

**A comment on, and an overview of, the Ballot  
for Assembly Membership: NSW Synod 2005  
Peter Bentley**

Note 1: As one of the sixty seven nominees, I concede this was a complex ballot, and I believe made more complex by the amalgamation of the minister and lay names on the one paper, with people told to vote for the 21 people (rather than to vote for 11 ministers and 10 lay people). I understand that this was related to the “Under 55 years” category which this Synod had approved and was applicable to the whole elected group. While this appears permissible (the regulation is not explicit), it seemed to me to be unusual, and I believe was a disadvantage for lay people, especially those who were not employed by the church, and thus did not have a more public profile. The other complex aspect was the Synod’s endorsement of the quota system for various categories, which as you will see makes election easier for certain people.

Note 2: The Synod appoints 26 members:  
Due to pre-assigned categories, only 21 places were set for election from the group of 67 nominees (36 lay and 31 ministers).

Eventual Assigned places for the 2006 Assembly:

**Lay (3):** Moderator; 1 lay person nominated by the Korean Commission;  
Also the UAICC nominated person was a lay person (they could have been a minister)

**Ministers (2):** General Secretary, and 1 Minister nominated by the Korean Commission.

Note 3: The declaration of the result of the ballot was actually conducted according to category: lay or minister.

**ELECTED**

**Minister and Lay. Overall: 8 Female; 13 Male.**

**1. Ministers:** 11; Male 7; Female 4.  
Synod employees, including UTC (3); Presbytery Based (1)  
Congregation based (7)

**Note 1:** Deacon- The Synod had determined that at least one Deacon would be appointed. There were only two Deacons nominated. It is worth noting that the over 55 years Deacon was chosen, against the under 30 years. The election of Marion Gledhill also meant a husband and wife couple appointed to Assembly. Interestingly, in the nominee list, there were three couples (husband and wife) standings.

**Note 2:** one of the ministers did not list membership of a congregation. Hopefully this was just an oversight.

**2. Lay:** 10; Male 6; Female 4

**Synod employees: 5**

Karyl Davison: ELM Centre; Youth Worker Rob Hanks: Youth Unit;  
John Oldmeadow: Board of Education; Glen Powell: Board of Mission; Tina Rendell:  
Board of Mission.

**Church Workers: 4**

Andrew Chin (Wesley International Congregation Youth Pastor); Youth Worker Mata  
Havea (Georges River); Emma Schubert (University worker); David Williamson  
(University based and Intern MOW).

**Other: 1.** Malcolm Gledhill – Synod Legal Adviser (Solicitor in private practice)

**2.1 The increasing professionalisation of the lay part of the church**

The election of church based professionals is of course related to the growing professionalisation and bureaucratisation of the institutional Church, especially in mainline churches, where polity is being dramatically affected by declining numbers of prominent and competent lay volunteers. Given its age profile, the UCA will simply lose more lay people in the next ten years who are presently involved in the life of the wider church. I believe if anyone thinks that the Uniting Church can sustain our present polity, then they ‘are dreaming’.

I became aware of the bureaucratisation of the church during my own ‘professional church life over 15 years’. This is the main reason why I never asked for automatic appointment as Presbytery Secretary for the lay presbytery position in the ballot for Assembly. I believe I could have easily been appointed possibly 3 times, but given there was only one lay position, and I was employed, I viewed this as denying the possibility of full lay representation from the Presbytery.

While ‘lay professionals in the councils of the Church’ are (hopefully) members of local congregations, there is a different context, and from my experience, a different perspective to an ‘ordinary lay person’. I am aware that some people do not agree with this, but the often spasmodic local church attendance, and possibly quasi clerical basis of participation, provide different opportunities and understandings to that of the volunteer member. Leave conditions, wider potential profile, and of course money make a difference. Sadly some people can end up as the visitor in their own church, or the professional in their own church.

While some people, like myself have raised questions over the last decade about the applicability of the present membership regulations for councils of the church, certainly the situation was stark this time. It is important to note that the regulations were written at a time when it was assumed that lay people were lay people in the full sense of the word. They were not employed by the church.

The main change has been in the richer Synods like NSW, which can afford significant numbers of paid staff. These people usually have a higher profile than 'ordinary' members. Smaller and poorer Synods do not have the same numbers of employed lay staff, but the trend is still evident from my presentation at the 2003 Assembly in the debate on presbytery representation (my vain attempt at six minutes before the Assembly concluded to have the Assembly consider increasing the number of lay Assembly members appointed by each presbytery from one to two). Given the overall age profile of the UCA, and the increasing trend to paid employment because of the difficulty in retaining the volunteer basis, the Uniting Church will simply have more church employed or paid professional members at the Assembly.

I am more concerned about the number of people in the institutional life of the church who are elected to councils like Assembly. I believe that if we are going to have quotas, we probably should also have a limit to the number of Synod and Presbytery (including University based) staff. Perhaps no more than two if there are ten members overall to be elected, or we should have a third category group.

We may also have to think about a limit to the number of other church workers, and perhaps also limit the number of paid congregational based workers (perhaps two or three). This would then mean that at least 50% of the elected members would be lay volunteers.

#### **2.1.1 Youthworkers:**

The Synod had decided that at least one Accredited Youthworker would be elected in the lay group. Two Accredited Youthworkers nominated for the Assembly Ballot. Given that Accredited Youthworkers are equated to ministers in terms of the regulations, I believe it is time to review their category basis and to consider asking the Assembly to include Youthworkers in the ballot for the minister group.

#### **2.1.2 Intern Ministers:**

Initially there were two interns appointed, but after the re-count on age, one intern minister was appointed. Advice is only now being sought regarding the status of this person in terms of their classification at the Assembly meeting, because they have now been ordained and will actually be a Minister at the Assembly. Perhaps, the church should consider whether intern ministers should be considered ministers for the purpose of the ballot, or as a third group? I note the Regulations refer to the place of Interns in Church Councils, The Presbytery and the Synod.

#### **2.1.3 Other Lay Specified Ministries**

There are also other groups of people who would have been considered in the lay category if nominated, highlighting the professional orientation and again potentially limiting the number of ordinary lay people:

Lay Pastors, Community Ministers and the new Synod recognised category of a pastoral worker who is ministering in a recognised placement. Perhaps there should be three categories for Assembly membership?

3. **GENDER**

	Minister MALE	Minister FEMALE	Lay MALE	Lay FEMALE
Nominated	25	6	21	15
Elected	7	4	6	4

**Note:** Synod determined that at least five of the lay representatives and four of the ordained shall be women. Quotas fulfilled. Note: the UAICC nominee was a woman, making the fifth female.

4. **AGE**

	Minister Under 30 years	Lay Under 30 years	Minister 30-55	Lay 30-55	Minister Over 55	Lay Over 55
Nominated	1	9	22	20	8	7
Elected	0	3	9	5	2	2

Note: Synod had determined that at least three of the **lay** shall be under youthful age (30 years or under). **Note:** This is based on a regulation of the church.  
Elected were: Andrew Chin, Emma Schubert, David Williamson.

Synod also determined that 12 of the representatives would be under 55 years. It is clear from the above that most nominees were from the 30-55 age bracket. While there is no evidence to prove this, anecdotally, I am aware that some people over 55 years did not bother to nominate.

5. **MIGRANT-ETHNIC**

Interestingly there appeared to be very few migrant-ethnic members standing in the Assembly ballot. I wonder if this reflects, in my view, and from my personal discussions with many members of migrant-ethnic congregations, the increasing distance between the stance of the institution on the high profile issue of sexuality and the personal stance of most migrant-ethnic members.

Note: Synod determined that at least one of the lay and one of the ordained shall be from a migrant-ethnic community (as defined by Synod). In terms of the numbers who nominated I am not sure how some people were recorded, but I suggest: **Ministers: 6 Lay: 5**. In terms of election, the Synod fulfilled its one minister and appointed two in the lay group.

## 6. **PRESBYTERY**

Presbytery	Nominee MINISTER	Elected MINISTER	Nominee LAY	Elected LAY	TOTAL Elected
Canberra	5	2	4	-	2
Central West	4	1	2	-	1
Georges R	1	1	1	1	2
Illawarra	2	-	2	1	1
Ku-ring-gai	1	1	1	1	2
MN Coast	2	-	1	-	-
New ENW	-	-	1	-	-
Parramatta-N	5	2	7	2	4
Riverina	2	1	-	-	1
Sydney	5	1	13	3	4
Sydney Nth	3	1	1	1	2
The Hunter	1	1	2	1	2

**Notes:** No Nominations from The Darling or Far North Coast.

One lay person was a member of the UAICC.

**Comment:** It is evident that it is helpful to belong to a metropolitan presbytery, simply because of the higher initial support in terms of potential votes.

## 7. **Past ASSEMBLY Membership**

This is difficult to outline because many members did not include their past Assembly membership.

**One interesting fact:** In 2003, the three NSW members who were elected to the Assembly Standing Committee (and of course members of the 2003 Assembly) were Wesley Gleeson, Matthew Grudnoff, and Revd Liva Tukutama. None of the three were elected to the 2006 Assembly in the Synod ballot for 2005.

### **Conclusion**

This was clearly a hotly contested ballot and with such a large and drawn out ballot paper, I would say it was difficult to collate. Some aspects are distinct, including the quotas for age, gender (especially female minister), Deacon and Youth Worker, Institutional Employment (and high Synod profile), and membership of a metropolitan presbytery. My articles on the elections of Moderators (including the survey of first 100 Moderators) and Presidents, may be relevant in terms of the factors that people consider when voting (available in *Church Heritage*)

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