

insights

WINTER 2021

30th Anniversary

Celebrating 30 years of building community and sharing the Good News

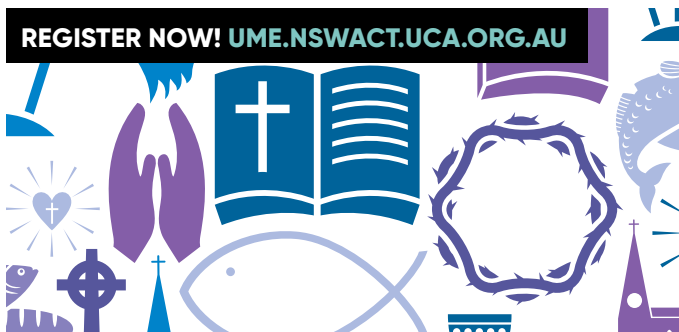
Gambling reform

Growing young

Prioritising young people in the Uniting Church

EVENTS & COURSES

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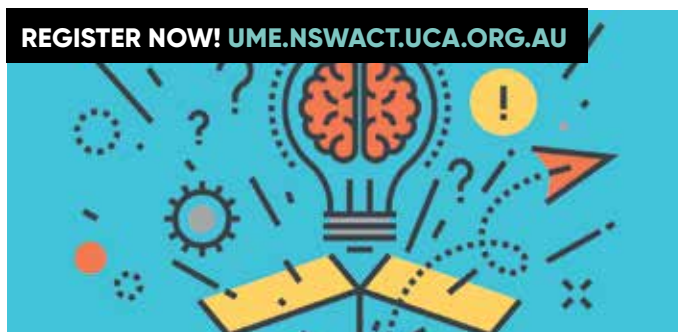
10 JULY–21 AUGUST

LIVING OUR FAITH

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An ideal opportunity for a small group, faith community, bible study group, or congregation to spend time studying the Christology of the Uniting Church. On-site at CFM, North Parramatta and via Zoom in seven parts

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28 AUGUST & 4 SEPTEMBER

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Learn about the history, polity and ethos of the Uniting Church. How the Uniting Church came to be, its journey so far, how we make decisions together, how we understand and nurture leadership as a 'Pilgrim People on the Way'.



Connecting the Church



REV. JANE FRY
**GENERAL
SECRETARY**

THE GENERAL SECRETARY IS APPOINTED BY THE SYNOD TO PROVIDE LEADERSHIP TO THE CHURCH BY ACTIVELY ENGAGING IN STRATEGIC THINKING ABOUT THE LIFE, DIRECTION, VISION AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

SHARING
THE UPS AND
DOWNS OF THE
DISCIPLESHIP
JOURNEY IS
A CONSTANT
JOY AND
CHALLENGE FOR
THE CHURCH

Thirty years of *Insights*, the magazine that has stitched together stories and images from across the church to inspire, challenge and connect the Uniting Church in this Synod.

It's changed over time as we all have; it's no longer the only communication 'channel' for the Synod, but it still has a very faithful readership and is valued across the Synod. Numerous people have been the custodians of *Insights* over its thirty year life span and they've all put their own stamp on the magazine. Its production is currently in the hands of the Synod Communications Team – Jonathan Foye (Editor and Content Producer), Rana Moawad (Senior Graphic Designer) and Angela Cadena (Communications Manager), under the management

of Adrian Drayton who is an incredibly faithful, thoughtful leader of the Synod communications team and has been a member of the team since 1994!

The creativity, energy and wisdom that Adrian always brings to all the communication needs and challenges of the

church is exemplary and, aside from the slightly hectic look in the eye that appears when deadlines aren't met by Moderators or General Secretaries, can be absolutely relied on to be calm and constructive

whatever the circumstances. And that's all before we take Synod meetings into account!

This year, thanks to the pandemic, communications for Synod 2021 have taken on the even greater challenges presented by an online meeting environment.

Communications has changed enormously over the lifespan of the *Insights* magazine. The channels now include various websites, social media, video, and weekly e-news all directed towards keeping the church connected across the different geographies and generations. Although the communications landscape has become much more complex, the fundamental task is the same – like the collection of writings that make up the New Testament, witnessing to the good news of Jesus Christ, encouraging and resourcing participation in the mission of God, and sharing the ups and downs of the discipleship journey is a constant joy and challenge for the church. This is the story that needs to be told in new ways, for every age, with tools that are relevant for the times.

Lately, I've been re-reading a book by John V. Taylor called *The Go-Between God: the Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* and was first published in the 1960s. John Taylor was Bishop of Winchester and a CMS missionary in Uganda for many years. Coincidentally, it appears that a new edition has been published in 2021.

This was a startling book when I first read it. It alerted me to the activity of the Holy Spirit working 'in-between' to enliven and connect not just in and through Scripture and tradition but also through the beauty of the world, through our intuitions and dreams and all our relationships to sense the joyful liveliness of God within everything. The work of the Spirit is to bring Jesus to our attention so that all our decisions and choices are made with reference to him. This awareness might have had something to do with why I found the Uniting Church Basis of Union call to be a 'fellowship of reconciliation' so attractive when the Anglican church and I finally came to a parting of the ways.

It's also why relationship is nourished by story-sharing, between individuals and in communities. It's also how we're connected as Church throughout the Synod. The communication channels that we have are not just the means for the 'Synod' to download news and information, but are now much more interactive, inclusive, and accessible enabling greater connection and, hopefully, growth in discipleship and relationship.

Happy birthday, *Insights!* 🎉

14 CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

In the lead up to *Insights*' 30th anniversary, we will be taking a look back at some of the key stories, people, and events that have helped pave the way in making the magazine and website.



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The Uniting Church in Australia is one of the country's largest denominations.

Our vision is that it will be a fellowship of reconciliation, living God's love, following Jesus Christ and acting for the common good to build a just and compassionate community of faith.

MANAGING EDITOR Adrian Drayton **EDITOR** Jonathan Foye **PRODUCTION/DESIGN** Rana Moawad

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MODERATOR'S REFLECTION

We are called to be in the midst of things



REV. SIMON
HANSFORD
MODERATOR

THE MODERATOR IS ELECTED TO GIVE PROPHETIC AND PASTORAL LEADERSHIP TO THE SYNOD, ASSISTING AND ENCOURAGING EXPRESSION AND FULFILMENT OF FAITH, AND THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH.

It was not just one of those days, but one that helps define who we are as church, and how our discipleship is shaped for the task before us.

Thursday began as many Thursdays do, but middled - and ended - not with a whimper, but a bang. Sometimes in the Synod offices, we are "just getting the job done", as we seek to serve the Church, as the Church serves the community, but fanfares are not always the order of the day.

First stop was St. Stephen's, in the heart of the city, opposite Parliament House. I sat in the front row of one of our most beautiful, "churchiest" churches, between a doctor, a past NSW Premier and federal Foreign Minister on one side, and three recovering drug users and the Executive Director of Uniting on the other.

We celebrated two decades of hard core, high quality, care and justice, as the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre was recognised as a lifesaving, life-changing institution at the heart of Kings Cross. The testimonies - of the three men on my right giving thanks for their lives, of a Liberal and Labor politician in furious agreement, of doctors Marianne Jauncey and Ingrid Van Beek in passionate service - all bore witness to a hope in action driven by Rev. Harry Herbert and our Synod, which has changed thousands of lives, politics and a community.

We hung our banner of hearts across the facade of Parliament House and danced down Macquarie Street, returning to our other work.

As I landed in the Synod Office, we welcomed student leaders from our schools. More than twenty senior students, chosen by their peers, had come to discuss the issues which they had elected as important - consent, climate change and the environment, and mental health registered as their top three.

This was an opportunity for me and some other members of our Synod to engage with the considerable capacity of these students, as they wrestled with confronting problems which beset them and everyone else in our community.

They were not hindered by their surrounds but, rather, energised by the opportunity to

have their views expressed and challenged. When they were asked what it means to be part of a Uniting Church school, even those students from other faiths were able to name their sense of being welcomed, of engaging in education, faith, and issues which are important to them. Almost everyone talked of the diversity - of faith, of opinion, of experience - and they attributed that to being part of the Uniting Church.

We have children in schools of all styles across our Synod; they are not the church of the future. They are the church now, and we should celebrate them as such.

As our schools event drew to a close, I hustled down Pitt Street to an Iftar meal hosted by the Affinity Intercultural Foundation.

This was a meal within our community, for Muslims and as many friends as they could fit in the room. My table had a judge, a politician, and two members of the armed services. We sat near politicians and broadcasters, journalists, and sportspeople, as we considered what it means to be a diverse, creative community. We wrestled with justice for refugees and Australians trying to come home, from India and other countries. We voiced concern about labelling, even blaming, specific groups of people because of their belief and background.

Iftar is not only a meal as part of the season of Ramadan, it is often hospitality at its best, where difference and shared hopes are held together.

This story of my Thursday is a story of our Uniting Church; engaged in conversation with our community. It is meeting with politicians and priests, or those ensnared by the challenges of life, or emerging from its injustices. We know that Jesus met with people living in all aspects of his community and, at our best, we seek to do the same.

We are called to be in the midst of things. It is here that we bear witness to our hope in Jesus, and offer that hope to others with whom we share our lives. As disciples of Jesus, we are in conversation with our community, articulating hope, embodying justice.

Every day. 🕒

THEY ARE THE
CHURCH NOW
AND WE SHOULD
CELEBRATE
THEM AS SUCH



Keep up with the Moderator by following these hashtags on Facebook and Instagram.

#moderatorinsession
#AllOfThisIsUs

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instagram.com/insightsmag

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COMMENTS

your say ONLINE

WE'VE ROUNDED UP THE BEST COMMENTS THAT YOU'VE LEFT ONLINE. If you would like to leave a comment on an article or have a viewpoint to share - just go online insights.uca.org.au and leave your comments.



TO CELEBRATE *INSIGHTS* 30TH ANNIVERSARY WE ASKED YOU TO SEND US YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORIES OF *INSIGHTS*...

Christian Students Uniting leading the UCA to the Global Climate Strike in 2019.

Gabrielle Cadenhead

Discovering the first film review that I'd ever read that referred to a passage of scripture. And then the next one. *Insights* was the magazine for me!!

Robbie Casey

Looking back, *Forward's* masthead sticks in the deep recesses of my mind. Just after the inauguration of the Uniting Church in June 1977 I suggested to the Elders Council at Grantham Heights (Seven Hills) that we should have a Publicity Officer. As with many suggestions in life, those suggesting something usually end up landed with the task.

Until a career move to Hobart in January 1985 I held the

position, making extensive use of the local "parish pumps", the free Cumberland newspapers both at Blacktown and Parramatta.

I also turned my hand to filing copy and photos for the Synod paper. A Wentworthville Parish "magazine", two foolscap sheets, 8 pages, aptly named Parish Gatherings was produced under my editorship, a borrowed IBM golf ball typewriter, lots of Tippex and printed on an offset printer by the late Sid Limbert in his Seven Hills garage printing "works".

On the night of Sunday 13 June, 1982, the 13th anniversary of the opening of the Grantham Heights building, a fire engulfed the church. The next day it was all hands on deck, making safe

the remaining structure. The memories of that clean up were captured by my Kodak Retinette 1B B&W camera. My report on the fire made

SO MANY INSIGHTFUL, THOUGHT-PROVOKING AND CHALLENGING ARTICLES

the front page. along the image of the then General Secretary of the Synod, the Rev Frank Butler, a member of the Wentworthville congregation, assisting.

Over the years I have had no less than 45 letters published in *Insights*, along with reviews, movies (4), DVD (1) and music (1). Congratulations *Insights* on your 30th Anniversary.

**Allan Gibson OAM
Wesley Castle Hill
Congregation**

I appreciate reading so many insightful, thought-provoking and challenging articles on such a diverse range of issues. Theology, ministry, country residents and Indigenous experience, art and popular culture. It is all there! It is also an incredible privilege to be able to write articles for *Insights* as I wrestle or am inspired or challenged by something in my own experience or that I witness. Thanks *Insights* for years of great reading and thinking!

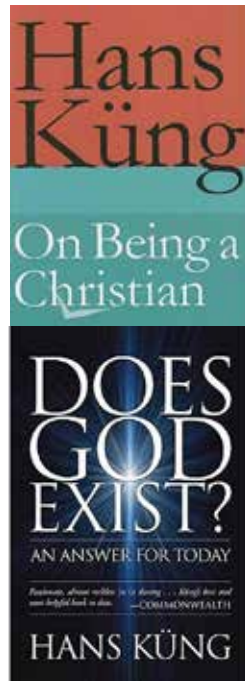
Katherine Grocott

I really enjoyed and still sometimes go back to the series of "Belief Matters" that went through the Apostles Creed over a number of issues. It was back in 2014 and was authored by Dr Ben Myers.

Ivan Dirk

Vale Hans Küng

CELEBRATED AND SOMETIMES CONTROVERSIAL SWISS THEOLOGIAN HANS KÜNG HAS PASSED AWAY AT THE AGE OF 93, A REPRESENTATIVE CONFIRMED IN EARLY APRIL




Küng was one of the authors of several proposals that were accepted at the second Vatican Council (or Vatican II). He was known for being unafraid of criticising his own denomination. The author of numerous theological classics such as *Infallible?*, *Does God Exist?*, and *On Being A Christian*, Küng called into question the Vatican's official opposition to women's ordination and the idea that the Pope was infallible. The latter saw him removed as a priest (although a negotiated settlement with the Catholic Church allowed him to remain a theologian in good standing).

He also variously criticised the Vatican's policies on governance, liturgy, birth control, priestly celibacy, homosexuality, soteriology, and other topics.

NEVER AGAIN
WOULD A
THEOLOGIAN
HAVE SUCH
INFLUENCE

An in-demand speaker, Küng's international trips included being a featured speaker at then 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, an event that featured the Dalai Lama as the keynote speaker. This was an example of Küng's work in extending the dialogue between Christianity and other world religions.

His work also served to create bridges between Catholics and Protestants

In noting the sheer amount of Küng's proposals that were accepted during Vatican II, Vatican expert Peter Hebblethwaite wrote that "Never again would a theologian have such influence." 

JONATHAN FOYE

Synod opts to forge ahead with its ***Future Directions***

THE SYNOD MEETING HAS AGREED TO ADOPT A NEW STRATEGY TO CHANGE ITS FUTURE TRAJECTORY > >



REV. SALLY YABSLEY BELL AND
SIOSIANA (JOYCE) TANGI



Building off the growth proposal from the 2019 Synod, *Future Directions for the People of God on the Way* sets a number of priorities for the Synod, including a focus on growing the church's younger membership and developing healthy congregations.

Future Directions was introduced by members of the Synod Standing Committee on Wednesday 7 April, and discussed in discernment groups before being amended and agreed to by consensus at Synod in Session 1B (10 April).

The proposal calls for the church to “affirm a commitment to being a contemporary, courageous, and growing church proclaiming Jesus Christ in worship, witness, and service.” It canvasses possible outcomes such as church attendance growth from 21,000 regular church attendees to 30,000.

The proposal aims to decrease the average age of church attendees, with the intent of taking the current 13 percent of regular attendees who are under the age of 50 and increasing this number to 21 percent of overall attendees. Synod 2021 was told the figures in the document were not targets but indicative of where the proposal could take the church.

The proposal was six-months in the making and four members of the 19-member Standing Committee were millennials (aged under 40). There were some amendments to the proposal which included an amendment that the resourcing framework for the proposal to be discussed at the June meeting of Synod 2021.

Prior to passing the proposal, the General Secretary, Rev. Jane Fry, compared the proposal to planning for an overseas holiday. “You first have to ask: Where you want to go?” she said. “This proposal is about direction setting ... other tactical questions about how we will do this (the funding, resources and strategy) we will get to this later.”

TENSION BETWEEN IMPATIENCE AND INERTIA

The Chair of the Synod Business Committee, Rev. Kent Crawford, said the discernment groups had been largely warm to the proposal with strong feedback that discipleship must be central. He said there was also widespread acceptance with the proposal to engage with young people.

“There was also a tension between impatience and inertia ... it reflected a view that we should just get on with it against questions about the strategy guiding how we will do this.”

Earlier, Rev. Crawford, said there were 190 delegates who participated online in the first stanza of Synod 2021 on Wednesday evening. He said there were 173 members engaged in discernment groups.

He urged delegates who could not make sessions of Synod 2021 to ensure they register as an apology so that discernment groups are not disrupted and also to identify those who were having technical problems and were lost due to technical problems.

THE PROPOSAL
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WITNESS, AND
SERVICE



JAYNE KWON AND JERRY FANG,
HAYDEN CHARLES (BELOW)



WALKING TOGETHER ACTION PLAN

Synod 2021 also agreed by consensus to the *Walking Together Action Plan* amid a strong commitment to work together on this plan and to support the work of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

“I would ask the wider Church to please understand the plea that the heavy lifting is our responsibility as a Church,” said Nathan Tyson of the commitment needed by the Synod.

“We can’t expect those disadvantaged, dealing with actual social work and trauma in their communities, to come to us. The heavy lifting is on us and we have to work at it together.”

Synod members were also updated on Synod’s Climate Change Strategy by Emma Maiden, Head of Advocacy & Media at Uniting and Erin Lewis, from Christian Students’ Uniting.

Synod 2021 also heard the first of three pre-recorded devotions from Dr Sathianathan “Sathi” Clarke, Bishop Sundo Kim Chair in World Christianity and Professor of Theology, Culture, and Mission at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC who spoke on “Where the wild God is”.

This year, the Synod general meeting is taking place online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Insights will provide full coverage of all proposals. 📺

MARTIN THOMAS AND JONATHAN FOYE

Synod in Session for June and August will be covered in Insights Spring issue out in September.

The location of the Kingdom of God



There are two Christian preoccupations that leave little room for the 'wild God', says Sathianathan "Sathi"

Clarke, Bishop Sundo Kim Chair in World Christianity and Professor of Theology, Culture, and Mission at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.

In the first of a series of devotions to Synod 2021, Dr Clarke said the first preoccupation was the western scientific mindset that sought to explore and analyse the nature of God. While the second preoccupation was our "anthropocentrism" - a turn to the self that needs to be "coddled and served".

He warned that his devotions would not be asking 'who is the wild God?', nor will it seek to answer, "what can God do for me in my wildness?"

"Instead, we will explore where the Wild God is. The space, the synergy, the dream where the wild God is," he told Synod delegates on Saturday morning, the second day of Synod 2021.

His first study centred on Mark 1: 4-15 and reflects upon Jesus' crossing via the river Jordan from embeddedness in kinship-security to relocation into the wildness of God's kingdom.

"The wild space of God's kingdom is the Good news: This is where the wild God wishes to reign," Dr Clarke said.

"In this bible text, marginal figures in the wilderness (John the Baptizer) appear coarse but testify to the wild demands of the kingdom."

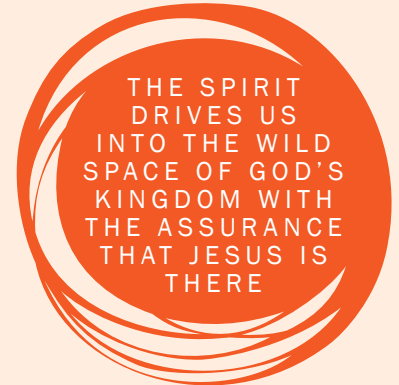
Dr Clarke said he first learned about this wild space that God operates in from a homeless man in D.C. who told him John the Baptist was similar to the homeless of today. He lived on the margins on society's norm and he passed judgement on 'the civilised' world.

"Jesus went to this homeless man, Jesus sought John out, in the wilderness, for baptism," he said.

Dr Clarke said the baptism of Jesus invites us to a radical break from the sanctuary of kith and kin -blood/ ethnic identity to the wild possibilities of God's kingdom identified through water and universal identity.

"The Spirit drives us into the wild space of God's kingdom with the assurance that Jesus is there and, even if there are "wild beasts," "angels" wait on us," he said.

The devotion was the first of three that Dr Clarke will deliver (the other two in June and August) throughout Synod 2021.



As well as his role at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C., Dr Clarke serves as Assisting Clergy at the Church of the Epiphany, Diocese of Washington, where he facilitated a bible study among homeless friends from 2010.

His vocation has been a unique blend of the joy of Church ministry, passion for working with communities of the poor and other religious faiths, and love of academic research and teaching. From the very beginning of his ministry, Clarke has worked passionately for justice for the poor and has travelled extensively to educate and encourage inter-religious dialogue.

He started his ministry in the Church of South India as a social worker and priest for the Diocese of Madras among oppressed Dalit communities in rural India. Clarke bridges the world between establishment and the marginalised, the global and the local, and academy and the congregation. For the last twenty years, he has taught and lectured on global Christianity, contextual theology, World Christianity, Christian mission, and interreligious dialogue in various countries in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, South and North America.

In the second half of 2021, Dr Clarke will undertake a residency at United Theological College.

MARTIN THOMAS



SAFE CHURCH

Keeping your church

safe

REV. BRONWYN MURPHY, REV. TARA CURLEWIS, AND ANNE EMPSON ARE THE NEW SYNOD SAFE CHURCH UNIT. THIS TEAM HELPS CONGREGATIONS KEEP EVERYONE IN OUR UNITING CHURCH SAFE.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE WORK OF THE SYNOD SAFE CHURCH UNIT?

A new website

The team have been working on a new website which is designed to equip congregations and church councils with the information they need to be compliant with NSW and ACT legislation. Each key topic has a dedicated page of information including templates and links to useful information. If your church has any suggestions please contact the Safe Church Unit.

National Safe Church Awareness training online

We have been working with the UCA National Safe Church Unit to create a national curriculum for Safe Church Awareness training which will be delivered online, at a time that suits the learner. This will be available in the second half of 2021. Every person who has a Working with Children or Working with Vulnerable People Check is required to complete Safe Church Awareness Training every three years.

Special Religious Education

The Synod Safe Church Unit is also responsible as the Uniting Church Provider of Special Religious Education in Department of Education schools across the Synod. Every teacher is required to be authorised by the Synod before entering a school. We ensure that all teachers meet the Department of Education requirements for training and minimum standards.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SAFE CHURCH COMPLIANCE?

Legislative Changes

Legislative changes have increased compliance responsibilities for church leaders and volunteers. In NSW and the ACT, mandatory reporting laws make it compulsory for those who work with children to make a report to the appropriate authority if there are concerns about the wellbeing of a child. In the ACT, all employees and volunteers are subject to the ACT Reportable conduct scheme.

Changes to Synod requirements


The Synod of NSW and the ACT is strengthening its approach to ensuring all leaders are child safe and now requires all church council members to hold a Working with Children's Check (NSW) or Working with Vulnerable People Check (ACT). All church Council members must have one.

The Child Safe Principles in NSW

The National Child Safe Principles have been developed drawing on the findings of the Royal Commission, extensive research and consultation about what makes organisations child safe.

The Synod Safe Church Unit webpage provides planning tools designed to assist congregations in developing a plan to implement the UCA National Child Safe Principles which align with the NSW Standards.

Safe Church Contact Person

Every Uniting Church congregation must have at least one Safe Church Contact person. This person is responsible for ensuring that all volunteers have a valid and up to date WWCC or WWVP check and up-to-date training. We have created a role description for the Safe Church contact person to assist church councils. 



THE SAFE CHURCH UNIT

For more information visit the Safe Church Unit website via shorturl.at/HIJ04

HOW CAN WE TAKE **BOLDER ACTION** ON CLIMATE?

THREE CRITICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT CLIMATE ACTION WERE POSED TO CONGREGATIONS FOR POSSIBLE CONTEMPLATION DURING THE SYNOD MEETING SESSION ON SATURDAY 10 APRIL

Uniting Head of Advocacy Emma Maiden put forward the questions as she presented the Synod Climate Action Strategy report. She asked;

How can we take bolder action consistent with our values, both in advocacy to government and reducing our own emissions?

How can we build community across these different demographics of the church – including communities now dependent on fossil fuels?



How can we support diversity in leadership on climate action – especially promoting the voices and perspectives of our Pacific Islander communities, First Nation's peoples and our youth? How can they play a key role in both awareness raising within and advocacy beyond Uniting and the wider church?

The five-page *Climate Action Strategy* report outlines how progress is being made on 2019 Synod meeting commitments that the church:

- 1. Advocate to all levels of government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions**
- 2. Reduce its own emissions across all parts of the church**
- 3. Stand with young people in their advocacy on global warming**

The report details a range of activities that have taken place over the last two years including;

- Involvement in student climate strikes and the global Sacred People Sacred Earth initiative
- The Climate Pastoral Care Conference
- Development of an Emissions Reductions booklet about behavioural changes
- A Solar Panel Information evening
- Climate banner distribution
- The establishment of task groups to implement the strategy

“More than 40 people have been involved in the task groups at some stage,” the report says.

“Some of these are Synod or agency staff, but the majority are members of congregations who have willingly given their time and energy to this work as part of their faith, and the commitment to care for creation which flows from it.”

Erin Lewis from Leichhardt Uniting Church and Christian Students Uniting also spoke about the theological basis for being involved in climate action. 🗣️

ASHLEY DONNELLY

If you would like to be involved in the next phase of the Synod Climate Action Strategy or to find out more, contact: advocacy@uniting.org



A faith-focussed RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Recently I had the pleasure of being involved in a working group to plan the Synod Climate Strategy Future Directions Conference. I joined a group of leaders and listeners from across the NSW and ACT Synod – practising and retired ministers, Uniting staff members, congregation members, and young people who all care deeply for climate and Creation. I was also invited to run a workshop at the conference about Youth Leadership in Climate Action with a fellow member of Christian Students Uniting. I consistently find myself energised by a church that prioritises a faith-focussed response to the climate crisis.

As a young Christian who has spent the last few years exploring how my faith informs my climate action, I am encouraged by the Synod addressing these issues seriously. As we continue to discern our role and course of action following the conference, some key areas emerge for me. Firstly – a united front that includes clear, strong, and simple language about changing climate and the realities surrounding this. I think this includes encouraging clergy to share this information directly from the pulpit. Additionally, continuing to identify and develop leadership in these spaces, as well as building relationship across difference in all areas of the church.

Christian Students Uniting is often asked, 'what can church congregations do?' Fostering a culture within churches of discussion and action is a great first step. I encourage you to talk to people you share a pew with about

climate change, and how you feel about it. Bring the discussion to your church councils. Start asking questions that investigate who we are as Christians, and our call to care for both Creation and those impacted by drastically changing climate. Uniting Earth has some fantastic resources on their website to support this.

I also encourage churches to think creatively about tangible actions to take in the physical spaces you occupy. Consider bigger projects like solar panels and rethinking energy and water consumption. Consider smaller projects like changing your church notice board to support an upcoming climate strike, or offering your hall for a local climate group to meet in. Together we can also influence broader political action. You can join local actions such as student movements happening in your area, and watch this space for an upcoming Synod campaign to do with the federal election.

So, where to from here? As this movement grows, so does the urgency for action. It is time for the Uniting Church to further our commitment to be at the forefront of the climate movement. To me, this looks like a 'big tent' approach to our action – bringing as many people with us as we can, in an inclusive and relational manner that prioritises First Nations and Pasifika voices. This work is long term and complex. We need to be prepared to disagree, hold tension, and grieve a collapsing environment. But I believe that we are called to do so. And with God's help, we will. 🙏

ERIN LEWIS

I ENCOURAGE CHURCHES TO THINK CREATIVELY ABOUT TANGIBLE ACTIONS & TOGETHER WE CAN ALSO INFLUENCE BROADER POLITICAL ACTION

insights

30

YEARS
ANNIVERSARY





FOR THIRTY YEARS, *INSIGHTS* HAS KEPT THE NSW AND ACT SYNOD INFORMED, GOT PEOPLE TALKING, AND BUILT COMMUNITY. THIS ISSUE, WE LOOK BACK AT THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE SHAPED *INSIGHTS* OVER ITS THREE DECADES AND MAP THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS. THOUGH THE TEAM HAS CHANGED OVER TIME, *INSIGHTS*' VISION AND MISSION HAVE STAYED THE SAME: TO SHARE JESUS' OFFER OF NEW LIFE AND MAKE HIM KNOWN.



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Lewis-Jones

P22
Reflections:
Adrian Drayton & Ben McEachen

insights

A RICH HISTORY

The first issue of *Insights* was released in August 1991. With the internet in its infancy (the first web browser launched the prior year), the magazine served as the primary way for the NSW and ACT Synod to inform congregations about the events and announcements affecting them. As such, the first magazine had more of a news focus, as opposed to the emphasis on analysis, reflections, and features that it would later come to be known for.

The first *Insights* team was led by then-editor Damian J. Gleeson. There was also a Senior Writer, Donald Kerr, and a writer, Stuart Pearce. Roy De Giorgio worked as an Advertising Officer, while Joan Hayes handled enquiries.

Looking back at the magazine issue itself is like looking into a time capsule from its day. The letters section saw a comment from a congregant querying the NSW MLC Fred Nile using the honorific "Reverend" while then-Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe did not. A young, recently-ordained Minister named Simon Hansford appears on page 35 as part of a ministry profile on Dubbo.

One of the key Assembly news items in the issue was the announcement that Rev. Dr D'Arcy Wood had been

installed as Uniting Church President, in a ceremony that took place at Melbourne's Festival Hall (a venue that Hillsong bought in 2020).

1993 would bring some personnel changes to the magazine, and some of these would stick for a long time. Marjorie Lewis-Jones was previously a Communications Officer for the national Assembly. Stephen Webb previously worked for the Anglican Church as a Social Issues Researcher. Ms Lewis Jones became the Communications Manager of the Synod while Mr Webb became Deputy Editor of *Insights*.

From 1993 to 2013, their run on the magazine would win numerous awards, as they grew the publication's voice, reputation, and footprint. This included launching the

magazine's official website in 1996.

In an interview (see pages 20-21 for the full text), Ms Lewis-Jones told *Insights* that the idea of working together started when she worked with Mr Webb in an ecumenical event in the Philippines.

"I'd been working as the Communications Officer for the Uniting Church Assembly for several years when I met Stephen Webb while reporting at the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) Assembly in Manila in 1990," Ms Lewis-Jones said. "Together with some excellent journalists from the region we formed the *Asian Ecumenical News Service*, which blazed a trail for two years then got quashed for reporting on issues (often related to justice) that were a bit too close to the bone for some church leaders. It was early days of the internet and email and I used to file my stories in that crazy 'new' way from the Assembly office in Australia to Stephen at CCA in Hong Kong and then our editor in the Philippines."

"In 1993, I saw advertised that the Synod of New South Wales

needed a manager/editor. But with our complementary skills, and with Stephen back in Australia, he and I knew we could do so much more. We made a pitch to the synod that ended up with me being appointed as the Manager of the Synod Communications Unit and Editor of *Insights* and him appointed as Media Officer and Deputy Editor – and we quickly set to work to build a strong communications team."

Less than a year later, Adrian Drayton would start in a fixed contract as an advertising officer. Little did he know at the time that he would become the team's longest continuously serving member (for a reflection from him, see page 22). At various points the team included Lyndal Irons, Emma Halgren, Leigh Pitkethly, Stephanie Johnson, Mark West, Deb Everist, Esther Butcher and others. They would go on to experience acclaim and multiple awards (see side panel).

In 2013, a major change took place that saw *Insights*' team change once again. With a Synod-wide restructure

30
YEARS
ANNIVERSARY

LOOKING
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MAGAZINE ISSUE
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underway, leadership took the controversial step of making the team redundant. The April 2013 edition of the magazine contains a farewell from Ms Lewis-Jones, calling on readers to continue to work for a just society in line with the Christian tradition.



SIMON HANSFORD
MODERATOR

Jonathan Foye, Editor at the Synod Communications team, showed me a photo from the first edition of *Insights*, from three decades ago. It was a young minister, in the first year of his ordinand placement in Dubbo. I appreciate the role which has been played by this journal for all my ministry life – challenging, surprising, annoying, reminding and encouraging so much of our Synod, as congregations and individuals. Like most of us, it has changed shape and appearance, and has had good and bad days over the years. But *Insights* has maintained a faithful record of our Synod's life, and the hope we have for God's call into our world and into our future. I give thanks to God for those who began it, all who have worked and contributed, and those who serve the Church through its pages - online and hard copy - even now.

In his column for that month, Moderator Rev. Dr Brian Brown wrote that recent financial losses had been, "... [B]ourne not only by Synod staff but also in the wider church due to cuts to Synod programs and allocations, which were unavoidable in the process of restoring the Synod's capital base."

"Nevertheless, for some of our work colleagues, the loss has become final... For many of them this has been a vocation where they have

contributed above and beyond the call of duty."

A number of contracted staff were brought on to carry the magazine through its new phase, with Mr Drayton becoming the permanent manager. Eventually, the Synod began hiring permanent staff again to deliver *Insights*. With extensive writing experience, including for Empire magazine, *Insights* contributor Ben McEachen was brought on as the new Editor (for more of Ben's thoughts, view his reflection on page 23). Other recent team members that worked on the magazine included Lisa Sampson, Melissa Stewart, Paul Sourlos, and Stephanie O'Connell (and those whose names are listed on this issue). Under this team, the *Insights* website grew to gain daily updates, and the magazine's social media footprint grew exponentially.

With the website growing and a weekly e-newsletter garnering more subscriptions, *Insights* left its original schedule of publishing monthly (except January) in 2016. In late-2017, *Insights'* team asked readers to give their opinion on whether they would support a quarterly publication. With the majority in favour, the schedule for the print version of the magazine changed again in early 2018, aligning now to different seasons.

While technology and *Insights'* publishing frequency have changed since that first issue in August 1991, the magazine remains a public voice and forum for the Synod of NSW and the ACT three decades on. 🗣️

JONATHAN FOYE



A recent project undertaken by Camden Theological Library's Moira Bryant has made *Insights'* past issues available online. Viewers can use the Illuminate search engine to view past issues of *Insights* and the changes over the past three decades. illuminate.recollect.net.au



EDITOR JONATHAN FOYE (SECOND FROM LEFT) ACCEPTS TWO AWARDS FOR INSIGHTS AT THE 2018 AUSTRALASIAN RELIGIOUS PRESS ASSOCIATION (ARPA) CONFERENCE

Awards through the years

The Australasian Religious Press Awards (ARPAs) has member publications from Australia and New Zealand of which *Insights* was a member publication. This is a snapshot of the awards (and covers) of *Insights* over the last decade.

2009

Gold Award for **Best Website**, Synod of NSW and ACT 2008

Gold Award for **Best Original Artwork** "What Would Jesus Buy?" *Insights*, July 2008

2010

Silver Award for **Best Website**, Synod website 2009 iteration

2011

Gold Award for **Best Feature**, "Ecumenism means you, too" by Emma Halgren, *Insights* August 2010

Gold Award for **Best Headline**, "Hey Moses, you call that a tablet!" by Stephen Webb, *Insights* October 2010

Silver Award for **Best Photograph** by Lyndal Irons, "Ecumenism means you, too" *Insights* August 2010

2012

Gold Award for **Best Article on Social Justice**, "People for sale" by Lyndal Irons, *Insights* August 2011

Gold Award for **Best Feature, Multiple Authors**, "Social media: virtual and virtuous" (including "God goes viral") *Insights* October 2011

Silver Award for **Best Website**

Bronze Award for **Best News** "Waste not want not" by Stephen Webb, *Insights* June 2011

2013

Editor and Director of Communications, Marjorie Lewis-Jones, and Media Officer,

Stephen Webb, were awarded the highest honour – **The Gutenberg Award** for services to religious communications and 20 years involvement with the production of *Insights*

Bronze award for **Best Feature by Multiple Authors** "Disaster response: How to help not hinder" – June 2012

2014

Gold for **Best Feature, Single Author**, "Seeking Refuge" by Sarah Sullivan, *Insights* September 2013

Gold for **Best Theological Article**, "Christmas for the fun of it" by Ben Myers, *Insights* December 2013

Bronze for **Best Cover Design** – "Escape to the country" – *Insights* November 2013

2015

Bronze for **Best Faith Reflection**, "How to make gravy: Christmas for the lonely" by Ben Myers, *Insights* December 2014

2017

Silver Award for **Best Design Magazine 2016**

Bronze Award for Best Cover 2016, *Insights* April-May 2016

2018

Silver Award for **Best Column**, "Digital Ministry" by Rev. Keith Anderson, *Insights* Feb-December issues 2017

Bronze Award for **Best Social Media Campaign** for Synod 2017 "Telling Our Story"

WHAT CAME BEFORE THE CURRENT INCARNATION OF *INSIGHTS*? DURING HIS YEARS IN MINISTRY, REV. RUSSELL DAVIES WAS THE PART-TIME EDITOR OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES METHODIST AND CONGREGATIONALIST. AFTER UNION, THIS NEWSPAPER WOULD EVENTUALLY BE REPLACED BY A MAGAZINE—TO REV. DAVIES' CHAGRIN. *INSIGHTS* SPOKE TO REV. DAVIES ABOUT THIS TIME.

For Russell Davies, his time writing for *The Methodist*, one of *Insights'* forerunner publications, began with a complaint.

As self-described “brash now ordinand” in 1966 he told the Methodist District Synod that their official paper was boring and had little appeal to younger readers.

“In typical style they promptly appointed me to the Epworth Committee, the body responsible for *The Methodist*,” he recalled.

“The editor, Rev. Alf Bingley, offered me a full page each week to appeal to youth, and I ran that for eight years with enthusiasm. This was the late sixties and seventies, so there was no shortage of youth activities to cover.”

In 1971, Rev. Davies was appointed to Paddington, where he shared ministry of the joint parish with Rev. Rex Matthews, an accredited journalist and NSW stringer for the *Australian Congregationalist*.

In 1975, two years before Church Union, the *Congregationalist* decided to stop production, so Rev. Matthews and Rev. Davies approached the NSW Methodist Conference with a request to merge the two papers under the name *Forward*, and to publish it from their Paddington church office.

“They agreed to the merger, but not to the name, so for 18 months we published a weekly newspaper with the catchy title, *The New South Wales Methodist and Congregationalist*,” Rev. Davies said.

“Their other proviso was that although Rex was far the more qualified, I was part of the larger denomination, so I must be appointed editor. Rex graciously agreed.”

Rev. Davies looks back fondly on this time as being “wonderful; the best of both worlds.”

The parish, he said, was one of the most stimulating places in NSW in the early seventies, while he also had the newspaper “to play with at the same time.”

However, on 22 June 1977, the paper became part of the Synod’s Board of Communications Services. They would abolish the 50/50 parish minister and editor roles, with Rev. Matthews staying in the parish, while Rev. Davies worked from the Synod office.

“At least, Rex stayed on as chairman of the Editorial Board,” Rev. Davies said.

The editorial board, had a vision for the paper which reflected what was widely viewed as the new possibilities of the Uniting Church.

“We saw it as a newspaper, not just a marketing exercise for the hierarchy,” Rev. Davies recalled.

“Our target market was the entire membership of the Uniting Church in NSW, with the hope that our members would find it stimulating enough to share it with their workmates and neighbours.”

When the Synod made controversial decisions, however, Rev. Davies found himself questioning his role.

According to Rev. Davies, “It quickly became clear to us that General Secretaries of the various boards saw our role as one of uncritical promotion of them and their policies, and on one famous occasion directed me that I was not permitted to run an article from one of our parishes, condemning an announcement by one of our Synod boards which had outraged the parish and most of the local community.”



REV. ALF BINGLEY OFFERED ME A FULL PAGE TO APPEAL TO YOUTH AND I RAN THAT FOR EIGHT YEARS WITH ENTHUSIASM. THERE WAS NO SHORTAGE OF YOUTH ACTIVITIES TO COVER

“While I continued to enjoy editing and publishing the paper, it became increasingly obvious to me that I was not suited to head office work,” he said.

“When the Board made the decision to go from a newspaper to a magazine, I realised that I was a parish minister at heart.”

From there, things would change and Rev. Davies accepted a call to the Dubbo, which he describes as being, “a lifesaver for me and my family.”

The Synod would adopt a magazine format for their publication in 1981, with the name *Uniting*. Eventually, this would become *Insights* in 1991.

While Rev. Davies was against the change, he recalls that he was altogether keeping busy in his new role.

“Meanwhile, I had a half hour radio program on 2DU in Dubbo, and a weekly column in the *Daily Liberal* to keep me busy,” he said. 🎧

JONATHAN FOYE

Insights thanks Rev. Russell Davies for his contributions and taking time for the interview. More features looking at *Insights'* origins are available online at insights.uca.org.au

Creativity & Wisdom

FROM 1993 TO 2013, MARJORIE LEWIS-JONES WAS THE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER FOR THE NSW AND ACT SYNOD. *INSIGHTS* CAUGHT UP WITH HER TO TALK ABOUT HER LONG TENURE IN THE ROLE AND WHAT SHE HAS WORKED ON SINCE.

HOW DID YOU COME TO WORK FOR THE SYNOD AND WHEN THIS WAS?

I'd been working as the Communications Officer for the Uniting Church Assembly for several years when I met Stephen Webb while reporting at the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) Assembly in Manila in 1990. Together with some excellent journalists from the region we formed the Asian Ecumenical News Service, which blazed a trail for two years then got quashed for reporting on issues (often related to justice) that were a bit too close to the bone for some church leaders. It was early days of the internet and email and I used to file my stories in that crazy 'new' way from the Assembly office in Australia to Stephen at CCA in Hong Kong and then our editor in the Philippines.

In 1993, I saw advertised that the Synod of New South Wales needed a manager/ editor. But with our complementary skills, and with Stephen back in Australia, he and I knew we could do so much more. We made a pitch to the Synod that ended up with me being appointed as the Manager of the Synod Communications Unit and Editor of *Insights* and him appointed as Media Officer and Deputy Editor – and we quickly set to work to build a strong communications team.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS THAT STICK OUT TO YOU FROM THIS TIME?

We came to our roles with ecumenical, national and international perspectives and tried to keep this emphasis alive while also championing state, regional and local people and initiatives. The Synod Communications team (later Uniting Creative) was great – as was the National Communications Group (founded by the Rev. Rex Hunt), which saw skilled journalists and editors from each Synod sharing stories for our papers, wisdom, and other support.

A highlight of this time was definitely the groundbreaking, good hearted, and intelligent people in the Uniting Church we got to work with when reporting for *Insights*. The stars in the firmament were many!

Rev. Dr John Brown and Rev. Dr Djiniyini Gondarra in their foundational work on Covenanting and Reconciliation.

Sir Ronald Wilson who jointly led the National Inquiry into the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities and co-authored the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report into the Stolen Generations, which led to the creation of a National Sorry Day and a walk for reconciliation across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 2000. The Rev. Dr Dorothy McRae McMahon, who has won many awards for her activism and also showed tremendous courage and grace coming out at the National Assembly meeting in 1997 – a pivot point to having homosexual ministers formally accepted within the Uniting Church.

Frances Milne with her foundational work with Balmain for Refugees and Bridge for Asylum Seekers, the Rev. Dr John Jegasothy for his tireless advocacy for people seeking asylum and internally displaced, Maz and Neil Smith working with disadvantaged people in Western Sydney and Deb Carstens, who established Asian Women at Work to help ensure fair treatment of women of migrant backgrounds, particularly in the textile, clothing and footwear industries.

I count myself fortunate to have travelled to North East India with Joy Balazo, the 2012 winner of the World Methodist Council Peace Award for her work with the Uniting Church and Young Ambassadors for Peace program (which I reported on).

I also went to Yirrkala to report on the ordination of the Rev. Liyapidity Marika, who was the first Yolŋu woman (Aboriginal woman from the North East Arnhem region of the Northern Territory) to be ordained as a Minister of the Word in the Uniting Church.

And the list could go on ...

WHAT IS YOUR NEW ROLE LIKE, WITH THE SOUTH SYDNEY HERALD?

My role as the Managing Editor for the South Sydney Herald (SSH) is a great fit for my skills and shows me the best of the Uniting Church as it is lived out in a local community. We published our 200th issue in February and the testimonials from community leaders were humbling.

Tanya Plibersek, MP for Sydney, said, "The SSH consistently delivers on their commitment to provide independent, high-quality journalism with a focus on local issues, politics and social justice. They amplify the voices of our community, telling stories, celebrating success and sharing concerns of people mainstream publications often overlook. It's not just a newspaper; it is an essential service for our community. I'd like to thank all the writers, photographers, editors, illustrators, the delivery workers and everyone who makes this paper happen."

I have many stars in the firmament around me now too. Rev. Andrew Collis is our assistant managing editor (and a true saint as the Uniting Church minister in the area), Dr Miriam Pepper is our environment editor, Dorothy McRae McMahon is our faith editor, Lyn Turnbull is our news editor... and I could go on about the many other gifted people in our (mostly) volunteer team, but I'll run out of space!



THE *INSIGHTS* TEAM IN THE EARLY 1990'S
(L-R): LEIGH PITKETHLY, STEPHANIE JOHNSTON, STEPHEN WEBB, MARJORIE LEWIS-JONES AND DEBBIE EVERIST

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ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

In 2012-13, when the Synod restructured and the Uniting Creative team was disbanded I wondered how my unique (and some might say quirky) skills – honed by two decades of steering *Insights* – would be put to good use. I soon started freelancing and established You Need a Writer consultancy with Stephen. The Rev. Nicole Fleming and Balmain Uniting Church (and more recently Rev. James Aaron) generously offered us space, friendship and community, which we've cherished.

In 2021, the South Sydney Herald has covered stories about halting the destruction of public housing in Glebe and Waterloo, faith communities calling for climate justice, safeguarding Rainbow elders from abuse, helping jobless people to rebuild after the end of JobKeeper, a young opera company that's broadening opera's accessibility through pay-as-you-feel entry, a new supper series that supports refugees, and much more ...So, I think you could say I've found my niche. 🌟

JONATHAN FOYE



MARJORIE LEWIS-JONES WAS THE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER FOR THE NSW AND ACT SYNOD FROM 1993-2013

Over its three decades in print, *Insights* magazine has had international journalists, award-winning photographers, university lecturers, and countless creative people behind its pages.

It has also been the voice of the Uniting Church for its many contributors who have told us the 'why' of their ministry and their passion for the denomination they hold dear.

It has also articulated the journey of the Church through its protagonists, like those who have been at the forefront of sexuality discussions that had clergy acknowledged for their contribution to the Church.

It has lived out the *Basis of Union's* acknowledgement of the inclusivity of the Church and what it means to be a Church that champions social justice while acknowledging God's "hands and feet" in its many congregations full of passionate volunteers.

Reflecting on *Insights* contribution, it's award-winning journalism, and now its digital presence that helps our stories get global uplift, it feels a lot like the magazine itself has had its own ministry.



I am always amazed at the Communication teams' ability to come up with each new and vibrant issue, brimming with stories of "sleeves up" volunteerism or mission initiatives in communities doing it tough, or simply reading the thoughtful columns from leadership that give us pause for reflection.

The *Basis of Union* talks about the unique gifts that build up the whole Church: "The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself."

I believe that the staff that have told the story of the Uniting Church to its members and the community over the last 30 years have done just that – *built up the whole Church*.

As we tell the story of a faithful person or congregation, read about the footprint of the Uniting Church in the community through its missions and agencies, unpick culture from a faith perspective, or even read a book recommendation, we understand how important this can be to the whole church.

A Significant Anniversary

ADRIAN DRAYTON, HEAD OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, REFLECTS ON *INSIGHTS*

The print version sits in vestibules in Uniting Churches across NSW and the ACT, its pages are full to brimming with the stories that have formed the Church. So it feels, in some way, that it punches way above its weight, its impact really can't be diminished.

After all, who would have thought that this flagship magazine would have lasted 30 years.

The Communications team often talks about whether the print version of the magazine is needed in a world that has mostly been taken over by digital media. And this is in one sense, it's new mission field. But to lose its vibrant pages that you can touch and turn with a coffee seems like something that's hard to give up. That's why, at least for the foreseeable future we will make sure that it has a physical presence in Churches.

If you have the latest copy in your hands, sit a spell. Put a coffee or tea on, and read *Insights'* beautifully designed pages, and the wonderfully written stories contained within it. And consider this our ministry to you dear reader. Because in the last 30 years *Insights* has employed those who consider it their Great Commission imperative to tell the story of Christ to a world that needs it more than ever.

Speaking on behalf of all who have been involved in the creation of *Insights*, we hope that you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoy creating it for you. ☺

ADRIAN DRAYTON
HEAD OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS
SYNOD OF NSW AND ACT



Faith in Action

FROM 2015 TO 2017, BEN MCEACHEN WAS *INSIGHTS'* EDITOR, A ROLE THAT SAW HIM WORK ON EVERYTHING FROM INTERVIEWING PEOPLE TO SUBEDITING THE MAGAZINE BEFORE IT WENT TO PRINT. *INSIGHTS* ASKED HIM TO SHARE SOME THOUGHTS ON WHAT HIS EXPERIENCE WAS LIKE.

I'm a long-term fan of *Insights'* desire to explore how following Jesus plays out in real life. Christianity being a way of life – one you actually live out – is a true declaration that not everyone lives by. Maybe some people don't think about it, or others think too much about it without putting it into practice. Whatever the reason, I've met plenty of people who seem happy to limit Christian life to a bunch of concepts or nice intentions, rather than seeking to grow in what it means to love, serve and honour Jesus with your whole life.

For more than a decade, I was a professional film reviewer for national newspapers, magazines and radio. Thanks to a tip off from my mum, I connected with *Insights'* guru and leader Adrian Drayton through movie events he organised at his church. He was one of the first Christians I had met who openly and actively engaged his faith with the films he watched. He even wanted to discuss how our screen entertainment interacts with what we believe, and encouraged others to do the same. Also, he turned out to be a great mate. Win.

Adrian invited me to contribute reviews for *Insights*, where I was able to do what he had been delving into for years – commenting on movies, with Christianity as a helpful lens of appraisal. From these sporadic reviews, I was able to join the *Insights* team for a few years as a writer and sub-editor.

I WAS STEADILY
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Beyond screen culture, I got to interview UCA members from all over, and also have input into articles, Bible studies and opinion pieces which were submitted. I was steadily struck by *Insights* being loaded with content about Christian faith in action. From school chaplains to local op shops or social justice campaigns, there was a constant thread of getting out there.

Congratulations to *Insights* on its 30th anniversary, especially to its core team who make it possible. May it strive to deliver content which points us to the glorious source of Christianity – Jesus Christ – and how we might seek to live for him in all we do. 🙌

BEN MCEACHEN

We have less to fear from tomorrow...

if we join hands today

Sometimes I like imagining the scenes unfolding in back rooms and on dusty roads in the days and weeks following Jesus' death and resurrection.

There's a bunch of different characters – some brash, some cautious – all a bit traumatised by everything they've seen and heard. One thing they know for sure: the road ahead is going to be tough. Jesus may have beaten death, but death, nonetheless, is all around.

"Okay," says one, and its probably Peter because he's always been a bit rash, and that incident in the courtyard means he has something to prove. "I will if you will."

The others look at each other. "Yeah? Are you in?"

"I'm in," confirms John, and Thomas touches his side and then nods.

Mary rolls her eyes and looks at Martha. "Well obviously..."

And that's how it starts, the birth of the early church. Just ordinary people who have each other's backs, joining hands and making a start.

They go on to change the world.

2,000 years later and here we are – the living legacy of that act of faith. We've survived through the centuries, but every single day, each of us is faced with that same challenge: are we still in? Are we up for joining hands and walking forward, together, to create the kind of world we long for?

Any time I ask myself that question, I find myself thinking of people I've met who live in parts of the world where the need

for redemption is both tragically obvious and powerfully in play.

Men and women die because they don't have clean water to drink, or oxygen tanks to give life to COVID-wracked lungs. Girls are forced out of school as soon as they're old enough to work, while their brothers keep hitting the books and go on to earn the living that their sisters can't.

And in response? People join hands, and they walk forward together. And they see the fruit of their labour, the answers to their prayers. It's not often dramatic. It's rarely quick. But it's the only way, and it always will be.

As we approach the end of the financial year, UnitingWorld is once again joining hands with smart creative people working to overcome poverty, the Australian Government, and those with the means to share their resources with others.

UnitingWorld, as the Uniting Church agency holding relationships with our church family around the world, is a trusted partner of the Australian Government. We're given flexible

funding under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) to implement overseas projects that fight poverty, hunger, disease, the impact of climate change and gender inequality.

We've committed to raise \$1 for every \$5 we receive from the Australian Government. This means that right now, any donation to UnitingWorld allows us to extend the reach of our programs and have as much as six times greater impact.

WHAT KIND OF IMPACT?

Your donation can create more women like Hashini, a seamstress and disability rights defender in Sri Lanka. Born unable to walk and growing up during the civil war, she suffered the tragic loss of her father when she needed him most. She joined hands with Uniting Church partner, the Methodist Church of Sri Lanka, to take control of her own life and invest back into her community.

It can create more stories like Raj's, a young man with Down syndrome who never expected to finish school, let alone have a successful career. He joined hands with the Church to undertake training and employment skills, and now he makes an independent living as a mechanic.

And it'll have a greater impact for each of us, here in Australia. Our government watches carefully to see how generous the Australian population is willing to be, and to whom. In response, they shape policy and allocate funding. When they see the trust and resources that ordinary citizens are willing to invest, they hear us loud and clear:

"We are citizens of a world in need. We're willing to work together to bring dignity and hope to our brothers and sisters, and we want your leadership."

That's why at UnitingWorld, we're asking you to join hands and give generously to our end of financial year appeal. Every donation, no matter its size, will be combined with Australian Government funding to help us increase the reach of our projects beating poverty and building hope. Pray, give and learn more here.

I'm in if you are. 🙏

CATH TAYLOR
UNITINGWORLD

WE ARE
CITIZENS OF
A WORLD IN
NEED. WE'RE
WILLING
TO WORK
TOGETHER
TO BRING
DIGNITY AND
HOPE TO OUR
BROTHERS
AND SISTERS,
AND WE
WANT YOUR
LEADERSHIP



HASHINI WAS BORN UNABLE TO WALK AND HAS JOINED HANDS WITH UCA PARTNER THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SRI LANKA TO UNDERTAKE TRAINING AS A SEAMSTRESS AND USE HER ENGLISH TUTORING SKILLS TO GIVE BACK TO HER COMMUNITY.



UNITING CHURCH SUPPORTS CASHLESS GAMBLING IN NSW

THE MODERATOR OF THE UNITING CHURCH SYNOD OF NSW AND ACT AND THE CEO AND SUPERINTENDENT OF WESLEY MISSION HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR SUPPORT TOWARDS CASHLESS GAMBLING IN NSW

Rev. Simon Hansford and Rev. Stu Cameron met with Rev. Tim Costello, Chief Advocate for the Alliance for Gambling Reform on Wednesday 19 May to discuss cashless gambling in NSW and how it could reduce gambling harm and improve the life of our communities.

Rev. Hansford said reducing gambling harm continues to be a priority issue of social justice given the considerable number of connections between this major public health issue and many others.

“The significant gambling losses occurring every day in NSW are harming individuals and families throughout our communities,” Rev. Hansford said.

“So many issues we face as a community have connections to gambling, including family violence, relationship breakdowns, mental ill-health and homelessness. We want to ensure our communities grow in peace, health and

happiness, and reducing gambling harm will be a significant contribution towards this positive growth.”

Wesley Mission is a provider of gambling counselling and legal services, ensuring Stu Cameron has gambling harm as a clear focus of his work.

“A radical change such as this move towards cashless gambling could have a considerable impact on people who are experiencing gambling harm, which is a significant number of people in NSW,” Rev. Cameron said.

“Many of the current measures aimed at preventing gambling harm, such as self-exclusion from gaming areas, are ineffective because venues do not take responsibility for the wellbeing of their customers. Cashless gambling reforms must be designed and implemented carefully and properly, with input from people with lived experience and counsellors. Then they could have a real impact on people’s lives as well as preventing money laundering.”

THE SIGNIFICANT GAMBLING LOSSES OCCURRING EVERY DAY IN NSW ARE HARMING INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES THROUGHOUT OUR COMMUNITIES

SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

Rev. Costello welcomed the support of the Uniting Church for the cashless gambling reforms in NSW.

“These are important moves being made in NSW that have repercussions for the whole community, and ideally will set valuable precedents for other states around Australia,” Rev. Costello said.

“We suffer far too much gambling harm in this country. We must do everything we can to reduce gambling harm – we will all benefit when that happens. We cannot sustain people losing \$14 billion a year nationally on poker machines. That’s draining our local economies and hurting families.”

Rev. Costello said a well-designed cashless gambling system was a winner for the people of NSW.

“It’s imperative this change is done right. If not, we will be opening up to a potentially massive increase in gambling harm,” Rev. Costello said.

“We simply cannot have a situation where we effectively move to ‘tap and go’ gambling without any measures in place to reduce gambling harm.

“Done right, a move to cashless gambling will all but eliminate money laundering via poker machines and casinos and will also help reduce gambling harm. Done wrong, you may as well set up direct debits to people’s bank accounts and sign over their

mortgage to venues. It could be that dangerous.”

Rev. Costello said elements key for a cashless system to not increase gambling harm included:

1. The system must be linked to verified ID, and to self-exclusion registers
2. Low load limits should be in place to ensure people regularly take breaks from gambling, which is an evidence-based circuit breaker for harm
3. Does not allow the use of credit cards for gambling
4. Is universal and compulsory across all NSW gambling venues.

“We have faith this can be done right, and we have come together today to ensure that’s the case,” Rev. Costello said. “I thank Simon and Stu for their invaluable support for gambling reform.”

NEW CEO OF THE ALLIANCE OF GAMBLING REFORM

Former ACT Attorney-General and Executive Minister at Kippax Uniting Church, Rev. Gordon Ramsay has been appointed the new CEO of the Alliance for Gambling Reform.

While in government, Gordon championed a gambling reform agenda in the ACT, resulting in a more than 20 percent reduction in poker machines, and substantial regulatory improvements that have laid the pathway for ongoing reform.

Rev. Ramsay said he was proud of leading a public health approach to gambling in the ACT, and of cementing relationships with advocates, regulatory bodies, industry and people with lived experience to

help reduce gambling harm. Before entering the ACT Parliament, he spent two decades working in community services and advocacy, both locally and nationally. Rev. Ramsay established and grew UnitingCare Kippax into one of the ACT’s best recognised and respected social service and advocacy organisations. 📞

ASHLEY DONNELLY



IF GAMBLING IS A PROBLEM FOR YOU, HELP IS AVAILABLE

Call Wesley Mission’s gambling counselling hotline on **1300 827 638** or Gambling Help on **1800 858 858**.

If you want to talk to someone right now, call Lifeline on **13 11 14** or use crisis chat online.

REV. RAMSAY SAID HE WAS PROUD OF LEADING A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO GAMBLING IN THE ACT



SUPPORT YOUNG LEADERS

AN OPEN LETTER ABOUT THE MODERATOR-ELECT

To the Nominating Committee for NSW/ACT Moderator, and the people of the Synod.

We, the undersigned, commend to you that in the search for nominations for Moderator-Elect, the committee should be determined to bring forward nominees of whom:

At least 50 percent are Indigenous or come from CALD backgrounds; and

At least 75 percent of candidates are under 40 years old if male/ under 50 years old if female. (The age discrepancy here seeks to acknowledge the reality that parenting tends to disrupt the work lives of women more than men)

The Uniting Church in Australia has a long-standing commitment to being a multicultural church, in covenant with the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, and this Synod has recently embraced a vision of “Growing Young”; yet the Moderator position (like most visible leadership roles at Presbytery, Synod, and Assembly levels) has yet to reflect these values.

We have allowed ourselves to uncritically embrace the vision of leadership promoted by our society – one which privileges whiteness, masculinity, and a rather limited age range. This is the cultural captivity of our movement.

Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthian church (12:21-24) that we are gifted to serve across all members:

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”, nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you”. On the contrary, the members of the body that seem weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we cloth with greatest honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect.

The church believes that leadership is a gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of leadership is not only found within older age members, nor is it restricted to specific migrant-ethnic categories of the Uniting Church. Leadership is not only found in certain limbs of the Body of Christ; rather, leadership is a gift found throughout the Body of Christ, and throughout all our age and cultural categories. If we affirm that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are found throughout the body, we are foolish to close our eyes (and our ballots) to the gifts of leadership the Spirit will offer the Church through younger, Indigenous, and CALD people.

The Uniting Church recognises that responsibility for government in the church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them. The Uniting Church therefore so organises its life that locally,

regionally and nationally, government will be entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of the church. (BoU para 15)

Perhaps instead of focusing solely on leadership we need to also consider wisdom. They are related, but not the same. Young and old alike can be wise, and it might be true to say that wisdom does actually increase with age. Yet being a leader is not the same as being a ‘wise elder’. Yes, we need wise elders in the church. But we also need inspiring leaders – hopeful, joyful, passionate and engaged. And inspiring leadership is

a gift found among the young at least as frequently as it is found among the old. Jesus was in his late twenties when he proclaimed the Kingdom of God. MLK Jr was in his mid-thirties when he spoke of his dream. Brooke Prentis was in her thirties when she was appointed CEO of Common Grace. Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, the list goes on.

Imagine a Church that took its commitment to growing young seriously enough to decide it will ask younger people to lead us forward?

This requires some sacrifice on the part of those who look like the leadership we are used to – white, male, older – to stop talking, step aside, and create space for others to step forward. Yes, wise elders will be there too. And not every Moderator or President must be under 40... but isn't it time we had at least one?

We have before us an opportunity, not for tokenism, but to change. To declare that no corner of our church falls outside of our key theological commitments: to heed the call of the Holy Spirit; and remain dependent on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who at just thirty years of age conquered sin and death and called the church into being. 🙏

SIGNED

Rev. Liam Miller

Minister of the Word, Supply at Forest Kirk Uniting Church

Pastor Steve Molkentin

Senior Pulse Field Officer (North)

Rev. Radhika Sukumar-White

Minister of the Word, Leichhardt Uniting Church

Editor's note: This open letter received more than 40 signatures. It has been edited for space. The unedited version is available on Insights' website, along with a complete list of signatories.

tinyurl.com/UCAopenletter

WE HAVE
BEFORE US AN
OPPORTUNITY,
NOT FOR
TOKENISM, BUT
TO CHANGE

Tackling the issues that matter

SCHOOL LEADER WORKSHOPS WITH THE MODERATOR

In March and May this year, a cohort of school leadership that represented Newington, PLC, MLC, Kinross Wolaroi and Knox Grammar met with the Moderator Rev. Simon Hansford and Rev. Stuart Bollom Director of Mission (Schools) for the Synod of NSW and the ACT.

The group met to discuss and prioritise the issues that mattered to them as a cohort and to begin to plan actions that will make an impact.

“I have been in ministry for 30 years, and this is the first time in any real way, that people of your generation and in our schools have engaged with us in a positive way and I want to say we are really excited about that,” said the Moderator.

“We are here together to discuss what’s important to you.”

The cohort broke up into three groups and discussed and brainstormed at length the issues facing them and the community. They then reported back to the larger group their concerns and

focus areas. They included issues such as consent, wellbeing and mental health, indigenous issues, bullying, gender equality, queer sex education and raising the students voices on these issues, both within their school populations and in the community.

THE SCHOOLS HAVE OVER
10,000 YOUNG PEOPLE
WHO ARE MOTIVATED BY
THESE ISSUES

“The idea of the school leaders workshops with the Moderator is for the church to be able to listen to the issues and concerns of students in our care. Our school chaplains are doing this on a daily basis, but it is important for the schools and

the students to see that they are connected to the other Uniting Church Schools and to the Uniting Church beyond their school,” said Rev. Stuart Bollom, Director of Mission (Schools) for the Synod of NSW and the ACT.

“Working together the schools have over 10,000 young people, who are motivated by these issues. As a church, we are more intentional in working with people in the first third of their life. As such we need to listen to the concerns of young people and as a church get alongside the issues that they care deeply about.”

Asked to vote by consensus, the young leaders prioritised three issues to take further action on. The issue that was front and centre for the cohort was consent and better and more informed debate and education for

young women and men on this important issue recently highlighted in the media and Australia-wide marches. Other issues the group will focus on at the next meeting in May are around mental health and wellbeing, and concerns about the environment.

Student leadership attendees were Conor Corcoran, Nicholas O’Shea and Rohan Ghandi from Newington, Katherine Gibbon, Emma Peters, Angelica Tan and Caitlin Kim from PLC, Maya Simpson, Claudia Bean, Mikaela Nguyen and Ana Trigg from MLC School, Oliver Sved and Nicholas Baker from Knox Grammar and Mackenzie Jones, Jess Moseley and Josie Mitchell from Kinross Wolaroi, Dorcas Chow and Mary Ma from Ravenswood. 📍

ADRIAN DRAYTON



Lest we forget?

MEMORY AND SCRIPTURE IN AUSTRALIA

Dr Merideth Lake delivered the annual May Macleod lecture on Thursday, 22 April at United Theological College.



The lecture explored the theme, 'Can religious history reframe how we imagine Australia now?'

The lecture explored the role of memory and scripture in Australian life and what it meant to remember well.

The May Macleod lecture is an annual event that first began in 1989. Named after the late May Macleod (1913-1984), the lecture aims to bring theological insights to the wider church and to celebrate the church's ministries.

"I hope the weight of it is already becoming apparent, in that what we remember, how we remember it, and what we do with those memories - helps structure personal and communal life," Dr Lake said.

"On this theme, I've been struck by the Cistercian monk Erik Varden's recent book on Christian remembrance. He says, 'To speak of remembrance is to speak of identity. We remember what we have been, what has made us who we are. At the same time, we become what we remember.'"

"Memory and identity are related, he rightly points out - and this is something both historians and theologians recognise. This relationship is in fact an important clue to why memory is, potentially, both a foundation and a fault line."

"I've chosen to reflect on the use of exodus images and ideas, because of their potency in terms of identity, and notions of nationhood - perhaps especially in settler colonial contexts."

"When it comes to the biblical images and stories which the earliest European colonist drew on, exodus from slavery to the promised land wasn't usually immediately in view.

"As we might expect, in convict settlements!"

With the expansion of free society, Dr Lake said, the idea of a journey to a promised land started to filter through into everyday language.

"To Barron Field, writing in 1822, the Bathurst Plains appeared 'the promised land of Australia' in 1822," she said.

"In the eyes of the young pastoralist William Brodribb, the Monaro similarly seemed a 'land of promise.'"

"And according to its promoters, South Australia was a land of 'beautiful hills, valleys, waters and provisions' with scenery somewhat like 'the Holy Land of Judea.'"

The lecture examined some central figures in colonial history who had made surprising contributions, with the idea of interrogating assumptions about Australian history.

One of the central figures Dr Lake focused on was John Dunmore Lang, probably a prominent figure for nineteenth century Australia, whose public career spanned more than half a century from his arrival in 1823 to his death in 1878.

Active in founding and leading the Presbyterian church in Australia, Lang was also well known as an educator, newspaper proprietor, and member of parliament.

"An activist evangelical whose political and ecclesiastical views became progressively radical, he is best known today as one of the earliest advocates of an independent Australian republic," Dr Lake said.

Dr Lake noted that, while Lang's rhetoric was largely what might be expected from a colonialist narrative, there was a surprising twist in that he humanised indigenous people.

"On the one occasion that Lang did relate the Aborigines to the original inhabitants of the biblical Promised Land, he described them as Gibeonites," she said.

"He was referring to a biblical incident involving Joshua, who,

RECONCILIATION BEGINS WITH REMEMBRANCE OF OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS, THE

on entering the promised land, made a peace treaty with the Gibeonites, while destroying other inhabitants."

"In a sermon expounding the colonists' 'social and public' sins, preached on a day of fasting on account of the 1838 drought, he suggested that the colonists' relationship with Aboriginal people, like Israel's with the Gibeonites, was stained by 'blood guiltiness.' 'Let us ask ourselves seriously and in earnest, whether, as the European colonists of this territory, we can lay our hands upon our hearts, and plead not guilty concerning

the Gibeonites, I mean the Aboriginal inhabitants of this land?”

The lecture also examined the rise of what Dr Lake called ‘ANZACery’, an almost religious veneration of the ANZAC myth. This, she said, was informed in part by religious symbolism and language, but this had since become unmoored from its original base.

“When I attended a dawn service, in 2017 I think, I was struck by the way the crowd really only joined in singing when it came to the refrain. It was almost as if ‘lest we forget’ were the only words still accessible to people, who were otherwise unsure of what to do with the hymn’s religious imagery and language.”

Dr Lake explored how Kipling managed to act as something for a mediator between Christianity and latter, secular Australia’s ANZAC myth, via a poem that is now quoted in part in ANZAC Day ceremonies.

“As empires rise and empires fall, Kipling seems to be confessing Britain’s pride and hubris. The very last line of the poem is explicit in expressing repentance - Thy mercy on Thy People, Lord!”

Australian history, Dr Lake said, was often a contested space between two broad narratives. One that sought to glorify the past and another that sought to move on from it.

Dr Lake suggested that both schools of thought were flawed, with the former tending to erase key parts of history that didn’t reflect well on Australia and the latter seeking to deny the role that was played by Christians in forming the nation.

Historians of church history, she suggested, could play a part as being part of a sub-community that worked towards reconciliation.

“Reconciliation with God goes hand in hand with reconciliation with others,” Dr Lake said. “And it strikes me, perhaps

because I’m an historian, that it begins with remembering - a recalling of our sisters and brothers, the recollecting of the grievances against us.”

“Memory in this view is indispensable to reconciliation.”

“And perhaps our churches and our wider community would benefit from dwelling on that.”

“Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, ‘God reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.’”

JONATHAN FOYE

Dr Lake is a historian, broadcaster, and award-winning writer interested in how Australians understand the big questions of faith and meaning.

She currently hosts Soul Search on ABC Radio National – a weekly show about the lived experience of religion and spirituality. She has also guest presented Compass.

**REMEMBERING - A RECALLING
AND RECOLLECTING OF THE
GRIEVANCES AGAINST US**



New Mission Plan

FOR GEORGES RIVER PRESBYTERY



WITH A NEW MISSION PLAN, OFFICE, AND BRANDING, GEORGES RIVER PRESBYTERY ARE EMBARKING ON AN AMBITIOUS NEW AGENDA. THE PRESBYTERY SAY THAT THEY ARE WORKING TO REVERSE A DECLINE IN NUMBERS AND TO ENHANCE THEIR MINISTRY. *INSIGHTS* SPOKE TO PRESBYTERY MINISTER REV. MATAGI VILITAMA.

At the heart of Georges River Presbytery's new 'Mission, Vision and Strategic Plan 2020-2025' are aspirations to reverse a declining trend in numbers and to see what Presbytery Minister Rev. Matagi Vilitama calls "healthy, growing congregations that are known for passionately pursuing the mission of Jesus."

"This is the vision of the presbytery," Rev. Vilitama said.

The mission plan has a particular youth focus as well. In keeping with the Synod's vision of a Uniting Church that is 'growing young', Georges River Presbytery are seeking to support a youth movement in the Presbytery. This includes a working committee of young leaders and youth mentors who are leading the initiative.

"We are investing in growing multicultural and Crosscultural youth groups and training young leaders with the help of UME and Pulse," Rev. Vilitama said.

"We are also mentoring young people to participate in Presbytery committees and we are beginning to see positive response in this area."

Through UME, Synod has provided mission consultants to assist Georges River Presbytery in mission planning.

"The presence and support from Synod has helped build the relationship and collaboration between Presbytery and Synod. Rana Moawad from Synod assisted us in the details of the new logo and branding. Albert Olley, Chief Operating Officer of the Synod, represented Synod in the official opening of the new office."

"THE NEW PLACE OF PRESBYTERY"

The Presbytery Mission Day took place on Saturday 27 March. According to Rev. Vilitama, the day's main goal was the welcome new members to "the new place of Presbytery: not just in terms of our new office space but a new place in terms of mission."

"It was a day to mark a new beginning in the life of the Presbytery celebrating signs of new growth and hope," Rev. Vilitama said.

The Presbytery Mission Day had four objectives: To provide a time and space to physically meet for the first time since the COVID-19 lockdown, Sharing 'Good News' stories about mission events and projects in congregations and Presbytery groups, launching the Presbytery's new logo/brand, and the official opening of Presbytery's new office in Hurstville.

"There were four presentations on the day," Rev. Vilitama said.

"Presbytery Youth, known as 'Living Streams in Christ' (name that grew out of the logo referring to Georges river); Engadine Uniting Church shared their new mission in their local community, Cronulla New Beginnings Uniting Church talked about their new Discipleship project, and Carlton-Ramsgate Glee youth shared their experience of revitalising their youth group by reaching out to new families in the community."

According to Rev. Vilitama, it was, "All very inspiring and missional in focus."

Accompanying the new mission and office is new branding, with a logo by the Synod's Senior Graphic Designer, Rana



Moawad. As Rev. Vilitama explained, the logo has a rich symbolism that encompasses much of the new mission that Georges River Presbytery is embarking on.

"The name "Georges River" is aesthetically positioned with the image of a river inside a leaf flowing outwards. The symbols in the image are deeply theological.

Water is a biblical and theological concept that represents life. Jesus said, "I am the water of life...he who comes to me will never thirst..." Water in Baptism speaks about cleansing and new beginnings - a fresh start.

The leaf in this logo is a symbol of all of God's creation. Much of Georges River environment includes conservation parks and it's something that the Presbytery is very aware of."

"The leaf symbolises new life, growth and vitality. It is inclusive of food, medicine, art and culture; it speaks to God's providence and sustenance. Living in the Anthropocene calls us to care for God's creation and Climate Justice is at the heart of our eco-theology. It is integral to the mission of the UCA."

"Our young people are passionate about social justice and action on climate change. Engadine's Shane Slade for instance, a young leader in our Presbytery, is one of the faces of the Church advocating in the climate and social justice space."

"So these symbols of leaf and river, the colours green and blue are intentionally chosen to represent the ideals and aspirations of Georges River Presbytery reflected in the new Mission, Vision and Strategic Plan 2020-2025." 📍

JONATHAN FOYE

THE MISSION PLAN HAS A PARTICULAR YOUTH FOCUS

MAKING MONEY MATTER

Money and Salvation History

The book of Ruth is, at one level, a simple, charming love story. It tells of a match made in heaven, between a woman who has seen much tragedy in her life and a man who felt that love had passed him by. Brought together by seemingly unlikely providential circumstances, the marriage of Boaz and Ruth brought great joy to all who knew them.

Many readers have enjoyed Ruth in that way. And fair enough, because it's definitely a wonderful love story, beautifully told. It is good literature, with a strong plot, great characters, drama, humour, irony and passion.

However, it's much more than that. This story sits in an important place in the whole sweep of the story that the Bible tells about God and humanity. It bridges the gap between the rabble that Israel had become by the end of the book of Judges and the more settled time when God could promise David that a king would sit his throne forever; and the two main characters feature in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

I don't think it's stretching things too far to say that the story belongs where it does in the Biblical narrative because these two key people had a right attitude to money and material well-being. They both chose to serve God rather than mammon.

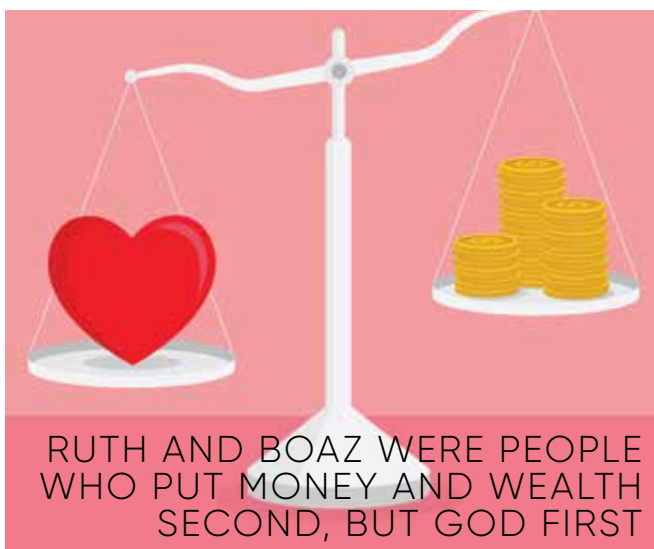
First, Ruth. She's well known for her famous declaration to mother-in-law Naomi that "where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people will be my people and your God my God." What's often forgotten is the context of that statement, so let's focus on that for a moment.

Naomi had left Bethlehem with her husband and sons to go to Moab about 10 years earlier to escape a famine. It didn't go well for her, as all three of the men died and Naomi was left feeling

that God was against her (Ruth 1:13). As she headed back to Bethlehem - where the famine had ended long ago - she urged her two daughters-in-law to go back to Moab to their own gods and to find husbands. She's effectively saying to them that they'll have a more financially secure future in their

is that he is a well-regarded, genuine fellow who takes God's ways seriously, not just in letter, but in spirit.

Although the high principles of the ancient law had hoped that all the people of Israel would live well in the land, God provided laws to provide for the vulnerable and



homeland, under the gods of Moab, than they'd find with Naomi in Bethlehem.

Ruth's response is, therefore, not just a declaration of loyalty to Naomi, but a defiant declaration that she will trust in the Lord, despite what Naomi currently thinks her experience shows about the God of Israel. She doesn't want the gods and people of Moab, she wants the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the people descended from them. Somehow she knows that this will be better than financial security.

Second, Boaz. One of the first things we learn about him

marginalised. For example, in Deuteronomy 24 there were enshrined principles of what we might call 'taxation' and the 'welfare state' in which grain that was dropped by the harvesting process or olives that don't fall from the tree during the first shaking or the grapes missed in the harvest would be left for "the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow" to gather.

We find Boaz is generous in his interpretation of these laws. He not only encourages Ruth to continue to glean in his fields rather than move to another, but he gave her even more so that she and Naomi had food left over after being

satisfied (Ruth 2:18). He was a wealthy man who made his wealth available to others who needed it.

Even more significantly, Boaz eagerly played the part of the kinsman-redeemer. I don't have the space to go into details about what this role was in ancient Israel, but suffice to say here that it was a costly process. Boaz was committing not only to buy the lands of Naomi's husband and son (Ruth's late husband), but to do so knowing that they wouldn't ultimately belong to him. This was because the 'redeemer' bit of the process meant he'd marry Ruth and the land he'd bought would automatically belong to any sons she bore to him.

Boaz was willing to do this, both out of love for Ruth, but also out of commitment to God's ways of keeping the land of Israel as something that was there for every one of God's people. Ruth's declaration that the God of Israel would be her God and the people of Israel her people could have found no more faithful or devoted counterpoint than in Boaz. (And if you can't see the parallels between Boaz and Jesus, our kinsman-redeemer who loves us and pays the price for us to belong to God's family then you're not really trying!)

Ruth and Boaz were people who put money and wealth second, but God first. They rightfully take their place in the genealogy of Jesus.

If the Uniting Church is going to grow in discipleship, impact, and number, we need more Ruths and Boazs who will put God first and mammon last. 🙏

WARREN BIRD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | UNITING
FINANCIAL SERVICES

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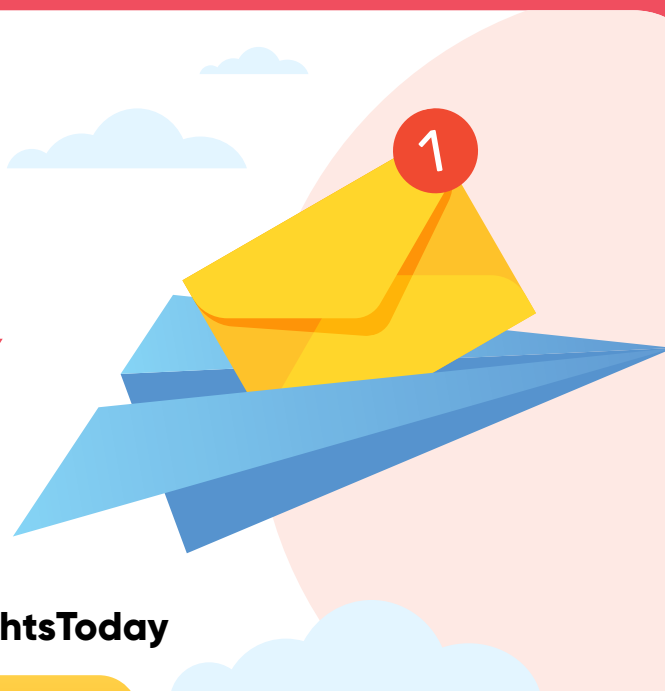
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Learning, playing and connecting

KIDS CAMP OUT (KCO) SAW MANY CHURCHES COME TOGETHER FOR A WEEKEND OF LEARNING, PLAYING AND CONNECTING. GROUPS FROM WOLLONGONG, WESTERN SYDNEY, GEORGE'S RIVER, NEWCASTLE AND THE NORTH SHORE JOINED FROM THEIR CHURCH GROUNDS AND HOMES FOR THE THIRD WEEKEND IN MARCH.



Children were able to help lead worship. Congregations were recounted on the journey of the children's weekend. Hear about the KCO place created and then were able to bless their children ministry. As these young hearts continue to learn more about Jesus.

Khurul Hamdan, Mission worker of Keriaview UC leader at their site shares 'Wollongong and Keiraview decided to join forces for Kid's Campout this year. It was great to see the kids from both congregations interact and make new connections. We had around 20 kids in total and a half dozen leaders from both Keiraveiw and Wollongong. It was really fun setting up the campsite in Keiraview's hall and going through the activities together. We are looking forward to planning more conjoined youth events in the future.'

This weekend provided valued community time, for everyone. KCO, very intergenerational shaped by all ages contributing to the fun. Parents, parents and volunteers helping with the catering and camping, as well as young leaders shaping and leading the program. 🙌

JOYCE TANGI
PULSE FIELD OFFICER (SOUTH)

The Annual Kids Camp Out in 2021, was shifted, shaken and stirred from the normality's that it would usually have run on. This years Kooka Camp, (KCO) was taken back to congregations and leaders to lead KCO in their places, to engage with their youngsters. As the theme this year, was 'KCO at your place' we asked the question, 'How would KCO look like in your own context? How do we build homes for Jesus. The responses back were incredible!

KCO is an annual camp for students in year 3-6. The camp gives opportunities for young leaders and families to participate in a truly inter-generational community. The weekend is sprinkled with games, worship celebrations and opportunities for church groups to develop friendships and discipleship.

This Year we explore what it means to have Jesus as the foundation and cornerstone. They created their own place in the comfort of your own homes or in your church halls. How do we explore that concept? As we have been isolated for a whole year now, and life has changed or shifted for many, how would you create your own place,

where Jesus would be there? These discussions are answered by games, story sharing and building new creations! Kids camp out was designed for 2021, with the possibility to do it from the comfort of your own home as interact online with your communities.

Churches received the resources and were able to find a mutual time online, where they shared and created crafts and prayers online with each other. For the Auburn Parish Uniting Church, it was not possible together at one location, for a whole church gathering face to face so the youngsters joined in the Sunday service via Zoom and joined in with singing and sharing, which was amazing to see! The diverse ways of joining together during this time of adapting to a new normal.

On the Sunday where we would normally gather as a whole body out at Wedderburn for prayers and worship we encouraged and to invite the congregation into the KCO Space.

HOW DO WE
BUILD HOMES
FOR JESUS?



PULSE

In recent weeks the Synod supported the Future Directions proposal. A key element in this document is the activating large, healthy, and young congregations. I have had many conversations with people about how could we make this happen particularly in light of Growing Younger.

For this to make sense you need to understand a couple of things about families. Firstly they need a place for their kids to belong, a community where their kids are seen, and their faith taken seriously. The other thing is more about humanity, we like to hang out with people like us. Mainly because people like us understand and give us space to talk through issues we are facing. It feels familiar and comforting. Thirdly people don't like to hang out with people who annoy them.. this, my friends, is humanity.

ACTIVATING LARGE, HEALTHY AND YOUNGER CONGREGATIONS

You might be wondering why the need for bigger? It is important because that gives a space where we have enough people to invest in all people, for us children and young people need to be a key priority in this. In so many churches there is one person passionate about children or maybe youth or maybe young adults but it is really hard to dream when you are just trying to hold it together. If we could allow ourselves to see that our "Church" is more than the people in the building we meet in but from a Uniting Church perspective, it is the other people who live in our area and worship near us, we might discover that we are not alone. Imagine how much more we could get done how much more creative and enthused we would be if we were doing it with others.

There are many congregations who are starting down this journey, some have been on it for a while and found themselves inspired to do things they never thought possible. This will require a bit of an adjustment to how we think and what we do. Sometimes that is not easy. We get comfortable in what we know and it is easy, but it isn't always that engaging to Emerging Generations. Together we are able to take more time to listen to young people, to think deeply, and pray together about our younger members.

Church is going to be different. We need it to be if we are to continue sharing the Gospel as a Uniting Church, but different is not always bad! (I know I am glad for internal flushing toilets compared to chasing the spiders in the drop toilet out the back!). I pray that as a Church we may be courageous enough to let go and let God, dream a bigger dream, hope a bigger hope, and free people to explore what is possible even if it is a bit crazy! God is not dead and neither is the Church, let's put on our hiking boots and head off on the next leg of the journey God is calling us on together. 🙏

KAREN MITCHELL LAMBERT
PULSE LEADER

FAMILIES NEED A PLACE FOR THEIR KIDS TO BELONG, A COMMUNITY WHERE THEIR KIDS ARE SEEN, AND THEIR FAITH TAKEN SERIOUSLY

BELIEF MATTERS

THE
Unexpected
GIFT

IS THE CHURCH ERASING SINGLENES?

A new book addresses the neglected area of singleness as an “unexpected gift” for Christians. Author Joelle Kabamba discussed *The Unexpected Gift* with *Insights*.

“As someone who has been single for quite an extended period of time and yet to marry, I was curious to investigate the stigmas surrounding singleness and delve deeper into whether it was a question of a shared experience between individual single persons.

“The different kinds of single people – how do their needs differ? Does a young woman who is looking to find a partner experience singleness differently from an older woman whose biological clock is nearing midnight? In what way does a woman who is single, because she has lost her partner to death or divorce, see the world differently from a woman who has never wanted to be married? “

“I was also intrigued about what circumstances evolved that saw these women find themselves on the path of singleness and how this impacts or transforms the way they now view the world.”

“As I continued to reflect I came to the revelation that every single one of us; every human being, will experience singleness at some stage of our lives. Singleness is part of the human experience and thus it is vital that we all come to understand and empathise with one another and ourselves on ways to navigate through such seasons, and do so in grace and strength. In a society that often projects negative connotations or dialogue surrounding singleness I toyed with the idea of writing a work that invited other Christian singles to learn what it means to not merely exist and get by, but to thrive in God’s kingdom. What if all Christian women could live powerful and confident lives enriched with hope and purpose, irrespective of their marital status?”

Ms Kabamba said that the book is focused on “the most underrated seasons of our lives” and that it contains, “a short call to Pastors and leaders on our mandate to help our singles to thrive in these changing times.”

“I take my readers to reflect on how divinely chosen and complete we are in God’s eyes [and] explore the stigma that’s been applied to single women historically and today.”

“This is a call to my readers to not only live but to thrive as a single in our communities by living a kingdom legacy, as we prepare for the ultimate wedding to end all weddings for eternity.”

For all of the book’s focus on singleness, Ms Kabamba said that she is not anti-marriage, but rather wants to see discussions about the church’s approach to be enlarged so as to be more inclusive of singleness.

“I believe in marriage, I just don’t believe it is the full story,” she said.

“The Bible does indeed cover many aspects about a life of singleness, much of what the church today has left out in their message is the significance of single-hood. Why has the

church neglected this area? I would like to believe that the why stems from historical representation and treatment of women and our place in society. There has long been the misinterpretation of scriptures when it comes to some of the key issues found in scriptures, particularly in regards to women.”

TIME FOR A FRESH NARRATIVE
The Unexpected Gift, Ms Kabamba says, was “written by a woman, from women’s perspective, for women.”

“There is a big difference between a view that says women have an important, cherished role in society which may or not include being a mother, and a view that only sees a woman’s role as to be married and have children,” she said.

“Meanwhile women throughout history have often been limited by a patriarchal understanding of God’s word...Historically, the Bible has generally been both written and expounded from a male perspective, be it the Jew or Greek or through an Eastern or Western lens.”

“I believe it is time for a fresh new narrative on singlehood and singleness. As a community of single people we must reclaim our true identity and turn back to God’s original intent and purpose as single and individual beings which is far greater than just our marital status.”

The book comes at a time when the audience for such a project is growing, and Ms Kabamba says that churches have a pastoral need to respond to, namely the statistical

growth in the the number of people identifying themselves in studies as being single.

“Statistically, the population of singles has been growing exponentially, there are people who are marrying late and more and more people are living alone,” Ms Kabamba said.

“Take for instance from 1986 to 2016, the single household went from 19 percent to two percent. In 2018 there were two million single households, the projection states in 2026 single households will surpass the traditional nuclear family.”

“This is the time to respond as Pastors and leaders and acknowledge and accept the change in demographics and act accordingly when it comes to presenting new fresh narratives. It is no longer acceptable to simply present the old sage template messages from the pulpit, we have a mandate to support all the different types of singles in our churches.”

Uniting Church theologian Dr Katherine Grocott explored the under-developed theology of singleness for her 2005 Honours thesis, *A Singular Focus*.¹

JONATHAN FOYE



THIS IS A CALL TO
MY READERS TO
NOT ONLY LIVE BUT TO
THRIVE AS A SINGLE
IN OUR COMMUNITIES
BY LIVING A KINGDOM
LEGACY





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LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

JUNE

Experiencing Miracles

6 JUNE

PENTECOST 2

1 SAM 8:4-11 (12-15) 16-20 (11:14-15)
& MARK 3:20-35

Leadership is an interesting thing in communities. We often want someone to take the responsibility and to lead us. When they don't we complain that no one is stepping up and doing their part.

Yet, often, when someone does step up, we are critical of them, particularly when they are not someone we would expect to see in that role.

This tension seems to sit between these texts. In 1 Samuel, Samuel highlights that if a King to lead them, as they request, this will mean certain sacrifices.

The King will want to do things in a particular way. He will expect to have a certain authority that the people respect. They will no longer have as much autonomy.

When Jesus returns to his family, it is not so much that the people dislike leadership inasmuch as they dislike him as leader and teacher. The comment 'He has gone out of his mind (Mark 3.21b)' suggests that he was not leading as they would hope, nor perhaps the person they expected.

How do we hold this tension when we, as a community, acknowledge that we sometimes do need leadership? And how do we encourage leaders who are not the one that we would normally choose, particularly when they encourage us to think differently?



I AM REMINDED THAT
I AM NOT ALONE IN
TENDING THIS GARDEN
OF FAITH

13 JUNE PENTECOST 3

MARK 4:26-34

In my small corner of the Uniting Church right now there are all sorts of seeds springing up. It is a beautiful thing, and I am incredibly lucky. With all these shoots of new life springing up, though, I am never quite sure which ones to tend. There is not time to tend them all.

Should I tend the most unique?

Or the most robust, simply because it has the best chance of becoming something?

Mostly I just find myself tending the closest one, or the one that scream the loudest.

I am not sure what the solution is, but I am grateful to be reminded that I am not alone in tending this garden of faith. There are those who have gone before me and planted the seeds, there are those that work alongside me to provide the sun and the rain, and there will be those who come after to find rest in the branches.

20 JUNE PENTECOST

4 PSALM 133- JUNE 20

I am not sure about this psalm. I do agree that it is 'very good and pleasant it is to live together in unity.' I can see how the metaphor for this works with the 'dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion.'

I am just not sure about the beard analogy. I have not ever had a beard so I am not a good judge, but I can't see how oil running down your beard and robes would feel so good. It would be sticky.

But then I remember Jesus being anointed by the unnamed woman at Bethany. I am reminded of times when I have anointed others: Babies during baptism, all manner of people at the other end of their life, even in death and sometimes others in between in times of joy and pain.

In remembering these, I realise that maybe unity is not just happiness, but connection, welcome, and love?

Maybe unity is about life and death, and all that lies in between? Maybe there is a tension in that- just like in the oil? Sometimes warm and sensual, sometimes sticky.

27 JUNE PENTECOST 5

PSALM 130 AND MARK 5:21-43

I imagine that all of the people in this week's gospel story went through a dark nights of the soul before they encountered Jesus that day. The hemorrhaging woman would have experienced many before she put all her hope in Jesus that day.

Sadly, for many of us who go through these experiences the result is not the miracle that we see here, but more pain. Perhaps this was the same for the Psalmist.

We don't always get the miracle, but what we can be assured of is that despite that, we are always loved. 🙏

Responding to the grace we have been given

4 JULY
PENTECOST 6

PSALM 48 AND MARK 6:1-13

It occurs to me that Jesus' instruction to 'shake off the dust that is on your feet' (Mark 6.11) as they leave is a bit backwards. Normally we shake the dust off our feet before we go into someone's house, as an act of respect and politeness, not as we leave. But of course, in this story the instruction is to shake the dust off your feet if you are not welcome into a house. What is the point of that? Aren't you just going to walk away and add more dust?

I wonder if politeness and respect is half the point of this? If the disciple was welcomed into a house, they would shake the dust off before entering. Maybe Jesus is saying that the disciples should also be equally respectful to those who do not welcome them? This is always the much more difficult thing. It is much easier to be polite to someone who is polite to you. Because who we are matters, and we never ever know what the dust that we leave behind does in the life of those who encounter it.

11 JULY
PENTECOST 7

2 SAMUEL 6:1-5, 12B-19

In any good story there is always one person that is grumpy at a party and in this story, it is no different. Michel, wife of King David and daughter of King Saul, sees her husband dancing and 'despised him in her heart.'

I wonder why she avoided the party?

Possibly she does not think it is fitting to dance in front of the ark of the covenant.

Obviously someone noticed, because we would not have the story that we have today, but whoever that wasn't didn't tell us why and I wonder if they knew or just noticed her discontent?

I don't know the answer of why she was grumpy.

My curiosity about Michel reminds me that in community when we notice that someone is not joining in, or grumpy, it is important that we understand why.

18 JULY
PENTECOST 8

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

How do other people identify you as a Christian?

Are you someone who assertively identifies as a Christian, or are you someone, like me who is more quiet about your faith?

As someone who didn't grow up in the church and is now ordained, my identification as a Christian has always held some challenges. I deeply humbled and proud of who I am and who Christ calls me to be. Yet I don't want this very strong part of who I am to overwhelm those who are on a different journey to me or those who are unsure or uncomfortable around those like me with strong faith.

This text helps me to remember that outward symbols are not so important, and it is up to me if I choose to wear or project them. These things are different for all of us. I don't have to replicate the mannerisms and clothing of others. This text reminds us that that is as it should be. Regardless of outward symbols of faith, we are 'one body' in Christ.

25 JULY
PENTECOST 9

2 SAMUEL 11:1-15

This text feels like a story of a powerful ruler who wants something and takes it, regardless of the consequences. Then, when it goes not quite as is expected, he kills the person to 'fix' it all up.

Though King David is God's servant, however, David is not God. His behavior does not reflect God, and I very much doubt reflects what God would have hoped. This is not the whole story of the Bible. There is a bigger story that is more important. There is the grand narrative of the scripture. And when we sit this story within that grand narrative it is not excused or justified.

The bigger story shows both good and bad responses to God's blessing. It reminds us that like King David, we have choice as God's people. We have a choice to respond with grace to the grace we have been given, or to respond contrary to grace. 🙏



I DON'T WANT THIS VERY STRONG PART OF WHO I AM TO OVERWHELM THOSE WHO ARE ON A DIFFERENT JOURNEY TO ME

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

AUGUST

Putting on the armour of God



WE WANT PEOPLE TO CONTINUE TO FEEL CONNECTED, COMFORTABLE AND LIKE THEY BELONG

1 AUGUST PENTECOST 10 EPHESIANS 4:1-16

Keeping the peace is something we do in communities, particularly in church.

We want people to continue to feel connected, comfortable and like they belong. Often this means that those of us who like to imagine, create and experiment need to be very patient in the way that we introduce change. We also need to be careful not to upset anyone. Sometimes it means that we don't 'speak out in love' (Ephesians 4.15) as our small way of maintaining peace. This becomes our contribution to 'the unity of Spirit.' (Ephesians 4.3).

Sadly, when we do not allow ourselves and others to 'speak out in love,' we often lose the opportunity to grow in Christ. Ultimately, this will break down our unity as those people lose faith in themselves. How can you encourage those with gifts in your community to 'speak out in love' (Ephesians 4.15)?

8 AUGUST PENTECOST 11 JOHN 6:35, 41-5

When I preside at communion my favorite thing is breaking one big loaf of bread into many pieces. In consuming the bread we become connected, not just to each other but to all of creation. One loaf of bread is made up of many things (wheat, water, salt, yeast), and these things were nourished. This combination is broken apart, given to each of us and somehow put back together by Christ.

Christ is the one that connects us, not just to each other but to all that is. Through Christ we are drawn together. Through Christ we have the opportunity to be created anew.

15 AUGUST PENTECOST 12 1 KINGS 2:10-12; 3:3-14

Often in a new situation we feel unsure. Solomon's prayer is a beautiful one. You can almost feel his fear, but also his deep desire to do the right thing by those entrusted to his care.

But Solomon doesn't ask God to fix everything. This is not a prayer that asks for an answer, or a solution.'

Instead, it asks God for the ability to discern what is best for the people he serves. This is a prayer not for Solomon, but deeply rooted in the hopes and dreams of those he serves. May we all pray like this when we are lost, and in serving each other, find ourselves.

22 AUGUST PENTECOST 13 EPHESIANS 6:10-20

As I child I was taught that different activities required different clothes. I had to wear a uniform to school. As I grew, I would learn that it was expected that different clothing was essential in my professional life if I wanted to create the 'right' impression. In that scenario suits and jackets became my amour.

In Ephesians, we are asked to put on the armour of God. Armour of course is designed to protect the wearer just as,

in their own way, my business suits were worn to protect me.

But this amour is not designed to protect us, but instead to love others through truth, righteousness, and most importantly perhaps, peace.

Faith is not something to hide behind, but something to be lived and shown. How we do this? What are the things we need to help us walk in peace?

29 AUGUST PENTECOST 14

SONG OF SOLOMON 2.8-13

This is a love song. The author sings a deep and sensual love song to his or her lover in the hope of re-kindling passion.

Love has fizzled a little after a dark time. Perhaps it was a cold winter as it says, but perhaps it was also just a really difficult time. One of the lovers has decided to seek the deep spark of love again.

This beautiful poem reminds us that love does happen without warning and without intent. But we can't just rely on these spontaneous sparks. We need to reach out, see the one we love and tell them how much we love them.

Love creates continuous new beginnings, even after the darkest of winters. That is the beauty of the love that God has created in you. That is the beauty of the love of God who created all and continues to create through each of us. 🕯️

THESE LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS WERE PREPARED BY REV. DANIELLE HEMSWORTH-SMITH

A stylized, high-contrast illustration of Philip K. Dick's face. The portrait is rendered in a limited color palette of yellow, black, and white, set against a light blue background. Dick is depicted with a full, dark beard and mustache, and his hair is black with white highlights. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the right. The style is reminiscent of a woodcut or a high-contrast photograph.

CULTURE WATCH

PHILIP K. DICK
& SCRIPTURE IN
CONVERSATION

PHILIP K. DICK WAS A PROLIFIC AMERICAN AUTHOR, MOST WIDELY RECOGNISED FOR HIS SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES.

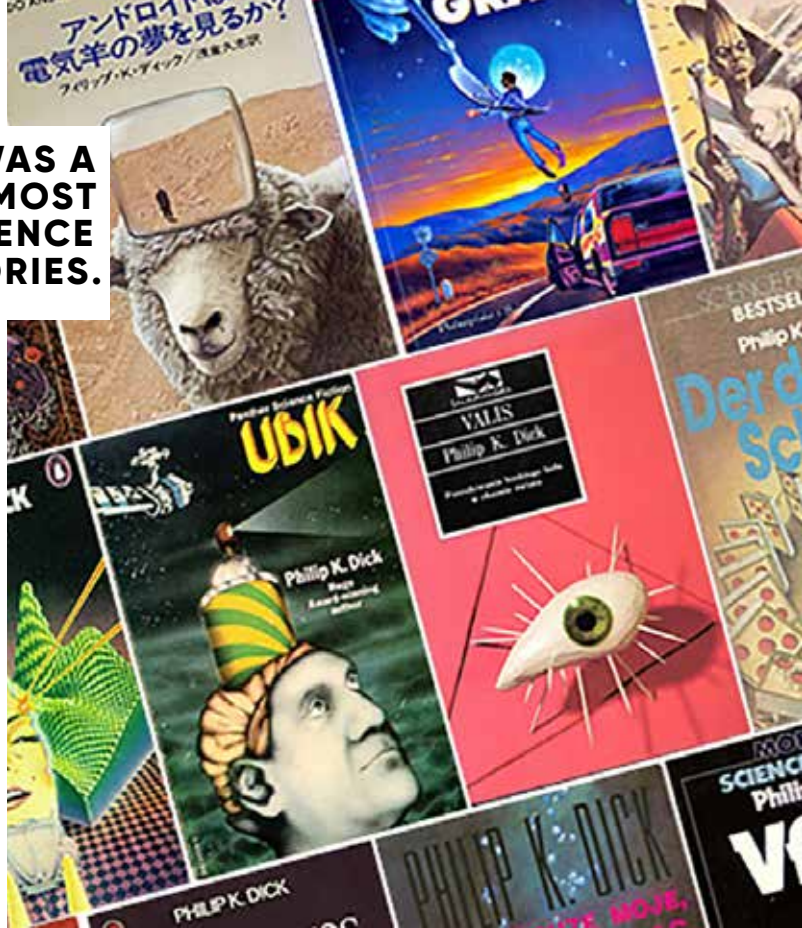
With 44 published novels and over 120 short stories, he explores a wide variety of topics including war, alternate histories, corporate greed, corrupt governments, drug use and human nature. His works are philosophical and reflective, inviting the reader to think further on issues. Philip K. Dick asks big questions of humans, making his writings a fruitful conversation partner for theology.

Despite his prolific writings, his name is not a commonly recognised one. We might be more familiar with the movie and television adaptations of his stories. The cult classic *Blade Runner*, which centred around the humanness of artificially intelligent replicants, was based on the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* The action-packed *Minority Report* was a short story of the same name questioning the nature of crime if it could be predicted. The cleverly animated dystopian *A Scanner Darkly* was a novel first, as was the recent television series *The Man in the High Castle*, which won the Hugo Award in 1963, and explores an alternate history where the Nazis and Japan win World War II. Most recently, several of his short stories have been turned into single episodes in the television anthology series Philip K. Dick's *Electric Dreams*, the only adaptation to bear his name. Twenty-three of his works have been adapted into movies and television series. Not surprisingly, however, many of the adaptations veer away from the original stories.

One defining aspect of Dick's works is that there are no heroes. The people that populate his stories are everyday, common people. A repair man, a shopkeeper, a common soldier returned from the war. While his stories may contain heroics, they are just as often about disturbing aspects of human nature. The repair man turns out to be from the future trying to repair an electronics unit that will brainwash much of the human race into subservient compliance. The shopkeeper turns out to be able to control time and space but uses her ability to monopolise a group of people needing to escape a dying, poisoned world into buying her produce. The soldier is struggling with life after the war and is unsure as to the purpose of the boat he is building in his backyard, until the rain starts falling. You are left suspecting that it is an ark story.

Philip K. Dick's characters are flawed, real, gritty. They are unashamedly human, much like so many of the Biblical characters. The Twelve Disciples are a rag-tag bunch of fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots. Yet, they were used, along with multitudes of nameless followers, to change the course of human history. David, a shepherd turned king, was also an adulterer and murderer. Yet, he is called a man after God's own heart. Saul, a Pharisee and persecutor of the church, became one of its earliest allies and has a name change to reflect the internal change. No one is excluded as a valuable character for Dick's stories, just like no one is excluded from being able to be used in God's loving and grace filled mission on earth.

One of the common themes in Philip K. Dick's works is that of human nature. He asks the question, what does it truly mean to be human or, as Steven Owen Godersky clarifies, 'What is it like not to be human?' In *Human Is*, a short story that was



adapted for the *Electric Dreams* television series, a woman struggles with an abusive and emotionally cold husband. He is dispatched to a mission off world, but he returns a changed man. His body has been possessed by an alien entity who proves to be a loving and caring partner – a far better example of a man, than the human it replaced.

THE CHARACTERS ARE UNASHAMEDLY HUMAN LIKE SO MANY OF THE BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

In Scripture we see the perfect example of being fully human, but only in the incarnate Jesus. The one who is fully God is also fully human and displays the grace, forgiveness, compassion and strength of character that humans are meant to strive for. Our humanity, on the other hand, is full of brokenness, failure, mistakes, and dehumanising tendencies. Christians are called to be 'little Christs' but there is a full awareness that this cannot be achieved through personal effort alone, but only through the work of Christ in one's life.

Philip K. Dick's understanding of science fiction was that it was not merely about the future, nor ultra-advanced technology. Rather, science fiction was about a fictional society that only differed from our own by a dislocating idea.

The conceptual dislocation – the new idea, in other words – must be truly new...and it must be intellectually stimulating to the reader; it must invade his mind and wake it up to the possibility of something that he had not up to then thought of.

While the Biblical message is certainly not science fiction, it does contain a conceptual dislocation, an idea truly foreign to the human mind. It contains a message of good news, of hope, of fulfilling and perfect relationship with the Creator of the universe, despite our imperfections and failings. A message which sees that Creator take on human form, dwell among us and show us a different way of living that involves loving one's enemies, caring for the least, standing against injustice and walking with the one who is fully human. 🙏

DR KATHERINE GROCOTT

Fellowship news

Many Congregations are starting to return to regular activities and groups are meeting after long breaks.

The Committee was saddened by the recent death of long serving Committee member Edith Ridge who was a Life Member and had held many positions in her years of service including Secretary and President. She was a wonderful wealth of information, especially for newer members. She was a great friend and a gracious inspiring part of our team and will be sadly missed.

We also share news of the passing of Jan Christie, late of Canberra and sister of Rev Alistair Christie. Jan was for many years very active and involved as Contact Person for Mid North Coast (South) Presbytery organising and planning their rallies and gatherings.

Our sympathy is extended to the families of both these ladies.

UCAF

The NSW/ACT UCAF Synod Committee met in April for its fifth Zoom meeting. It is hoped that the June meeting will be held in Sydney. The UCAF NSW/ACT Webpage has now been updated, check it out at: <https://nswact.uca.au/social/justice/community-engagement/adultfellowship>

APPRECIATION CERTIFICATES

Appreciation Certificates continue to go out to valued 80, 90 and 100 year olds who have been active in their fellowships and Church Communities. Recent requests were from Alstonville, St David's Dee Why and Canberra.

STAMP COMMITTEE

The Stamp Committee continue to collect and collate your used stamps and at our April meeting the total raised so far from November to March this year was \$11,000. A large number of stamps are ready for delivery to Philas

for the July auction. The Committee has looked at new items for our Sales tables at Rallies and Gatherings and we hope to have these available for those planned later in 2021.

OTHER NEWS

The National UCAF Consultation has concluded after a valuable three days in Adelaide. Laraine Jones, Eldrene March, and Judy Hicks represented us.

Great fellowship was shared between the participants from each State and planning and business as the new model of National Committee was begun.

At the conclusion of day three, the new National Committee was sworn in with Margaret Pedler from Victoria/ Tasmania the new Chairperson, Pam Grant Secretary, and Alyson Madsen Treasurer. NSW/ACT will be represented by

Eldrene March and Margaret Gregory.

We were able to take a large amount of donations for the South Australian Fellowship Groups "Packing Day" benefitting indigenous communities in Central, North and West Australia and the "Old Timers Fete" in Alice Springs.

RALLIES AND GATHERINGS

Illawarra Presbytery
27 May at Corrimal

Paramatta-Nepean Presbytery
31 July at Grantham Heights

Mid North Coast (South)
8 September

Macquarie Darling Presbytery
9-10 October at Cowra (Encouragement Weekend)



If you would like to share your fellowship news or have any questions, please contact Judy Hicks: judyh_rnh@hotmail.com

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