

# insights

Summer 20/21

Prayer  
in a pandemic



The  
not too  
distant  
God

where the  
wild God is

# RETREAT YOURSELF 2021

#RY21

**15/01/21**

Communal Friday Night  
Cook-Off™ (evening)

**16/01/21**

Worship, study, and a deeper  
encounter with God

## **ENCOUNTER**

How do we encounter God personally, locally, within our church and wider community, and as we grow as disciples? What does it mean for us to be gathered together but also online as we engage in a continuing journey of faith?

Hybrid online/ local gathering

**REGISTRATION:**  
[nswact.uca.org.au/Ry21](http://nswact.uca.org.au/Ry21)



RY21 is a collaboration between PULSE and young adult ministries across the Synod. PULSE is an activity of the NSW/ACT Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia

# Journey through the wilderness



REV. JANE FRY  
**GENERAL  
SECRETARY**

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

Over the course of this year my favourite Bible has fallen to pieces. To be fair, the book itself was quite old but it has accompanied me through the last forty years, years which have included leaving the Anglican Church (very painful) and joining the Uniting Church (mostly surprising), through theological studies and formation for ministry, through the rhythms of congregational ministry and into new roles in the Synod. It has also been a faithful companion through family ups and downs as well as the small, personal challenges that have had to be navigated along the way. Of course, I have other bibles but they're not the same - I like this one.

This year it's been well used. I expect that holds true for many of us who turn to the Word to make sense of the world. This year has certainly needed a lot of 'making sense of' and that necessity doesn't look like ending any time soon.

I've found it helpful to be reminded, in the stories of God's ways with God's (frequently wayward) people, of God's continuing patience with and love for frail, messy, sometimes very ordinary, humans. Over and over again, when the Israelites get lost, or tangled up or stuck, God picks them up, dusts them off and sets them on the Way again. In the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem during which he takes on

the system, heals people, includes everyone, speaks up for the voiceless and holds before us the vision of a reconciled humanity, we're constantly reminded of the lengths to which God has gone and will go to bring this amazing creation project to life in all its fullness. There are very good reasons why those who find themselves in this story (Jews and Christians alike), are called 'the people of the Book.'

However, it's not a book that ever lets you off the hook. At every moment, there are invitations and provocations that remind us that this is not just a 'story' that we read or hear and then go about our own business. This story makes God's business our business as well. It invites - actually expects - us to be participants and reminds us that there is stuff for us to do and that the time for doing it is right now.

Obviously the 2020 COVID disruption is nowhere near over yet and it's increasingly clear that the ramifications will not only be prolonged and challenging for everyone but will likely also mean that the cracks in existing systems will widen and many more people will fall through. It would be very tempting and natural for the church to start hankering after the 'flesh-pots of Egypt' (aka 'return to normal') but, in fact, we're going to be navigating this wilderness for some time to come.

I think there are a couple of important questions that we need to ponder:

- how are disciple-forming communities (congregations and faith communities) equipping their members and participants to notice and pay attention to the circumstances and needs of those around them?
- how are those same disciple-forming communities organising themselves to respond to those needs?
- if not, why not?
- if not now, when?

*The Rule of Benedict* (another favourite text) says that we must 'obey God with the good gifts which are in us' - with all the goodness, all the love, talent, wisdom, care and concentration we must pay attention to the voices of those in danger of being left behind on the journey through the COVID wilderness.

The commitment that God made and makes to God's people is that, if we commit to this journey and stay on the road, we'll discover God standing ready to sustain and support us along the way and the journey through the wilderness will be a journey into new life, fresh hope and renewed purpose. This is the promise of the Bible (in whatever condition) and the testimony of the church.

Have a blessed and holy Christmas, everyone!

P.S. I've had the Bible repaired. All is well. 🙏

THERE ARE INVITATIONS AND PROVOCATIONS THAT REMIND US THAT THIS IS NOT JUST A 'STORY'



# 14 The not too distant God

Moderator Simon Hansford, Rev. Rebecca Lindsay, Rev. Jon Humphries, Sally Yabsley-Bell, and Steve Molkenin share what 2020 has taught them and where they saw God present in a challenging year.

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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

# God says Yes



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.

*Imagine a God, who,  
from the very beginning,  
says Yes.*

*A God, who,  
in shaping light from dark,  
dry land from water,  
and placing humanity at the heart of it all, says Yes.*

*Who, despite our frailty and failures,  
seeks us out,  
calls our name,  
and welcomes us home.*

*Imagine a God,  
always hopeful, forever faithful,  
and never distant.*

*This is the God we know in Jesus Christ.*

*Our story begins,  
and is made complete in Jesus.  
As we consider how we can celebrate Christmas  
after this strugglesome, rigorous year,  
we begin where we have always needed to begin –  
with Jesus, the promise of God*

*It is precisely because of years like this one,  
drought and bushfires, coronavirus and its wake,  
that Christmas is vital,*

*When we have been told  
that we need to be isolated from each other  
in order to be safe  
we discover why Christmas is so important,*

*Because at Christmas,  
with the birth of Jesus,  
God closes the distance between us.  
God comes close in order to give us life,  
each one of us,  
and all creation.*

*The promise of our God who is not distant,  
Who has never been far from us,  
is a baby born, for us to embrace.  
Christmas is the assurance  
of a never too distant God.  
A God with us. Saying Yes. 🙏*



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

**#moderatorinession**  
**#AllOfThisIsUs**

facebook.com/InsightsMagazine

instagram.com/insightsmag

twitter.com/Insightsmag

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

### IN RESPONSE TO OUR VIEWS ON THE NSW RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BILL

As an atheist, I would like to commend and lend support to the views expressed by the Uniting Church and most recently by Rev. Hansford in relation to the NSW 'religious freedom bill'.

At a time when politics, the media and increasingly parts of society rely on division and acrimony, it is so important to have voices calling for a recognition of our common values, and shared spirituality that comes from being human.

This statement: "such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life ... religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race." is surely the basis for coming together rather than splitting apart.

Please pass on my very best wishes to Rev Hansford, and I wish him well in his appearance before the committee.

**ROD SIMPSON**



### IN RESPONSE TO OUR ONLINE ARTICLE WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT WHO WROTE THE NEW TESTAMENT GOSPELS?

Thanks for these observations, John. While we can't know anything much about the actual historical authors, and the church has often filled that gap with imagination, I think that we can usefully come from the other direction: the audience.

Remembering that each Gospel was written to or for a specific faith community helps us imagine what the text might have meant then, and for us to read each Gospel thinking from a communal, rather than individual perspective, and to attend to our context.

**ROB MCFARLANE**

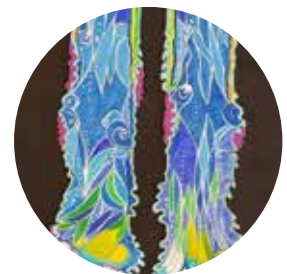
► Read the article in full at [tinyurl.com/whowrotegospels](http://tinyurl.com/whowrotegospels)

### IN RESPONSE TO OUR ONLINE ARTICLE THE ART OF PREACHING

Rev. Dr. Raine makes a valid point. Is preaching actually transformational now? I agree with her that it has become a routine where much time and energy are expended by the preacher, with little return. Maybe this is because many of the people listening have heard so many sermons before and they need a fresh mode of interaction?

**REV. KAREN PAULL (MOD)**

► Read the article in full at [tinyurl.com/preachingart](http://tinyurl.com/preachingart)



### IN RESPONSE TO OUR ONLINE ARTICLE STOLE SEARCHING

Certainly a creative way to engage the community. The exhibition on line would be well received. An innovative way to evoke and engage conversation.

The image of stoles not only for worship being drawn around shoulders of those hungry or disillusioned over the years comes to mind.

The Gordon Uniting Church women have been making stoles for recently bereaved women members for comfort and to symbolise their presence in their loss.

All good wishes for this interesting exhibition and undoubtedly others to come for Rod and for the artists involved.

**BEV PLAIZIER**

LEURA UNITING CHURCH

► Read the article in full at [tinyurl.com/stolesearching](http://tinyurl.com/stolesearching)

# A new chapter in ministry

**After thirteen years in the dual role of Hope Uniting Church Ministry Leader and UNSW Chaplain, Rev. Andrew Johnson is finishing up in January 2021. From February, he will be the new Senior Minister at Newtown Mission, a role that he says he is “nervous and excited” about. *Insights* spoke to Rev. Johnson about this new chapter in his ministry.**



Located at Maroubra Junction in Sydney’s east, Hope Uniting Church is a diverse community. It is linked to the tertiary ministry at the nearby University of New South Wales (UNSW). Since 2008, Rev. Johnson has held the role of Ministry Leader and Chaplain.

“Whether it’s the UNSW bible studies spending time exploring theological rabbit holes with students, the Wednesday morning hymn singing, or the BBQ Sundays – it’s the time with such faithful friends that I will miss,” Rev. Johnson said.

“Similarly, the shared journeying with the Hope Ministry team over many years has been an ongoing source of support and friendship. Who knew Bec Lindsay could survive sharing an office with me for nearly eight years and still remain such a valued friend and colleague?”

“In all of these places and groups, it’s been the sharing of our stories, our doubts and hopes, and the constant suspicion that God has been in the midst of things that has been so lifegiving.”

“Hope Uniting has some big dreams about mission and engagement with this south eastern part of Sydney. Yet throughout the swings and roundabouts of strategies and property planning, they’ve grown into an incredibly gentle and diverse community.”

Rev. Johnson described the Hope Uniting Church community as one that is, “multi-generational, different theologies, and quietly committed to listening to one another.”

“In my experience that’s both valuable and rare. Wherever these strategies lead, this gentle, diverse graciousness will be a foundation stone for the Hope community.”

Rev. Johnson told *Insights* he is looking forward to his new role.

“Newtown Mission is a large canvas that crackles with energy and creativity. The swirling mix of the Jordan Cafe serving people on King St, The Creative Arts Centre in Annandale, the Tongan community, and throughout each of these the many, many people engaged in exploring Christian discipleship makes for a rich and diverse community. There’s a real sense of faithfulness that wonders, “What’s the next season that we’re entering into with God?”

“I’m very lucky to be joining that mix and that journey next year. What does it mean to be a community of faithful

discernment? How can we listen to the movement of the Spirit within the church, and throughout the local community? I’m excited to continue exploring these questions with the church in Newtown.”

## NEWTOWN MISSION IS A LARGE CANVAS THAT CRACKLES WITH ENERGY AND CREATIVITY

Tertiary chaplaincy, “one of the furnaces for faith to be tested”

While Rev. Johnson is departing tertiary chaplaincy, which he has been involved in since his own undergraduate studies, he remains a passionate advocate for what he considers to be a cutting edge ministry.

“Tertiary Chaplaincy has been a central part of my life since 1996, and I am so grateful that the Uniting Church has

been invested in this ministry,” he said.

“The opportunity to be involved in faith formation with staff and students is both a privilege for me personally, but also a core responsibility for the church as a whole. It’s not only about the formation of future leadership for the church, as crucial as that is.

“Tertiary chaplaincy is one of the furnaces for faith to be tested in conversation with biomedical engineering, Australian law and international development, and the constantly unfolding climate crisis amongst many other fields. We should never be afraid of being questioned and challenged.”

“As a church we should continue to be ready to step up to the plate of tertiary ministry (and our funding should match this commitment!)”

**JONATHAN FOYE**

# Where The Wild God is

## SYNOD 2021

After an extraordinary year, we are looking forward to new ways of celebrating being the Church and living out our faith. Our Synod meeting in 2021 is being adapted to suit this challenging time and has a theme to match. Synod 2021 will explore “Where the wild God is”, a God that is active in the turbulent world in which we live right now.



The Wild God  
is **active in the  
turbulent world**  
in which we live  
right now.

How do we  
**discern and  
obey** Christ's  
call together ?

### **DISCOVERING CHRIST'S CALL TO EXPLORE & DISRUPT**

As we navigate this wilderness time together, we will discern and seek to obey Christ's call as we participate in worship and hear the way God is inspiring, shaping and guiding decisions across the life and mission of the Synod.

The Synod Standing Committee has determined that Synod 2021 will take place in an online environment (73/20SC).

Meeting online presents both challenges and opportunities to our regular practice of gathering over three or four days every eighteen months.

### **COLLABORATION, DISCERNMENT & ENGAGEMENT**

In order to meet these challenges, and capitalise on these opportunities, the Synod Standing Committee has endorsed a model of Synod 2021 that, at first glance, might be described as a six month process involving the whole Church, rather than just a three day event involving members. With Zoom fatigue an issue and COVID-19 restrictions in place, we commit to time together to explore the real issues facing the Church, and in doing so have an opportunity to maximise collaboration, discernment and engagement across the Synod.





## WHOLE CHURCH EVENTS ACROSS THE SYNOD IN 2021

Whole of Church livestreamed events across the Synod will help us discover together Where the Wild God Is. These events will be held in Churches across the Synod and lead by the Moderator to help us navigate.

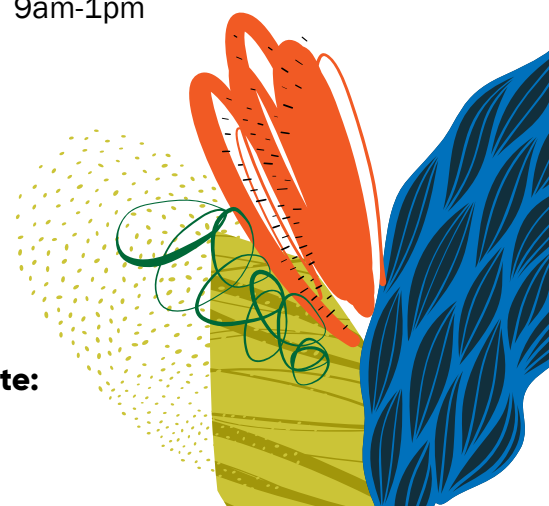
<b>Wednesday, 17 February</b>	Ash Wednesday <i>"Into the Wilderness"</i>
<b>Sunday, 28 March</b>	Palm Sunday <i>"Obedience in the Wilderness"</i>
<b>Sunday 23 May</b>	Pentecost <i>"The Possibilities of the Wilderness"</i>
<b>Sunday 8 August</b>	Transfiguration Sunday <i>"Changed in the Wilderness"</i>
<b>Sunday 21 November</b>	Christ the King Sunday <i>"Home in the Wilderness"</i>

## SYNOD IN SESSION DATES FOR 2021

<b>Saturday 13 February</b>	Induction of Synod members	9am-1pm
<b>Wednesday 7 April</b>	Opening of 39th Synod Meeting NSW & ACT & Session1A	6pm-9.30pm
<b>Saturday 10 April</b>	Session 1B	9am-1pm
<b>Wednesday 2 June</b>	Session 2A	6pm-9.30pm
<b>Saturday 5 June</b>	Session 2B	9am-1pm
<b>Wednesday 4 August</b>	Session 3A	6pm-9.30pm
<b>Saturday 7 August</b>	Session 3B & Closing of Synod 2021	9am-1pm

## DISCOVERING TOGETHER

Whether you are nominated to membership of Synod 2021 or a member of the Church, there are many ways to be involved in Synod 2021, so that together we can discover Where the Wild God Is.



**Uniting Church**  
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT

**For more information visit our website:**  
<https://tinyurl.com/Synod2021>

# PNG honours Uniting Church Minister

The Papua New Guinea Government has honoured a Uniting Church minister for his work as a missionary. The government's 2020 New Year Honours Awards included the Award of Companion of the Order of the Star of Melanesia (CSM) to Rev. Neville Arthur Threlfall "for service to education and the community as a Methodist Pastor in East New Britain and New Ireland, and for his work on the revised translation of the Bible and a number of publications including *The Story of Rabaul*."

The Companion of the Order of the Star of Melanesia is one of the highest in the PNG Honours system. It is conferred "for distinguished service of a high degree to Papua New Guinea and Melanesia, sustained over a period of fifteen years." Rev. Threlfall served as a missionary in PNG from 1961 to 1980.

Since 1980, Rev. Threlfall has made a number of working trips to PNG, and continued work on the completion of the *Bible in Tinata Tuna* (the language of the Tolai people of East New Britain), as well as the writing of books and magazine articles on PNG history. He now lives on the Central Coast with his wife Margaret, in Uniting's retirement village Nareen Gardens, Bateau Bay.

The award was supposed to be presented to Rev. Threlfall at Government House in Port Moresby in July, but the restrictions on international travel, and requirements for quarantine, prevented him from attending. He is waiting to hear if it can be conferred in Australia by Papua New Guinea's Consul-General or High Commissioner.

"I was surprised and somewhat overwhelmed to receive news of the award. It is of course pleasing to have my work recognised, but quite unexpected to receive such a high honour," Rev. Threlfall said.

"The award really recognises not only my own work, but that of my late wife Roma, who supported me in my pastoral work and in my historical researches and writing about Papua New Guinea. (I have indicated something of her share, in the Dedication and Introduction of my latest book, on the history of Rabaul.)" 🗨️

JONATHAN FOYE

# Shaping the next generation



**Rev. Stuart Bollom is the new Director of Mission (School) for NSW and ACT Synod, a role he began on Monday 19 October.**

According to Rev. Bollom, the role will see him working with Schools in the Synod, assisting them to, "find ways to better reflect the ministry and values of the church and to help link schools and students to local [congregations]."

"The role includes supporting and encouraging School Chaplains, who do an amazing job," he said.

"The third part of the role is to work with the Schools Education Committee to explore the possibilities of establishing new schools in growth areas around South Western Sydney."

"Schools have a huge privilege in shaping the future of the next generation and instilling values such as integrity,

generosity, compassion and justice in response to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. To work alongside Chaplains, teachers, principals, and school councils in that task, is very exciting."

Rev. Bollom initially trained as an accountant with Price Waterhouse, studying for a Bachelor of Economics at Macquarie University, before taking up roles within the church at Leichhardt-Petersham Mission and Gordon Uniting Church.

He received his Bachelor of Theology from United Theological College and was ordained in 1990. He started his ministry at Guildford-Granville Uniting Churches, before moving to Newington as Chaplain. During this time, he studied a Diploma of Education through Australian Catholic University and a Master of Education at Sydney University.

Rev. Bollom has also worked in a variety of other educational settings, including as the Deputy Head – Pastoral at Oxley College. After 10 years in the role he stepped down to resume classroom teaching. He has taught in the Humanities area, History and Commerce to junior years, Business Studies, and Studies of Religion to HSC.

He says he believes that the Uniting Church has an important opportunity in school education.

"The message of the Church has never been more relevant to young people," he said.

"To know that they are loved by God, and that they can make a difference in their world is fundamental to their ability to flourish as they navigate life's joys and challenges. In a rapidly changing world, we need to be encouraging young women and men to join with the church in creating a more just, inclusive and caring community that reflects God's love for all people."

NSW/ACT Synod General Secretary Rev. Jane Fry welcomed Rev. Bollom's appointment.

**THE MESSAGE OF  
THE CHURCH HAS  
NEVER BEEN MORE  
RELEVANT TO  
YOUNG PEOPLE**

"I believe that it was Stuart himself (when he was chaplain at Newington) who described himself as a leader in the 'largest youth group in the Synod'," Rev. Fry said.

"In a church that's growing old, it would be irresponsible to ignore the 10,000 children who currently attend our schools.

"Beyond the opportunity this gives the church to influence the formation of 10,000 souls, there's also the possibility of engaging the whole church in the concerns that many young people express about their future. The church's active support of the School Strikes for Climate are a recent example of this support. Stuart's role will be pivotal in keeping the ongoing relationship between the church and its schools as constructive and creative as possible." 🗨️

JONATHAN FOYE

# WITH LOVE TO THE WORLD

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



**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.

Our daily Bible reading guide is now available as an app, as well as in booklet form, making it easily available wherever you may be. The annual subscription is just \$24.



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

For more information,  
email Dr Peter Butler:

**[butler@wagga.net.au](mailto:butler@wagga.net.au)**

# Great Outback BBQ



**WHAT REALLY MATTERS IS TO GET TOGETHER WHILE CHANGING THE LIVES OF THOSE DOING IT TOUGH IN REMOTE AUSTRALIA**

## HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT WHAT CHRISTMAS WILL LOOK LIKE?

**W**ith one of the most challenging years in recent history almost over, many of us are now reflecting on life, lessons learned, and the near future.

So why not gather, show our loved ones how much we care while helping others? The Great Outback BBQ is an opportunity to do something fun and fundraise to offer support and make a real difference for farmers during tough times. We can all get the barbie sizzling and ask friends, family or colleagues for a donation to Frontier Services, a Uniting Church agency and Australia's oldest bush charity working for rural communities for more than 100 years.

Celeste Ambalong is the Events Coordinator at Frontier Services. She told *Insights* that even during lockdown and while restrictions were still in place, there were so many people willing to help that many alternative activities came up.

"Some congregations are doing a virtual BBQ, no BBQ BBQ, and other activities such as a trivia night or garage sales," she said.

As governments ease restrictions, The Frontier Services team are more confident about people being able to host a Great Outback BBQ, because what really matters is to get together -even virtually- while changing the lives of those doing it tough in remote Australia.

They are still far away from their \$260,000 goal. Other fundraising activities scheduled throughout the year for the same purpose had to be postponed until 2021 due to COVID-19. With this money, they will support those farmers and graziers in need as well as help mobilise

more people, Bush Chaplains and volunteers to lend a helping hand. At the moment, Frontier Services work with around 100 Farmers. These numbers vary depending on the time of year and the weather. According to Celeste, "In the last financial year, we had approximately one hundred fifty-four volunteers out helping farmers with a lot of the same volunteers, volunteering multiple times."

Frontier Services is asking for help, particularly during a year when farmers need it. They are trying to rebuild after the worst drought on record, devastating bushfires, and now COVID-19. The pandemic has meant some farmers cannot get stock sold because overseas markets are closed. These recent disasters have had a catastrophic effect on people living on isolated properties around Australia.

Since Frontier Services has extended the time frame for the BBQ, they are hoping to get people signing up around the Christmas and New Year period. Those who register will receive a special Thank You, Welcome Kit. Participants who bank funds before 31 December go into the draw to win a special prize. The highest amount raised and banked before 31 December will win. 🍷

**ANGELA CADENA**



To register and find out more, go to the Frontier Services website:

**[frontierservices.org](https://frontierservices.org)**

*Please remember to adhere to current government advice in your local area; physical distancing and hygiene are still necessary.*



WILLUNGA UNITING CHURCH OUTBACK BBQ



**The Great Outback BBQ looks a little different this year. We know that you might not be able to host a BBQ the same way you have in previous years. Check out what our creative friends around the country have been doing instead. It might just spark some inspiration for your own event!**

**HOST A VIRTUAL GREAT OUTBACK BBQ**

There's no need to worry about cleaning up the backyard or doing a crazy amount of dishes when you hold a virtual BBQ. All you have to do is video call your friends, chuck a couple of snags on the stove and enjoy your BBQ without leaving your house.

**WHO DOESN'T LOVE A DRIVE-THROUGH?**

If you and your friends are able to, a drive-through BBQ could be the way to go. Mask up and select a location, invite your guests and serve those sausage sizzles to them straight from the barbie!

**HOST YOUR OWN FRONTIER SERVICES EVENT**

It doesn't have to be a BBQ. Host any kind of event in line with the restrictions and health guidelines where you are. It can be a bake sale, a movie night or a pizza party.

Register your event at:

[greatoutbackbbq.com.au](http://greatoutbackbbq.com.au)

The not  
too distant



# at 1000



2020 HAS BEEN A CHALLENGING YEAR. DESPITE OUR PHYSICAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DISTANCE, GOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN NEAR TO US. AND THIS IS NEVER MORE EVIDENT AS WE CELEBRATE CHRIST'S BIRTH. TO CLOSE OUT 2020, WE ASKED PEOPLE ACROSS THE SYNOD TO REFLECT ON THEIR YEAR, AND THEIR MINISTRY CONTEXT.

# The not too distant God



**REV. SIMON HANSFORD**  
MODERATOR  
UNITING CHURCH  
SYNOD OF NSW AND ACT

**As our year is bundled into the splendour of Christmas celebration, take some time to consider the artistry of God's imagination.**

**A**s we discover ourselves slowly emerging from the rigours of the last few years – not only the strictures of the coronavirus, but the fear of the bushfires and the exhaustion of the drought for so many – look at the wonder not only of God's promise, but the way in which God proclaims it.

All too easily our diaries keep moving us forward, allowing us barely a moment to consider what God has done in Jesus' birth. In Jesus, God has transformed everything, and everyone.

It begins, as always, with God.

In the beginning, God.

This God, who has always intended life, knowing our brokenness and our beauty, declares life and hope in the birth of Jesus.

God breaks into the world on the margins, where none expects anything. Under the dead, dreadful hand of empire, God speaks life through a couple of little consequence, to nameless stock workers and a handful of foreign mages.

Imagine this God who, from the stuff of the stars and the dust of the earth, has shaped us. Imagine this God who called us from the very beginning, by our name, and with love.

Is this not wonderfully amplified in the birth of Jesus?

This is not some comfortable story of a benevolent nonna, ignoring our misdeeds and airbrushing our failures. This is a God who, because of our need, and because of God's own intent, has





acted in Jesus to save those crushed under the boot of empire, and also those who wear the boots.

This is where I invite you to contemplate how God has acted. Imagine a God who has chosen to look exactly like us, in the same circumstance as each of us, born. Is there any greater affirmation of our humanity than God embracing it?

Immediately the trials and celebrations of our life are not distant to our God; the embrace of friends and family, the grief of loss, the injustices many experience, are known by the one whose breath is inherent to each of us. In Jesus, the fullness of our lives is embraced by the fullness of God.

And of all years, this Christmas, when isolation has been the story for young and old, for families and communities and nations. Our faith declares that God has drawn near to us in Jesus Christ, in a year when proximity has been prohibited. In a season when shaking hands and passing peace have been forbidden, at Christmas God embraces each of us.

In the simplicity of a baby's birth, we hear the imagination of God's yes. This story is welcomed with astonishment by the least, yet missed by monarchs, perhaps because the powerful always assume God has guaranteed their place

and the powerless are surprised that God will scarcely bother with them at all.

Can we imagine Christmas worship with the hope of God's promise in Jesus, despite our changed circumstances? We must insist upon the promise of God most especially this year, and every year.

How shall we celebrate this Christmas, when we need to mute our singing and gather at arms' length? We cannot let fear of infection dilute the wonder of what God has done, we cannot let the lack of our singing restrain our celebrations. When we have been told that the only way to be safe is by being distant from each other, we proclaim that by coming close to all of us, God has indeed brought life.

In Jesus, God says yes to forgiveness, to justice, to healing. In Jesus' birth, God embraces those on the edges, those unnamed, those our community brushes aside. When we believe that we are beyond the reach of God's mercy, outside the hope of God's love, Christmas asserts that none of us is beyond God finding each of us, welcoming us, and bringing us home.

Christmas assures us that God is never distant. In Jesus, God says yes. ②

➔ CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

**IMAGINE THIS GOD WHO FROM THE STUFF OF THE STARS  
AND THE DUST OF THE EARTH HAS SHAPED US. IMAGINE  
THIS GOD WHO CALLED US FROM THE VERY BEGINNING BY  
OUR NAME AND WITH LOVE**





**REV. REBECCA LINDSAY**  
MINISTER  
HOPE UNITING CHURCH

**Like many of us, I've spent far too much time staring at a screen this year. I've struggled with the disembodied gathering of a faith that's all about embodiment- the God who puts on flesh and dwells inside a body. I've missed physical togetherness, bread crumbs underneath the communion table, and singing. However, I've found myself surprised by the depth of community that online forums have allowed within the Hope Uniting congregation.**

**M**embers of our congregation have been invited to gather for a Zoom catch-up each Sunday morning since the beginning of the pandemic. These gatherings have been an unexpected blessing to the community. After some experimentation with format, we've settled on a structure around two questions. The first question, in lieu of morning tea chatter, allows us to get to know each other better (What's your favourite summer food? What's your earliest childhood memory?). The second question connects to the theme or Scripture passage for the week, and invites reflection upon the reality of faith in our pandemic experience.

Each week the shared stories and insights have included the vulnerable, profound, and hilarious. While trying to understand why this depth was possible in Zoom (!!)

when it has sometimes seemed difficult within our physical worship services, we have noticed a few things. In our Zoom gatherings, we can all see each other's faces. We are looking at each other and find joy in that connection. We are learning to encounter God in the faces of our congregation. In

our Zoom gatherings, we use a mutual invitation turn-taking method. This means each household is valued and given space to tell their story. We give people the questions to discuss in the week leading up to the meeting.

Everyone is able to participate without being put on the spot. We are learning to see that God has gathered us as one body, even though our life experiences are diverse.

Our online catch-ups work best when we acknowledge that we are not just friends gathering socially, even though we enjoy each other's company. We are gathering around the story of the God we encounter in Christ. We are a community because of our faith in this story. Our first online communion at Easter highlighted this for me. It was awkward and messy and interrupted (mostly by my three year old).

Yet I had a deep sense of Christ's presence within and among us. The congregation, the body, were gathered there together. Each of us could play our part in the drama of the liturgy and contribute to telling the story. In some ways each of us were more present than usual as each household had to prepare the elements, light candles, break bread and take responsibility for their sharing in the meal. The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving says that the communion meal gathers us up across time and space and even to the life beyond death. This Easter's scattered, online, Zoom communion embodied these words. 🙏

# The not too distant God

**IN SOME WAYS EACH OF US WERE MORE PRESENT THAN USUAL AS EACH HOUSEHOLD HAD TO PREPARE THE ELEMENTS, LIGHT CANDLES, BREAK BREAD AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR SHARING IN THE MEAL**



**REV. JON HUMPHRIES**  
CHAPLAIN  
RAVENSWOOD  
SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

### Where is God in Times Like These?

**"...And see I am with you always until the end of the age."  
(Matthew 28: 20)**

**W**here is God in our lives? How do we know that God is there and that God is with us? Where might we find God in the midst of such things as a pandemic, where life is not going the way we thought it would and blessings might seem to be thin on the ground? Jesus, at his birth, was named 'Immanuel' which means God with us. Jesus promised to be with us until the end of the age, and we often affirm that he is with us when two or three are gathered in his name. Furthermore, we believe that we experience God as the Holy Spirit, who is amongst us because, again, Jesus promised that he would send the disciples the Spirit. This is all nice theology which we strongly believe, but what does it mean.

## **WHERE MIGHT WE FIND GOD IN THE MIDST OF SUCH THINGS AS A PANDEMIC, WHERE LIFE IS NOT GOING THE WAY WE THOUGHT IT WOULD AND BLESSINGS MIGHT SEEM TO BE THIN ON THE GROUND?**

As an educator I am prompted in the face of such questions to use a thinking routine such as 'See, Think Wonder' which is a thinking routine from Project Zero, of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. To use this thinking routine one simply needs to complete the

sentence stems: 'I see...'; 'I think...'; 'I wonder...'. Given that Jesus at the end of the Great Commission in Matthew tells us to "see/look/behold," it seems to fit our need.

We see Jesus through love. Knowing God is with us has less to do with our feelings and more to do with our actions. It is less to do with our feeling that God loves us or is with us, but by our loving others as we have been loved by God, after all "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God lives in them." (1 John 4: 16) Furthermore, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (1 John 4: 12) Similarly, in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats Jesus suggests that when we love our neighbour by feeding, clothing, visiting or caring for them then we are doing that for/to him. So, I see people laying down their lives for others in the name of Christ and caring for others in important small and large ways, so God is with us.

We can think about our gifts and how God is calling us to use them, as there is no gift without its corresponding ministry or service (*Basis of Union*, Par 13). So when we think about our gifts, and seek to discern God's call, then clearly God is with us. When we use them in loving service of others, then God is with us. So, I wonder in the light of this, where do you see God at work in your life and the community around you and the world? Look, behold, see and know that Christ is with us even until the end of this age. It is something to think and wonder about. God bless. 🙏

➔ CONTINUED ON PAGE 20





**SALLY YABSLEY-BELL**  
PASTOR AT WILLOUGHBY AND  
NORTHBRIDGE UNITING CHURCH

### How do I see God at work in my own ministry context?

This year has seen many changes to what is involved in ministering to a congregation, but through these changes God has been moving and working at Willoughby and Northbridge Uniting Church.

While we would not wish the devastation of COVID-19 on anyone, the restrictions it has brought challenged us to really strip back everything we were doing as a church and refocus on what is most important to us. We were able to really celebrate our congregation's strength in pastoral care. Many members found the need to reach out to the church community just to connect with people outside of their home bubble.

Through being pushed into a new digital and hybrid space, we have been able to connect with families overseas who were feeling alone and isolated. We were able to connect with people who had moved away or who were moving into alternative living arrangements that would keep them from attending church. One of the biggest blessings has been people having their names under their faces on Zoom. Our congregation only officially amalgamated two weeks before lockdown, and having people's names displayed allowed our congregation to become true community much quicker than it might have without lockdown. Lockdown streamlined some of the processes that enable ministry with online offerings and email newsletters and it brought us together as we glimpsed into each other's houses.

Praise the Lord that we can now attend meetings via Zoom. Late night meetings where I can be at home in slippers have been an absolute God send. I was recently in a presbytery meeting where we were given State of Origin updates by members who were sent out as we voted. Now if that isn't a sign of God at work in the church then perhaps the fact the NSW won the match is.

We are lucky enough at Willoughby and Northbridge that we have been able to resume meeting in person on both sights as we have enough space and dedicated people who will ensure COVID safety protocols are followed. We have seen how much people have appreciated being able to connect in person, have a chat over morning tea and to be able to take communion together was really moving.

We have seen God moving us as a community to see how we can more meaningfully connect with each other and the community around us. We want to build real relationships of trust and connection, not just relationships of consumer and host. We have noticed what connects us to our faith and community and we are building new leadership roles with in our structure to help us as we continue to journey together.

I want to acknowledge that we are a very lucky congregation who have only been able to do so much at this time because we are in a wealthy area and the people who came before us have set us up well. We are grateful for this and we hope we are able to leave the church in an even better place when we leave.

Blessings 🙏



**STEVE MOKKENTIN (MOLK)**  
SENIOR FIELD OFFICER  
PULSE TEAM

**In March 2020, COVID-19 knocked us all for a six.**

**W**e had to pull up stumps and change the way we gathered – no longer could we meet face to face, we either went online or we stopped gathering. This presented youth leaders with a unique challenge: how would they keep young people interested in an online gathering when they'd spent all week connecting to classes online?

In no small part it's been easy to see God at work in these efforts. Young people shouting into Zoom meetings as they ran around the house looking for the next item in an 'at-home scavenger hunt'. Real warmth in relationship was encouraged and developed as they prayed and cared for each other, and cracked jokes about silly hats or strange jumpers (or whatever that week's dress-up challenge was). The intention was clear—with God in our midst this was not going to beat us.

Leaders like Craig and Emma Hunter, AJ Hawkins, Kristy Tritton and the team at Terrigal UC delivering their online *KidsLife* show for Kinder and early primary-aged people is a great example of the creative spirit of God at work amongst us, and really is a blessing to the wider church.

Vic/Tas Synod Intergen Youth Ministry Consultant Bradon French and I created weekly chaos with *CALM DOWN*, the only online, late-night chat show in the country. The less said about that, the better (they are still available on the Pulse Facebook page should you choose to hunt them down).



We did, however, drop the ball right on the try line. There was lots of talk about how we could pivot\*, becoming more agile\* as we faced the impact of this unprecedented\* pandemic. We talked a big game as we were presented with the opportunity to re-think how and why we gathered. Could we do it better? Could we engage young people in the centre of our gatherings? Very few congregations did much work on this, as

was evidenced by how quickly we rushed back to gathering the same old way as quickly as we could. We must continue to work at reshaping who we are to prioritise young people and their families everywhere.

I know we have all seen God at work around us during this time of upset caused by the Coronavirus. Its impact will shape our stories for years to come. Be encouraged to get better at sharing these stories with each other...and maybe even share them online. Ask a

young person to show you how to do this, and then ask how the pandemic affected them.

Sharing our story is vital to who we are as a people of God, and will help us when we have the opportunity to talk to someone about the difference Jesus makes in our lives. 🙏

*\*Please never use these words again.*

**THE INTENTION WAS CLEAR:  
WITH GOD IN OUR MIDST  
THIS WAS NOT GOING TO BEAT US**

*The not too distant*  
**God**

# UCA members help secure funds for vulnerable migrants

CALLS TO ASSIST AT-RISK MIGRANTS DURING COVID-19 CONTINUE AFTER UNITING CHURCH MEMBERS HELPED SECURE \$6 MILLION FOR RED CROSS EMERGENCY SERVICES BY CONTACTING MPS OR PROVIDING PRACTICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR A SYDNEY ALLIANCE CAMPAIGN.

Within the more than one million people in Australia with no safety net, a report commissioned by the Refugee Council of Australia estimates up to 14,000 people seeking asylum and refugees could become homeless due to COVID-19.

The Sydney Alliance is a coalition of organisations, unions and schools that campaigns for the interests of the community.

Lead organiser David Barrow said the Federal funding win would not have happened without the hard work of the UCA community. Uniting Church and Uniting members sent over 50 different emails to moderate MPs at each of the campaign moments.

Mr Barrow said the funds will go a long way, but it is still not enough to keep vulnerable migrants not covered by JobKeeper and JobSeeker from a point of destitution.

"Homelessness, suicide, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence have been recurring stories of what is being experienced by those our government has excluded," he said.

"The most vulnerable people need access to time-limited, reoccurring payments that will help them get back on their feet and be able to secure employment again."

"The fact we saw no new funding in the Federal Budget this month is very disappointing, a failure of courage, compassion and strategy."

Earlier in the year, the Alliance fought for \$7 million in Federal funds for the Red Cross, as well as NSW Government packages of \$6 million for vulnerable migrants and \$21 million for international students' emergency accommodation.


The Alliance has trained organisers as part of this campaign, including Chaitra Hareesh who is now living in accommodation she played a role in advocating for earlier this year.

"At the beginning of 2020, I was working towards completing my Masters to pursue a career as business analyst," Ms Hareesh said. "I never thought I'd be advocating for students' rights."

Organiser Dianna Olmos said the government has treated international students like commodities.

"We cannot let them continue to entice us to Australia with one hand, and push us down with the other," Ms Olmos said.

"I've met international students who can no longer pay their rent. They are cleaning hostels just to get a bed for the night."

"I've worked to get hundreds of grocery vouchers for people on temporary visas so they can eat. I've watched the scale of this crisis grow by the day." 

**ASHLEY DONNELLY**

THE FUNDS WILL GO A LONG WAY, BUT IT IS STILL NOT ENOUGH



## HOW YOU CAN HELP

Contact:

Uniting Head of Advocacy:  
Emma Maiden

[Emaiden@uniting.org.au](mailto:Emaiden@uniting.org.au)

or

Sydney Alliance Lead Organiser:  
David Barrow

[Dbarrow@sydneyalliance.org.au](mailto:Dbarrow@sydneyalliance.org.au)  
to get involved in the campaign.





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- IT IS ANTICIPATED THAT THE EDITOR WILL WORK FROM HOME

## WITH LOVE TO THE WORLD EDITOR

We are looking for an editor who will be responsible for producing the *With Love to the World* quarterly magazine—a daily Bible reading guide for use by Uniting Church members (and others) for their faith nourishment and discipleship development. *With Love to the World* is managed by the With Love to the World Committee consisting of elected representatives from Strathfield Uniting Church and United Theological College and other co-opted members. The Committee is governed by a Constitution that is approved by the Synod of NSW and ACT.

The Editor will report to the chairperson of the Committee and will be responsible for producing the magazine including:

- Preparing schedules of Bible readings based upon the Revised Common Lectionary
- Recruiting and commissioning writers and contributors
- Determining and implementing production schedules
- Editing all material for publication

### SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS MUST HAVE:

- A high level of theological and biblical training
- Experience in editing
- Advanced PC skills
- Strong communication and interpersonal skills
- Strong organizational skills and attention to detail

The position has become vacant following Dr Peter Butler's retirement after 16 years' service.



If you are interested in this position, please email your resume to:  
Dr William Emilsen: [wemilsen@gmail.com](mailto:wemilsen@gmail.com)  
Applications close on 1 February 2021.



**APPLY  
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### The United Theological College is running two intensive subjects in January

#### THL215/ THL407: JESUS THE CHRIST

Who is Jesus Christ for us today?

REV. DR. PETER WALKER

19–22 January 2021 | Port Macquarie

#### THL308: PROPHETIC LITERATURE

Reading the biblical prophets

REV. BRIAN KOLIA

18–22 January 2021

Each of these subjects is available as part of BTh, as a single subject, or for those wanting to audit a subject for interest.

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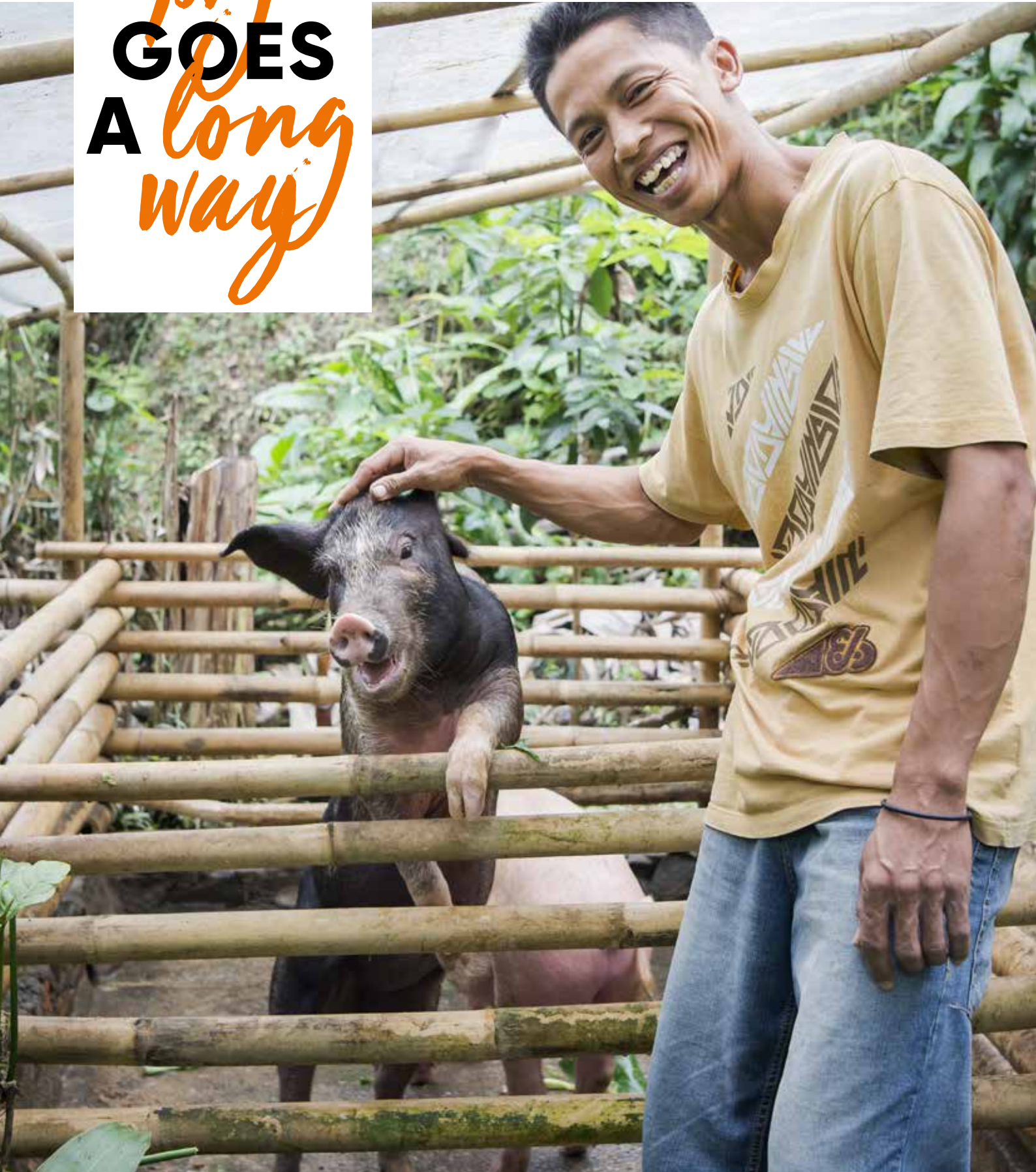


Charles Sturt  
University

UNITINGWORLD

**A** *little*  
*pig*  
**GOES**  
**A** *long*  
*way*

HOW YOU CAN HELP A FAMILY CELEBRATE  
NEW LIFE THIS CHRISTMAS





**There are no pigs pictured at the birth of Jesus. Donkeys, yes. Maybe a lamb. Pigs – no. Considered unclean by Jewish people, they're unlikely to have been among the much-romanticised gathering.**

**O**ne fabulous hog, however, has taken centre stage at the birth of a child just to our north, in Bali, Indonesia. The pig is a bit of a symbol for the life-changing impact of Jesus' birth – for everyone.

The hog belongs to Komang Ariadi, a young man from remote north Bali. At 25, Komang worked as a labourer, and was already married with two children. Without land of his own or official training, he picked up jobs wherever he could – on building sites, in a clove plantation. His family lived in a home they'd built themselves, but on land owned by others. Money was tight. Sometimes the family skipped meals to provide for the children. Sometimes they didn't have anything spare for medicine. They're among the hundreds of thousands of people who live in poverty amidst the idyll of tourist life in Bali.

In mid-2015, Komang was spending each day looking for work. Life was in a predictable rhythm marked by anxiety and the endless quest to make ends meet. To his surprise, he heard that a new group – Christians – had visited his village and were interested in starting a project to support people through innovative training in livestock breeding and small business skills.

Christians are very much a minority group in Bali, representing less than 2 percent of the population, and our partner MBM (Maha Bhoga Marga), the development agency of the Protestant Christian Church in Bali, are always greeted with cautious curiosity whenever they make a new contact. Their mandate, though, is clear. Christ is alive in the world, bringing new possibilities for all. They go wherever there's need, and they bring practical skills and hope. And when Komang plucked up the courage to meet with them, the next few months became an absolute revelation.

He learnt about small business and livestock breeding and after completing training, secured the capital to buy two pigs. Feeding and caring for them, he looked forward to the day when they'd give birth and he'd have pigs of his own to rear or sell. The pigs brought a newfound security to his family – for

the first time in his life, Komang had a resource that he could build on and a sense of being able to control his future.

But that wasn't all. Komang attended further training about water, sanitation and the rights and obligations of Balinese citizens. He added a toilet to his house, taught his family about hygiene and – critically – was able to secure the legal rights to his home.

"It was the best thing I could have learned," Komang said. "Having a safe place to live changes everything."

The transformation of Komang's family began with a pig – a pig supplied through the generosity of givers to UnitingWorld's *Everything in Common Gift Catalogue* at Christmas. Some happy individual here in Australia was delighted to be remembered by a handy hog given in his or her honour – and in Bali, a family took control of their future.

And the birth of the child? Well, a few months ago, Komang and his wife welcomed into their family another baby, much loved. The child arrived at a difficult time – the impact of closed borders on the Balinese economy has been savage. The cost of living has gone through the roof, and competition for jobs is incredibly tight. Feeding his small pig herd is expensive, and Komang needed money for his family. In consultation with our partner, he made the difficult decision to sell one of his hogs. It's a heartbreaking moment to feel as though you're going backwards, through absolutely no fault of your own, and Komang agonised over the sale. But the pig, once again, gave him independence and opportunity to provide for his family – and with MBM's help, he'll get back into the market when life begins to return to normality in the tourist sector. 🐷

**FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, KOMANG HAD A RESOURCE THAT HE COULD BUILD ON AND A SENSE OF BEING ABLE TO CONTROL HIS FUTURE**

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# Making a *Jesus-shaped* difference in the world

**In early 2020, organisational transformation specialists, Anne Cosgrove and Milena Milojevic assisted the Synod Office and key leaders in thinking about how we could work together to support the Church more effectively in its ministry and mission.**

**COVID-19 hit and the duo facilitated adapted workshops via Zoom, providing staff with an opportunity to have their voice heard as part of identifying the new Synod Office, purpose statement, values and behaviours.**

**We asked key leadership to reflect on the transformational culture and values journey.**

**REV. JANE FRY**  
GENERAL SECRETARY

We've learnt a lot about 'isolation' over the course of this, very demanding, year. The personal consequences and costs of working from home, being separated from work mates, and spending hours staring at a computer screen have reminded everyone who works in the Synod office that humans really are social animals. Our wellbeing depends on healthy relationships and that includes our relationships at work.

Culture and Values has invited all of us to reflect on the foundation of that community and to contribute to its ongoing 'formation'; the process has tapped into the hearts and minds of all those who work in the Synod office.

**ALBERT OLLEY**  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

What is culture and do we understand values? Interesting questions for a Church and somewhat confronting. Whilst not directly a specific outcome of the culture conversations we've been holding, I'd propose that the biggest impact we've seen is willingness to trust and engage in conversation where we can support each other.

This exercise is about people's hearts and minds, why do we do what we do, what is it we are called to do in our roles serving the church? What do you mean I'm to help the church find ways to do what its called to do in a million different forms and expressions every day?

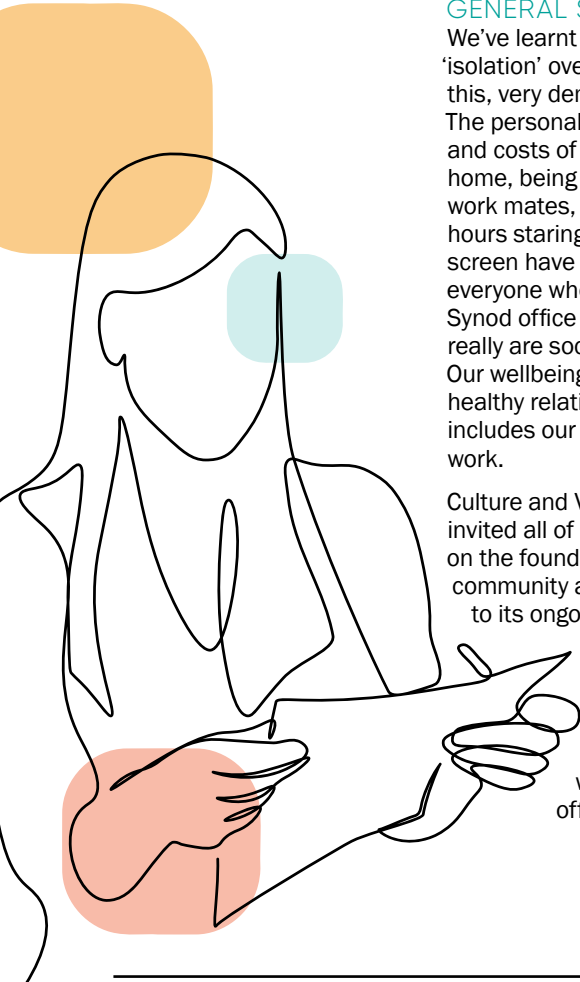
Throw in the challenge of how do you support the many people who passionately serve Christ, the church and the wider community to understand the myriad of messages we were being bombarded with as we entered lockdown.

**REV. BRONWYN MURPHY**  
ASSOCIATE SECRETARY

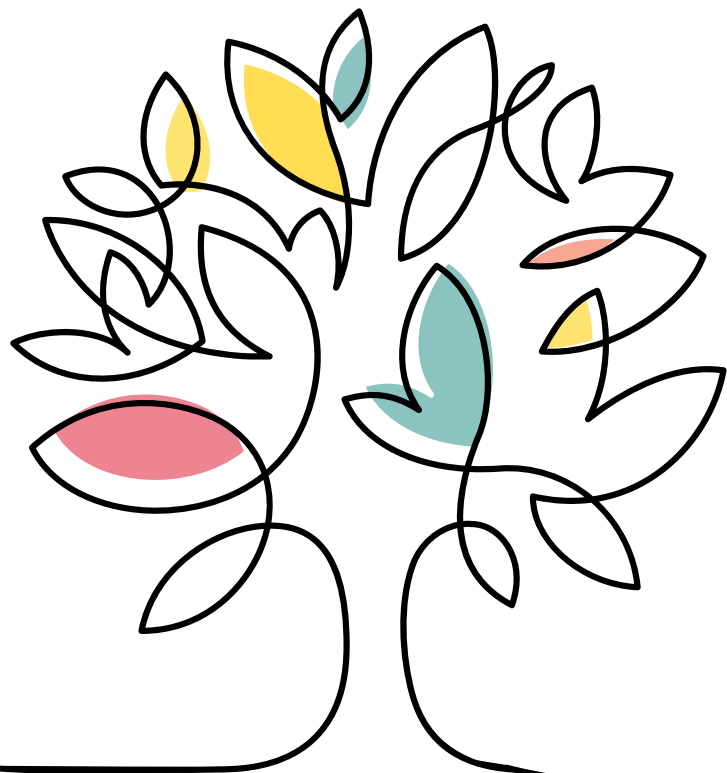
The Culture and Values process revealed how many Synod staff work for the church because they want to make a difference. I have a deeper appreciation for working with such gifted people who genuinely want to help people.

Relationships are stronger, people are more willing to think beyond their immediate sections and collaborate. We have a more intentional team approach now and think of each other more by name than job title or role.

**I HAVE A DEEPER APPRECIATION FOR WORKING WITH SUCH GIFTED PEOPLE WHO GENUINELY WANT TO HELP PEOPLE**



"HOW CAN WE BETTER SUPPORT OUR PRESBYTERIES AND CONGREGATIONS?" WAS THE QUESTION THAT SPARKED AN ORGANISATION-WIDE DISCUSSION LED BY GENERAL SECRETARY JANE FRY AND CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER ALBERT OLLEY.



**GLEN POWELL,**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
UNITING MISSION AND  
EDUCATION

"Hey, I know you from the Culture and Values Zoom call!"

If you have ever been hosted by the Uniting Venues staff team, you will know they embody hospitality and professionalism – in fact they embody the values of the Synod culture and values program – integrity, respect, collaboration and compassion.

At a thank you BBQ for the Venues staff, we had Venues and other Synod staff from Naamaroo, Elanora, Pitt St and the Centre for Ministry who had never met each other before.

But there were familiar faces everywhere thanks to the relationships that emerged through the Culture and Values workshops.

It has been a great opportunity for Synod staff across the many and varied Synod teams to frame our work around a common purpose.

**WARREN BIRD**  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR  
UNITING  
FINANCIAL  
SERVICES

How you get things done – the way decisions are made and the way the members of the organisation treat each other and all other people they interact with (i.e. culture) – is crucial for being effective in what you're trying to achieve. Treat each other and those around you poorly and even the best strategy can be undone.

The Synod's recent culture conversation set us on a more constructive path of agreeing that the way we work together needs to have genuine integrity and be more collaborative, respectful and compassionate.

**HELPING THE UNITING CHURCH TO BRING TO LIFE THE GOSPEL MESSAGE OF LOVE, FORGIVENESS AND SERVICE OF OTHER PEOPLE IS A GREAT REASON TO BRING OUR BEST TO WORK EACH DAY**

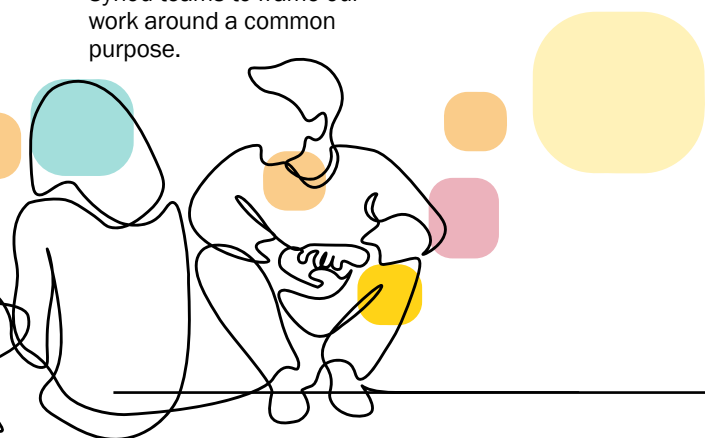


Anne Cosgrove and Milena Milojevic talk about their work

The teams really cared about each other and making a difference in people's lives through their work, and it was for this reason we felt such a strong alignment to the work being done at the Synod.

It became clear really early on that everyone had the best intentions, however there were still silos getting in the way of teams working optimally together.

We knew that if we could help the staff break down silos and communicate more transparently, relationships would flourish and collaboration would improve which would in turn enable the Synod to build greater trust across teams and with the people they support. It's not making decisions about people but making decisions with people.



# An interchurch dance

CHRISTINE AND WARREN SHEPPARD'S LONG INTERCHURCH MARRIAGE WAS CHARACTERISED BY GENEROSITY AND A DESIRE TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

Rev. Christine Sheppard is a recently retired Uniting Church minister. In 1987, she became the first woman from the Hunter region to be ordained.

Her late husband Warren passed away on 14 July after a "courageous, long battle with Parkinson's disease." He remained Catholic his entire life and worked as a pastoral assistant in his local parish.

Their long marriage, itself an unusual symbol of Christian unity, was characterised by Rev. Sheppard as an "interchurch dance." It would also be the catalyst for relationship-building in their local area between multiple denominations.

Rev. Dr Rod Pattenden is the minister at Adamstown Uniting Church. He knew the couple well.

He told *Insights* that the Sheppard's marriage was "an unusual ecumenical marriage and relationship" that served to "bring the churches together in the region."

"Christine and Warren were regulars at our evening service over about eight years," he said.

Rev. Dr Pattendon said during this time, Warren's faith was one that he displayed in, "A lived and compassionate way."

"These days it doesn't matter what brand you are, but...no doubt early on it was quite unusual," he said.

"They were great pathfinders."

"The two of them did a lot with humanising what the ecumenical relationships were in the Hunter Newcastle region."

The couple first met in 1974 while on holidays. They shared a memorable first conversation.

"We were both Primary School teachers," Rev. Sheppard recalled.

"Warren was in Newcastle and I was in Coonabarabran. We used to say we met "In a conversation about Gough Whitlam and the Virgin Mary-of course not necessarily together!"

Religion and politics would be constant themes in their conversations over the years.

They were married in a Catholic Church at Merewether Beach, by two Catholic Priests and a Methodist Minister.

"We were both very involved in our own congregations, and chose to be involved in each other's congregations," Rev. Sheppard recalled.

From 1984 to 1986, both completed their Bachelor of Theology Degrees, with Rev. Sheppard studying at United Theological College.

"Warren's degree [was] mainly at Catholic Theological Union, Hunters Hill, but also at UTC," she said.

"He became a Pastoral Associate in Hospital, Hospice, and Parish."

"Our beautiful daughter, Sarah, who was born in Coonabarabran, also lived an Interchurch life and was baptised in the local Catholic Church by our Priest and our Uniting Church Minister."

Rev. Sheppard said that this was all made possible by her long-held openness towards Catholicism. This, she recalled, dated back to 1965, when her dad joined the local St Vincent de Paul, post-Vatican II.

Despite being from different traditions, Rev. Sheppard said the only challenge in the journey was not being able to share Eucharist.

"I had come to faith in a Methodist Communion Service and remain passionate about Eucharist. I thank God for the Eucharistic hospitality of

WHAT CAN WE  
LEARN FROM  
EACH OTHER?



# Uniting Mission and Education

# Education Calendar

All dates subject to change.

## 2021 Events

### JANUARY

16-17	Pulse   Retreat Yourself	P
18-22	United Theological College (UTC) Intensive   Reading the Biblical Prophets for Today	U
19-22	UTC Intensive   Who is Christ for us today?	U
29 Jan - 1 Feb	Pulse   YouLEAD+   Retreat 1 of 2	P

### FEBRUARY

10	Learning Management System Core Training for Presbytery Oversight	M
11	Living Our Faith   Exploring the Old Testament   14-wk Program	L C
11 - 12	Living Our Values	L M C
11 - 12	Living Our Values   Train the Facilitator Sessions	M
13	Synod Meeting   Induction of Synod Members	SM
14	Mission Shaped Ministry   Day 1 of 12-session Program	
18	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse 2nd Generation   Leaders Mission Conversation	
18-19	Ethical Ministry Foundations	L M C
20	Living Our Faith   Leading Worship in the UCA	L C
24	Ethical Ministry Half-day Refresher   Topic 2021A	M
24	Ethical Ministry   Train the Facilitator Session	M
24	UTC   Opening Service, Inaugural Lecture, New Student Orientation	U
25 - 27	Gospel Yarning Conference	C
27	Pulse   Junior Leadership Initiative	P

### MARCH

1	United Theological College (UTC) / Charles Sturt University (CSU) Session One   Classes Commence	U
11	Life and Witness Consultation Training Day 1 of 3-session Course	
19	UTC   Research Colloquium	U
20-21	Pulse   Kids Camp Out   Sydney	P

### APRIL

<b>2 - 5</b>	<b>Easter</b>	
7	Synod Meeting   Opening & Session 1A	SM
10	Synod Meeting   Session 1B	SM
12 - 23	UTC/CSU Session One Mid-Session Break	U
22	May Macleod Lecture   UTC	U
22 - 23	Phase 3 of Ministry   Early Stage Retreat	M
22 - 23	Ministry of Pastor   Professional Development Days	M
23	UTC   Research Colloquium	U
27	Ethical Ministry Half-day Refresher   Topic 2021A	M

### MAY

3	Pulse   Emerging Gen Workers Day   1 of 2	P
18	Supervision   Professional Development Day	M
19	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Leaders   2nd Mission Conversation	
20 - 21	Living Our Values	L M C
21	UTC   Research Colloquium	U
23 - 26	Women in Ministry Retreat	M
28 - 29	Synod Selection Panel	

### JUNE

1 - 3	PreachFest! Preaching Festival	L M C
4	UTC/CSU Session One   Classes Conclude	U
9 & 12	Synod Meeting   Session 2A then Session 2B	SM
18	UTC   Research Colloquium	U
21 Jun - 9 Jul	UTC/CSU Session Break	U
21 - 25	UTC/Pulse Intensive   Theology of Children & Families	U P
30	Pulse   Digital Online Storytelling Training	P



### JULY

3	Living Our Faith   Leading Worship in the UCA	L C
4-6	Out of the Box Mission Conference	L C
9 - 12	Pulse   YouLEAD+   Retreat 2 of 2	P
10	Living Our Faith   Proclaiming Jesus Christ   7-wk Program	L C
12	UTC/CSU Session Two   Classes Commence	U
15 - 17	UCA 16th Triennial Assembly	
15	Havea Lecture   UTC	U
16	UTC   Research Colloquium	U

### AUGUST

4	Mentoring for Ministry Development   4-wk Program	M
4 & 7	Synod Meeting   Session 3A then Session 3B & Closing	SM
10	Ethical Ministry Half-day Refresher   Topic 2021B	M
14 - 15	Pulse   YouLead   Youth Leadership Weekend	P
19 - 20	Ethical Ministry Foundations	L M C
20	UTC   Research Colloquium	U
23 Aug - 3 Sep	UTC/CSU Session Two   Mid-Session Break	U
28	Living Our Values   Part 1 of 2	L M C
30 Aug - 2 Sept.	Phase 3 of Ministry Retreat	M

### SEPTEMBER

4	Living Our Values   Part 2 of 2	L M C
11	Synod Jam Day	M C
17	UTC   Research Colloquium	U
17- 18	Synod Selection Panel	
20 - 24	Pulse   High School Camp	P
27 - 1 Oct	Pulse   HSC 'Lock-in' Study Camp	P

### OCTOBER

8 - 9	Healthy Churches Expo	L C
14	Supervision   Professional Development Day	M
15	UTC   Research Colloquium	U
15	UTC/CSU Session Two   Classes Conclude	U
19 - 20	Understanding the Sacraments	L M F
23	Lay Preacher Refresher Day	L F
29	UTC   End of Year Service & Celebrations	U

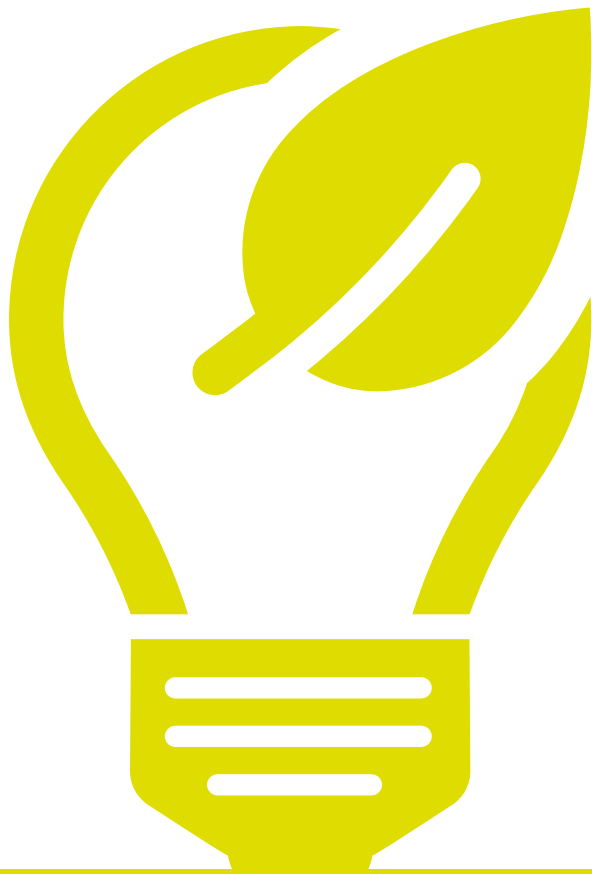
### NOVEMBER

1	Pulse   Emerging Gen Workers Day 2 of 2	P
2 - 4.	Introduction to Presiding at Weddings	L M F
10 - 12	Introduction to Presiding at Funerals	L M F
17	Ethical Ministry Half-day Refresher   Topic 2021B	M
19	UTC   Research Colloquium	U

### DECEMBER

3-15	TBC - Holy Land Study Tour	
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- SM** Synod Meeting 2021
- L** Ideal education or event opportunity for current or future lay preachers
- M** Ideal for further Ministerial professional development
- U** United Theological College (UTC) related content and study
- F** Formation pathways study or learning
- C** Learning opportunities for church and congregation community members
- P** Youth program or Pulse program events



# Conducting an Energy Audit

## *in your Congregation*

"EVERYTHING WE HAVE COMES FROM GOD. WHAT WE DO WITH IT IS AN ACT OF DISCIPLESHIP. WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO USE THE EARTH'S RESOURCES IN A WAY THAT DOES NOT JEOPARDISE THE INTEGRITY OF THE EARTH AND THE ENJOYMENT OF IT BY FUTURE GENERATIONS."

So begins the introduction to the *Energy Audit Handbook*, part of the Five Leaf Eco Awards.

Our Gymea-Miranda congregation used a bit of "down time" during the pandemic to have a look at energy use in our buildings and determine whether there were savings to be made both in financial and emissions terms. It was essential to have a tool to guide us through the process and we used this one as it was designed specifically for churches, but there are others available online and professional energy auditors are also available.







## HOW TO DO IT

The Handbook advises to “get a team together” prior to embarking on the audit. We are fortunate to have an electrical engineer in our congregation and from my non-technical perspective it was invaluable to have someone with background knowledge, skills and interest to help with the process. For those with minimal understanding of energy terminology, reading of meters and such-like, there is an introductory section to help you. You will need a list of all the activities on your premises which use power and also your energy bills (for us it was only electricity; for others gas also needs to be considered) going back two years. This helps you work out your baseline and seasonal energy use.

Heating/cooling and hot water are the main energy users in a typical Uniting Church property so the next step is a walk-through site inspection looking at passive building features such as the construction of the buildings and active features such as heaters, cooling systems, hot water systems, lighting, and appliances. This is where it gets a bit technical as you need to record not just the number of these items but the amount of energy which is used by each type when they are in use. (This is stated on the appliance itself.)

The next step is to calculate which appliances are used – and for how long – during a typical winter or summer week (e.g. heaters only on in winter; ceiling fans on in summer) taking into account hall hiring patterns and other variables. Adding it all up, you arrive at: total energy use in kWh per year, CO2 equivalent emissions per year, and financial cost per year. (Note: we used the second edition of the Handbook which quotes a rate of 15c per kWh. This is around half of today’s rate; you should use the rate you actually pay for power when calculating costs. This will be shown on your bill under “Charges”; for example, 28 c/kWh.)

## RESULTS

Our total energy usage was 4959 kWh per year, costing approximately \$1900 and producing 6.9 tonnes of CO2.

For us, the category with the highest usage (and therefore costs) was interior lights (27 percent), followed by heating (23 percent), urns and kettles (15 percent), security lights (14 percent), hot water (13 percent) and fridges (4 percent).

## PROPOSED CHANGES

Working out what changes to make is a balance between what is possible and what costs are associated with the changes. For example, to change our hot water system to off peak power would have saved on running costs but would have involved installing a new power circuit under a concrete slab between the meter box and the hot water system. This was prohibitive for our congregation.

We therefore recommended three measures to our Church Council:

- Replace all the fluorescent tubes in our buildings with more efficient LED tubes (using existing battens)
- Replace the fluorescent tubes in our security lights with LEDs and change the settings on the timer controlling these lights.
- Turn off the second fridge when it’s not in use.

We estimated that this would save 1118 kWh (>20 percent), 1.6 tonnes of CO2, and \$324 per annum. It was anticipated that the up-front costs of making these changes (cost of electrician, LED tubes etc) would be \$1100 and financial costs would be recouped within 3 years while emission reductions would start immediately after installation. However, we subsequently discovered the NSW Energy Savings Scheme (Ph 9290 8452) which actually provided the suitably registered electrician AND new LED battens and tubes for a total cost to our congregation of \$33.00!

## UNDERTAKING A COMPREHENSIVE ENERGY AUDIT GAVE US A LOT OF INFORMATION ABOUT USAGE AND COSTS WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN UNRECOGNISED

### SUMMARY

Our church building is 50+ years old and improvements have been made piecemeal over the years. Undertaking a comprehensive energy audit gave us a lot of information about usage and costs which had previously been unrecognised. Some improvements in energy savings can be made with minimal up-front costs and the NSW Energy Savings Scheme (open to both residential and businesses) meant our costs were virtually zero yet we reduced our usage by over 20 percent and reduced our emissions by 1.6 tonnes of CO2 per year.

Making changes following an audit can improve a congregation’s financial situation at the same time as improving our God-given stewardship of the planet. Another win-win!

### GILLIAN MINTO

UNITING CHURCH AND MEMBER OF THE CHURCH AND INDIVIDUAL EMISSION TASK GROUP (SYNOD CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGY)

# Drawing from the pool

Earlier this year – I gave a speech at an event that discussed the cladding of commercial buildings. Don't worry, this piece isn't about cladding, but something that was said during the Q&A session after my speech.

A chap in the audience prefaced his question with an interesting observation. He said that the Uniting Church's financial model was, in his view, a unique and outstanding one. As far as I know he's not a member of the Church, but he was commending the Synod of NSW & ACT for the way we pool all the financial assets of congregations and other Church entities, managing them as a central pool of funds for the benefit of the whole Church.

Of course, I agree with him. I think the Uniting Church in NSW & ACT has made an excellent decision to manage its cash and investments in-house. This means that, instead of the church's liquid funds generating profits for bank shareholders, they are earned by Uniting Financial Services (UFS). Congregations get the same interest as they would investing elsewhere, but the Synod gets to make use of the profits in doing

things like providing training and formation for ministers.

I've wondered at times when and how that decision was made. I knew it went back at least as far as the Synod meeting of March 2000, which passed the resolution that enacted the compulsory deposit policy, which remains in place today. However, since the organisation that's now known as UFS has been investing funds and providing income to the Church for 90 years, I figured it probably goes back further than that.

Recently I was given cause to investigate the history of this approach. What I've discovered is the story of some great servants of the Church over the past nine decades who saw the importance of the Church dealing wisely with its money to serve the common good.

The story starts in March 1930 with the formation of the Methodist Trust Association (MTA), for the purpose of holding monies in trust for the Church and earning interest income from secure investments. In the early years, the main beneficiaries of the income were the Church's Overseas and Home Missions Departments. For a long

time the assets were held to maturity, then reinvested.

That continued until 1965 when a dynamic fellow by the name of Roy Glover took over as the Synod's Property Secretary, which included oversight of the MTA. Roy was an active member of the Church – eventually becoming the Rev Roy Glover - but also an experienced businessman. His initiatives resulted in a more active approach to managing a wider range of investments in order to generate higher returns for the church than just earning interest. To oversee this operation, people were recruited to the Board who had appropriate investment and business skills.

This more active Board created new products into which church entities could deposit funds and also established the Methodist Investment Fund for individuals to place investments. The Fund earned the income to pay to its investors by itself investing with the MTA, so that there was a common pool of funds being managed. Although not at that time 'compulsory', the

Trust worked hard to make its investment products attractive to church and private investors, resulting in growth in the deposit base.

(Incidentally, the two-pronged structure essentially remains in place today at Uniting Financial Services. Church organisations invest directly with UFS, while the Synod's Property Trust issues debentures to private individuals, but then invests them via UFS.)

As to the investment activities of the MTA, these also became more focussed on doing more interesting things in order to generate better returns. The MTA began writing commercial mortgages in the mid-1960s and was actively involved in a number of church property developments through the 1970s. These included the current site of both Wesley Mission and the Synod offices at 222 Pitt Street in Sydney as well as many aged care facilities, taking advantage of the Whitlam Government's generous funding for this key social need that the Church had been involved with for many

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH DEALING WISELY WITH ITS MONEY TO SERVE THE COMMON GOOD



years already. Investment in shares also increased, with ethical considerations being important in deciding which companies to hold.

With the formation of the Uniting Church in 1977, the MTA's work carried on with a formal name change to the Uniting Church Trust Association (UCTA). Soon after, while Rev Glover remained as the Executive Director (ED) with oversight of UCTA, the day to day management was taken on by another stalwart of the Church, Mr Ed Walker, who eventually became ED in 1982.

Mr Walker oversaw a number of key initiatives, including extending the investment options from at-call accounts only, adding term investments to the product mix, as well as the realisation through sale of some of the property developments of the previous decade. These steps were successful and the many bodies across the Synod supported the UCTA by investing with it. Ultimately, that became widespread enough that doing so became the policy enacted in 2000.

Roy and Ed believed that looking after money properly was important. They believed that the pooling of Church

and private individuals' funds to deliver not only investment returns to them, but a surplus for the use of the wider church, was a positive and wise thing to do. They weren't the only two individuals to play key roles in developing this ministry by any means (and I mean no disrespect to the others by not mentioning them here), but their contributions caught my attention as the current occupant of the position they held. I'm humbled to be leading an organisation that's as strong as it is because of their great work.

So I'm thankful to my audience member for his observation about our financial model and I say 'three cheers' to all the men and women over the last 90 years who've made the church's money matter.

Please pray for me and the team at UFS as we seek to continue what they started.



**WARREN BIRD**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | UNITING  
FINANCIAL SERVICES



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# My Life At War

NEW PODCAST TO HIGHLIGHT FORGOTTEN VETERANS



**A new podcast series reveals new details about the conditions forgotten veterans experienced during World War Two.**

The veterans shared their stories with *My Life At War*, a new six-part podcast series. These valuable stories will disappear with these courageous veterans and so the last year has been spent collecting their stories for this six-part podcast.

To recognise and give voice to our unsung heroes, Uniting has created an inspiring podcast series featuring interviews from veterans, most of whom are currently living in Uniting residential aged care facilities such as Uniting Amala Gordon, Illowra, Garrison, Hawksbury Village, Wirreandra and Springwood.

Over six weeks, the *My Life at War* podcast series features veterans sharing their experiences from the time the war was declared, through conflicts abroad and on our shores and life after the guns fell silent.

Stories include the signals operator who first heard Japanese midget submarines off Sydney, the 15-year-old who falsified his age to get into the Air Force, Australia's first Indigenous

Air Force pilot and the female veterans who faced discrimination on ANZAC Day immediately after the war.

Tracey Burton is Uniting NSW.ACT's Executive Director.

"In a year when our elders are enduring a pandemic, it's more important than ever to remember how incredibly valuable they are to our community," she said.

The series also highlights the role women played in the war.

David Wilson is a military historian.

"As the war progressed, more and more women stepped up to take the places of men serving overseas. They served in all branches of the military, in civilian organisations, industry and agriculture."

"Women kept the nation ticking over during these years."

The podcast follows the veterans' experiences from the time that the war was declared in 1939 to the end of the war. 🎧

**JONATHAN FOYE**

**IT'S MORE  
IMPORTANT  
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INCREDIBLY  
VALUABLE OUR  
ELDERS ARE TO  
OUR COMMUNITY**



# Uniting Chaplains continue ministries during uncertain times

On 9 September, three Uniting Chaplains, Lita Mendigorin, Mike Ansky, and Arun Naicker, were inducted via a service held on Zoom. *Insights* spoke to them about this unusual ceremony method and their ministries.

**P**arramatta-Nepean Presbytery's Rev. Dr Rob McFarlane presided. He told *Insights* that COVID-19 had meant the church now needs, "to invent everything as we go along."

"This commissioning was the first time that we have attempted a similar service entirely in a virtual space, with none of the participants gathered in a physical space," he said.

"For some that would have felt alienating; for others this allowed them to participate when they would not have been able to otherwise."

The three Uniting pastors were Lita Mendigorin, Mike Ansky, and Arun Naicker. These pastors work in ministries to hospitals and aged care, offering a wide range of pastoral care services to those who need them the most.

"Arun, Mike and Lita are all present in communities and for individuals in specific situations of need, being Christ's presence, representing the whole church," Rev. McFarlane said.

"Their work is inter-disciplinary with other staff, as well as ecumenical and increasingly interfaith. This is a highly challenging ministry; pray for these three servants and for all chaplains."

Lita Mendigorin is a Hospital Chaplain at Westmead Hospital, working with a team of permanent Chaplains and supported by volunteer

chaplains of different faiths in providing emotional and spiritual support to patients, their families, and hospital staff. Chaplains can be called outside office hours (week nights and weekends) to ensure patients needing comfort and support any time of day can be ministered to."

"To me, it was a good opportunity to be commissioned as Pastor without waiting for COVID restrictions to be lifted which could take some time," Pastor Mendigorin said.

"As a hospital chaplain, patients often call me 'Pastor' and it was quite uncomfortable hearing it when I was not commissioned yet, so the commissioning was very important to me. Moreover, it is uplifting to my heart that the church recognises my call and support me in this ministry."

"It is such a gracious privilege to walk into every bed bringing the light of Christ, listening to every story, being with those who need to be heard, comforting the distressed and being a healing and non-anxious presence to them," she said.

"It is also an awesome privilege to be with those who are nearing death to comfort the family and to give the final blessing to the dying patient."

COVID, Pastor Medigorin said, had presented difficulties for families and friends to visit loved ones.



Mike Ansky is a Mental Health Chaplain to the Western Sydney Health District. Among other responsibilities, this role involves visiting the locked mental health wards in Cumberland, Westmead, and Blacktown hospitals.

"I run worship services, pastoral groups and meet with individual patients to support them in their spiritual needs," he said.

"We work as part of a team of chaplains, Anglican, Catholic and of course Uniting. Volunteer chaplains of other faiths also work with us which provides an enriching experience for us and of course for the patients, staff and carers who have very diverse spiritual needs in this region of Sydney."

The Zoom service, he said, was not what he had expected his induction might be like.

"What surprised me was the number of people present over Zoom and how interaction was still possible before and especially after

the induction service," he said.

"I actually took the time to see everyone present and I will really treasure this as a special moment. It still felt like the people there were cheering us on."

Arun Naicker works as a Chaplain for Hawkesbury Village Richmond, with daily work involving providing spiritual care and support to residents. This includes performing Chapel Services and offering a presence and listening ear to those who are hurting and grieving.

"Having my induction service through Zoom was a unique experience, however I did not feel it was any less special as my colleagues, friends and network partners had the opportunity to witness my commissioning," Pastor Naicker said.

"Afterwards, I received many acknowledgements and congratulatory messages from those who attended." 📌

**JONATHAN FOYE**

I WILL REALLY TREASURE THIS AS A SPECIAL MOMENT

BELIEF MATTERS

Let us  
**pray**

**PRAYER IN A  
PANDEMIC**



**Questionnaires from both Australia and the US seem to indicate that people are praying more than they were before COVID-19. With some additional time around the house, anxieties about what looks to be a long-term situation outside most people's control, and access to online church resources, prayer is something more people are taking up, whether they classify themselves as people of faith or not.**

**W**ith this in mind, it's perhaps worth exploring: what is prayer? With more people apparently expressing their thoughts and trying to communicate with God, what changes, if any, will we see in people's lives? And what do people's prayer lives look like, exactly?

To explore some of the questions surrounding the theology and practice of prayer, *Insights* spoke to a number of ministry agents and theologians, asking them for their views on what prayer is, and how they go about it.

Rev. Jon Humphries is the chaplain at Ravenswood School for Girls and, in what he calls a tongue in cheek way, a self-titled "prayerwright", a term he coined to mean someone who writes lots of prayers. Rev. Humphries told *Insights* that the concept of prayer is one that "Needs to be challenged a little."

"We are so familiar with it, but we have domesticated something that should be more raw," Rev. Humphries said.

"I was once asked to do a seminar on prayer and I went back to the prayers of Jesus, particularly in Gethsemane, and the Psalms, and found something about prayer in the honest expression of thought and feelings which challenged me to rethink how I prayed."

#### **PRAYER: THE COMMUNICATION PATHWAY**

"The heart of any relationship is communication, and if faith is founded on our relationship with God, then prayer is the communication pathway which deepens that relationship. However, this means that we might need to approach prayer differently at times to what we have inherited from our religious traditions, as valuable as what they might be. Prayer, needs to be organic, and is as much, if not more about tuning into God, than speaking to God. The other important aspect of prayer, which we learn from the Psalms, is its power to allow us to be real with God, to vent our feelings, be they joyous or otherwise, and be led into transformation. Transformation is the key aspect of prayer. Our prayers should tune us into God, and if we become tuned to God and God's will, especially God whom we know as Christ and the Spirit, then our prayer should have an edge which convicts us of our flaws and failings, but holds us in God's grace and then calls us into love and the ministry of service of others. So, even praying for others should be important, not only for them, but for us being moved to get up off our knees at least in some way, to join God in the work of change in the world."

Rev. Liam Miller is the Sydney Central Coast Presbytery's New Growth Minister. He said prayer is important because, while "an activity we undertake, it is as much, if not more so, something God does in us."

"When teaching the disciples to pray, Jesus invites them to pray to "our Father"- our meaning his and our; so we are invited to pray within the relationship of the Son and the Father, within the life of the Triune God," Rev. Miller said.

"Elsewhere, Paul reminds the church in Rome that when we do not know how to pray, the Spirit intercedes with sighs to deep for words - God speaks to God (or deep calls to deep - to use Sarah Coakley's expression) within us - once again we find that our prayer occurs within the relationship of the Triune God. Prayer then, is important in that it draws us into an increasing

awareness that our lives are lived within the life of the Triune God."

Rev. Karen Mitchell Lambert is the Pulse Leader for NSW and ACT Synod. She told *Insights* that she thought prayer could be defined as, "Our connection and conversation with God."

"It is about me sharing my life with God but is also about me allowing myself to be shaped and moulded by God as well," she said.

"Prayer is not about moving God, or changing things but being open to God moving us. We can ask God anything, be honest and real in any situation, God is gracious and loving in this. It is like having an amazing friend who accepts me exactly as I am whether it is a good day or a bad day offers guidance wisdom and deep calm that I cannot find any other way."

Rev. Dr Christine Gapes is the Uniting Church Chaplain at Western Sydney University.

"Prayer is not about demanding that God changes situations but that we might learn to change ourselves so we might act with more justice and compassion," Rev. Dr Gapes said.

"God is always wanting the best for us."

"Alan Walker, the creator of Lifeline, once spoke of flash or three second prayers. When he was in a difficult situation or was listening to someone who was struggling with life, Alan would send a quick prayer to God for strength. I try to remember that prayer is about reconnecting with God, to remember you are not alone and all the world's problems don't have to be solved by you."

#### **SEEKING COMMUNION WITH GOD**

Each of the ministers *Insights* spoke to had a different approach to their own prayer lives.

Rev. Dr Gapes told *Insights* that prayer is something that has taken a long time to learn, having never been taught. Instead, she recalls learning from observing how others prayed.

"As a teenager I never thought I could pray "properly" because I couldn't use the language I heard in church with "thees" and "thous," and long winded sentences addressing God," she said.

"John Mallison teaching conversational prayer helped me see there were many different ways of praying."

Rev. Humphries has developed an online Facebook ministry that has included sharing his prayers.

"So, I do have a pattern of prayer, which is that I pray usually once a day, but that is rarely at the same time, nor is it often in the same way. My prayer life also evolves from my role as school chaplain, where I am often asked to write prayer, or need to write prayer for services."

"This has shaped the way I that pray. So, rather than the traditional notion of quiet time or a time which is dedicated to devotional prayer and intercession for myself and others, I try to allow God as Spirit, or situations of life, to lead me into prayer. Thus I try to be prayerfully engaged in life each day and try to take the prayerful moments which I feel inspired to. It might be some lyrics from a song which I am listening to, or a situation that confronts me on the news, or someone or something in my ministry, but these I then try to pray about. I also often wake up with the bones of a prayer calling to me in my thoughts, and

**IT IS ABOUT  
ME SHARING  
MY LIFE WITH  
GOD BUT  
ALSO ABOUT  
ME ALLOWING  
MYSELF TO BE  
SHAPED AND  
MOULDED BY  
GOD**

then I sit down and try to pray it into something that makes sense. When I listen to sermons, I try to pray them, just as I often try to turn what I read in Scripture into prayer. So, whilst my pattern of prayer can seem random, there tends to be a rhythm of discipline and inspiration, which results in me being engaged in prayer each day.”

“Whilst I am more organic and creative in the way I approach prayer, for others a more ritualised or structured habit can work well. The key thing is that we learn more about the types of prayer, the different forms of prayer, the different ways of praying, and then build into our spiritual prayer life patterns and habits which lead us into prayer, as well as ways of stretching us beyond our comfort zones and which help us grow because of the challenge. Prayer also needs to be theological.”

“If theology is ‘faith seeking understanding’ (St Anselm) or words and thinking about God, then our prayer which is words to God, needs to be an expression of our theology, informed by our doctrine, but also something that opens us to the revelation of God. Prayer not only changes us and changes the world, but it should also change our understanding of God over time, maybe not in radical ways, but in the sense that we grow in knowledge, understanding and faith.”

Rev. Karen Mitchell Lambert said that she had a structured and repeated pattern of prayer.

“Every morning when I wake up I open the blind and take time to give thanks to God, I be really intentional about trying to be grateful for all parts of life and my life. I have found it has helped start my day in a really good way. I still have bad days but this helps my vision tune in to what is good.”

“I see prayer a bit like Paul, without ceasing, so will pray, in and around meetings, travelling in the car, while cooking, while having coffee with a friend.. It is a constant conversation between God and I.

“Finally I pray for other people when I make things for them.. I think the prayer of making is rarely recognised. When I am making something for someone it is usually for a reason, during that time I will be thinking of them and their situation and praying for them.. Every stitch is made in prayer with love.”

A busy father of two, Rev. Miller said that he is “terrible when it comes to a pattern of prayer.”

“I’ve tried and failed many a time,” Rev. Miller admitted.

“It’s particularly tough with a three-year-old and three-month-old in the house, so I tend to just shoot up quick prayers when something comes across my mind, line of vision, or Twitter timeline.”

Despite this, he said it was important to not feel guilty about prayer.

“There’s nothing to be gained in guilting yourself over your prayer life (or lack thereof),” Rev. Miller added.

“God loves you and loves you and loves you - let that be the motivator to seek communion with God.”

### EFFECTS OF PRAYER

So, with more people apparently praying than before, will this change anything? Each minister suggested to *Insights* that more people praying could potentially have profound implications, as people re-oriented themselves.

“Prayer has an effect,” Rev. Humphries said.

“The primary effect, as I have suggested is transformation of us. Whether it is like in the lamenting Psalms, our venting of our pain or frustration or doubt, leads us into faith or reminds us of the need for faith, that is important. Praying for miracles has some power, but they are, in my experience, few and far between. However, prayer not only establishes a connection with God, but connects us with those whom we pray for. More connectedness is a good thing and can lead to a change in the better, especially if more people become tuned into the will of God and the way of Christ.

“I have also read some research which suggest that people who are in hospital who are prayed for have better outcomes, and this is regardless of whether or not they know that they are being prayed for. This takes the effect of prayer beyond a placebo effect. I am not big on the approach to prayer which seems to imply that if we pray enough then we change God’s mind and then God changes the world, but I am open enough in faith to acknowledge that prayer has a power which goes beyond our understanding because it rests in God.”

Rev. Mitchell Lambert said that she could see more people praying having an effect on the way that people perceive themselves and their world.

“I was having a really bad mad day the other day,” she recalled.

“I was so frustrated and angry and I was ranting at God and in a moment it was like God said, “OK that is the reality so what are you going to do about it now?” In that moment the steam was taken out of it and I was flipped in my thinking.”

“As a culture we have become so individualised and self-centred. We think we can control it all and make everything go our way. That is not our reality.”

### THERE IS MORE TO THIS LIFE

“I hope and I think it has flipped a lot of people’s heads and made them realise that maybe there is more to this life and that we are not in control, so who do we want to be now? This is a beautiful thing because this brings an openness to the possibility of the movement of the Spirit and Spirit is always about love, this is what changes the world.

“For me this can change how we see each other, both the people we know and the stranger and the way we see the planet. For me this is where we will really see those prayers make a difference.”

“Obviously we have to be careful in thinking that more people praying means more of God’s work will be done - our prayers don’t make God more powerful,” Rev. Miller said.

“But more people praying - and praying more - during this time does mean more people are seeking to attune and open themselves to the love of the Triune God for them and for their neighbours - and that has the potential to have a powerful effect.”

Rev. Dr Gapes said that there was another opportunity in the disaster of COVID-19.

“In some ways I think the disaster of COVID is an opportunity for us to see 2020 as a Sabbath year where we aren’t as productive as we expected and we rely on what we have already planted in our lives,” she said.

“Of course this is easier for those who have a regular income but the Sabbath was also about leaving enough for the poor to glean from the harvest leftovers. In a Sabbath year we are reminded that all is God’s and we are blessed by what is given us to tend.” 🌱

JONATHAN FOYE



## LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

# DECEMBER

## Advent is here

### 29 NOVEMBER

MARK 13:24-37

*Keep awake!*

The last two words of this passage—the last two recorded words spoken by Jesus in this long speech, given to his disciples outside the Temple in Jerusalem—these two words set the theme for the four weeks of Advent, that start today. Advent literally means “towards the coming”. It is what pregnant women do; they look “towards the coming” of the expected child. It is what young children do, as dinner time approaches; they look “towards the coming” of their working parents, returning home to share in the evening meal and associated rituals. It is what we are called to do during these next four weeks; to look “towards the coming” of Jesus, the one whose birth we celebrate on Christmas Day. And as we look “towards the coming”, we are instructed to “keep awake” (13:37, and see also 13:35), to “keep alert” (13:33), “be alert” (13:23), and “beware” (13:9 and 13:5). Get the message??

### 6 DECEMBER

MARK 1:1-8

*Prepare the way  
(get serious!)*

The earliest Gospel that we have does not begin at the start of the story. It tells nothing of the birth of Jesus. Instead, it plunges into the story when Jesus is an adult. It links Jesus with a strange character, living in the desert, wearing strange clothing, eating strange foods, and speaking striking words. The desert dweller points beyond himself, to the one who is still to come: “he will baptise you”. And baptism means, literally, dunking; being plunged, fully-clothed, deep down into the water. Baptism was a serious business. Getting ready for such an experience took

concentration, focus, and clear intention. Who would want to experience, even just for a few seconds, the feeling of drowning? Baptism requires serious preparation. So, too, in this season of Advent—as we look with anticipation to the celebration of the birth of Jesus, we need to prepare, seriously, with intention. Let’s get serious!



### 13 DECEMBER

JOHN 1:6-8,19-28

*He is coming!*

The “book of signs”, the fourth Gospel in our Bible, begins with a poem, painting wonderful word pictures about the Word. But the poem is interrupted by a somewhat prosaic account of a man named John. We met John last week, a wild wilderness figure, in Mark’s Gospel, the earliest Gospel we have. This week, in John’s Gospel, the last to be written of the four that we have, John has been “tidied up”. The first thing said about him is not what weird things he ate, nor what strange things he wore; no, John the evangelist says that this John was simply “a man sent from God”. He was a messenger, sent to deliver a message; “a witness to testify to the light”. Last week, in Mark, John bore testimony to Jesus; so, too, also this week,

in John. Jesus is the light. Jesus is the Messiah, the one chosen by God. That’s who we look to, as we prepare for his coming.

### 20 DECEMBER

LUKE 1:26-38

*Something out of the ordinary*

The “orderly account of the things coming to fulfilment” (which we know as the Gospel

of Luke) tells us much more about the beginnings of Jesus (his conception, birth, and early days) than the other Gospels. This passage recounts the moment when Mary learns that she will bear a child. She is perplexed,

amazed; she is a virgin. “How can this be?” A messenger from God informs her, though, that impossibilities are now becoming realities. Indeed, her aged, barren cousin is now pregnant, and Mary will find herself bearing a child—but no ordinary a child; a child “who will be holy, who will be called Son of God”. Now that is really out of the ordinary!

### 25 DECEMBER

LUKE 2

*Shepherds and angels celebrate*

Every year, on Christmas Day, we hear year this familiar and beloved story from the “orderly account” of Luke’s Gospel. It contains an interesting collection of characters: a man of royal descent, accompanying a young woman pregnant but not married; a group of shepherds (marginalised characters at the best of times in ancient society) who

see a vision in the sky; and a crowd of messengers from God, who suddenly appear and burst into song! The strangeness of the story is diluted by the repetition of this biblical passage every year. It is strange because it tells of God’s eruption into the everyday lives of ordinary people. It is strange because this eruption by God provokes and challenges. May that be the focus of our expectation and hope this Christmas: hope that God will burst anew into our lives in an unexpected and challenging way!

### 27 DECEMBER

LUKE 2:22-40

*Mother and baby: the challenges of faith*

Again this week, we hear stories found only in the “orderly account” we call Luke’s Gospel. Again, there is an interesting cast of characters. As well as the baby (given the name Jesus in 2:21) and his parents, there are the Temple priests who receive the family’s sacrifice, the devout man Simeon, and the elderly prophet Anna. Both Simeon and Anna are inspired by the Spirit to declare how significant this newborn child would be. Anna relates him to “the redemption of Jerusalem” (2:38); that points to his significance as Saviour. Simeon also relates him to salvation (2:30), but indicates that the pathway ahead will be divisive. “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel” (2:34). That predicts a hard path for Jesus—and also for his mother, to whom Simeon declares, “a sword shall pierce your own soul too” (2:35). The destiny of this mother and child is not that of a gentle love story, but of a rugged, challenging route. Faith confronts and challenges. 🕯

## LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

# JANUARY

## We begin the new year



**FAITH IS A  
CALL TO  
TRUST IN GOD.  
HOW IS YOUR  
FAITH BEING  
CHALLENGED?**

### 3 JANUARY

JOHN 1:10-18

#### *Rejection, Grace, and Revelation*

We return to “the book of signs” (the Gospel of John) this week. Three clear notes are sounded in this passage, signalling three important themes of this Gospel. Revelation is the function that Jesus has (1:18); he makes known the very being of God. Grace is the character of Jesus (1:16); he lives in a manner that invites and encourages. Rejection, however, is the fate in store for Jesus (1:11). Not universal rejection, for some did accept him (1:12); but there would be significant rejection, to the extent that he would be cursed and stoned by his own people, then tried and put to death by Roman authorities. This would be no easy pathway for the chosen

one. Let’s remember that after the Christmas story comes the narrative of Jesus’s life, which shows that even he faced huge obstacles and challenges.

### 10 JANUARY

GENESIS 1:1-5

#### *Light and dark*

For today and the next four Sundays we explore passages set in the lectionary from the Hebrew Scriptures. These passages illuminate the message of the Gospel which we hear each week from the New Testament. In the season of Epiphany, we celebrate Christ as the light that comes into the world, illuminating and enlightening. This story tells of the creation of light, the first act of creation, standing at the head of the story. Light is important for our daily life. Light is health-giving and energising. Light also comes into being to

provide differentiation from darkness. Light governs the day, darkness governs the night. The regular pattern of day and night provides us with the pattern of waking and working, resting and sleeping. A full 24 hours in the light would soon become wearying. A full 24 hours in darkness would likely become depressing. Darkness plays a role for us in regular life. We need it. We should value it, alongside light.

### 17 JANUARY

1 SAMUEL 3:1-10  
AND JOHN 1:43-51

We read the story of Samuel and Eli alongside the account of Philip, who invites Nathaniel to “come and see” (John 1:43-51). Both are stories of call—a confrontation, an request, an invitation to take up a challenge. One call is mediated, the other is direct. The message to Nathaniel is mediated through Philip, a man who has already responded to a direct call from Jesus. The message to Samuel comes directly from God, but Samuel mistakenly believes that it is old Eli, speaking to him in the night. Nathaniel makes a clear confession about the significance of Jesus, as Son of God (John 1:49). Samuel eventually responds to the call from God, but it took Eli to interpret it for him (1 Sam 3:8-9). Who mediates or interprets God’s call to you?

### 24 JANUARY

JONAH 3:1-10  
AND MARK 1:14-20

Today, another pair of call stories. We read the story of Jonah, called to proclaim God’s message to the city of Nineveh, alongside the story of Andrew and Simon Peter, John and James, called to become followers

of Jesus. Jonah is effective in his proclamation to Nineveh, which in turn provokes God to change his mind about the calamity that he had promised for them. That is power!! But this was the second call that Jonah had received (3:1); the first had ended in quite a catastrophe (Jonah was thrown overboard and swallowed whole, 1:15-17). Andrew and Peter, John and James undergo a period of learning-on-the-road with Jesus, before they start to proclaim with power. Theirs was a slowly-evolving call, requiring diligent attention and persistence. How is your call being worked out in your life?

### 31 JANUARY

DEUT 18:15-20  
AND MARK 1:21-28

Once we are called by God—then what?? We read today a story about the promise God made to Israel, to “raise up a prophet”, alongside the story of the man possessed in the synagogue in Capernaum, who was exorcised by Jesus. Both stories focus on the distinctive nature of faith in the particular contexts of these stories. The prophet of Israel stands over against “other gods” (Isa 40:20). Jesus of Nazareth is recognised as one who speaks “a new teaching—with authority” (Mark 1:27). Both stories indicate that being faithful to the call will place us in challenging, daunting, perhaps even threatening situations. Faith is a call to trust in God as we enter into those situations. How is your call being challenged? How are you responding? 🙏

## LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

# FEBRUARY

# Following Jesus' example

## 7 FEBRUARY

ISAIAH 40:21-31  
AND MARK 1:29-39

We read today an inspiring story from a prophet of Israel, speaking to the people as they prepare to step into the wilderness, journeying to the promised land. We read this alongside stories about the early period of the ministry of Jesus. Both passages are set at the start of a significant period of time; both stories reveal important things about the nature of God, and the ways that God engages with human beings in their lives. God is portrayed as powerful and sovereign in Isaiah 40; that was comforting and reassuring for the journeying Israelites. God comes with power, also, in Jesus; yet in his humanity, Jesus needs time to replenish and rejuvenate (Mark 1:35). His example tells us that we need to hold in balance the desire to do great things, with the need to care for ourselves and remain connected with God.

## 14 FEBRUARY

MARK 9  
*Jesus with Moses and Elijah*  
(WITH 1 KINGS 2:1-12)

Every year at this point of the year, we read the story of Jesus on the mountain, when “his clothes became dazzling white”, and—quite amazingly—Moses and Elijah appear alongside him. This is a story which pierces the constraints of history, which gathers three greats of the faith together. Alongside this story, on each of the three years in the lectionary cycle, we read a companion story from Hebrew Scripture. This year, we read a story about Elijah—the moment when he passes the mantle of his prophetic leadership to Elijah, and “ascended in a whirlwind into heaven”. This story also breaks open the constraints



**WE PLACE OUR TRUST IN GOD  
GOD EQUIPS AND ENABLES US TO LIVE OUT OUR FAITH IN DAILY LIFE**

of how we normally see life, as the whirlwind whisks Elijah into the heavens. Both stories invite us to look carefully for such moments when the heavenly realm breaks into the earthly; when the barrier between heaven and earth is opened. In Celtic Christian spirituality, such moments are called “thin places”—opportunities to review the regularity of our lives, to grasp a vision of the deeper things of faith.

## 21 FEBRUARY

GENESIS 9:8-17,  
MARK 1:9-15

This week we read and hear the beginning of the story that Mark tells, about the beginnings of the public activity of Jesus. Jesus is baptised, immersed into the water, then he emerges changed. Jesus is tested, challenged about his call. Both elements shape Jesus for what lies ahead. They signal that Jesus was dramatically commissioned by God, then

rigorously equipped for the task he was then to undertake amongst his people. We read this story alongside the account from Hebrew Scripture of God making a commitment to the whole of the earth—an agreement with all humans and all living creatures. Both stories represent the significance of the covenant with God in our faith journey. We place our trust in God; God equips and enables us to live out our faith in daily life.

## 28 FEBRUARY

GENESIS 17:1-17  
MARK 8:31-38

Crisis and Challenge. Cross words and Crucifixion. The Gospel passage is filled with elements that disturb, disrupt, and destabilise. Peter, acting and speaking on behalf of the disciples (and perhaps on behalf of us as well?) is affronted by talk of suffering, rejection, and death—to say nothing of resurrection! His rebuke of Jesus is quite

understandable; after all, he was the one chosen by God to bring renewal to Israel. But Jesus appears quite clear about this: the covenant that he entered into with God (as we read last week) involves suffering, and leads to death. The passage is mirror-reverse of the covenant story from Genesis. Abram and Sarah, even though way past childbearing age, will bring into being a whole new entity, living in covenant with God—descendants who will form the people of Israel. And yet, the Gospel also directly parallels the Genesis story; beyond the immediate, there lies new possibilities—a multitude of descendants for Sarai and Abram, resurrection for Jesus. So the texts are also about Promise and Possibilities; the pathway to a new future. 🕊

**REV. DR JOHN SQUIRES**  
PRESBYTERY MINISTER  
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AND BUILD HOPE

## NEWS FROM UNITING CHURCH ADULT FELLOWSHIP (UCAF)

# Fellowship news

### ROLE CHANGES

The NSW/ACT UCAF Synod Committee held their Annual General Meeting in October to enable Committee to be appointed to the new National UCAF Committee before the 30 November deadline. Our two Representatives from this Committee are Margaret Gregory and Eldrene March.

At that meeting the Committee accepted with regret a resignation from a Life member Lyn Drabsch who has held many roles including Chairperson, secretary, and Corresponding member. We always valued Lyn's dedication and we will miss her.

Rev. Noreen Towers remains Chairperson for 2021, Laraine Jones is Secretary and Margaret Gregory and Judy Hicks Assistants. Ron Gregory is the new Treasurer with Geoff Hicks as Assistant Geoff will also look after Electronic Communications (Zoom and Facebook) and "Connexions".

Corresponding Members are the two appointed to the National Committee. Judy Hicks will continue as Sales Convenor and *Insights* contributor. Proxies remain unchanged and most Presbyteries have notified us of their Contact Person details. These details will be available with the 2021 Yearbook available February.

### APPRECIATION CERTIFICATES

Appreciation Certificates continue to be presented to 80, 90 and 100-year-old members and are a special memento for service given over many years.

Chairperson Noreen and Carole Burnard from Illawarra Presbytery were invited to such a presentation at Keiraview Uniting Church in November and presented Certificates to five 90 year olds and 35 to those over 80. They shared information about the Synod Committee and how it operates.

The Stamp Committee was expecting to be back sorting in November. As at 1 October, \$18,000 had been raised this year an amazing effort with all the restrictions placed. Please continue to save your stamps.



### BURSARY AWARDED

A National UCAF Synod Committee Joan Stott Bursary has been awarded for 2021. The recipient is Reuben Edmonds from Star Street Uniting Church in Carlisle, Western Australia who is studying in Melbourne.

This is a great opportunity for young people (Under 35 years of age) you know who are undertaking Theological or Youth Training within the ethos of the Uniting Church. Applications will be available early in 2021 for the year 2022.

### NATIONAL UCAF CELEBRATION DATES

The National UCAF Celebration and Consultation is to go ahead in Adelaide in 2021 from 28 April to 2 May and will be by Zoom or in person.

### SYNOD COMMITTEE MEETINGS

In 2021 The NSW/ACT Synod Committee will endeavour to meet at least three times by Zoom. It is unsure whether the Annual Dedication of the Committee in February can be held in the Pitt Street rooms.

Moderator Rev. Simon Hansford has agreed to be the special Guest Speaker for the occasion. 🙏



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

# Summer reading GUIDE



Christmas and New Year is a time to slow down, enjoy a hard-earned break and enjoy a great read. Whether that's a physical book, an audiobook, or a Kindle or device, there's something great about immersing yourself in a gripping, heartwarming or just plain absorbing story. Each year, we try to compile a diverse range of books for a variety of tastes. So here are some great suggestions and special mentions.

## WONDER RJ PALACIO



If you are looking for a light and inspiring reading, this is your book, and if you haven't seen the movie, please read it before you see it, because as in many occasions, the book exceeds the film, even though it is a great production with a memorable cast.

*Wonder* is a novel by Raquel Jaramillo, under the pen name of R. J. Palacio, published in February 2012; her son's breaking into tears after noticing a girl

with a severe facial difference inspired R.J. Palacio to write this novel.

*Wonder* tells the story of August Pullman, a 10-year-old kid born with several genetic abnormalities, a facial disfiguration and who has gone through 27 surgeries. He dreams of being seen as "ordinary", just like he feels and he gets the chance to achieve this dream when his mum decided to send him to school after she homeschooled him all his life.

The story follows Auggie's first year at school in New York, his challenges, disappointments and achievements.

The story is narrated from the perspective of six different characters, showing his best asset: a warm and strong family that not many "ordinary" kids have.

*Wonder* reminds us, readers to be nicer to people and to look beyond what our eyes see. Its anti-bullying, pro-acceptance message will resonate with teenagers and adults as well. 📖

ANGELA CADENA

## PURE INVENTION MATT ALT



For the West, Japan has long been a place that has inspired. From the days when it was, somewhat patronisingly referred to as a land of "pure imagination" to today's Weeb subculture, the Land of the Rising Sun has featured prominently in the western imagination.

In *Pure invention*, American writer and Japanese resident Matt Alt takes a look at the ways that Japan has shaped so much of global pop culture, through the lens of the inventions, gadgets, characters, and games that Japanese creators have brought forward.

In this book, part of what Alt does is a celebration of the mythology surrounding the likes of Mario, Space Invaders, Hello Kitty, and the Walkman. Part of his work is also a demythologising, stripping back some of the crafted stories to investigate how some ideas really came about (the karaoke machine, for example, is claimed by multiple inventors, all of whom worked independently on machines that did somewhat different things).

Economics played a part for many of these inventions, and Alt looks at their wider economic and social implications. From the end of world war two and through Japan's boom time, to the bursting of the economic bubble and the 'lost generation' living at home in an economic downturn but still playing and creating, all of it is explored in some detail.

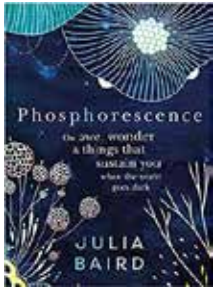
Alt has written for a number of magazines and websites such as Kotaku, and his experience at taking heady concepts and making them accessible is on display here, making *Pure invention* a breeze to read. 📖

JONATHAN FOYE

# Summer reading Guide (cont.)

## PHOSPHORESCENCE

JULIA BAIRD



**Julia Baird has written many an article on gender and politics, and even a few on gender politics. Sometime host of ABC TV's The Drum and author of two books, this book was an interesting journey inward. With *Phosphorescence* it feels like Baird is sitting you down and having a conversation about life, the universe and everything.**

The subtitle of this book is “on awe, wonder and things that sustain you when the world goes dark”. Baird’s book was released in May this year, when we were in peak lockdown due to the pandemic. Nothing seemed more apt than this book.

Part memoir, part scientific exploration and part personal development, this book (and its cover) are a wonder, and it is so much more than the sum of its parts. The book takes as its jumping off point, the idea that the very human experience of awe and wonder is good for you – good for your health, general wellbeing, ethics, and your spirit. It’s an inspiring investigation into how we might find and nurture internal happiness - the ‘light within’ that Baird calls our ‘phosphorescence’.

Amongst the scientific explorations of phosphorescence (yes there is the odd science lesson) there is a mixture of beautiful observations. From the beauty of a sunrise (“In Australia, the dawn is an arsonist who pours petrol along the horizon, throws a match on it and watches it burn”) to medical trauma (“those millions of us with cracked hearts, battered bodies, blackened brains”).

The book is Baird’s own musings and renewed sense of wonder and awe given her own traumatic medical ordeal and subsequent surgeries to have a cancerous tumour removed.

And the book is written from this take each day for its wondrous vantage point. There’s nothing like your own mortality to bring perspective on what counts. There is wisdom to pass on with a couple of chapters addresses to her two children. And it is interesting to note that the book was written between surgeries – some chapters feel clinical in their observation, while others are beautifully lyrical and yet others are wisdom filled.

Phosphorescence is a process in which energy is absorbed by something (an earth worm, a night light, a glow stick) and then released slowly in the form of a light. In many ways the book is asking how are we releasing this light which we each happily absorb back into the world. How are we making sense of life? Where do we find a place for contentment when the whole world seems so fragile?

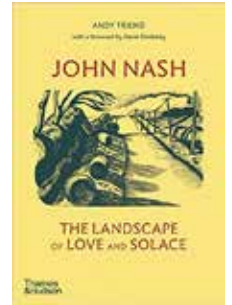
A luminous book. 🌟

**ADRIAN DRAYTON**

## JOHN NASH: THE LANDSCAPE OF LOVE AND SOLACE

ANDY FRIEND

**During summer I often want to get immersed in a big biography, and my thoughts often turn to art as well – maybe it’s something to do with the summer light. *John Nash: The Landscape of Love and Solace* (Andy Friend, Thames and Hudson) is the first proper biography of the English mid-century landscape painter, and has the luxurious Thames and Hudson style – thick, creamy paper and colour reproductions sprinkled liberally throughout.**



I was first alerted to John Nash through Ronald Blythe, who until recently wrote a weekly column on church, books, garden and countryside for the UK’s Church Times, and who inherited John and his wife Christine’s old farmhouse in East Anglia, where Nash documented his ‘30-year encounter between artist and place’, far from the hectic London art scene.

John Nash is less famous than his brother Paul, who painted landscapes with a more surrealist edge, but John is known for some iconic paintings of WWI and idyllic English countryside. Unsurprisingly perhaps, he once said that surviving the trenches made him more attuned to the loveliness of the countryside when he returned home, and his art attests to the need for beauty in the face of tragedy.

In some ways, the Nashes’ story is a typical mid-century story – wartime austerity, the joy of simple things, seeking to uphold tradition, but also pushing the boundaries of tradition. Typically perhaps for artists of the era, there were infidelities, which caused particular hurt for Christine, and the psychological effects of war and the loss of their only child in a car accident didn’t help either.

Although obviously fitting into a mild, English form of modernism, Nash ignored most contemporary trends, instead taking inspiration directly from the English countryside, particularly farmland, then simplifying and distilling its rich essence. He was the ‘finest botanical draughtsman of his era’, adept at watercolours, woodblocks, oils. Blythe says Nash taught him to look more carefully at the countryside, and Nash delights in corners of fields, quiet stretches of water, the patchwork nature of a working landscape, the stillness of snowfall, as well as more modern preoccupations – mines, industrial harboursides.

His illustration work is cleverly economical, his oils not romantic but, rather, lonely and longing, calm and direct, all at once. 🌟

**NICK MATTISKE**

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CONTENTMENT  
WHEN THE WHOLE  
WORLD SEEMS  
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