

insights

SPRING 2021



*That's
a wrap!*

Synod 2021
Round-Up

**Meet Rev.
Havea Hiliau**
*Moderator
Elect*

*Future
Directions*

A blueprint to
grow the Church

**Calling
all Uniting
Creatives!**



Events & Courses 2021



5 OCTOBER – 23 NOVEMBER

LIVING OUR FAITH

Exploring the New Testament

An Ideal opportunity for a small group, faith community, bible study group, or congregation to spend time studying the New Testament together.



11 OCTOBER – 22 NOVEMBER

PULSE | YOULEAD + DEEP DIVE
LIVING OUR FAITH

Exploring Theology

This 7-week series creatively explores the foundations of Christian theology and how it applies to life and leadership for youth and young adults today.



13, 14, 20 AND 21 OCTOBER

Mentoring for Ministry Development

This 4-session program will equip you as a mentor by working through the Assembly standards and responsibilities of mentoring.



14 OCTOBER

Supervision Across Cultural Diversity

(UCA Trained Supervisors Professional Development Session)
Professional development session which provides an opportunity to hear from a panel of ministry leaders from different cultural backgrounds.



19-20 AND 26-27 OCTOBER

Understanding the Sacraments

A 4-session program to explore the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as celebrated by the Uniting Church in Australia.



2-4 NOVEMBER

Presiding at Weddings

Are you interested in becoming a wedding celebrant, being able to conduct ceremonies for such joyous occasions in the lives of communities?



5-7 NOVEMBER

Songwrite 2021: New Songs for Worship

Songwrite seeks to encourage the writing of exciting new contemporary worship songs for congregations and faith communities.



10-12 NOVEMBER

Presiding at Funerals

This course explores the practicalities around planning and leading a funeral – and combines this with the exploration of the basis behind grief and loss.



13 NOVEMBER

Living Our Values

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

For more information and registration go to www.ume.nswact.uca.org.au

Future Directions for the People of God on the Way



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.

WE ALL HAVE
SOMETHING TO
CONTRIBUTE
TO THE FUTURE
DIRECTIONS
JOURNEY

Why are the people of God in the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of NSW and the ACT, on the move?

In 2019, the Synod committed to 'focus on growth' and asked all of the councils of the church to 're-organise' themselves for growth in relationship, discipleship, number and impact. The Future Directions resolutions recently approved by Synod 2021 represent some initial efforts towards that reorganisation and continued the surprising eruption of energy, momentum and hope that began in 2019. Surprising, because we're in the world of the pandemic and yet momentum and enthusiasm continue to characterise the decisions of the recent – admittedly very long – Synod meeting.

There is work for the church to do in the world that's changing in expected and unexpected ways. Future Directions focuses the work of the church in this Synod towards young people, First People, rural and regional people and – common to the whole creation – the ways that the climate of the planet is changing. All in the context of a global pandemic whose consequences, though still unclear, will doubtless include increased vulnerability for people on various edges, unpredictable and intensified climate events and exacerbate economic disparity. These are chaotic times that call for creativity and hope to imagine our way into a future that looks

like kin-dom for everyone. In the Synod Bible studies, Professor Sathi Clark talked about being '...born again into the wild relationality of the Spirit that empowers us...', a phrase that captures something of the rich possibility of kin-dom.

There are some 'values' that were re-affirmed through the Synod 2021 deliberations. They included recognition that the gifts of God are given to bless, not to hoard; that those gifts can be shared out of a generosity that's grounded in God's grace and mercy; and that we're all in this together ('whole of church') and we all have something to contribute to the Future Directions journey.

There's an argument that says that the journey of the people of God began when Adam & Eve were kicked out of the garden of Eden. That event initiated an experiential learning journey that continues with our own discipleship, wayward and distracted as it so often is. Future Directions is the latest in a long line of Synod mud maps to guide our next steps in the ongoing journey with God.

One of the archetypal stages on the learning journey of the people of God occurs in the Exodus from Egypt lead – for forty years - by the reluctant Moses. In a journey that started with haste as they gathered to flee from immediate danger, they necessarily had to travel light

and leave behind the material accumulations of their lives in Egypt. In a journey that lasted for generations, it's also pretty obvious that not everyone would have reached the river Jordan and crossed over into the long promised land. Moses himself handed over the leadership to the next generation and did not continue the journey.

As we embark together on the Synod's Future Directions journey, we do so knowing that that the pandemic has already had an enormous impact on our community and on the church. While we don't yet know what the long-term consequences will be or exactly how the landscape of the church will change, we probably do know (whether we acknowledge it or not!) that change is likely. The use-by date for business as usual and 'the way we've always done things' is closer than ever.

As disciples, and as faith communities and congregations, there are some important questions to ponder as we get organised for the next part of the journey.

As a disciple, what is God asking of me now – in courage, generosity, sacrifice, imagination and hope?

As a congregation, what does Future Directions mean for us in terms of courage, generosity, sacrifice, imagination and hope? 🌱



14 *Where The Wild Gods* SYNOD 2021

With the COVID-19 pandemic still causing issues for gatherings, and eventually a rolling lockdown affecting much of the Synod, the NSW and ACT Synod meeting took place online.

REGULARS

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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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CIRCULATION: 15,000. ISSN: 1036-7322 Commonwealth of Australia 2020.

MODERATOR'S REFLECTION

Worth Remembering



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.

Many of us are brought from a simmer to a slow boil, as eleven o'clock chimes each morning. Medicos, politicians, journo's and others talk in numbers and percentages about life, death and underlying conditions, while pundits of all shapes and abilities on media – social and otherwise – offer angry comment.

Mostly, we remain frustrated, waiting in our homes and nowhere else. Part of our frustration is that we are unsure of what comes next, of where this season ends, and what life – and church – will look like on the other side of this. At our worst, we want someone to blame, because powerlessness and isolation are not good comrades.

Deeper, there is the sadness for those who are emotionally or physically affected. The growing cases in south-west Sydney and the western part of our state are not statistics, but friends, colleagues and family. They are not them, they are us.

We worry too about our church community. People with whom we would share and sing are reduced to a matchbox on our screens. Together is altogether not.

Through all this, Afghanistan, Haiti, climate change and women's safety are almost airbrushed from our screens because our gaze is fixed on this one thing.

In the face of this turbulence, it is easy to forget who we are. Our response is that we become self-absorbed, worrying solely about our health, our safety, and that of our immediate family.

We become focused on QR code compliance and masks and urban boundaries which have never mattered until now. It is hard to see beyond our own immediate constraints.

An essential part of our discipleship is remembering. On each occasion when we celebrate the bread and wine of the eucharist, we are commanded, remember me. The central act of our shared life calls us to remember the crucified and risen Christ.

Remembering calls us back to ourselves, to who we are called, by Christ, to be. The awe-inspiring news that we are crafted in the image of God; the reminder that at our best,

at our most average and at our worst, we are still loved by God. The astonishing promise that God's mercy and hope address each frailty and failure, and articulate each time we bless others in our turn.

This is why community is so valuable. On the occasions when it is difficult to recall our hope, our faith, there are others who break the bread and share it with us, inviting us to rediscover our value and our call. We are re-membered, regathered by the community as we tell the stories of how has acted, and is acting now.

We have congregations across the Synod who are helping people in their communities to discover hope in Christ, or to remember it. People are being offered food parcels, or phone calls, hampers are being carried to isolated communities and congregations are partnering with vaccination hubs to support everyone who calls through.

Our Ministers are being vaccinated to encourage our Church community and posting it on social media - #lovenighbour – and our parish missions across the Synod are engaging in vaccination and meals and community support for isolated people of all ages.

Our university chaplains are providing pastoral support to overseas students, offering financial support to many in need. I am pleased that the Moderator's Fund is being used in several places in our Synod, in a disaster where there are no fires, floods or drought, but plenty of people struggling.

Remembering, under the urging of the Holy Spirit is about our decision, about our faithful following of Christ. In seasons like this one, the Spirit reminds us of the One who has died and been raised, which is the reason we serve - and proclaim - in the world around us.

I am praying for our church, for all our congregations and communities, parish missions and service agencies, for our presbyteries and for our Synod.

We are in this challenging time, this pandemic, with the living God. We will serve, and proclaim, offer forgiveness and mercy, and live out justice. We will remember the one who calls us, who is always faithful. 🙏

AN ESSENTIAL
PART OF OUR
DISCIPLESHIP IS
REMEMBERING



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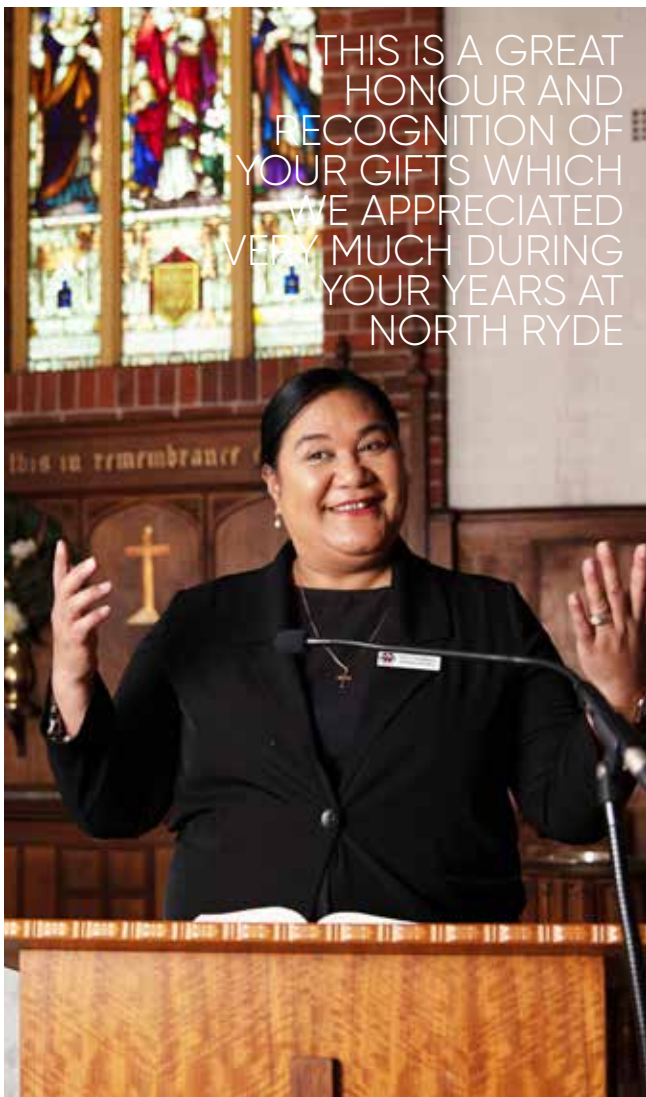
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COMMENTS

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.

IN RESPONSE TO **REV. FAAIMATA HAVEA HILIAU BECOMING MODERATOR ELECT** WE HAD AN **OUTPOURING OF CONGRATULATIONS ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA:**



THIS IS A GREAT HONOUR AND RECOGNITION OF YOUR GIFTS WHICH WE APPRECIATED VERY MUCH DURING YOUR YEARS AT NORTH RYDE

Congratulations Mata. At North Ryde we are very pleased to have been part of your spiritual and pastoral journey. Blessings on this next chapter in your calling and the life of our church.

HOWARD CLARK

Congratulations Mata, it was great to have you at North Ryde, and I will be following your progress in the coming years.

MAX JOYCE

This is a great honour and recognition of your gifts which we appreciated very much during your years at North Ryde. Heartiest congratulations and blessings on your future years of tenure as Moderator.

SHIRLEY HOLMES

Congratulations Mata. We at the Northern Beaches have been so fortunate to have been part of your continuing journey. Your passion and energy will be of great service to NSWACT.

MAX BLACKER

Congratulations, Mata. I look forward to your leadership.

GREG WOOLNOUGH

Congratulations Mata and best wishes for this important position.

ISLAY HOWARD CLARK

Hurray! Congratulations Mata! Great news.

SUREKA GORINGE

CONGRATULATIONS REV FAAIMATA HAVEA HILIAU. TO GOD BE THE GLORY GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE! FAKAFETAI EIKII! GO WELL MATA..OFA LAHI ATU MOE LOTU KIA KOE MO HO FAMILI UI EIKI KE FAI HONO FINANGALO AS A MODERATOR FOR HIS PEOPLE..GOD BLESS

UATE N MATARIA TUPOU

Rachel Held Evans' Final Book to Release



RACHEL HELD EVANS' FINAL BOOK IS SET TO RELEASE, TWO YEARS AFTER THE AUTHOR'S UNTIMELY DEATH.

Entitled *Wholehearted Faith*, it is set for a 2 November release.

In a post on the late author's Facebook page, her husband Daniel recounted the experience of getting together Ms Held Evans' unfinished work, which has since been completed by editor Jeff Chu.

"Frankly, I don't yet know how to market this book," he wrote.

"I couldn't bring myself to read it until just a handful of weeks ago. In 2019, as I sorted through Rachel's laptop to gather the material Jeff Chu needed to finish it, I didn't read the documents. I checked word counts and edit dates and then closed them. While she was still alive, Rachel didn't let me read her work until it was good enough to send to the publisher."

"But she always had clean first drafts because she

edited as she wrote. All I can say right now is: Jeff, thank you for all your work. Thank you for taking Rachel's last written words, previously unpublished writings, and building this polished work of art. It is beautiful."

The blurb for *Wholehearted Faith* reads:

This book is for the doubter and the dreamer, the seeker and the sojourner, those who long for a sense of spiritual wholeness. Through theological reflection and personal recollection, Rachel wrestles with God's grace and love in an imperfect world, looks unsparingly at what the Church is and does, and explores universal human questions about becoming and belonging.

The book is the latest posthumous publication from the author and her last book aimed at adults.

In March 2020, Daniel published an unfinished post to her popular blog, on the theme of LGBTI inclusion.

Rachel Held Evans passed away on 4 May 2019 at the age of 37.

She was known for her advocacy for a more inclusive church.

While researching *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, she spent much of 2011 enacting Biblical verses word for word as a critique of rigid literalism.

In a 2015 piece written for the *Washington Post*, Held Evans suggested that churches seeking to gain younger members need to stop "trying to make church cool."

This, she said, was because churches all too often focused on stylistic factors which were not themselves, "the key to drawing millennials back to God in a lasting and meaningful way."

"Young people don't simply want a better show," she wrote. 🗨️

SHE WAS KNOWN FOR HER ADVOCACY FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE CHURCH

JONATHAN FOYE

Wholehearted Faith is available now for pre-order from Angus & Robertson and Amazon.

Helping Churches Grow

Renewing the vision of congregations with confidence

John Lamerton is a consultant who helps churches find ways to address issues in their ministry and realise their potential. His more recent experiences helping Uniting Church congregations have seen a number of them try new things as part of the Synod's wider growth agenda.



"My background is mostly non-profit leadership, business

development, and project management," he said.

"Since late 2019 I have been an independent consultant helping faith-based initiatives scale and grow. This usually involves understanding my clients'

challenges or barriers for growth and developing strategies or plans to overcome these and I have a passion for God's kingdom growing, so am keen to use whatever skills or knowledge I've gained along the way for those purposes." Over the past year, a number of these clients have included Uniting Churches from across the NSW and ACT Synod.

"In 2020, the Sydney Central Coast Presbytery's Growth and Mission Minister, Rev. Fiona Blair, invited me to help facilitate the New Growth course alongside herself and Rev. Martin Levine. This is a church planting course adapted with permission from the Centre for Church Multiplication in the UK."

"We had eight teams take part over seven weeks in September to October last year and six of those have now started new ministries or launched new congregations."

These congregations include Manly, Terrigal, Tuggerah Lake South, Gordon-Pymble, Beecroft-Pennant Hills, and Woollahra. There is one more in-development in the George's River Presbytery.

"It is so exciting seeing congregations which were previously stuck or lacking self-belief, come alive and renew their vision and confidence in what God can do. God can do a great deal with a little."

"Each new ministry we've seen sprout up is unique and is seeing growth in its own ways, sometimes, it's improved community engagement, sometimes it's faith commitments

like baptisms, and in some instances, its numerical growth."

"One congregation recently told me they had seen 17 new families join them over the past six months and another grew from 12 to 60 worshippers in eight months."

During his time working with churches, Mr Lamerton says that he has noticed a few commonalities.

EACH NEW
MINISTRY WE'VE
SEEN SPROUT UP
IS UNIQUE

"The common trait I've noticed most is the underlying passion within our leaders (ordained and lay) who are eager to get on with the mission of God and try new things," he said.

"Unfortunately, there seems to be a variety of things holding us back and we need to find ways of removing those barriers if we're going to see even wider growth."

Mr Lamerton said he hopes to share some of his experiences with a wider audience through the New Growth course again, should circumstances allow for in-person gatherings to resume.

"We are hoping to run the New Growth Course again after lockdown, hopefully October to November," he said. 📍

JONATHAN FOYE

WOULD YOU LIKE TO LAUNCH A NEW MINISTRY OR REVITALISE AN EXISTING ONE?

Join us for the next New Growth course! For dates and info, email Fiona Blair at: fiona.blair@sccpresbytery.org.au



Belfield Celebrates 100 Years

BELFIELD UNITING CHURCH CELEBRATED 100 YEARS OF SERVING THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY WITH A COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE ON 6 JUNE

With 150 people in attendance, the service acknowledged the work undertaken by the forebear congregations and Belfield's ongoing ministry.

Local Members of Parliament Tony Burke and Jodi McKay attended the service, alongside the Mayor of Canturbury-Bankstown, Khal Asfour.

Ms McKay read from a Hansard extract her prior acknowledgement of the 100th anniversary prior to the event, which she delivered in NSW parliament on 13 May.

"I acknowledge George Hooper, Convenor, and the Centenary Organising Committee for their work in arranging the centenary service, and welcome new Pastor Sunil Baek and his wife Jiwon to the Church," Ms McKay said.

"Happy 100th anniversary."

Work on the original Belfield Methodist Church commenced in August 1920.

The church opened officially on 4 June 1921.

Two 'Victory Trees' were planted to mark the opening, with one of these still visible near Linda Street.

A new Church building opened on 4 February 1968, and the congregation became known as Belfield Uniting Church when Union took place on 22 June 1977. Belfield Uniting Faith Community is nowadays part of the Sydney Presbytery.

The church has since produced several Ministers, including Vic Hayes, William Galt, Harry Brentnall, Tom Hanna, Don Worley, Alan Broughton, Kevin Murray, Garry Hooper, Craig Hooper, and George Ayoub.

The church's current Pastor is Sunil Baek. Originally from South Korea, Mr Baek is a recent graduate from United Theological College.

A LOVING AND CARING COMMUNITY WITH A DISTINCT EVANGELICAL EMPHASIS

Methodism commenced in Belfield with the first House Church held on Sunday 22 February 1920 in the home of Charles and Ethel Playford.

Patricia Thursby, the Granddaughter of Charles and Ethel cut the 100th Anniversary Cake at the anniversary service.

Event convenor George Hooper told *Insights* that the congregation, "has always been regarded as a particularly loving and caring community with a distinct Evangelical emphasis." 🙏

JONATHAN FOYE



LOCAL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TONY BURKE AND JODI MCKAY ATTENDED THE SERVICE, ALONGSIDE THE MAYOR OF CANTURBURY-BANKSTOWN, KHAL ASFOUR.





The wild dream in which 'God is', rejects the subduing and dominating mission that human beings have pursued in the world, Sathianathan "Sathi" Clarke, Bishop Sundo Kim Chair in World Christianity and Professor of Theology, Culture, and Mission at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC told Synod 2021 in August.

In the final of a three-part bible study, spread over the three stanzas of Synod 2021, Dr Clarke moved from the 'wild space' of the kingdom of God to the 'wild synergy of God' that interweaves a radically open human 'kin-dom' and finally to the 'wild dream' in which God is.

"We learn from this biblical creation story that the wild dream in which God is ... envisions and enhances the mission of God that entwines humanity with the beasts and the birds, as well as the land, minerals, vegetation, and waters that constitute Mother earth," he said.

"If human beings do not repent from our ego-centric, me-first and Anthropos-only historical trajectory, which is not in sync with the design of the divine creator, the wild dream of God will continue to be a nightmare for all those who wish to share life together on our blessed earth."

In this study, Dr Clarke drew upon Genesis 2 and its call on humanity as the principal agents of the affliction and health of our planet to "turn around" and "return" to God's original wild dream for all of God's creation? He challenged Synod 2021 with two key thoughts.

"To start with, human beings need to realign with God's original wild dream by taking our rightful place in creation. Genesis 2 offers us a way to "turn around" and "return" to the wild dream in which God is still invested. It describes the intrinsic kinship between human beings and the rest of creation.

HUMAN
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CREATION

Dr Clarke said we had much to learn from the deep and expansive interrelationship indigenous Australian communities have with creation.

"A second lesson from Genesis 2 also has enormous relevance to us. It charges human beings to reclaim our mission within God's original wild dream by joining in with the Divine to tend and keep the earth." he said.

"It is important to notice that Genesis 1 has God doing all the work of creation by the power of a somewhat distant Word with human beings as the last culminating act."

Dr Clarke spoke of his disappointment in not being able to join Synod 2021 in person having travelled to Australia and undergone quarantine only to be foiled by Sydney's latest COVID-19 inspired lockdown.

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. 🌐

MARTIN THOMAS

Prof Clarke will be teaching Contemporary Theology in a Global Context at Uniting Theological College in late 2021/22. For more information visit www.utc.edu.au

ORDAINED UNITING CHURCH MINISTER REV. DR ELENIE POULOS RECENTLY SAW HER PHD DISSERTATION PUBLISHED. *THE POLITICS OF BELIEF: THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN AUSTRALIA* DRAWS ON **CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS TO EXAMINE THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DEBATES THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN AUSTRALIA OVER THE PAST 35 YEARS.**

“I was interested in why and how religious freedom became such a hot topic in public debate,” Rev. Dr Poulos said.

“My academic background is in linguistics, so it was a pretty natural thing for me to decide to explore this by looking at how we talk about religious freedom in public and political discourse and how this has changed over the years.”

Rev. Dr Poulos’ dissertation was a thesis by publication, which required her to produce four articles for academic journals, which formed the core of a thesis.

Each article looked at a different genre of public discourse: the official church submissions to a Senate inquiry in 2012 on anti-discrimination law reform, speeches made in the parliamentary debates on marriage reform from 2004-2017, every report from government and public inquiries into religious freedom and other inquiries that included a focus on religious freedom, and every editorial on religious freedom published in The Australian newspaper.

Rev. Dr Poulos found that there are three discourses of religious freedom in Australian public debate that emerged over three phases:

- the ‘religious diversity’ discourse – phase one (1984-2010);
- the ‘balancing rights’ discourse – phase two (2011-2014); and
- the ‘freedom of belief’ discourse – phase three (2015-2019).

“All three discourses are present to varying degrees at all times, but one is clearly dominant in each phase,” Rev. Dr Poulos said.

“One of the keys to identifying these discourses were the answers to three questions about the way the idea of religious freedom was being framed: what is the threat? Who do we need to protect? And what is being freed?”

“I wanted to explore whose voices were being heard, how they were framing religious freedom and whose voices were being lost or marginalised.”

“What I found was that the ‘freedom of belief’ discourse has effectively marginalised the voices of minority religious groups in the public discourse of religious freedom.”

“The idea of religious freedom, once focussed on protecting people from minority religious groups from discrimination, prejudice, harassment and vilification (the ‘religious diversity’ discourse), has become a powerful tool used by the conservative right to legitimise ongoing discrimination against LGBT+ people and undermine progressive social politics.”

HOW WE TALK ABOUT THINGS MATTERS



Religious freedom debate marginalised religious minorities

In the process, Rev. Dr Poulos argues, the ongoing debate has marginalised the needs of people from minority religious groups.

“How we talk about things matters. If we want to build a society where everyone is valued and has the opportunity to flourish, then we need to be careful to ensure that our language supports and contributes to this in positive and hopeful ways, even when we disagree.”

Rev. Dr Poulos told Insights that she was glad to have the project finished.

“While the first paper was published in 2018, having

the whole thesis available for anyone who’s interested is a good feeling,” she said.

“That the research is proving helpful is very satisfying.”

“It was such a privilege to have been able to do my PhD full-time and I’m grateful for all the support and encouragement I received from so many people along the way.”

JONATHAN FOYE

Rev. Dr Elenie Poulos’ PhD dissertation is available online via Macquarie University.

Building Children's Ministry

The Lugar Brae Uniting Church experience



MOTHER'S DAY MESSY CHURCH

As we work towards a younger, more engaging Uniting Church, the main aim of the Future Directions, *Insights* has heard some inspiring stories from congregations focusing on growing the church younger and developing healthy and courageous congregations. One of these is Lugar Brae Uniting Church.

Rev. Kevin Kim is the minister at Lugar Brae Uniting Church. *Insights* talked to him about a journey that started a decade ago and has become a pillar of their congregation over the last couple of years: an exciting Children's Ministry.

According to Rev. Kim, they started their Messy Church more than ten years ago. They began as they had a few young families with little children in their pre-school and low primary aged kids. As those children grew up, they lost a connection with the young families for a few years, but the kids ministry has developed and grown over the last couple of years.

About nine congregational members are now involved in the team that runs the Messy Church. Thanks to the growing group and young families ministry, they started a new Kids Choir in April with two different rehearsing dates, Thursdays and Fridays.

"Developing the children's ministry has been one of our mission plans. One of our goals in the kids' ministry area was to start and establish a Messy Church," Rev. Kim said.

The group enjoyed the craft activities and games the most, and it made a significant growth up to the beginning of 2020 when everything changed.

Unfortunately, during the first COVID-19 lockdown period, they were not able to gather.

"In fact, we had to wait more than 12 months to have a face-to-face Messy Church gathering in March 2021. At March Messy Church -Easter theme-, we had 30 children and 20 adults, and at the most recent May Messy Church -Mother's Day-, where the kids' choir performed for the first time, we had 26 children and 24 adults attending. As a small size congregation, it has been a great success for us," Rev. Kim explained.

They have enhanced their connections with local schools in Bronte and Randwick through Messy Church and the Kids Choir program. Kids attending both programs are from more than five different schools, strengthening the Children's Ministry.

When *Insights* asked Rev. Kim about a memorable anecdote he remembered, he was emphatic when sharing.

THE KIDS MINISTRY HAS DEVELOPED AND GROWN OVER THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS

"For more than ten years, I have been teaching children a Protestant Christian scripture class at Bronte public school with other church leaders in our community. As we have a big group of students, school teachers help us to run the scripture class," he said.

"There is a young teacher who has always been supportive, kind and encouraging to our scripture teachers. She and our teachers developed a good relationship. When we started the Messy Church again about two years ago, she joined with her little daughter. She was keen to help run a Messy Church and is now a member of our messy church team. A few months ago, she asked me to baptise her young ten-month-old boy, and we recently had her son's baptism with lots of their friends and family attending our Sunday service."



CHILDREN'S CHOIR AT LUGAR BRAE

"The challenge for Messy Church or the 'fresh expressions' movement is how we move beyond fun craft activities to make Messy Church members the disciples of Jesus. This story is significant for us as we have witnessed this teacher and her family have deepened their spirituality through our Messy Church and open to become better disciples of Jesus."

Unfortunately, Lugar Brae Uniting Church could not host the 'Christmas in July Messy Church' nor the 'Christmas in July service' due to the recent outbreak. They were hoping to have a delayed 'Christmas in July Messy Church' in August, but it was not possible either. Two choirs, the Lugar Brae community Choir for adults and the Children's choir, both have practised the songs to perform at this service and are ready to sing in a delayed 'Christmas in July' service ... hopefully soon. 🎵

ANGELA CADENA

Synod votes to plant a new school and congregation

After consideration in discernment groups and questions, the Synod meeting has voted to accept a proposal to build a new Uniting Church school with an attached congregation in Western Sydney.

The motion went to a formal majority vote after consensus could not be achieved. 86 percent of the Synod members in attendance voted in favour of the proposal.

The decision means that the Synod will now proceed in consultation with Standing Committee in preparing a new Uniting Church school in Western Sydney, with a new attached congregation and community hub. The current plan is for the school to be opened in 2025.

According to Dr Glen Powell, the school will be attached to, “a contemporary, inclusive, Gospel-centred church.”

The school would be paid for using a series of loans from Uniting Financial Services (UFS). It would be a K-12 co-educational school. There would be some 70 scholarships and bursaries for students.

The proposal was previously introduced to the Synod meeting on Wednesday 2

June by General Secretary Jane Fry.

There was robust debate over whether or not to proceed and Moderator Rev. Simon Hansford said that there would need to be consideration of those who had been opposed to the proposal.

“Help us hear the voices who are uncertain,” he said during his prayer for the Synod.

In keeping with the usual processes, Synod members asked questions about the proposal. Jason Masters suggested that the proposal would need to make explicit what was meant by “inclusion”. Another speaker arguing against the proposal suggested that the school would be establishing a space for “privileged people.”

As the issue of public education funding arose, a number of participants suggested that there was room for the church to lobby government on the issue of school funding, and advocate for public schools to receive more and better funding.



CONCEPT DESIGN OF THE NEW SCHOOL



“I think we have a responsibility to step up when the government has poor policy, and a responsibility to (advocate for)... better policy,” Dr Powell said.

The proposal will now go back to Synod Standing Committee, who will consider the next steps.

The Uniting Church’s process for meetings seeks to gain consensus for proposals, and then in some cases calls for a vote if this cannot be achieved. 🗳️

JONATHAN FOYE

2021



Where
**The wild
God is**

SYNOD 2021



RESOURCES



Watch all the Synod 2021 videos here:

vimeo.com/showcase/8388836



Watch all the Synod in Session meetings on the Synod of NSW and ACT Facebook page here:

facebook.com/unitingchurchnswact



Visit the Synod 2021 Where the wild God is website:

nswact.uca.org.au/synod-2021-where-the-wild-god-is





Where The Wild God is

SYNOD 2021

With the COVID-19 pandemic still causing issues for gatherings, and eventually a rolling lockdown affecting much of the Synod, the NSW and ACT Synod meeting took place online. The courageous discernment and decision making throughout the six month commitment from members was embodied in this Synods' imaginative theme: *Where the wild God is*. From February to August 2021, Synod members deliberated over an ambitious agenda with implications for the Church's mission and priorities over the next decade. *Insights* was on hand to cover each meeting and to explore what the proposals meant for the Church and its future, as the church worked to discern *Where the Wild God Is*.

RESOURCING THE GROWTH PROPOSAL

Following from the 2019 Synod's approval of the Growth Proposal, the 2021 meeting considered how to resource this ambitious plan. The proposal was introduced during the April 2021 Synod meeting.

Before the resourcing framework was put to Synod members, General Secretary Rev. Jane Fry warned that the proposal was likely the most contentious part of the Synod meeting. She challenged those in attendance at the meeting to liberate the necessary funds.

Rev. Fry said that while simply passing the proposal would not be hard, it would prove challenging to live up to all that the proposal entailed in terms of liberating resources to give life to a contemporary, courageous, and growing Church.

"I'm aware that potentially the Future Directions Synod Resourcing Framework is the most challenging thing on the agenda. The real challenge is if we commit to working together to liberate the funds to bring Future Directions to life," said Rev. Fry of the proposal.

"Future Directions is the Synod's response to the Growth Proposal from 2019. Reorganising for growth means that we can be a courageous and contemporary Church, worshipping,

witnessing and servicing the God who has claimed us and called us."

BIBLE STUDIES BRING THE WILD GOD INTO FOCUS

Rev. 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, gave three Bible Studies throughout Synod in Session.

Across his Bible Study series Rev. Dr Clarke explained that he would "explore where the Wild God is. The space, the synergy, the dream where the wild God is," he told Synod delegates on in April. He would go on to give Bible Studies in June and August.

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

The approved renewal blueprint, Future Directions for the People of God on the Way seeks to prioritise and fund:

- Rural and regional ministry
- Ministry with people in the first third of their lives
- Walking together with First Peoples and to the covenant with Congress
- Stewardship of the earth
- Working with Presbyteries to organise ourselves to promote growth within and through our congregations

Previously Synod had heard that for *Future Directions* to succeed and for the Church to continue to grow and fund its mission, it will need:

- People with the vision, skills and experience to grow the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit
- Programs that help our witness to Jesus Christ flourish
- Money to pay for the people, property, and programs
- Property that supports the delivery of mission and ministry.

The Resourcing Framework paper states: "We propose that the Church commits to our shared sense of purpose as a living Church in mission together and commits to sharing and using our resources to strengthen the Church, as a whole and as individual Congregations, to enable us to continue to bear our unique and transformative witness of the gospel."

The Future Directions Synod Resourcing Framework was accepted by agreement.

SYNOD IN SESSION – A SIX MONTH COMMITMENT

Over six months, the Synod meeting dealt with a packed agenda.

Members met on April 7 and 10 to receive the ambitious Future Directions for the People of God on the Way proposal and resolved together that the Synod of NSW and the ACT would be a contemporary, courageous and growing Church proclaiming Jesus Christ in worship, witness and service.

The Synod in Session meeting on 5 June voted to approve the planting of a new school in south West Sydney, with an attached congregation. This proposal,

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IS THE SYNOD'S RESPONSE TO THE GROWTH PROPOSAL FROM 2019. REORGANISING FOR GROWTH MEANS THAT WE CAN BE A COURAGEOUS AND CONTEMPORARY CHURCH, WORSHIPPING, WITNESSING AND SERVICING THE GOD WHO HAS CLAIMED US AND CALLED US

and the debate surrounding it, is explored on page 22.

The 5 June meeting also discussed Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD). With the NSW Parliament set to debate and vote on legislation later this year, the Synod discussed the possible approaches in small discussion groups.

In June members also endorsed the Advocacy report and affirmed the Home Stretch campaign to increase the age of foster care support from 18 to 21.

On 5 August, the Synod meeting heard a report from Saltbush. The report included a number of comments from people who said that Saltbush had helped them during the COVID-19 pandemic, including through online worship or 'cafes'. The Saltbush team presented a proposal to resource their ministry over a number of years. The Synod agreed to "warmly commend" the proposal to the Standing Committee to consider.

The 5 August meeting also quickly approved the Walking Together Action Plan, a framework that commits the NSW and ACT Synod to a series of practical steps regarding reconciliation with Australia's First Peoples. This plan is detailed on page 11. The accompanying Future Directions Synod Resourcing Framework was also endorsed to assist Future Directions goals in becoming a reality over the next decade.

The Moderator who will lead the church through these changes was elected when the Synod voted during the August meeting. Candidates included Rev. Simon Lee, Rev. Rev. Viniana (Vinnie) Ravetali, and Rev. Faaimata (Mata) Havea Hiliau. After hearing from each candidate on 5 August, Synod members voted.

On 7 August, Rev. Faaimata (Mata) Havea Hiliau was announced as Moderator Elect. For more on Rev. Havea Hiliau's election, view her profile on page 18.

RECOGNISING GIFTS AND GIVING THANKS

Rev. Danielle Hemsworth Smith, the chair of the Moderator Elect Nominating Committee said of the process that

"one of the joys of the committee was recognising the gifts of all who nominated and giving thanks for them."

In closing what was termed by leadership "the never-ending Synod", Rev. Peter Walker pointed out that we should indeed be thankful for the gifts of those who nominated and that we should do the same as a Church, acknowledging the difficult times in which members met noting that it was indeed a "marathon" that began with an induction to how members would meet on the 13 February.

"The oldest Christian documents that we have are the letters of Saint Paul, and all but one of Paul's letters to the churches begins with a word of thanksgiving," notes Rev. Walker. "The oldest of those letters is Thessalonians 1. It begins: We always give thanks to all of you, mentioning you in our prayers, remembering you before our God and Father, you work of faith and labour of love and steadfast love in our Lord Jesus Christ. So I want to give thanks for those who have made this Synod meeting possible."

"Thank you members of Synod for staying the course and your faithfulness, discernment and decision making along the way." 🙏

JONATHAN FOYE AND MARTIN THOMAS

NEW SYNOD STANDING COMMITTEE ELECTED

Along with the new Moderator Elect, the Synod meeting has elected a new Synod Standing Committee.

Alisi Siakimotu, Rev. Amelia Koh-Butler, Denise Wood, and Rev. Simon Lee have been elected to serve two terms.

Andrew Wright, Pablo Nunez, Rev. Robert McFarlane, Rev. Tau'alofa Anga'aelangi, and Ross Johnson have been elected to serve one term.

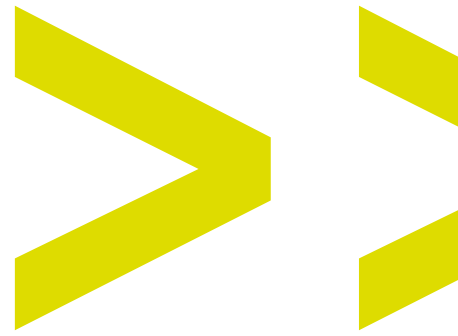
David Barrow, Sharon Flynn, and Danielle Hemsworth-Smith are serving a second term.

Rev. Amanda Hay was elected as the new Chair of ACOMP.

The Synod Standing Committee meets monthly and is elected during the Synod meeting every 18 months.



Daring to Lead



THE NSW AND ACT'S FIRST MODERATOR FROM A TONGAN BACKGROUND PLANS TO BE A COURAGEOUS LEADER.



On 7 August, the Synod meeting heard that Rev. Faaimata (Mata) Havea Hiliau will act as the next Moderator of the NSW and ACT Synod.

Rev. Havea Hiliau told the Synod meeting she was, “deeply humbled and ever so grateful that I have been called by God...to be your Moderator Elect.”

“I thank you for your bold, courageous, risky, and prayerful decision.”

Rev. Havea Hiliau will serve as Moderator from 2023 to 2026. As the next Moderator, she will speak on behalf of the Uniting Church in the public sphere, exercise pastoral leadership, and chair the Synod meeting every 18 months.

Her time in the role comes at a key point in the Synod's life. Faced with declining attendance, the NSW and ACT Synod agreed to a growth agenda at the 2019 meeting that found its strategic focus in the Future Directions Synod Resourcing Framework.

As part of this growth plan, the Synod aims to make a wider impact in the public sphere. The Synod is also underway with its climate change strategy.

Rev. Havea Hiliau currently minister at Northern Beaches Uniting Church. She has already made history as the Synod's first Moderator from a Tongan background.

Paying tribute to her late parents at the Synod meeting on 7 August, Rev. Havea Hiliau said they had worked “to give her a better life in Australia.”

The ninth of 10 children (which she called “a cool Tongan fact” in her interview), Rev. Havea Hiliau says that her faith is something she was born into, but that has evolved through her experiences.

“I was born and baptised into a Tongan family whom were Christian, so that's my DNA,” she said.

“I was born and identified as a Christian. As I grew, my identity as a Christian person has been shaped by my life experiences. I've had great joys in my life experience and professional life, but I've also had many challenges.”

“But those challenges have led me to a place where one could say that I might've been outcast, might've been on the edge or on the margin of what it means to be a Church, to be a part of a Church community. Just because of the context, the cultural context that I was in, and the social context that I was in, I felt quite marginalised.”

“Those challenges, regardless of those challenges, the Church became a place of refuge and also a place of hope and

healing for me. So, I'm a Christian because I have experienced first-hand what it means to be loved, to be forgiven, to be in grace, embraced by the grace of God."

Rev. Havea Hiliau is married to Hakiti. They have two daughters who are 26 and 11 years old.

She was ordained as a Uniting Church minister in 2010. Her next placement was at North Ryde Uniting Church, which she says, "really formed me to see the best of mission and also lay leadership."

"I got to experience firsthand the best of what it means to have lay leaders in the Church," Rev. Havea Hiliau said.

"It also empowered me as a missional Church that we're embracing mission with UnitingWorld, the Christmas Bowl Appeal, Mission Month with indigenous communities, and also places like Kiribati who are being impacted by the climate change.

Outlining her reading habits for Synod members, Rev Havea Hiliau indicated that she had recently read *Dare to Lead* by Brene Brown.

"It's one about courageous leadership, sort of stepping out and leading, and utilising your story of life to lead courageously, whether that be as a mother, or as a friend, as a Minister, and a leader in the Church," she said.

"So it's a book that I've been quite inspired by in recent times."

WHAT CAN CHURCH MEMBERS EXPECT FROM REV. HAVEA HILAU'S TIME AS MODERATOR?

Rev. Havea Hilau told the Synod meeting that she was a preacher and a storyteller, "that will continue to tell the story of Jesus Christ as Lord."

She has previously outlined a number of priorities that she would like to see the church concentrate on.

Another area close to Rev. Havea Hiliau heart is the church's response to climate change.

"As a woman from the Pacific, I'm well aware on the impact of climate change, and the rising sea levels, and what it has on the coral reefs of the islands of the Pacific, to places like Kiribati, a people that might find themselves as environmental refugees in the very near future. How can I, as a spokesperson for the Church, act locally, speak boldly, and be a spokesperson in those places?"

Rev. Havea Hiliau has also previously pointed to reconciliation with Australia's first peoples and resourcing churches throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as two of her priorities.

This, she said, was a matter of ensuring that we loved our neighbours and ensured they had what they needed.

In an interview conducted prior to the Synod meeting, Rev. Havea Hiliau said the Uniting Church could stand to do realise the potential of its multicultural membership.

"One of the things that sets us apart as a Uniting Church, that we are a multicultural Church with 145 different languages being spoken across the Uniting Church in the length and width and breadth of the Uniting Church," she said.



AS AN ORDAINED
WOMAN, AS
A WOMAN OF
COLOUR I THINK
OUR DIVERSITY AS
A CHURCH IS ONE
TO BE EMBRACED

"I think that's what sets us apart and we celebrate that, but I do believe that as a multi-cultural Church, we've yet to reach our full potential on what that means. Not just by word, but also by action."

"Our potential as a multi-cultural Church is our reality. That is who we are, so we're not a dying, aging congregation, but we're a Church that is growing and thriving now and into the future."

"I'm encouraged as a woman from a culturally, linguistically, and diverse background to find myself in a position of leadership within the Uniting Church. As an ordained woman, as a woman of colour. I think our diversity as a Church is one to be embraced."

Rev. Havea Hiliau is far from alone in calling on the Uniting Church to embrace its own diversity. Her candidacy occurred amidst a groundswell of support for a person of diversity to be Moderator. An open letter published on Insights' website and in its Winter edition called for the Synod to support a younger person as a candidate for Moderator, particularly a CALD person. The letter received over forty signatures from across the NSW and ACT Synod.

One of the Synod members who signed the open letter was James Ellis. He told *Insights* that he was happy with the Synod's decision.

"Mata embodies my hope for our church - a church of growth and one which is in touch with the communities it dwells in," Mr Ellis said.

"As someone who was a signatory to the open letter, I was quite happy with the nomination of Mata and the Synod discerning her as our selection for the next Moderator. I think Mata's self-description as a preacher is very appropriate for this office: someone who 'proclaims.'"

"The Synod has a busy future ahead of it, especially with the future directions the Synod has just set. Mata's election shows that the same synod who adopted those future directions also takes them seriously in terms of our leadership." 🗣️

JONATHAN FOYE

Rev. Havea Hiliau will serve as Moderator from 2023.



SYNOD FUTURE DIRECTIONS YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH

In April, the Synod of NSW and the ACT voted to adopt a new strategy for the church's Future Directions. Among its objectives is "a renewed commitment to ministry with people in the first third of their lives" as the Synod seeks to grow the church. The accompanying report for this strategy provides some bleak statistics: only 13 percent of people who attend Uniting Churches in NSW and the ACT are under the age of 50. The Future Directions strategy aims to increase this number to 21 percent. *Insights* approached churchgoers "in the first third of their lives" to ask them about their hopes for the Uniting Church's future.

Rev. Radhika Sukumar-White is an ordained minister currently serving at Leichhardt Uniting Church. Michael Ramaidama Utoni studies Business Management and Community Service, and he worships at Burwood-Croydon Uniting Church. Maddie Dickens is a pastry chef who worships at Terrigal Uniting Church. Patricia Bevan is a lawyer whose church home is Wesley Uniting Church East Maitland. Mikali Anagnostis studies Arts and Science at the University of Sydney, where they are Queer Officer for Christian Students Uniting, and they worship at Leichhardt Uniting Church. Hayden Charles is a managing director for Indigenous Commercial Cleaning, and he is part of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

HOW DID YOU COME TO THE UNITING CHURCH?

Radhika: I was born into the Uniting Church; my parents migrated to Australia from Sri Lanka in the 70s, and the UCA was the natural fit for their Church of South India heritage.

Michael: I [was] a Methodist back in Fiji, and I joined the Uniting Church in Australia because of the Methodist merge.

Maddie: From a young age, once my family moved houses on the Central Coast, we have been attending Terrigal Uniting Church for 17 years.

Patricia: I was always interested as a child in religion and church. My [immediate] family were not very religious [but] I occasionally got to attend

Sunday School when staying with [extended] family. I really enjoyed Scripture in primary school and as I got older, I started trying to work out what I believed in and searching for a group of like-minded people. I did some research, and the Uniting Church was the church that I really felt drawn to.

Mikali: When I moved to Sydney, friends directed me to [Leichhardt Uniting Church] because they knew that I shared its values and that it was queer affirming.

Hayden: One of the student support teachers [at my school] invited me to Sylvania Uniting Church for youth and I was pretty interested in the church after my first National camp in Adelaide NAIYG, which was an amazing gathering of Indigenous youth all around Australia.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE UNITING CHURCH THAT MADE YOU WANT TO STAY/JOIN?

Radhika: The concept that we're a Pilgrim People, our inter-conciliar councils, and consensus decision making does it for me. I also remember the National Youth Adult Leaders Conference in 2012 when we were so moved and inspired by the 1977 Statement to the Nation – I thought, "this is the church I want to serve."

Michael: Staying part of the church... has been a conflicting choice in my mind for reasons that are personal... However, I chose to stay. It has been an interesting and an eye-opening journey as I discover more about my faith, Christianity, and myself... I am who I am, and I am celebrated for who I am in the church.

Maddie: The Uniting Church catered for our family's interests and needs that specifically suited us, and [this] is the reason we stayed and I continue attending today.

Patricia: I felt a sense of belonging. Not so much within the local congregation, where I... often felt myself and my daughters were not always welcome. Most people were welcoming but the minority made me feel uncomfortable. The opportunities when I got to meet people within the wider church were where I really felt like I belonged.

Mikali: I've stayed in the UCA because the church is actively engaged in issues of justice that are currently affecting our world; justice for Aboriginal Peoples, climate justice, LGBTQIA+ rights and acceptance in the church, justice for refugees and people seeking asylum, women's rights... I think the Uniting Church's structure allows us to have uncomfortable conversations about what it means to be disciples today.

Hayden: The reach the Uniting Church has in the community and the fabulous people I've interacted with.

HAVE YOU FELT SUPPORTED BY PROGRAMS OFFERED TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR EXPERIENCE OF THE UNITING CHURCH?

Radhika: Yes I have; National Christian Youth Conventions, National Youth Adult Leaders Conferences, and youth quotas on committees have all worked in my favour, though sometimes it can feel a bit shallow – “Come into the room, youths, but don't say anything controversial!”

Michael: There is no youth group or service in my church, but I could say that from the broader church, yes, I have been supported by a few programs. Being part of Christian Students Uniting, Pulse, and School of Discipleship has been fun and awesome. What a celebration!

Maddie: All through my high schooling [and] into young adulthood, I have always felt supported by the programs offered to us young people through my experience.

Patricia: Not at a local level. There was a Youth Group, Kids Club and Sunday School for younger people and for a while Bible Studies that were really great. But as people moved or those involved grew older, there ended up only really being my three children and myself that were younger, so those programs which... allowed us to create our own space and belong were no longer viable.

Mikali: I've greatly benefited from the Uniting Church's investment in tertiary ministry and am very grateful to the presbyteries and congregations that have sustained those programs. In my experience, different organisations within the Uniting Church, such as the Uniting Advocacy team, Pulse, and previously Uniting Earth, have been very active in supporting and encouraging Christian Students Uniting in our work around climate justice.

Hayden: So much support offered by the members of the UCA and UAICC helping me in my younger years.

WHAT HOPES DO YOU HOLD FOR THE FUTURE OF THE UNITING CHURCH?

Radhika: That we move from palliative care/resuscitation ministry to resourcing thriving, growing communities and ministries; that we keep moving forward as a pilgrim people; that we don't disenfranchise our most precious gift (young people) with politics, bureaucracy and inertia.

Michael: I hope that there will be more youths in the church. To be honest, I have been worried and anxious about the future of the church because of this, however I shall remain hopeful and prayerful.

Maddie: The hopes I hold for the future of the Uniting

Church is that the activities and programs continue to cater for all ages, and that all ages feel they are able to contribute.

Patricia: I hope that the church continues to grow and welcome those who are searching for them. I pray that the welcoming, open acceptance far outweighs any negativity, and that the church continues to value the contributions of even the youngest – before they give up and leave forever.

Mikali: I hope that we continue to have honest and open-minded conversations about how the world really is and how our actions as the church can create change. Mostly, I hope the Uniting Church stays radical; that we remember our identity as pilgrim people and never get too settled... I hope the church remembers our calling to locate ourselves at the margins of society.

Also, as an institution that owns a lot of real estate, I hope the Uniting Church can wrestle with the implications of our financial assets being stolen Aboriginal land... As more of those spaces cease to be used by congregations, I hope that we can inquire deeply of what the gospel requires of us.

Hayden: I hope we connect with the UAICC. The UAICC has a great history and our future is bright. I hope we take the journey to a whole new level.

HOW CAN THE UNITING CHURCH BETTER ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE "IN THE FIRST THIRD OF THEIR LIVES?"

Radhika: By resourcing ministries and congregations with strong engagement with young people – play to our strengths. Also, let's do more speaking out on current affairs and controversial topics.

Michael: [By creating] a space for youths to be heard... [By helping] existing or new families to centre Christ in their family life. Babies and kids will grow to make choices for themselves, but that faith in Jesus is one that can be shaped or planted at an early stage. [Also, by gathering together through storytelling, art, and music:] it's an investment, providing jobs for youths and building a community with an aspect of faith.

Maddie: I believe younger people need to be given opportunities to communicate, share and learn from each other and our mentors, building a rapport and relationships with various members of the church community. Building an understanding of what it is the church represents and responding in relationship with God.

Patricia: For me, the key to engagement would first be [a willingness] to openly converse with and understand the gifts these people bring, and work with them so they feel they belong as much as everyone else.

Mikali: Young people care about justice. More investment into programs that support young people to engage in activism and advocacy will never be wasted!

Hayden: Show the young people the diversity at the [National] Assembly. The floor of the Assembly has members from all walks of faith with experiences they've gathered over the years in the UCA and the business is extraordinary. ...everyone is heard and having a say about the life of the church. ☺

GABRIELLE CADENHEAD
MISSION WORKER FOR
CHRISTIAN STUDENT UNITING
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY





Creative writing as Worship

Creative writing has long been a useful tool for human beings as we try to better understand our relationship with God. The practice enables us to delve deeper into what we believe, find fresh expressions for our faith, and share these with our wider community. Poetry is a tool of prophets as they demand justice; shared metaphors bind communities together; and creative writing allows us to engage more personally and pastorally with our faith than is possible through academic or theological writing.

We could consider the Bible in this way: as a collection of creative texts of a variety of genres, written by many different people in different languages, united by their purpose of pointing the people of God toward God.

We understand our relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit through story: stories that imagine how the world was created using stirring metaphor, stories about a group of people who strayed from and returned to their God over and over

again, stories that proclaim freedom for the oppressed, and stories that illustrate a love so selfless it must lead to the cross.

Jesus himself taught through story. His parables contain rich layers of meaning that cannot be conveyed in any other way but through narrative. Not weighed down by scholarly jargon, the parables were accessible to his largely uneducated followers, using images from their own lives, and they continue to challenge the church today.

Over two thousand years, Christian writers have attempted to comprehend

their faith and the faith of their communities in the context of their own time and place. The result is a literary tradition rich with story, metaphor, and theology, as writers make the Bible their own. Old stories are made new by fresh expressions which draw on different concepts, cultures, and lived experiences.

Hildegard von Bingen wrote poetry in praise of a Creator God. C.S. Lewis carved fantastical worlds in heaven's image. Rachel Held Evans used story to invite her readers into the Biblical text. Rev. Dr Wil Gafney's Midrashic techniques fill the gaps where women are omitted from Bible narratives. Our understandings of God and how we relate to God are shaped by many of these creative expressions. What if we were to participate in the act of creating ourselves?

Creative writing is, for me, a deeply spiritual practice. I create because I am made in the image of a Creator God, because I am compelled to make sense of the world in this way. When I pick up a pen to write about my faith, I enter into a long tradition of Christian creativity. When I am free of my inner critic and truly able to engage with my faith through imagery and metaphor, the Spirit works through me.

Sometimes after an evocative sermon or challenging Bible study, writing a poem is the best way to wrestle with what I have learned. I am often transformed by this process. As I find new metaphors to understand the events of Good Friday or the complex power dynamics between Hagar, Sarah, and Abraham in Genesis, my own thinking shifts. Writing means inviting the Spirit into my creative process and allowing Her to transform me through my own words on the page.

Sharing these words with others sparks deep conversations, and can complement the liturgy in a church service. This is an accessible way to explore theological concepts, through story, imagery, and metaphor. Because of the many layers of meaning that can be drawn from narrative and poetry, each reader or listener will find different elements that resonate with them.

I recently had the privilege of facilitating workshops for the wonderful people of Christian Students Uniting, a four-part series titled Creative Writing as a Spiritual Practice. My aim was to equip our students with the creative tools to

tell their own faith stories in a supportive environment. During such a formative time as university, young adults in the church are widening our horizons and figuring out what we believe, and creative writing is an invaluable practice as part of this process.

Across the four workshops, we participated together in a variety of writing activities. Some prompts invited our writers to bring their whole selves to the page for a weekly check in, others encouraged them to experiment with different forms – from odes to recipes to borrowing the volta of a sonnet – while other activities asked them to engage with different faith concepts in creative ways.

These creative writing workshops were an incredibly rewarding experience. Our cohort

was a mix of experienced writers and people who had lost their creative relationship with the page since high school. I watched students blossom from disbelief in their ability to write creatively, to confidently reading their own poems to the class in our final session; from grappling with creative block to fully participating in the communal ritual of writing together. Many reflected that the writing activities opened up for them something about their faith that they had not interrogated before.

Participant Mikali Anagnostis described the workshops as “a safe space where I learned to turn off my inner critic and explore writing without judgement from other people or myself. It was a valuable experience and I’m definitely going to incorporate a lot of what I learned into my creative and spiritual practice.”

Hannah Roux found that “the process of working on and developing different pieces of writing on related spiritual topics was one I found clarifying and useful – in the spiritual as well as in the artistic sense... One of the things I liked best about these workshops was the context of writing in, for and with a particular group of people about our shared faith and spiritual experience. This helped bring things to the surface for me that I might not have noticed

otherwise, and I was able to engage with those topics in a deeper, more considered way.”

The “biggest impact” of the workshops for Clare Pryor “was that they provided the opportunity for healthy introspection through creativity. It had been a while since I took the time regularly each week to get back in touch with myself.”

These workshops were a creative and pastoral ministry. Baring your your faith on the page is a transformative experience, and I hope that those who participated feel empowered to continue using these creative tools. Engaging

with creative writing as a communal practice also invites writers to connect with each other on a deeper level, as we are each touched by the other’s writing. The vulnerability of sharing a poem or a story with the group bound those of us in the workshops together, like a sermon drawn from the preacher’s life experience.

I was moved by the below prose poem, written by Hannah Roux, Secretary of Christian Students Uniting at the University of Sydney, a participant in our creative writing workshops who is currently undertaking a PhD in English Literature.

Time of the Month by Hannah Roux

At That Time of the Month, I get back pain and often want to lie flat, looking upside-down at the world. I sometimes feel, then, that something strange is moving, in my belly and through me. Something not-me is in me, and my body is writhing under skin. There’s not much I can do about this.

Sometimes I lie on the floor, and my eyes drink in the ceiling. All the world is pressing into my skin and I can feel the sky breathing. Then everything but me is moving, and something is moving in me, and all the world’s pressed in, like fizzy lightning. Eyes closed, I can see everything. Or maybe everything is a felt thing.

At times, it feels like my body is doing things without me. Having its own adventures, keeping its own time. Paul calls the church a body. Sometimes I think this is why. My body does things without my permission – even though my body is me.

Sometimes I find it hard to trust that my body knows what it’s doing. Especially when I’m bleeding, and it feels like my flesh is wriggling. The body doesn’t always know what it’s doing. It seizes up, gets sick, grows frail, is not in my control.

God is another thing I cannot control. But I try to remember: God, too, had a body that bled.

Bringing faith and creative writing together can bear many different kinds of fruit: from hearing a friend articulate something you have felt but never found the words for, to reimagining prayers in a liturgy for the Season of Creation, to encouraging more lay participation in church services.

Sermons are not reserved for ordained ministers who preach from pulpits. A sermon can be a picture book read to children, a poem that commands a congregation’s attention, a letter to a friend, a novel that allows you to escape into a new world and return changed to our own, a song performed by a singer with tears in their eyes, a community play full of laughter, a meditative chant that we repeat until the words are part of us.

Words carry power, and using them to express our experiences of faith, of justice, and of community empowers us. We know ourselves and our God better when we articulate what we believe through metaphor, imagery, and story. Through the act of creating, God re-creates us in Their own image, over and over again. I encourage you to pick up a pen and invite the Holy Spirit onto the page. 🌿

GABRIELLE CADENHEAD

MISSION WORKER FOR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS UNITING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

WORDS CARRY
POWER, AND USING
THEM TO EXPRESS
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JUSTICE, AND
OF COMMUNITY
EMPOWERS US





GROWTH

Some Metrics

HOW MANY DEBTS HAVE WE FORGIVEN?

According to Canstar, the average Australian owes \$3,925 on their credit card, has personal debt of \$21,200 (excluding credit cards and property loans) and has a mortgage of \$540,166. Debt is a live and often oppressive reality for our neighbours (and our own members). It causes deep stress, controls choice, and contributes – for many – to a palpable sense of shame. Debt not only infringes on the ability of people to experience the abundant life Jesus sought for us, but also – in the way that it occupies headspace and time – inhibits people having the freedom to ask, seek, and knock. Fortunately, our Scriptures are also concerned with the reality of debt, and thus the necessity of debt forgiveness. From teachings on Jubilee, to the Lord's Prayer and Jesus' opening proclamation of his ministry in Luke 4 those whom have experienced the liberative forgiveness of God are called to extend forgiveness – not only spiritual but material.

Recently, St. Bede's Episcopal Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico wiped out nearly \$1.4 million of medical debt for 782 households – indeed the medical debt of the entire state. This is the work of loving our neighbours, this is a joyous response to the grace and forgiveness we have received, this is the work and witness of the church. So consider, a metric: how much debt (for neighbours, strangers, members) have we forgiven this year?

HOW MANY OF OUR MEMBERS HAVE FELT CONVICTED TO LEAVE JOBS THAT THEY FEEL ARE NO LONGER COMPATIBLE WITH THEIR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM?

The gospels record people leaving their professions in order to follow Jesus (and in the case of Zacchaeus, redistributing what they have improperly gained through an unethical profession to those they exploited). We also know that in periods and places of the early church it was believed to be incompatible to serve in the military and be a Christian. As we explore what

it means to be disciples in Christ in our time, as we – through the signs, symbols, and stories of the gospel – shape our Christian imagination, it is not inconceivable that members in our church might begin to question if their employment is compatible with the call of Christ. That we might begin to wonder if our employer or industry is too complicit in ecological destruction, in the harming of vulnerable people, in the exploitation of unequal power dynamics, to bound to the ways of the principalities and powers for us to continue with clear conscious, and so, as an act of fidelity to Christ and his kingdom, disciples may chose to leave that form of employment.

There is a related, sub-metric, that needs to accompany this: how has our church structured and presented itself in a way that those who feel this conviction to step out of their employment in faith know that the church will support them (financially, emotionally, and spiritually) through this transition as potentially re-train and seek new employment.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE WE VISITED IN PRISON?

The first teaching that might come to mind when reading this metric is Matthew 25, where Jesus condemns the unrighteous for their failure to attend to him by their neglect of those in prison. In addition to this, I reflect often on the admonition in Hebrews, "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them" (13:3). It is difficult to remember those whom we have never met and whom we have no relationship with – moreover it is difficult to remember those in prison as though we were there with them, if we haven't been there with them.

Sadly, in our society prisons operate in a mode of out of sight, out of mind – placing prisons in often inaccessible places, well out of the way from many of us. This locating makes this remembering and visiting all the more difficult. Yet, this should only spur us on to take decisive action to build relationships with those our society seems so determined to forget.

WE NEED TO
THINK MORE
CREATIVELY
ABOUT HOW
WE MEASURE
GROWTH

AT ITS RECENT MEETING, THE SYNOD OF NSW AND THE ACT REAFFIRMED ITS COMMITMENT TO GROWTH, TO BEING A GROWING CHURCH. FROM THE BEGINNING THIS GROWTH HAS BEEN BROADLY CONCEIVED – YES IT INCLUDES NUMBERS OF ATTENDEES/MEMBERS, BUT IT IS ALSO ABOUT GROWTH IN DISCIPLESHIP AND IMPACT.



I AM SUPPORTIVE OF THIS COMMITMENT AND FOCUS ON GROWTH, AND AM **ALSO IN FAVOUR OF METRICS** – IN FACT, DESPITE OFTEN HEARING CONCERNS TO THE CONTRARY, I AM ACTUALLY IN FAVOUR OF **MORE METRICS**, RATHER THAN LESS. AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THIS DISCUSSION, AND AS A POTENTIAL RESOURCE TO CHURCHES AS WE CONSIDER HOW WE WILL UNDERSTAND AND MEASURE GROWTH, I OFFER THE FOLLOWING METRICS THAT I BELIEVE ARE **WELL WORTH INCORPORATING INTO OUR ANNUAL REPORTS.**



HOW HAVE WE RECKONED WITH HAVING PROPERTY ON LANDS OF UNCEDED INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY?

At the last National Assembly, the Uniting Church recognised the ongoing, unceded sovereignty of the Indigenous nations of this land. Given the recognition of this reality the next important question is, how do we recognise this? How do we grow as a church in our understanding of the history of this land, the legacy of colonialism, and the responsibility of the church to seek to redress the wrongs of the past and present? How do we grow as people of repentance who seek truth, restitution, and justice?

These questions are not ones we answer on our own but in relationship with those whose sovereign land we now live and worship and witness. And they are questions in which we ask with a readiness to be led and directed. Perhaps it involves “paying the rent” as it were with the sales proceeds and rent gained on this land, perhaps it involves supporting programs and organisations established to work of Indigenous justice, perhaps it involves decolonising our liturgies and polity? In this repentance and vulnerability we will have to give up some level of security and control, however this will enable us to grow in our trust in God who calls us to seek the truth and for in the truth there is freedom.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WHO LIVE ON THE SAME STREET AS OUR CHURCH HAVE INVITED US INTO THEIR HOMES?

When Jesus sends out the twelve he orders them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. Jesus’ disciples are sent out vulnerable so that we will not think to rely on our own resources, or think of ourselves as self-sufficient/self-enclosed, but will rely on our neighbours to greet us and welcome us, to feed us and provide us with shelter. Further the disciples are told wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. While, clearly, attitudes of hospitality and home are strikingly different in our time and place, there remains a lesson for us here. Disciples are sent in such a way that they need to (in some form) rely

on the hospitality of, and enter into relationships of trust with, those to whom we are sent.

We are sent to our neighbours (and while this is a conversation for another time, there is a virtue in church’s narrowing their focus to understanding themselves as existing for the closest 200 houses to their church, or the six blocks circling the church) and if that is the case we should desire to develop relationships or trust and ease with them to the extent that they invite us into their homes. Mission is not only about the hospitality and service we can offer, it is about being guests – being able to accept hospitality, relinquish control, and develop relationships of mutuality from which the sharing of life and love and faith overflows naturally. There will be some in our street who will not offer welcome, not invite in, and this is fine – Jesus doesn’t ask us to become combative or to compromise who we are in order to gain this invitation – but we won’t know who will welcome and who will not until we know the people in these households themselves: know their names, their stories, their hopes, their stresses (which might also help us with metric 1).

These metrics aren’t going to be able to be applied whole cloth in each community, and there are many other missional and contextual metrics that can be drawn for the stories and symbols of our faith and developed in dialogue in each place. The hope of this article is to encourage us to think more broadly, creatively, and specifically about how we measure growth than we have previously envisioned and entertained.

Also, as my own act of confession and repentance – as a disciple and minister – I shake in my boots at the thought of being measured by the metrics outlined here. And yet I do, truly, want to be a part of a church that could. And so I call out earnestly to my siblings in Christ for support and fling myself into the wings of the Spirit for hope that I may, by the grace of God, be so bold as to try again. 🙏

REV. LIAM MILLER

PHD CANDIDATE AT CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY AND IS A MINISTER OF THE WORD CURRENTLY SERVING AS SUPPLY MINISTER AT THE FOREST KIRK UNITING CHURCH ON THE LAND OF THE GAYEMAGAL PEOPLE. HE HOSTS THE *LOVE RINSE REPEAT* PODCAST.

UNITINGWORLD

"WE CANNOT JUST PREACH THE GOOD NEWS. WE MUST BECOME IT."

REV. DR MERY KOLIMON, WEST TIMOR



REV. MERY KOLIMON WITH WOMEN FROM A GARDENING GROUP – NEW
TRAINING TO FEED THEIR FAMILIES AND BUILD AN INCOME

Even before she was conceived, Mery Kolimon had a calling.

Her parents, Timorese nationals from one of Indonesia's most beautiful archipelagos, dedicated their first child to God's work even before Mery's mother fell pregnant. It was a promise with a profound impact.

Rev Dr Mery Kolimon is now the Moderator of the Evangelical Church of Timor, leading a church deeply committed to helping transform every aspect of the society it serves.

"I'm glad that my parents promised me to the Church and to the world," Mery says, via a Zoom call squeezed in between many others. She is recovering personally from COVID-19 and leading a team responding not only to the pandemic, but to the worst cyclone in West Timor's history.

"I believe the role of the Church is to be actively emersed in every part of our society: the economy, the environment; socially, politically and spiritually.

It's not enough for us to teach or proclaim the good news. We must work hard to become it for those around us."

It's an absolutely no holds barred approach to the meaning of faith, refreshingly clear about the role of the Christian Church. In a country where COVID-19 is decimating the population and the economy, and where poverty has always stalked families and hollowed out dreams, Mery's vision of the good news leaves no room for debates between word and deed.

"We are here to strengthen people's faith and spirituality, but we can't be only busy with ourselves," Mery says. "Malnutrition, human trafficking, poverty, disaster – how is the Church the good news in all of this?"

The answer lies in the way the Church is responding to its context. Churches offer prayer, trauma counselling and activities to engage children who lost everything in the recent cyclone. Their preaching focusses on finding God in suffering, care for creation and environmental stewardship. They help re-train those

who are in desperate need of an income, offering small business start-up loans and education on everything from livestock breeding to marketing. They've been actively assessing disaster-struck regions to support government efforts to provide help, and have been on the ground providing their own resources like solar lamps, food, clean water, school uniforms and building materials. And they've been in touch with other partners in the region to find out how to build back better.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IS TO BE ACTIVELY EMERSED IN EVERY PART OF OUR SOCIETY

In other words, they're a people with an impact upon every aspect of life. Their ministry really matters.

As the first female Moderator of her church, Mery is often asked what she wants her legacy to be. The Evangelical Church of Timor has

a long history of women's engagement in ministry, with ordination of women beginning in 1959. But what would a church led by a woman in the top job look like, she's asked?

"I don't know if its about gender as much as it is about power," Mery responds. "I see my role as being about empowering others, about how power is managed especially for those who have the least. This has always been the way of Jesus – standing with those who are poor, bringing liberation to those with heavy burdens."

Each year the Evangelical Church in West Timor chooses a passage of scripture to guide its ministry for the next twelve months. This year, Mery says, Ezekiel

37:10 has provided the vision the church needs.

"God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy that the dry bones in the valley would come back to life," she says. "That's our role – to breathe life back into that which seems dry and hopeless. We are building something new for the child who dreams of going to school and can't afford the fees... for the family looking for hope... for the earth itself as we look for ecological renewal."

Mery and the Evangelical Church of Timor are one among many partners who have similar holistic, inspiring approaches to their life together. This month, UnitingWorld is highlighting their work and asks for your prayer and giving as we live the gospel among our global neighbours.

Find out more at unitingworld.org.au/goodnews

CATH TAYLOR
UNITINGWORLD



YOU CAN BE PART OF THE GOOD NEWS OUR WORLD NEEDS!

Your donation will support the inspiring mission of our partners West Timor and beyond. Please visit unitingworld.org.au/goodnews to give a gift today.



MEMBERS OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF TIMOR TAKING SUPPLIES TO COMMUNITIES IN THE WAKE OF CYCLONE SEROJA

Back to Lockdown

WITH MUCH OF NSW RETURNING TO LOCKDOWN FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, UNITING CHURCHES IN THE SYNOD ARE FINDING THEMSELVES IN A FAMILIAR SITUATION.

With churches unable to meet in person, congregations once again find themselves turning to digital services and creative ways of delivering pastoral care. *Insights* spoke to a number of Uniting Church ministers about their experience during the new round of lockdown.

Rev. Manas Ghosh is the Minister at St John's Uniting Church in Wahroonga. For Rev. Ghosh, COVID-19 has proven to be more than a frustrating experience of lockdown.

"COVID-19 is not a statistics to me but very personal as I lost my own dear brother just two months ago in COVID-19 in India," he said.

"I do empathise with all those who are suffering and have lost their loved ones. Also having a frontline health worker at home I understand the stupendous job all the frontline workers are doing. May God bless them with his/her wisdom, strength, courage and protection."

"St John's is following the NSW Government and Health Officials restrictions, and the church is closed for onsite worship and having Zoom services only. It creates some degree of disappointment among its members as people love to worshipping in the church. But the members of St John's are very responsible members of the community

and as such they want to set an example before the community to emphasise the importance and absolute necessity to follow the government's instructions to fight COVID-19."

"In this time of lockdown and social isolation staying in touch with members of the congregation is our number one priority. Myself, our elders, and our pastoral care teams are extra busy in keeping in touch with ALL members especially those who live alone or those who are unwell. We make sure that every hand we are unable to shake must become a phone call we make, every 1.5 metre distance we put between ourselves and another must become a thought about how we could help that other should the need arise."

"It is frustrating but is

absolute necessity to prevent the outbreak of the new delta strain which is highly contagious. It is also a sobering reality that regardless of our scientific, technological and medical advancement we are still vulnerable, and it's a great equaliser as prince, prime minister, pauper, and people like us we all are victims of it. It brings us close to one another reminding us of our common humanity, and hopefully our responsibilities to one another.

Matt Kang is English Pastor of the Sydney Cheil Church.

He told *Insights* that, while it was "a bit of a bummer to be physically separated from our spiritual family," he thinks the congregation has "transitioned well."

Cheil Church are delivering their Sunday services over Zoom. This includes a pre-recorded sermon.

"The pre-record method was intentional on my end," Mr Kang said.

"We wanted the Sunday Bible preaching to be as clear as possible, and we felt that

pre-record was the best way, as it guarantees clarity and quality."

"Our weekly small groups ('Lifegroups') meet over Zoom - where Bible studies, sharing, and prayer takes place.

"Apart from official church gatherings like prayer meetings or Lifegroups, I know that some members are gifting other members with care-packages or food delivery."

"Our congregation is mainly made up of young adults, so being people who are adept with technology and social media, staying connected with other members has come pretty easy for us. Other examples of the 'togetherness' we experience, is sometimes playing online video games together, or gathering friends online for a "virtual watch party" - movies on Netflix, etc."

Located in the Blue Mountains, Springwood Uniting Church is adapting to lockdown by shifting services online. Rev. Leigh Gardiner said that these included streaming the church's regular Sunday morning service, offering a Zoom 'morning tea' after the service, and a regular online 'Messy

EVEN THOUGH
WE ARE IN A
LOCKDOWN,
THE MISSION
OF THE GOSPEL
CONTINUES

Church' service. Springwood are coupling these online services with regular phone calls for pastoral care and mailing worship resources to people's houses.

"When we returned to face to face worship services we kept going with the livestream so that aspect wasn't a problem for us when we were suddenly thrust into lockdown again," Rev. Gardiner said.

"We want to encourage a missional focus so we're about to start incorporating short interviews with local community group representatives to see how they are doing, offer them our prayer, and practical support where feasible/appropriate."

"While we are online, we are endeavouring to improve our technology, and the flexibility of the technology, for the benefit of all including funeral services."

In Sydney's inner west, Newtown Mission has shifted to delivering services online, along with some essential services in person.

The minister at Newtown Mission, Rev Andrew Johnson, told *Insights* that the lockdown had, "brought out such a variety of responses at Newtown."

"The pivot to online gatherings was nearly seamless, as the experiences of 2020 and our increased tech capacity were put to good use," Rev. Johnson said.

"We've felt the impact in other areas though."

Newtown Mission's Jordan

Café has moved to providing free meals from the steps of the church on King St, so as to reduce foot traffic through the Mission buildings.

SECOND ROUND MORE DIFFICULT?

A few of the ministers said that the second lockdown had proven to be more difficult than the lockdown that took place in 2020.

Rev. Andrew Johnson said that the lockdown had impacted Newtown Mission's congregation members.

"The tech questions are easier, but the energy levels are lower," he said.

"Those of our members without secure housing and jobs, or who live by themselves, are finding this time very, very, tough. Without question everyone is finding the uncertainty hard to deal with. How long will this go? Everyone has a guess, but none of us really know."

"The other challenge has been to everyone's mental health. People from all parts of our congregation, and all corners of our community, are finding the struggle to maintain good mental health far tougher than previously."

Rev. Leigh Gardiner said that this resonated with her too.

"It feels tough," she said.

"There isn't the same adrenaline/energy to be doing new things as there was last time."

"We are aware that members are finding this lockdown harder than the first one."

On the other hand, Matt Kang

said that the experience of the first lockdown meant that Cheil Church could use what they had previously learnt.

"I would much rather preach to a physical congregation than to a camera, and I would much rather pray with someone face to face rather than over the phone," Mr Kang said.

"Having said that though, the transition into this lockdown has been much easier than the first one last year as most of our workers and university students are used to the "WFH" or "SFH" life," he said.

COMFORT IN SCRIPTURE

A few of the ministers nominated key passages in scripture that they said they had been reflecting on during the time of extended lockdown.

Rev. Manus Ghosh nominated some of Paul's words as being helpful for him.

"At this time of pandemic I find comfort, strength and hope in the words of Paul," he said.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine [pandemic] or nakedness, or danger or sword?"

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our

Lord (Romans 8:35, 37-39)."

With God's help and with everyone's cooperation we shall overcome."

Matt Kang pointed to 1 Peter as a text he had drawn from.

"A passage that has been on my mind is 1 Peter 1:24, where the Apostle Peter quotes from Isaiah 40 and says:

"All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever."

"There are many unknowns in life. None of us can claim to know what life in Australia will be like in three weeks, three months, or three years' time."

"But what we do know is that God has given us His word, the Bible, and that His word "endures forever."

I am challenged by the Bible because even though we are in a lockdown, the mission of the Gospel (Matt.28:18-20) continues.

Rev. Andrew Johnson said that the Psalms offered an ancient voice that was spoke to the current situation during lockdown.

"One practice we're exploring is to return to the Psalms and listen to the voice of those crying out to God from other times and other struggles," he said.

"We're not supposed to feel happy all the time, and God wants to hear our cries as much as our gratitude." 🙏

JONATHAN FOYE

WITH GOD'S HELP
AND WITH EVERYONE'S
COOPERATION WE SHALL
OVERCOME

Luke 2: 1-2: Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. (NIV)

A VOICE FOR ALL



OPPORTUNITIES FOR MISSION
CAN'T HELP BUT EMERGE **WHEN**
A CHURCH ADDS THIS DATA TO
THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR
COMMUNITY

The idea of a census has been around a while. The census that drew Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem was a far cry from our on-line census experience in 2021.

For those of us experiencing lockdown during August, there was a much higher chance of us being in our usual place of residence than usual, and completing the survey online rather than on paper with a black pen or 2B pencil.

Apart from the usual things - changing demand for schools, health care and aged care in each local area, for example - the census this year will give us an insight into the changing nature of our communities and the impact of changed working arrangements that have impacted various sections of the workforce.

NO MATTER HOW
WE'RE GATHERING
FOR WORSHIP
AND ENGAGED IN
MISSION TOGETHER,
WE'LL STILL BE
ABLE TO HAVE A
SAY ABOUT OUR
CHURCHES AND
THEIR FUTURE

NEXT COMES THE NATIONAL CHURCH LIFE SURVEY

Much more than just a census of religious life in Australia, the National Church Life Survey has been holding a mirror up to the church in Australia since 1991.

For local churches, there are insights for leaders about strengths to build on and areas of potential improvement to work on.

How many current attendees are newcomers? (five percent on average in 2016)

What do members think are their gifts for mission and ministry? (Hospitality was top at 40 percent on Average in 2016)

How strong is the sense of shared vision? (33 percent in 2016)

Are you ready to try something new? (72 percent in 2016)

For the church together, as Presbyteries and as a Synod, **what can we learn in 2021 that will help guide the implementation of Future Directions?**

Which churches are being effective in engaging with Emerging Generations? (According to the 2019 congregational census, 52 churches were leading the way with ministry to children and young adults.)

A heat map of congregations where there is enthusiasm for actively engaging with covenanting with First Peoples, and with advocacy on issues like Climate Action.

Which churches are growing – in discipleship, relationship, number and impact?

How has gathering online in virtual communities helped build connectedness, especially in rural and remote communities?

PUTTING THE TWO TOGETHER

One of the tools the NCLS team has developed based on the community census is a “Community Social Profile” – a report on the community within a certain radius of any address. Opportunities for mission can't help but emerge when a church adds this data to their understanding of their community and is able to compare this to the picture of their membership of the church from the NCLS.

OH, THEN THERE'S PANDEMIC

Our last snapshot of the country and the church was in 2016, while the NSW. ACT Synod also conducted a short-form “census” of our churches late in 2019.

As we move into the last part of 2021, the pandemic is still with us. We're all unsure about how lockdowns and restrictions will impact our meeting together for the rest of the year. While we all hope to pick a week where those who are part of each church community can complete the NCLS while gathering, there is no certainty that will be possible for all of us across the Synod.

No matter how we're gathering for worship and engaged in mission together in October and November, we'll still be able to have a say about our churches and their future. Keep your eye out on the UME website for resources and ideas for running the survey and making the most of your results. 📍

DAVID CORNFORD
DIRECTOR MISSION STRATEGY
AND GROWTH, UME





Living in Community

It was my first O-Week at the University of Sydney in February 2016, and I knew what I was looking for. Uniting Church born and bred, I had no doubt that Christian Students Uniting (CSU) was the place for me. I signed up to the club and attended my first Bible study the next week. Immediately it felt like home: a space of welcome, of challenge, of deep questions and few answers.

After a several weeks of participating in CSU Bible Studies, I sought out a church. Venturing out on my own for the first time, there was a sense of freedom in being able to choose where I would worship – previously, my church attendance had been determined by my dad’s placement as a minister. I asked the chaplain and mission workers of CSU for church recommendations, and at the top of the list was Leichhardt Uniting Church (LUC).

The first time I attended LUC, I ran into a friend I knew through Uniting Church circles in the Hunter Valley and discovered that we had both moved to Sydney for university. When she told me that she lived next door to the church, I knew that I wanted to live there too.

At LUC, I found a congregation full of young adults who took theology seriously, who cared deeply about justice, and who welcomed all. Epworth House is an extension of this welcome, a community largely comprised of students who do life and faith together. With 24 rooms, a communal kitchen, a cozy lounge room, and a rooftop garden, it falls somewhere between residential college and share house.

Living in community at Epworth House was one of the most formative experiences of my life, as I grew into early adulthood and into my faith. It taught me empathy for people with different life experiences and different theological backgrounds. It taught me that my mental health is not something I must bear alone and that it is okay to lean on those around you. It provided a supportive environment for learning to be independent, and for interrogating my beliefs.

While not so healthy for my sleep schedule, living at Epworth House allowed for deep theological discussions at all hours of the night. Whether we were unlearning purity culture, grappling with questions about an afterlife, or discussing the historicity of Jesus, the lounge room always felt like a safe space for exploring faith. It was wonderful to be able to attend church, and then come home to play board games and reflect on the service together.

Christian Students Uniting’s initiative to organise the church for climate action was born out of that lounge room. Jam sessions that blurred the line between worship music and folk music have happened in that lounge room. House dinners have filled that lounge room with food and laughter and light. Deep friendships were forged in that lounge room that I will carry with me for life.

None of this is possible without the support of LUC. As a community of worshipers, LUC welcomes the residents of Epworth House and encourages them to participate in church

services using their different gifts. The staff and elders of the congregation are an invaluable support system, providing practical and pastoral care to residents.

The LUC congregation would not still exist without tertiary ministry, and the influx of young people through Christian Students Uniting and Epworth House has revitalised the community.

Epworth House is one part of a system designed to support young people in the Uniting Church through tertiary ministry, affordable housing, and participation in the worship life of a congregation. This model represents a way forward for parts of the church that own property but whose congregations dwindle in number.

2020, my final year at Epworth House, brought COVID-19 restrictions and a forced closeness, which blossomed into deeper friendships. Toward the end of my time there, I facilitated creative writing workshops for my housemates, to give them an outlet for self-expression in the midst of the pandemic. These workshops culminated in *Unintentional: An Epworth House Zine*, which I edited and Sybil Mendonca designed.

To quote my own editorial, “This zine captures the chaos and the hope of 2020 in a diverse array of poetry and prose, reflecting the experiences and creativity of the residents of Epworth House.”

“As some of us move on to the next chapter of our lives, *Unintentional* is a parting gift to this wonderful, chaotic, caring house of which we have been so fortunate to be a part. 2020 has been a tough year for many of us, but this community has come out of it stronger. This unthemed zine is as eclectic as the people who make up this house, and as beautifully varied as the experience of living here.”

I lived at Epworth House for four years, from 2017-2020. It is a place that still welcomes me when I visit, and which truly felt like home as I was learning what home means. I would not be the disciple I am today without Epworth House. 📍

GABRIELLE CADENHEAD

MISSION WORKER FOR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS UNITING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY



GABRIELLE CADENHEAD LIVED AT EPSWORTH HOUSE FOR FOUR YEARS

THE
LOUNGE ROOM
ALWAYS FELT
LIKE A SAFE
SPACE FOR
EXPLORING
FAITH



Epworth House is now accepting residency applications:
leichhardtuniting.org.au/epworth



Fellowship News

With continuing lockdowns due to COVID outbreaks it has been a disappointing time with all Rallies and Gatherings cancelled or postponed. The NSW and ACT UCAF Synod Committee has continued its meetings by Zoom with the last held in August

UCAF

We were saddened by the passing of another valued UCAF Synod Committee member Beryl Auld who served on the committee from 2011-2019, representing us on Sydney Day Mission Support Group and Frontier Services. She joined us on the Encouragement bus trips also representing the Committee at the Mid North Coast Gathering(At age 85). A delightful gracious and valued member. Our condolences to her family and friends.

The UCAF Synod Committee information is now listed in a new place and comes under the banner of Social Justice: The website is listed below. "Connexion Newsletter" can be seen there. <https://nswact.uca.org.au/social-justice/community-engagement/adult-fellowship>

The new style UCAF National Committee has met by Zoom and its second meeting occurs in a few days. We as a State Committee are already getting information and minutes. The World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women is also meeting in August with some UCAF Committee members attending by Zoom. No applications were received for The Joan Stott Bursary for 2022.

Parramatta-Nepean UCAF Committee has unfortunately had to disband, and their farewell Gathering at Grantham Heights was cancelled because of Sydney Lockdown. We thank the committee for their service and especially Jan Dunstan for regular input on activities. Rev. Noreen Towers is working with others to explore other formats so contact can continue.

In the Hunter Presbytery the planned Retired Ministers luncheon at East Maitland UC and Gathering at Hamilton Uniting Church were also cancelled. Macquarie-Darling Encouragement weekend with Gathering at Cowra has also been cancelled.

It is disappointing for many who love the Fellowship and time together these events hold.

The UCAF Synod Committee is also keen to find interested Uniting Church Delegates to represent us at the following three groups/associations: Pan Pacific and South-East Asia Women's Association(Meets 10.30 am last Wednesday of the month), National Council of Women NSW (Meets last Thursday of the month 4.30 pm) and World Day of Prayer. These groups have meetings in Sydney.

If you would like to know more or are interested in being our representative at any of these meetings, please email me at the address below. References will be required.

STAMP COMMITTEE

The Stamp Committee has met to allocate Grants for 2021 and over \$31,000 will go to Congregations and Groups who meet certain criteria. Congratulations. It is a wonderful outreach, and it's so simple for everyone to just keep collecting used stamps.

Stamp Albums are also collected and Committee members attend auctions for best outcomes. Appreciation Certificates still available for 80-, 90- and 100-year-olds who have been active and involved in your Church Communities. They have been so well received.

Stay safe everyone. 🙏



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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Gabby Cadenhead, Resident 2017-2020,
Christian Students Uniting Mission Worker,
Poet & Composer.



Keeping Faith
Doing Justice
Building Community



PULSE

Being the Church

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND MOVING TO A PLACE OF TRANSFORMATION



ATTENDING ISN'T WHAT THEY ARE
ACTUALLY LONGING FOR, THEY ARE
LONGING FOR A COMMUNITY TO
BELONG TO

So I shouted out to some of my friends who have families or who work with families in the UCA to see how they felt about the Future Directions decision of the Synod. The first question I asked was what would you like the Church to know?

The responses were intermingled between working from home, home schooling and trying to be faithful in an overwhelming COVID situation. Life is always crazy busy for families no matter where they live and what they are trying to balance, and like many families before them, balancing Church life, children's life, and work commitments means that once a month is actually seriously understood by the church as regular attendance.

But attending isn't what they are actually longing for, they are longing for a community to belong to. People who will wrestle with them about faith and what it means in their work situation and in their families, not in a judgmental way, but an earnest wrestling together. People who will inspire the best in them and grieve in their suffering, and be grace with them in all of our failings. This is really what it means to be Church, the verb not the noun.

So how did they feel about the Church's decision? It was nice to hear a bunch of people who were tired and broken by the Church at times sounding hopeful. I must confess there is a little skepticism in their voice as they hope that maybe this time the church is actually going to put something in place to prioritise young people and ministry with people in the First Third of life.

Their hope that we will start to see more young people in leadership, real leadership, being paid and valued for their ministry in a way that they can afford to live.



OUR FAMILIES LOVE OUR CHURCH, THEY REMAIN BECAUSE OF THAT LOVE, THEY LONG TO SEE THEIR CHILDREN DISCIPLINED AND GROWN IN THE UNITING CHURCH

Their hope that the Church will slow down just a little to make sure it has listened to those young people and families even if it means someone needs to go and meet them for a coffee, or takes the time to make a phone call.

Their hope that as they share in a committee, the committee will listen to new ideas, even if it is hard to understand, or something they haven't heard of before.

We all know that these great plans are amazing, our hope and prayer is that the whole church can make the cultural changes needed to be able to bring this into reality.

Our families love our Church, they remain because of that love, they long to see their children disciplined and grown in the Uniting Church and for the church to grow. The Synod's decision says this is important to us as a whole Church as well.

COVID has moved us very quickly to a place of transformation, this gives us an incredible opportunity to do new things in new way, God is doing some amazingly courageous things.

To quote a parent - "Those are some big changes. This gives me hope!"

REV. KAREN MITCHELL LAMBERT
PULSE LEADER





BELIEF MATTERS

RESURRECTING SIN TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

RECENT INFERNOS IN CALIFORNIA
AND FLOODS IN GERMANY REMIND US THAT
CLIMATE CHANGE IS A GLOBAL DRAMA
WHICH MAY END IN UTTER TRAGEDY
FOR THE WHOLE CREATION
IF WE DO NOT ACT

Just as when a finger bumps a spinning top from its perfect rhythm, and the rotating toy then teeters out-of-balance before finding a new equilibrium or collapsing, the Earth System has been bumped out of balance. And not by accident, but by a willing, decision-making species. That's us. Earth System Science tells us this planet is finely tuned, yet one species has been serving its own needs to such an extent that the cost to everything else has become intolerable. And it is showing.

Human impact on the Earth System is caused primarily by our disruption of an enormous quantity of carbon from its settled state within the Earth. The process is profoundly unnatural and yet has become second nature to the industrialized world for over two hundred years. Oil and coal (liquid and solid carbon) are mined from the Earth, burnt in engines and smelters, and the previously unharmed carbon in the soil below is turned into harmful carbon dioxide in the sky above. That layer of carbon dioxide is creating a greenhouse-like effect. Heat is held within the Earth's atmosphere, unable to escape the carbon layer, and the planet's temperatures have risen, and continue to rise. We know we are contributing to this unfolding catastrophe.

The concept of sin has almost entirely disappeared from public discourse, and even from thoughtful church discussion. Reinhold Niebuhr wrote in *The Nature and Destiny of Man* that "the Christian view of human nature is involved in the paradox of claiming a higher stature for human beings and yet of taking a more serious view of their evil than any other."

What did Niebuhr mean? Principally that Christian theology finds human beings a confounding contradiction. We are the likeness of the Creator, according to the Book of Genesis, yet characterised by selfishness, disunity, and brutality. How is it that human beings are capable of astonishing goodness as well as appalling cruelty? The doctrine of sin seeks to address this paradox.

The essential goodness of humanity is theologically bound to the concept of the imago dei, that we have been set within creation to be a reflection, or image of God. It is via the doctrine of sin that Christian theology seeks to understand why that reflection has been fractured: why human behaviour has perennially presented a dark contradiction to belief in our essential goodness.

The depth of the Christian concept of sin is not touched if sin is understood as a series of wrongdoings. Rather, we are nearer the meaning of sinfulness when it is viewed as a condition. Our acts of selfishness, injustice, and violence are the outward sign of a greater problem. Martin Luther King Jr described sin as "the universality of the gone-wrongness of humankind". The sixteenth century Reformer, after whom the civil rights leader was named, described sin as *homo incurvatus se* (the person turned in upon the self).

As strange as the language of Christian theology may seem in the public square today, the human-induced climate emergency, brought about by our selfish abuse of the planet, surely requires a resurrection of the language of sin.

WE ARE THE
LIKENESS OF
THE CREATOR,
ACCORDING TO THE
BOOK OF GENESIS,
YET CHARACTERISED
BY SELFISHNESS,
DISUNITY AND
BRUTALITY



There was speculation in early 2020 that Pope Francis might name humanity's abuse of the Earth as sinful in his statement on the plight of the Amazon. He did not. In *Querida Amazonia* (*Beloved Amazon*), Pope Francis did denounce the unrestrained industrial destruction, saying "The businesses, national or international, which harm the Amazon and fail to respect the right of the original peoples to the land and its boundaries, and to self-determination and prior consent, should be called for what they are: injustice and crime." That language of "injustice and crime" is powerful, yet it is not the most inherently powerful language available to Christian leaders.

The abuse of the Earth is a sin. The climate emergency has come about because of our sinfulness. It is a sign, and may prove the most telling of all signs, of our universal gone-wrongness, and of the fact that humanity has turned in upon itself. Calling people to prayer for the planet without naming the sin that makes those prayers and global action to save the planet essential is a profound moral and theological failure. 🌍

REV. DR PETER WALKER
PRINCIPAL OF UNITED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

STUDY CHAPLAINCY & SPIRITUAL CARE



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LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

SEPTEMBER

What's so funny about faith, love, and understanding?

MARK 9:38-50

Jesus and John are discussing the issues of what we would now call denominational squabbles and what the standards by which they should be held by outlining points of accountability.

John tells Jesus that they tried to stop a group of people from casting out demons in His name, and Jesus says that this is perfectly fine by him.; if people are doing good things in the name of Jesus, then that's a net win. When good things are done, then the Christian message goes wider.

As far as accountability, Jesus tells John that if his hand causes him to stumble then he is to cut it off; and then continues to outline other examples of how it's better to be without a limb than to retain both and cause harm to the wider community due to vanity.

But what if we as Christians don't practice this accountability? What if we don't hold others to the same standards

we hold ourselves to? What happens if Christians start carrying out abuse of the people they are commanded by Christ to minister to and liberate from oppression?

It's easy to look at pieces in this passage from a predominantly white, largely straight, almost completely cisgendered perspective and take away from it things like Christians demonising the LGBT community. Or blaming the poor or sick for their circumstances because they don't have enough faith in God, and overlooking at what's happening in Israel and Palestine.

Even from this perspective, as easy as it is, we'd need to do some serious re-thinking about whether or not this is placing a stumbling block in front of people, or creating an unnecessary chasm for people to overcome.

Sometimes the silence is obscene, or worse when speaking up is met with comments like "we shouldn't be calling out our brothers and sisters."

At what point does accommodating a "broad church" become platforming hate? It's hard to imagine an honest adherence to the gospels that sees Christians supporting the removal of transgender healthcare from a group that already experiences a rate of attempted suicide around 40 percent. So many of my trans peers don't make it because of how hard it is to live their lives faithful to who they are, to how God made them...

It's time all of us started stepping up, to put into action what we read in authors like Dave Andrews and Ched Myers, to say we need more than just words in a sermon or reflection to remind us to be better.

What are the steps we could take in our own lives to fix these problems? How do we have conversations that tackle these things in our own circles? 🗨️

Music Reference: Tool 'Descending' / Anberlin 'Hearing Voices'

SARAH ALICE ALLCROFT
LAY PREACHER

IF PEOPLE ARE
DOING GOOD THINGS
IN THE NAME OF
JESUS, THEN THAT'S
A NET WIN



LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

OCTOBER

An under-appreciated and complex miracle

MARK 12:28-34

When Jesus and the disciples are departing Jericho they came across a Blind man named Bartimaeus, sitting by the side of the road. Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus for help, to be healed, and even though the crowd tries to silence the man, Jesus goes to him. What happens is that Jesus completely disregards what the crowd thinks and heals the person they considered completely unworthy.



Unpacking the text and looking at what's really happening is a complicated thing. How much do we understand the culture, the law of the day, and the way in which people with disabilities were treated when these things were taking place? If we look solely at the performing of a miracle, in this case making a blind man see, then we ignore the act of civil disobedience and liberation taking place quietly underneath it. If we look at this purely as an act of mercy, we risk reinforcing the notion that there is an impossible to cross divide that separates humanity from Christ, and this betrays the demonstration of how not-so-impossible that divide is to cross in Peter's walking out to Jesus on the water.

But read together as a whole, it's hard not to see that all things are connected, woven with a thread to link Jesus' discussions with the disciples, His constantly being challenged by the Pharisees and temple priests, and the miracles He would perform along the way speak not just to the liberation of the oppressed as individual through healing, but also the healing of a society that had become so unjust and broken through the things that it had become "blind" to.

BEING A CHRISTIAN
ISN'T JUST ABOUT
BEING "SAVED". IT'S
ABOUT LIVING OUT
THE MISSION OF
CHRIST

How many of these miracles can we unpack in a similar fashion to find that there may have been more going on beneath the surface? Another example would be to look at Jesus' healing of the paralysed man at Capernaum where the tension between Jesus and the powers that be are more in focus. The act of a multifaceted liberation is more obvious as He calls out the forces of oppression employed by the Pharisees in segregating people based on sickness and perceived sin where his response to the anger of the Pharisees was to ask if it's easier to forgive a person their sins whatever they be or tell them to get up and walk?

There is a lot here that should make us want to reflect on ourselves and our relationships, but also how we give a pass to not just churches, but organisations and politicians who need to do better toward the marginalised and those on the fringes. Being a Christian isn't just about being "saved" or redemption because you yourself made the choice to become a Christian; it's about living out the mission of Christ.

Whether you advertise it or not is completely irrelevant, it's what you actually do with the knowledge and examples given. What's the point in being a Christian if we're only going to

use it as a license to say we're better than someone else, or to continue the cycle of liberation and oppression we see carried out through not just the Bible as a whole, but history that repeats afterward? These things matter in who we vote for and why, how we spend our disposable income, who we donate money to. Are these in any way kingdom building things, or are they oppressive empire things with the thin veneer of sanctity?

These are hard questions for hard times, but imagine for a moment being someone who is impacted by actions and policies carried out by people who advertise themselves as something and completely fail to live up to the expectations that the declaration comes with.

Hopefully in the midst of the upheaval resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the beginning of the effects of climate change becoming more apparent we rediscover our capacity for selflessness and grace.

These are times when we should be looking to not just claim to be followers of Christ, but actually reach out and live that mission. 🙏

Music reference: Pink Floyd's 'On The Turning Away' was an integral part of this coming together. Maybe worth a listen/read of the lyrics.

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

NOVEMBER

Beware that no one leads you astray..

MARK 13:1-8

The disciples stood in awe of the architecture and stonework of the city, the grand designs of Empire all around them, but Empire things always come with Empire prices.

The cost of these things isn't always immediately recognisable, and it usually comes in the form of not just a monetary cost, but a cost to others. Our lives, whether Christian or not, is a somewhat nerve wracking tightrope walk of trying to balance our wants, desires, and needs against the harm it causes others.

Apocalyptic statements are tricky, we all want to know about what's to come, and Jesus is intentionally coy on the topic. It's this air of mystery and unknown that pulls people in, but it's not the point the teacher is trying to make.

Kingdoms rise, kingdoms fall, and everything that has a beginning will end. If there's one certainty in the universe, this is probably it. This wasn't even the point He wanted to emphasise even though it was this they wanted to hear about.

Instead? He tells them to be careful and not be led astray. There will be people who claim to speak on behalf of or even claim to *be* Jesus, but it will always lead to no good, and he emphasises later in Mark 12:38-24 the sort of thing to be wary of: the rigid adherence to the law of the temple priests, the ruthless morality, the need to cloak themselves in excess and extravagance.

We see this now, and the worst of them will call for discrimination, violence, and hatred under the supposed justification of scripture, relying on the ignorance of people who back them not having engaged with the texts on any meaningful level themselves.

The curious part is how this is tied to people's perceptions of the always imminent end-times and ratcheted up to fever pitch, so as to justify and excuse the enthusiasm with which people engage in methods of "conversion", and failing that, vilification.

This is what being led astray looks like.

My advice? Walk away from it and focus on grace, on compassion, on love without condition or fear. Meet people where they are at. Learn the difference between 'eros', 'filio', and 'agape'. Fill your life with moments that build people up instead of tearing them down.

Be a voice for the oppressed, especially when that oppression is happening in places that ought to know better.

These are the kingdom things that Jesus pulls us toward, and these are the things that last when everything else has been swept away.

If nothing else, err on the side of grace; it's going to be easier to explain than demonising the vulnerable and saying you were just doing what you were "told" in the scriptures. 🙏

Music Reference: PJ Harvey's 'Missed'.

SARAH ALICE ALLCROFT
LAY PREACHER

FOCUS ON
GRACE, ON
COMPASSION, ON
LOVE WITHOUT
CONDITION OR
FEAR





Uniting Creative calls on emerging artists

Throughout September to December, Uniting Creative will be taking a cohort of creatives through a writing, recording, and production program with David Gungor (The Brilliance). Mr Gungor is a writer and mentor who works with worship artists in New York.

The program will consist of a series of gatherings, which are planned at this point to include online and face-to-face interactions (as restrictions allow).

He said that those who joined the program could expect, "A collaborative community of artists who take creative risks to best tell the story in fresh ways."

"We do this by commissioning artists and craftsman to tell the story of God with beauty and imagination," he said.

"We will be doing a series of gatherings both in person and digitally, as well as song writing cohorts."

"We are attempting to create a safe environment for artists to experiment and learn together."

In July, Tash Holmes began work as the Worship Project Facilitator role with the Mission Enablement Team, a position created by Uniting Mission and Education that aims to gather, inspire, and equip emerging artists.

"It is an opportunity to mentor and cultivate the gifts of people from all

facets of the Uniting Church: across generations, cultural groups, and diverse stylistic frameworks," Ms Holmes explained.

"As the Uniting Church affirms their commitment to be a contemporary, courageous, and growing church, our creativity, our music has the incredible opportunity to inspire, uplift and reach many lives. Our goal is to build capacity and momentum to develop creative leaders as we 'weave a new sound' in and through our churches."

Toward the end of 2020, Uniting Creative released 'All of This is Us', celebrating the rich diversity, advocacy for justice, and genuine welcome for all that is at the heart of our church.

"It's important for our church to sing songs that speak to who we are, our story, pilgrimage and courageous call to 'lengthen the table of our church.' Our vision is for the holy creativity to take its place & follow its call alongside our church leaders. To write the sacred soundtrack of our journey, let music through the spirit hold us when we cannot stand,

uplift us in hopelessness and anchor us when we feel lost."

During the 2020 lockdown, a number of Uniting Church creatives worked together on music projects. Ms Holmes said that Uniting Creative were hoping to recapture that during the current lockdown (at the time of writing).

"Yes, lockdowns are always challenging times, but we are moving forward as much as we can through creative Zooming groups, co-writing sessions, and rehearsals," she said.

Mr Gungor also said he was looking forward to working with emerging artists.

"I think emerging artists often are open to taking creative risks in fresh ways," he said.

"I also love being able to be a part of a community that values creative feedback."

"We use music to tell the story of God, with artistry, to inspire the Christian imagination.

We use music to help tell, receive, and join in the story of the Trinity."

In an interview, he recalled the recent time when he got

to play some music together with friends for the first time since the COVID pandemic began.

"The emotions seemed to be so high, and there was so much love and gratitude with

IT'S
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TO WHO
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OUR STORY,
AND OUR
PILGRIMAGE

tears of grief and joy," he said.

"I can't begin to express how powerful it was to be able to make music again with people that you love."

According to Ms Holmes, Uniting Creative are calling on, "all writers, singers,

musicians, and creatives to come together as we gear up to connect, grow, and launch new music throughout 2021."

She said that long term plans for Uniting Creative includes an online platform to host existing artists, local church music releases, and collaborations. Ms Holmes said she was also keen to create a "one stop shop" for congregations to access music resources all in one spot. 🎧

JONATHAN FOYE

JOHN ARNDT AND DAVID GUNGOR OF THE BRILLIANCE JOINS UNITING CREATIVE'S COHORT FOR 2021



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For more information about Uniting Creative, contact Tash Holmes:

Natasho@nswact.uca.org.au

ENTERTAIN ME



A NEW 80S ERA NEWSROOM DRAMA SET IN THE MIDST OF SOME OF THE MORE CAREER-MAKING STORIES IN TELEVISION HISTORY, THE NEW ABC DRAMA *THE NEWSREADER* RECALLS MANY CHARACTER-DRIVEN DRAMAS BASED AROUND THE NEWS WHILE ADDING A UNIQUELY AUSTRALIAN SPIN.

THE

NEWSREADER

STARRING: ANNA TORV, WILLIAM MCINNES, SAM REID



Like *Morning Wars* starring Jeniffer Aniston and Reese Witherspoon, and before it *The Newsroom* starring Jeff Daniels, this is a unique look at broadcast television in Australia when you could lose a story because the Betamax player chewed the master tape. Before social media and even online news it was a time when the evening bulletin was the news and had people glued to their television.

The Newsreader is a terrific ensemble piece with a who's who of Australian actors.

The central characters are Dale Jennings (Sam Reid), a news reporter with aspirations to being anchor and co-anchor of the nightly news bulletin Helen Norville (Anna Torv), who represents everything Dale aspires to but wants to be taken seriously as a journalist. Norville battles the male-dominated field before

#metoo even existed. She's glamorous, poised, and delivers the News at Six – alongside 30-year veteran Geoff Walters (Robert Taylor).

Off-air, though, Helen deals with the bullying, ranting and undermining tactics employed by newsroom boss Lindsay Cunningham (William McInnes), it's little wonder. McInnes is unrecognisable from his *SeaChange* days as the blowhard bully directing everyone in the newsroom.

In the maelstrom of the daily news grind Dale and Helen form an unlikely partnership that develops into romance.

THE NEWSREADER IS A TERRIFIC ENSEMBLE PIECE WITH A WHO'S WHO OF AUSTRALIAN ACTORS

It turns out 1986 – when the series is set – was a big year for news that shaped the world with events such as the AIDS crisis, the Challenger space shuttle disaster, the Russell Street bombing, Lindy Chamberlain's release from prison, Halley's Comet and the Chernobyl disaster. Rather than making commentary on these events the series uses them as a backdrop for back door politics and workplace drama, all the while highlighting the sexism, sexual harassment, homophobia, and racism that was rampant in the industry at the time.

Created by Michael Lucas and directed by Emma Freedman and backed by a top-notch cast, this is the sort of prestige drama that ABC is known for. 📺

ADRIAN DRAYTON

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