

Christmas Edition

insights

SUMMER 2024

Mary's Song

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Walking
Together

ACTION PLAN 2025



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SYNOD OF NSW & ACT



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Stewardship of Faith



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.

Over the course of this year, I've participated in a series of Discernment Summits which gathered leaders from the Synod and the presbyteries to identify priorities and practicalities for resourcing the church for mission and ministry.

The word 'stewardship' featured often in these gatherings. Like many members of the church I have vivid memories of congregational stewardship 'campaigns'. Usually annual events grounded in reminding the church that everything we have is given to us by God and drawing on many familiar stories from scripture – the parable of the talents, the widow's mite, the rich young ruler and many others – encouraging members to consider their levels of giving or inviting them to contribute to some worthy or necessary cause.

The opportunity to reflect on and experience the gift of giving in the light of God's great and steadfast generosity is always valuable. Stewardship or attending to the costs and material practicalities of the church's life is a fundamental responsibility and an increasingly delicate balancing act as the church contracts, expectations increase and resources are stretched.

This tension fuels an underlying anxiety about 'rainy days' and the need to provision to cover the costs of the unexpected. Sinking funds are simply necessary to manage the (constantly escalating) costs of old buildings. However, sometimes provisioning for rainy days can become a form of hoarding if it gets detached from its grounding in God's generosity, faithfulness and missional intent. Hoarding actually contradicts what we profess and proclaim.

Since the last Discernment Summit, I started to wonder whether wealth is the only thing hoarded in the church. Should we also be reflecting on the stewardship of our faith as well as the stewardship of our assets?

In the church, we're very familiar with the advice we frequently receive from politicians when we've expressed an opinion in the public space. Usually along the lines of 'the church should mind its own spiritual business and leave policy or politics to the grown ups'. Unsurprisingly, I generally regard this as a positive indication that the church is doing precisely what it is created to do – proclaiming

the gospel in word and deed for the sake of the lost and the least.

However, over the course of my congregational ministry, I've had countless pastoral conversations with committed church members earnestly explaining to me that their 'faith' was a private matter between them and God, a position that I've always found quite baffling. If my godmother (and others) had not talked to me about their faith, their experience of Jesus Christ, their discipleship, I would not now have any faith.

THE FAITH OF DISCIPLES IS A CRITICAL ELEMENT OF THE WEALTH OF THE CHURCH

The faith of disciples is a critical element of the wealth of the church. It's not stored in bank accounts or buildings. It's storied in the lives of faithful disciples to be shared with generosity and joy at every opportunity.

This perspective was sharpened for me by a column written by Tim Winton in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 October 2024), titled 'We need to find a new story to live in'. Tim describes the world as being co-opted into a story that 'urges us to pursue live of endless consumption and pitiless competition powered by the fuels that are killing the world.'

At its best and at its heart, the church doesn't live in or from that story. In baptism, we are all called into a very different story – a very old and eternally new story that has transformed the world through time and hasn't finished yet. In other words, the UCA and all the disciples gathered therein has not finished – our work is to tell God's different story. In the times that we're in (but probably in all times) there's real urgency arising out of the consequences of the 'world's story', so we better organise ourselves to get on with that work which is what the Discernment Summits are seeking to do.

Advent, the beginning of the church's year, is a perfect time to reflect on what sharing God's different story might involve for you and your church next year. 🕯️



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**WALKING TOGETHER
ACTION PLAN 2025**



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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.



Uniting Church
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT

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Christmas

A Timeless and Transformative Season for All



REV. FAAIMATA
HAVEA HILIAU
MODERATOR

My brothers and sisters in Christ, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas, a season for all, for families, for communities and for the world, Micah offers a timeless and transformative call. "What does the Lord require of you: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

This resonates deeply with the true meaning of Christmas, and invites all of us into a profound reflection on how we live out our faith.

At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, God's radical, transformative act coming into the world as a vulnerable child born into poverty and uncertainty.

CHRISTMAS NOT AS A SEASON OF EXCESS, BUT A MOMENT TO RECOMMIT TO JUSTICE, KINDNESS, AND HUMILITY

For those families that are managing the rising costs of living or communities coming together against division and violence, and the world battling injustices of war and climate change, it calls us to reimagine Christmas not as a season of excess, but a moment to recommit to justice, kindness, and humility.

To "do justice" at Christmas means recognising the systems of inequality and oppression that persist in our world and standing with those who are most affected. In a time when many are struggling to make ends meet, facing poverty, war, and injustice, we are called to be advocates for change. Whether it's supporting fair treatment of those with drug dependency, working with the homeless and the marginalised, or advocating for climate justice, doing justice is our response to the love that came into the world in Christ.

To "love kindness" is to embody the radical compassion and mercy of Jesus. In a world often marked by division and indifference, Christmas invites all of us to extend kindness not just to those who are easy to love, but to the stranger, the "other", and even those we disagree with. Kindness can be a powerful force for healing and reconciliation, transforming both individual lives and entire communities.

To "walk humbly with God" is a reminder that our faith calls us to a posture of humility, recognising that we are all interconnected and dependent on God's grace.

Christmas challenges us to transform our world, to set aside pride, greed, and self-interest, and instead live together with one another, seeking peace and reconciliation for all people.

This season, we honour the birth of Jesus Christ. Good news. Indeed, Good news for all people.

Bring justice, kindness and humility for your families, for your community, and for our world. Have a blessed Christmas. 🙏

Follow the Moderator on Instagram:
[instagram.com/moderator_ucanswact](https://www.instagram.com/moderator_ucanswact)



YOUR SAY...

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



IN RESPONSE TO THE STORY **THE VOICE REFERENDUM: A PERSONAL REFLECTION A YEAR AFTER THE "NO" RESULT**

Thanks, Nathan, for such a powerful reflection. I appreciate you telling it straight and being direct about why the result occurred and how it makes you feel. 🗳️

GRAEME TUTT

Powerful article, which is a call to all members of the Uniting Church to speak out about the shameful result of the Referendum. You describe accurately the continuing measures of disadvantage faced by First Nations people and the obvious objective of assimilation promoted by the supporters of the No vote. But take heart that there were 40% of the population voting Yes and the proportion was greater among the younger voters. We must continue the struggle for Voice, Treaty and Truth-telling as the only way forward. 🗳️

DOUG HEWITT

IN RESPONSE TO THE STORY **UNITED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE SUPPORTS THEOLOGY STUDENTS IN BEIRUT**

We have also been given accommodation at the NEST in Beirut when we were visiting Lebanon in 2002 as members of a group from the NSW Ecumenical Council. The purpose of our visit was to show solidarity with the Near East Council of Churches as funds raised through the Christmas Bowl in Australia supported projects of the NECC, including NEST. We also spent time in the Bekaa Valley south of Beirut at a school for disabled children, some of whom has been injured in earlier bombing by the Israeli Defence Forces. Once again in recent weeks the Bekaa Valley has been the target of IDF bombs. When will the horror of war end and a ceasefire be achieved? We will continue to give support to the suffering people of Lebanon. 🗳️

DOUG AND ISABEL HEWITT

IN RESPONSE TO THE STORY **A LEGACY OF ONES OWN**

I am really grateful for the time and tireless efforts you devote to your work. Thank you! 🗳️

HELEN WASUN KOKA

A true labour of love Margaret and the ultimate gift to such an amazing community. Ron would be proud! Well done, true and faithful Servant! 🗳️

JOAN SCOTT

IN RESPONSE TO THE STORY **NEW BOOK PROFILES LOGGING BREACHES BY FORESTRY CORPORATION**

What an excellent collaboration by dedicated and wonderful people! Borne purely out of knowing the right thing to do and loving the beauty and magic of the natural world. Logging must end to protect something more precious than anything temporal. Seeing the destruction of the far south coasts' state forests is heartbreaking. Heads should roll: not trees. 🗳️

BRONTE

ACT FOR PEACE

CONFRONTING INJUSTICE TOGETHER
THROUGH THE **act**alliance

75 years of bringing hope to displaced families

For 75 years, church communities have been uniting through the Christmas Bowl Appeal to give hope to families who are displaced.

In 1949 Rev. Frank Byatt first laid a bowl of remembrance on the Christmas dinner table asking his family to 'share your good dinner with hungry children in other lands'. The Christmas Bowl appeal was born.

Brian and Jillian Polkinghorne have been supporting the Christmas Bowl since Brian was the congregational minister in a South Australian country Uniting Church Parish in 1965.

"It's probably the most effective witness to Jesus," Brian explains. "Love for the poor, the outcast, the widows, and the orphans."

For the Polkinghorne's, their faith in action has defined their lives. 50 years ago, the Christmas Bowl supported them to start an agriculture production and training centre in Tanzania.

"It's part of the call of the gospel to be there for your neighbour."

"We have so many blessings, and we see the injustices. We see, the oppression, we see the unfairness of it all, and we just feel that we have to respond."

Across oceans, families like Brian's have been providing much-needed support for families displaced by conflict and disaster.

Families like Jane's in Zimbabwe.

When Cyclone Idai hit in 2019, Jane lost everything.

"The cyclone started around 8pm when I was asleep with the children in the house," says Jane.

"I woke up to find the house shaking and about to collapse. I was taken up with the water. I fractured my skull and hurt my leg."

Jane lost her three children in the cyclone. She spent two years living in a tent after the disaster and was one of 700 displaced families who required relocation.

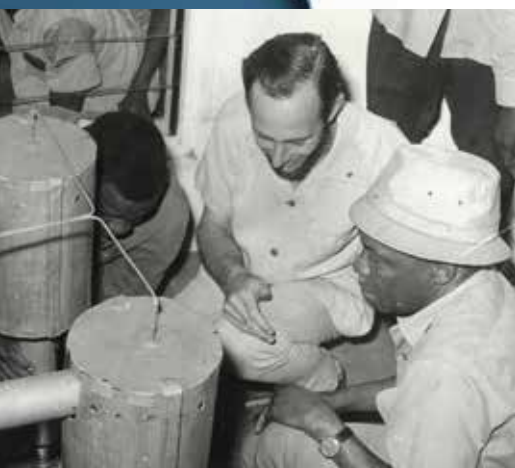
For 75 years, generous families like Brian's have been helping families like Jane's to rebuild their lives.

Thanks to Christmas Bowl supporters, Act for Peace's partner the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) could improve services like electricity, water, schools, health clinics and sanitation and hygiene for relocated families. 🙏

AIMÉE KEAY

Please join us in praying and acting for peace in the world as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Christmas Bowl. Please give today, visit:

christmasbowl.actforpeace.org.au



Brian with Tanzania's former President, Hon Julius K Nyerere, discussing the incubator project Brian started. According to Brian, the president said: "Will you hatch me a million chickens a year for the country Brian?"

Image credit: Brian Polkinghorne / Act for Peace



Jane and her miracle child – after losing her three children in the cyclone, she gave birth to her son at the age of 43.

Image credit: Tobin Jones/Act for Peace

Synod

ANNOUNCEMENTS



GENERAL SECRETARY SYNOD 2025

Rev. Jane Fry has indicated that she will conclude her placement as General Secretary in 2025.

Accordingly a new General Secretary will need to be appointed by the July 2025 Synod meeting. Synod Standing Committee (SSC) have appreciated advance notice of her intention and have appointed a General Secretary Nomination Committee to undertake the recruitment process.

In the meantime, the SSC is pleased to enthusiastically support Jane's leadership as General Secretary in an important season for our church until the conclusion of her placement. 🌱



DRCN DIRECTOR SYNOD 2025

Announcing a new Director of the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN)

Rev. Dr Stephen Robinson announced that Rev. Dr. Mark Layson has been appointed as Director / Senior Chaplain of the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN) in October.

Mark has been an important part of the Synod Disaster Recovery Ministries team - working as Operations and Connections Manager of the DRCN since October last year. As Director/ Senior Chaplain, Mark will have oversight of the team based at Pitt Street and the nearly 400 volunteer DRCN chaplains across NSW and the ACT.

Rev. Dr Stephen Robinson will remain the National Disaster Recovery Officer and the coordinator of Synod Disaster Recovery Ministries which includes the Synod Peer Support Team and broader recovery ministries beyond disaster recovery chaplaincy.

We congratulate and support Mark as he takes the DRCN into the future. 🌱

CLIMATE AND WORSHIP

Worship serves as a 'lifeline' for the church. Worship nourishes church communities with knowledge about the values, teachings, traditions, and histories of the church. Worship also motivates church communities to think and act in ways that (worship leaders take to) reflect the values and teachings of the church. The primary source for worship is scriptures, interpreted to be relevant to the life of worshipping communities (locally) and the church (institutionally).

There are interrelated challenges in the life of worshipping communities – e.g., poverty (worsened by rising costs of living), violence (especially against women and children, but also against minoritized races, religions, orientations, and nations), technology (which shifts so quickly with the advances of artificial intelligence), climate change (the devastating effects of which are at hand), and so forth. When these challenges are engaged in worship, the messaging for worshippers to take become relevant for their lives. And consequently, the lifeline of the church functions relevantly.

Climate change is one of the critical challenges of our time that need to find more attention in worship events. This conviction is behind the "Acclimatise (the) lectionary" project, which will begin by providing weekly reflections on how lectionary texts may be interpreted to address the realities of climate change and the rise of climate injustice. 🌱

JIONE HAVEA

MISSION CATALYST - STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH

These reflections will be available at climatelectionary.uca.org.au in **January 2025**, on Epiphany Day.

UTC Supports Theology Students in Beirut



Each day, students and staff at United Theological College (UTC) pursue their studies in the peaceful, leafy environment of the Centre for Ministry at North Parramatta.

This is a marked contrast to the students and staff at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) which is situated on the western tip of Beirut, only a short distance from the Mediterranean Sea. As their librarian, Liza Titizian recently wrote in an email to Moira Bryant, Manager of UTC's Theological Library, 'the situation here is very difficult these days... I'm praying for God's intervention and peace.'

NEST was formed in 1932 as an interconfessional Protestant Seminary to train pastors and church workers for ministry in the churches and other evangelical organizations in the Middle East. It also provides continuing education for pastors and church workers in active service, and for lay people.

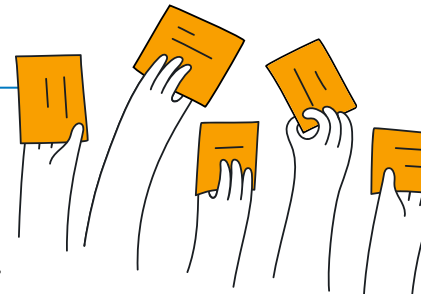
During 2023, Rev's Clive and Mary Pearson visited NEST with Rev Gaby Kobrossi of Bankstown Uniting Church. Although they found an excellent print collection in the library, they also found that most students had been advised to return to their home countries because of the worsening political situation.

They now cannot access library resources to support their study.

To encourage the students and staff of NEST, UTC began providing them with access to our eBook collection. Since the start of 2024, Moira Bryant and Liza Titizian have worked closely to achieve this goal. The Near East School of Theology now has access to a wide range of eBooks thanks to the efforts of these two remarkable librarians.

The initial licence fee for these digital resources was covered by the Armenian Missionary Association of Australia. We now need to look elsewhere to cover the next subscription. If you feel moved to support this initiative financially, please contact Moira at moirab@nswact.uca.org.au to receive our banking details for transfer to the Synod's Library Trust Fund. 📧

PETER WALKER
UTC PRINCIPAL



DISCERNMENT SUMMIT 4:

TOWARDS SYNOD 2025

The final Discernment Summit in our Year of Discernment took place on November 1-2, gathering 50 leaders from Presbyteries and Synod Mission Services to consolidate work from previous Summits on form, function, and funding.

In a significant decision, Presbytery leaders reached a consensus to bring forward a transformative proposal at the Synod meeting in July 2025, aimed at:

- **Restructuring Presbyteries:** Dissolving our 12 existing Presbyteries, and creating 3 new, larger, better-resourced Presbyteries.
- **Transforming Culture:** Shifting beyond structural changes to empower congregations in mission by rethinking culture, staffing, and funding.
- **Enhancing Connectivity:** Developing new ways to connect within and across the restructured Presbyteries.
- **Reallocating Resources:** Optimizing Synod Mission Support Staff and establishing a Presbytery Resource Fund.
- **Transitioning Smoothly:** Creating a transition plan to build robust, pastoral teams with the support of the new fund.

Across the weekend, participants envisioned this new structure's potential for a culture of relational oversight and consistency in Presbytery resourcing and roles.

Key areas for resource allocation include ministry and mission development, governance, finance, and administration.

NEXT STEPS

In preparation for Synod meeting in July 2025, we will:

- Form a PRF Committee with Presbytery representation to oversee the Presbytery Resourcing Fund.
- Host virtual town halls to discuss the proposal's background and impacts.
- Draft a proposal for Presbytery review in early 2025, ensuring feedback before Synod deliberates.

There is much work ahead, but through prayer and collaboration, we trust that this vision will provide the resources and support needed for the flourishing of our Presbyteries and Congregations and their mission objectives. 📧

ADRIAN DRAYTON



**PASTOR DAVID SHRIMPTON
WITH ANDREW MCDONOUGH**

THREE WISE CAMELS AND A FLYING PADRE

A project funded by the Synod's Missional Grants program will take artist, storyteller, and developer of Lost Sheep Resources, Andrew McDonough, to six remote schools across outback New South Wales.

'The Flying Padre' Pastor David Shrimpton worked to put the funding proposal together for this SRE project. He said the grant would help enhance Special Religious Education (SRE) classes he delivers in remote schools.

"It all started October last year. I was in Adelaide for a conference," Pastor Shrimpton said.

"Andrew McDonough was part of that group. We were chatting before the conference started. I asked, 'Would you consider doing something remote, doing SRE?'"

"He produces the lost sheep resources, does books, writes, illustrates. It was quite a big 'yes.'"

"Nothing more came of it until I saw and heard about these grants. I thought, this is a great idea, but how do we get funding. The travel is no problem, because he'll just shadow me."

According to Pastor Shrimpton, the SRE classes have been well received at the remote schools he visits, like Tibooburra, Wanaaring, Louth, and Clare, among others.

When Mr McDonough visits the schools with Pastor Shrimpton later in the year, the schools will be divided into two visits, one for the northern part and another for the south.

"We'll get Andrew to Broken Hill, do a day at each of those, then do another three days south," he said. "It's been a work in progress."

Pastor Shrimpton said he aimed to take Andrew McDonough through the schools during second week of November.

"In the fourth term we look at the Christmas story and I will probably leave part of that up to Andrew," he said.

"When I do SRE, we do an introduction, singing, a bible story, more singing, close in prayer, then hand it back over to the teachers.

Rev. Shrimpton said one of the highlights of this part of his ministry was the rapport he developed with the teachers.

"They will ask us how much time we need. They have the sense the kids enjoy it. The kids are amazing.



**ANDREW MCDONOUGH
WITH HIS ILLUSTRATION**



THE KIDS ARE
AMAZING. THEY
REMEMBER FROM ONE
VISIT TO THE NEXT



ANDREW MCDONOUGH
ILLUSTRATION FROM THE LOST SHEEP STORIES

They remember from one visit to the next. It might be a ten week period til I see them. They remember the stories. They remember the songs.”

At the time of this interview, Rev. Shrimpton was in Broken Hill. He had recently returned from Lowth, where a school fete and local races brought 4000 people to a town that usually has a population of 150.

“That went very well,” he recalled. “It was a fantastic day. People just camped everywhere. They all get dressed up for the races.”

“There’s the fashions of the field, there’s novelty fashions of the field. There’s other people in all the same shirts. Then you had them dressed in their finery, fascinators and everything. Among all

this dust, eight races, for myself to be there.”

“I go and cook donuts. The school kids, they’ve seen me do donuts and other things. It’s a different interaction then with the students and the school.”

The use of Lost Sheep Resources is funded by a Synod Missional Grant. The Synod’s Missional Grants provide congregations up to \$10,000 for missional activity through the Synod Growth Investment Fund.

Rev. Shrimpton said that he wanted to extend, “A big thank you to the Synod.”

“It’s very flexible as to the usefulness of that grant.”

JONATHAN FOYE

For more information on the Flying Padre, and to donate to his ministry, visit his website:

bhpatriol.wixsite.com/bhpatriol

NEWS Margaret Jurd College Tuncurry



A COMMUNITY CELEBRATION OF GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY

Margaret Jurd College celebrated the grand opening of their new campus in Tuncurry, marking a significant milestone in their mission to provide tailored support and education to young people facing challenges. The event, attended by the Moderator, Rev. Faaimata Hiliau Havea, the General Secretary, Rev. Jane Fry, and representatives of Uniting Church congregations, Synod Office, community members, and families, was a vibrant celebration of collaboration and commitment to the future of youth in the region.

THE UNITING CHURCH'S VISION FOR EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE

The Uniting Church played an instrumental role in supporting the establishment of MJC's Tuncurry campus. Rooted in the Church's mission to create inclusive, compassionate spaces for those who need it most, the College has long been a beacon of hope for young people with complex needs who require an alternative form of education.

Rev. Faaimata Havea Hiliau opened the ceremony with a prayer, reflecting on the shared values between the Church and the College. "Today is such a significant day," the Reverend shared. "We give thanks to the multitude of people whose vision, work and planning that has brought this day into being. We offer love and care to all people, but especially to the most vulnerable in our community."

"It's great to see a school like this in an area like this," said Rev. Stuart Bollum, the Director of Mission (Schools) within the Synod of NSW/ACT. "The Church and school have come together in the community to provide care and service to the children who will come to this school. It really is fantastic."

"We are deeply grateful to the Uniting Church Tuncurry congregation for their unwavering support and partnership in our shared mission to uplift young people," said Principal Darren Twist.

"Together, we have created a united foundation of care and opportunity, ensuring that every student feels a sense of belonging and hope as they embark on their educational journey at Margaret Jurd College."

The presence of the Uniting Church at the opening underscored the spiritual and ethical foundation upon which MJC is built. The new campus aims not only to provide education but also to foster a sense of belonging, hope, and resilience, ensuring that every student receives holistic support in their academic and personal journeys.





STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY BONDS

The success of the Tuncurry campus is due in no small part to the Mid North Coast community, which has embraced the college with open arms. The new facility, which will cater to youth from the surrounding communities, has already become a point of pride for the region. During the opening, Head of Campus Josh Field spoke about the values of Margaret Jurd College, and how the necessary support can create a lasting impact on the lives of young people in the community.

“What makes this school special, and gives the heart and soul is the students, the community, and the team. That’s what we’re creating here.” said the Head of Campus. “The right environment, guided with the right values, makes all the difference. We’re creating a space where young people can manage their struggles, engage in their education, and feel like they truly belong.”

“We do this in partnership with the community, to give our young people what they need.”

The college’s connection to the local community was evident throughout the event. Partnerships with local businesses, councils, and support organisations have been integral in bringing the new campus to life. These partnerships will continue to be a cornerstone of MJC’s operation, ensuring that local young people have access to a wide range of opportunities and resources within the area.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The opening of the Tuncurry campus is a key part of Margaret Jurd College’s strategic vision to expand its reach and impact. The College’s Principal Darren Twist and management team under the guidance of the College Board, have worked tirelessly to ensure that the new campus meets the high standards of care, safety, and quality education that MJC is known for.

“This is a significant achievement for Margaret Jurd College,” said Jim Knowles, Chair of the Board. “But this is only the start of the dream.”

“Under Darren’s excellent leadership, Tuncurry is the first of five new planned campuses. What we’re doing is working, and if we keep doing that, the legacy of Margaret Jurd will continue.” 🗣️



Synod 2025

Transforming Communities

11-13 July

Western Sydney Conference Centre | Penrith

Nominations
for Membership
close **Monday**
24 February 2025



For more information visit: synod2025.uca.org.au

Moderator Elect Nominations



Do you know someone who has the leadership gifts and skills to carry out the role of Moderator for the Uniting Church Synod of NSW and ACT?

The Moderator Nominating Committee is seeking nominations for the position of Moderator within the Synod of New South Wales and the ACT for the period 2027-2029.

The Committee is tasked to bring three nominations to 2025 Synod in Session, 11-13 July, where an election for the position of Moderator Elect will take place.

- Please download and fill out the Nomination Form with all the details of the person's name, contact details, nominators details and a 500-word rationale which includes the nominee's current role/position and listing their gifts and vision this person will bring to the Church.
- As a matter of courtesy when preparing the nomination, please advise the nominee of the intention to nominate.
- Emailed submissions should be marked "Confidential" and sent to Trish Bevan, Chairperson, Moderator Nominating Committee, moderatornominations@nswact.uca.org.au before **COB Friday 28 March 2025**.

Download a Full Position Description and Nominating Form is available at: ModeratorElect.uca.org.au



Uniting Church
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT

Fellowship News

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Another year has flown by, and as we enter the Christmas season the NSW/ACT UCAF Synod Committee sends greetings to you all. May the real message of Christmas continue to touch us all. May you have a safe, happy, and holy season. Thank you to all who have contributed comments, news, and information during the year, and I thank you for the opportunities to share in your activities, Rallies and Gatherings. Despite declining numbers, groups all over continue to do amazing things in their churches and communities.

The UCAF Synod Committee will meet in mid-December for their last meeting, and it will be a face to face activity. We always enjoy coming together in person.



GATHERING AT SALAMANDER BAY

The Hunter Presbytery held their Gathering at Salamander Bay UC and over 80 enjoyed a great day of fellowship, some wonderful singing and a special reflection by Rev. Graham Perry the Hunter Presbytery Minister. He gave us a very inspiring message on his life journey. Special thanks to the congregation for their warm welcome. Nancy Axe from Sydney/Central Coast Presbytery presented their Tapa Cloth to Pam Rolfe from Hunter Presbytery. The Flying Padre and Yaacaaba Centre were the recipients of the offering. Six members of the NSW/ACT UCAF Committee attended. A large boot load of stamps for the Stamp Committee were taken to Sydney by Margaret and Ron Gregory.

WAUCHOPE GATHERING

In October the Mid North Coast Presbytery held their Gathering at Wauchope and again six members of the UCAF Committee attended. The fellowship was wonderful and Wauchope congregation provided a warm welcome to those who attended. Rev. Charissa Suli, President of the Assembly, was the special guest and delighted those

attending with her special message. The offering was divided between the Tertiary Chaplain at Port Macquarie Campus of Charles Sturt University and The Flying Padre. We later learnt that Rev. Suli was to meet King Charles on his Sydney visit.

CHRIST IS OUR CONNEXION

Whilst on a recent holiday in the UK, I found a Connexion Magazine with inspiring stories from the Methodist Church. Auriel Stevenson introduced our magazine "Connexion" in 2011. First a booklet, it later became the newsletter we have now. Auriel had previously worked in the London Office of the Methodist Church, so it came from there. Connexion with a X represents Christ which means we have Christ in our Connexion with each other.

INTERFAITH IN ACTION

East Maitland UC Fellowship recently provided a soup and damper lunch to around 40 women as part of the Newcastle/Maitland Interfaith group. Each year four different worship centres are chosen for their "walk".

This year it was the turn of the Uniting Church and so East Maitland lead the "walk" around the Rutherford Mosque, The Grainery, a Pentecostal Church and the Morman Church Metford. Those attending enjoyed time together learning about the faith of each other. Lots of chatter over lunch showed how successful this event is.

STAMP COMMITTEE SALES

The Stamp Committee report that stamp sales to date total \$21,000. Keep saving those stamps. There are no confirmed Rally or Gathering Events for 2024 at this time. The Annual NSW/ACT UCAF Dedication Service will be held by Zoom on Wednesday 12th February. 📧



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

Transforming Communities Through Music and Worship

On the 8th of November, over 30 creative writers gathered to begin the journey toward the next collection of songs for Synod 2025. With guest mentors David Gungor from The Brilliance, and Jonny Robinson from CityAight, creatives delved into what it means to write for their congregations and communities. They explored insights and techniques fused with the call to be bold and courageous in the prophetic, while embracing simplicity. This workshop was not only a space to refine songwriting skills, but also a moment to reflect on the deeper purpose of music in worship: to create songs that invite transformation, connection, and spiritual depth.

As Nia Peebles reminds us, “Life is a moving, breathing thing. We have to be willing to constantly evolve. Perfection is constant transformation.” This philosophy resonates deeply within the creative process of songwriting. Just as life is in perpetual motion, so too is music—constantly shifting, growing, and evolving. In this context, songwriting becomes an act of transformation, both for the artist and the community they serve.

MUSIC AS A CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATION

David Gungor, a key figure in The Brilliance, shared insights into the creative process during the workshop, emphasising the transformative nature of songwriting. “Songwriting is a process of discovery. I don’t always know where a song is going when I start writing it, but there’s something beautiful in letting the process reveal things about God and about myself,” Gungor explained. His words reflect the ongoing journey of creativity, where music serves as a medium not only for self-expression but for spiritual discovery. It is this openness to transformation that allows music to connect deeply with listeners and foster an atmosphere of worship.

Gungor also touched on the importance of simplicity in songwriting, noting, “Some of the most powerful songs are the simplest ones. It’s not always about complexity, but about being able to create space for people to connect with God.” In worship, simplicity is often what allows a congregation to join together in a shared experience, while depth is found in the lyrics that guide people toward truth and reflection.

THEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN WORSHIP MUSIC

Jonny Robinson, a key member of the Australian worship band CityAight, echoed similar themes in his discussion on songwriting. He believes that music for the church should be theologically rich and accessible for the congregation. “When we write songs for the church, we’re thinking about songs that point people to Christ and the gospel in a way that they can grab hold of,” Robinson said.





THE CREATIVE HUBS, WORKSHOPS, AND UPCOMING ALBUM PROJECT FOR SYNOD 2025 ARE ALL DESIGNED TO FOSTER COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS

These testimonials highlight the deep personal and communal impact of the creative workshops, where participants not only grow as artists but also as members of a larger, collaborative church community.

UNITING CREATIVE COLLABORATION: BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

In addition to the Transforming Communities album project in 2025, the Uniting Creative initiative is also establishing COLLAB studios across the Synod. These hubs will serve as spaces where local artists and musicians can gather to co-create, share ideas, and support one another in their artistic ministries. Through these hubs, the Uniting Church hopes to foster an inclusive, collaborative spirit where artists can grow together and develop projects that respond to the needs of their specific communities.

By offering these creative spaces, Uniting Creative is not only nurturing the artistic gifts of individuals but also strengthening the relationships within local congregations and the wider church community. The COLLAB studios will serve as incubators for new ideas, a place where the next generation of creative leaders can be mentored and empowered.

EMPOWERING CREATIVE LEADERS

To support this growing movement of creative ministry, Uniting Creative is also launching a centralised online platform. This platform will allow creatives to share music, videos, worship resources, and more, helping artists and churches stay connected and inspired. Additionally, Uniting Creative is developing training pathways for worship leaders through the Enliven course, which will equip participants with the theological, practical, and leadership skills needed to lead vibrant, mission-driven worship.

A CALL TO ACTION: JOIN THE TRANSFORMATION

As we look ahead to Synod 2025, the Transforming Communities project invites all artists, musicians, worship leaders, and congregants to participate in this exciting journey. Together, we can create something beautiful and transformative, reflecting the diversity and vitality of our Uniting Church community. The ultimate goal is to help people encounter the gospel through music, to engage in worship that inspires spiritual growth, and to build deeper connections both with God and one another.

Through creativity, collaboration, and the power of music, we can participate in the ongoing transformation of our communities, using our gifts to bring about change and live out the mission of the church. 🎵

NATASHA HOLMES

Email: natashaho@nswact.uca.org.au
www.nswact.uca.org.au/resources/uniting-creative-resources

For Robinson and his team, songwriting is an act of service to the church—helping the congregation sing songs that reflect truth and the gospel message.

He also emphasised the collaborative nature of songwriting. “Songwriting is a team effort for us. We often work with different people, different voices, and different perspectives. It’s about crafting something together that is bigger than any one person’s idea.” This resonates with the spirit of collaboration that is central to the Uniting Creative initiative. The creative hubs, workshops, and upcoming album project for Synod 2025 are all designed to foster collaboration between artists and musicians, empowering them to work together and create something that serves the broader mission of the church.

VOICES FROM THE CREATIVE COMMUNITY

The transformative power of music is not just theoretical—it is lived out in real-time by those who participate in these creative workshops. One creative writer reflected on their experience, saying, “I was fortunate to participate in Saturday’s workshop with David Gungor. This intimate workshop was encouraging to me as a singer/songwriter. Hearing the things people are working on, and being able to build knowledge, experience and relationships is a beautiful way to not only express our art but be an integral part of the church as a whole.” *Elizabeth Plant*

Another participant shared their experience, saying, “The time together was a gift to us as individuals and a collective of musicians, to be nourished and nurtured in our own craft and faith adventures. I left feeling empowered to look towards my next steps in what it is to foster my own strengths in music and to offer them to collaborate with others and see what honour and play we can serve the broader church with.” *Kirrily Mann*

“Having David with us over the past few days has been such an encouragement to song writers within the Uniting Church. He is an exceptional artist - but more importantly a genuinely curious and kind soul, grounded in the story Jesus. David challenged us to embrace the power of artistic expression to move us toward greater empathy for others, genuine hope in the reconciling power of God and ‘joy in the middle of a crazy storm.’ Such an inspiring time as we look towards our next album.” *Glen Spencer*



The second SoulCare conference ran from 12-13 September 2024 at the Wesley Conference Centre, Sydney. It was a transformative Conference that brought together pastoral carers, chaplains, and ministry leaders from across NSW, ACT, and beyond. This collaborative initiative—brought together by the Synod Vital Leadership Team, Chaplaincy and Pastoral Practice in Uniting, and Wesley Mission Congregation and Chaplaincy—emphasised the importance of shared learning and innovative approaches to ministry.

With the theme “Rediscover and Reimagine Pastoral Care,” the conference focused on equipping participants with practical tools and practices in Pastoral Care, fostering a renewed energy to engage with their communities. We asked those who attended the conference to share their thoughts about the conference via a short feedback survey. Whether it was disaster relief, youth ministry, or online pastoral care, the feedback attendees provided revealed they felt empowered to take new insights back to their churches, schools, and neighbourhoods.

WHAT MADE SOULCARE 2024 STAND OUT

Participants shared how meaningful it was to be among others who share a passion for pastoral care. One chaplain attendee noted, “It was fabulous to be in

a room filled with people who love doing pastoral care. For two days, I didn’t have to explain what I do—everyone just got it.”

The conference was made up of keynotes, workshops and worship sessions which provided both spiritual inspiration and practical tools. Rev. Dr Jane Leach’s keynote address was frequently mentioned as a highlight: “Her keynote gave a great frame to view ministry through,” said one participant. “I’ll definitely be seeking out more of her writing and insights.”

Attendees also found value in sessions that tackled trauma-informed care. “The healing through attachment session provided me with practical language I can use during emergencies in the hospital,” remarked another participant. The diversity of topics demonstrated that pastoral care isn’t confined to

one context—it meets people wherever they are, from hospitals to schools to churches; across ages and cultures.

ENGAGING DISCUSSIONS ON NEURODIVERSITY AND TRAUMA

Several attendees expressed how the Neurodiversity in Pastoral Care Panel challenged them to reflect on their practices: “We have people in our congregation who fit into this category, and this session gave me new ideas for how we can better care for them and their families.”

Mental health and inclusion were recurring themes throughout the conference, with many participants inspired to rethink how they provide pastoral care to diverse communities. There was also a focus on supporting youth and engaging with those on the

margins. “The session on pastoral care with young people was very helpful—it gave me tools to approach youth ministry with fresh ideas,” one attendee shared.

FINDING VOICE AND TAKING ACTION

Rev. Dr Jane Leach built on the themes of her Keynote in “Finding Voice,” a workshop that gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their own practice. “This workshop was fantastic. It provided resources that will shape my pastoral work moving forward,” said one participant. Others echoed that the mix of spiritual reflection and practical exercises made this session especially valuable.



Worship also played a central role in the conference, fostering moments of reflection and renewal:

“The worship sessions were wonderful—being part of the labyrinth session especially helped me reconnect with God.”

BUILDING A STRONGER COMMUNITY OF CARE

The feedback from attendees reflected the community’s eagerness for more opportunities to connect and learn:

“I loved the networking opportunities and hearing the stories of other pastoral carers.”

“This conference explored many cutting-edge issues in people’s lives; I hope future conferences explore more topics like dementia care and what happens when the church lets you down.”

While some participants attended online, they appreciated the accessibility: “Thank you for making the conference accessible

online—it allowed me to attend despite my circumstances.”

LOOKING AHEAD: CONTINUING THE JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION

SoulCare 2024 provided a space for learning, reflection, and connection, equipping attendees with tools to enhance their ministry practice. Participants left feeling inspired to integrate new practices into their work: “I’ll be reviewing my pastoral care practices with fresh eyes, using the ideas I gathered here to better serve my community Christ has called me to serve” shared one attendee.

As the conference concluded, the message was clear: pastoral care is complex and challenging and sometimes misunderstood, yet a vital ministry of Christ. Those involved are committed to making a transformative difference in their communities.

Co-directors Ben Gilmour and Graeme Tutt, with the organising committee, expressed their gratitude to all attendees, contributors and supporters, emphasising the importance of bringing together diverse voices to foster growth and support to deepening one’s own practice of Pastoral Care as a vital form of discipleship and ministry.

SoulCare 2024 was a reminder that care, love, and witness can and does transform lives by hearing ‘voice’ as we companion each other in participating in God’s conversation. 🙏

REV. BEN GILMOUR



SOUL CARE 2024 CONFERENCE

“I LOVED THE NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES AND HEARING THE STORIES OF OTHER PASTORAL CARERS”

“IT WAS FABULOUS TO BE IN A ROOM FILLED WITH PEOPLE WHO LOVE DOING PASTORAL CARE. FOR TWO DAYS, I DIDN’T HAVE TO EXPLAIN WHAT I DO—EVERYONE JUST GOT IT”

Fresh Expressions

Explore ➤ Form ➤ Connect

The concept of "Fresh expression" is not new to the Uniting Church. If you have taken the Mission Shaped Ministry course, you'll likely be familiar with the term. Fresh Expressions is about doing church differently by exploring alternative forms of worship and community.

We already have many Fresh Expressions in our Synod, and they are on the cutting edge of mission. Many are connecting with the broader community in creative and exploratory ways, helping to bridge the gap between church and society. At a time when people are skeptical about the church, Fresh Expressions can be an easier entry point into the Christian community.

HOW IS A FRESH EXPRESSION DIFFERENT FROM A TRADITIONAL CHURCH?

Fresh Expression is a church that does not look like traditional/inherited church. It starts with listening to the community, serving that community then moving towards discipleship and starting an intentional community. A Fresh Expression might or might not have a church building, a paid minister or a lay leader. It could be attached to a traditional church or a presbytery for support. It is always missional placing the broader community before the needs of the church.

WHAT MAKES FRESH EXPRESSIONS RELEVANT TODAY?

Fresh Expressions offer a more accessible entry point into the Christian community, especially for people who may feel disconnected or skeptical about traditional church. In our Synod, we believe that all forms of church are necessary for contemporary society to reach all people, which is why we've adopted a "blended ecology" approach.

EXAMPLES OF FRESH EXPRESSIONS

It is usually small and simple and might have other names like micro-church, faith community, dinner church, kava church, Forrest church- there is so much variety. A Fresh Expression is different to a missional initiative. A missional initiative might not necessarily be an intentional community- it may be a café for instance or a community garden. A Fresh Expression will always be intentional about moving people towards discipleship and faith and forming an intentional community. This happens through careful listening to the neighbourhood as well as building solid relationships- this could take years.

NEW 3 STEP PATHWAY

We have a vision to see Fresh Expressions thrive in our Synod. This means they need to be free to start up, be supported, encouraged and financed by our structures and institution. We have a new three-step pathway— look out for this pathway in our usual promotions!



1. Explore

To know more about Fresh Expressions, come to our EXPLORE gathering that is held online twice a year. We encourage everyone to join and learn more about Fresh Expressions and hear stories of starting new initiative from those leading the gathering.

2. Form

This is our training program for Fresh Expression leaders. There will be an apprenticeship/coaching model involving some teaching to help form leaders who want to lead Fresh Expressions communities. This is an evolving space so keep watching!

3. Connect

Website: A new webpage focused on Fresh Expressions is currently in progress and will be available soon. It'll provide resources to support you and connect with the right people to help you start something new or get the information you need. Stay tuned for updates!

Connect groups: These groups are self-initiated and designed to support Fresh Expression practitioners. A list of them is available on our webpage, and anyone can start a group by registering online and selecting a facilitator. Connect groups come together to offer mutual support and encouragement—whether through prayer, learning, or sharing the challenges and joys of mission. Group sizes can range from as few as 3 people to as many as 12.

Authentication: what does it take for a Fresh Expression to be seen and authenticated as a "church" in its own right? How do we "ordain" Fresh Expression leaders? How can we support presbyteries to support Fresh Expressions? How do we encourage traditional churches to plant Fresh Expressions? How do we grow Fresh Expression leaders? These are questions that need deep thinking and planning. We are wrestling with these questions currently and would love to hear from you if you have some ideas.

Currently, our Fresh Expressions steering team includes Andrew Smith, Christine Palmer, Leigh Gardiner, Will Small, and Rod Pattenden. They're available for a coffee and chat if you'd like to discuss anything related to Fresh Expressions. We'd love to hear your thoughts!

Our vision is to see Fresh Expressions grow as a thriving movement within our Synod. We aim to support and nurture this community, knowing it's challenging to embark on this journey alone. If you're passionate about starting something new or want to be part of this evolving community, we invite you to join us. We'd love to have you on this journey! 🌟

REV. DR KARINA KREMSKI

MISSION CATALYST - FORMATION AND FRESH EXPRESSIONS
karinak@nswact.uca.org.au

The *Walking Together* Action Plan 2024-2027

www.nswact.uca.org.au/resources/first-nations-resources



In late 2023 the Synod Meeting endorsed the draft *Walking Together* Action Plan 2024-2027, an updated version of the inaugural WTAP (which was endorsed and approved at Synod 2021), which was formally approved by the Synod Standing Committee in early 2024.

The *Walking Together* Action Plan 2024-2027 will continue many of the initiatives included in the inaugural WTAP, but also includes a few significant updates.

PROCEEDS OF SALE

The approval of the WTAP 2024-2027 by the Synod in Council included approval of a new policy in relation to Proceeds of Sale arising from the sale of church properties in NSW and the ACT. Whereas the inaugural WTAP encouraged the contribution of 3% from the proceeds of sale to support the Synod's work with First Peoples, the WTAP 2024-2027 now requires a contribution of at least 3% of the proceeds of sale to be made to support the Synod's work with First Peoples. These funds will be used to support the ministry of the UAICC in NSW and the ACT, and also support other Synod initiatives designed to support learning, advocacy and local relationship building.

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL CAPABILITY MODULES NOW AVAILABLE FOR CONGREGATIONS

A registration process has now been established to enable members of UCA congregations to access three online Aboriginal Cultural Capability modules. These modules, developed by Aboriginal company Corporate Culcha, provide important foundational learning for non-Aboriginal people to begin learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. Members of Uniting Churches in NSW and the ACT can register for the modules here:

tinyurl.com/AboriginalCulturalCapability

The Synod will also be organising regular local "Walking on Country" experiences for members of the Synod, commencing in 2025, as it is recognised that local "on the ground" and/or face-to-face learning is critically important to assist building understanding and relationships.

LOCAL WALKING TOGETHER ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

To support congregations who are interested in learning more about First Peoples, and/or in building relationships with their local Aboriginal community, the Synod has developed a *Local Walking Together Action Plan* template. The template provides a range of suggested goals and activities to which the congregation can opt into, along with space to add any bespoke initiatives or goals that the particular congregation may already be engaged in, or may want to develop.

EXPANSION OF THE FIRST PEOPLES THEOLOGICAL STUDY (FPTS) SCHOLARSHIP

In recognition that there are some relevant courses offered by Uniting Church theological colleges, that are not available at the United Theological College in Sydney, the FPTS Scholarship has been expanded to allow First Nations people to apply for a scholarship to cover the costs of doing a theology related University course at another UCA college, for example Pilgrim College in Melbourne, or the Uniting College for Leadership and Theology in Adelaide. The expansion of the Scholarship is a small way in which the Synod of NSW and the ACT can help support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the UCA in other Synods to access relevant theological learning.

ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT

The WTAP 2024-2027 continues the Synod's commitment to achieve a target of at least 3% of our employees identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The Synod has also recently commenced work to develop an Aboriginal Employment Strategy, to ensure Synod's employment policies and processes are appropriate, effective and culturally safe for Aboriginal people. 🗳️

NATHAN TYSON HEAD OF FIRST PEOPLES STRATEGY AND ENGAGEMENT

Welcoming OUR NEW FIRST PEOPLES STRATEGY & ENGAGEMENT CONSULTANT Mikenzie Ling

The Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT has recently welcomed Mikenzie Ling, a proud Aboriginal Christian woman of the Wiradjuri nation from Narromine (NSW), as the First Peoples Engagement and Strategy Consultant. Her appointment is part of the Church's 'Walking Together' initiative, which seeks to build meaningful connections and collaborations with First Peoples.

Mikenzie's path to this role is shaped by significant milestones, including her work with Prof Dr Anne Pattel-Gray, a mentor and key figure within First Nations theology, academics and advocacy. Through this mentorship, Mikenzie became a consultant with WCC for Indigenous Peoples in the Southern Hemisphere. "Both jobs overlap really well," she explains, "with a synergy that allows me to address Indigenous issues on both local and global levels." Working part-time at both WCC and the Uniting Church, Mikenzie strives to elevate Indigenous voices within the Church, fostering a space where First Nations cultural identity and Christian faith harmoniously coexist. "There's a need for the church to embrace an empowering and liberating approach to Indigenous theology," she shares, "one that celebrates the healing power within Indigenous culture."

A PERSONAL JOURNEY TO FAITH AND IDENTITY

Due to separations within her family history, Mikenzie's journey in the understanding and expression of her Aboriginal identity has been challenging. "Growing up in church, I was taught that there wasn't really room for being Aboriginal within "good Christian spaces". There was an expectation to align with Western Christian culture," she recalls.

This conflict reached a turning point during her theological studies, when she had found herself to be the only Aboriginal person in a cohort of 200 emerging church leaders and ministers. "It was a massive interception moment,"

Mikenzie said. "I realised I wasn't living in a way that truly represented my Aboriginal identity before others or before God." This experience led her to deeply wrestle with and affirm her identity, finding strength in the belief that her cultural identity is a vital part of her faith.

TRUE LISTENING
REQUIRES TIME,
RESPECT, AND
UNDERSTANDING

Through connecting with Elders and immersing herself in community, Mikenzie began to integrate her Aboriginal identity and her Christian faith. "Being an Aboriginal woman is an intentional, purposeful part of who I am and how I was created," she shared. "It's not something to be disconnected from my faith and theology."

INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY AND CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Mikenzie's academic journey naturally evolved towards Indigenous theology, particularly around concepts of Land and custodianship. Her Master's thesis explored "Australian Aboriginal Christian Theologies of Custodianship and Connection to Country." This research examined the intrinsic connection Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with Land and creation—a connection that recognises Land as a living entity, imbued with value, rather than a mere commodity.

This journey allowed her to sit with and learn from Aboriginal Christian Elders, pastors, and community leaders. "I had the honour of hearing grassroots Indigenous theologies from incredible people," Mikenzie said. She also had the opportunity to speak at the Indigenous Theological Conference earlier this year where she discussed justice, land, and

culture alongside influential voices, including members of the Uniting Church.

A VISION FOR CHANGE

In her role with the Uniting Church, Mikenzie is committed to elevating First Nations' voices in church spaces, ensuring these perspectives are heard and valued. Her vision for the "Walking Together" initiative is to create inclusive environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, wisdoms and cultures are valued, and able to fully participate and authentically contribute. "The church can't be what it's intended to be without all of our cultural identities at the table," she said. She encourages congregations to approach collaboration with Indigenous communities not from a place of assumed authority, but with humility and openness, allowing First Nations voices to inform and shape the Church's mission.

Mikenzie also emphasises the importance of community connections, particularly fostering genuine kinship between churches and Indigenous communities, which is at the core of First Nations values. "Kinship is essential to meaningful reconciliation and unity within the church," she explains.

A FOCUS ON DEEP LISTENING AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The practice of "deep listening," a value central to First Nations culture, is another focus for Mikenzie. In her view, listening in a culturally sensitive way involves not only hearing but deeply understanding the needs and perspectives of First Nations communities.



MIKENZIE LING IN PROCESSION OF INDIGENOUS THEOLOGAINS INTO ST PASCHAL CHAPEL

Photo from University of Divinity Facebook page

THE CHURCH CAN'T BE WHAT IT'S INTENDED TO BE WITHOUT ALL OF OUR CULTURAL IDENTITIES AT THE TABLE



“True listening requires time, respect, and understanding.” This process of deep listening, she explains, will allow the Uniting Church to ensure that its programs and initiatives are culturally safe, relevant, and embraced by communities.

Mikenzie is passionate about supporting young Indigenous members within the Church, where they can find a sense of solidarity and have their voices heard. However, she stresses that this focus on youth must also be underpinned by a cultural understanding of how Indigenous communities engage and communicate.

LOOKING AHEAD

As Mikenzie continues her work, her immediate priorities are rooted in strengthening relationships, listening with intention, and empowering First Nations voices. In her dual roles with the Uniting Church and WCC, Mikenzie is preparing for a significant year ahead.

With the global church observing the same liturgical calendar and celebrating several significant anniversaries within church history, Mikenzie sees this as a unique opportunity to highlight Indigenous perspectives on key theological themes like the Nicene Creed and ecumenical unity.

“The work is complex, but it’s about deepening relationships, collaboration, and creating spaces where Indigenous voices can lead the way,” Mikenzie said.

As Mikenzie steps into her role, the Uniting Church eagerly awaits the impact of her dedication, wisdom, and vision for a more inclusive and compassionate faith journey. 🌱

ADITEE VORA



Email Mikenzie:
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Upcoming Events & Courses

2025 Calendar

JANUARY

30 Jan-2 Feb	Pulse Retreat Yourself Theme: Growing in Love	Y
30	"Thinking about becoming a Supervisor?" Exploration of requirements and training options Online via Zoom	M

FEBRUARY

3 - 7	Uniting Church Studies Intensive (Audit only)	U
13-14	Ethical Ministry Foundation On-site CFM	M
17 - 21	Christian Worship Intensive (THL115/THL490)	U
17 Feb-7 Apr	Exploring Theology (LOF3) 8 Monday evenings	C L
18	Ministry Masterclass	M
20	Ethical Ministry Facilitator Training	M
25	United Theological College Opening Service	U
25	Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry – Congregation Day 1 of 4 Online via Zoom	M
25	Quarterly Synod Missional Reading Group 1 of 4 "Mission Is the Shape of Water: Learning From the Past to Inform Our Role in the World Today" by Michael Frost	C
28 Feb - 1 Mar	Incarnate with MNC/FNC (+NENW) Presbyteries at Sawtell	L M C
28 Feb - 2 Mar	Creative & Worship Leaders Gathering	C

MARCH

3	United Theological College Session 1 starts	U
4	Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry – Congregation Day 2 of 4 Online via Zoom	M
4 & 5	Professional Supervision 1 (MIN503) Pt.1 of 3	U
4, 11, 18	Living Our Values (LOF1) 3 Tuesday evenings	C L
11-12	Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry – Congregation Days 3 & 4 On-site, Brisbane	M
13	Fresh Expressions – Explore	C
18	Ministry Masterclass	M
22	Ministry Engagement Day	D
22-23	Pulse Kids Camp Out (KCO) – Sydney	Y
24-28	Theological Hermeneutics Intensive (THL514)	U
27	Ethical Ministry Refresher 2025A	M
29	Saltbush Gathering Riverina (Griffith)	C L R

APRIL

1 & 2	Professional Supervision 1 (MIN503) Part 2 of 3	U
3	Leading Worship in the UCA (LOF2)	C L
18-21	Easter	†
29	Ethical Ministry Refresher 2025A [M]	M

MAY

2-4	Discernment (POD) Retreat	D
6, 13, 20	Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry – Leader Online via Zoom 3 Tuesdays	M
6 May- 24 June	Exploring the Old Testament (LOF4) 8 Tuesday evenings	C L
13 & 14	Professional Supervision 1 (MIN503) Pt.3 of 3	U
7, 14, 21	Presiding at the Sacraments Online via Zoom 3 Wednesday evenings (theory)	C L
17	Practical training On-site CFM, North Parramatta	
22	Ethical Ministry Refresher 2025A	M
26-29	Women in Ministry Retreat (for Ordained women)	M
27	Missional Reading Group 2 of 4 7 pm – 9 pm "Mixed Ecology: Inhabiting an Integrated Church" by Ed Olsworth-Peter	C
31	Presiding at the Sacraments Refresher Online via Zoom	C L
TBC	Saltbush Gathering – The Hunter Presbytery	C L R

JUNE

6	UTC Session 1 ends	U
7	Mentor Training Option 1 of 2 Onsite CFM, North Parramatta	M
12	Ministry of Pastor Assessor Training	M
12	Supervisor Professional Development Day Onsite at CFM 9.30 am - 4.30 pm	M
14	Stewardship of the Earth Conference Onsite CFM, North Parramatta	C
17	Ministry Masterclass	M
30 Jun- 4 Jul	Homiletics Intensive (THL320/THL469)	U

All dates subject to change.



JULY

7-11	Interfaith Dialogue Intensive (THL334)	U
11-13	Synod Meeting: Transforming Communities Western Sydney Conference Centre, Penrith	SM
12	Witness: Uniting Creative Album Launch @ Synod	C
14	UTC Session 2 starts	U
15	Ministry Masterclass	M
15 & 16	Professional Supervision 2 (MIN525) Pt.1 of 3	U
30 & 31	Reflective Practice in Contemporary Ministry (MIN400) Pt.1 of 3	U
31 July - 18 Sept	Exploring the New Testament (LOF5) 8 Thursday evenings	C L
TBC	Saltbush Gathering - NENW (Armidale)	C L R

AUGUST

5,12,19	Living Our Values (LOF1) 3 Tuesday evenings	C L
6 & 13	Presiding at Weddings 11 am - 4 pm each day <i>Part 1: 6 August Part 2: 13 August</i>	F L
7, 14, 21	Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry - Leader Online via Zoom 3 Thursdays	M
12 & 13	Professional Supervision 2 (MIN525) Pt.2 of 3	U
26	Missional Reading Group 3 of 4 7 pm - 9 pm <i>"Women in the Mission of the Church: Their Opportunities and Obstacles Throughout Christian History"</i> by Leanne M. Dzubinski & Anneke H. Stasson.	C

SEPTEMBER

3 & 4	Reflective Practice in Contemporary Ministry (MIN400) Pt.2 of 3	U
11 & 12	Ethical Ministry Foundation Online via Zoom Pt.1 of 2 - 11 & 12 September	M
18 & 19	Pt.2 of 2 - 18 & 19 September	
16	Ministry Masterclass	M
15, 22, 29	Leading Worship in the UCA (LOF2) 3 Monday evenings	C L
18	Fresh Expressions - Explore	C
23 & 24	Professional Supervision 2 (MIN525) Pt.3 of 3	U
25	Ethical Ministry Refresher 2025B	M
26-27	Climate, Calendars, Ancestors, and Worship Conference Onsite at CFM, North Parramatta	C
29 Sept- 2 Oct	Pulse Uniting Youth Camp (UYC25)	Y
TBC	Saltbush Retreat for Lay Preachers/Leaders	L R
TBC	Saltbush Retreat for Ministers, Deacons and Pastors	M R

OCTOBER

7 Oct- 25 Nov	Proclaiming Jesus Christ (LOF6) 8 Tuesday evenings	C L
8 & 9	Reflective Practice in Contemporary Ministry (MIN400) Pt.3 of 3	U
Online: 9,16,23	Presiding at the Sacraments Online via Zoom 3 Thursday evenings (theory)	C L
Onsite: 18	On-site CFM, North Parramatta (practical)	
17	United Theological College Session 2 ends	U
20	Ethical Ministry Refresher 2025B	M
21	Ministry Masterclass	M
24-25	PreachFest	L M C

NOVEMBER

5-7	Presiding at Funerals	F L
8	Ministry Engagement Day	D
4, 11, 18	Mentor Training Option 2 of 2 Online via Zoom 3 Tuesday mornings	M
10-14	Reconciliation Intensive (THL328)	U
20	Ethical Ministry Refresher 2025B	M
25	Quarterly Synod Missional Reading Group 4 of 4 7pm - 9pm <i>"Mission and the Cultural Other: A Closer Look"</i> by Randy S. Woodley	C
TBC	Saltbush Gathering - FNC (Grafton)	C L R
TBC	Saltbush Gathering - MDP (Dubbo)	C L R

DECEMBER

2	Lay Preachers Code of Ethics Training (LOF7)	L
9	Presiding at the Sacraments Refresher Online via Zoom	C L

- D** Discernment pathways for those in ministry or discerning a call
- 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
- R** Rural and regional program
- SM** Synod Meeting



Mary's song

is a call
to mission and
justice for all



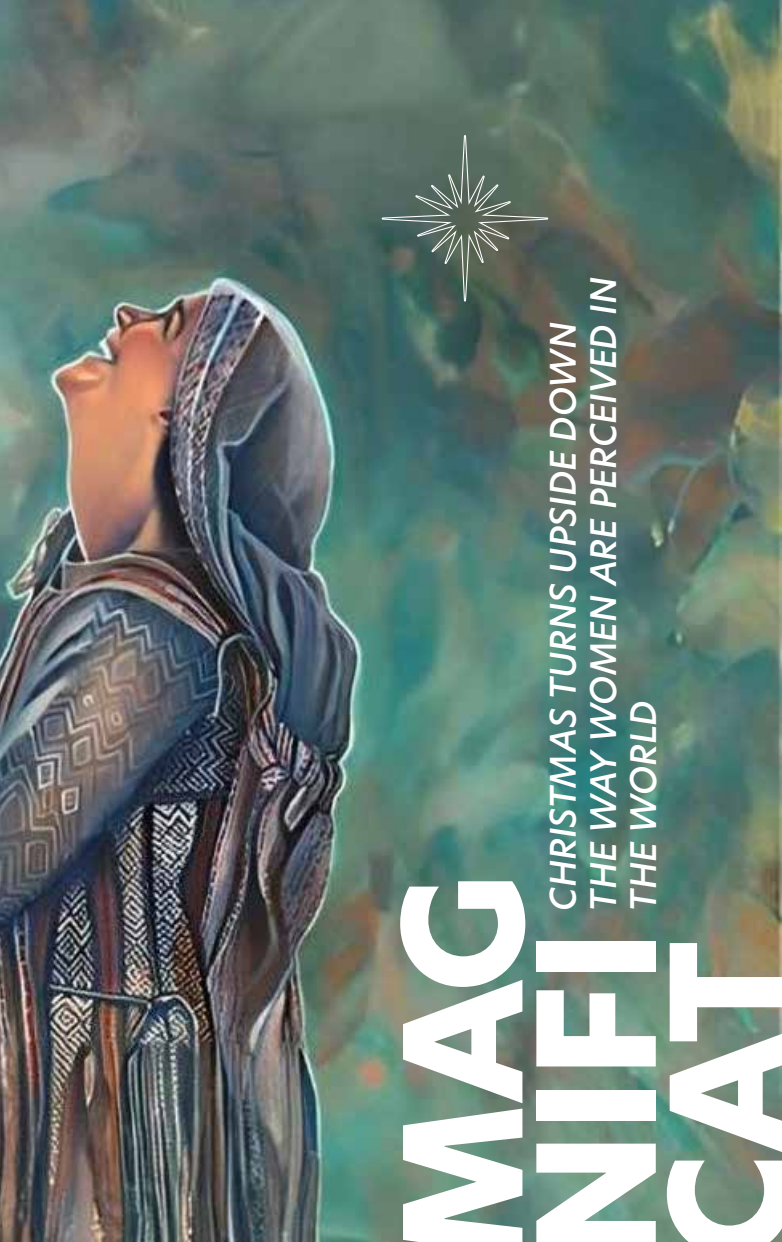
SHE RECALLS HOW GOD'S DIVINE MERCY TRAVERSES ALL GENERATIONS, IT IS HANDED DOWN FROM ONE TO ANOTHER. MARIAM PROCLAIMS THAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE ALL OF THESE THINGS, IN SPITE OF ALL EVIDENCE TO THE CONTRARY AND IN SPITE OF HER PRESENT REALITY

As I think about Christmas, I think about Mary, a young, poor, young woman betrothed to Joseph, in an arranged marriage. I think of how amazing it is that God called Mary (Mariam) to do something very unusual and a bit surreal! It seems very unusual in terms of those who normally get chosen to do important things by God for God and it's usually not women!

Christmas focuses mostly on the coming of Jesus, the birth of the Son of God. Yes, it's quite countercultural, in the sense that God would want to save the world through the faith and trust of a young woman. To actually bear a child who had a deeply spiritual and divine purpose was very radical for the time.

At that time women were the property of men. Daughters had no real say in their futures. Mary was betrothed to Joseph so that's all okay, except discovering she's pregnant puts a bit of a spanner in the works, even though God is somehow behind this conception of Jesus (Yeshua). There's shame, they send her away, but Joseph is given the insight in a dream that he should proceed to marry Mariam. He will need to support her through this and the child will be the son of God. He'll be part of the story of an incarnation, the son of God coming into the world. Pretty amazing!





MAGNIFICAT

CHRISTMAS TURNS UPSIDE DOWN
THE WAY WOMEN ARE PERCEIVED IN
THE WORLD

Christmas turns upside down the way women are perceived in the world that God actually doesn't use the same lenses that other people do. It's about faith and trust.

When I think of the *Magnificat*, Mary's song in Luke 1:45-56, she talks about not only being chosen, but about what God's going to do. The poor will be uplifted, the proud will be scattered, the rich will be sent away empty while the hungry will be fed. The hope of social transformation for not only herself but for all people in the world. She effectively quotes Hannah's song from I Samuel 2, a prophetic song about her rejoicing in God as her Saviour, who's going to change the world and bring about a new ordering of things.

Mary trusted God and was willing to actually engage in the process in spite of what it meant for her. This was pretty challenging. Dr Amy-Jill Levine talks about Mary's trust in Yahweh, "she trusted the ancient prophecies would be fulfilled, to have faith in the divine, in trust and discernment". (*The Gospel of Luke*, A-J Levine & Ben Witherington, p40). She recounts that the songs of victory in Hebrew scripture are on

women's lips, recounting Miriam's song (Exodus 15) Deborah (Judges 5) and Hannah (I Samuel 2) pointing to the house of David and his descendants.

The words of Mary's song are prophetic, raising up the poor from the dust, blessing Mariam with the great things God has done for her. She recalls how God's divine mercy traverses all generations, it is handed down from one to another. Mariam proclaims that God has already done all of these things, in spite of all evidence to the contrary and in spite of her present reality.

Rev. Dr Wilda Gafney, black American Episcopal priest and theologian in her womanist commentary on Luke 1:53, wrote-

"God has filled the hungry with good things in the before times and every once in a while in our time. People still go hungry, people still die in squalor, taxed to death by Rome and Romanesque imperial imitators, but God still provides unexpected and unimaginable blessings. Our people will not be starved to death and pass out of existence on God's watch. Some of us will survive and that is enough. God has helped God's servant, in our faithfulness and in our faithlessness. God has been faithful. In our history, in our memories, in our scriptures. God has been faithful and it is enough (Dayenu). In Luke's gospel, the story of Jesus is anchored strongly into the story of Israel.

People talk about Christmas being a time of hope. The 1st century Jewish people struggled, they didn't know how long this would continue. They hoped for a Saviour, life was tough under Roman occupation. They had no voice at all. Jesus coming would bring about a new era and continues to impact us today in 2024. People who later followed him because of who he was, the incarnate Christ and what he did in lives turned upside down.

Many women in the past have had to do similar things to actually bring about the greater good, not for themselves only or their families, but in fact, for others beyond themselves. She's become a timeless person in that sense for all women but also for everyone. The elevation of women in the sense of the valuing of them as equals before God had never been experienced before. That's for everyone. There is a place, a call and a purpose for each one of us and a place for us to have in the Kingdom to be part of the community of God. Turning upside down many of the values and social norms that have been part of the way life is ordered.

**THERE IS A PLACE, A CALL
AND A PURPOSE FOR EACH
ONE OF US AND A PLACE
FOR US TO HAVE IN THE
KINGDOM TO BE PART OF THE
COMMUNITY OF GOD**

At a time in the world when climate change is real and impacting our daily lives, those of our pacific neighbours and our children's futures; where wars rage, dictatorial powers continue to destroy nations and communities, piles of rubble and innocent people lost, may the words of Mary's song take on a deeper meaning for us that God has remembered God's promises to us and will keep them. May we converse with God and never

let God forget God's promises to our ancestors or to us, even when we can't see the fulfilment of those promise yet, may that be enough to know and live in the love of God who is with us. God remembers and that is enough!! Christmas blessings! 🙏

REV. JAN REEVE

UNITING MISSION AND EDUCATION

References:

A-J Levine & B Witherington III *The Gospel of Luke* Cambridge University Press, 2018
W C. Gafney *Womanists Wading in the Word* www.wilgafney.com



Will Christmas even reach them?

In the Australian outback, Christmas can be quiet. In some remote communities, there won't be Christmas carols in the air. In some faraway properties, children won't have presents to unwrap come Christmas morning. The sad reality is that children in rural and remote areas often miss out—not just at Christmas, but all year round.

According to the 2024 *Child Social Exclusion Index*, a report by UnitingCare and the University of Canberra, nearly half of children living in regional communities face high or very high risk of social exclusion. The report states:

“Many children experience disadvantage on multiple fronts, lacking the opportunities and family resources to be socially connected and to be able to participate fully in their local communities.”

This is no surprise to Frontier Services Bush Chaplains, the frontline staff who live and work among these remote communities every day. It confirms what we've seen and known for a long time: our kids living in the outback are not given a level playing field.

Bush Chaplains work day and night to be the connection and support that families and children in the bush need. They travel vast distances to be physically and emotionally there for those who feel alone and disconnected from society.

And they will be working hard this Christmas. Bush Chaplain Jennie will be traveling the outback to bring songs, presents, and the Christmas spirit to isolated communities in Queensland. In South Australia, Bush Chaplains Sunny and Julia will be delivering food hampers and presents. In Western Australia, Bush Chaplain Lindsay and a few of his teenage music students will be doing a special Christmas performance for elderly people in Kalgoorlie. In a small community in Far North Queensland, Bush Chaplain Joe will be hosting a humble barbeque and bringing presents to children who often go without.

We are so grateful to our community of supporters for helping Bush Chaplains bring the spirit of Christmas to people in remote areas, showing children in the bush that they are not forgotten and that kind and determined people are there for them - at Christmas and beyond. 🎁

PHOTOS
TOP LEFT: BUSH CHAPLAIN DAVID JACKSON DELIVERING CHRISTMAS GIFTS TO RICKY IN MORAWA, WA
TOP RIGHT: BUSH CHAPLAIN SUNNY K DELIVERING CHRISTMAS HAMPERS

Your donation of \$20 today could buy a book, an art set, or an educational toy for a child in the bush. It could help pay for 10 litres of fuel to help Bush Chaplains travel the distance to families and children on remote properties. Please donate before Christmas at frontierservices.org/donate



Building Kids

of Faith



One of my strongest childhood memories was sitting around the garden table in our backyard after a Sunday lunch. Our local Anglican minister and his family had joined us for the meal. There was no Uniting Church in Wee Waa (north west New South Wales) in the 1980's, so my parents decided to attend the Anglican Church in town. The two mothers were chatting about something inside. My two siblings were playing with the minister's sons. My dad was talking to the minister and the conversation had moved, inevitably, toward theology. I was not getting up from the table.

The two of them talked deep. At different times, both had studied at the University of New England in History and Education. Both had taught in country high schools. The minister had completed a Masters Degree at Moore Theological College in Sydney while dad had done the local preacher's certificate under Rev. Dr Jim Udy and a Diploma of Religious Education through Melbourne College of Divinity.

They didn't always see eye to eye, but their conversations were always respectful and thought provoking.

I loved to listen. Even better, was the fact that I could ask questions. Neither of them ever dismissed my questions as silly or childish, and they never offered Sunday School answers. They entertained my questions with patience, calmness, and thoughtful answers. As a young girl, I was given a seat at the theological table and allowed to participate, in a way that made me believe that understanding God was a quest that anyone could undertake. While I may not remember my questions, I remember the answers were offered with grace and love.

Dad was often called upon to practice lay preaching. Depending on where the service was, our whole family was often included. Mum would do the children's talk, often utilising Charlie Brown comic strips that she had enlarged and

redrawn by hand. My brother, sister, and I would participate by saying prayers, reading the Bible, and taking up the collection.

It was not unusual for the three of us to be the only children in the congregation, especially in the smaller congregations that Dad ministered in. That wasn't a big issue in my eyes at the time, because we were still participating and enjoying the fellowship of community.

When I was 14, I was asked if I wanted to help teach Sunday School at Wee Waa Anglican. I took up this opportunity and taught the littlies for a couple of years before we moved for Dad's work. I'm honestly not sure whether I was ready for that responsibility or role, but the fact that I was trusted by the congregation to help share God's love with children, meant that I took it seriously.

➔ CONTINUED ON PAGE 30

THEY DIDN'T ALWAYS SEE EYE TO EYE, BUT THEIR CONVERSATIONS WERE ALWAYS RESPECTFUL AND THOUGHT PROVOKING



These examples, from my own childhood, highlight some things that I believe churches need to acknowledge. Firstly, children are part of the church now, they are not merely the church of the future. Secondly, children need positive, healthy relationships with adults other than their parents. Thirdly, children can thrive when they have a place and a role in the church. Finally, there needs to be a Biblical or theological underpinning to raising children in the faith and helping them become followers of Jesus.

CHURCH NOW

Children are full and important members of the church right now. Their energy, insights into the contemporary world, their grasp of technology, and their ease of relationship with social media are all valuable. Every generation has something unique to offer the church and how it can relate to the social context it finds itself in. When the church fails to include children in its worshipping and ministry life, it is in danger of being out of touch with the younger generation.

We are all members of the body of Christ. We need the mouth of the preacher expounding scripture. We need the hands of the servant helping someone in need. We need the heart of the carer that breaks for those who have lost hope. But we also need the eyebrows of the young raised in questions and the cheeks smiling in holy mischief.

HEALTHY ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

While mum may remain the most important person who demonstrates being a good example of following Jesus to a child, according to the 2016 National Christian Life Survey, churches cannot ignore the role that other non-family adults take. These become more important still when children transition into teenagers. The minister, youth pastor, and other adults in the church have incredible potential to be a positive influence in the life of a child or young person. The conversations, interactions, and journeying together that children, young people and adults take together are vitally important as to whether the young people will continue their faith journey into adulthood. It is a key factor as to whether people will still attend church once they have “graduated” from any youth programmes.

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

People can thrive when they have a safe place to learn, grow and express themselves. The church can be such a place for children. A place where they can test their skills, abilities, and gifts. A place where they are valued. A place where their opinion matters and is taken into consideration. A place where they have a voice and are heard. A place where they can actually contribute in significant and meaningful ways. A place where they can explore their faith, ask questions, test ideas, and grow as followers of Jesus.

Specialised programmes focused on developmentally appropriate activities have value. If churches always segregate children and youth into their own programmes, however, they run the risk of losing those young people. The biggest drop out rates occur when children move from one programme to another (Sunday School to Youth Group, Youth Group to “Adult” church) because they often have no connection to the people in the next level. Ensuring that intergenerational activities play a significant role in the life of the church is important. Even adults remember the message of a children’s talk better than what they heard in the sermon! I am grateful for people like my mum who, in the late 1970’s, fought for a creche play area at the front of the first Uniting church in Glen Innes, where parents and babies could play but still hear and participate in the service.

BIBLICAL GROUNDING FOR MINISTERING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

In the Old Testament there are some explicit directives to parents in relation to bringing up their children and teaching them about God. For example:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them

when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

“Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live.

Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, ‘Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children’” (Deuteronomy 4:9-10).

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

**CHILDREN'S
MINISTRY NEEDS
TO BE GROUNDED
IN LOVE FOR
THE CHILDREN.
CHILDREN
RESPOND
POSITIVELY TO
LOVE, AFFECTION,
AND CARE**

These instructions, however, are few and far between. Lawrence O. Richards, in his book *A Theology of Children's Ministry*, believes that:

“When we look at the ideal community sketched in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy we find little explicit instruction on child rearing. But we do find a clear expression of the social context that God designed for the nurture of faith. That context can be simply defined. Children are intended to be brought up as participants in a loving, holy community”.

Children’s ministry needs to be grounded in love for the children. Children respond positively to love, affection, and care. It is this kind of atmosphere that needs to be generated in whatever children’s ministry a church is undertaking, whether it is the weekly service, Sunday School, a Kid’s Club, Messy Church, Mainly Music, after school care or children’s camps.

The New Testament is basically silent in terms of the instruction of children. Children are to obey parents (Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 3:20) and parents are to discipline their children lovingly (Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21). Jesus himself seems concerned with the treatment of children, but does not give



specific instructions as to what that would contain.

“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.” (Mark 10:13-16).

Despite this scriptural silence, it is obvious that children have long been a part of the church family and have received training, whether it has been as part of the adult worship setting or specifically their own programme in more modern times.

Jesus did give very strong encouragements for believers to love one another as they love themselves (Matthew 19:19) and as He Himself had demonstrated (John 13:34-35).

DISCIPLING CHILDREN INCLUDES THEOLOGICAL TEACHING, LOVING RELATIONSHIPS, AND SAFE, POSITIVE INVOLVEMENT IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY

relationship with older people will help a child develop and give them support to face the issues that they will be presented with in life.

Loving children helps them to feel secure and stable. However, just loving them will not help them to live out all aspects of their lives, especially the challenging and hurtful parts. Children need to know that God loves them too. The truths about God are timeless, and are just as applicable in today’s society as they were a few thousand years ago. Discipling children includes theological teaching, loving relationships, and safe,

It is a fundamental need of children to know that they are loved. A children’s ministry needs to be a place where the children are loved and they know it. Positive, healthy relationships with children are so important. Having a stable, caring

positive involvement in the church community.

Building children up in the life in the church is a huge responsibility. It needs to be based in love and safety and shared amongst the whole congregation. It needs to give them opportunities to share their gifts and have a say in the life of the body of Christ.

It also needs to make space for questions and exploration as they wrestle their own growing relationship with Christ. And it needs to allow for grace and forgiveness. Those young people may one day become parents themselves, raising their own children in the faith. 🌱

DR KATHERINE GROCOTT

Supporting growth, inspiring renewal in 2024:

Synod Growth Investment Fund

The Synod Growth Investment Fund (GIF) exists to help the Uniting Church grow in discipleship, relationship, number and impact—living out our commitment to be a contemporary, courageous, growing Church. What this looks like on the ground is as diverse and vibrant as our Church is across the Synod. The GIF supports a range of projects and activities, and each—in its own way—represents the vision and heart of people compelled to join God’s mission to love and serve their local communities. There are now three levels of Grants:

1. MISSIONAL GRANTS

Up to **\$10,000** available to congregations as one-off grants for missional activity (applications for this grant reopen 2025).

2. INNOVATION GRANTS

Up to **\$100,000** available over 2-5 years for exploring new ways to do church (applications for this grant reopen 2025).

3. STRATEGIC GRANTS

Up to **\$500,000** over 5 years for strategic congregations or initiatives focused on growth and aligned with Future Directions. Applications must be received from Presbytery (applications for this grant reopen 2025).

HOW DOES THE GROWTH INVESTMENT FUND WORK?

Each year the Synod funds a number of projects that are submitted through an open grant application process. Projects are reviewed and outcomes determined by the Growth Investment Committee, a small group comprised of representatives from congregations, Presbyteries and Synod.

The Committee approves projects from three discreet grant streams – Missional (up to \$10,000), Innovation (up to \$100,000) and Strategic (up to \$500,000). For each stream, applicants must address the grant criteria to be approved for funding, and discerning approval is a collaborative, prayerful process.



Whilst its early days, the successful funding grant from Synod to support a First Third of Life Ministry Leader at Keiraview is going to directly support our strategy of 'Growing Young'. The process of finding the new Leader is also opening doors for new leaders to emerge which I have found to be an unexpected bonus.

Scott Morrison | Keiraview UC

2024 HIGHLIGHTS

2024 has seen projects funded from Byron Bay to Broken Hill to Yarralumla. Across the Synod many congregations have taken the time to think, pray and commit to applying for funding to support their missional goals. Highlights from this year include:

- 17 successful applications in total from across the Synod, representing 10 Presbyteries
- From two funding rounds (April and August), a total of \$2,004,485 has been allocated to projects approved in 2024 alone
- A strong alignment with Future Directions commitments in applications, with particular focus on ministry to those in their first third of life
- 4 Strategic Projects approved for funding:
 1. Bangalow/Byron Bay & Alstonville Uniting Churches combined project - Developing First Third of Life Ministry in A Rural Context
 2. Keiraview Uniting Church - Ministry Leader, First Third of Life
 3. Leichhardt Uniting Church – Emerging Generations Pastor
 4. Hunter Presbytery - Family and Children’s Mission Consultant

GROWTH INVESTMENT FUND - OVERALL SNAPSHOT

The Growth Investment Fund in its current form commenced in 2022. Here’s a small snapshot of what the GIF looks like to date:

- 5 rounds of grant funding over 3 years
- A total of 37 individual projects are currently funded across the Synod
- Over the 5 funding rounds a total of \$7,665,688 has been allocated to projects
- With many projects funded for between 3-5 years, current funding spans from 2022 through to 2029
- Funding supports 23 full or part-time ministry agents working in and with more than 30 congregations and 11 Presbyteries across the Synod.



nd



The Rivergum Community Garden is a key project of Revesby Uniting Church as we seek to be a welcoming, inclusive community. The continued development of our community garden has been greatly assisted through the funding provided by the Synod Growth Fund. The \$10,000 grant enabled us to provide signage, seating and shade to improve the visibility, accessibility and comfort of our Rivergum Community Garden. Beautiful new signage, a sandwich board and flag, all let people know where we are and what's happening.

People feel more comfortable and welcomed to sit and chat due to the purchase of five wooden benches, a six-seater table with chairs and three large colourful umbrellas. We thank Synod for their support. It has enabled us to transform our garden into an even more colourful and welcoming space for all to enjoy.

This grant has allowed us to progress in our green space revitalisation strategy, offering "a space and place for all" that provides, nourishes and nurtures community.

Julie Bertram | Revesby UC



The funding Caves Beach Uniting received has already had a very positive impact on the community engagement focus my role concentrates on. Community Crop Swap mornings where fresh produce, plants and gardening supplies are traded have been very popular. The most recent event had 42 attendees. 2025 will see both a Playgroup at the park initiative and a fortnightly board and card game morning for those who had expressed a need for connection with others. We are so grateful for this support as it enables us to truly positively impact the local community.

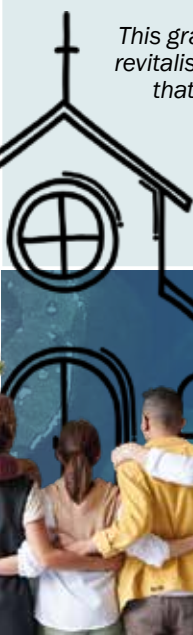
Rebecca Arthur | Caves Beach UC

Receiving a missional grant has breathed life into our mission plan. It has also given confidence to the congregation's leadership that the work we have been doing and are seeking to do has the support of the wider church and is seen as "worth it". It's enabled us to have some seed funding to just 'get started' and commit some funds towards exciting missional opportunities.

Rev. James Ellis | Yarralumla UC

WHAT'S NEXT?

The next round of the Growth Investment Fund opens in March 2025. There will be further information and updates communicated closer to the time. In the meantime, if you know, or are part of, a congregation considering applying for growth funding, now is the time to start planning and praying, particularly if you have a larger strategic project in mind. Feel free to reach out to the Growth Investment Fund team at: growth@nswact.uca.org.au with any questions.



5 ESG TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2025

AS WE MOVE TOWARDS 2025, ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE (ESG) ISSUES CONTINUE TO EVOLVE, WITH REGULATION, TECHNOLOGY AND THE IMPACT OF COMPANIES ON PEOPLE HIGH ON THE AGENDA. HERE WE OUTLINE FIVE KEY TRENDS TO WATCH.

1

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CLIMATE ACTION

With just five years left to run on the Paris agreement, which aims to limit global warming to no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, governments and regulatory bodies are increasingly holding companies to account for their climate action plans.

Recent years have seen the introduction of a raft of new regulations, including the SEC's climate disclosure rule in the US and the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD).

A survey this year by Deloitte¹ found that 99% of companies are preparing for increasing disclosure requirements and that three-quarters are investing by creating new roles and responsibilities within their organisations.

2

BIODIVERSITY AND NATURAL CAPITAL

In recent years the economic significance of dangers to natural capital has been in the spotlight. The World Bank² estimates that the global economy could lose \$US 2.7 trillion by 2030 (compared to business as usual) if certain ecosystems collapse.

The release in September 2023 of both the final Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) guidance and Nature Action 100 (a global engagement investment initiative) drew renewed attention to the linked threats to both nature and the world's economy.

Currently there is a marked under-investment in conserving our natural resources, known as the 'Nature Finance Gap.' However, as policymakers worldwide implement stricter environmental regulations to address such issues as climate change and biodiversity loss, there are likely to be a growing number of investment opportunities in this space.

3

INCREASED FOCUS ON THE 'S' IN ESG

Today there is more focus than ever on the social impacts of organisations, encompassing areas such as community engagement, employee well-being, diversity, inclusion, and philanthropy. The social and sustainability impacts of global supply chains are also coming under greater scrutiny.

As a result, companies are now paying more attention than ever to social factors when undertaking their due diligence, undertaking human rights impact assessments to identify risks and report on their efforts to assess and address issues such as modern slavery.

4

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) with ESG reporting is expected to revolutionise data collection, analysis and reporting. According to Deloitte, 74% of companies are planning to invest in sustainability reporting technology and tools over the next year.

This will not be a simple task, given there is not currently a globally standardised approach to ESG disclosures. However, the trend will facilitate more detailed and real-time reporting, allowing stakeholders to make more timely and informed decisions regarding sustainability.

5

EXPANSION OF THE VOLUNTARY CARBON MARKET

Voluntary carbon markets (VCM) allow carbon emitters to offset their emissions by purchasing carbon credits in schemes designed to remove or reduce GHG from the atmosphere.

Companies can participate in this market either individually or as part of an industry-wide scheme. For example, several airlines now offer voluntary carbon offsetting for passengers through trade association the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Following a few years of strong growth, the voluntary carbon market hit a crisis of confidence in 2023, driven by concerns about its credibility. However, since then the Biden administration released a Statement of introducing the concept of 'high integrity' carbon credits and financial regulators have issued guidance and consultations on the VCM. This not only expected to help address some of the challenges so far but may also represent a new stage of maturity for VCM initiatives.



SUMMARY

ESG is continuing to grow rapidly and shape the corporate agenda. Rigorous ESG standards not only prompt companies to recognise their impact on people and the planet but also help them to align their operations with investor interests.

If you would like to find out more about how UFS applies ESG principles to its investments, you can view the *Ethical and ESG Investment Policy* on our website: [unitingfinancial.com.au](https://www.unitingfinancial.com.au)

MICHAEL CHOU
INVESTMENT MANAGER
UNITING FINANCIAL SERVICES

¹ Deloitte: 2024 Sustainability Action Report ² World Bank 2021: The Economic Case for Nature

Important information: The Uniting Financial Services (UFS) unregistered managed investment schemes are available for investment only to wholesale investors. Prospective wholesale investors who wish to invest via our unregistered managed investment schemes can access the Information Memoranda for these any of these funds on the UFS website. While the information in this email has been prepared with all reasonable care, UFS accepts no responsibility or liability for any errors, omissions or misstatements however caused. No action has been taken to register or qualify these products or otherwise permit a public offering of these products in any jurisdiction outside Australia. Past performance is not indicative of future performance.

PULSE

Renew 2025

A YEAR OF DISCOVERING YOUR PLACE
IN GOD'S RENEWAL OF ALL THINGS



I am on the lookout for five 18–25-year-olds who are keen to spend next year helping Pulse launch our all-new leadership and discipleship program *Renew*. Part of my job with the Synod Pulse team has been to design a year of experiential learning for Young Adults who wish to take a deeper dive into their faith and explore how their passions and skills align with what God is doing in their lives; enter *Renew*, a year long journey to “discover your place in God’s renewal of all things!”

As I was praying, discussing with colleagues, and researching other similar programs it struck me that my most pivotal moments as a young disciple of Christ were the opportunities and decisions that emerged from some really specific experiences in my late teens and early twenties. In my life this largely looked like church camps, mission trips and road trips with friends.

RENEW WILL
INCLUDE SPECIFIC
AND CORE
INTELLECTUAL
TEACHINGS

As one of my Theology Professors would put it – ‘Memory Events.’ I want to be clear that I don’t think it was the events themselves that had such an incredible impact on my life, faith and leadership journey. I believe it was the deep community that came from participating in these spaces:

The natural opportunities for deep relationships with both peers and potential mentors to form me; for life changing conversations to take place with me; and to be given leadership experience in challenging and demanding but ‘safe to fail’ environments. This brought to fruition in me, a readiness for leadership and service in God’s church.

Renew will include specific and core intellectual teachings, and is designed to encourage this kind of faith formation. At its core, our understanding of New Testament discipleship is not too different, Jesus called His disciples to

follow Him in the most literal sense of that word. Learning the way of Jesus, being empowered as leaders, and discovery of their place in the kingdom of God was something that literally happened as they walked with Jesus observing, discussing, telling stories, and doing mission together.

If you happen to be 18-25 and this sounds like something you’d love to do, go to renew.uca.org.au to find out more and fill out the expression of interest form. If you are not in that demographic but you believe this could be a really meaningful experience for a young person in your life, church or Presbytery, please tap them on the shoulder or chat to another church leader about what it would take to get them engaged. And for everyone reading, please pray that *Renew* will be the start of something wonderful in the lives of young people that flows into our churches and communities. 🙏

DAVID TOOGOOD

UYC WRAP



The Pulse team have returned rested and recovered from our third year of Uniting Youth Camp! This year we gathered at the Y Camp, Yarramundi and saw over 150 high school kids from across the Synod.

Uniting Youth Camp is our Synod wide camp for high school students from Year 7-12, providing an opportunity for them to experience the wider church family through community, fun, food, activities, worship, and even study, over 4 days of the October school holidays.

Alongside our campers, we had 40 leaders join us to help make camp happen, including running activities, engaging in worship, being attentive first aid officers, capturing important camp moments, supportive tutors, and ensuring every kid had fun in a safe environment!

This year's camp theme was 'Time to Shine', and we were blessed to have Rev. Sally Yabsley-Bell, Kinross Wolaroi School Chaplain, as a speaker this year. Sally's sessions allowed the campers to explore and discuss questions around what lights us up, how we use our light to help other people's lights grow and ways other people helped us shine at this camp.

On the last night of camp, kids had the opportunity to shine and share with the camp community. Some kids created their own bands and performed different worship songs together, others shared poetry, bible readings, creative artwork, action songs, traditional dances and chants, solo performances and there was even a magic trick! This All in Worship was followed by supper and an spontaneous disco.

It is a blessing to be able to create this space for our high schoolers across the Synod and an even bigger blessing to hear their experience from camp.

We continue to invest in our camps ministry not just to provide mountain top experiences for our young people, having space for them to gather and grow in faith, but also to allow our leaders to stretch, grow, and gain experience in ministry too! 🙌

MILISE (OFA) FOIAKAU

HOW CAN I SEND A KID TO CAMP?

To donate, people interested can send funds to the:

PULSE CAMP FUND:
BSB: 634634 | ACC: 100046230

"Hi my name is Rosa, and I have attended UYC from the beginning which was 2022. I wanted to say that I had an amazing time at UYC 24. Worship was amazing, I felt like it was a time that I could truly express my feelings to God. The outdoor activities were nice to get out and do, although it would be nice to have actual water activities. It was a great time to actually bond with the other churches and find common interests between all of us. My favourite part was the game night and the disco party that wasn't planned lol. The game night allowed all of us to go out and work together as teams to have the prize of bragging rights. I would also like to thank all the leaders who had a massive impact on making my camp experience what it is. See ya'll in 25!"

ROSA, AUBURN PARISH

"UYC 24 was a great experience for me to grow in my faith in God and connect with other people my age. Even despite the mozzies, it was a great camp and I had lots of fun throughout the week."

TIM, QUAKERS HILL UC

"Camp was so fun! I was able to do new experiences and meet new people. Worship time was so amazing! It felt so good being in a wonderful group of people praising God."

NATE, QUAKERS HILL UC

"Camp was amazing! I got to meet new people and enjoy some fun activities! I got to grow closer with God through worship and prayer. It was lots of fun and I can't wait till next year!"

HANNAH, QUAKERS HILL UC

"UYC 24 was an epic experience meeting new people, joining in with fun activities and praising God. Growing closer with my current friends (as well as new ones) was awesome!"

DANIEL, QUAKERS HILL UC

"I found camp an enjoyable experience where I was able to make new friends and learn about god, my favourite part of camp was connecting with friends and in general just having a good time."

SEB, QUAKERS HILL UC



A beacon of hope

The message of Christ's birth is as radical today as it was more than two thousand years ago. Born in humble circumstances, the Son of God came to embody hope for the poor, the oppressed and the forgotten. As I reflect on this journey, having just returned from Indonesia where I witnessed the harsh realities of climate change, poverty and inequality, I was reminded that the birth of Christ is not just a past event but an ongoing story—a living invitation to all of us to join in God's mission of transformation.

During my recent trip, I met with church leaders from West Papua, Bali, and West Timor. Together, we wrestled with how climate change is impacting the poorest and most vulnerable. Rising sea levels, deforestation and natural disasters are not just statistics—they are the lived reality of many communities. Yet, amidst this, the church stands as a beacon of hope. I saw firsthand how local wisdom and theological reflection converge in the church's response to these crises.

Local wisdom has always been the foundation of how communities respond to challenges. In Minahasa, a tradition of togetherness and mutual cooperation known as Mapalus came from small farming cooperatives who understood that collaboration and teamwork is vital to sustaining the community and environment around it. In Bali, the Subak philosophy arose as a system of equitably sharing water across separate but interconnected rice farms. In Sentani, West Papua, the Fira Wali encourages the responsible use of natural resources like the sago tree, reminding the people to live in harmony with creation.

Each of these ideas began as an agricultural technique and then expanded to become a greater understanding of the interconnectedness between humans, the land and the spiritual world. A way of life that honours God's creation and cares for the community.

It made me consider: is there a way of life that flows from the nativity story?

THE NATIVITY
IS A STORY OF
GOD'S SOLIDARITY
WITH THE
MARGINALISED

The nativity is a story of God's solidarity with the marginalised. When we look at the manger, we see the Son of God who does not remain distant but enters the world in vulnerability. The shepherds, considered outsiders, were invited to be among the first to hear the good news. Wise magi, strangers to the people of Bethlehem, travelled from far away to show honour and offer extravagant gifts.

Christ's birth and the life he went on to live should challenge our understanding of power and vulnerability. In following Christ, we come alongside the lives of others exactly where they are—equal in vulnerability—and we offer love, hope and renewal.



Gracious God, we give thanks for the birth of Christ, a story of hope, love and transformation. As we reflect on the nativity, may we be inspired to live out these values in our daily lives. Open our hearts to the needs of the world, especially people facing poverty, injustice, and environmental destruction. Empower us to be agents of Your love, joining in the work of healing and restoration. May the legacy of Christ's birth guide us to serve others and to bring about a world that reflects Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

That is our story. And it is one that Christ is always calling us to join.

During my time in Indonesia, I saw so many of our inspiring and formidable church partners answering Christ's call and working for justice, inclusion and care for the most vulnerable in their communities. I saw communities that are completely exposed to the next extreme weather event, the next economic shock, the next food security crisis. As climate change, deforestation and other environmental injustices make life harder for the poor, communities are crying out for justice.

Here in Australia, we can help. This Christmas, as we gather in churches and homes, let us remember that the nativity is not a static story. It is an active call to love, serve and transform. The child born in a manger invites us into a life of compassion, urging us to take part in God's mission for the world.

UnitingWorld's Everything in Common Gift Catalogue gives us a tangible way to participate in this ongoing story. Everything in Common invites us to give each other gifts that are expressions of God's love for our neighbours—clean water, education, sustainable agriculture, leadership opportunities for women in the church, and more.

It's named after the Christian community described in Acts 22: 44-45 who responded to the message of Christ with lives of radical generosity:

"All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."

Giving gifts in solidarity with our global neighbours is a continuation of the nativity, where God's love broke into the world through humble and transformative means.

For Christians the nativity is more than a story.

It's a way of life. 🌱

REV. DR APWEE TING



EVERYTHING IN COMMON

GIFT CATALOGUE

*Gifts that fight poverty
and build hope!*





Tobin Jones / Act for Peace

From your family to theirs

Never have so many people been without a safe place to call home due to conflict and disasters. This Christmas, help people like Jane* and her family have the peace that comes with having a safe place to belong.

Act for peace this Christmas. Please give today.

**Name has been changed for safety reasons.*

ABN 86 619 970 188

75
years



Christmas
Bowl

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December 2024: Keeping Christmas Real

Prepared by **Rev. Robert McFarlane** Presbytery Relations Minister, Synod Mission Services

1 DECEMBER (ADVENT 1) Luke 21:25-36

As the new liturgical year begins, we jump to the end of time. The first Sunday of Advent is about the final coming of Christ every year. Passages about the end times jar with us. We're busy with end-of-year Christmas parties and planning for Christmas Day. We don't want to hear this spooky stuff. We want the animals in the stable and friends around the dining table. Distressed nations and people fainting from fear (verses 25 & 26) don't make us feel Christmas-y at all. What were the lectionary editors thinkin'?! Well, maybe that's the point. Advent 1 urges us not to make Christmas too cute nor Jesus too safe. Look out the window and figure out what's going on (verses 29-31), then decide how you're going to act here-and-now (verses 35-36).

8 DECEMBER (ADVENT 2) Luke 3:1-6

Real estate is about three things: location, location, location (and timing). When Luke begins to tell the adult story of Jesus, he locates it in place and time (verses 1 & 2). This may just seem like clutter in the story. However, for the original readers, this told them a lot. The detail is not about a date – scholars love to argue about that. The details are about who's in charge, when and where. We have an emperor, a governor, some wannabe kings, and the religious establishment. The word of God didn't come to them, and certainly not in a palace or a temple. The word came to a shaggy bloke in the wilderness. If you were announcing the coming of Jesus to us today, who would YOU say was in charge?

Where do YOU expect the word of God to come?

15 DECEMBER (ADVENT 3) Luke 3:7-18

“Do you want the good news or the bad news first?” That's what this passage reminds me of. John calls the crowd a bunch of snakes and warns them to flee from God's anger (verse 7) before the axe takes down their tree. That doesn't sound like “good news” (verse 18). But, maybe what's bad news for some is good news for others? It IS good news to hear that there are enough resources to go around if they are shared equitably (verse 11). It IS good news to hear that we can be free from extortion by corrupt government officials (verses 12 & 13). It IS good news to hear that foreign soldiers will respect our property and due process (verse 14). John the Baptist began what Jesus would continue, and what he passed on to us. What bad-good news do people need to hear today?

22 DECEMBER (ADVENT 4) Luke 1:39-45, (46-55)

When we hear in Luke from women that the Messiah is coming, even before Jesus' birth (Luke 1:39-45). When we hear in all the Gospels that this Messiah, who has been crucified, has risen from the dead, we also hear the news from women (Luke 24:1-12). This is both surprising and unsurprising. We hear that the Messiah will turn the world upside-down (Luke 1:52,53). Who better to use to announce this news than



LOOK OUT THE WINDOW AND FIGURE OUT WHAT'S GOING ON THEN DECIDE HOW YOU'RE GOING TO ACT HERE AND NOW

people at the bottom? When God looks at Mary and sees “the lowliness of his servant” (Luke 1:48), that's not about keeping her down, it's about where God is beginning the revolution. As the revolution goes on, who is God lifting up today?

25 DECEMBER (CHRISTMAS DAY) Luke 2:8-20

Sheep and shepherds are cute. Stables and mangers are pretty. That is until you get close enough to smell them. When I smell the mix of lanolin and stale urine in our shearing shed, I understand how frankincense and myrrh were actually useful gifts. Shepherds were semi-nomadic with half-wild animals. “Abiding in the fields” also sounds sweet but was when farmers invited the sheep-herders to bring their sheep to graze on cultivated fields annually between harvest and the next planting. The sheep provided weed control and manure. So, who are the shepherds in your

world? This Christmas don't be fooled by the carols and cards. Keep Christmas real.

29 DECEMBER (CHRISTMAS 1) Luke 2:41-52

Luke tells us three times that Mary pondered and/or treasured things in her heart. The first, when troubled by the archangel Gabriel's greeting, she pondered what it meant (1:29). The second, she treasured and pondered the shepherds' words after Jesus' birth (2:19). The third, in today's reading, she treasured in her heart all that happened while they were in Jerusalem (2:51). This is a story-telling technique, inviting the reader to ponder the same things, emphasised by being in a set of three. The invitation: What do these things mean about who Jesus is? While we readers today know how the story comes out, we are asked: “What do YOU ponder and treasure in your own life?” 🧠

January 2025: What is your real sense of purpose?

JANUARY (CHRISTMAS 2) *John 1:(1-9), 10-18*

In the Gospel readings in Advent, we saw how Luke grounded his story of Jesus in the human political realities of his time. We heard about emperors, priests, young women and smelly shepherds. We learned that Jesus came into the world to turn the order of things upside down: “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:52). John tells the story very differently. For John, Jesus came into the world to reveal the glory of God (John 1:14,18). Luke begins his story with kings and priests (Luke 1:5). John begins his story with the creation of the universe. For Luke, Jesus is revealed within human history.

For John, Jesus was present before the universe came into being. I love Luke’s human grittiness. However, I also appreciate the cosmic perspective John brings. We don’t use the language of “doctrine” in the Uniting Church much. However, in John 1 I find two of the doctrines that most anchor my faith. The first is the doctrine of creation. John 1:1-5 is a deliberate echo of Genesis 1:1-5. The world is a treasured creation of God that is declared good and the place where God can be revealed. Matter is not evil but infused with light. The second doctrine flows from the first: the doctrine of the incarnation. “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). Physical existence is not something to flee in order to find salvation in some

other spiritual realm. If God can take on human form it’s a pretty good way of being. Creation and incarnation turn us towards the earth and one another as the path towards God.

2 JANUARY (BAPTISM OF JESUS) *Luke 3:15-17, 21-22*

The liturgical year jumps around a bit after Christmas and takes the lectionary with it. The 6th of January in the Western Church, “the

Sundays after Epiphany have themes of Jesus being revealed as divine. Today’s reading is the Baptism of Jesus. We often talk about Jesus being made one with us in solidarity with humanity in baptism. However today, we are invited to focus on the heavenly voice in Luke 3:22 “You are my Son, the beloved.” We will hear this voice and these words again at the Transfiguration (Luke 9:35), another time of epiphany. In Jesus’ baptism we see how

this was the context for the first of Jesus’ miracles that John records. Now, “miracle” isn’t John’s word; he prefers “sign” (John 2:11). Turning water into wine isn’t a party trick; it’s a moment of revelation or “epiphany” (see last week’s reflection). The first half of John’s Gospel is structured around seven signs, beginning with Cana and climaxing in the raising of Lazarus (John 11) in which God’s glory is revealed (John 2:11; 11:40). Where do you see signs of God’s glory?



WE ARE INVITED TO FOCUS ON THE HEAVENLY VOICE “YOU ARE MY SON, THE BELOVED”

twelfth day of Christmas”, is Epiphany when we remember the coming of the Magi to Jesus and his family with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 1:1-12). “Epiphany” means something like being revealed or made manifest. This means that the coming of the Magi from the east, following the star to Jesus, is a symbol of Christ as a light to the gentiles (non-Jews): “Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” (Isaiah 60:3; see Acts 13:47) When the Magi arrive this shows that God has been revealed to the whole world through Christ. That’s why

Jesus is “fully human and divine”, an idea that was developed fully in the C4th to C6th.

19 JANUARY (EPIPHANY 2) *John 2:1-11*

Weddings are times of intense emotion for the couple and all around. Water and wine are powerful symbols in themselves, and wine is an intensifier of emotional and spiritual arousal. Although weddings and parties seem the stuff of everyday life, they can also be the space where much that was concealed is revealed. It’s not surprising, then, that

bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 4:18.19) That’s Jesus’ personal statement of purpose for what he is about to do in the rest of Luke. Forget the cliches – what is your real sense of purpose? 🕯️

26 JANUARY (EPIPHANY 3) *Luke 4:14-21*

I’ve read a lot of CVs lately. People begin by describing their own excellence, dedication, superior skills, etc. They say everything and nothing. I haven’t read one that says “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to

February 2025: Jesus turns the world and its powers upside down

**2 FEBRUARY
(EPIPHANY 4)**
Luke 4:21-30

Today's reading is the second part of the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. It's worth reading in context from verse 14. Things began very well for Jesus (verse 15). Things even went well when he came back to his hometown – at first (verse 22). Jesus read well and spoke well. People were proud of their own young Rabbi who was doing well. It seems weird, yet also strangely familiar, when Jesus chooses to provoke the congregation in Nazareth, his hometown (verses 23-27). This reminds me of when ministers are going through a rough patch in their relationship with their congregation and say, "I don't care what people think of me. I'm not here to be popular!" I hold back from saying, "Well, you're doing a good job of that." It's a tricky balancing act to be connected enough to the system to be listened to, but not so enmeshed that you're unable to challenge the system from within. Jesus shows us that there's a time to provoke and a time to embrace. It takes emotional and spiritual intelligence to discern the moment.

**9 FEBRUARY
(EPIPHANY 5)**
Luke 5:1-11

Today's reading is a composite of two stories from other Gospels, one from the beginning of Jesus' ministry and one from the end. In Mark 1:16-20 we read the calling of the fishermen, who immediately left everything and followed Jesus (see Luke 5:11). In John 21:1-6 we read the miraculous catch of fish as a resurrection narrative. Perhaps Luke brought together two stories from when the disciples' journey

started (Mark 1) and when it was restarted after Jesus' death and resurrection (John 21:1-6; see Luke 5:4-9) to make a point. After all, Luke tells us that he consulted many sources and put them in order (Luke 1:1-3). For me, this tells me that being Christian, being the church, has at least two dimensions. First, it is about discipleship. Following Jesus means leaving other things behind. Secondly, the abundant catch is generally taken as a symbol of God gathering people at the final judgment (Matthew 13:47-50), just like the symbol of the harvest (eg Matthew 9:35-38; Mark 4:26-29). Following Jesus is about gathering people under the reign of God. Our Synod resolved in 2019 to organise ourselves for growth in and through our Congregations in discipleship, relationship, impact and number. In today's passage I hear growth in both discipleship and number.

**16 FEBRUARY
(EPIPHANY 6)**
Luke 6:17-26

In Luke 4:16-21 we heard Jesus pronounce his own personal statement of vocation. He found his purpose in the words of Isaiah 61:1-3. (See 26 January.) This week's reading begins Jesus' manifesto for the people of God. This is Luke's so-called Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49), roughly parallel to Matthew's longer, better-known Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

**JESUS SHOWS US THAT
THERE'S A TIME TO PROVOKE
AND A TIME TO EMBRACE**



The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes (blessings) in Matthew 5:2-12. Luke begins his Sermon on the Plain with a shorter set of blessings (Luke 6:20-23), but pairs these with a matching set of Woes (curses) in Luke 6:24-26. This reflects what we heard in the Magnificat (Mary's Song of Praise) about God's purpose in Jesus (22 December), including "He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." (Luke 1:53; see Luke 6:21,25). Throughout Luke, we see Jesus turning the world and its powers upside down.

**23 FEBRUARY
(EPIPHANY 7)**
Luke 6:27-38

I once had a strange linguistic experience in a Greek Orthodox convent. This happened in Meteora, central Greece, the cluster of convents and monasteries perched impossibly on the top of sheer-sided pinnacles to protect them historically from Ottoman attack. My local guide had warned the

group against taking photos in the convent as the fierce nuns would confiscate their cameras and not give them back. As we wandered through the convent, we came across an inscription in Greek which I pointed out to the guide, Luke 6:37. I think that my New Testament Greek was better than hers! We discussed what I saw as the gap between stated belief and lived-out values in that context. It seems that it easy to worship the words as a community but forget what it is to live them. Which enemy of yours is God calling you to love? (Luke 6:27-36) Which person whom you find intolerable is God calling you to forgive? (Luke 6:37-38) Our love and forgiveness may not change the other, but they can heal us. 🙏

REV. ROBERT MCFARLANE
PRESBYTERY RELATIONS MINISTER,
SYNOD MISSION SERVICES

Perfectly imperfect

In a world that often idolises perfection, our faith presents a unique perspective. Christian life is a journey marked not by flawlessness, but by continual growth and transformation.

The Bible has many stories of imperfect people who were deeply loved and used by God. From Abraham's doubt to Peter's denial, these narratives reveal a profound truth: our imperfections can be a catalyst for spiritual growth.

Our faith invites us to embrace our imperfections as opportunities for growth. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, writes, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). This verse is not a condemnation but a recognition of our shared humanity.

When we acknowledge our weaknesses and shortcomings, we create space for God to work in our lives. It is in our moments of vulnerability that we are most receptive to God's grace and love.

The Bible is full of examples of vulnerable individuals who were deeply loved and used by God. Moses, for instance, struggled with insecurity and a speech impediment. Yet, God chose him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

David, despite his flaws, was anointed as king of Israel. These stories remind us that our imperfections do not disqualify us from God's love and service.

Faith is rooted in the belief in God's grace. Grace is God's unmerited favour, his love for us even when we don't deserve it. It is through God's grace that we are able to overcome our imperfections and live a life of faith.

WE ARE NOT CALLED TO BE PERFECT WE ARE CALLED TO BE FAITHFUL

The Apostle Paul often speaks of the power of God's grace. In his letter to the Ephesians, he writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). This verse reminds us that our salvation is not based on our own merits but on God's grace.

The Christian life is not a destination but a journey. It is a process of growth and transformation. As we journey with God, we will inevitably encounter our own imperfections. But rather than being discouraged, we can embrace these challenges as opportunities for growth.

We are not called to be perfect we are called to be faithful. When we trust in God's grace and love, we can find strength and courage to face our imperfections.

You just have to open social media to see a world that often values perfection above all else, our faith offers a refreshing perspective. It is a journey marked not by flawlessness (photoshopped or otherwise), but by growth and transformation.

By embracing our imperfections and trusting in God's grace, we can experience a life lived in relationship with God. 🌱

ADRIAN DRAYTON



Plate for a Mate *this Christmas*

Every day at Parramatta Mission's Meals Plus service we provide food, assistance and support to those in need. As we celebrate the birth of Christ this Christmas, we are reminded of His call to love and serve those in need.

We are committed to reflecting this love by reaching out to individuals and families who are facing hardship—whether due to homelessness, crisis, or mental illness. We do this by providing meals, food hampers, essentials and support services in the heart of Parramatta.

This Christmas, we invite you to help us by donating a Plate for a Mate.

Every \$25 you donate provides a meal and support to someone who might otherwise go without, sharing the warmth and joy of Christ's love during this holy season.

Your support will make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who need it most. Thank you for your gift to spread joy and kindness this Christmas.

Donate today, or contact us to find out how you can help.



**Make a donation by scanning the QR code, or visiting
www.parramattamission.org.au/plateforamate**

Reprogramming Relationships and Hospitality in *The Wild Robot*



***The Wild Robot* is a film based on a book by Peter Brown and is a captivating story about a robot named Roz who, after being shipwrecked on a deserted island, learns to live among animals and form meaningful relationships with them.**

This story is deceptively simple, presenting complex themes through a narrative that combines adventure with profound reflections on human (and non-human) connection. At its heart, *The Wild Robot* explores how hospitality can redefine relationships, particularly when individuals who seem to have nothing in common come together to foster understanding, empathy, and cooperation.

Roz's journey on the island begins with a stark contrast: she is a machine, engineered for labour, in a world of organic, living creatures. At first, the animals are frightened by her mechanical appearance and strange, automated movements. To them, she is an alien presence, an unwelcome intruder in their world. This initial fear and distance highlight the natural tendency to distrust the "other". Roz's willingness to adapt and help her new neighbours reflects a shift from her initial programming; she begins to learn

TRUE
HOSPITALITY
CAN TRANSCEND
INITIAL BIASES
AND FEARS

what it means to be compassionate, responsive, and above all, hospitable.

Hospitality becomes a transformative force in Roz's life. Though programmed with basic functionality, Roz goes beyond her initial design by observing the island's

inhabitants and learning their ways. Her actions create a ripple effect; as she shows kindness and a willingness to help, the animals slowly start to trust her, and eventually, some even begin to care for her in return. Roz's hospitality is first put to the test when she adopts a young gosling named Brightbill, whose mother was killed accidentally. Although she has no biological bond with him, Roz assumes the role of a parent, a turning point that redefines her identity. Her love and dedication to raising Brightbill defy her programming, demonstrating how hospitality reprograms Roz to become more empathetic, self-sacrificing, and emotionally intelligent.

Through Roz's journey, the film (and its source material, the book) explores the idea that hospitality is not just a one-time act; it requires continual growth and adaptation. Roz's relationship with the other animals deepens as she learns their ways and respects their needs. The animals come to appreciate Roz's presence on the island, recognizing her contributions to their community. When winter arrives and the island becomes harsh and unforgiving, Roz's innovative thinking and willingness to help the animals prepare for survival ultimately forge lasting bonds. This moment underscores that true hospitality can transcend initial biases and fears, creating a mutual sense of responsibility and care.

The Wild Robot suggests that hospitality is the foundation of real relationships, especially between beings who initially misunderstand or even fear each other.

Hospitality requires openness and patience to embrace those who are different. By embracing this principle, Roz teaches the animals the value of coexistence, while they, in turn, reshape her identity from an isolated machine to a beloved community member. Through these relationships, both Roz and the animals grow, their lives enriched by one another's companionship and support.

Brown's tale is also a subtle reflection on how empathy can emerge in the most unexpected of places. Roz's reprogramming is not just technical; it is emotional and moral, reshaping her into a figure who embodies the warmth, care, and protectiveness typically associated with family and friendship. In a broader sense, *The Wild Robot* suggests that hospitality can be a powerful tool for bridging divides. It encourages readers to consider how showing openness and kindness to those who are different can reshape their own lives and communities.

The animation used to bring Peter Brown's novel to life is beautiful and seems to merge both hand-drawn and CGI to enliven and enhance his message. Chris Sander's direction and the flawless voice cast round out the viewing experience. Lupita Nyong'o's performance as Roz, is the beating heart of the film.

In *The Wild Robot*, hospitality is more than a theme; it is a catalyst that redefines relationships and reshapes identities, something that shouldn't be lost on Christian viewers. Roz's transformation illustrates that even the most unlikely connections can lead to fulfilling and reciprocal relationships when approached with compassion and openness.

The film ultimately leaves audiences with a hopeful message: the potential for meaningful relationships exists everywhere, and hospitality is the key that unlocks this potential, even in the unlikeliest of beings. 🌟

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