

# insights

Autumn 2023

he is  
not here  
he is  
risen  
*Matthew 28:6*

## Easter Hope

Christians  
for Voice  
and Justice

Refocusing  
during  
Lent



Nobby's Beach  
Port Macquarie 2022  
Rev. Dr Rod Pattenden





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## WELCOME FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

# Restoration, Renewal and Resurrection



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.

The world seems to hunger for certainty, to have things tied down, under control. And when the ‘thing’ – the current concern, the situation – becomes too big for our limited, fearful imaginations, we distract ourselves by focusing on the details (relevant or not) and leave the big picture, God’s vision, to fend for itself. Thankfully, God is not limited by our limitations.

The season of Lent and the traditions associated with Lent is the church’s way of inviting us to pay attention to our individual and collective failures of grace and imagination. It is a

sombre and solemn season, that demands serious engagement and requires us to get real about faith

and life. I think that it requires us to face up to things that we have generally preferred to sweep under the nearest carpet. In other words, Lent is not a feel-good season. It’s not susceptible to the Hallmark treatment and can’t be summarised in sentiment.

The public conversation about the Voice to Parliament and the constitutional recognition of Australia’s First Peoples is illustrative. We know, and have known for a very long time, about the violence and oppression which is part of the history of this country. We know about the impact of policies that created the Stolen Generations and the impact that experience had on First Peoples. We know about Aboriginal deaths in custody and we know about continuing disproportional rates of Aboriginal incarceration. We know about Aboriginal life expectancy and the very mixed effectiveness of ‘Closing the Gap’ initiatives. It’s easy enough to come up with this list – what it doesn’t capture are the personal stories of generational pain and trauma which have left deep scars on the soul of a whole people. And yet we’ve been generously invited into this journey with First Peoples through the Statement from the Heart. The Voice to Parliament is one step along that journey.

Tragically, the experience of Australian First Peoples is common among Indigenous people all over the world. I read recently about the journey for healing – the ‘trail of tears’ – undertaken by the Lakota people of north America. This was a ‘voluntary act of

penance undertaken in an effort to restore the sacred hoop of their people, and to pray for the healing of Grandmother Earth.’ The journey was undertaken in blizzard conditions when the temperature was -24°F. Their destination was the graves of those who had died at Wounded Knee. I find it simply extraordinary that the Lakota, a people who have had to drink the cup of suffering over many generations, should voluntarily take on yet more suffering in their search for healing and restoration or feel any need for penance given what they’ve experienced. Their story is an uncomfortable reminder for all of us.

### REPENTANCE IS THE NECESSARY PRELUDE TO **TRANSFORMATION AND RECONCILIATION**

The Lenten journey towards Jerusalem and Holy Week is the church’s ‘trail of tears’. Lent call us to face the facts of our – individual and collective – lives. To quote a familiar prayer,

*...we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,*

*we have broken your holy laws,*

*we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,*

*and we have done those things which we ought not to have done...*

My experience worshipping in different congregations over the last few years is that there seems to be a trend towards a Lent-lite, reflected in the absence of any recognisable prayer of confession and a general tendency to downplay the necessity of repentance.

While this might be understandable – no one wants to face uncomfortable truths – it’s also dishonest. Any number of biblical stories point to repentance being the necessary prelude to transformation and reconciliation (check out the Prodigal Son story as an obvious example). Repentance is not optional, it’s foundational.

We should all be concerned if there really is a trend towards Lent-lite. It may be painful to face facts and fears, but it is the only way to strip away the deceits by which we hide from ourselves, from each other and from God. It is the gateway to restoration and renewal and, ultimately, resurrection.

Have a blessed Easter! 🌱

<sup>1</sup> Maggie Ross *Writing the Icon of the Heart: In Silence Beholding* (Cascade Books, 2013)



Artist: Chris Wyatt  
 Station 11: Jesus is nailed to the cross  
 Gouache ink and acrylic on paper  
 Stations of the Cross Exhibition 2022

# Easter

# Hope

14. What are the implications of the cross, and how might it speak to us today?

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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.

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## MODERATOR'S REFLECTION

# Only in Silence...



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.

In the silent waiting before God speaks the creation's beginning, and as God's breath is building over the waters, we are invited to listen, to attend.

And God speaks light. And dark, and sky and sea and land and life and wonder. And humanity.

There are stories woven throughout scripture, and our experience, where it is only in the silence that God's voice is heard. In our world, where silence is less and less likely, how shall we find the space to attend to what God might say, in between breaths, in the waiting?

Can we attend to God in the silence, in the whispered breath, when we are being subtly attuned only to wait for the next sound?

It is not only the audible distractions, there are also the "devices" which drag our attention and decimate our concentration, so that everything is truncated to bite-sized pieces of information - and misinformation. Türkiye and Syria slip from our screens and our minds because there's a new tax on millionaires or MAFS has another fabricated crisis.

As we are trained for sound bite after tiktok, how we will discern what God has to say, when we need to pause, to pay attention? The measured steps to Easter - the journey we name as Lent - require pauses along the way; we lay burdens and distractions aside so that we might better heed what Christ has to offer us.

However, we have better, more colourful things to do and hear and see. We can find a way for worship and witness to fit our culture, so everyone will be satisfied. If we fill our worship with content, then we can hold everyone's attention; we can craft a sermonette, so that there's barely a hindrance to our day and our discipleship; and, of course, silence is "dead space", so we trim that from our diet.

Yet, Easter finds us, each and every year.

We have always tried to whittle God's presence from our own, and to shape it for our purposes. Lent is offered to challenge that, gradually; Easter stands, at the heart of creation and history, to repudiate it.

When we are sufficiently deceived to think of power as earthquake, wind and fire, a still, small voice, speaks in the silence and the dark.

Before all the hallelujahs, the whisper of God is heard from Gethsemane to Golgotha. We would want to rush to glory, but there is more to hear and see.

At the moment when Christ is silenced, when his execution echoes throughout creation, God's fullness is proclaimed to us. In the silence, we listen for what God, in Christ, is saying, and we wait. Here, crucified, is God. There is no moment when God is more completely God than this.

This is God, for us, at the heart of history. In the deafening silence of the cross is Jesus Christ.

There, at the foot of the cross, we wait.

And there, at the tomb, we wait, holding every breath.

Then, in the emptiness of the second, new, morning, everything is transformed. God's breath is stirring in the silence. God speaks light, and life and wonder. And renews our humanity.

We cannot rush here, nor tell this story in a sound bite. We cannot sprint from cross to resurrection without attending to the death of Christ and the wonder of what God in Christ has done. We dare not let ourselves be distracted from this event of God residing at the core.

For all those breaking, or broken; for all those who are lost, or who have lost; for all those believing themselves beyond hope, this story is essential.

Our hallelujahs rise, because having waited with Christ in the silence, we see what God has done, and is doing. Our hope, our forgiveness, are here, because this event proclaims that death is not the whole story, that resurrected life through Christ speaks more fully than any utterance of death, and our emptiness is filled with the love and glory of God.

Listen, if you have hope, in the silence, for what God will say. 🗣️

IN THE  
DEAFENING  
SILENCE OF  
THE CROSS IS  
JESUS CHRIST



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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](https://insights.uca.org.au) and leave your comments.



The cover of *Insights* this issue is titled *Nobby's Beach Port Macquarie 2022* by the Rev. Dr Rod Pattenden.

### EASTER COMMENTARY

*Life is full of surprises. In such moments we learn a lot about our capacity for change and our grasp of life as a form of hope.*

*While this image is not a traditional illustration of the Easter story, it has given me a lense through which I approach the Easter story with a new vividness. This is what the disciples see in the empty space of the tomb. The shock of the new, and the delight of embodied hope.*

More of Rod's art work and reflections can be viewed on his website:

[www.rodpattenden.id.au](http://www.rodpattenden.id.au)



### IN RESPONSE TO ANNE RICE'S COMPLICATED CHRISTIANITY

Reading this actually felt very personally relevant to me. Anne Rice's complex relationship with organized religion and her relationship with Christ is a mirror of my own.

I grew up with devout Baptist family members and, I was taught early on who was "going to Heaven" and, who wasn't... I questioned this teaching and these questions eventually led me to leave the church. It wasn't until I was much older that I could develop and listen to the Holy Spirit in my life: the Holy Spirit was telling me that God is love and not to be upset by those who abided by obstinacy. 🙏

**CHRYSAL CRITES**

### IN RESPONSE TO A REFLECTION ON THE TRIUNE GOD

If Jesus pretended to be God, or made himself "equal to God", or if he appropriated God's name - "I Am", and thus pointed out that he is the God of the Jews, that he is Yahweh, or so, the second person of the triune God, - why was he not accused of this before the Sanhedrin? Why does the Bible not mention any polemics of Jews and Christians about how the one-person God changed to the triune God? Why the silence? They couldn't all lose their memory after all! If Christians had taught the trinity in the 1st century, it would have caused a literal "revolution" in the Jewish mind, and the response would have been visible everywhere. This could not be simply overlooked, since the scheme of Israel (Deut. 6:4) did not allow it. And if so, the Bible and history would document it, she said. I don't understand why the silence. It is also a biblical fact that "God does not change", He is "still the same"! This is what God YHVH says about himself. But if he changed into a triune God, then it is not true? But "God cannot lie", so then who lies? 🙏

**MILAN**

### IN RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS A MATTER FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS

It's great to read something positive on the acceptance of different faiths in our country. I particularly enjoy Stan Grant's comments about his own Christian faith. This encourages me, and I hope others, to be more courageous. 🙏

**LORNA ZHULAN**



### IN RESPONSE TO THE SANTA CLAUSES WILL FOCUS ON THE RELIGIOUS ORIGIN OF ST NICK, BUT NOT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

When are Christians going realise Santa Clause is taking, or has taken the place of Christ? That then makes the whole Santa thing an Anti Christ. It's time we faced facts. Is Christmas about Christ? Or is it about the anti Christ? We can't have it both ways! 🙏

**G ABRAHAMS**

# Joint Training

## COOPERATION BETWEEN SYNOD AND SYDNEY PRESBYTERY LEADS TO NEW JOINT TRAINING

**A new joint effort between Sydney Presbytery and the Synod has developed new governance training videos. With an expected release date in mid-2023, these videos will help congregations across the Synod.**

Sydney Presbytery's Alan Harper told *Insights* that the training resources were developed over a number of years.

"Some years ago, the suggestion was made that Sydney Presbytery seek to work with an appropriate Synod agency to develop a training package for Church Councillors," he said.

"What resources were already available were garnered, utilised and built upon. There was input from a number of individuals, which meant that the materials that were developed achieved a good balance. For example, Rev. Stephen Matthews, a United Church of Canada minister who was at that time serving at Burwood-Croydon Uniting Church, ensured that the overriding focus was mission – we don't do governance for its own sake, but so we can do mission more effectively. Ian Goff, Financial Manager of Sydney Presbytery, ensured that financial governance was given due weight."

"The materials were first presented to people within Sydney Presbytery in November 2016, when they were well received. They were presented a second time in Sydney Presbytery in February 2018. With that "road testing" done, Sydney Presbytery then offered to present workshops

for other presbyteries who put up their hands."

Filming for the current resource took place in November 2022 with help from Mustard Seed, which has since been working on the editing and production. The result is a full set of modules currently scheduled for review in late January. Mr Harper said that once the review is completed, and final production work is undertaken, the final materials will be launched by mid-2023.

**WE DON'T DO GOVERNANCE FOR ITS OWN SAKE, BUT SO WE CAN DO MISSION MORE EFFECTIVELY**

"These governance materials have been refined and developed over a long period of time," Mr Harper said.

"They have also been checked for legal accuracy by Synod experts. They represent a very valuable resource for those at any level who are involved in governance of the Church. They are of a quality that one could pay a lot of money to access in the training market. They are also specifically honed to the context of the Uniting Church."

Rev. Dr Niall McKay is an Educator for Lifelong Learning for Uniting Mission and Education.

He told *Insights* he had seen several people undertaking the training who had never experienced it before, which was a hopeful sign for church growth.

Rev. Dr McKay said he was aware that governance seemed like a dull topic. However, he said it was necessary for the Synod to pursue its growth targets.

"Perhaps the greatest challenge will be to encourage Church members to make use of the materials," Mr Harper added.

"Unless people appreciate the responsibilities they carry as members of a Church Council or other board, they will not necessarily see the point. That can be particularly true in very small congregations, where a few people carry most of the burden. One of the most valuable contributions presbyteries can make would be to promote the importance of these new resources, and encourage Church Councils to use them together."

*Insights will have more information when the training modules are available.* 📌

**JONATHAN FOYE**



# WITH LOVE TO THE WORLD

[withlovetotheworld.org.au](http://withlovetotheworld.org.au)

**THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE BIBLE-READING RESOURCE *WITH LOVE TO THE WORLD* IS NOW AVAILABLE. THE ISSUE COVERS THE SEASONS OF LENT AND EASTER.**

edit this resource, which is produced by the Uniting Church in Australia and follows the Revised Common Lectionary. That lectionary provides four readings for each Sunday. These are the readings which are heard in worship each Sunday in many churches around the world. The resource includes short devotional commentaries on these four Bible passages, as well as an additional three readings each week.

There is a passage with commentary each day of the week. In addition, for each passage there is a short prayer, a relevant song or hymn, and a discussion question relating to that passage.

Whilst designed for personal use, many small groups also use the resource for their weekly discussion group.

The resource helps people who are preparing to lead worship and preach. My own view is that proclamation in sermons should encompass both the good news of the Gospel and the cares and concerns of our daily life. It's about how we live out our discipleship each day. That's the focus in the issue which has just been published.

This issue has contributions from writers in Western Australia, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, and Tasmania.

During Lent, a number of cherished stories told in John's Gospel are read and considered each week, whilst in the season of Easter many stories of the early church from Acts are in focus.

One week of commentaries reflects on the passages from a First Nations perspective, contributed by Alison Overeem. The cover is a striking Australian coastal scene painted by artist, art historian and Uniting Church minister Rod Pattenden. The issue includes a reflection on the artwork by Rev. Pattenden.

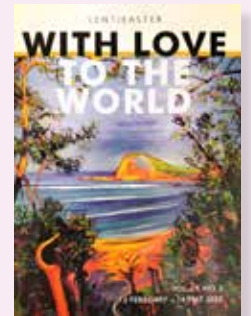
## **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Subscriptions for *With Love to the World* are easy to arrange. The printed resource is available for just \$24 for a year's subscription or the resource can be accessed on phones and iPads via an App, for a subscription of \$24.49 per year (go to the App Store or Google Play).

Artworks by Rod Pattenden can be viewed here: [www.rodpattenden.id.au](http://www.rodpattenden.id.au)

Copies are available at no cost if you would like to sample the current issue. Contact me on 0408 024 642 or [editorwlw@bigpond.com](mailto:editorwlw@bigpond.com) and I can arrange postage. 📧

**JOHN SQUIRES**





## Amelia Koh-Butler to take Council of World Mission role

**Rev. Dr Amelia Koh-Butler has been appointed as Mission Secretary – Education and Empowerment for the Council of World Mission (CWM)**

Rev. Dr Koh-Butler was previously serving as Minister of the Eastwood Uniting Church, Uniting Church in Australia (UCA). She was a member of the World Methodist Council (WMC) Steering Committee member and Convenor of the WMC Worship and Liturgy Committee. She received a Doctor of Missiology from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Rev. Dr Koh Butler was also previously the Director of ELM Centre (Education for Life and Ministry). As CWM Mission Secretary – Education & Empowerment, she will be responsible for developing proposals and strategies for guiding member churches to prepare next-generation leaders to be transforming disciples and for scholarship programmes.


Rev. Dr Koh-Butler began her work at the Council of World Mission on 1 March 2023. 📍




JONATHAN FOYE

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BONHOEFFER IS PROBABLY THE MOST **INFLUENTIAL AND WIDELY READ THEOLOGIAN** OF THE 20TH CENTURY

## UTC TO HOST INTERNATIONAL *Bonhoeffer Conference*

**UNITED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE WILL HOST A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE DEVOTED TO THE WORK AND THOUGHT OF 20TH CENTURY CHRISTIAN MARTYR DIETRICH BONHOEFFER IN JANUARY 2024.**

**T**he XIV International Bonhoeffer Conference will feature papers from a wide range of disciplines, with the central theme of how Bonhoeffer's ideas might be used to confront present day challenges.

Michael Mawson is a member of the International Bonhoeffer Society.

"This is a major international congress on Bonhoeffer's witness and theology that takes place every four years," Dr Mawson said.

"This will be the first time ever that the Congress has been held in Australasia, and will attract international and local participants."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian jailed by the Nazis. He was executed shortly before the end of World War Two, making him a 20th Century Christian martyr. Bonhoeffer's works have been translated into multiple languages, with *Letters and Papers*

*From Prison, Life Together, and The Cost of Discipleship* among his best known books.

"Bonhoeffer is probably the most influential and widely read theologian of the 20th century," Dr Mawson said.

"Part of the appeal to his work is that it is accessible, and yet provides profound and useful insights for negotiating the complexities of Christian life. Christians have continued to draw on him in a wide variety of contexts and struggles."

"Anyone is welcome to the Congress—both to contribute or to come along. The event is not just for academics." 🌐

**The XIV International Bonhoeffer Conference takes place at United Theological College from 14 to 18 January 2024.**

**JONATHAN FOYE**

# From Galston to Parramatta City

**REV. GEOFF SMITH WILL BEGIN AS THE NEW MINISTER OF THE WORD AT PARRAMATTA CITY UNITING CHURCH IN MARCH. THE PLACEMENT COMES AFTER 11 YEARS AS MINISTER AT GALSTON UNITING CHURCH.**

Rev. Smith told *Insights* he was looking forward to engaging Parramatta's diverse and growing community. "I am also engaged with the idea of being a new church in a new city," he said.

"The transformation of Parramatta reaches far beyond the boundaries of the CBD and will take decades to take shape. I look forward to working with our communities to see where the journey takes us."

"Part of the journey will, I truly hope, help us to more intentionally and constructively engage with as many of the varied communities in our region as possible."

Rev. Smith said the call to Parramatta came about as a result of his trying to discern God's calling.

"As the time has been approaching for me to leave Galston I have been trying to attend carefully to my next call," he said.

"Over the past 20 years in particular I have tried to discern God's call whenever possible."

Having consulted with the Joint Nomination Committee and his "most trusted" friends and colleagues and entering into prayerful reflection, Rev. Smith felt called, "to help Parramatta City in whichever ways I can."

"It was not an easy choice, but it was a clear one," he said.

"God's call is not a guarantee of success... but it's a great place to start."

## A WONDERFUL PLACE TO BE CALLED TO

Rev. Smith told *Insights* he would miss Galston's people the most, both in the congregation and wider community.

"It has been the most wonderful place to be called to and trusted in," he said.

"Both the congregation and community have brought out the best in me with their trust, confidence, and encouragement."

"Then there's the kids (once a youth worker...) – whether through our KUCA and youth groups, schools, and our early learning centre, I have been richly privileged to meet kids of all ages and stages."

"Having been in the community so long, some of the 'kids' are now parents, homebuyers, university graduates, tradespeople and more – such a joy to be a part of their lives."

"Then there's the walking. Whether it's in the wonderful Fagan Park, around the community or on many fire trails and bush walks I have spent many, many hours wandering – meeting people, basking in the beauty, seeing the flora and fauna we live with."

GOD'S CALL IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF SUCCESS BUT IT'S A GREAT PLACE TO START

"We just won't talk too much about the red bellied black snake that bit me 12 months ago."

Looking ahead, Rev. Smith said he was looking forward to the next challenge, but admitted he was, "nervous about all that lays in front of us."

"I trust in God's leading absolutely but also hope that many people I'm the Synod will be praying for God's guiding and inspiration as we embark on this great adventure," he said. 🙏

*Rev. Geoff Smith begins at Parramatta City Uniting Church on 1 March.*

**JONATHAN FOYE**



OPINION

# Change the Date

## Bringing Healing

**Let me say at the outset that I love this country. I have been privileged in my life to see much of it – from Tasmania in the south, to Duan and Saibai Islands of the Torres Strait, Kakadu in the top end, and the Pilbara in WA. I've been to Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Lightning Ridge, Cairns, Dareton, Broken Hill, and many more places.**

I grew up on both the North Coast of NSW and the South Coast of NSW where my parents lived. On the North Coast I went to high school in Lismore, and lived on a farm at Brooklet, while down south I enjoyed the crystal waters of Bawley Point and surrounds. I've also been able to travel to several other countries around the world, and while these countries have been wonderful to visit, I will always call Australia "home".

I have also never heard an Aboriginal person say they don't like this continent that we now call Australia. Aboriginal peoples have lived on this continent for over 60,000 years. If we didn't like it, we would have left at some point. Celebrating country is not new for Aboriginal peoples. We have story and ceremony that celebrates country that have been passed down through thousands of generations.

The issue of contention in the celebration of this country is the date. 26 January is simply not the right date to choose to celebrate what is great about this country, because sadly it represents what is not great about this country. It represents the commencement of a brutal period of colonisation, and all of the associated negative events and actions. It represents dispossession, rapes, murders, massacres, and attempted genocide. It represents events that today most Australians wish had never occurred. Unfortunately, they did. We cannot go back in time and change these awful events, but we can easily change the date on which we choose to celebrate this country.

For me, the worst part of 26 January (and the weeks before) is the significant rise in instances of racism, racial vilification and hate speech on social media. "Australia Day", because of the contention of the date it is celebrated, results in Aboriginal people identifying the day as "Survival Day" or "Invasion Day". Many non-Aboriginal people respond to posts advertising "Survival Day" and "Invasion Day" events with hate speech and racial vilification.

Every year, in the lead up to 26 January, I see racist vitriol from non-Aboriginal people, spouting racist myths and stereotypes, based on ignorance. I see comments telling Aboriginal people we should be grateful the British invaded this continent. We are told we should be grateful we have white man's technology. We are told we should be grateful we weren't all killed. We are told to stop whinging because we aren't grateful for all the money we get. We are told

Aboriginal people were stupid and couldn't even invent the wheel.

There are comments that are even more offensive that I won't repeat here.

It is clear that keyboard racists, who feel free to racially vilify Aboriginal people through hate speech and derogatory comments while hiding behind their screens, have little if any knowledge of the colonial past of this country. They know nothing of the Doctrine of Terra Nullius. They know nothing of the hundreds of massacres of Aboriginal men, women, and children – often historically described as "sport."

They know nothing of the forced removal of Aboriginal people from their ancestral homelands, and the detention of Aboriginal people on missions and reserves. They've never heard of an "Exemption Certificate". They don't understand what the Stolen Generations is about, or the profound grief and trauma it caused to thousands of Aboriginal children and their families. They don't understand what is like living in a country where deep seated racism is at play every day, and where institutional and systemic racism remains a constant impediment to "Closing the Gap".

They don't understand what it is like to lose a loved one who dies in gaol because the staff at the time didn't believe the pleas for medical assistance and/or couldn't be bothered calling an ambulance or health professional... and they don't understand the legitimate distress when nobody is held criminally liable for such fatal negligence. This level of ignorance unfortunately results

in zero capacity for empathy. What is even sadder, in many ways, is that these keyboard racists refuse to educate themselves. They refuse to access the wealth of information online about these topics. They stubbornly insist on remaining ignorant, all the while making racist statements about Aboriginal peoples and communities which are untrue, misleading, or just blatant lies.

All because of a date. All because Aboriginal people highlight that we don't see 26 January as an appropriate date of celebration. How dare we. Apparently, some people don't like hearing about the truth of this country's colonial past, and won't have a bar of changing the date because... because... umm... well they can't think of an actual legitimate reason, so they return to racist taunts and insults.

Yes, 26 January is an awful date to try to celebrate this wonderful country. It is a catalyst for a surge in racism and hate speech towards Aboriginal people. The date can and should be changed.

I am aware that there are some Aboriginal people who say they don't care about the date and that we should be focused on other issues that are more important. I am always confused by this. Just because I think the date of "Australia Day" should be changed does not at all mean I am not concerned about the safety of women and children, the scourge of domestic violence, land rights, overcrowded housing, a lack of infrastructure in remote communities, deaths in custody, the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody, getting our kids educated, and of course the establishment of a Treaty. These are of course very important issues that must be addressed. Perhaps those who claim we should focus on more important things can't multitask? However, I work on the assumption that most of the population can walk and chew gum at the same time. Let's change the date to one we can all celebrate. 🍷

**NATHAN TYSON**

DIRECTOR OF FIRST PEOPLES STRATEGY AND ENGAGEMENT, SYNOD OF NSW AND ACT

IT IS SIMPLY NOT THE RIGHT DATE TO CELEBRATE WHAT IS GREAT ABOUT THIS COUNTRY

## NEWS FROM UNITING CHURCH ADULT FELLOWSHIP (UCAF)

# Fellowship news

### ANNUAL DEDICATION SERVICE

The Annual Dedication Service for the NSW and ACT UCAF Synod Committee was recently held by Zoom with special guest Pastor David Shrimpton, "The Flying Padre", and Chairperson Rev. Noreen Towers leading worship and the Dedication. David shared stories of his ministry and we look forward to continuing support for this wonderful service to people in the outback.

### WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Many towns and centres will have now shared in the annual World Day of Prayer supported by the Bible Society. This year it was prepared by the people of Taiwan with the Theme "I have heard about your Faith" and shared stories of the difficulties faced by many in this country. It is wonderful for many faiths within our communities to be able to gather together. Next year will feature the people of Palestine.

### THINK TANKS

The UCAF Synod Committee has planned two "Think Tanks" to be held at Wyoming Uniting Church after their normal meetings in April and October. This will enable discussions on the way forward and ways to address the ongoing closure of groups. The focus is trying to encourage whole Congregations to meet together rather than small groups, especially for Presbytery Fellowship events.

### JOAN STOTT BURSARY 2024

Applications are now being encouraged for The Joan Stott UCAF Bursary for 2024. These were set up by Joan Stott, a former National President of UCAF and were to assist two people committed to or already studying in the field of leadership or theology within the ethos of the Uniting Church. The previous age cut off was 35 years at time of application but this year the age has changed to under 50 years. We ask congregations

to encourage applications from suitable people. Applications close with this Committee by 31 May 2023. Enquiries to Eldrene March [ellemarch@bigpond.com](mailto:ellemarch@bigpond.com)

### STAMP COMMITTEE

The Stamp Committee raised \$22,200 in 2022 and grants worth \$31,200 were shared with 46 Congregations for their Community/Outreach programs and projects. It is a wonderful encouragement to all to save our stamps, maybe ask local businesses to save theirs too. The committee meets to sort and trim stamps on Tuesdays from 9am-12 on the first Friday of the month, Level 2 262 Pitt Street Sydney. Volunteers welcome. Email: [uniting\\_stamps@gmail.com](mailto:uniting_stamps@gmail.com) for updates and newsletters

### FLYING PADRE

The UCAF NSW/ACT Project continues to support The Flying Padre Pastor David Shrimpton based at Broken Hill. He has a 225,000 square km. congregation and officiates at funerals, weddings, baptisms, and

chats to his 600 members. He is available to speak and is already booked for Hunter Presbytery's gathering. Donations can be forwarded to our Treasurer: Ron Gregory PO Box 615 Woy Woy.

### APPRECIATION CERTIFICATES

Continue to ask Secretary Laraine for Appreciation Certificates for active, involved 80, 90, and 100-year-old members of your Congregations. They are always much appreciated.

Thank you to our Contact People; Bruce and Bronwyn Guy, Canberra Presbytery, Ailsa Braid, Mid North Coast North and Peta-Gai Adamson, Mid North Coast South, who have recently resigned. We have valued your service.

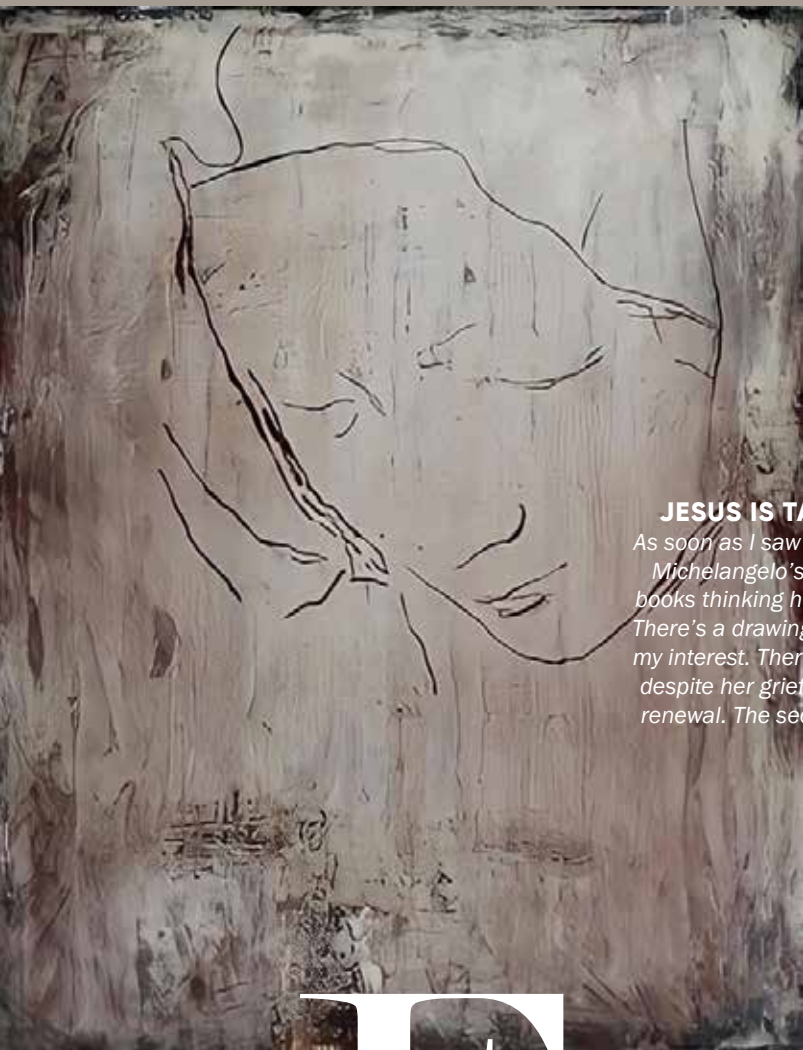
### GATHERINGS

**Hunter Presbytery**  
Thursday 18 May, Morisset UC, Speaker: Flying Padre

**Illawarra Presbytery**  
Thursday 1 June, Gerringong  
Speaker: Rev. Josh McPaul. 🗣️



If you would like to share your fellowship news or have any questions, please contact Judy Hicks: [judyh\\_rnh@hotmail.com](mailto:judyh_rnh@hotmail.com)



### STATION 13:

#### JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

*As soon as I saw the word Pieta I immediately thought of Michelangelo's famous sculpture. I dived online and in books thinking how can I work with this iconic sculpture. There's a drawing study for the mother Mary that caught my interest. There's something optimistic in Pieta's face, despite her grief. Something that speaks of eternity and renewal. The second image is a reflection on falling into death or falling out of consciousness.*

# Easter Hope

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<i>The Cross In Our Context</i>	24

# *Insights* asked contributors from a range of backgrounds to examine the implications of the cross, and how might it speak to us today?

Our feature also includes artworks from the 2022 *Stations of the Cross*, an annual art exhibition co-hosted by Northmead Uniting Church and Northmead Creative and Performing Arts High School, with thanks to Rev. Dr Doug Purnell for granting permission for their use in the following pages.



Artist: Andrew Purvis

Left image:  
*Pieta*

Oil and mixed media  
on canvas.

Right image:  
*Falling*

Oil and mixed media  
on wooden panel

**At Easter, with Christians across the globe and with Christians throughout the centuries before us, we celebrate that when the man Jesus of Nazareth lay dead in a tomb near Jerusalem, God chose to share God's own life with him in order that he be raised from the dead. In the mystery of that astonishing event, life became promising for each one of us. We may say with Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope though the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!" (1 Peter 1:3)**

# Easter

**Y**et notwithstanding that confident hope, we are wise to proceed humbly when speaking of the resurrection. And we are in good company if we do so because surprisingly little is attempted even in the New Testament by way of an explanation for the resurrection. We have appearance stories. Testimony also enters the record about an empty tomb. Yet it lends integrity to these limited accounts that there has been no attempt to describe or 'make up' what happened between God and Jesus in that tomb.

One thing not to be missed in the biblical record is that the resurrection is God's doing. It is especially Peter (preaching at Acts 10:34-43) who declares that it was God who was proclaiming the message of peace through Jesus Christ; God who anointed Jesus at his baptism; God who raised him on the third day; and God who ordained Jesus to be Lord of the living and the dead. The resurrection was the culmination, but not the end, of an extraordinary drama in which these two characters, God and Jesus, were so interwoven the early church began to confess that if you have seen the Son, then you have also seen the Father. It is a wonderfully straightforward expression of the central conviction of the Christian Church: Jesus's work is God's work; Jesus' life is God's life.

Yet it's not true to speak of only 'two characters.' There is a way of understanding the resurrection that arose before Paul wrote his letters (beginning in the early 50s) and which he incorporates into his own thinking. It is located at the start of Romans. The tradition is this: that Christ's resurrection from the dead was an activity of the "spirit of holiness" (Romans 1:4).

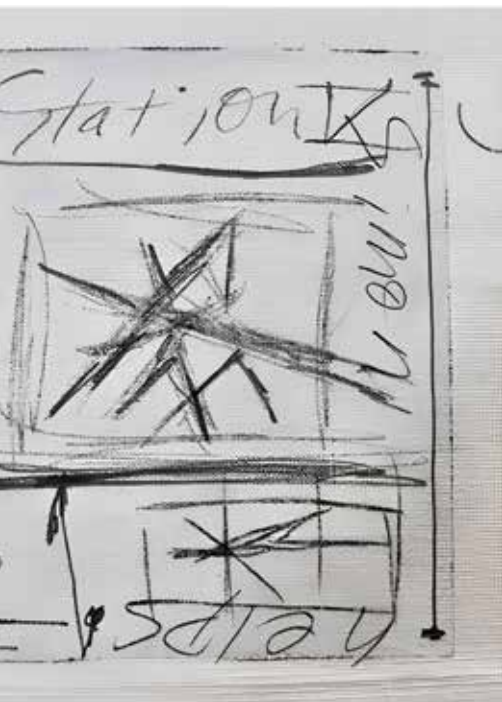
Pre-dating Paul, this is a very early attempt indeed to grasp what lay behind the mystery of the resurrection. The Spirit, which the Hebrew scriptures refer to as 'breath', 'wind', 'storm', and the 'power of creation', is the quake of energy that brought Jesus from death to life. According to this early understanding, God the Spirit is the power of resurrection life.

And if speaking of the Spirit as the power of resurrection life isn't interesting enough, also intriguing is the fact that the New Testament speaks of the same Spirit as creating the church, as a counsellor, guide, and inspiration to believers, and the instinct that leads into truth.

# Resurrection







**STATION 5: SIMON HELPS JESUS CARRY HIS CROSS**

Artist: Christopher Auckett  
 Preliminary drawing for station 5  
 Gesso, carbon transfer and pencil  
 on watercolour paper

So, at Easter we also celebrate that when we ourselves experience the church truly being the church, when we feel the nearness of the guidance, counsel, and inspiration of God, and when we feel ourselves led into truth, then perhaps we too have been found by the quake (or whisper?) of the Spirit at work in the resurrection of Christ.

When we have such experiences, we sense that we have been encountered and helped by something from beyond our individual or even our collective capabilities. Something, someone outside of us reaching in. The believer, and the believing community, are part of the resurrection reality through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I shouldn't finish without returning to the earlier image of the resurrection as the culmination but not the end of the drama. One of the regular mistakes we make is to view the resurrection as a closed event. It has happened; it happened to Jesus; and it is over. But this is to neglect one of the core aspects of the early Christian teaching about the resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not the happy ending to an otherwise sad story. The early church believed his resurrection to be the start of God's new creation. The New Testament uses various images to express this truth. Primary among them is the belief that the risen Christ is 'the first fruits of those who have died' (1 Cor 15:20) and 'the firstborn from among the dead' (Col 1:18). The resurrection is an open event; it is an ongoing process.

Here is hope and promise for us all. Death is shown not to be the power we thought it to be. Reality has been changed. The resurrection is the beginning of the new creation when God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28). We are all being included in whatever was the astonishing event, which we now apprehend only in part, that happened in that tomb outside Jerusalem. Along with those who have already passed into the rich life of God, the words of the Psalmist will be fulfilled for us:

*Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices;*

*my body also rests secure.*

WHEN WE FEEL  
 OURSELVES LED INTO  
 TRUTH, THEN PERHAPS  
**WE TOO HAVE BEEN  
 FOUND BY THE QUAKE  
 (OR WHISPER?) OF  
 THE SPIRIT AT WORK  
 IN THE RESURRECTION  
 OF CHRIST**

*For you do not give me up to the depths,  
 or let your faithful one see the pit.*

*You show me the path of life;*

*in your presence there is fullness of joy,*

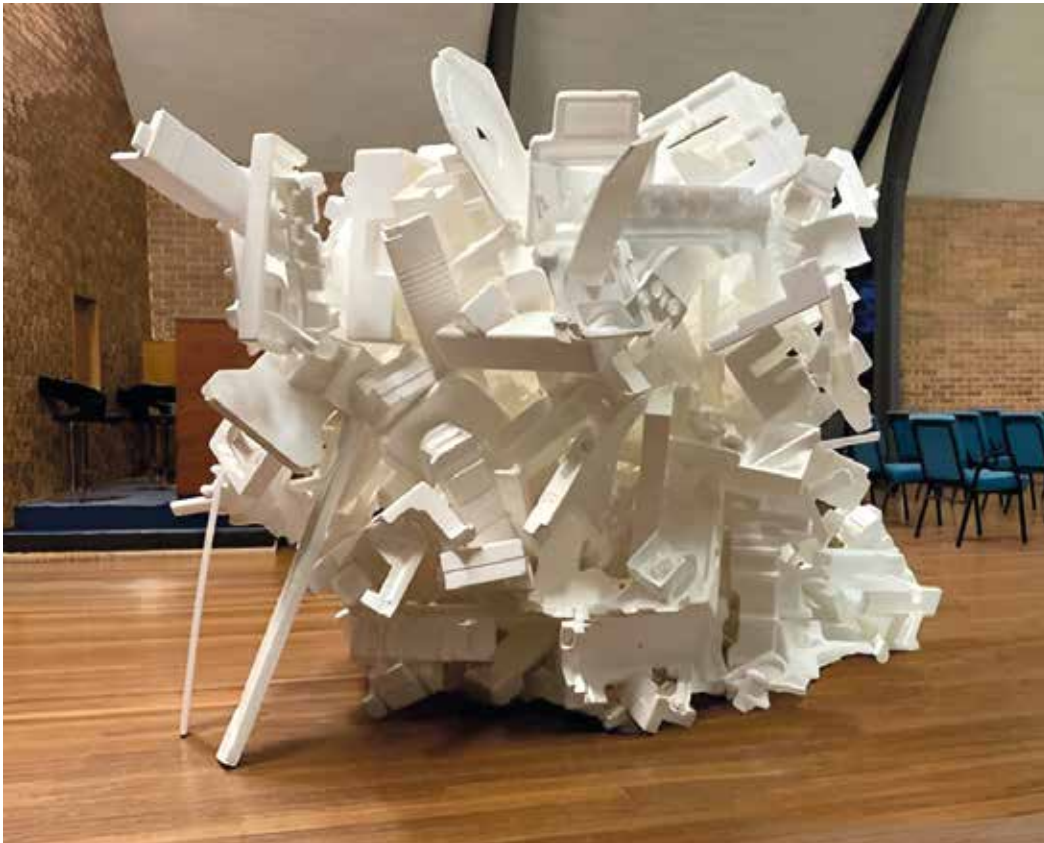
*in your right hand are pleasures  
 forevermore. (Psalm 16: 9-11) ①*

**REV. DR PETER WALKER**



**STATION 14:  
 JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB**

Artist: Mirre Van Dalen  
 Ink, acrylic and charcoal on  
 loose canvas



Artist: Dell Walker  
Overreach. The Falling Tower  
Balancing discarded, single use  
styrofoam packaging

### STATION 3

# JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

I belatedly realised the folly of my plan to assemble a freestanding crumbling tower on site (given just two days) by using found styrofoam packaging forms, just balancing on each other or wedged together. Once again, I had overreached; this is a folly in both senses of the word, a purposeless ornamental building foolishly undertaken.

The tottering tower idea rose out of my lived experience of falling, which I had often associated with the proverbial, 'pride comes before a fall'. Despite planning the feel of falling for this work, it was only when I trialled the tower that I realised my foolishness once again, as my principles of assemblage require using foam pieces as found, no shaping (and making more harmful crumbs) and no glues, ties or armature (so all can be reused before recycling). Normally a pleasure to play with, like building a house of cards, this was a struggle.

Entirely single-use rubbish from consumer goods, the tower is fragile and unsustainable, like the growth economy that produced it. We could instead move toward a circular economy that plans to reuse all materials, a cheaper alternative with no waste that many manufacturers are adopting. With consumerism we created a monster: I like that in the end the tower required feeble props, like arms reaching out trying to break the fall, as I do; I sympathise with this personification of consumerism.

STATION 7

# JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME



Artist: Euan MacLeod  
Acrylic-poly

This painting is part of a series based on memories of being in the NZ alps and negotiating dangerous terrain. I never actually fell into a crevasse but was always aware of having a companion holding the other end of the rope and that they could help me get out if I did.

# Epilogue.

“And everyone is hidden, and everyone is cruel And there’s no shortage of tyrants, and no shortage of fools And the little white shape dancing at the end of the hall Is just a wish that time can’t dissolve at all”

*Nick Cave - Bright Horses*

It had been ten years since Celeste had stepped through the doorway that brought her home, and fourteen years since she had been dragged across the space that separates one reality from the multitudes around it.

For the most part, the world just carried on as it always had: political feuds played out as if nothing had changed, geopolitical tensions waxed and waned, the economy kept moving with its ebbs and flows, and people kept being... people.

There was an awareness about what had transpired, and a hesitation about what its implications were, but most people pushed it to the back of their minds because events outside the normal realm of experience are too hard to deal with.

Sitting at a table outside her usual café haunt, listening to the footsteps and half-conversations of people walking past, Celeste flicked through the notes for the second book she was about to finish about her adventures across the void. “Adventures?” she thought, looking at her mug of coffee as though it had been the one to suggest such an insensitive, nearly offensive word, for what had happened. “Adventures is all wrong. It just doesn’t fit” her voice carrying her thoughts away from her as a mumble before a sigh, followed by a sip of her coffee. Across the table a young woman in her late teens pulled out a chair, sat herself down, and started looking over the menu.

Celeste, caught up in the growing whirlpool of her own thoughts, hadn’t even noticed Genevieve’s arrival; she just sat, and thought. Genevieve, knowing how much her “found family” aunt hated small talk and would much rather people just got to the point of the conversation, asked from behind the menu... “What was the point of it all?” “Huh? Oh, hi Gen” Celeste said, lazily. “All of this happened. You saw all of it. There were other people who saw it as well; not just here, but over there”.

She’d been thinking about this since the last time they’d spoken nearly a month ago. “Well, why don’t we look at it from a different perspective. What do you think the point of it is?”. “I think the point is that you went through this incredible ordeal, you did what anyone should have done and told your story...” by now her hands were swinging with gestures that punctuated her words.

Genevieve continued, “people should have shared in this thing that changed your life. You’re a different person now because of it all”. Celeste took a sip of her coffee and let the taste linger over her tongue before she swallowed. It was such a simple ritual, but one that has kept her grounded in the years since she made it back home. “Maybe?” she said uncertainly. “There are days I don’t even believe it myself, so I understand why others keep it at arm’s length. And it’s not like we haven’t seen similar play out here”.

IT WAS ABOUT  
DRAWING A LINE  
IN THE SAND  
AND SAYING  
WE COULD BE  
BETTER

Celeste gestured to a battered copy of the Gospel of Mark that sat amongst half a dozen other books in her backpack. “Two thousand years ago a revolutionary was executed for standing up to the powers of empire and oppression. People are told weekly that He died for their sins and all they have to do is make a decision to follow His way of life and the world would be better for it”. “... and?” Genevieve asked. “And what?” Celeste shrugged; “Good people are still crushed by laws and structures bigger than they could ever take on by themselves, innocent people die every day, evil men still get away with...” “What if I ask you a question?” the younger voice interrupted. Genevieve continued, not giving Celeste a chance to answer the request, let alone decide if she was okay with it, “what does it mean to you?”

Celeste shifted her hips in her seat, and pulled her ankles tightly together under the chair. She was uncomfortable, as anyone who has been through something traumatic would be when asked to give an answer any more than superficial about things they’d been through. “It means I’m broken,” she sighed.

“It means that it was never about righting things once and for all, it was about drawing a line in the sand and saying we could be better. We learned that it’s not only in this world that good people are sacrificed but others as well. It means we learned how to destroy angels”.

It was all she could do to stop herself from bursting into tears. She wrapped her hands around her mug of coffee, noticing that all too familiar ache in her throat that held back the flood of grief that threatened to shatter her into a thousand pieces.

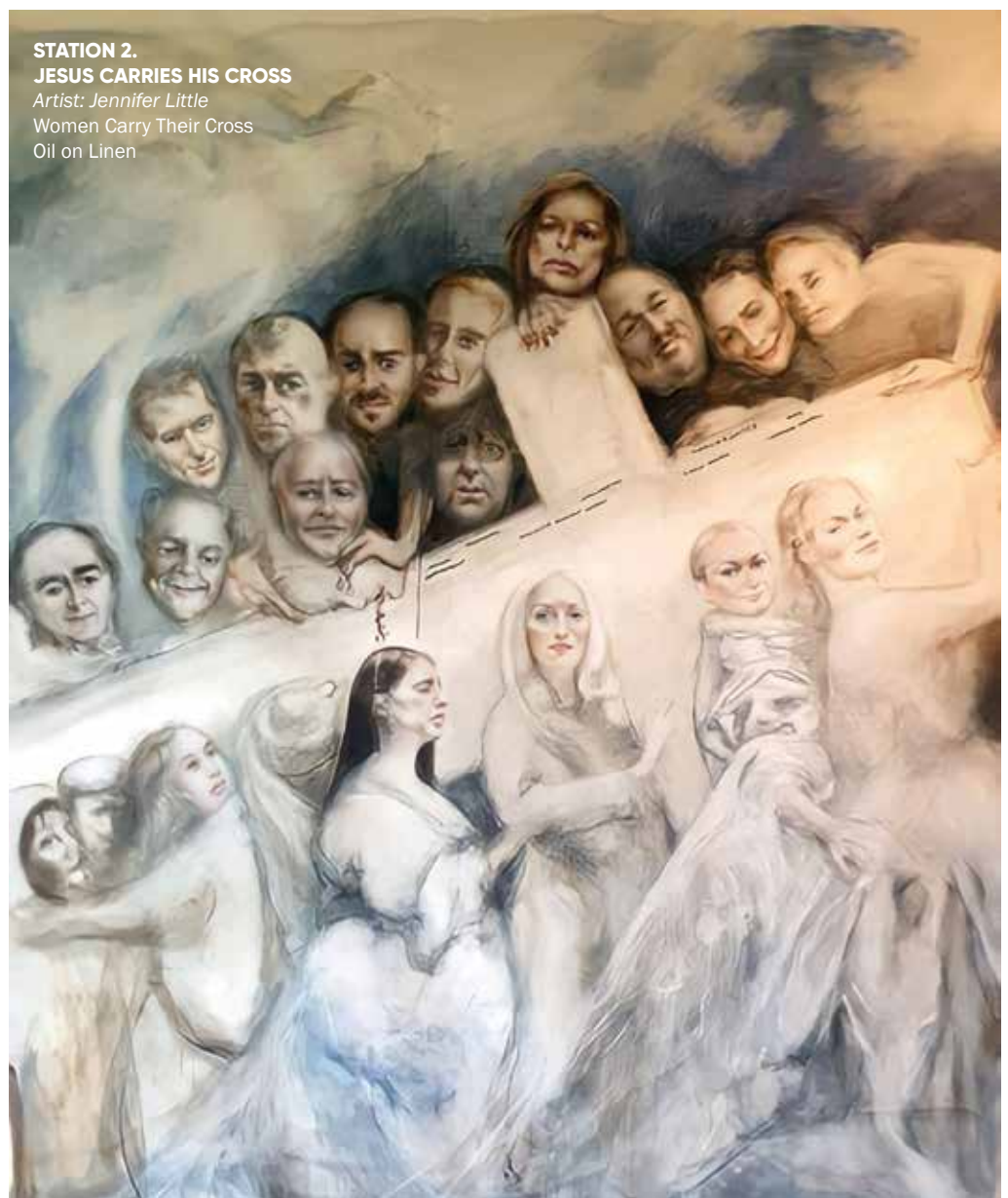
She took a sip of her coffee and again took a moment to meditate on the sensation of the milky fluid moving through her mouth, the bitter taste of coffee muted by the milk and sweetened with a bit of brown sugar.

The feel of the ceramic beneath her fingertips, in parts still warm from the liquid held in the cup, and others cool from the air that had moved around it in the time she let it sit atop the table. It caught her. It calmed her.

Something so simple.

Genevieve had finally got her to hint at the things she’d left out of her writing. She knew it was there, it was in the things Celeste had left out, and she knew it was about the woman she loved. There was a hole in the story, omitted in order to protect herself, but it was keeping those things out that hurt her the most. “Do you think it’s time to tell her story?” Genevieve asked, being as gentle as she possibly could, knowing that there was a trauma surrounding her memories of Anier, and how any relationship between them was now impossible.

Celeste looked up from her coffee and glanced around, reassured that everything was still there as it was before her attention shifted... Almost.



“Be her witness. Let her inspire others the way she inspired you”. Genevieve’s words filled her ears, but as she looked up she was already walking away. A familiar flickering of light reflected from the window across the street, a flickering that had no source, it was the same flickering of white unsettling light that she’d seen in the days before she wound up across the void. 🕯

#### SARAH ALICE ALLCROFT

Music:  
Nick Cave and Warren Ellis: *Hand Of God*  
Nick Cave and Warren Ellis: *Shattered Ground*  
Nick Cave and Warren Ellis: *L.I.T.A.N.I.E.S.*

STATION 6

# VERONICA WIPES JESUS' FACE



Artist: Douglas Purnell, Acrylic on canvas

This year as I looked fresh at the connection between station 5 and station 6, both seemed to be about care. Simon helps Jesus carry his cross, and then, Veronica reaches from the crowd to wipe Jesus face. Care is absolutely crucial to the human condition, the deepest expression of love. I thought that Veronica's cloth would be covered in tears, sweat and blood, wiped from Jesus face. In the depths of life's struggles we all reach out to care. I wanted the painting to be on cloth and the paint to reflect the drips of blood sweat and tears, and the orange colour on top to reflect the life given through acts of care. Tradition says Jesus face was imprinted on the cloth. I began to grasp that the mystery that is God is reflected in every act of care. A special thank you to the carers, is, I hope, reflected in this painting.

There is only  
thought.

We exist only  
in the minds  
of the living.

All that is  
good is in  
love.

No one  
gets to stay.



Artist: Lottie Consalvo, And she said, 'no one gets to stay, Acrylic on Canvas

**STATION 12**

# JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

# What does the cross say to our context?

READING THE CROSS IN OUR CONTEXT 20 YEARS ON

In July, Douglas John Hall's *The Cross In Our Context* turns 20. Released against the backdrop of the War On Terror, when people were asking questions about the relationship between faith and violence, Hall's book argued that the church should reclaim the Theology of the Cross as its key signature.

Throughout *The Cross In Our Context*, Hall argues that, during the time of Christendom (when the church was established as the law of the land after Constantine made Christianity the state religion of Rome) the church embraced a Theology of Glory, a triumphalist perspective that saw the church protect its own interests as an institution. The decline of Christendom, he argues, gives the church a chance to return to its roots as an underground force for good in society.

So, twenty years on, what is the book's legacy?

Uniting Church theologian Clive Pearson told *Insights* that *The Cross In Our Context* remained a worthwhile "conversation partner" the church would still do well to consider.

Rev. Dr Pearson said the book was, "An accessible entry into an undervalued theological tradition which speaks into our current context."

"It invites us to think about how we might conceive a theology of the cross in an Australian setting and be able to express our frustrations and disappointments with the institutional church while holding out an authentic hope," he said.

Throughout the book, Hall develops what is often known

as a contextual theology, which seeks to ground the work of theologians in the geographical space in which they work, accounting for how this affects the conclusions the theologian reaches.

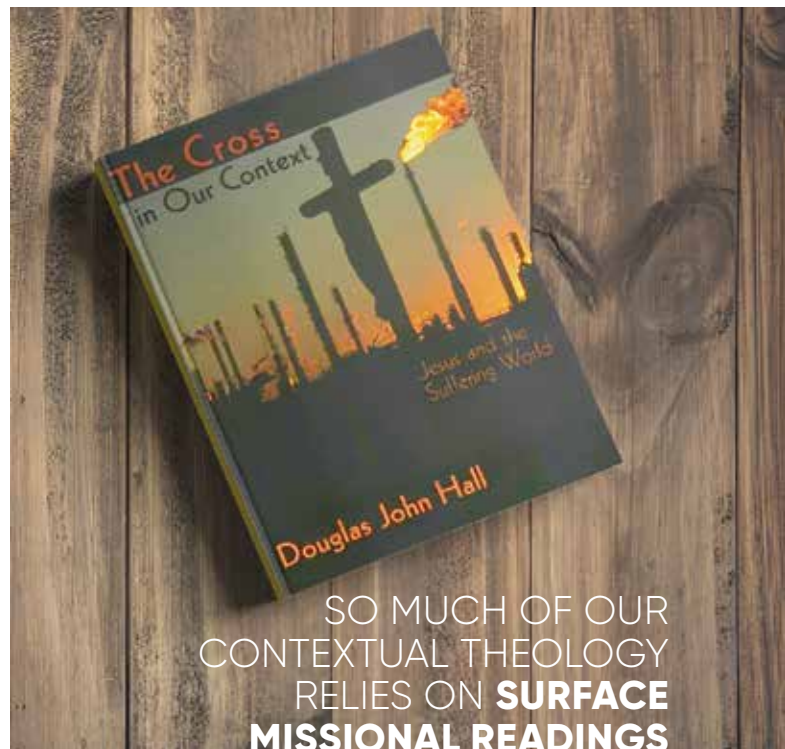
The book, explained Rev. Dr Pearson, "came in the wake of 9/11 and a tendency to see 'religion' as the cause for violence."

"Hall wished to probe what was the impact and legacy of a Christian triumphalism - a theology of glory - and how that had humiliated Islam."

"The emphasis on the theology of the cross (and in particular how this relatively minor tradition within current church practice) lay at the heart of Luther's theology and the origins of Protestantism," Rev. Dr Pearson said.

"The theology of the cross is not a theology about death but rather about how God 'sees; humanity and the creation, how they are subject to pain and suffering, and worth 'dying for'. It is an invitation to humility;"

"Hall wished to engage with a properly constructed theology of context / culture. - his idea of hic et nunc, here and now. He emphasised the importance of doing the hard theological work - so much of our contextual theology relies on surface missional readings of culture. Hall dug much deeper than that."



SO MUCH OF OUR  
CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY  
RELIES ON SURFACE  
MISSIONAL READINGS  
OF CULTURE. HALL DUG  
MUCH DEEPER THAN THAT

"The theology of the cross deserves further exploration in the current Uniting Church but it will need to find its voice over and against three rivals which claim excessive attention for its proper hearing: 1) the repeated turn to 'mission' without an adequate theological underpinning; 2) the concern for institutional structures (re-structures) without an adequate theological underpinning; and the one I find most disappointing - the use of

the rhetoric of intercultural ( a sociological term that exists on a horizontal plane and is rather thin by way of comparison) whereas cross cultural (a theology of the cross) grounds our diversity in 'the word of the cross' - our practice of cultural diversity is not as strong and deep as it might be / should be. This book would be a helpful conversation partner in these three areas."





HALL BECAME  
INCREASINGLY  
UNFLINCHING  
IN DRAWING  
**POLITICAL AND  
ECONOMIC  
IMPLICATIONS**  
FROM HIS  
THEOLOGICAL  
INQUIRIES

### DOUGLAS JOHN HALL'S LEGACY

Douglas John Hall is himself an interesting subject, with a biography that sounds unlikely at first. Born in 1928 and raised in Innerkip, Ontario, Hall left school at 16 to attend business college to help his family. The oldest of six children, he pursued various opportunities until undertaking a probationary ministry course at the University of Western Ontario. From these humble beginnings, Hall undertook postgraduate study at New York's Union Theological Seminary, obtaining his Doctorate in 1963.

Hall's work (including *The Cross In Our Context*) often cites people who directly taught him, including Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul

Tillich. He also encountered a number of other theological giants throughout his early years, including Karl Barth, Phyllis Trible, Beverly Harrison, Malcolm Boyd, Walter Wink, Edward Farley, and Rhoda Palfrey, who he later married.

According to Rev. Dr Pearson, Hall is "underrated" as a theologian.

"His life is not as so high profile and 'attractive' as that of, say, Bonhoeffer, but he is a more complete theologian, given that he has written on the whole field of theological beliefs and subjects and striven to address a contemporary audience in North America which shares some similarities to ours," he said.

"So many of the big named theologians of the 20th century came out of Germany and were addressing the loss of meaning through the killing fields of World War One and the rise of totalitarian states, Our immediate context is not this."

His voice as a theologian developed over multiple decades. According to David Lott, "Hall...[became] increasingly unflinching in drawing political and economic implications from his theological inquiries, in ways that will give devotees of free-market capitalism pause."

Nine years after *The Cross In Our Context* and at the age of 85, Douglas John

Hall released his final book, *What Christianity Is NOT: An Exercise in "Negative" Theology*. He has since contributed shorter chapters to other books.

At Easter, *The Cross In Our Context* is worth returning to, as the church marks Jesus' death and resurrection. 🕯️

### JONATHAN FOYE

***The Cross In Our Context*** is available to purchase and can be borrowed from Camden Theological Library.



# Canowindra Connections Centre

WORKING TOWARDS COMMUNITY

**Known as Australia's hot air balloon capital, the historic village of Canowindra is home to airborne adventures, acclaimed vineyards and a fascinating colonial history. Located on the Belabula River, between Orange and Cowra in the central west of New South Wales, Canowindra is home to 2,300 people with a strong sense of community.**

The Canowindra, Cranbury, and Cudal linked congregations began a cooperative arrangement with the Anglican Parish of Canowindra/Eugowra in 2004 after the Uniting Church Congregation voted to join the All Saints' Anglican Congregation for worship under the leadership of Rev. Margaret Finlay. Home Church Groups were created where members of both denominations began relationships focusing on The Gospel and love of Jesus.

Since then, and wanting to contribute further to their community, they have established several services, including the FoodBasket, to assist low-income families in accessing cheaper food items and a Community Garden financed by a Uniting grant, among others. But they knew they could do more.

After several years of thinking and analysing how to become more open and give more to the community and a visit from Peter Worland, the then Executive Director of Uniting, a vision of a bigger Canowindra was born. With assistance from Corrina Alchin, Community Engagement Leader at Uniting, they undertook a Needs Analysis in 2016 and, together with congregations, community members, and other denominations, established a Reference Group to help determine the best direction for the future mission.

The identified areas were lonely older people, families needing assistance, single parents, and young people with mental health issues. After visiting Albury/

Wodonga, where a similar development existed for some years, they saw an opportunity to use their resources better to meet the community's needs.

Late last year, the Canowindra Connections Centre was officially opened by Rev. Sharon Hollis, President of the Uniting Church in Australia, Ms Colleen Geyer, General Secretary, Dr Denise Wood, Chairperson, and members of the Macquarie Darling Presbytery. From the Synod, Rev. Bronwyn Murphy, Associate Secretary and Kingsley Murphy, Presbytery Service Manager, attended the event alongside with Mr Phil Donato MP, and his wife.

This Centre includes a new worship space, an internet cafe, a commercial kitchen, three counselling rooms, a new pantry for the Foodbasket, and a new vestry that is now a shared space for both the minister and a part-time Coordinator, among other new spaces.

Kingsley Murphy told *Insights*, "The extensions have been created with a community focus in mind, providing office space to visiting professionals, which was a great need for the people of Canowindra."

Marion Wilson is the Chairperson of the Church Council at Canowindra Uniting Church and was the main person behind the development. She told *Insights* that, "after several years of planning, we self-funded the wonderful facility we now have for the church and the community. There is a Stage Two for further works that will complete the complex that we, unfortunately, cannot fund at this time."

"The community of Canowindra is excited by the opening of the facility in the town, which will assist in supporting many people. The potential for people to get to know Jesus through action, service, and The Word is enormous. We have learned much on our journey – especially that it is in God's time and place that it has all come together." 🗨️

**ANGELA CADENA**



THE POTENTIAL FOR PEOPLE TO GET TO KNOW JESUS THROUGH ACTION, SERVICE, AND THE WORD IS ENORMOUS



MR PHILIP DONATO, MP MEMBER FOR ORANGE; REV JOY HARRIS, ANGLICAN PARISH PRIEST; REV. BRONWYN MURPHY, REV. SHARON HOLLIS, PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLY UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA; COLLEN GEYER, ASSEMBLY GENERAL SECRETARY; MARION WILSON CHAIRPERSON OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL AT CANOWINDRA UNITING CHURCH.

UNITINGWORLD

Cutting through the  
noise of life and

# Refocusing during Lent



KIM ALLEN, A YOUTH LEADER WITH OUR PARTNER  
THE UNITED CHURCH IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

*“When I was a child, I would sit on my mother’s lap and she would tell me the stories of our people. It meant that my whole life I’ve known who I am because I know my story.”*

*“I’m so grateful for it because today it’s fading away. It’s harder for young people because of the noise of modern life.”*

UnitingWorld is the international aid and partnerships agency of the Uniting Church in Australia. We’re a channel for people like you to connect with God’s work around the world, working together with the global church to build lives that are whole and hopeful, free from poverty and injustice. Find out more: [www.unitingworld.org.au](http://www.unitingworld.org.au)

**Ever since I heard this from Kim Allen, a youth leader with our partner the United Church in Papua New Guinea (UCPNG), I can't get it out of my mind. I think it's because his words transcend his culture and speak into our current moment in time.**

At just 28 years old, Kim is responsible for around five thousand youth across almost ten remote islands. He acts as a facilitator to connect youth to the work of the church.

"The challenges we're facing are school dropouts, unemployment, early marriage and the impacts of climate change," he told me. But the underlying problem affecting young people today is what he describes as 'noise'.

"Young people are exposed to so much noise, with the internet, mobile phones, drugs, peer pressure, music. They can't focus."

I asked Kim how he and his church are addressing it:

"The first step is to help them be aware of themselves and their lives as children of God," Kim said. "With that awareness we can then meet them at a practical level, training them to be good citizens, to work against violence, to build up their communities. The church gives them hope and a solid foundation to be human. We see that as intrinsic to spiritual development."

I think we can all relate to that feeling of too much noise in our busy, modern world. I love that Kim's antidote is having greater awareness of who we are as children of God as a first step to refocusing our lives.

I know I don't have to tell you how powerful that idea is, but I always find the reminder encouraging. When we see ourselves and others as created children of God, infinitely loved and valuable, our hearts are changed.

We can't ignore the cries of people suffering in poverty and injustice. We long to make a difference, and through God and God's people, we find the power to do it.

I hope, like me, you find strength and encouragement in that thought, because it's a critical time to play your part, however you can. Here at UnitingWorld and across our church, we do that together during Lent with Lent Event. We reach out to others through prayer, living more simply and practising generosity. 🙏

**DR SUREKA GORINGE**  
NATIONAL DIRECTOR UNITINGWORLD

*Here's how to join us:*

*Pray*

Use our prayer guide to pray alongside our partners as they address the challenges facing their communities.

*Live simply*

Give up something in solidarity with people who have less.

*Give*

Donate or fundraise to help our partners fighting poverty and injustice.

Every prayer, action and gift make a difference, and not just for people overcoming poverty. Because when we work for change, we too are changed.

I hope you'll join us for Lent Event this year as we seek to refocus our lives through prayer, simplicity and generosity. In 2023, Lent is from 22 February to 6 April.

Head to [www.lentevent.com.au](http://www.lentevent.com.au) today to get started.

**lentevent**  
22 FEBRUARY - 6 APRIL 2023

40 days of prayer, simplicity and generosity for our hurting world.

*You can change lives this Lent*

[www.lentevent.com.au](http://www.lentevent.com.au)

UnitingWorld  
connecting communities for life



# 2023 Calendar

## MARCH

<b>16-17</b>	Life & Witness / Mission Planning & Property Training	M C
<b>23</b>	Phase 3 of Ministry   Early-stage Retreat	M
<b>25</b>	Uniting Creative Cohort 2023 <i>A New Breath - Reclaiming Creative Attention</i>	C
<b>25 Mar &amp; 1 Apr</b>	Living Our Values (LOF1)	L M C

## APRIL

<b>12 Apr-10 May</b>	Mission Shaped Ministry   Exploring Mission (MSM1) via Zoom   5 wk Program	C
<b>13-27</b>	Living Our Faith   Leading Worship in the UCA (LOF2)   via Zoom   3 wk Program	L C
<b>20</b>	Ministry of Pastor   Professional Development Day	M
<b>21-23</b>	Pulse   Kids Camp Out   Sydney	Y
<b>27</b>	Ethical Ministry Half-day Refresher Topic 2023A	M

## MAY

<b>2 May-20 Jun</b>	Living Our Faith   Exploring the Old Testament Includes: YouLEAD+ Deep Dive Old Testament via Zoom   8 wk Program	L Y F
<b>4-25</b>	Presiding at the Sacraments   3 sessions via Zoom + 1 session in-person   3 wk Program	L C
<b>6</b>	Pulse   Young Adult Gathering 1 of 3	Y
<b>15-18</b>	Women in Ministry Retreat (for Ordained women)	M
<b>18</b>	Supervision   Professional Development Day 1 of 2	M
<b>23 May-13 Jun</b>	Mentoring for Ministry Development 4 wk Program	M

**SM** Synod Meeting 2023

- L** Ideal education or event opportunity for current or future lay preachers
- M** Ideal for further Ministerial professional development
- U** United Theological College (UTC) related content and study
- F** Formation pathways study or learning
- C** Learning opportunities for church and congregation community members
- Y** Youth program or Pulse program events



### JUNE

3	Church Governance Toolkit   Train the Trainer	C
8-29	Coaching Development   4 wk Program	M
19-22	UTC   Interfaith Dialogue (THL334) Intensive Course	U
27 Jun-11 Jul	Living Our Values (LOF1)   3 wk Program	L M C
29 Jun-27 Jul	Mission Shaped Ministry   Getting Started (MSM2) via Zoom   5 wk Program	C
30 Jun-2 Jul	School of Discipleship	Y

### JULY

15	Intercultural Briefing for Synod 2023	M C
18 Jul-5 Sep	Living Our Faith   Exploring the New Testament (LOF5)   via Zoom   8 wk Program	L M F
20-21	Life & Witness / Mission Planning & Property Training	M C
26 Jul, & 9-10 Aug	Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry - Leader	M

### AUGUST

10	Ethical Ministry Refresher   Topic 2023B	M
12	Pulse   Young Adult Gathering 2 of 3	Y
19-20	Pulse   YouLEAD Camp 2023	Y
31 Aug-8 Sep	Ethical Ministry Foundation   via Zoom 4 session Program	L M C

### SEPTEMBER

15-17	Synod Meeting   Katoomba	SM
27 Sep-11 Oct	Presiding at the Sacraments   3 sessions via Zoom + 1 session in-person	L C
28 Sep-6 Oct	Mission Shaped Ministry   Building a Good Foundation (MSM3)   via Zoom   5-wk Program	C

### OCTOBER

3-5	Retreat for Phase 3 of Ministry, Ministry of Pastor & Admission of Ministers	M
3-6	Pulse   Uniting Youth Camp	Y
10 Oct-28 Nov	Living Our Faith   Proclaiming Jesus Christ (LOF6) Includes: YouLEAD+ Deep Dive Proclaiming Jesus Christ   via Zoom   8-wk Program	L Y F
14 & 21	Living Our Faith   Leading Worship in the UCA (LOF2)   via Zoom   2 wk program	L C
23	Supervision   Professional Development Day 2 of 2	M
24	Ethical Ministry Refresher   Topic 2023B	M
27	UTC   End of Year Service & Celebrations	U
28	Pulse   Emerging Gen Resourcing Day	Y

### NOVEMBER

1-3	PreachFest 2023	L M C
4	Pulse   Young Adult Gathering 3 of 3	Y
13-17	UTC   Youth Culture and Mission (THL354) Intensive Course	U
15-17	Presiding at Funerals	L M F
18 & 25	Living Our Values (LOF1)	L M C

### DECEMBER

5	Living Our Faith   Lay Preachers Code of Ethics Workshop   via Zoom	L M C
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### JANUARY 2024

14-18	XIV International Bonhoeffer Congress: <i>Crisis and Hope: Reading Bonhoeffer for Today</i>	U
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PULSE

# Retreat Yourself

**From 3-5 February, 50 young adults from across the Synod converged at Chittick Lodge in Gerringong for a weekend of community, worship, beach fun, great food, prayer, and sharing as they discussed Courageous Discipleship.**

The weekend kicked off on Friday with an added leadership development day with Matt Anslow and Joanna Drayton from Synod's Vital Leadership team giving a talk on A Biblical Perspective on Leadership.

This is the first time the Pulse team has been able to run the event since the beginning of the pandemic. This is an important opportunity in the calendar to meet and develop relationships across the Synod.

Look out for Retreat Yourself again in 2024! 📌





# Where to from here



## MOVING TO CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY AND EXPLORING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE UCA LOCALLY

**I sit writing this with two weeks left in my PULSE job.**

I have been here for four years. When I came four years ago it was Joyce and I trying to figure out what we will do and how will we do it. We went to every Presbytery and met with anyone who would talk to us about what they dreamt for the Uniting Church in the areas of children's and family, youth, and young adult ministry. We were met with a lot of very tired, worn out and hopeless people.

They had big dreams, but the modern reality of our culture makes ministry with the first third hard work. The reality was at this point, very few Presbyteries knew if there was any ministry happening with first third, and a lot of congregations didn't really care.

To be honest, I wasn't sure how much longer some of these people were going to hang on for.

The call from Bradon French at Synod 2017 that we needed to invest in first third ministry before time ran out, was actually an understatement. So our team went to work to encourage, resource and support communities who were already engaged in first third ministry.

We had, and still have, limited resources so we planned ways that everyone could benefit from the work we did. We have come a long way since then.

Presbyteries are trying to organise themselves to work more effectively with people in their first third of life and congregations are starting to realise things could be different. We now have a suite of camps set up so that we can all work together to give our children and young people mountain-top experiences that connect young people with God and each other. We have developed UCA-specific leadership development and tertiary subjects with UTC on children's and family ministry and youth ministry. There are a number of places now online you can hear about what is happening in ministry and you can discover resources, such as the PULSE website ([pulse.uca.org.au](http://pulse.uca.org.au)).

I have big hopes for the Uniting Church in Australia. I believe that no church is too old to grow young if they truly want to, but this requires us to be willing to do things a bit differently and try something new, including maybe listening to or singing music we do not like. It requires us to want to have a relationship with young people. Real, honest relationships.

I've been thinking a lot lately about the desire to be a welcoming church; a place where new people can come and

belong. I don't think we are called to be a welcoming church, but a loving church. A loving church/community person takes the time to get to know you, to listen to what matters to you, and sit with you in your sufferings and celebrate with you in your joys. A Jesus-loving community.

If we are following the ways of Jesus we love people no matter if they are stranger or friend, old or young, male or female or other, physically abled or not. We show we are a forgiving community by accepting people no matter how much we or others have stuffed up (do you remember the story of the woman at the well? Or the woman accused of adultery, or the tax collector?). When we see the best in people even when they let us down (Do you remember the words of Jesus to Peter after he denied him? or how many times we are called to forgive?).

The last couple of years have all been a reminder of what it means to be truly a Jesus shaped community – it is all about love. The time has come for us to move out of the silos of our churches and realise how blessed we are to have each other. How blessed we are to live in this Christian community. Do you

know how many people do not have this? Who are longing for this? You hold the keys to the kingdom, people.

So as I finish at PULSE, I am exceptionally grateful for the saints I have met along the way. All the amazing young people and people who are passionately trying to live a Jesus-shaped life. Thank you for your wisdom, passion, enthusiasm, hospitality and companionship, I have been so blessed by every single one of you.

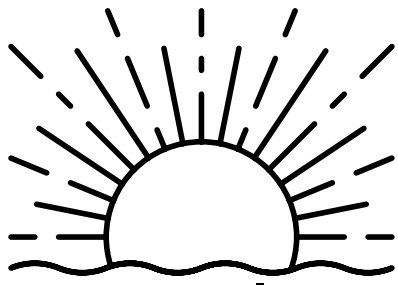
I move now into Gordon Pymble Uniting Church, working with the people there and exploring what it means to be a Uniting Church where God has planted us. I am looking forward to having two Uniting Church schools beside us that we can journey with, and all of the amazing people in the wider community who I can't wait to meet.

I pray for the work of PULSE which I still passionately advocate for, like Bradon before me. I leave passionately reminding the Church if you do not invest in young people there will not be a Uniting Church in the future and that this is going to be costly, one way or another. Realistically, the time is now to make this happen and it requires everyone to choose to be part of this transformation. 🙏

**KAREN MITCHELL-LAMBERT**

IS ORDAINED IN THE MINISTRY OF DEACON AND WAS THE TEAM LEADER OF PULSE

THE TIME HAS COME  
FOR US TO **MOVE OUT**  
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# Rebuilding

# Hope

## CHRISTIAN STUDENTS UNITING ON CAMPUS

**2022 was a year of rebuilding for the Uniting Church's tertiary ministry on university campuses. Located at universities across Sydney, Western Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle, and Port Macquarie, these ministries connect with students through Bible studies, social events, mentoring, pastoral care, justice work, inter-faith events, and more.**

Lockdowns have had a huge impact on students and hit tertiary ministry hard, prompting chaplains to reimagine what engagement looks like. As the culture of university life shifted with hybrid learning, so did the work of Christian Students Uniting and chaplaincies adapted.

Several chaplains spoke to *Insights* about the work of rebuilding and their hopes for the new year.

### UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Rev. Phil Newton, chaplain at the University of New South Wales, described how students "were keen to reconnect and enjoyed being together again" in 2022.

"I think the lockdowns and online learning did have a detrimental impact on people, but the effects weren't always very obvious... Some preferred the flexibility of online learning, [while] others felt it was substantially poorer than in the flesh," he told *Insights*. "It's hard to be an incarnational community when we're not sharing space."

Rev. Newton has connected with students through Bible studies on campus, Corio Student House next door to Hope Uniting Church in Maroubra, and

"the pastoral edges of ministry."

He described the "great gift" of working alongside Steff Fenton, then associate chaplain, in the first half of this year. "Steff has such a gift in inviting people into a safe space of being and learning together."

While Rev. Newton has been able to connect with new students, the shift to trimesters at the University of New South Wales has presented its own challenges. "This shift has placed extra pressure on students and is a change to the rhythm of the year that will take some adjustment," he said.

In 2023, he is looking forward to "deepening the relationships that have grown this year," sharing in

what emerges from the community at Corio Student House, and participating in multi-faith conversations with other chaplains at the university.

### UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

Chaplain at the University of Newcastle, Pastor Kim Langford, described efforts by the multi-faith chaplaincy centre to "remind students and staff that we are available," assisted by the university's

Communications Team. She told *Insights* that returning to campus this year was met "with a mix of enthusiasm and trepidation" as students wrestled with the complexities of both online and in-person learning spaces.

Pastor Langford has connected with students through pastoral counselling and mentoring, as well as through her



L TO R: REV. PHIL NEWTON, STEFF FENTON, AND GABRIELLE

capacity as a Justice of the Peace. She has become a trusted, non-judgemental ear for many students as they grapple with significant decisions about their studies.

Being openly affirming of LGBTQIA+ people as a chaplain is also an important pastoral ministry. Pastor Langford said, "As one of two ALLY-trained chaplains on campus, I've received referrals from UoN counselling services to offer further support for students struggling with sexuality, gender, and faith."

In her interactions with students, Pastor Langford has "noticed growth in students' hopes of what contribution they can make to their communities through their vocation or volunteer roles."

One of the biggest challenges in 2022 has been how spread thin the chaplaincy team is at the University of Newcastle. Pastor Langford told *Insights*, "The majority of our chaplains are volunteers, available for half-days. Enhancing and deepening team connection has remained a strong priority during this period of flux and uncertainty."

In 2023, she is looking forward to "the nurturing of new relationships and

GOD DOES NOT HOLD BACK THE GRACIOUS LOVE THAT LED JESUS TO OFFER HIS LIFE TO US. WE WILL FIGHT TO REACH STUDENTS WITH THIS LOVE

connections alongside the continuity of trust and willingness to be vulnerable,” an at times difficult task within a university environment some experience as “competitive, objectifying, and stressful.”

### MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

UCA chaplain at Macquarie University, Rev. John Dacey, has faced significant challenges over the past two and a half years. He told *Insights*, “It was clear that tertiary ministry needed reinventing, with or without COVID, if we were going to have any students involved.”

So Rev. Dacey set out to find out “what the wider student community at MQ (not just Christians or UCA members) wanted that the UCA chaplaincy could deliver.” After surveying 200 students, he began developing a mentoring program, and fourteen people from Uniting Churches in the region were trained up to mentor university students. However, after a social media campaign and handing out 600 flyers, the program received only six registrations and was unable to proceed.

After several attempts at reimagining tertiary ministry at Macquarie University, the difficult decision has been made to end the UCA chaplaincy work on this campus. Rev. Dacey described how “the vast majority of young people are one, two, or perhaps three generations away from having positive exposure to faith/religion/church... It is extremely difficult to ‘fly the flag’ of Christianity (even progressive and active expressions of it) when it is seen by most as, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, dangerous.”

“A reinvented tertiary ministry could be viable if the church chose to put the resources in to make it happen,” he told *Insights*. “It takes more than one chaplain and a couple of mission workers to make the kind of changes that are needed.”

### UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

Rev. David Gore is UCA chaplain at the University of Technology Sydney. He told *Insights* that the beginning of 2020 saw Christian Students Uniting’s “best recruitment drive ever” at UTS, however because of the first COVID-19 lockdown “we were not able to capitalise on the opportunities that were opening before us.”

The University of Technology Sydney presents unique challenges to tertiary ministry as a campus, and Christian Students Uniting has been unable to rebuild a core group of students in 2022.

A highlight of this year for Rev. Gore was a multi-faith forum on War and Peace held on campus. He was the MC for this event, and UCA minister Rev. Dr Josephine Inlpin was a speaker on the panel.

“The power of the Gospel itself” brings Rev. Gore hope for the new year. “Our God does not hold back the gracious love that led Jesus to offer his life to us. This love finds a way. We will fight to reach students with this love,” he told *Insights*.



“The students themselves are the best people to know what is helpful and makes sense. I see myself as a support worker to their ministry,” Rev. Gore said.

### UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Rev. Adrian Sukumar-White, UCA chaplain at the University of Sydney, described rebuilding as a “slow process” due to the decrease in social engagement across the university. “It has been great to be able to meet and work with students in person again,” he told *Insights*.

Regular Bible studies have returned to campus, alongside social catchups, fostering connection with local congregations and Epworth House, and participating in School of Discipleship face-to-face.

Rev. Sukumar-White told *Insights* that a highlight of this year’s studies was reading *Rainbow Spirit Theology* together. “It’s been great to see how students have been energised by Indigenous theology and advocacy, and really wrestled with what it means to live, work and study on stolen land.”

University of Sydney student Mikali Anagnostis described how they “feel so held in that space to ask questions about identity and my place in the work of justice – questions that can be hard to

voice unless you know you’ll be met with grace and a spirit of growing together.”

This book study concluded with an opportunity to learn from Aboriginal Christian leader Brooke Prentis. Mx Anagnostis told *Insights*, “Brooke’s stories helped us gain some insight into the realities of the injustice for Aboriginal people in the church. She also invited us to [take] practical steps toward justice.”

In 2023, Rev. Sukumar-White is “excited to see how our students live out their passion for Indigenous justice and advocacy, particularly in light of wider society conversations about the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament.”

#### GABI CADENHEAD

MISSION WORKER FOR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS UNITING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY.



Connect with the work of Christian Students Uniting on university campuses here: [csu.org.au](https://csu.org.au)



# The Drop Off

## HOW CAN UNITING CHURCHES SUPPORT THEIR MINISTERS AS THEIR CHILDREN START SCHOOL?

**Insights spoke to Uniting Church ministers whose children started school for the first time in 2023. While they represented a wide range of ministries, they reported some similar experiences in balancing their work with their children's new needs.**

Rev. Nicole Fleming is Candidate Formation Coordinator at United Theological College. Her partner, Eve, has just started working at a Preschool in the Blue Mountains.

"I love my role and the privilege of supporting candidates in their formation and working in the UTC team," Rev. Fleming said.

"One of the gifts of ministry is the flexibility it offers to be able to do this sort of thing."

Rev. Radhika Sukumar-White is one of the ministers at Leichardt Uniting Church.

She told *Insights* that, along with her husband Adrian, she had been lucky to work as part time ministers, while their daughter accessed daycare two to three days a week.

"School is a big change in rhythm, with five shorter days, along with uniforms, lunch boxes, homework, school holidays, pupil free days, and more," Rev. Sukumar White said.

"I experienced some burnout last year, so as much as possible, I want to balance ministry work with quality time with my child, carving out that after school time every day to be with her, and finding spaces in the week for quality time as a family."

"I think parenthood is as much a calling and vocation as ministry, and I want to do what we can to ensure our child doesn't experience that common PK (Pastor's Kid) experience where she feels deprioritised in favour of church."

Rev. Heewon Chang is part of the ministry team at Hope Uniting Church. Her congregation currently has three five year olds starting school, with her daughter being one of them.

"One of the things I learned quickly during formation was the importance of scheduling and this practice has certainly sustained my family life as we juggle pick-ups and drop-offs,

odd meeting hours and zoom meetings, pastoral visits, and worship preparations," Rev. Chang said.

"I am a mother in ministry and every day I am learning what that is like. Some days it is hard, especially the evening meetings and the meetings on Saturdays which translates as the time taken from family time. So, unless, it is necessary I try to keep my Saturdays free as possible."

"Ministry does not come with a 9 to 5 fixed time slot, which can be challenging at times but I am trying to use the flexibility to my advantage and every morning as I take [my daughter] to school, that 10-minute walk to school together is our precious time together."

Rev. Bec Lindsay is a Uniting Church minister currently completing a PhD. With her son starting school this year, she said her family was finding new patterns for the week, a process that was "a bit rocky for now."

"We will get there, but it takes time to negotiate different hours and schedules," she said.

"One of the amusing things for our school was meeting the principal last year who had worked out there would be two Uniting Church minister's kids starting kindergarten."

"She found it odd that my child was enrolled into Catholic scripture. I now find it amusing that these two UCA minister's kids are not only in the same school, but in the same class!"

Rev. Liam Miller is also a PhD Candidate at United Theological College. His eldest daughter started school this year.

"It's all new to us," he said.

"I'm very fortunate with flexibility of my role and ability to generally set the calendar so that I could be there for drop off and pick up most days these first weeks. It's a big adjustment though, we went from doing days of 8-4:30 at daycare/preschool, to 9-3 with school. So it's a whole new rhythm to figure out."

PARENTHOOD IS AS  
MUCH **A CALLING**  
**AND VOCATION AS**  
MINISTRY

## HOW CAN WE HELP?

The ministers *Insights* spoke to expressed a number of ways congregations could potentially help parents in this position.

Rev. Fleming highlighted how UTC had supported her as an example.

"I am incredibly grateful for the support that Peter Walker has offered me to work at home this week and then to work out how an on-site/at home balance will work best for my family," she said.

"Ministry in a congregation setting has a different balance and demand. While evening/weekend meetings and Sunday responsibilities might offer a sense of flexibility during the week, time with the family and one's own downtime when the kid/s are asleep can be lost to the demands of congregational ministry."

"I'm aware of a colleague in another Synod whose congregation ensure that their minister has one weekend a quarter without worship responsibilities so that their family is enabled to have a weekend off together. That congregation also try to keep evening meetings to a minimum – one or two a month where possible."

According to Rev. Sukumar-White, Leichardt Uniting Church has been "a real village" for her daughter, actively participating in her upbringing.

"That's the dream I think, for minister's kids not to feel like they're on show or needing to behave perfectly at church, but to feel home, loved, respected and cared for, as they are. Also, don't expect your ministers to be super-human! Ministers are servants, not slaves, and we have the same needs for rest and recreation as everyone else."

Rev. Chang said it was important that churches allow their ministers to keep a day free.

"Help them keep their Saturdays free as possible," she said.

## IT'S IMPORTANT THAT CONGREGATIONS SUPPORT THEIR MINISTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO DEVELOP STRONG AND HEALTHY BONDS

"And not just for ministers but for young families, try to have child minding in place at large church gatherings or designated kid's areas so that people with young kids and babies can still participate."

Rev. Lindsay expressed similar sentiment.

"I think church communities and councils need to remember that ministers, just like other members and other employees, are also trying to find time to be with their families," she said.

"If they have a partner who works 9 to 5 and/or kids in school then that means weekends and evenings."

"If they're already running services on Sundays, that means Saturday might be their only uninterrupted family time."

"It's important that congregations support their ministers and their families to develop strong and healthy bonds, and that means allowing them time, which may mean that particularly opportunities can't be taken up for a period, for example if Saturday is the only family time available then please don't expect regular Saturday commitments from a minister."

Rev. Miller said that congregations could help ministers by, "just understanding the time commitment."

"Not just in terms of drop off and pick up, but all the time needed to help manage emotions, nerves, expectations of the kids," he said.

Rev. Miller said the texts he received the week his child started school was one of the highlights of the first week.

"Everyone says the whole first term is just a huge effort, with the kids been tired and overwhelmed," he said.

"So realising whatever support is offered in the first weeks needs to linger a little while yet." 🕒

**JONATHAN FOYE**





# Listen to the Heart

## Christians for Voice & Justice



**COMMON GRACE LAUNCHED THE NATIONAL LISTEN TO THE HEART CAMPAIGN TODAY, CALLING CHRISTIANS TO VOTE YES IN THE REFERENDUM FOR A CONSTITUTIONALLY ENSHRINED INDIGENOUS VOICE TO PARLIAMENT.**





# Common Grace calls Christians to Vote Yes for Voice and First Nations Justice



led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Leaders, Listen to the Heart invites Christians across Australia to deeply listen to the calls of Indigenous peoples for justice, through Voice, together with Treaty and Truth-Telling.

Common Grace National Director Gershon Nimbalker said the campaign will give Christians a chance to reflect on the significance of the Uluru Statement of the Heart and then act together for change.

“I’m convinced of the power that Christians have when they work together with God to pursue the goodness that He intends,” he said.

“Common Grace believes that as followers of Christ, we are called to love and respect our neighbours, to seek justice and righteousness, to repent and make amends for wrongdoing, and to work towards reconciliation and healing.

“A constitutionally enshrined First Nations voice to parliament would provide a formal mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate more fully in decision making processes that affect their lives and communities, ensuring their voices are heard.

“It’s a step towards better policy, towards addressing the harm and injustice that they have endured, and towards reconciliation.

“Constitutional change is hard in Australia – only 8 out of our 44 referendums have been successful. We know some parts of the Church are uncertain about this referendum, but we hear the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian leaders calling us to act and a successful YES vote is what the overwhelming majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples want.”

Common Grace Relationships and Storytelling Coordinator, Safina Stewart, a proud Wuthithi and Mabuiaig Island woman, said a Yes vote would renew faith in ourselves as a nation and in the repairing process of reconciliation.

“The whole of Australia would be gifted when our First Peoples can give full expression to our cultural beauty and have justice and self-determination restored,” she said.

“Whenever we yarn about topics like Voice, treaties, or truth telling, we always come back to the topic of justice. This is because of the injustices that continue to wreak havoc in the daily lives and future of our people.

“We face much sorrow for our people, and much frustration at structures that inhibit the health, freedom and flourishing of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

“Yet, I’m always astounded by the resilience and faith of our Aboriginal Christian Leaders. They remind me of the impossibility of

justice or restoration without relationship to Creator, the resurrecting power of Jesus, and guiding inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

“I would like to ask churches to pay special attention to the voices of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Leaders who burn brightly for hope, justice and gritty grace.”

Common Grace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Coordinator, Gomeroi woman Bianca Manning said, “Jesus has heard the cries of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who have been raising their voices for self-determination and justice for over 200 years. An Indigenous Voice to parliament, alongside Truth-Telling and Treaties, is an important step on this healing journey.”

IT'S A STEP  
TOWARDS  
BETTER POLICY,  
TOWARDS  
ADDRESSING  
THE HARM AND  
INJUSTICE  
THAT THEY  
HAVE ENDURED,  
AND TOWARDS  
RECONCILIATION



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Connecting people to God, each other and the community

## General Secretary

Uniting Church in Australia  
Synod of South Australia

The Synod of South Australia seeks to appoint a General Secretary who will be accountable to the Church in South Australia through its Synod Standing Committee. This position is the Secretary of the Synod and the Senior Executive Officer of the Uniting Church SA.

The General Secretary has responsibility for leading both the Synod Office and the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology and this includes management of the Church's financial operations, property resources, risk and insurance; its marketing and communications; and being pivotal in establishing and maintaining a positive and supportive organisational culture.

To be considered for this position you must be a committed member of the Uniting Church in Australia; have a passion for the Gospel; and gifts in visionary, prayerful and empowering leadership.

A Position Description & Person Specification for this role is available from the Synod of South Australia website located at: <https://sa.uca.org.au/uc-positions-vacant/current-positions/-general-secretary-synod-of-south-australia>

Further information to: [humanresources@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:humanresources@sa.uca.org.au) or please contact Manager, Human Resources on (08) 8236 4278. Applications to be submitted to: [humanresources@sa.uca.org.au](mailto:humanresources@sa.uca.org.au)

Applications close Friday, 31st March, 2023 at 5.00 pm.



The Uniting Church in Australia  
Synod of South Australia

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# March Reflecting on our relationship with God



**LENT 2  
5 MARCH 2023**

*Genesis 12L 1-4a, Psalm 121, Romans 4: 1-5, 13- 17. John 3: 1-7*

Throughout history, people have gone the extra mile to seek higher teaching, ultimate truth or enlightenment.

Nicodemus came to Jesus, a young wandering preacher who also performed miracles. Nicodemus considers Jesus no more than a distinguished rabbi who has done miracles like many rabbis attributed in Jewish writings.

During this Lenten season, we meet Jesus, not as a distinguished rabbi who performs miracles but as the one lifted on a cross so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

**LENT 3  
12 MARCH 2023**

*Exodus 17: 1-7, Ps 95, Rom 5: 1-11, John 4: 5- 42*

“Give me a drink”, Jesus, a Jewish man, asks the Samaritan woman who came to fetch water from Jacob’s well at midday.

The antipathies between Jews and Samaritans at the time of Jesus were irreconcilable. Furthermore, there was strong prejudice towards women like the Samaritan woman in her community.

But the openness of the Samaritan woman received Jesus, who revealed himself as the gift of God who could give living water and hear the revolutionary understanding of worshipping God in spirit and truth.

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well invites us to respond to a more profound truth, the divine communion with God, even if it takes a courageous step of breaking the customs of our time.

**LENT 4  
19 MARCH 2023**

*1 Samuel 16: 1- 13, Ps 23, Ep 5: 8- 14, John 9: 1-41*

One in five Australians has some form of disability, and an estimated 1.3 billion people or one in six people worldwide, experience significant disability. People with disabilities experience discrimination more frequently than others.

The story of the man born blind from the gospel of John allows us to talk about the issue of disabilities, which is often absent in faith conversations.

Jesus saw that God was present and that God’s grace was with everyone in every situation. So he said, “So that God’s works might be revealed in him” ( Vs 3).

During this Lent, as we reflect on our relationship with God, let the experience and insights of people with disability expand our awareness of God’s grace.

**LENT 5  
26 MARCH 2023**

*Ezekiel 37: 1-14, Psalm 130, Romans 8: 6- 11. John 11: 1-45*

The story of Lazarus is one of the most famous stories in the Bible, a dead man walking out of the tomb!

John’s gospel has many wordplays, which are the metaphorical means to highlight the spiritual realm.

Jesus is inviting us, like Martha and Mary, to break free from the bonds of spiritual death and live in the light and eternal life. ☺

*These Lectionary Reflections have been prepared by Rev. Myung Hwa Park and have been edited for length. Find the full versions at [www.insights.uca.org.au](http://www.insights.uca.org.au)*

THE OPENNESS  
OF THE  
SAMARITAN  
WOMAN  
RECEIVED  
JESUS, WHO  
REVEALED  
HIMSELF AS  
THE GIFT OF  
GOD WHO  
COULD GIVE  
LIVING WATER

▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

# April

## Are we willing to follow Jesus?

### LENT 6

#### PALM SUNDAY 2 APRIL 2023

*Psalm 118: 1-2, 19- 29, Matthew 21: 1-11*

Today, we celebrate Palm Sunday, the day the proper Lenten journey ends, and the day we inaugurate Holy Week. But some will observe today as Passion Sunday, when people will hear the entire Passion narrative of the persecution and death of Jesus at Golgotha as a prelude to the observance of Holy Week.

In 2000, more than 250,000 people walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in support of Reconciliation. People from all walks of life joined in the remarkable act of strength, which led to a roll-on effect around the country for reconciliation.

On Palm Sunday, as we celebrate Jesus riding on a donkey entering Jerusalem, let us ask ourselves, 'Are we willing to follow him?'

### HOLY WEEK

#### 3 APRIL – 8 APRIL 2023

Holy Week is a time when the church lives out the events of Jesus' passion. We remind ourselves of what happened to Jesus in his final days, and as we reflect on the sequence of Holy Week, we become part of the story and let the story become part of us.

### MAUNDY THURSDAY (HOLY THURSDAY)

*Exodus 12: 1-4, 11-14, Ps 116: 1-2, 12-19, 1Cor 11: 23-26, John 13: 1-17, 31b-35*

The texts for Maundy Thursday focus on three communal celebrations: the Passover meal, the Eucharistic meal and the foot washing.

As we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we re-enact the last meal Jesus had with his disciples as a Passover meal.

Foot washing is an act of hospitality, and Jesus performed it as an act of service when he washed the disciple's feet. And this powerful act of foot washing set the tone for the new commandment: 'Love one another, as I have loved you, so you must love one another.'

### GOOD FRIDAY

*Isaiah 52: 12- 53:12, Psalm 22, Heb 10: 16-25, John 18: 1-19: 42*

Good Friday is the darkest day in the Christian calendar. On this day, we ponder on the suffering and death of Jesus and let Good Friday help us to

recognise the reality of suffering and death and allow us to face them in faith.

Like John, we watch Jesus on the cross, the Son of Man, sent by God to be one of us, who told us the truth of what matters the most, and revealed the love of God so that we too can break walls and rules that judge and discriminate against others.

### EASTER SUNDAY

#### 9 APRIL

*Acts 10: 34- 43 Ps 118: 1-2, 14- 24, Col 3: 1-4, John 20: 1-18*

Although there are little variations of the Easter account in the four gospels, they have consensus that women went to the tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week and found it empty.

Mary didn't expect anything but to find the dead body in the tomb. But instead, she saw the stone was rolled away. Her immediate conclusion was that someone must have taken the body of her Lord.

A Korean Poet, Kim Chun Soo, has put this in his poem, *The Flower*; 꽃

*"Before I called her name, she was nothing more than a gesture. She came to me when I called her name and became a flower."*

내가 그의 이름을 불러주기 전에는 그는 다만 하나의 몸짓에 지나지 않았다.내가 그의 이름을 불러주었을 때, 그는 나에게로 와서 꽃이 되었다.

Mary's encounter with the risen Lord prefigures the holiest mysterious experience of a personal encounter open to all who love Jesus.

### SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

*Acts 2: 1-4a, 22- 32, Psalm 16, 1 Peter 1: 3- 9, John 20: 19- 31*

Today is the second Sunday of Easter, sometimes called "Low Sunday", but the gospel reading brings us back to the first day of Easter. The gospel of John's account of the disciples' "Easter experience" provides us with continuity

between the Risen Lord and the emerging church and the implication for the human community.

Thomas' reaction was quite reasonable and important for those who also hadn't physically met the risen Lord.

Jesus' response gives a blessing to all who come to believe Jesus without meeting him in the flesh.

### THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

*Acts 2: 1-4a, 36- 41, Psalm 16L 1-4, 12- 19, 1 Peter 1: 17- 23, Luke 24: 13- 35*

This week, the third Sunday of Easter, we look at the Easter experience recorded in the gospel of Luke, which is the most extended single post-resurrection narrative in the gospels; it

raises a question for us 'What is the Easter message and what are we to do with it?'

It was not until Jesus took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them that they did recognise him.

In the breaking of bread, we too, will recognise Jesus, who fed the multitude with blessing (9:16), the last supper when

he revealed that the bread was his body which would be given for them, and the cup as the new covenant in his blood. ( 22: 20 ) We might ask ourselves, which road are we walking on, and who is our companion?

### FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

*Acts 2: 42- 47, psalm 23, 1 Peter 2L 19- 25, John 10: 1-10*

Jesus said with great emphasis: "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture." (vs 9)

As we read this text after the Easter event, we can be more acutely aware of the role of the shepherd, who not only came to take the sheep to a safe place but also to be sacrificed so that the wayward sheep were able to return.

The relationship between the sheep and the shepherd is born out of experience. How would you develop your relationship with Jesus? 🕊

WE WATCH  
JESUS ON THE  
CROSS, THE SON  
OF MAN, SENT BY  
GOD TO BE ONE  
OF US

# May What is our mission to the world?

**FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
7 MAY 2023**

*Acts 7: 55-60, Psalm 31: 1-5, 15- 16, 1 Peter 2: 2-10, John 14: 1-14*

In the previous chapter, Jesus had announced to his disciples that he would be going away, and they could not come. This must have been a terrible shock to them because they had followed Jesus for the last three years, and they wouldn't want him to leave now or ever.

Jesus gave a simple but memorable saying to explain who he is, and who we are to become in relation to him, with the "I am" statement. 'I am the way, the truth and the life' ( vs 6 ). Jesus is saying that he is the path to get to life and wisdom.

**SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
14 MAY 2023**

*Acts 17: 22- 31, Psalm 66: 8-20, 1 Peter 3: 13- 22, John 14: 15- 21*

Losing a loved one is one of the most painful experiences of life. Jesus offered pastoral assurance and promised that the disciples, who were anxious and shaken by the thought of the absence of Jesus, and, perhaps ultimately, the absence of God, would not be left alone.

Jesus repeatedly stressed love and keeping the commandments, which is a natural response to love, as the way to reveal the abiding relationship between Jesus and God and between Jesus and the disciples.

In our world of division, war, disparity, loneliness, and loss, the good news is that we are not left orphaned but know that we have a Helper to bring us together in the abiding presence of God.

**ASCENSION OF THE LORD  
18 MAY 2023**

*Acts 1: 1-11 Psalm 47 Ephesians 1: 15- 23. Luke 24: 44- 53*

In the protestant church tradition, Ascension is not celebrated like Christmas or Easter, although it is one of the oldest feasts celebrated by the church. We confess in the Apostles' Creed, "He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty."

Ascension is an important event as it marks the end of the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth. It gives us hope for the glorious and triumphant return of

Christ one day after the interim period between promise and fulfilment.

Luke 24:44-53 allows us to see the wonderment and anticipation in hope of those early days by detailing the last scenes of the risen Lord appearing to his disciples and others at various times for 40 days before he ascended to heaven. On Ascension Day, let us ask what our mission is in the world and how we bear witness to it.

**SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER  
21 MAY 2023**

*Acts 1: 6-14, Psalm 68: 1-10, 32- 35 1 Peter 4: 12- 14, 5: 6-11 John 17: 1-11*

In his earthly ministry, Jesus prayed on numerous occasions: for healing, blessing, thanksgiving, and forgiveness for his disciples and himself.

Interestingly, Jesus begins by praying for himself before he prays for his disciples. Jesus probably needed confirmation concerning what he had done and was about to do. So he asked God to glorify him. "Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son, so that the Son may give glory to you." (Vs 1)

The word 'Glory' or 'glorify' is not a word in everyday use for us, so let's borrow a word close to the meaning of 'glory'. We might use 'honour' instead. So we can rewrite verse 1 as 'Father, the hour has come; honour your Son so that the Son can honour you.'

**DAY OF PENTECOST  
28 MAY 2023**

*Acts 2: 1-21, Psalm 104: 24- 34, 35b , 1 Corinthians 12: 3b- 13, John 20: 19- 23*

On the Feast of Weeks in the first century AD, devout Jews celebrated the holy gift of the Law, 'Torah ' at Mt. Sinai as well as the spring harvest.

About one hundred twenty followers of Jesus (Acts 1:15) began to speak in other languages enabled by the Spirit.

There are 24 language groups in the Uniting Church as well as many other Aboriginal language groups. Whatever circumstances have led them to journey within the Uniting Church; it is a clear sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Uniting Church.

Just as God breathed life into Adam, the risen Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples to empower them to carry out the ministry of reconciliation. 🌱



## BELIEF MATTERS

# To delight in the Commandments



**P**salm 112:1–10 portrays “those who fear the Lord” (verses 1–9) in contrast to “the wicked” (verse 10). I suspect that this psalm is a fitting companion to Matthew 5:17, in which Jesus strongly affirms the Law: “do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

This affirmation of the Law (in Hebrew, תּוֹרָה, transliterated as Torah) is a distinctive characteristic of the book of origins which we attribute, by tradition, to the disciple Matthew. In this Gospel, Jesus holds consistently to the requirements of Torah, advocating strongly for the righteous-justice that is at its heart, debating strenuously the interpretations offered by the scribes and Pharisees, and claiming his role as the authorised Teacher of Torah: “you have one teacher, and you are all students ... nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah” (Matt 23:8, 10).

The strong affirmation of Torah which is expressed in Matthew’s Gospel is ubiquitous throughout Hebrew Scripture. The Law is God’s gift to Israel; in Exodus, God tells Moses, “I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instructions (Exod 24:12).

In a later retelling the story of Moses, the Deuteronomist has Moses, speaking on behalf of God, telling the Israelites, “take to heart all the words that I am giving in witness against you today; give them as a command to your children, so that they

may diligently observe all the words of this law” (Deut 32:46). Indeed, he intensifies this in the next sentence: “this is no trifling matter for you, but rather your very life” (Deut 32:47). The Torah is the very heart of the matter.

Some of the great figures in Israel (at least in the historical sagas that were collected) are remembered as those who were faithful to Torah. On Josiah, the great reformer who recalled a faithless Israel to the covenant, we are told “before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him” (2 Kings 23:25).

On Hezekiah, who had the neglected Temple cleansed and sanctified and then restored the right worship of the Lord in the Temple (2 Chron 30:8–9), we read that “every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God, and in accordance with the law and the commandments, to seek his God, he did with all his heart; and he prospered” (2 Chron 31:21). And during the restoration of Jerusalem, we are told that Ezra “had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10).

Each of these leaders manifested in their life what this Sunday’s psalm states; they are “those who fear the Lord, who greatly delight in his commandments” (Ps 112:1). Elsewhere in the psalms, this same piety is clearly evident.

The opening psalm affirms that for the righteous, “their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night” (Ps 1:2). A later psalm declares that “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart” (Ps 40:8).

The longest psalm of all, Psalm 119, is an acrostic series of 22 eight-verse stanzas (arranged alphabetically) in which the author(s) consistently affirm this. “I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word” (Ps 119:16). By contrast to “the arrogant”, whose “hearts are fat and gross”, the psalmist declares, “I delight in your law” (Ps 119:70).

Again, we hear, “let your mercy come to me, that I may live, for your law is my delight” (Ps 119:77); “if your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my misery” (Ps 119:92); and “I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight” (Ps 119:74). Echoing these words many centuries later, Paul, in the midst of his agonising about Torah in Romans 7, is able to affirm, “I delight in the law of God in my inmost self” (Rom 7:22). Delight for the Law runs through Jewish history.

So this longest of all psalms, a series of 22 meditations on Torah, contains regular affirmations of its place in personal and communal piety: “give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart” (v.34); “Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long” (v.97); “I hate the double-minded, but I love your law” (v.113); “I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law” (v.163); and, “great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble” (v.165).

In the long speech attributed to Moses (but actually crafted many centuries later during the time of a renewal of the covenant), the lawgiver distills the essence of Torah: “now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 10:12). Love is at the heart of the Law, as later faithful Jews would affirm. The Preacher, writing as Hellenism comes to the ascendancy, declares that “those who fear the Lord seek to please him, and those who love him are filled with his law” (Sirach 2:16).

Just a few centuries later the Pharisee-turned-evangelist Paul declares that “the one who loves another has fulfilled the law” and, citing a number of commandments, emphasises that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:8–10); and again, citing a verse from the Torah, he affirms that “the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” (Gal 5:14, quoting Lev 19:18).

The terms used in Psalm 112 to describe “those who fear the Lord” and “delight in his commandments” are striking. Most strikingly, they are characterised by their “righteousness” (112:3), which is at the heart of Torah. The psalmist places these two concepts in poetic parallelism in the song, “your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your law is the truth” (Ps 119:142).

They are depicted as “upright” (112:2, 4) and they “conduct their affairs with justice” (112:5). This is a central claim of Torah on the people: “justice, only justice you shall follow” (Deut 16:20), “with justice you shall judge your neighbour” (Lev 19:15)—with the corollary that “anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice” is to be cursed (Deut

27:19). The call for justice is, likewise, a regular refrain amongst the prophets, calling the people to act justly (Amos 5:18–24; Micah 6:6–8; Isa 5:1–7; 42:1–4; 56:1–2; Jer 21:12; 22:3; 33:15; Ezek 18:5–9; 34:11–16; Zeph 3:5; Zech 7:9, to name just some of the many key passages on justice).

These people are “blessed” (112:2), a word which resounds through the stories and songs of the ancient Israelites. God’s blessings are given in the story of the creation of the world, where God blessed “living creatures of every kind” (Gen 1:22), and then humankind, made “in the image of God” and blessed to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 1:26–28). God blesses Noah and his sons, with the same charge to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1), and Abram (Gen 12:2), and through Abram promises to bless “all the families of the earth” (Gen 12:3; the blessing is on “all the nations of the earth” at Gen 22:18).

An early prayer, later attributed to the priests, began, “the Lord bless you and keep you” (Num 6:23); these words are picked up in a later psalm, praying “may God be gracious to us and bless us” (Ps 67:1–7). God’s blessing is indeed realised by those who are faithful to God’s way, as expressed in Torah, with each of the patriarchs blessed: Abraham (Gen 22:15–18), Isaac (Gen 26:24), Jacob (Gen 28:1–4), and Joseph (Gen 49:22–26).



## JESUS HOLDS CONSISTENTLY TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF TORAH, **ADVOCATING STRONGLY FOR THE RIGHTEOUS-JUSTICE** THAT IS AT ITS HEART

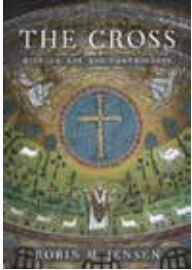
God blessed the people in the land (Deut 30:16), Elkanah and Hannah, parents of Samuel (1 Sam 2:18–20), David (2 Sam 7:28–29), and on through the ahead the blessing continued for the faithful people of Israel (Psalms 3:8; 5:12; 24:5; 29:11; 63:4; 107:38; 115:12–13; 133:3; Isa 44:1–5; Jer 31:23; Ezek 34:25–31; 37:26; Hag 2:19; Joel 2:14; Mal 3:10).

These blessed people, righteous and upright, thus are said to have exhibited the character of God, for they are “gracious, merciful and righteous” (Ps 112:4). This description echoes the refrain heard many times through the Hebrew Scriptures, affirming that the Lord God is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Exod 34:6; 2 Chron 30:8–9; Neh 9:17, 32; Jonah 4:2; Joel 2:13; Ps 86:15; 103:8, 11; 111:4; 145:8–9). This is the Lord God who enters into covenant, time and time and again, with the people of Israel; they, in turn, exemplify the qualities of God in their daily lives. They are “gracious, merciful, and righteous” (Ps 112:4).

Such a strong affirmation and deep appreciation for Torah, as we find in this psalm—and, indeed, in a number of other psalms—underlies the portrayal of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel that we will encounter, week by week, throughout this Year A of the liturgical cycle. This is the emphasis that Matthew offers, for he wants to heighten the fidelity of Jesus as a Torah-abiding Jew, and encourage his hearers and readers to follow that same pathway of faithfulness to the Torah. Jesus stands firmly in the tradition of the psalms, grateful to God for his covenant relationship with God, and seeking to live with justice and steadfast love in all the ways that God expects and requires; and he beckons us to follow in that same pathway in our lives of faith. ☉

**REV. DR JOHN SQUIRES**  
EDITOR OF WITH LOVE TO THE WORLD

# THE STRANGE HISTORY OF THE *Cross*



**THE CROSS: HISTORY, ART AND CONTROVERSY** ROBIN JENSEN

For the first decades, even centuries, of the church, fish, anchors, ships and doves were far more prominent symbols of Christianity than the cross. Robin Jensen, in his book *The Cross: History, Art and Controversy*, writes that frescoes were more likely to feature other episodes from Jesus' ministry and life, such as his baptism, rather than his

crucifixion. In their book *Saving Paradise* scholars Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker tell us that it was not the crucifixion but paradise that was the key image of the early church, representative of God's kingdom bursting forth on earth, a sign of hope and community amongst the Roman world of cruelty.

For the earliest Christians, both Jewish and pagan in origin, the cross was a reviled image, reserved for the worst criminals, which is why St Paul has to persuade his readers not to be ashamed of it but to see its significance. For Paul, paradoxically, the means by which Jesus is humiliated becomes for us a celebration. But the adoption of the cross as a symbol simply proved to pagans and Jews how strange these Christians were.

Once the cross became a well-used symbol, it was malleable. It could be associated with ships and builders' tools, and it represented the four points of the compass. It would also be closely associated with Eden's Tree of Life, a symbolism refined and embellished over the centuries. In the Middle Ages a legend developed that the cross was actually made from wood from the Tree of Life, because, says Jensen, it was thought the wood itself must have been in some way special.

Origen wrote that the cross shouldn't be thought of as magical, but after Constantine's conversion and the story of his mother's implausible discovery of the relic of the True Cross, this is exactly what happened. It seems the hunger for talismans is strong. Pieces of the True Cross, which could magically duplicate, were used for healing, taken into battle and housed in elaborately jewelled containers.

It is surprising to us, writes Jensen, with our being used to their ubiquity, that crucifixes only appeared after the ninth century, and even then they featured a defiantly living rather than dying Jesus. As the importance of focussing on Jesus' suffering developed in the Middle Ages crucifixes became more realistically gruesome, often to encourage guilt and therefore loyalty to the church as the means of being saved. In the East, they thought this was a problem as these crucifixes took away from the importance of the resurrection.

Martin Luther's theology, building on St Paul's, has the cross at the centre, as a hidden, paradoxical place of power. Luther thought contemplating Christ's suffering, as a means of our liberation, was appropriate, but for Zwingli and Calvin crucifixes were part of all that Catholic superstition, and their followers burned and smashed them along with the statues of Mary and the saints.

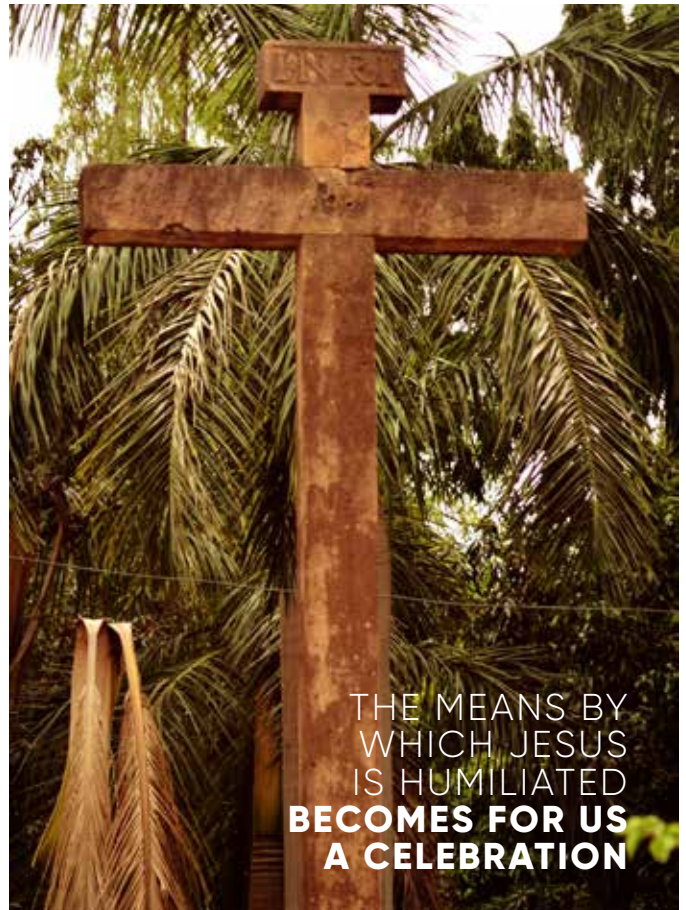
The cross remains a controversial symbol. In China the government recently removed external crosses from churches, only to have lawyers challenge the practice. As has been well-publicised, wearing a cross on the job can get you fired in Europe. And in our mainstream media the image of a cross silhouetted against the sky inevitably refers to dark, scandalous behaviour within the church, turning the cross once again into a symbol of pain and shame.

For some churches, an empty cross, rather than a crucifix, symbolises that it is not atonement and displaced punishment that is central and necessary, but rather the Easter message of new life arising surprisingly, amongst the poor and marginalised and despite the world's tendency to cruel displays of power. 🕯️

**NICK MATTISKE**

BLOGS ON BOOKS AT [COBURGREVIEWOFBOOKS.WORDPRESS.COM](http://COBURGREVIEWOFBOOKS.WORDPRESS.COM) AND IS THE ILLUSTRATOR OF *THOUGHTS THAT FEEL SO BIG*.

**IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA THE IMAGE OF A CROSS SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE SKY REFERS TO DARK, SCANDALOUS BEHAVIOUR WITHIN THE CHURCH**



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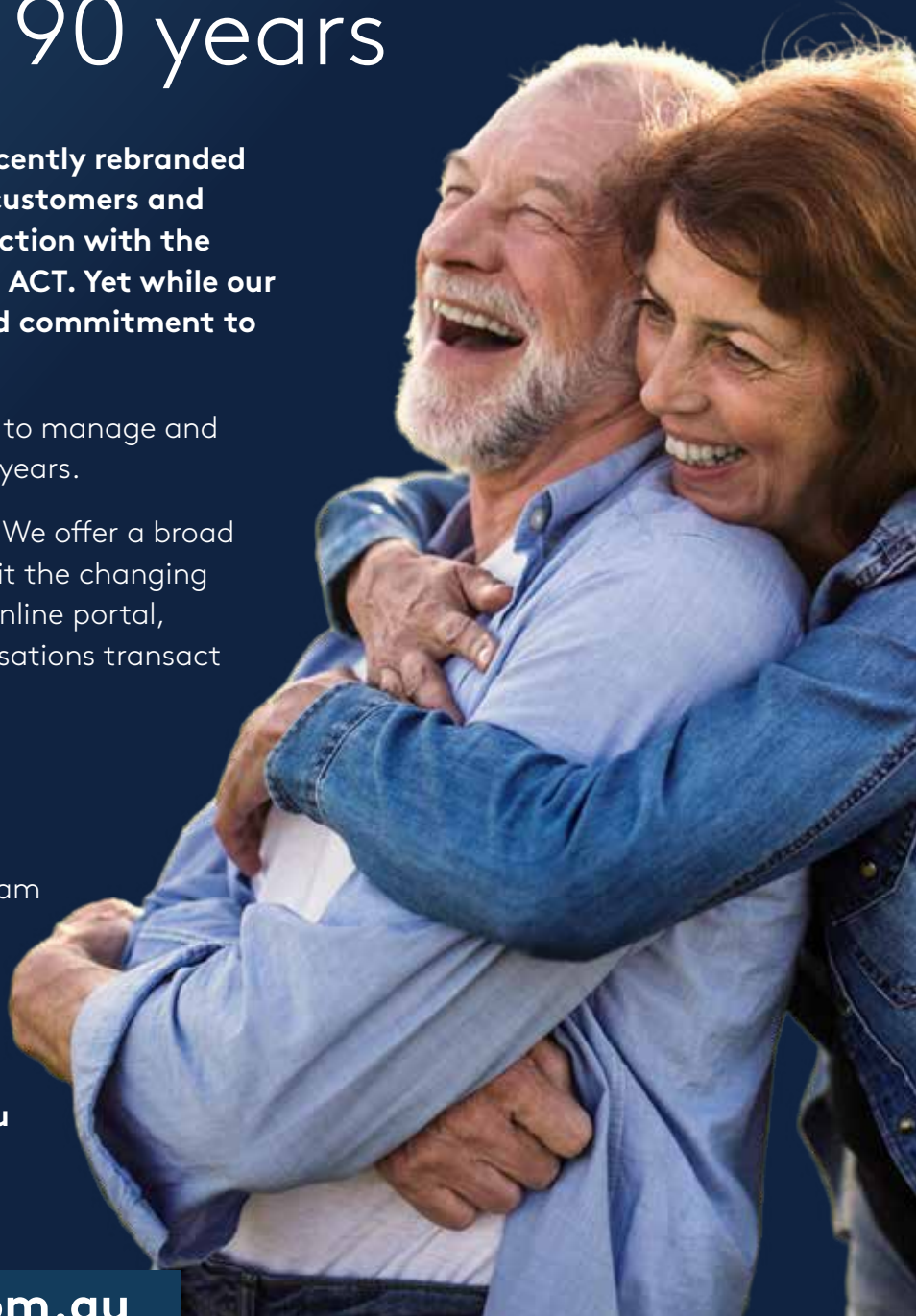
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