

## 100 NOT OUT: A further Statistical Note about Moderators in the Uniting Church: 1997

**Note 1:** this short note builds on my article published in *Church Heritage* (March 1995) on the first 92 Moderators in the Uniting Church. The Victorian Synod will install the 100th Moderator, Reverend Pam Kerr, the third woman minister to be installed as Moderator.

**Note 2:** One person has been elected Moderators on two occasions (Don Whebell, Queensland: (1989-90 and 1993-1996).

**Note 3:** Two other Synods will install new Moderators in 1997: S.A. (Lay man) and Tasmania (Lay woman). This summary is based on the first 100 installed. This means that by the end of 1997, 101 individual people will have been Moderator of a Synod of the Uniting Church.

**Note 4:** Breakdown of the 7 Moderators in office at the end of 1997:  
Men: 4; Women: 3. Ordained (Ministers of the Word): 4; Lay: 3.

### 1. A Basic Profile

1.1 Two factors are significant: Ordination and Gender:

The substantial majority of Moderators have been male (88) and most have been **Ordained** (*ministers of the Word - no deacon has been a Moderator*): **81** and of this group most were **male - 78**. Only three women ministers have been (or will be) installed as Moderator. Of the 19 lay Moderators represent there have been 10 men and 9 women. 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 (40%), while Queensland (94%) and SA (90%) have the highest proportion of ordained Moderators.

1.2 The **age range** for Moderators (at installation) is significant, extending from 33 (Tasmanian Moderator) - 68 (Northern Synod Moderator). NSW has the highest **average age** (59) and Tasmania, the lowest (50). To a large degree, this reflects the size of the Synods and the number of members, and in particular, the number of available ordained ministers. The overall average age at installation was 54. Lay Moderators are slightly older on average, reflecting the number of retired people and the higher age of women (56).

1.3 There have been 12 **women** Moderators, 75% being lay leaders.

1.4 Five Moderators (including three of the inaugural Moderators) are **deceased**. Their Synod and Year of office is in brackets.

Graeme Bucknall (*Northern 1977-79*) and Graham Bence (*Northern: 1981-83*). Rolie Busch (*Qld: 1977-79*), Michael Sawyer (*S.A.: 1983-85*) and Ron Allardice (*Victoria: 1977-78*).

### 2. The Ordained

2.1 The most significant factor for the ordained is the length of time from ordination to the Moderatorial year. The average time from ordination to installation as Moderator is 24 years, with the range being 5 years (W.A.) to 41 years (NSW). NSW has the longest average time (30 years), with Tasmania the shortest (17 years). This, of course, is consistent with the age profile, but is also related to the number of available ministers.

The majority of Moderators were ordained in the 1950s (30) or 1960s (29) (73% in all). One was ordained in the 1930s (1939), five in the 1940s and 14 in the 1970s. Only 2 Moderators were ordained by the Uniting Church. One in NSW (in 1985) and one in W.A. (in 1984). It should be noted however, that, when installed as Moderator, both of these people were actually older than the average Moderator in their state.

## **2.2 Synod of Ordination.**

Some states have experienced greater homogeneity than others. Overall, some 63% of Moderators were ordained in the state they were later to become Moderator. 29% were ordained in states other than their own Moderatorial state and 9% were ordained overseas. Both Queensland and Victoria had the highest correlation between the Synod/state of ordination and the state/Synod of Moderatorial election. The Northern Synod and Tasmania were the opposite. The latter statistics reflect the increased mobility of ministers in these areas. Ministers, 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 to those ordained in say NSW or Victoria, where the person may spend their whole ordained ministry. Another significant factor for Tasmanian ministers was the circumstance of their ordination, particularly for those of Methodist background. As a single conference, based in Victoria, the Conference usually ordained all candidates together, 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, South Africa.

The first Aboriginal Moderator was Djiniyini Gondarra (Northern Synod in 1985). He was a Minister in the United Church before Union).

## **2.3 Settlements.**

Though in some cases it is difficult to classify a category, the following provides a picture of where our Moderators have come from. The majority (56%) came from a Parish settlement, which in most cases continued, though usually on a very reduced basis. Synod accounts for another 17%. Theological College - 10% and smaller numbers from Presbytery and Assembly positions.

There are some significant differences with the actual settlements of Moderators (at the time of installation). In NSW and Victoria, a Moderator is more likely to have been in a Parish settlement, while in Queensland, the Moderator is more likely to have been in a Synod/Presbytery position than any other category. In some Synods, like Tasmania, the parish emphasis is due to the few positions available outside of Parish settlement.

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 Assembly - Frontier Services) and chaplaincies/community-based ministries, which have a definite relationship to the church through the Synod, but also have a community emphasis. Only one Minister was retired at the time of election and installation.

## **2.4 Other features of the Ordained**

\* City based ministers dominate, especially in NSW.

\* A significant number have had extensive organisational experience in the church, including roles in Presbytery and positions on Synod committees.

\* A large proportion of Moderators, particularly in Victoria and Western Australia were influential figures in the moves toward union. This is evident when the number of future Moderators attending the First Assembly is considered.

### 3. Lay Moderators

3.1 All Synods have elected a lay person as Moderator, and all Synods except for Queensland have elected a lay woman. The first lay woman Moderator was Lillian Wells, the inaugural Moderator in NSW. Given their actual size, it is significant that the Synods of Tasmania and Western Australia have elected 42% of the total number of lay Moderators.

#### 3.2 Occupation/employment for lay people

I have only used three main categories for this study. 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. No women had a paid church position when installed as 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, 47% of lay Moderators had retired by the time they took up the position. **The occupations of the lay Moderators** varies considerably, reflecting the variety of people.

Categories though were mostly professional in orientation: *Legal, Medical, Tertiary/teaching, Business, farming*. Of the three Moderators who were church employees, one was a Patrol padre and the other two held senior positions in Synod departments.

#### 3.3 Other significant factors for lay Moderators

- \* long-term involvement in the church, particularly in Synod committees and Presbyteries;
- \* involvement in women's church organisations prior to union (for women)
- \* spouse being a minister
- \* Lay Preaching background. This features strongly, with nearly all the lay people of Methodist background being accredited lay preachers.

### 4. Church Antecedent 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, eg., 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 in SA (70%), NSW (60% - including the last six Moderators in NSW), Queensland (59%), Tasmania (57%) came from a Methodist background, while WA (50% - 40%). and the Northern Synod 36%-27%) were the only states to record a higher Presbyterian background. The Northern Synod also recorded the largest number from a Congregational background - 3 of the 9 overall or 27% of the Northern group. Tasmania (8 Methodist-6 Presbyterian) and Victoria (9 each) have not elected a Moderator with a Congregational heritage.

Overall, the majority of Moderators have a Methodist background (53), with Presbyterians (37) and Congregationalists (9). One Moderator came from the Church of South India (already a United Church). The numbers are not statistically significantly different when only the ordained are examined. Given the number of Moderators who had a Congregational background, the number of lay Moderators is quite significant - 4 out of 9 overall, and 3 of the 4 were women. Methodists recorded 8 lay Moderators and Presbyterians 7.

Interestingly, these statistics reflect the numerical position of the denominations at union. For example, South Australia had six times the number of Methodists compared to 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 to consider 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 (NSW). It should be noted that the first Moderators were not initially elected by their Synods, but appointed by the various planning committees (with considerable consultation).

## **5. Assembly Presidents**

Six Moderators (including three of the inaugural Moderators) have gone on to become Presidents of the Uniting Church in Australia (Rollie Busch, Ian Tanner, Ron Wilson, D'Arcy Wood, Jill Tabart, and the next President John Mavor).

## **6. 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:

1. A person of mature age (and presumably Christian maturity)
2. A person with wide church knowledge and background
3. A person with experience in church leadership (of councils or organisations)

### **Notes:**

*1. I have estimated the age for one person (from NSW. It is unlikely that this has had any significant effect on the data.*

*2. I have used a later date for the ordination year of one person (from NSW), reflecting the actual date of the start of their regular ministry and the date recorded in the Synod directory.*

*3. Most of the statistics are derived from a survey and conversations with Moderators and former Moderators during late 1994 and early 1995. Other sources include Synod Directories, Memorial Minutes, Moderator's Minutes and addresses published in Synod proceedings.*

*For other statistics related to the denominations see:*

*W.W. Phillips, Religion, in Australian Historical Statistics, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, Sydney, 1987.*

**Peter Bentley is a member of the Executive of the Church Records and Historical Society (NSW) and works part-time for the Christian Research Association and the National Assembly.**