

# insights

Spring 2020

**GAMBLING**  
*reform*



*First*  
*Sundays*



A LIVING WAY OF  
INSPIRING ONE  
ANOTHER

**CLIMATE  
ACTION**



THE UNITING  
CHURCH TAKES  
POSITIVE STEPS TO  
SAVE THE PLANET



Uniting Church  
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT

# WITH LOVE TO THE WORLD

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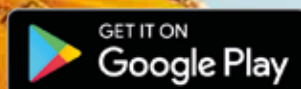


**A daily devotional guide that provides a reflection on a Bible passage for each day of the year.**

During these difficult days of the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are seeking ways to find meaning, encouragement, and hope for life, and are keen to maintain and deepen their faith and sense of community/connectedness with their church and other Christians.

*With Love to the World* has been meeting these needs for the past 45 years with its daily commentaries on lectionary and associated Bible passages, prayer suggestions, and questions for individuals and groups.

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For more information,  
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**[butler@wagga.net.au](mailto:butler@wagga.net.au)**

## WELCOME FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

# The walls came tumbling down



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.

OUR (CHURCH) LANDSCAPES AREN'T ALL THE SAME - WHILE THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH REMAINS THE SAME

There's an old Gospel song that we used to sing called (I think) *Joshua Fit The Battle of Jericho*. It had a catchy tune and it was an amusing take on the story of Joshua's invasion of Jericho by means of trumpets. It might even have had actions to go with it - I'm sure many of us could still belt it out now if pressed. It contained the line ...and the walls came tumbling down...

It popped into my head in a recent meeting when a comment was made about increasingly porous boundaries across the church. Thanks to COVID-19, the church has taken to the internet in a whole variety of ways and the 'way we've always done things' has necessarily changed. While we might buckle with the sheer number of Zoom meetings in any given day, it is possible to gather people from across the state, even across the Assembly, to discuss matters that we have in common much more cheaply, quickly and (hopefully) effectively than has ever been possible before. I don't think anyone really thought this degree of change was possible in the church prior to the COVID disruption but it was actually accomplished within a matter of weeks. And aside from business meetings, it's even possible to worship with a range of different communities around the world if you feel so inclined. While I'll be quite glad to see the back of virtual worship, I've loved being able to gather with my godmother in Tasmania from time to time - she nurtured me in the faith and we worshipped together often.

One of the unforeseen consequences of decisions that have been made in the church over the last forty odd years has been the trend towards increasing fragmentation. We opted to do away with parishes and we've favoured a model of lone-ranger ministry instead of team ministry. In doing so, we've diluted the intent of the *Basis of Union* and its commitment to an inter-conciliar church and inadvertently fragmented the household of God. Ministers and Congregations can simply decide to attend to their own 'patch' and avoid any interaction with other ministers, Congregations or other councils of the church. Shocking, I know, but nevertheless quite common.

Now, however, in the virtual gatherings and discussions that have been made possible by the COVID disruption, there appears to be

a growing recognition that we really are 'all in this together' and that we are collectively responsible for the church both now and into the future, not just for our own 'patches'.

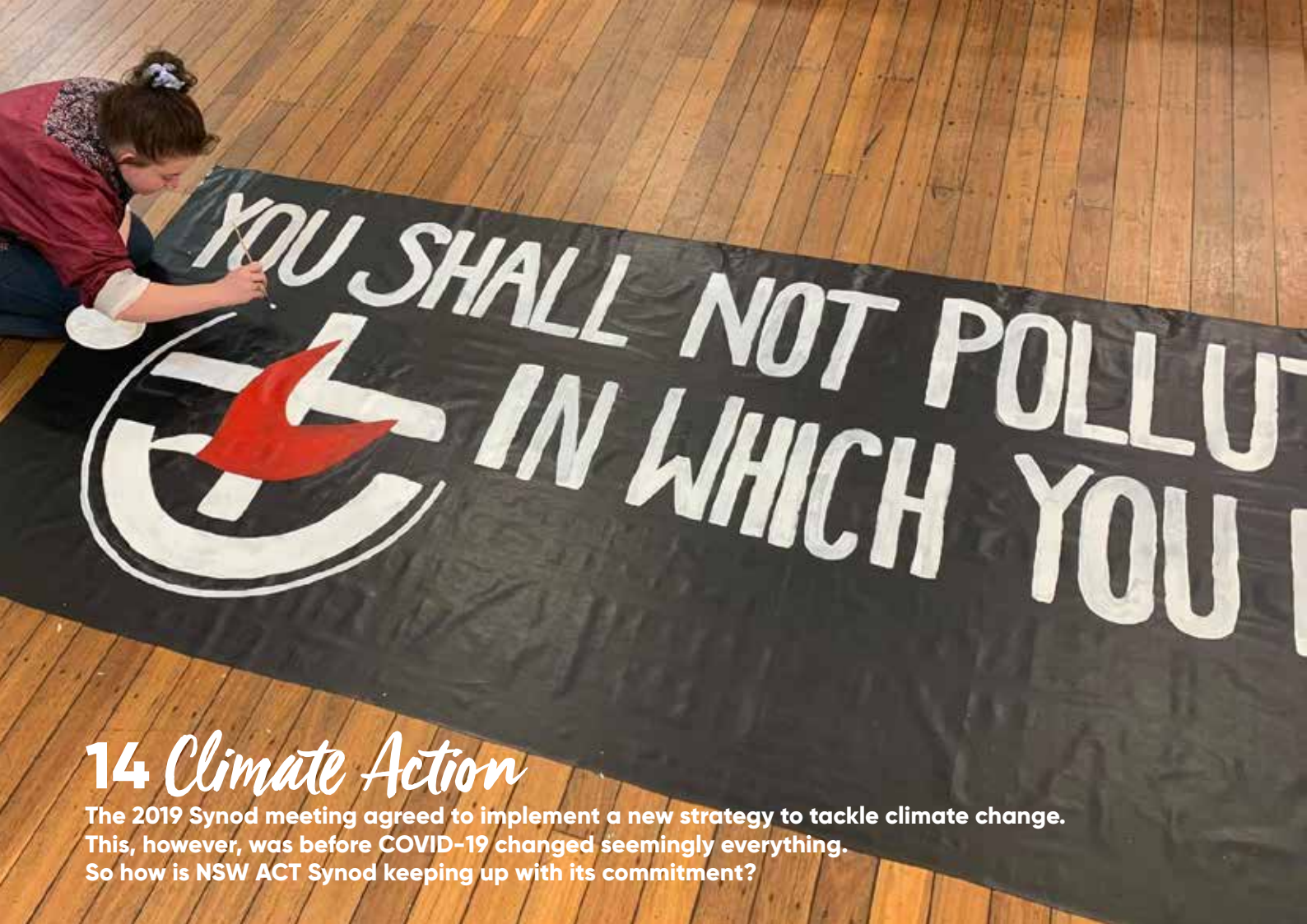
This experience sharply represents the question to which the church must always attend: what is God saying to us now?

- how do we lift our eyes to reconnect with God's bigger picture?
- how do we understand ourselves collectively - disciple, Congregation member, Presbytery member, Synod, etc. - and start to imagine a whole church framework to explore God's purpose for, call to the church for the future?
- how can we stop defending territory?
  - the territory of the way we've always done things
  - the territory of 'us'
  - the worship territory, the music territory, the morning tea territory
  - and all the battles over detail that go on to defend those territories?

Our (Church) landscapes aren't all the same. While the purpose of the church remains the same, the particular ways in which that plays out is different in different places - church in a small rural town is different to church in the centre of the city to name just one distinction. But collectively our responsibility is to witness to Jesus Christ in the whole Church and our collective challenge is how best to support and resource that witness to be vital and (hopefully) transformative in all the different landscapes of the Synod.

While it's tempting to think that we're living in unprecedented times and we don't know what to do and we need to just wait until either the way becomes clearer (preferably obvious and easy) or someone comes to the rescue and makes it all better. Neither scenario has anything to do with faithful discipleship and both are a version of magical thinking.

Whatever the circumstances, the work of the church is the same - to proclaim in word and deed the gospel of Jesus Christ! 🙏



# 14 Climate Action

The 2019 Synod meeting agreed to implement a new strategy to tackle climate change. This, however, was before COVID-19 changed seemingly everything. So how is NSW ACT Synod keeping up with its commitment?

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

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

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## MODERATOR'S REFLECTION

# Waiting, listening, Praying



REV. SIMON  
HANSFORD  
MODERATOR

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

THREE DISCIPLES  
OF JESUS WHO  
DISCIPLED ME IN  
THEIR TURN

The Uniting Church will seek ways in which the baptised may have confirmed to them the promises of God, and be led to deeper commitment to the faith and service into which they have been baptised. [Basis of Union, par.12]

It seems the pandemic has bookended and pervaded every conversation since March. I noted with some friends that other, important things have slipped past, unremarked. If nothing else, being sequestered at home for lengths of time has given me the chance to reflect.

In the last couple of months, three older friends of mine have died. Three men, two and three decades my senior, all of whom were members of Dubbo Congregation, my first placement. I have seen all three of them less in these last years than I would have wished, but time and distance – and everything else – intervened.

Dick was a retired Minister (we had been warned at College about retired Ministers...) who, from our first meeting, was a support to me. In ways both implicit and explicit, Dick taught me about ministry, about paying attention and waiting and listening, about struggles and speaking up and leading when the time was right.

Dick had retired early due to an illness which hindered his ability to preach and lead worship, significant in his ministry. Something he had learnt out of his wisdom and pain, was how to receive the elements of the eucharist, once again, after four decades of presiding over the bread and wine, then offering them as sacrament. Dick offered his wisdom to me instead.

My original prayer partner was Denis and we met weekly in my study for years. I learnt to wait, to listen, to pray. Denis taught me to pay attention to the living God and the lives of people around me, so that prayer – and all aspects of my ministry – might be better informed.

My struggle with stillness surprises no-one who knows me and yet it was Denis' leadership which kept me seated and still for an hour each week. Denis' patience with me exemplified what I have always needed to understand, and enact, so that I am able to pray more fully into the presence of God for the concerns and wonders of the world around me.

My third friend, Brian, informed my faith and life in a different way. Brian took me out west, to the desert country, teaching all my family about "the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended, and at night the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars".

My first strong memory is Brian taking me to a riverbed outside Dubbo in his 80 series Land Cruiser, bogging it deliberately, putting me in the driving seat and saying, "Get us out of here. Don't worry, you can't break it".

We bought an old Cruiser (80 series, naturally) soon afterwards, and for several holidays journeyed with Brian and his family up and down western Queensland and New South Wales, off road and on, talking about faith in Christ, what tyres run best, raising a family, why it's dangerous to camp in riverbeds, forgiveness, and the majesty of camp oven cuisine.

Three godly men, who gave out of their faithfulness and in full awareness of their own frailty. Three disciples of Jesus, who discipled me - and many others - in their turn.

In this season of our Church's life, we can grieve the loss of worship and community as we have known it for so long. We can look for ways to sing our faith when we cannot sing as we always have. Preaching has moved online, so that we can hear a sermon as easily from overseas, or from other times, as we can from our local preachers.

Discipleship remains, vital and indispensable. We pay attention to the lives of others, offering fractions of our experience and stories of our life in Christ, to guide them as we have, in our turn, been led. Graciousness and frailty, strength and good humour. Faith earthed in Jesus Christ and elevated by the Spirit of that same Christ.

It takes time and decision. It takes others; for me there have been many women and men who have challenged, blessed and chastised. It requires the hope we have in Christ.

We have chosen to follow Jesus, we are called to invite others to share our road.

Dick. Denis. Brian. May they rest in peace. May they rise again in glory. 🙏



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## COMMENTS

# your say ONLINE

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

### WHY 'ALL LIVES MATTER' IS NOT AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO 'BLACK LIVES MATTER'

Imagine you are at the funeral of a five year old girl who tragically died unexpectedly. The little girl's mother is delivering a eulogy to a group of friends and relatives who have gathered to mark the sad occasion. The mother is speaking through tears about how precious her child was, and how much she cared for her, and how much the little girl mattered to her... Then somebody yells out from the back of the room "All children matter!"

Most people would think "OMG, why would you do that!?" Most people understand that expressing how much somebody

or something matters doesn't automatically mean that nothing else matters. That should be common sense, yes?

When we see people protesting about domestic violence, and how our mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters lives matter... normal people don't respond with "Hey, actually, all people matter". We understand that this group is particularly concerned with the issue of domestic violence and its impact on women in our communities. It's a good cause, and we support those who are raising awareness of the issues.

We see groups gathering to raise awareness of Breast Cancer - we see stadiums full of people wearing pink... do we respond by saying "Hang on, all cancers matter!?" Of course, we don't. We see a legitimate issue and acknowledge people are showing their support.

So why is it that when Aboriginal people protest to raise concerns about the deaths of Aboriginal people in custody, using the phrase "Black Lives Matter", there are some people who insist on responding with "All lives matter!"?

### THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE IS WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE?



Of course all lives matter, the same as all children matter, all women matter, and all cancers matter. Just because we say we care about one thing, doesn't mean we can't care about other things. It is possible to multi-task compassion.

Responding to "Black Lives Matter" with "All Lives Matter" can appear to be saying: "Actually black lives don't matter unless it's in a situation where all lives matter... so it only matters if white lives are also affected". It has a flavour of colonial attitudes towards Aboriginal people - "You don't matter unless we say you matter".

Sadly, I believe that most people responding to "Black Lives Matter" with "All Lives Matter", are exactly the reason why we need the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

Underpinning the "All Lives Matter" response are things like deep seated racism, bigotry, unconscious bias, ignorance, and often likely a desire to ensure that Aboriginal/black people don't get any "special treatment". And if that somehow isn't the case, I can assure you that from the perspective of most Aboriginal people (and many others) that it certainly comes across that way. So, if you are meaning to show

solidarity or support for Aboriginal or other black peoples - please do not do so using the ALM tag.

If one-day Aliens come and attack the planet and are killing humans indiscriminately... please feel free to protest and wave placards saying: "All lives matter". Until such time, please drop it from your conversations as it is offensive in the current global context of protesting systemic and institutionalised racism and can be seen as a deliberate antagonism to people and communities who are already experiencing grief and trauma.

There is no good reason to respond to "Black Lives Matter" with a comment that "All lives Matter". The appropriate response is "Yes, they certainly do. And what can I do to help make a difference?".

**NATHAN TYSON**



## Uniting World launch Beirut Appeal

**UNITINGWORLD HAVE LAUNCHED AN APPEAL TO SUPPORT RECOVERY EFFORTS FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY THE RECENT EXPLOSION IN BEIRUT**

**The massive explosion caused 160 deaths, and some 5,000 injuries. It has damaged much of Lebanon's capital city.**

In a joint letter, Uniting Church president Dr Deirdre Palmer joined Uniting World's National Director Dr Sureka Goringe in expressing solidarity with those affected.

"On behalf of the Uniting Church in Australia, we write to convey our deep sympathy and prayers for you all, who have lost loved ones and for those who have lost their homes and their livelihood," the letter read.

"We understand that church communities and schools have had buildings significantly damaged and hospitals are overwhelmed with people who are injured, in addition to responding to people affected by COVID19.

"We are aware, through conversations with Mr Stuart McMillan, ex-President of the Uniting Church, what wonderful hospitality you showed him when he visited Lebanon in 2017, and the warmth of the relationship experienced between our two churches at that time.

"We are also richly blessed in the Uniting Church through the relationships members of our Church continue to hold with you and your communities.

We are aware of the distress and pain being felt by many of our own members here and are seeking to support and care for them pastorally as well."

The Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, a church organisation that the Uniting Church recently began a relationship with, saw their building damaged by the blast.

Rev. L. Nishan Bakalian is the organisation's Coordinator of Church Relations. He said that the blast could be felt a kilometre away, and has asked Christians to continue to pray for the country and its people.

Lebanon's Prime Minister, Hassan Diab previously said the cause of the explosion was 2,700 tonnes of ammonium nitrate, an industrial chemical used in fertiliser and in mining explosives. Mr Diab's government has since resigned in the aftermath.

UnitingWorld will continue to post updates on Beirut and how the appeal's funds are used. 📍

**JONATHAN FOYE**

WE WRITE TO CONVEY OUR DEEP SYMPATHY AND PRAYERS FOR YOU ALL



To donate to UnitingWorld's Beirut Appeal, visit the official webpage: [fundraise.unitingworld.org.au/beirut](https://fundraise.unitingworld.org.au/beirut)



# Call to ask local councils to join power program

**“Why not?” It was this simple question that Wellington-based minister Rev. Peter Harvey posed to his local council that delivered a big result.**

Rev. Harvey asked Dubbo Regional Council to sign onto the Cities Power Partnership (CPP) an important clean energy program that aligns with the Church’s climate justice work.

The CPP is Australia’s largest local government climate network that targets greenhouse gas pollution and climate disruption and the hope is that all Australian local councils will sign on.

The Moderator is now asking asking Uniting Church members to reach out to their local councils and ask them to join.

“The Uniting Church Synod of NSW and ACT is proud to support the Climate Council’s Cities Power Partnership, which promotes clean energy to councils, towns and cities across Australia,” Rev. Hansford said.

“As a strong supporter of climate justice, the Church is calling on its 50,000 members across 500 congregations to ask local councils to join the Cities Power Partnership and take immediate and decisive action to cut greenhouse gas pollution.”

Rev. Harvey said it was a no-brainer when he discovered that his council weren’t yet part of the project.

“We did have existing relationships with a couple of people on the council. In a meeting we asked if they knew about the CPP and if there was a reason ‘why they hadn’t joined it?’ It was just putting it before them and highlighting the project and the benefits of being part of a national project to speak into the climate debate.

“For Dubbo Regional Council it ended up becoming part of their policy on power and climate within the region. They used the information available from the CPP to guide their policy on power generation and usage within the region, so it was very helpful for them,” Rev. Harvey said.

In 2019, the Climate Action Strategy Task Group was set up to oversee the Synod Climate Action Strategy to reduce

carbon emissions across all councils and agencies of the Church and to advocate to Federal, State and local governments to take decisive steps to reduce our emissions nationally.

The Uniting Church has been vocal on the need for climate action since 1977 and was the first major institution in Australia to support the climate strike in August 2019.

All the details on how to do this can be found on the Uniting Earth website ([unitingearth.org.au](http://unitingearth.org.au)).

The CPP requires cities to make five key commitments towards local climate action and focuses on four main areas; renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transport and community advocacy. 🌱

**ASHLEY DONNELLY**

THE UNITING CHURCH WAS THE FIRST MAJOR INSTITUTION TO SUPPORT THE CLIMATE STRIKE



# Uniting toolkit helps residents access specialist services

**Uniting NSWACT and CHIA NSW launch toolkit to help older tenants stay in their homes longer. The program supports more stable tenancies by providing community organisations with specialist housing information and resources**

Community organisations assisting older and more vulnerable Australians who in the past may have struggled to find stable housing will now have access to a new toolkit that helps residents access the specialist services they need.

The toolkit will be launched at a webinar followed by a virtual masterclass on how to use it, with the author Sue Cripps, a consultant with extensive experience in the homelessness and housing arena.



THE COVER OF THE WORKING WITH OLDER TENANTS DOCUMENT

Uniting, the largest provider of aged care in NSW and the ACT, has partnered with Community Housing Industry Australia (CHIA) NSW to launch the 'Supporting Older Tenants as They Age Toolkit'.

Saviour Buhagiar is Director of Ageing, Uniting NSW.ACT.

"As a not for profit provider of community services, Uniting believes affordable housing is a fundamental human right," said Mr Buhagiar.

"Older people are increasingly vulnerable to homelessness. They need information developed especially for their circumstances and that is tailored to their backgrounds.

"The toolkit provides specialist guidance for community organisations. It also contains important information to support older people from diverse communities including Aboriginal Australians, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and members of the LGBTI community."

Uniting NSW.ACT is a leader in developing innovative partnerships that deliver best practice aged care services including those that tackle homelessness.

In 2016, Uniting won the prestigious Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (AACQA) Better Practice Award for a community outreach public housing program for older tenants of the Greenway Estate in NSW.

Uniting is interested in working with the NSW Government to trial a specialist seniors housing support service to improve housing outcomes for older people so that they can age well in appropriate and affordable housing.

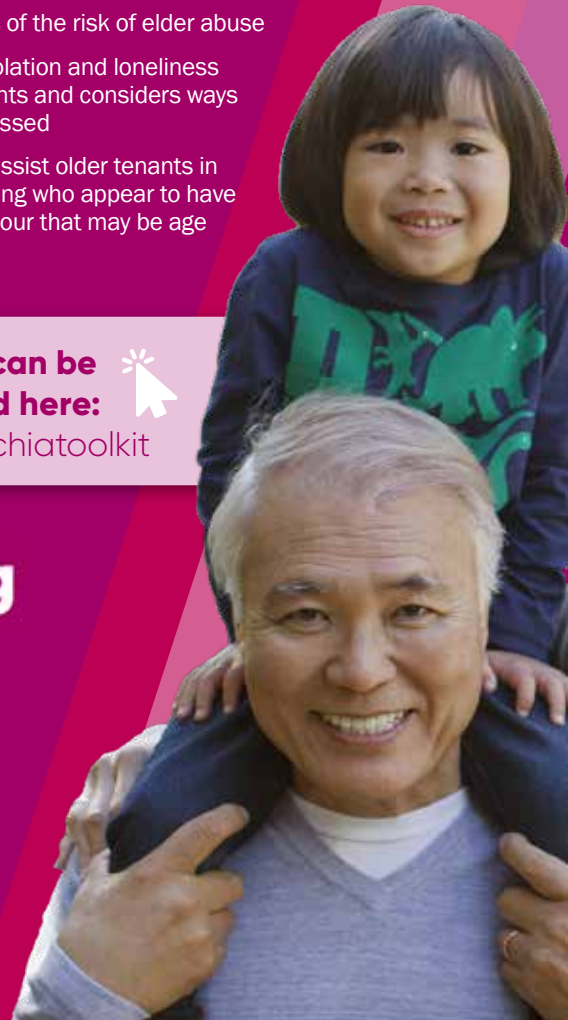
This proposal has wide support from housing and aged service peak bodies and providers through the NSW Ageing on the Edge Forum; a coalition of organisations working together towards housing justice for older people on low incomes.

## THE TOOLKIT COVERS SIX KEY AREAS

1. Tailored advice to support all groups of people identified as part of the diverse Australian community
2. Explores the aged care service model in relation to keeping older tenants at home for as long as possible with the supports they need
3. Promotes understanding of structural housing adaptations that can be made to enable staying at home for longer
4. Raises awareness of the risk of elder abuse
5. Explores social isolation and loneliness among older tenants and considers ways they can be addressed
6. Identifies how to assist older tenants in mainstream housing who appear to have changes in behaviour that may be age related.

The toolkit can be downloaded here: [uniting.org/chiatoolkit](https://uniting.org/chiatoolkit)

**Uniting**



# SafeChurch

THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA IS COMMITTED  
TO PROVIDING A SAFE PLACE FOR ALL PEOPLE

**Looking back at the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, we can see the momentous impact it made on society, churches, other institutions and the lives and safety of children.**

**In response, changes have been implemented in Uniting Church policy and practice, impacting congregations, schools, councils and agencies. The Church has grown in its understanding of the responsibilities involved in the safety of children and vulnerable people.**

**A part of that vigilance is investment in training to meet the Child Safe Standards set by the Office of the NSW Children's Guardian. Additionally, work has been completed to address risk and ensure clear reporting and accountability mechanisms are in place.**

The commitment in NSW and ACT includes the establishment of a Synod Safe Church Unit (SSCU) entrusted with the task of staying on track, keeping up to date and delivering on all new initiatives. The SSCU works closely with the National Safe Church Unit ensuring national consistency while complying with relevant State and Territory legislative requirements.

The Synod Safe Church Unit is the responsibility of the Associate Secretary, Rev. Bronwyn Murphy.

Rev. Tara Curlewis is providing supply in the role of Relationships Minister and Anne Empson has taken on the role of Quality and Compliance Manager. The Unit is also supported administratively by the Synod Secretariat.

The SSCU is available to support the Church, in all its contexts, to understand, interpret and enable implementation of the *National Child Safety Policy Framework*. Our unfailing commitment is to child safety vigilance, reconciliation and the rebuilding of trust.



THE SYNOD SAFE CHURCH UNIT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ASSOCIATE SECRETARY, REV. BRONWYN MURPHY

## WHAT ELSE DOES THE SSCU DO?

- **Speak Out**

This is an independently run hotline, available for anyone to report a wide range of issues confidentially or anonymously.

- **Safe Church Workshops**

These workshops began in 2008 and align with the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA), Safe Church Training Agreement (SCTA) standards. This agreement means people can attend any training in any of the 36 partner denominations and be accredited.

The Safe Church Awareness Workshops address topics such as: safe church foundations (duty of care, transparency and accountability); child and vulnerable person's protection; understanding and responding to abuse; protective behaviours; safe leadership; and safe programs and environments.

To date, these workshops have been delivered face to face. A part of our commitment to providing access for all, the National Safe Church Unit is currently working with the Synods to deliver online training in 2021. If you need to complete or refresh your training before then, please contact the Safe Church Unit.

- **Person of Concern**

As an inclusive church, we wish to welcome all people. Sadly, not all people are safe for children and vulnerable people. Person of concern is a process to ensure the church and community members are safe at all times.

- **School Religious Education**

We have over 300 committed Scripture teachers in our Synod. Each must be trained and authorised by UCA and the Department of Education.

- **Working with Children Check (WWCC) and Working with Vulnerable Persons Check (WWVC)**

To work with children or vulnerable people, it is a legal requirement to hold a valid WWCC or WWVC. This applies to all ordained ministers, ministry of pastor roles, and all people who work with children or vulnerable people. The check must be kept up to date and valid. Recent legislative changes mean anyone who holds a WWCC in NSW is a mandatory reporter.

- **Mandatory Reporting and Reportable Conduct**

Ensuring completion of the Church's commitments to the Children's Royal Commission; the SSCU will assist all leaders to be equipped for reporting responsibilities through training and education as appropriate for a range of activities that deliver on our commitment to safety for all people.

As we move into the future, it is our hope and our prayer that all people will feel valued, included and safe in the Uniting Church. The Synod Safe Church Unit welcomes your enquiries and looks forward to supporting you in this work. 🌟



Contact the Synod Safe Church Unit:

E [safechurch@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:safechurch@nswact.uca.org.au)

P 02 8267 4300



**AS WE MOVE INTO  
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VALUED, INCLUDED  
AND SAFE IN THE  
UNITING CHURCH**

# KIDSLIFE!



**KidsLife was a fun new TV program by Terrigal Uniting Church, which helped kids engage with God in an online space. It was aimed at preschoolers and early primary children and included stories, craft, music, puppets, animals, and more! Angela Cadena interviewed the team at Terrigal Uniting Church.**

Twelve episodes of about 30 minutes were released on Facebook, YouTube, and their website each Friday morning, starting on 22 May until the end of July where the season finale was released, with over hundreds of views per channel per episode and many shares. Episodes talked about the story of the wise man who built his house on the rock, explored the story of the Good Samaritan, and celebrated that God made us just the way we are, among other topics.

Emma Hunter is the Pastoral Care and Childrens, Youth and Family Minister at Terrigal Uniting Church; she shares this role with her husband, Craig. They both produced and created all episodes. Emma told Insights that when COVID-19 lockdowns came

in, they wanted to reach all ages that they work with.

“Our Friday Ministry over Zoom reached our Kids ages 8 to 11 and Youth 12 to 17, so we brainstormed the idea to reach our pre-school to early primary. We did do one Zoom for them, but it was a bit tricky. Then we joked about Playschool, watched an episode and the idea of KidsLife was born.” Terrigal Uniting Church

**“Our boys loved watching this and doing the craft. A great program for the kids!”**

ALISON GALLAGHER  
CONGREGANT AND MOTHER

minister Rev. Richard Harris was supportive, as he has always been of new ideas.

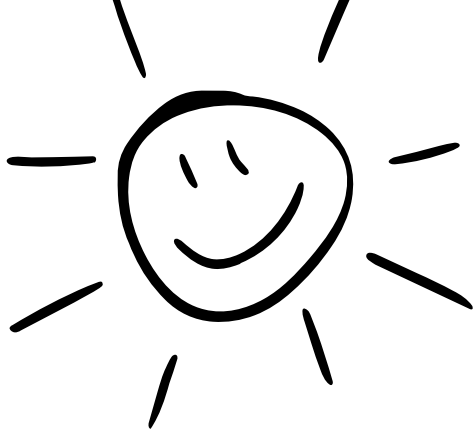
Filming, sound and editing was done by talented congregational member Andrew Hawkins. Terrigal Uniting Church music and communications pastor Kristy Tritton organised the opening and closing credits and graphics of each episode and also put them online each week. They tried to use familiar

faces from their Kids Church ministry team and playgroup ministry for storytelling.

According to Emma, they wanted to focus on Jesus’ teaching. “As this is preschool-lower primary focused, the story delivery was important. We love telling and reading stories, we’ve collected quite a stash of books, and our church has a wonderful children’s book selection too.”

Emma is trained in early childhood; that’s why kids craft comes easily to her. She also picked up some ideas from Pinterest when needed, and with her husband, would brainstorm about how to tell the story.

It is up to families to decide how, when, or if they watch KidsLife. Emma hopes to find how many children watch once they can all meet in person again. Their Sunday morning Children’s ministry’s largest group is the preschool-



lower primary, so this became a great way for them to stay connected.

Some of the most significant challenges that they overcame during this first season of KidsLife was Zoom fatigue.

They also ran Zoom bible study and youth groups the whole time, and with extra Zooms in the week for work and their own commitments, they were ready for face-to-face ministry to come back.

“We were really lucky actually, as Craig, myself and our two key Friday leaders met weekly (via Zoom), and we could share the challenges and get creative with ideas to keep us going. One of our other wonderful Friday volunteers attended the weekly Primary school Zoom also, and she was a delight to have. We’ve missed being able to all serve as a team. I’m sure that once it is safe to, it’ll be a celebration to return to ministry for many,” Emma commented.

When asking Emma about advice for those congregations that are working and looking for options to keep kids connected, she said: “This has been such a learning curve I’m not sure I have any words of wisdom. Firstly, care for your team. I hope I have. I have also really enjoyed the sharing of resources, if we share what we have, surely that’s the best way forward, I have learnt so much from others. I think we also need to remember to keep our childlike view too.

Kids often - not all - don’t want to wade through readings and reflections, they get enough of that at school. Physical, creative and active, age-appropriate, engagement is what I need to remember to do.



Finally, don’t take it personally if what you put out isn’t used. I know that during this time, many families have not wanted or needed more to do.

“It’s been different for everyone, but kids have had school work and a busy disruptive school year, and some families simply just can’t add another thing to do into their lives. Finally, prayer for families is the best support.”

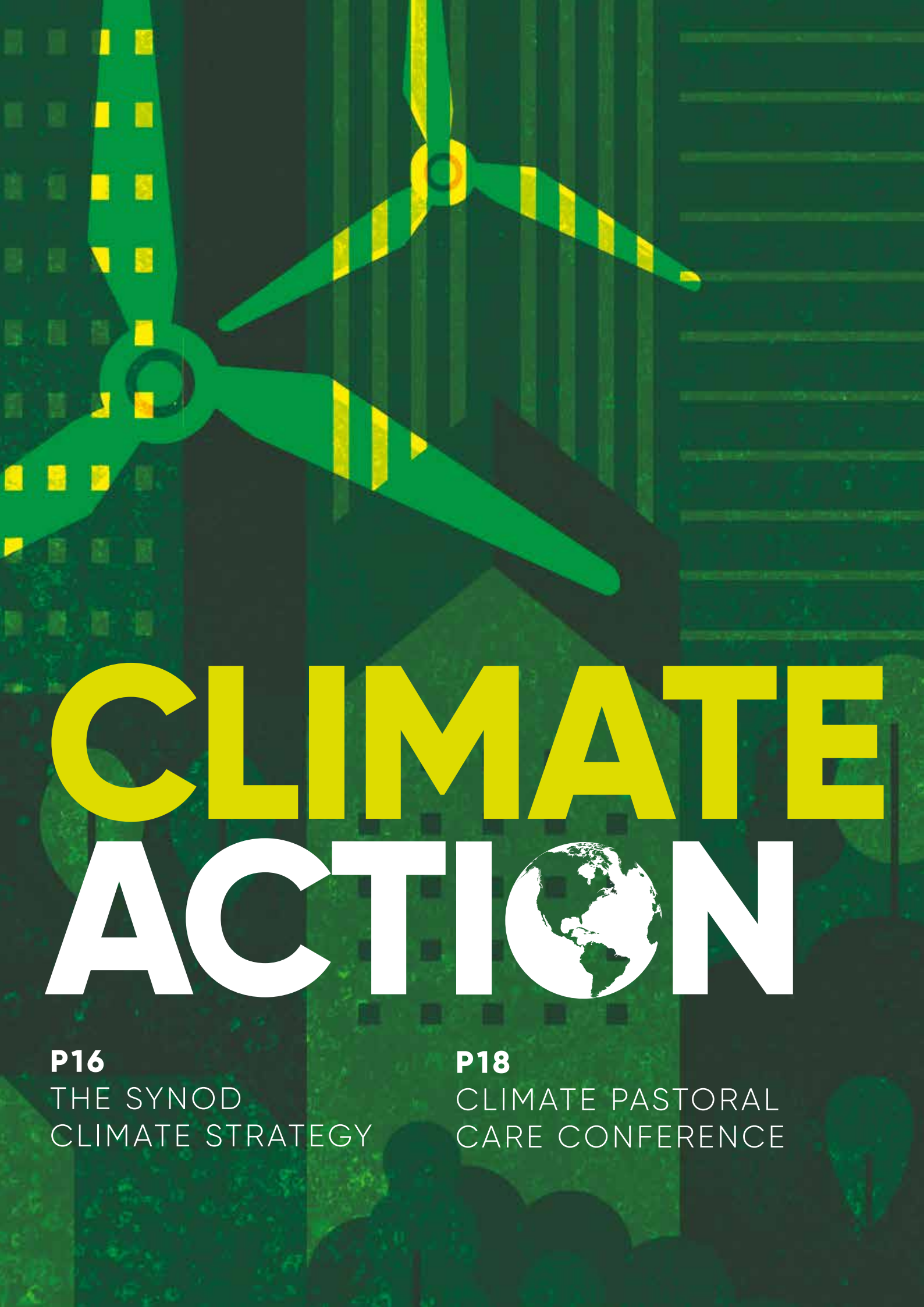
While the team loved the series and working together, they have since returned full-time to their place of work, so more episodes are not possible at the moment. They do hope to create both a Christmas episode and an Easter episode to share online. 📺

**ANGELA CADENA**

**“Thank you, thank you, for this wonderful, generous ministry!”**

**REV. SIMON HANSFORD  
MODERATOR OF THE UCA SYNOD  
OF NSW AND ACT**





# CLIMATE ACTION

**P16**

THE SYNOD  
CLIMATE STRATEGY

**P18**

CLIMATE PASTORAL  
CARE CONFERENCE



# THE UNITING CHURCH TAKES POSITIVE STEPS TO SAVE THE PLANET

The 2019 Synod meeting agreed to implement a new strategy to tackle climate change. This, however, was before COVID-19 changed seemingly everything. So how is NSW ACT Synod keeping up with its commitment?

This issue explores what the Synod has been doing since to address the issue of climate change, from the way the church manages

its own carbon emissions, to the initiatives individual congregations have implemented as part of the wider strategy.

Climate change is a problem that is too big for individuals alone to address, and as this *Insights* feature shows, the Uniting Church is uniquely positioned to make an impact on the issue.





# THE SYNOD CLIMATE STRATEGY

In July 2019, the NSW and ACT Synod agreed to adopt a new strategy to combat climate change. As well as working to curb the church's own carbon emissions, the plan includes efforts to campaign for better government policies, and to support efforts such as the youth-led School Strike 4 Climate (making the Uniting Church the first major institution to endorse the effort). As *Insights* has previously reported, the plan tasks a number of working groups with overseeing these initiatives. While COVID-19 has meant that the working groups needed to readjust, the Synod's climate change strategy is still underway. *Insights* caught up with some of the group convenors to see how their work is progressing.

Daniel Andrew is the Synod Office's Director of Operations. He co-convenes the Synod Emissions Task Group, which focuses on reducing emissions from the Synod's operations.

Mr Andrew told *Insights* that, despite COVID-19, the Synod's climate strategy remained on track.

"There have been a number of developments worth highlighting, including the emissions reduction working group preparing a paper for Synod Standing Committee approval that will allow the fleet to be carbon neutral by 2023," he said.

"The group is also looking ways to increase our green power options, our green building standards, and supply chain."

The next project he highlighted is an upcoming large site emissions competition. Organisations will be asked to design carbon neutral solution for the Centre for Ministry, and the Centre will implement the winning design.

The Synod Emissions task group is also currently working on a report on the viability of solar farm investment, as well as drafting a theology and values paper.

Once this work is completed, the Emissions task group will move on to

developing policies on airline flights and use of conferencing platforms as another way that the Synod can reduce its carbon emissions.

## REMAINING ACTIVE

The 2019 Synod meeting resolved to support initiatives taken by young people in advocating for action on climate change, including the global climate strikes. This included the School Strike 4 Climate (SS4C) rally held in September 2019 and the online rally held on 15 May. The Climate Action Task Group is responsible for supporting and helping coordinate this activism.

Dr Miriam Pepper is one of those involved. While the work remains underway, Dr Pepper admitted that COVID-19 had affected the situation.

"COVID-19 has meant that some things, like rallies, haven't been possible," she said.

"We've needed to adjust our plans," she said.

"But we can take action to live lightly on the earth and to advocate for a better future. It is critically important

to respond to both the COVID-19 crisis and the climate crisis."

In particular, she highlighted the Synod's support of the 25 September 'Build Our Future' event as a focal point for this task group.

The event will be a collaboration between SS4C, SEED Indigenous Youth Climate Network and others. The event covers the theme "COVID-19 recovery funds should not be spent on gas and other damaging fossil fuel projects."

According to event organisers, these funds should instead be spent on:

"Resourcing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions that guarantee land rights and care for country.

WE CAN TAKE ACTION TO LIVE LIGHTLY ON THE EARTH AND TO ADVOCATE FOR A BETTER FUTURE





“The creation of jobs that fast-track solutions to the climate crisis and help communities recover

“Projects that transition our economy and communities to 100 percent renewable energy by 2030, through expanded public ownership.”

“Supporters of this event can participate by making/displaying a sign or banner on the theme “fund our future not gas,” Dr Pepper said.

According to Dr Pepper, the event will feature, “Everything from human signs to selfies - which can be done in accordance with COVID-19 restrictions.”

Some climate action themed banners are available for free from the Synod (contact Jon O’Brien via [joobrien@uniting.org](mailto:joobrien@uniting.org).) Common Grace will also host a prayer rally on the day.

### CLIMATE PASTORAL CARE GROUP PROMOTES SUCCESSFUL CLIMATE EVENT

The Climate Anxiety and Pastoral Care Group looks at the way in which climate change contributes to mental health issues.



This group recently helped plan the Climate Pastoral Care Conference jointly supported by Uniting, Common Grace and the Five Leaf Eco Awards.

The event, which took place from 30 July to 1 August, was an online conference conducted via Zoom.

The event saw some 180 people attend, which represents three times the number of people who attended a similar conference in 2019 (see pages 18 and 19 for a full report).

The task group has also developed:

- **A Climate Conversation Guide Resource:** how to personally reflect on and speak with others about concerns about climate change.
- **Kids and Creation:** Helping kids find solace in nature during COVID-19 (and beyond) and other resources, available at: [unitingearth.org.au/connecting-kids-and-nature](http://unitingearth.org.au/connecting-kids-and-nature)
- **A personal climate anxiety reflection video:** available on YouTube.

### CHURCH AND INDIVIDUAL EMISSIONS GROUP CONTINUES

The Church and Individual Emissions task group looks into ways that Uniting Church members can collectively and individually cut carbon emissions. It has met six times and currently has eight members.

Uniting Social Justice Advocate Jon O’Brien convenes this task group. He told *Insights* that the group was “working well” and that “people are putting their hands up.”

While COVID-19 presented challenges, online meeting formats meant people from across the Synod able to participate in the group.

“Zoom meetings are a great equaliser in terms of participation,” he said.

“If it works, it reduces the tyranny of distance and time really well.”

The task group promotes the Five Leaf Eco Awards in order to encourage congregations to cut their emissions, and the Living the Change Program for individuals and households.

With COVID-19 meaning that congregations have not been meeting face-to-face until recently, the promotion of the Awards has been limited. Despite this, one church used this time to complete its own energy audit. Other

actions to date include drafting an overview of the *Living the Change* program and information sheets on the three main aspects - energy use, transport and diet.

Mr O’Brien explained the process of the *Living the Change* sessions as asking people to reflect on how climate change had affected their lives, as well as what changes they had made, then what changes they could next put in place.

The working group has conducted two trials of the online *Living the Change* supper discussion- with a community group associated with Pitt Street Uniting and members of Christian Students Uniting

The task group will soon move its focus to identifying target groups and developing a strategy for hosting more *Living the Change* Supper discussions.

Mr O’Brien said that the group remained open to more people joining.

### ADVOCACY TASK GROUP

Convened by Uniting’s Belinda Noble, the Advocacy Task Group has met four times and has around eight members at the time of writing.

One of the group’s main priorities has been promoting the Cities Power partnership program, where local councils work with their communities, business and other groups to promote renewable energy use and other strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

To date, the Advocacy task group has consulted with the Climate Council on the CPP program, developed a media and communications plan for the strategy, and written media releases in support of the Cities Power Partnership program, and the SS4C events on 15 May.

In the next phase, the Advocacy Task group will focus on identifying advocacy opportunities aimed at state and federal governments. 🌍

**JONATHAN FOYE**



Keep up with the latest news about the Synod’s climate change strategy on *Insights* website:  
[insights.uca.org.au](http://insights.uca.org.au)



# Climate

## PASTORAL CARE CONFERENCE

FROM THE WAYS THAT GLOBAL WARMING IS MAKING BUSHFIRES WORSE, TO THE WAY THAT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE, TO THE WAY TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION, THE 2020 CLIMATE PASTORAL CONFERENCE COVERED A RANGE OF VALUABLE MATERIAL.



## LET THE YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW THAT YOU WANT THEM TO LIVE IN A BEAUTIFUL WORLD

**The conference ran from Thursday 30 July to Saturday 1 August online via Zoom. It featured keynote addresses from Merle Conyer, Brooke Prentis, Rev. Dr Stephen Robinson, among others.**

One of these keynotes was delivered via Merle Conyer on Friday 31 July.

Ms Conyer is a psychiatrist and author. She spoke on the concept of how to help children deal with climate anxiety.

Young people, she said, often tell her that their main worry is that older people don't take their concerns seriously.

In such cases, she recommended people develop toolkits to help them discuss and work through their concerns, including drawing or spending time in nature.

"The key definition of trauma is when we lose the ability to respond," Ms Conyer said.

She highlighted how fight, flight, or freeze were the responses to trauma, and that climate responses involving climate action would be a source of hope.

Another point was that children need to be engaged about climate change in age appropriate ways.

To some age groups, Ms Conyer suggested not talking about climate change unless it was brought up by them.

"For primary age children, I think it becomes appropriate to [begin conversations]," she said.

"Let the young people know that you want them to live in a beautiful world."

"By the time we come to early teens...going into research together is a wonderful way to steer young people towards reliable information sources."

"This action reduces an aloneness that young people feel [when dealing with the subject]."

"There is a role for young people...to claim their agency and act."

The conference also featured a number of engaging workshops.

In one of them, Common Grace CEO and Wakka Wakka woman Brooke Prentis took attendees through the intersection between climate justice and the lives of first nations people.

The workshop asked participants to consider a number of questions. These included, what hope was to them, as well as what grief is, what whiteness was, what Black Lives Matter meant, and how Black Lives Matter related to climate justice, among others.

This, she said, was so participants could self-reflect on where they sat in relationship to indigenous Australians and climate justice.

The workshop articulated a number of struggles that indigenous peoples were engaged in in their countries for climate justice.

"This is why we acknowledge country."

Ms Prentis pointed participants to how the Torres Strait is already affected by rising flood levels.

She referred to the Nylah Burton article, 'People of colour experience climate grief more deeply than white people'.

Ms Prentis said, during the recent bushfires, indigenous people were looked to so as to teach their fire management, but that there were much more that they had to teach.

"We feel the pain of all of country," she said.

"Country was all of those animals."

The session challenged non-Indigenous Christians to truly work alongside Aboriginal people for "truth, justice, and love."

This, she said, meant meaningfully partnering in a way that properly considered indigenous people.

For instance, she observed that Indigenous climate activists had felt the need to boycott the 2015 people's climate marches, because they had felt marginalised in the planning of the events.

"The government and the church structures in this country don't want to listen to us."

The conference saw some 175 people attend online via Zoom. They included climate activists, ministers, counsellors, and former Moderators. They interacted in break out rooms and via the chat function.

The conference was a joint venture between Uniting, Common Grace, and the Five Leaf Eco Awards.

Proceedings were recorded, and will be available on the Uniting Earth Web site soon. 🎧

**JONATHAN FOYE**

# THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE



## AAP AND PUBLIC INTEREST JOURNALISM

BREAKING NEWS

LIVE

WHEN AAP LOST THE FINANCIAL BACKING OF MAJOR NEWS OUTLETS, THE NATION'S MEDIA INDUSTRY LOOKED SET FOR THE END OF AN ERA. **FIRST OPENING OVER 80 YEARS AGO, AUSTRALIA'S LONGEST RUNNING NEWSWIRE SERVICE HAS FILLED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE. WITH NEW INVESTORS STEPPING IN TO PURCHASE THE SERVICE, AAP NEWSWIRE LOOKS SET FOR A NEW LIFE AS A NOT-FOR-PROFIT. *INSIGHTS* SPOKE TO INVESTOR JOHN MCKINNON TO FIND OUT WHAT MOTIVATED HIM TO STEP IN.**

Australian Associated Press was first formed in 1935. One of the few non-government wire services worldwide, it has long served the needs of Australia's newspapers by providing wholesale reports and images.

When former owners Nine and News Corp opted to end their association with the service, however, the wire service looked set to shut.

Dr John McKinnon is part of the group of some 35 investors who stepped in to express interest in the wire service last June, a decision he has partially attributed to his Christian faith.

Dr McKinnon has previously held a number of roles in the not for profit (NFP) sector, including time spent as the Program Coordinator for Christian aid organisation Tear Australia. He is also the current President of the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand.

"Our key aim in seeking to save AAP is the desire for diverse, independent, unbiased, fact-based journalism that serves all of Australia (regional media is very dependent on AAP as a source)," Dr McKinnon said.

"Any structure we set up had to ensure, as strongly as possible that this mission was locked in and not open to corruption by shareholders."

The move to purchase AFP newswire will save some 70 jobs that would have otherwise been lost. According to Dr McKinnon, the organisation's new policies will guarantee the editorial independence of those working for AAP Newswire. Decisions by management and the board will answer to the charitable purpose built into the constitution, rather than shareholders.

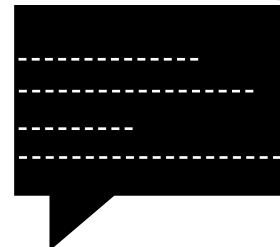
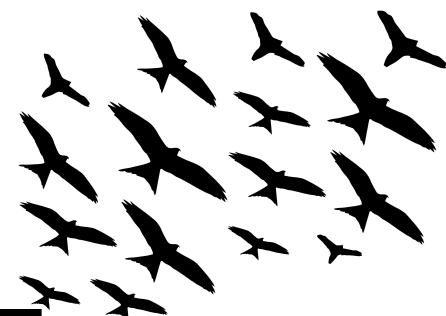
"An NFP structure allows a mission oriented organisation rather than a profit oriented organisation, that is not at risk of shareholder influence or sale to the highest bidder who might have different values," Dr McKinnon said.

"Also, given the need to cover losses for some period of time, an NFP structure allowed for philanthropic funding in the short term."

While the business model will change, AFP Newswire will retain the previous distribution model for written content and images.

"It is "media without the mogul", a public interest media organisation with a mission to serve the public and no more," Dr McKinnon said.

"As I have said in every interview, no financial contributor has any control or influence over the output of the new AAP. No profits will ever flow out the door to shareholders."



**DEMOCRACY ONLY WORKS  
WHEN THE PUBLIC ARE  
ADEQUATELY INFORMED  
ABOUT THE ISSUES AT STAKE.  
INFORMATION IS A KEY TOOL  
FOR EMPOWERMENT**

"So I think the structure is the key part of this deal. The technical term is probably "social enterprise". That was the subject of my PhD thesis 10 years ago now and I'm very pleased to be finding practical application and creating a model for a better way of doing business and doing good."

Dr McKinnon told *Insights* that his Christian faith played a part in the decision to get involved, but noted that his motivation was not dissimilar to that of his non-Christian colleagues.

"My Christian faith is the foundation of all my work for justice and a better world. I have long believed that Jesus' call on his followers is to continue his work of bringing the Kingdom of God into reality on earth," he said.

"My non-Christians friends and colleagues will use the language of justice, inclusion, democracy etc., but in practice, we are working towards the same goals. Independent journalism is very much a justice issue."

"Democracy only works when the public are adequately informed about the issues at stake. Information is a key tool for empowerment. Entrenched power is served by controlling information flows. Jesus talked about the truth setting us free. I think that has application to the current state of journalism in Australia."

"AAP is certainly not the complete answer to the current woes of our media industry. However, as an independent and unbiased source of news, it forms the foundation upon which can be built a truly democratised media sector that in turn can form the foundation for a more equal, democratic and just society." 🗣️

**JONATHAN FOYE**

# FIRST Sundays

A Living Way  
OF INSPIRING ONE  
ANOTHER



**First Sundays is a new initiative out of Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery. Released, as the title suggests, on the first Sunday of the month, these videos will showcase the work Uniting Churches are doing in their local area.**

Each will include seven stories. They will be recorded and produced by production company *Signalbox*, who will share their skills with the participating groups.



JOSH WYATT FROM SIGNALBOX FILMING AT QUAKERS HILL UNITING CHURCH

According to Parramatta Nepean Presbytery's Rev. Geoff Stevenson, the idea for the videos emerged from during lockdown, when many churches quickly adapted to conducting services online.

With many members of the presbytery expressing the desire to upskill, Parramatta-Nepean are responding with additional training. Rev. Stevenson said the process of filming was one of "learning through doing."

"We are excited by what we have heard from some of the participating groups," he said.

The inaugural *First Sundays* video was livestreamed to Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery's Facebook Page.

The video featured a message from Moderator Simon Hansford and showcased a number of projects from across the presbytery.

The first video streamed on Sunday, 5 July at 3:50pm.

Congregations involved in the first video include West Epping, Campbelltown, Blacktown, Quakers Hill, Springwood, Hawkesbury Zone, and Lidcome Samoan Uniting Church.

Stories ranged widely, from the way the selling of hand sanitiser is helping Campbelltown Uniting Church's ministry with refugees to Blacktown Uniting Church's community garden.

Josh Wyatt from the *Signal Box* worked with each church to produce the segments. The majority of congregations used phones to record.

Springwood Uniting Church's Rev. Leigh Gardiner said that, "They know what they are talking about, were very patient with us novices, and lovely to work with."

According to Rev. Stevenson, there was much to be learned.

"Our biggest two take-aways were identifying the need for a filmography and technical 'cheat sheets' that explain the best practice fundamentals of lighting, audio, and framing

techniques, and the need for cost-sensitive advice to upgrade equipment/setup for when services go back to face-to-face, enabling a hybrid setup."

As of 9 July, the video had been viewed 9,611 times, mostly by people who did not already follow the page. Those watching when the video first streamed came from 17 locations across the Synod.

"The First Sundays help...fulfil some of our strategic goals in helping our presbytery to think and act in new missional ways, work in collaboration

with other congregations and organisations for mission and to develop our communication," Rev. Stevenson said.

"The sharing of stories is a living way of inspiring one another as we witness to the mission of God around us and through us."

Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery stretches east to west from the Sydney Olympic Park to the western side of the Blue Mountains, and north to south from the semi-rural areas of the north-west and south-west of Sydney. 📍

**JONATHAN FOYE**

**THE SHARING  
OF STORIES IS A  
LIVING WAY OF  
INSPIRING ONE  
ANOTHER AS WE  
WITNESS TO THE  
MISSION OF GOD  
AROUND US AND  
THROUGH US**



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**Uniting  
Mission &  
Education**

# South Sudan needs us today

**THERE'S A CRISIS UNFOLDING IN SOUTH SUDAN, HIDDEN TO THE WORLD BY THE HUGE NUMBERS OF COVID-19 CASES GROWING IN PLACES LIKE INDIA AND BRAZIL**

**Seven million people are at risk of starvation as conflict continues to rage and pandemic lockdowns break the spirit of those searching for food. In the midst of suffering, Uniting Church partner the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan is working hard to bring hope to those in desperate need. Rev John Yor tells this story.**

**M**y name is John. I live in Juba, the capital of the world's youngest nation, South Sudan, and I am the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS)

This week, the PCOSS team and I spent time traveling to meet with people who've had to leave their homes because of constant fighting – many villages are burnt, homes looted, cattle stolen and crops destroyed. This is Ida, who lives here as a refugee with many others, a long way from her traditional home. There are four million people living in camps like this inside South Sudan and nearly two million more have fled across the borders to Kenya or Ethiopia as refugees.

Food and water are hard to find in the camps as well as in the cities. In recent months, drought and a devastating locust plague have destroyed our crops. Water pipes, wells and reservoirs are old

and broken, so our women and girls walk long distances to find clean water to drink. They face the threat of assault and rape as well as abductions by fighters of ongoing intercommunal disputes. We have so few resources that we have to rely on our neighbouring countries for food, water and diesel to power our electricity generators – but with renewed fighting, borders and roads are closed and food prices in the market have shot up. The rainy season is about to make transport even more dangerous.

For Ida and so many other people, hunger makes responding to the COVID-19 pandemic even more

difficult. People do not understand the seriousness of the disease; our medical facilities have been corroded by conflict and there is only one infectious disease unit in Juba, with 100 beds for 12 million people. The team and I are spending time distributing masks and educating people about the disease and







its symptoms. The official count of cases is still quite low, but because there is only one place for testing and the backlog for results is significant, we suspect the numbers are much higher. As the fighting grows worse and people struggle for control of the land and livestock that will keep their families alive, both hunger and disease threaten huge numbers of people. Providing people with emergency supplies, food and water, is as critical as keeping them safe from disease.

For several years, with support from the Uniting Church in Australia through UnitingWorld, PCOSS have been running peace workshops, offering trauma counselling and training leaders who will help heal our country's wounds. We were at the centre of peace negotiations in 2012, and people listen to us because we look beyond the tribal groupings to the worth of every human in God's eyes.

At the moment we can't run our workshops, but as soon as it's safe, we will return to our training. The future of our country depends on peace, and we are called by God to nurture the leaders who can help make it happen.

Right now, we are spending all our time working to help people simply survive this crisis.

John and the other PCOSS team members are serving at a deep personal cost: they too often go without food, water and electricity. It's not safe for John's wife and six children to live with him in Juba, and John has been on his own in the city for six years. Other team members have made similar sacrifices.

We are committed to helping keep this team continue serving their people in the midst of this latest outbreak of violence, hunger and disease. 🙏

**CATH TAYLOR**



## SOUTH SUDAN BY THE NUMBERS

**2011**

SOUTH SUDAN GAINED INDEPENDENCE FROM SUDAN



**65%**

OF THE TOTAL POPULATION FACING CRITICAL FOOD SHORTAGES

**7 million**

PEOPLE FACING SEVERE HUNGER



**1.6 million**

PEOPLE FORCED FROM HOMES INTO CITIES OR CAMPS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

**2.25 million**

SOUTH SUDANESE LIVING IN REFUGEE CAMPS OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY



**60%**

CHRISTIAN

**30%**

INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

**1 million**

MEMBERS OF OUR PARTNER, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SOUTH SUDAN



If you'd like to help, please give at [unitingworld.org.au/southsudancrisis](https://unitingworld.org.au/southsudancrisis)

# Faith

## WILDLIFE RECOVERY AND COVID

**AFTER THE BUSHFIRES, MUCH WAS SAID ABOUT WILDLIFE. WE WERE ALL VERY CONCERNED AND TOUCHED ABOUT ALL THE ANIMALS THAT DIED, WERE INJURED, OR WHOSE ECOSYSTEMS WERE DESTROYED ENTIRELY. INSIGHTS SPOKE TO REV. LEIGH GARDINER, A UNITING CHURCH MINISTER WHO IS ALSO A WIRES VOLUNTEER. WE DISCUSSED HOW SHE FACED THE BLUE MOUNTAINS BUSHFIRES, HOW COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED HER WORK AS AN ANIMAL RESCUER AND HOW SHE ENVISIONS THE FUTURE OF WIRES AND THEIR PROGRAMS**

Rev. Gardiner joined the Central West branch in 2014 because she felt helpless with all the macropods and turtles by the side of the road and wanted to be able to offer some help to those still alive. In the Blue Mountains, she is principally caring for birds but hopes to find time to do the training for some other species in the future.

"I believe that God loves every part of God's creation, and that is the only reason I need to care for creatures. But there are many other reasons including the 5 Marks of Mission. The 5th one states: "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth" so to care for

wildlife as well as other aspects of Creation Care is also part of participating in God's mission." explains Rev. Gardiner

Rev. Gardiner also explained that with the constant barrage of news about COVID-19 focus has been diverted from the destruction of animals habitats and the slow recovery. People see pictures of new shoots and regeneration but it isn't recovering quickly enough to support wildlife.

"I'm a WIRES volunteer and involved with the rescue of native animals and care all year round. However, in response to the fires up in the Blue Mountains, I did go out to rescue, but



REV. LEIGH GARDINER WITH WIRES VOLUNTEERS

in reality, we found very few animals injured and alive. So it became more important to set up feed/water stations to support anything that did survive and we couldn't find. In those initial days, we did see quite a few injured macropods (kangaroos/wallabies), and they all needed darting and then specialised care. After that, I was part of a group, working with other community volunteers, setting up those feed/water stations from Blackheath across to Bell, Mt Wilson, Mt Tomah etc.

"The fires were so hot that most wildlife, including birds, were simply incinerated. Very little escaped because of the heat and widespread nature of the fires and the backburning. We were all so devastated. The silence was inescapable. I now have a new understanding and experience of deathly silence," said Rev. Gardiner.

WIRES was endowed with many donations at the time, which was fantastic, and they have been active in distributing funds to other wildlife groups and shelters around the state, and interstate. As part of the bushfire recovery, WIRES has already been able to fund a number of programs including donating over \$2M to non-WIRES groups and individuals around Australia caring for drought and fire-affected native animals and a \$1M partnership with Landcare

to fund individual and group community wildlife projects. WIRES has also provided emergency funding to ARC to assist those landowners and groups who are not registered wildlife carers. They also have a number of other major bushfire recovery projects about to be announced shortly and will continue to invest in and support programs that provide the best short and/or longterm outcomes for our native wildlife.

During the crisis, Men's sheds, individuals and other groups made boxes for possums, birds, and gliders. Wildlife carers, whether WIRES or other endorsed groups, pay for food for the animals in care themselves. The donated funds have helped carers to subsidise the specialised formulas required for many species. However, there are groups such as in the Shoalhaven who are still in great need of donated fruit and vegetables to continue to support the animals they have in care.

Vets are vital in supporting WIRES mission, and the pandemic has meant that additional care and restrictions were implemented to move animals to and from Vet clinics. According to Rev. Gardiner, many vets are currently experiencing mental health difficulties, and there is a shortage of professionals, which puts more pressure



on the doctors on duty. That's why she strongly suggest that we all pay more attention to them, support them, and somehow highlight our appreciation for their commitment and hard work.

Rev. Gardiner also explained that she has continued to volunteer during the lockdown because they were given permission to travel for the care of animals. Still, for her, it has been about taking care of non-bushfire related wildlife. It is mostly about wildlife who come into care because of collisions -cars, birds flying into windows or clear pool fences-caught by cats or dogs, or other illnesses.

Moving forward, Rev. Gardiner thinks WIRES will have to reinvent some of their strategies. There should be more opportunities for online training, even though people will still need face-to-face instruction. After the fires, there were many people interested in becoming volunteers but have been unable to do the training necessary. Hopefully, training programs can resume soon with social distancing requirements in place. 📍

**ANGELA CADENA**



Want to find out more about WIRES and how to become a volunteer? [wires.org.au/rescue/become-a-rescuer](https://wires.org.au/rescue/become-a-rescuer)



A WIRES VOLUNTEER REHYDRATING A JOEY

**WIRES VOLUNTEERS DO CARE FOR INJURED AND SICK WILDLIFE ALL YEAR ROUND; NOW IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER WITH THE AMOUNT OF HABITAT DESTRUCTION WE HAVE SEEN**

**REV. LEIGH GARDINER**



A WONDERFUL DONATION OF POSSUM BOXES



VOLUNTEERS RESPONDING TO THE BUSH FIRE CRISIS

# OPQRS JK P S R K N S J G A M B L I N G R E F O R M

**The Alliance for Gambling Reform is urging Australians to boost their awareness of the dangers of gambling. The Alliance's chief advocate, Rev. Tim Costello AO, has combined forces with Wesley Mission CEO, Rev. Keith Garner, and the Moderator, Rev. Simon Hansford, to take action to reduce the harm caused by gambling with a campaign for a reduction in opening hours for gaming rooms.**

## **STEP 1: LEARN ABOUT THE ISSUE**

Australia has the greatest per capita gambling losses in the world. The statistics are staggering. Around \$24 billion is lost each year, \$12.5 billion attributed to poker machines.

In NSW, over \$18.7 million is lost on poker machines each day. The state is home to 30 percent of the world's pub and club poker machines, but reform has been slow.

The Moderator, Rev. Simon Hansford, said the Church has always had a real concern about gambling. "This is an ongoing crisis for our community," The Moderator said. "We know that seeking systemic change to reduce the power and social license of the gambling industry is critical. COVID-19 has made this even more pronounced, as people are more isolated, and the opportunity has increased to spend more time gambling in clubs and online. We need to approach this in terms of counselling and support for all those who are harmed, but also to address the structural concerns of how gambling is able to take such a hold on people's lives."

"At the moment in NSW, \$7,500 can be pre-loaded into a poker machine and you can bet up to \$10 on a single push of

the button. It's not hard to imagine what damage that might do to an individual and their family and what impact that has on the community. If we can work together to slow the spending - and the catastrophic losses - down, it stands to reason that we can reduce the damage done," Rev. Hansford said.

## **THIS IS AN ILLNESS WHICH ENSNARES MANY OF US INCLUDING OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILIES**

Many Australians might not know the full scale of the issue and its devastating consequences. Gambling can lead to a spectrum of harm, from anxiety and financial stress, to mental ill-health and links with poverty, family breakdown, homelessness and potential self-harm.

The Alliance for Gambling Reform has joined Wesley Mission and the Synod of NSW and ACT to focus on reduction of harm caused by gambling. As a first step, the campaign is asking for a reduction of opening hours of gaming rooms in NSW. Currently, poker machine rooms can be open for 18 hours a day, 10am to 4am, which correlates to \$1 million in losses per hour in NSW. The campaign will ask for a reduction of four hours to close gaming rooms by midnight.

## **STEP 2: PRAY**

"This is an illness which ensnares many of us, including our friends and families", The Moderator said.

"As with other addictions, the costs are measured in broken lives and families, lost jobs and poverty. As followers of Jesus, we believe in forgiveness, we believe in healing, we are a people of the resurrection. Please pray for those whose lives are being punished and destroyed. Pray too, for justice in our community - that politicians and communities would no longer tolerate the societal

disease brought about by unfettered gambling. Pray for the courage to act."

## **STEP 3: RAISE YOUR VOICE**

The role of Congregations is vital. An important part of the campaign is contact with local MPs to encourage them to take action. A letter is available on the dedicated campaign area of the Alliance for Gambling Reform website for members of Congregations and other concerned people to send to their local MP. You can use the automated letter to send directly to your local MP, or you can write your own letter or call.

The letter encourages local MPs to take action to reduce the impact of gambling harm by closing gambling rooms between 12am and 10am. This still leaves rooms open for 14 hours a day,

seven days a week. The letter also asks MPs to provide the data on how much is lost in the electorate between the hours of 12am-4am over the last month.

If an MP does not provide information available through NSW Liquor and Gaming, advocates can refer them to the Alliance for Gambling Reform.

Finally, it's important to encourage others to raise their voice and join the campaign.

#### **STEP 4: REFER TO LOCAL SUPPORT OPTIONS**

The Moderator said that the congregation is often seen as a place of respite and recovery for people in crisis. It is helpful to have knowledge of the resources available for counselling and support in your local area and online, so that you are able to help people who

may come to you, who are ready to break their silence and to seek help

This is a problem for some people within our congregations as well; the Church is not immune, and we need to approach this with compassion, as well as offering resources.

Mr Garner has advice, "If you know someone who is experiencing financial difficulties, one of the possible causes may be gambling. We encourage people to have a brave conversation, and to helpfully point towards seeking professional support from Wesley Mission which is effective and available," he said.

#### **STEP 5: FIND OUT WHERE TO ACCESS THE CAMPAIGN AND SUPPORT**

Access the campaign advocacy letter to send to MPs and read more about the campaign on dedicated the Alliance for Gambling Reform website page: [pokiesplayyou.org.au/nsw\\_unitingwesley](http://pokiesplayyou.org.au/nsw_unitingwesley)

Find out more about gambling reform on the Alliance for Gambling Reform website: [pokiesplayyou.org.au](http://pokiesplayyou.org.au)



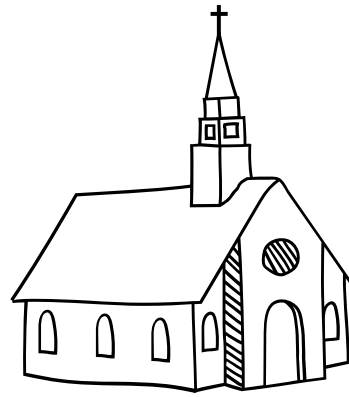
#### **IF GAMBLING IS A PROBLEM FOR YOU, HELP IS AVAILABLE.**

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

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



# How does the Uniting Church



## APPOINT ITS MINISTERS?

**Appointing a new minister to a Uniting Church congregation is a long, drawn out process. Choosing a new minister of the word or deacon can take several months or even years. It is an involved process that involves working out whether someone will be a good fit and if there is a call. Insights spoke to some of the people involved in deciding who goes where and to find out more.**

Rev. Dr John Squires is  
Presbytery Minister  
(Wellbeing) at Canberra  
Region Presbytery. According  
to Rev. Dr Squires, the  
process of calling a  
minister to a new church  
is a distinctive and unique  
process that does not follow  
the usual process for hiring  
found in say, business.

“It does not normally involve  
an advertisement, a list of  
applicants, a short list, and  
an interview,” he said.

“Some of these elements may  
be involved, but they are part  
of a broader mix that is quite  
different.”

“The process reflects the  
way that the Uniting Church  
understands itself to be  
organised and governed. So  
filling a ministerial vacancy  
in a Congregation is not  
simply a matter for a local  
Congregation alone. Three  
of the four Councils of the  
Church are involved at  
different steps along the way—  
Church Council, Presbytery,  
and Synod. It is a process  
of thoughtful discernment,  
rather than something  
that involves cutthroat  
interviewing.”

The Church Council puts  
together a profile that  
describes the Congregation,  
its hopes and vision, its  
activities, worship, and  
ministry. This is done  
alongside the local Presbytery,  
usually through the Pastoral  
Relations Committee  
(PRC). This provides an  
outsider perspective on the  
Congregation as well as views  
from those within. Presbytery  
members assist with this part  
of the process.

The Presbytery PRC receives  
the profile and considers it.  
It will request modifications  
if these are needed, and will  
eventually adopt the profile.

The Presbytery then sends  
the profile to the Synod’s  
Advisory Committee on  
Ministerial Placements  
(ACOMP), which considers  
vacancies across the Synod  
and the ministers looking for  
a placement. That committee  
undertakes a process of  
discernment, involving prayer  
and thoughtful discussion.  
Eventually, decisions are  
made about which ministers  
will be matched against which  
placements.



**IT IS IMPORTANT  
FOR THE MINISTERS  
PROFILE TO MATCH THE  
CONGREGATION’S PROFILE**

“[ACOMP] seeks to have the  
good of the whole church as  
the foremost element of its  
processes,” Rev. Dr Squires  
said.

“It is hard work!”

When names of ministers  
are matched against  
vacancies, the minister  
will enter talks with a Joint  
Nominating Committee  
(JNC). The JNC comprises  
up to six representatives  
of the Congregation, and  
two representatives of the  
Presbytery.

The JNC has at least two  
conversations with each

minister whose  
name they have  
been given.

“The hope is that  
through these  
conversations, a  
good match will be  
agreed upon,” Rev.  
Dr Squires said.

“If that does not  
eventuate, the  
process goes back  
to the stage of  
having more names  
placed against the  
vacancy by ACOMP.”

All of this, then, can  
take a long time.



As Synod Associate Secretary, Rev. Bronwyn Murphy, is quick to point out, however, there is good reason for why this process is drawn out. She points to what can go wrong if the process is not exacting.

“Ministers hold enormous power and influence,” Rev. Murphy said.

“It may not feel that way, but it is true.”

“It has never been a competition [to appoint someone].”

“Quick may not always serve us well.”

Jenny Matthieson has had years of observing the process of appointing new ministers. As she told *Insights*, there are many other reasons for the length

of time between a placement becoming vacant and the calling of a new Minister.

“Congregations often have high expectations of what they desire and need in a new Minister. Ministers also often have particular ideas of what they would like to see in a new placement, she said.

“It is important for the Ministers profile to match the congregation’s profile.”

In addition, there are some practical realities that further complicate the call of a new minister.

“There are not nearly as many Ministry Candidates these days as there used to be,” she recalled.

“Therefore as Ministers retire, the available pool is becoming smaller.”

“The availability of Ministers to be able to move anywhere, and have no geographical restrictions is less frequent these days. Therefore congregations outside of Sydney often have to wait longer or struggle to fill a placement.”

Rev. Dr Squires echoed these sentiments, adding that congregations often wanted, “simply to “fill the hole” left by the prior minister “and not undertake any discernment process about their future needs or their possible mission in the future.”

He also pointed to an “increasing sense that ministry is not a vocation exercised in response to a call, but a professional role to be carried out in a situation that is seen more favourably by the minister.”

**JONATHAN FOYE**

# Church in a Bag

No one is left behind

## AS THE PANDEMIC CONTINUES AND CONGREGATIONS DO THEIR BEST TO SERVE THEIR COMMUNITIES, DUBBO UNITING CHURCH HAS GONE BEYOND TO MAKE SURE CONGREGANTS RECEIVE A WEEKLY RESOURCE FOLLOWING THE LECTIONARY

As is the case for some congregations, Dubbo Uniting Church is without a paid ministry agent. Instead, wonderful members of their congregation lead services and initiatives.

As COVID-19 restrictions were enforced, worship was suspended. For many reasons, including the fact that some of their congregation do not have access to the appropriate technology, they decided that they would not yet move to online worship.

Raelene Burn is the Office Manager at Dubbo Uniting Church. She told *Insights* that during this time of slight indecision and wanting to find a way to stay in touch spiritually with congregants, she had a conversation with a friend, Captain Lara Sutcliffe of the Salvation Army in Dubbo. "We have held a few combined events with the Salvos here at the Dubbo Uniting Church, and we often chat about how things are going," she said.

"Lara mentioned that she would be preparing *Church in a Bag* to share with her congregation. "What's that?" I asked. After Lara explained what she would be creating, I definitely thought this was achievable."

April saw their first delivery of approximately 80 bags to their congregation; now their outreach has increased to 96 deliveries each month. "Our *Church in a Bag* is a weekly resource following the lectionary that contains



RACHEL AND BENNY RECEIVING CHURCH IN A BAG AND SOME HOSPITALITY FROM ANNE. BENNY HAS A BRAND NEW SISTER, JUST TWO WEEKS OLD!

prayers, a reflection on the reading prepared by our lay leaders, a song to sing or to read, and a lectionary-based puzzle or brain teaser. We also include a tactile surprise, a hand-crafted item, or if things are busy, a tea bag, coffee sachet, and a biscuit (pre-packaged of course!). I and my small team -those who have been crazy enough to offer to help!- have had great fun and stretched our creative levels to include origami, inspirational notes, papercraft, woolly sheep, bookmarks, fridge magnet, a mini bible including something for the sweet tooth, and August will see a jigsaw puzzle. Activities are also included for families with kids who might be needing some inspiration of their own," Raelene said.

Dubbo Uniting Church's Discipleship Church Care Circle Leaders have been responsible for distribution. Church in a Bag is hand-

delivered monthly in a cloth bag, made by one of their volunteers or sent by post to members, both in and out of town.

Along with delivering *Church in a Bag*, generosity abounds from their 'drivers' with the addition of some shopping and other essential items for those who are self-isolating for health reasons, or because they can't physically leave their homes.

Dubbo Uniting Church has had a positive response to their little bag of inspiration delivered each month since April. Congregation members in aged care facilities share it with their neighbours; Saltbush has also shared it during their worship services; some are delivered at request to friends in other areas of NSW; one congregation in the Port Macquarie area is using it regularly, and many

others are using it directly from their website.

According to Raelene, "It's been a great resource to keep us together, though we are not physically meeting for worship- it's often a topic of conversation during the many regular phone calls between our congregation."

But Dubbo Uniting Church does not stop there. They have two Zoom social catch-ups per week on Friday evening for 'dinner', and on Saturday morning the craft group gets together. The ladies choir, *Cantando Sorelle* also meets via Zoom on Monday evenings.

"As a conductor of a Zoom choir, I think that my lip-reading skills are getting better with each week. The facial expressions at 'succeeding or not' to achieve the desired singing can be priceless!" Raelene said.



Weekly newsletters are still emailed and delivered by post. Knitters have been very busy, and many blankets and beanies have been shared with the local Uniting programs and other agencies around town.

They have a small food pantry that has been operating for some years that can assist community members in need with a two-day emergency supply of basic pantry items, a venture that has been very busy over the last few months.

While restrictions ease, simple things in their daily life are returning to 'normal.' 'Some of our ladies have been meeting to walk together. This

is a great time to rejuvenate, reconnect, and reawaken the body, mind and soul," Raelene said.

Dubbo Uniting Church's Mission Teams are also working on their plans to return to small gatherings to worship and meet in smaller groups, ensuring all people are well looked after when they do return.

*Church in a Bag* has reached out differently to members who were unable to come to worship at church before COVID-19. It will be a continuing mission of Dubbo Uniting Church. 🙏

**ANGELA CADENA**

## LIFTED SPIRITS

**AS A RECIPIENT OF 'CHURCH IN A BAG', I MUST SAY THAT THE PROJECT HAS LIFTED SPIRITS, SUSTAINED A CONTINUITY WITH CHURCH FAMILY, MAKES ONE FEEL 'NOT FORGOTTEN' AND A DEFINITE FEELING OF "YES. GOD DOES REALLY LOVE ME".**

**A BIG THANK YOU TO ALL THE WONDERFUL FOLK WHO HAVE CONTRIBUTED IN ANY WAY TO THE PRODUCTION AND DELIVERY OF THIS PRECIOUS GIFT!**

ELAINE DRUMMOND



THE BAGS CONTAIN THE LECTIONARY, PRAYERS, A SONG AND A LECTIONARY-BASED PUZZLE OR BRAIN TEASER. THEY ALSO INCLUDE A TACTILE SURPRISE, A HAND-CRAFTED ITEM, A TEA BAG, COFFEE SACHET, AND A BISCUIT



THROUGH CHURCH IN A BAG, DUBBO UNITING CHURCH HAS MANAGED TO REMAIN CONNECTED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



THE BAGS PREPARED AND READY FOR DISTRIBUTION

## MAKING MONEY MATTER

# Making a difference for the Climate

The Olympics aren't the only event that had to be canned in Tokyo during the delightful (northern hemisphere) autumn of 2020. PRI in Person was also due to be held there, in October, but has now been postponed until September 2021. "What in what"? I hear you asking.

PRI in Person is the name of the annual conference of the Principles of Responsible Investment (PRI). This is an organisation, which is affiliated with the United Nations, that has signed up many of the world's investment firms to a commitment to incorporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations into their decision-making processes. Uniting Financial Services is a signatory because the ESG-based investing is aligned with the Church's ethical investment principles, of which UFS is the champion within the Synod.

I've written before about how the Uniting Church was ahead of the pack in this arena. The ethical investment principles that we use today are almost unchanged from those first drawn up in 1980, so that what's now called ESG investing is the DNA of what UFS does. This is across all our portfolios – whether we're investing a congregation's money that's in a fixed term investment with us or in the Ethical Diversified Fund.

PRI is a hugely significant organisation for climate action. The world's investment community was slower to come to the table on this than the Church and UFS, but the pace has picked up in recent years and, on the whole, large global investors are deploying capital in climate-friendly ways.

Some of the ways in which UFS investments are contributing positively towards the fight against climate change include:

- **Green Bonds:** which are fixed income securities in which the company that has issued the bonds uses the proceeds to finance positive green

initiatives (eg a bank financing loans to wind farms). About 40% of our domestic fixed income and 12% of our global credit assets are in the form of Green Bonds.

- **Property:** A few years ago, in conjunction with the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, UFS seeded a property fund that's explicit goal was to acquire office buildings with a poor carbon footprint and undertake the spending needed to significantly improve the footprint. This reflects one of the updates made to the ethical investment policy. Previously, we'd have been excluded from owning a building that had excessive emissions, but we wanted to adopt a more positive approach, using our investments to improve things. Since that fund launched in 2017 there have been several other funds with similar goals come to market, and the property industry as a whole now places more emphasis on the climate impact of buildings.
- **Renewable energy:** Several of our investments are in renewable energy projects. One, in particular, is the Palisades Renewable Energy Fund, which fosters the development of clean energy through the adoption of two measurable objectives. The measures relate to the number of homes provided with clean energy and to a calculation of how much CO2 is abated, or not emitted, because of the change in energy source.
- **International Shares:** One of the global share funds we invest in is with a company called Nanuk. The entire fund invests in companies that are benefiting from, or contributing to, improving global environmental sustainability and resource efficiency -

primarily in areas such as clean energy, energy efficiency, industrial efficiency, advanced and sustainable materials, waste management, recycling and pollution control, food and agricultural productivity and healthcare technology.

Finally, at the industry level, tools are being developed all the time to assist fund managers to measure the impact of their investments on climate change. One very recent initiative is the launch of the Australian Climate Transition Index.

The purpose of this share market index is to determine which companies included in the ASX 300 are best positioned to embrace climate transition and achieve net zero emissions by 2050. This is an Australian expression of a global initiative, that's been signed up to by funds that manage over \$16 trillion in total, developing a framework to help portfolio managers aim their investments towards the goal of zero net carbon emissions by the year 2050.

The PRI isn't sitting around waiting for a conference to make progress on these things. However, when the PRI in Person event does get held next year, I've no doubt that a key topic will be the continued development of both the commitment to tackling climate change, but also to the tools to help fund managers follow through on that commitment. Being part of this movement in the investment industry gives me encouragement that there will be meaningful climate action ahead and that the Uniting Church is not alone in its passion about this issue. More and more, money is being made to matter in the mission to make the world a better place. 🌱

### WARREN BIRD

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | UNITING FINANCIAL SERVICES

MONEY IS BEING MADE TO MATTER IN THE MISSION TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE



# COVID-19 HUB

INFORMATION FOR  
PRESBYTERIES AND  
CONGREGATIONS

The Covid 19 Synod Hub on the Synod website contains all the latest advice and guidance as Government restrictions ease. Bookmark the site and refer to it often for the latest information. Also included on the hub are ministry resources and a full list of the Uniting Churches that are live-streaming their services.

For more information visit

[nswact.uca.org.au/covid19saferoadmap](https://nswact.uca.org.au/covid19saferoadmap)



Uniting Church  
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT



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DIGITAL MINISTRY

# THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



**THE DIGITAL DIVIDE, WHEREBY PEOPLE WITH LESS ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY BECAUSE OF WEALTH DISPARITY, IS A WIDELY DISCUSSED TOPIC. ACCORDING TO PEOPLE WORKING WITH AUSTRALIA'S LOWER SOCIOECONOMIC COMMUNITIES, IT'S A PROBLEM THAT IS BECOMING WORSE DURING COVID-19. INSIGHTS TOOK A LOOK AT WHAT THE UNITING CHURCH IS DOING IN THIS AREA**

**Research into the concept of digital inclusion suggests that having access to technology and being digitally literate are essential parts of participating in contemporary Australian society.**

As the OECD report *Bridging the Digital Divide* suggests, “The risk for some of being disconnected through being unable to participate in the modern economy is now acute, with participation conditional to a large extent on accessing ICT with confidence and competence.”

The University of New England's Len Unsworth suggests that digital literacy is part of a wider “plurality of literacies” and should be considered alongside the ability to read and write as what constitutes ‘literacy’.

Bec Reidy has witnessed what not having meaningful access to technology can do for members of a community. Ms Reidy is as a Community Network Developer for Bidwill Uniting, a role that involves working with people typically living with high levels of disadvantage. Located in Sydney’s west, Bidwill sits amongst some of the most disadvantaged areas in the country. Shalvey, Emerton, Whalan, and Blackett rank three in the SEIFA index, while Lethbridge Park, Tregear, Willmot and Bidwill rank at just two. Dropping Off The Edge Reports indicate that Mt Druitt has been ranked in the most disadvantaged five percent of localities in NSW for many years.

Ms Reidy's role as Community Network Developer involves offering people with a sense of connection and opportunities. She has worked to help people get involved in collaborative projects that bring change to their communities—but all of this has needed to stop during COVID-19.

This, Ms Reidy says, “means that many of the people that we support, and many of the residents who have been really involved in collaborative projects, have been isolated at home.”

This has been particularly difficult for people living in the area because they often lack access to the internet or a useful device to connect with others, study, or entertain themselves.

“Even when they are given or lent a device, they often don’t know how to use it and are forced to use mobile data which is expensive and runs out quickly,” Ms Reidy said.

“We have heard many stories of parents at home with their children with very limited ability to help them do their online schoolwork- families where a parent and five children have one mobile phone or one laptop between them. The schools have been doing the best they can, but it has been difficult for them to respond to the scale of the need, especially with global technology shortages during COVID.”

The digital divide was already a problem for the area before COVID-19, but the pandemic has emphasised the scale of inequity in access to technology and the impact that this can have on people’s long-term prospects.

“With most people on Centrelink benefits living below the poverty line, things like buying a computer or device and accessing an expensive monthly Wi-Fi plan are simply out of reach for most of the people we work with,” Ms Reidy said.

Another related issue is a lack of digital literacy: when people are able to access a device, they need to learn the skills to use it properly. According to Ms Reidy, “these issues further compound the inequalities that already exist.”

**BRIDGING THE DIVIDE**

Bidwill Uniting initiated the drawing together of Wester’ly, a Western Sydney-wide coalition of organisations that are campaigning for better outcomes on the issue of the digital divide. The coalition’s website will launch in early August. One of their other major initiatives is a briefing paper that will launch alongside the website, as a tool for people to use to lobby politicians. The key ask is that politicians read the paper and advocate for digital literacy programs and policies within their party.

“We are playing a key leadership role within the coalition- convening and facilitating meeting and co-writing the briefing paper and website,” Ms Reidy said.

“Together with other organisations, we are really leading the way on this.”

Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery is also getting involved in trying to bridge the digital divide, with a number of workshops aiming to help their congregations upskill their members for digital ministry.

According to Ministry Leader Rev. Dr Rob Macfarlane, the Presbytery has seen the digital divide impacting many of their congregations, who represent some of Australia’s most highly-disadvantaged communities, and whose members struggle digitally in wider life as well as church life when face-to-face has not been an option.

“A number of our congregations who have sustainable online worship have assisted others by either advising their neighbours in a peer-to-peer way or by inviting people from other congregations to join in,” Rev. Dr Macfarlane said.


**WITH MOST PEOPLE LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE, BUYING A COMPUTER OR DEVICE ARE SIMPLY OUT OF REACH FOR MOST OF THE PEOPLE WE WORK WITH**

“For some, this has been every Sunday with one acting as hub for their neighbours. For others, this has involved alternating between which congregation is preparing worship each week, easing the burden and growing connections. While this may seem to be only about worship, the learning environment in our congregation has helped people of all generations “get online”. The motive and reward of being connected with their congregation has helped people learn skills for all of life.”

“From this early organic connection, we have had great support from UME who funded Josh Wyatt and Ben Pietor from The Signal Box to do a scoping exercise on our digital needs, and to offer tailor-made solutions.”

One particular part of this that is currently rolling out is a “digital mentor scheme”. Each of the Presbytery’s seven Mission Zones will have a number of people who will receive extra training to support others across the Presbytery. 📍

**JONATHAN FOYE**

 For more information on Wester’ly and Bidwill Uniting, contact Bec Reidy: [bec@bidwilluniting.org.au](mailto:bec@bidwilluniting.org.au)

# The art of Preaching

**Preaching is traditionally the main way that churches proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. An ancient practice, its relevance has sometimes been called into question in a context where people have access to more information than ever before. What is preaching, exactly, and do we still need to engage in it? *Insights* spoke to a number of people from different facets of Uniting Church life, to ask them what they think preaching is in the age of Zoom-mediated worship.**

Anyone who has stepped foot in a church before has encountered preaching. While not always considered the central feature of a church service (in Catholic liturgy, for example, communion is emphasised above other aspects), it is a prominent part that has been a part of church life since Jesus' ministry.

## **PREACHING: WHAT IS IT?**

Rev. Dr Elizabeth Raine is Minister of the Word at Tuggeranong Uniting Church.

"Preaching in essence is considered to be the proclamation of the word, and is designed to help people in congregations help understand the meaning of scripture and its importance to growing faith and discipleship in their lives. This is what sets it apart from other inspiring forms of speech, the focus on scripture, relevance for our lives and encouraging discipleship," Rev. Dr Raine said.

"I have to say it seems to be important because it has a very long tradition in the

church. People expect a sermon in worship services. For some, it may be the only teaching they receive on a scripture passage."

Rev. Dr Ockert Meyer lectures in homiletics at United Theological College.

"What preaching is, also distinguishes it from other types of public speeches," he said.

In other words, in preaching the congregation is not simply told a story about things that happened in the past, nor are they simply given (moral) advice or instructions about their life in the present or future, but they are given (proclaimed) the good news of God's gift in Jesus Christ.

"The word 'proclaim' is very important to understand the unique meaning of preaching as opposed to public discourse," Rev. Dr Meyer said.

"To use another example that is relevant here: it is like the moment a celebrant declares to a couple that they are legally married, his or her words have an effect that

changes the status of the couple."

"Preaching as 'proclamation' contains something of this. We see this in the NT in Jesus' first sermon as reported in Luke 4:21 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"

"However, preaching is not only the proclamation of the Word of God, but also of the presence of God. An old Reformed Confession put it like this: 'The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.' In other words, in preaching we have a God who is present both in the spoken word and present as the One who speaks the Word."

"This doesn't mean that the preacher is simply a puppet speaking at the behest of a divine ventriloquist. Preaching is deeply incarnational because God dares the Word in the mouths and on the tongues of ordinary men and women. Preachers are called and used with their talents and shortcomings. The Word enters into their lives and the word that leaves their mouths

is a word that is saturated with the power and potential to give new life, faith and hope – in ways that the preachers cannot even imagine for themselves."

**PREACHING  
IS NOT  
ABOUT THE  
PREACHER;  
IT IS ABOUT  
THE VOICE  
OF GOD**

"The preacher is the one who speaks the words of the sermon, but God actually does the proclaiming."

The point of preaching, Rev. Dr Meyer said, is not to provide moral advice, express opinions, or to lay out life principles, "but rather to be the occasion for the hearing of a voice beyond the preacher's voice: the very words of the living God."



Preaching, then, has very specific meaning in the life of the church, but is often a misunderstood activity.

Adding to this is a popular understanding of 'preaching' as moral instruction, that often sees the term used in less-than-favourable ways.

### IS IT STILL RELEVANT?

Rev. Dr Raine told *Insights* that she sometimes questions whether or not preaching remains relevant in and of itself.

"Certainly it keeps the stories of the Bible alive and hopefully fresh for people to think about, but I wonder at whether this is necessarily the best way for people to engage with scripture and discipleship in a congregation," she said.

"The question I have is, 'Is it still relevant?' Ask any given congregation the following week whether they remember the sermon of the week before, and generally they cannot tell you. The exception is if you have done a bible study as well as preaching on the text.

"Research tells us talking at people in a monologue for 10 to 20 minutes does not actually influence behaviour

or change people's thinking. However, I have found Bible studies do change thinking and behaviour, as you get time to really explore the text and discuss the implications it has for how people live."

"We are no longer an oral culture so do not have the same capacity to remember stories and words and think about them. This has worsened since the advent of three minute YouTube bites and social media grabs. Apparently researchers have demonstrated that this is actually changing our neural pathways in the brain and the way we process information. Maybe preaching is therefore no longer the best way of communicating."

Rev. Dr Raine also identified the additional challenge of what can happen when preachers are reticent to challenge their congregations.

"Part of the problem I think is that preachers want to reinforce the beliefs of people or expound their own hobby horses and this tends to keep congregations right in their comfort zones, probably explaining why they don't tend to remember sermons," she said.

### What's in a name?

**One problem with understanding preaching is the way that the word "preach" is often negatively interpreted in wider society. As one dictionary definition puts it, preaching often is interpreted as: 'to give moral advice to someone in a pompously self-righteous way.'**

"To 'sermonise' is not regarded as something good," Rev. Dr Meyer said.

"Madonna had a song titled 'Papa don't preach' and much of the way probably the majority of people outside the church think about preaching, is captured by this."

"However, this does not mean that we have to find an alternative word. (it would only mean that one would have to continue to find new words...)

What we have to do is to retrieve the biblical meaning of preaching, with all its associations of good news, of power and possibility – especially in and for the church."



### Not just for ordained ministers

**While churches traditionally set aside ordained ministers with the task of preaching, they are not the only people who handle preaching duties, which also fall on Deacons and lay people.**

James Ellis is a Uniting Church lay person, who has been preaching since he was 16.

"I think [Lay Preaching] is important for a few different reasons," Mr Ellis said.

"Proclaiming the gospel isn't the sole duty of 'the minister'. It is something lay people are called to do in their baptism. While not everyone is suited or feel called to preaching in public, it is important for the church to be reminded. I think the Uniting Church does this reasonably well."

Mr Ellis also suggested that Lay Preachers add an extra layer of flexibility for congregations,

relief for ministers, and opportunities for those exploring the various ministries of the church."

"I think the Church should place more emphasis and a sense of 'renewal' on the ministry of Lay Preacher as a valid vocation available to people in the Church," he said.

"While the flexibility exists that almost anyone can be given the opportunity to preach, properly resources and training Lay Preachers ensures that 'good theology' preached, and that preaching is consistent with the Basis of Union and what it means to be a Uniting Church."

"Sermons that stir people up and challenge their perceptions or values tend to be remembered more, but this is seen as risky by many preachers."

"Despite what many ministers will tell you about themselves, there is actually little evidence that most preaching ... transforms congregations or grows them in faith or numerically. Engaging them in behaviours that are out of their comfort zones and creating space for people to process this is what leads to transformation in my experience."

Rev. Dr Meyer said that the question of preaching's relevance is not a new one,

attributing it in part to times when it has not been done properly.

"In the first half of the twentieth century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer also refers to this and then says that the Church is not suffering from too much preaching, but from too much bad preaching," he said.

"In his four-volume set 'The History of Preaching', points out that over the course of the last two thousand years, the times of the great preachers also coincided with the times of the greatest exponential growth in the church."

"Herein might lie the reason for the decline of the church..."

**JONATHAN FOYE**

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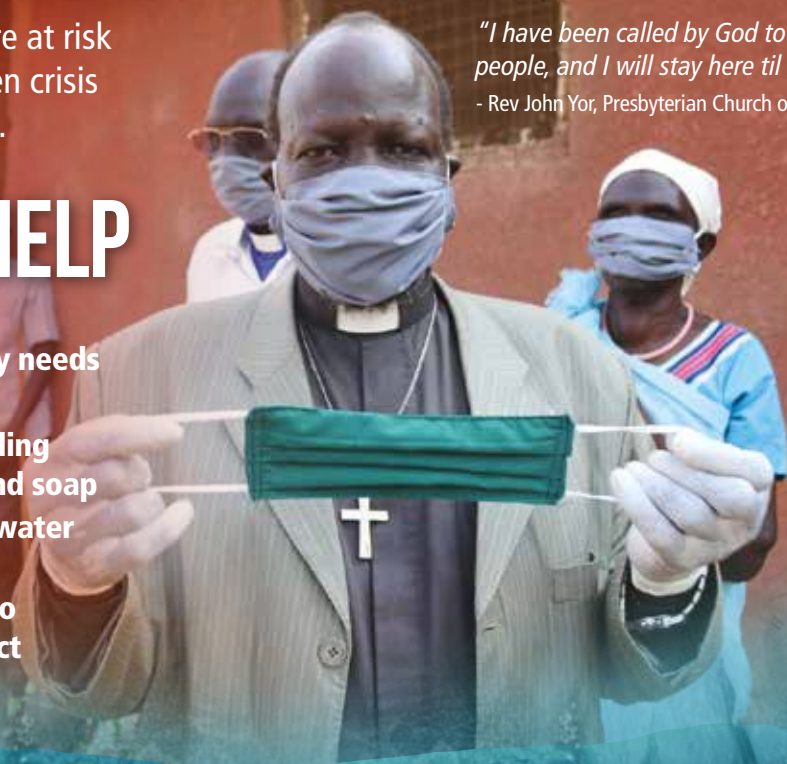
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## LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

### SEPTEMBER

# The love of God is big enough for all

#### 6 SEPTEMBER

MATTHEW 18:15-20

Jesus' description of how to confront difference is not about groups or individuals who are defined as sinful because "they" will not "repent" and agree with our cultural definitions of behaviour. Rather, it is about internal interpersonal conflict within church communities and the imperative to seek peaceful restitution when we believe someone has wronged us or acted badly.

This is a complex passage which could tempt us to exclude people who will not listen to our reasoning instead of continuing to treat them with love and compassion. If they will not seek forgiveness after repeated attempts at reconciliation, we are urged to treat them as Gentiles or as tax collectors. How did Jesus treat the Gentiles and tax collectors? Jesus welcomed them into a new community.

Sandwiched between the story of the lost sheep and the question about how often to forgive, the process for seeking repentance is framed by an unrelenting desire for reconciliation and restoration. When reasoning fails, continue to love.

#### 13 SEPTEMBER

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Peter asks Jesus how often he has to forgive a person who has sinned against him. Jesus' answer suggests that the binding and loosening from the previous section is not about exclusion but treating recalcitrant members with forgiveness and acceptance. Perhaps the story of the unforgiving servant reveals that church members who believe they have the right to bind and loose people must be very very careful. They too owe

**IN JESUS' COMMUNITY,  
NO ONE IS JEALOUS OF  
WHAT OTHERS RECEIVE  
BUT ARE GRATEFUL THAT  
THE LOVE OF GOD IS BIG  
ENOUGH FOR ALL**



much and must act as those forgiven and released into a new way of acting with justice and care towards those still struggling. The story is embedded in a question: how often should I forgive?

The answer - many many, many times. Though this forgiveness does not mean we remain in dangerous domestic violence situations. The forgiven servant failed to change his behaviour and show forgiveness to another. Remember that we too are forgiven many, many times. God's forgiveness, grace, and mercy are never ending and available to us for all our imagined and real sins? Not the punishment but the never ending grace of God is the key to this story.

#### 20 SEPTEMBER

MATTHEW 20: 1-16

The saying, "the first shall be last and the last shall be first," always irritated me when I was a young person. Going to some camps where the first in line for food were greedy, I was worried that there would be little left for me. A trivial example but one that seems all too true when the sharing of resources is compromised.

Those who are first in line don't want to lose their status and power. Those who are last recognise the grace and mercy of God who draws them out of oblivion. The saying is beautiful in a community of love where the grace of God is freely received, where all ensure that none miss out. In Jesus' community, no one is

jealous of what others receive but are grateful that the love of God is big enough for all.

In Jesus' community the first look around and see the despair and hopelessness on the faces of those languishing in the boredom of a long day as they wait to be hired. The first are happy when the long term unemployed are given the dignity of work and they rejoice that the love of God is shared equally for all.

#### 27 SEPTEMBER

MATTHEW 21:23-32

A few years ago, I attended a *Responsible Use of Power* course in the US where George, a professor from England, told of his encounter with a rough New Yorker who wanted to smash his face.

The mild mannered professor was standing on a corner when the lights changed. As he stepped off the curb, a van raced through the red light, almost colliding with him.

Instinctively, and stupidly he admitted, George slapped the side of the van. Screeching to a stop, a mountain of a man lumbered out, towered over George and threatened to punch him to the ground.

George knew he was outmatched and in trouble. Looking up at this man's face almost covered by a large bushy beard, George suddenly had a memory of his beloved grandfather. Not knowing what to do, he simply kissed the man who, stunned, looked around at all the people laughing at him, climbed back into his van and raced away. Legitimate power is not coercive. Jesus acts with the power of God enabling him to evade the trap set by those who were trying to destroy him. 🕊

## LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

OCTOBER

# Loving our neighbours as ourselves



**IF WE ACCEPT OURSELVES AS FORGIVEN AND LOVED PEOPLE THEN WE WILL TREAT OTHERS WITH KINDNESS, LOVE AND RESPECT**

### 4 OCTOBER

MATTHEW 21: 33-46

Parables are puzzling. Just as we think we've figured them out, the story overturns us. Jesus sidesteps the chief priests' answer that the landowner will terrorise the tenant farmers for refusing to acknowledge his power. Jesus seems to sidetrack to a different metaphor - the cornerstone. It's as if he is saying there is an ending to the old world where lush land is sectioned off for tenant and subsistence farmers to labour for wealthy, absent landlords. The impoverished in his audience would have a different understanding of the parable as they groaned under the weight of the dictatorial Roman Empire. Instead, Jesus will become the cornerstone of a new community where the land will

not be fenced off but all will share the fruits of their labour. A cornerstone was the first stone put down in building a structure. From this one stone measurements were made to ensure alignment for all the walls. Jesus is to be the marker for all alignments of new ways of living. Parables imaginatively recreate our reality.

### 11 OCTOBER

MATTHEW 22:1-14

This double parable is so confusing. The expected guests declined invitations and even killed the king's messengers. Why would you not want the honour, prestige, networking opportunities of attending a king's celebration? The king opens up the feast, getting his slaves to invite the overlooked, those at the edge of the city. In recent months the Black Lives

Matters movement has made the word "slave" resonate with so much historical, social, economic and political pain and disadvantage. In this passage I imagine these slaves seeking those like them who've never been included in such a feast. Instead of serving, they would be served. I imagine their ability to "see" people like them who have been overlooked and enslaved.

We may be shocked by the King's response to the one guest without a wedding robe, but should we be more shocked by the guest's offensive behaviour? They haven't come prepared to join the celebration; they are not honouring the king. They are not clothed with the garments of Christ and have not joined the community of God where joy and love are recognised in our actions.

### 18 OCTOBER

MATTHEW 22:15-22

Despite the malice in the chief priests' sanctimonious flattery, the character of Jesus is revealed as the teacher who is sincere, truthful, and shows no deference to privilege. The Pharisees opening remarks remind me of people who begin a stinging attack with the phony words, "With Respect," and then show none. Even if the Pharisees are false in their compliments, truth is revealed. "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality." From his enemies we gain a view of how the people were seeing Jesus as one who spoke with integrity, sincerity and faithfulness. He accepted all, regardless of status, intent, and political persuasions; even these men

who were trying to trap him in a political blunder. Trying to trick him, they bring the Emperor's image into the sacred space but Jesus responds with love and a message for us all. Out of the trap we hear good news: We bear the image of God.

### 25 OCTOBER

MATTHEW 22:34-46

Once a spiritual director repeatedly asked me about the greatest commandment. I replied several times - love God, love your neighbour as yourself. I was a little annoyed with her repetition until I realised the significance of the third part of this commandment. We need also to love and care for ourselves. Many struggle with self-defeating issues, having been beaten down by parents and society. Those living in domestic abuse situations, those working 80 hours a week, those defined by their workload, often find it difficult to love themselves even while they care for others. This kind of love is an active choice to have as much mercy, patience and generosity towards yourself as you are expected to give to your neighbour.

There are three parts to this commandment: love God, love your neighbour, love yourself. The first two receive most attention but the last, to love oneself, can be overlooked by faithful people who exhaust themselves in giving to others.

If we accept ourselves as forgiven and loved people then we will treat others with kindness, love and respect. And show our love for God. 🙏

## LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

# NOVEMBER

# We wait with expectation

**EVEN THE SMALLEST OF OUR KIND ACTIONS IS VALUABLE EVEN IF IT DOESN'T SEEM TO SHAKE THE FUNDAMENTAL INEQUALITIES OF SOCIETY**



### 1 NOVEMBER

MATTHEW 5: 1-12 ALL SAINTS DAY  
MATTHEW 23: 1-12

The truth of words and aligned actions are key to being a follower of Jesus. His disciples are to follow the teachings of the religious leaders only when their authority comes from “Moses’ seat”, but they are not to copy their actions that privilege the leaders’ positions, claiming deference, glory and honour that rightly belongs to God. Instead, they are to share in the egalitarian community Jesus is establishing where all are servants. The alternate reading for All Saints Day, Matthew 5: 1-12, sets out the rules for living in this new community; one which preferences actions of mercy, righteousness and peace. “May our lives give us the right words, and may our words lead us to the right lives.” (Nouwen)

### 8 NOVEMBER

MATTHEW 25: 1-13

“Don’t just do something, [wait] there.” Waiting is so hard for me. As an active person I’d rather be doing than waiting. Interestingly, it was okay for the bridesmaids to sleep while they waited, but the lack of preparation in bringing extra

oil prevented some from joyously accepting the arrival of the groom and celebrating.

Those who did not anticipate and prepare for the delay were not invited into the feast. Jesus is clear that no one knows when he will return. He gives no particular date, so we need to be ready at all times.

How often do we frantically rush around in ministry trying our best to fill our days? Then COVID Lockdown came and all our events were curtailed or cancelled. How did you fare in the waiting? Perhaps it was a time to refill the oil. In the Hebrew Scriptures, oil often represented the presence of God in the temple. Don’t just do something, wait there with expectation, wait for God’s guidance for what you are called and invited to do.

### 15 NOVEMBER

MATTHEW 25:14-30

Faithful risking is scary. One servant didn’t know their Master very well because they hid their one talent rather than risk losing it. The Master had taken many risks to increase his fortune and certainly risked losing eight coins by trusting these servants to increase their income.

Perhaps if the one talent slave had risked losing the meagre amount he was given, he might have seen a different side of the Master who could celebrate the action rather than the result. With nothing to lose as our funding was ending, the Uniting Church chaplaincy team at Western Sydney University, decided to take huge risks with little chance of success. Putting aside our fear, we stepped out in faith and were astounded by the responses we received.

In just one initiative we went from an average attendance of eight people to over 160 students and staff attending.

More important than numbers, we created new networks in the university that allowed our ministry to grow. God risks so much for humanity. Do we risk showing God’s love to the world? Do we risk speaking words of compassion and challenge, or do we hide ourselves from scrutiny.

### 22 NOVEMBER

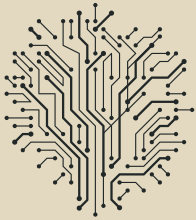
MATTHEW 25:31-46

Those on the left of Jesus truncate and summarise Christ’s words, and only at the end say “did not care for you.” Even now they can’t repeat their missing actions

that reveal their lack of mercy and compassion. They cannot mention that it was Christ they ignored, only repeating “you” twice when the righteous repeat all of Christ’s words and mention “you” seven times. Those on Jesus’ right repeat all of his words showing how attuned they are to living as a follower of Christ. As Elisabeth Johnson writes in *Working Preacher*, “They have simply been doing what comes naturally for them in caring for their neighbors in need. Their actions are a sign of their relationship with a loving and merciful God...”

Even the smallest of our kind actions is valuable even when it doesn’t seem to shake the fundamental inequalities of society. Neither the sheep nor the goats were aware their actions were being observed. With surveillance cameras and social media, our actions are easily made visible to the world. The ethics of our actions in real time are unveiled with shame or acknowledgement. 🕯

**REV. DR CHRISTINE GAPES**  
UNITING CHURCH CHAPLAIN AT  
WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY



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## NEWS FROM UNITING CHURCH ADULT FELLOWSHIP (UCAF)

# Fellowship news

**2020 continues to be a disappointing year for fellowship with UCAF Presbytery meetings, events with all rallies and gatherings planned for this year cancelled.**

### GATHERINGS CANCELLED

Sadly, the UCAF National Gathering in Adelaide was cancelled and although a new date was chosen in February 2021, there are moves to change this because of continuing border restrictions and ongoing concerns. The Consultation to deal with the business and reports of National and State Synod Committees and to see in the new National Committee will be held prior to this.

### COMMITTEE UPDATES

The NSW/ACT Synod Committee met in August by Zoom, and it was great to see and hear how everyone was going. We were able to hear reports and plan for the return of normal events. The Stamp Committee has been in recession but after completing their COVID Safe plan, hope to start back at Pitt Street Uniting Church for sorting and packing in October. They have also asked that only stamp denominations above 40 cent value be saved please.

Changes to the format of the new National Committee will come into being at Consultation in 2021. As many states are unable to form a National Committee on their own it has been agreed to change. The new Committee will be a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer from any State and then include two representatives from each State. The two representatives will be elected by each States

Synod Committee with at least one member to be from that Synod Committee. NSW/ACT Synod Committee will vote at their October meeting. Nominations close on 31st October 2020.

### JOAN STOTT BURSARY

The Joan Stott Bursary administered by the National UCAF Committee is calling for applications for 2021. The Bursaries, worth \$1500 each, are awarded for up to two people under the age of 35 years who are studying or intend to study in fields of Leadership or Theology within the ethos of the Uniting Church. Applications can be requested from Janice Willis Corresponding Member.

### VIRTUAL BBQ

October has regularly been the month for Fellowships and Congregations to host a Great Outback BBQ to support Frontier Services. However, this year with all its restrictions has meant changes. It is hoped that instead a Virtual BBQ can be hosted and funds raised this way. The work of this organisation is always ongoing and we have always been great with support in the past.

### APPRECIATION CERTIFICATES

Appreciation Certificates are still available for 80,90- and 100-year olds who have been active and involved in your congregations by contacting Laraine Jones Secretary. We have had some great photos sent to the Committee of your presentations.

### BRING A PLATE COOKBOOK

A small number of the cookbook "Bring a Plate" are still available from Janice Willis. They are \$10 each plus postage. 📧

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# The Armchair Traveller

It's about this time of year when we all plan our overseas travel. Spring brings the warm weather and a taste of the outdoors as we emerge from the cocoon of winter. Pre-pandemic this meant travel to far flung places or even a road trip interstate.

The world is finally breathing a sigh of relief with less people circumnavigating the globe, many would-be adventurers are embracing virtual reality to bridge the gap as they try and imagine what travel might be like during the pandemic. From trips to Machu Picchu to the Galapagos Islands there has been a reported surge in interest in virtual travel experiences.

For others in lockdown, like *New York Times* reporter Reif Larsen travel via Google Street view is a viable option, "there is something tantalising about being there but not being there, about being everywhere and nowhere at once," he says of the travelling around the globe one street at a time.

The *Smithsonian Magazine* has even created a list of travel experiences that it recommends from an Alaskan bob sled ride to Californian Napa Valley wine country experiences.

VR or virtual reality has been around for a while and what have been the most popular are travel apps. Google Earth VR has its own version, while others can take you to the Grand Canyon or swim with sharks. These 360 degree experiences have everything, except the smells and sensation of being there.

Not to diminish the experience, but strapping on some goggles and feeling vaguely ill still seems odd even if it might be the only way we can experience the world at the moment.

We can't travel overseas, we can barely travel interstate at the moment so I've done my share of lockdown projects.

It also has me thinking. But not about travel, about imagination and what

sparks it. Because if I have found anything during lockdown and the pandemic it's boredom and routine. Some early days of sitting at my work desk on Monday and standing up on Friday felt very much like Groundhog Day.

Now I've read the excellent book *Bored and Brilliant: How Time Spent Doing Nothing Changes Everything* – the notion that boredom stretches your brain to be more creative in a world where we have everything – literally – at our fingertips.

The idea behind *Bored and Brilliant* came from how cluttered our lives are with experiences, both virtual and digital and that doing a brain spring clean and detoxing from your mobile phone can positively impact and enhance your creative thinking and wellbeing.

Manoush Zomorodi, host of the WNYC podcast *New Tech City* and author of *Bored and Brilliant* said before she began the research on the book, "I kind of realised that I have not been bored since I got a smartphone seven years ago."

Studies suggest that we get our most original ideas when we stop the constant stimulation and let ourselves get bored, Zomorodi says. She points to a study by a UK psychologist, Sandi Mann, who asked subjects to do something really boring and then try a creative task.

"And the participants came up with their most novel ideas when they did the most boring task of all – which was reading the phone book," Zomorodi says. "And in fact [Mann] is on a mission to bring back boredom."

She talked to Mann, who said that when we're bored, we're searching for something to stimulate us.

I like to think this is how virtual reality came about. After all, virtual reality came out of someone's imagination – right?

What if one day some tech boffin said 'I'm bored. What if we could virtually travel?' Can you see where we are going with this? Virtual reality and imagination. What sparks imagination. Boredom? Solitude? Reading?

Can reading actually take us on a virtual travel experience? What about a virtual imagination tour of Narnia or Middle Earth for instance?

Like all these beautiful online curated virtual travel experiences groaning under the weight of a Google search, our own flights of imagination can come from some of our favourite books.

Maybe the answer to all this virtual travel aspiration is your favourite book in your favourite chair – sort of like a virtual armchair traveller.

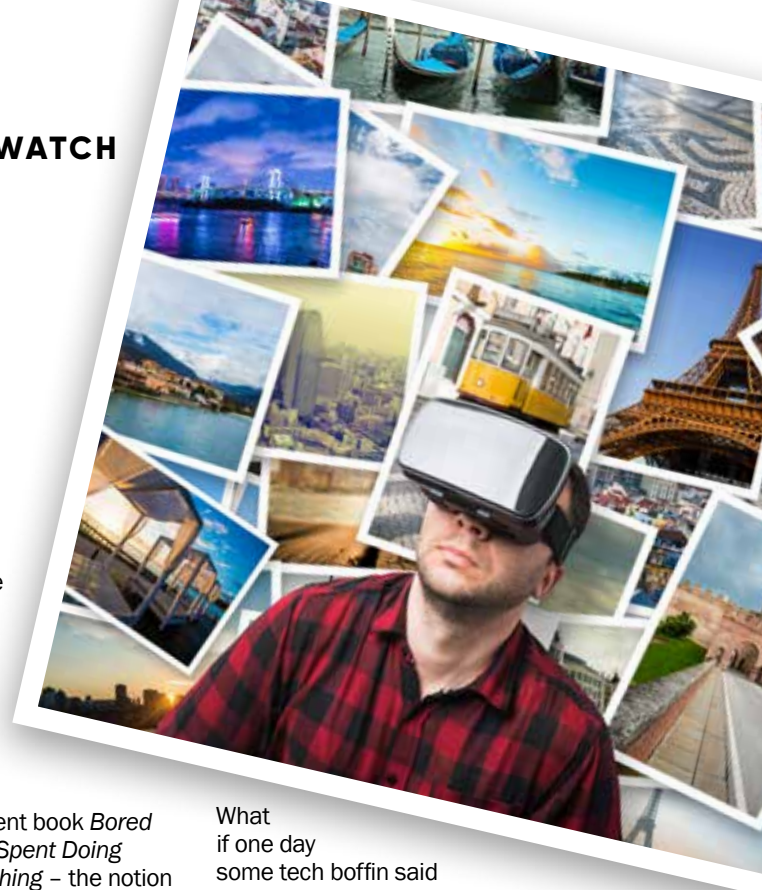
Take *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* for starters. One of my favourites in the *Narnia Chronicles*. It's the tale of a bonkers sea expedition in the tradition of the Old Norse sagas, following the good ship Dawn Treader as she navigates through magical archipelagos filled with salve traders and dragons and merpeople on her way to the edge of the world. There's sea monsters and side quests. It's the full virtual travel experience.

So while we can't travel the world and no one knows when we will be able to do so, we literally have thousands of travel options available to us on our bookshelves.

So in this season of staying put and staying safe perhaps we can take comfort in our armchair travelling adventures. 📖

**ADRIAN DRAYTON**

THERE IS SOMETHING TANTALISING ABOUT BEING THERE BUT NOT BEING THERE





**KATHLEEN JAMIE**

*Sort Of Books*

**The notion of long-buried things seeing the light of day again is a theme in this recent prose collection of Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie's, encapsulated in its title – artefacts tumbling out of the melting permafrost, pottery fragments surfacing in a ploughed field, miners surfacing from a mine, a grandmother surfacing after depression, memories surfacing after decades, old ways of doing things surfacing in our plastic-proliferated present.**



This idea of surfacing brings out the cyclic nature of time, something easier to miss in an urbanised environment, with deadlines and notions of progress and commutes from A to B, but more prominent in a country setting, and also something a poet tends to bring out, poetry sailing as it does on rhythm – circling, a spiralling perhaps.

Jamie visits a Skara Brae-type archaeological dig in the west of Scotland, where they have found a small stone box, within which, she writes, one might expect to find a cryptic message, a talisman, from the past, a message to our fraught present, but it is empty – a metaphor perhaps for the study of history?

When our present resurfaces as archaeology, what will it tell about our progress and decline? (She is thinking of the layer of Anthropocene pollution.) Is it a learn-able lesson? Or, as Hegel said, do we learn nothing from history? Jamie is told that the site has enough material to keep PhD students busy for years. Neil Oliver and his BBC crew visit in their shiny black Range Rover, prevail upon the tired archaeologists to be more enthusiastic for the camera about the riches they have found – for the relentless cycle of TV documentaries – and leave.

WHEN OUR PRESENT RESURFACES AS ARCHAEOLOGY, WHAT WILL IT TELL ABOUT OUR PROGRESS AND DECLINE?

A local visitor offers her lesson by summarising, 'we don't live very long'.

Jamie visits a remote Indigenous community in Alaska preoccupied with the advance of the sea and the retreat of the ice. Chunks of land are disappearing so quickly that houses are being relocated.

There she again participates in an archaeological dig. The village has modern conveniences – four-wheel motorbikes, guns, fridges – but the loss of traditional knowledge is being painstakingly addressed. Memories return when artefacts are unearthed. Stories too are unearthed. She likes the Indigenous people's habit of 'coming at a subject sideways' (which is what a poet does too). They miss nothing. They are attuned to the land, and the cycling of seasons. Here one is more likely, says Jamie, to imagine the land before roads and farms, as 'unparcelled' and whole'.

For the Scottish Jamie, and for many of her readers, Alaska has an otherness, and she asks the locals if they are scared when out on the tundra. (Bears, the vastness.) 'Why?' one elder replies, 'This is our backyard.' 📍

**NICK MATTISKE**  
COBURGREVIEWOFBOOKS.WORDPRESS.COM

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People with a referral from their GP on a Mental Health Care Plan may be able to claim Medicare benefits\* (\* see Medicare schedule for claimable items – available on request or on the psychology website [www.psychology.org.au/medicarefact\\_sheet](http://www.psychology.org.au/medicarefact_sheet))

Ph: 02 9683 3664 | [pciuca@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:pciuca@nswact.uca.org.au) | [pastoralcounselling.org](http://pastoralcounselling.org)



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