e.g. Methodist or Presbyterian. The Northern Synod statistics are a bit difficult because of the seven people that I have listed as Methodist and Presbyterian, at least four were technically members of the United Church in Northern Australia, established prior to the national union.

The majority of Moderators have a Methodist background (51%), with Presbyterians (39%) and Congregationalists (8.7%). One Moderator came from the Church of South India, already a United church. The numbers are not statistically significantly different when only the clergy are examined. Given the number of Moderators who had a Congregational background, their number of non-clergy Moderators is quite significant - 3 out of 8, and 2 of the 3 were women. Methodists and Presbyterian each record 7.

**TABLE 5:**

**ANTECEDENT DENOMINATIONS OF MODERATORS**

<b>SYNOD</b>	<b>Congregational</b>	<b>Methodist</b>	<b>Presbyterian</b>	<b>Other</b>
N.S.W.	2	10	6	-
Northern	2	3	4	1
Queensland	1	9	6	-
South Australia	2	6	1	-
Tasmania	-	7	6	-
Victoria	-	9	8	-
Western Australia	1	3	5	-
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1</b>

In some ways, the statistics in the table above reflect the numerical position of the denominations at union. For example, South Australia had six times as many Methodists as Presbyterians, and while there were more Methodists in W.A., the highest percentage of Presbyterians who actually went into union occurred in W.A.

It is interesting that of the seven inaugural Moderators, five came from the Presbyterian Church (Northern, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia), one from the Methodist Church (Victoria) and one from the Congregational Union (N.S.W.). It should be noted that the first Moderators were not initially elected by their Synods, but nominated by the various planning committees (after considerable consultation).

In my preliminary count, some 14 Moderators held an equivalent leadership position in their antecedent church. Of these, the Congregational Union had the largest group (6), and the Methodists and Presbyterians had 4 each. Relevant factors here are the size of the denomination, the age of the Moderators, and particularly in the case of Presbyterians, which leaders went into Union. The state breakdown is N.S.W. (1), Northern (2), Queensland (1), South Australia (3), Tasmania (3), Victoria (3), and Western Australia (1).

I am aware that many people in the Uniting Church do not like to refer to people's antecedent background, perhaps because they want to concentrate on the future or they believe that prior denominational background is no longer relevant to their role. While this may be true in part, it is also true that church antecedent background is very important. For many, perhaps the majority of our members, their previous denomination provided their formative church experience. It is not uncommon for someone to visit a certain church and by the end of the service know the denominational background of the people and/or the minister.

I believe that knowledge of, and continued study of the heritage of our previous denominations is essential, but I would also acknowledge that we need to be Uniting people, rather than merely former Methodists or Presbyterians or Congregationalists. Relating the above comments to this study, I believe that it is extremely unlikely that people still seriously consider antecedent background when voting for a Moderator. This was certainly the case in the first couple of years after union, if only because people often knew people from their own denominational background better. This has by now come to an end, with the important point being how well the person is known in the Uniting Church.



## **Links with the National Assembly**

Not including the inaugural Moderators, who were appointed by the First Assembly, until the first meeting of the Synod concerned, 28 of the delegates who attended the First Assembly of the Uniting Church in 1977 went on to become Synod Moderators. Of the 28 the Synod breakdown was: N.S.W. (3), Northern (2), Queensland (4), South Australia (5), Tasmania (2), Victoria (8), Western Australia (4). This indicates that about 50% of all the Moderators in S.A., Victoria and W.A. attended the First Assembly, a significant grouping. Their antecedent backgrounds were Congregational (6), Methodist (12), and Presbyterian (10).<sup>4</sup>

Of the 92 Moderators, 26 have been elected to the Standing Committee for at least one term (1 for 5 terms, 2 for 3 terms and 12 for 2 terms). Five Moderators have gone on to become Presidents of the Uniting Church in Australia (Rollie Busch, Ian Tanner, Ron Wilson, D'Arcy Wood, Jill Tabart).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, a comment about what people may look for when they vote for Moderator-elect. Based on this limited study three factors emerge as significant. First, a Moderator is a person of mature age, and presumably of Christian maturity. Secondly, he or she is a person with wide church knowledge and background. Thirdly, a Moderator is a person with experience in church leadership on councils or in organisations.<sup>5</sup>



**ENDNOTES:**

1. I have estimated the age for one person (from N.S.W.). It is unlikely that this has had any significant effect on the data.
2. Note that this section refers to Ministers/Ministers of the Word. No Deacon has been a Moderator as yet. I have used a later date for the ordination year of one person (from N.S.W.), reflecting the actual date of the start of their regular ministry and the date recorded in the Synod directory.
3. One person in Queensland has been elected as Moderator on two occasions, the first for a one year term and the second, as the first full-time Moderator, for a three year term. For the purpose of this study, I have counted this person as two distinct people.
4. Six of the seven inaugural Moderators attended the First Assembly - the Rev. Professor Roland Busch (Qld) was absent.
5. Most of the statistics are from my survey and conversations with Moderators and former Moderators during late 1994 and early 1995. Other sources include Synod Directories, Memorial Minutes, Moderators' Minutes and addresses published in Synod proceedings.

For other statistics related to the denominations see: W. W. Phillips, "Religion", in *Australians: Historical Statistics* (ed. W. Vamplew, Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987), pp. 418-435.