

insights

AUTUMN 2021

**Growing
the Church**

God comes close
THE TRIUMPH OF EASTER



Uniting Church
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT



*Journey
through
Lent*

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WELCOME FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Wilderness Taunts



REV. JANE FRY
**GENERAL
SECRETARY**

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

The book that I'm wondering through Lent with this year is called *Wilderness Taunts* by Ian Adams. The daily reflections are responding to the demands and challenges of being a hopeful human being in 21st century. It was published in 2016 and I'm quite relieved that the author didn't have the COVID experience to further colour his ruminations – I'm finding them quite challenging enough! The book *...imagines what might be the taunts that we face now, whenever the light of our hope is confronted by the darkness in the world, and by the shadows within ourselves...*

The whole human community continues to be taunted by the antics of a devastating microbe and it feels as though nothing can be taken for granted anymore. 'Church' as we had known it forever has been shaken out of familiar places, patterns and habits and is having to draw on deep reservoirs of faith to sustain hope and discipleship. I confess that sometimes I find it easier than others.

As I contemplate the hopefulness that I see infusing and informing the planning and preparation for Synod 2021 which is due to kick off formally in April, I'm struck by the sheer audacity and tenacity of the church in its determination to gather, witness and work together despite very complex challenges.

Not surprisingly perhaps, I think a lot about the Synod meeting at the moment – doing something completely differently is peppered with interesting moments! I've

been reflecting on the hope embodied in recent Synod decisions –

Saltbush was a proposal born out of the faithful witness of disciples in rural and regional NSW and a strong desire to see that witness grow;

Pulse was born out of an equally bold hope that the witness of the UCA has something valuable to learn from and share with people in the first third of life (or born after 1970);

Makaratta reiterated and restated the commitment made over many years to walking together with First People and to the Covenant with the UAICC;

Climate – at the last Synod, I was slightly taken aback by the vehemence and passion of young people across the church, including many from our UCA schools, who insisted on being part of the presentation and practically invaded the stage! Grounded as we all are in the story of creation, reconciliation and renewal and given the responsibility to be wise stewards of the earth, the 'groaning of creation' cannot go unheard in church.

Finally, **Growth** – still in my head the most surprising resolution in all my experience of Synod meetings which committed all the councils of the church to reorganizing themselves for growth in discipleship, relationship, impact and number. Of course, COVID has disrupted and delayed

some of that reorganization even as it has concentrated attention on the growing thirst in the community for words of hope and promise.

My hope for this Synod is that we can reaffirm our commitment to directions already set by previous Synods – to rural and regional ministry, to ministry with people born after 1970, to walking together with First Peoples, to being wise stewards of the earth and,

in so doing, to growing the witness of the church in all the communities where we serve.

What I also hope (quite fervently!) is that we will collectively 'organise' ourselves across the whole church

to adequately resource the implementation of these initiatives. I remain convinced – more convinced than ever – that the vision of a contemporary, prophetic and courageous Uniting Church as first imagined in the Basis of Union has a vital witness to make in responding to the dilemmas faced by the whole community and in helping people to navigate the white water of complex transitions. Always bearing in mind, as Ian Hunt affirms in *Wilderness Taunts* that ... *your future is, if you allow it to be so, just one element in the greater future that is already taking shape. Nurture awareness of the deeper streams that are at work and step into them...*

AMEN to that! ☺

IT FEELS AS
THOUGH NOTHING
CAN BE TAKEN
FOR GRANTED
ANYMORE



14 Growing the Church

We hear from some Uniting Church leaders who have experienced growth in their ministry contexts. How can the Church continue to grow in these challenging times?

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Uniting Church
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT

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

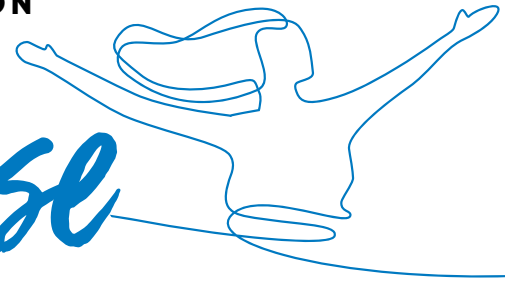
Our vision is that it will be a fellowship of reconciliation, living God's love, following Jesus Christ and acting for the common good to build a just and compassionate community of faith.

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God Comes Close



REV. SIMON
HANSFORD
MODERATOR

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

In a dream, wrapped in the swaddling bands of confusion caused by Mary's pregnancy, Joseph hears God's comfort and direction as to what to name their child. And Matthew, with customary editorial license, reminds us of Jesus' pseudonym and purpose, "Emmanuel ... God is with us".

In the shadowed mystery and wonder of the Christmas story, we find ourselves relieved and thankful that God is such a God as this. The delight of a newborn baby, even in these fearful circumstances, is joy incarnate. We sing Emmanuel.

Yet Emmanuel seems to slip from our vocabulary as we read further into the gospels. We bias one side of the scales, to speak only of Jesus' earthed humanity, or elevate him beyond our laughter and fears and grumpiness to a hologram. Neither is sufficient.

The sacrilege of God's behaviour is in breaking all the rules, to defy and surpass the expectations of what a God – our God, any god – is supposed to be and do. To assert that God is born, as we are all born, that God lives and stumbles and serves and loves and laughs and grieves, moves us into the depths of the promise cracked open in Joseph's dream and Mary's faithful acceptance.

In this season, of all our recent seasons, this promise of God is vital. We have been meeting and worshipping on screen or, perhaps, at double-arms' length and wonder if we will ever shake a new friend's hand again. Our singing is constrained (unless we're barracking), and we are wary of holding those who have lived (and we have loved) longest for fear of infection. We have seen the suffering across our world, acknowledging the danger of being close.

In these difficult days, we proclaim Emmanuel.

It is not simply COVID 19. The viruses take many forms and are equally infectious: social distance caused by mistrust; endemic violence blamed on race and gender and sexual orientation; callous disregard for the world which God created in love and joy.

Because of these, and in their midst, we assert Emmanuel.

In our churches, disciples can lose hope, as we struggle to discover the rhythm of this new journey. If worship is not how we have known it, then what might it be? If we cannot break and share the bread in the manner known and loved, then how? Can we stand shoulder to shoulder in prayer for our world, and if not, who are we?

Precisely here, we preach Emmanuel.

Easter is history's darkest moment, before the startling light of resurrection. The resurrection will always bear the signature of the cross. We need it to be so.

God not only knows the struggles through which we live, but has also suffered. More than that, we assert with hope and profound thanks that God is with us in each moment.

Easter is not a theological maths problem, solved by God's clever calculation.

Easter is God's engagement, beyond expectation, even beyond hope, entirely in prodigious love.

The brokenness of Friday is Emmanuel at its most necessary, most wonderful and most awful. The Word is framed in wood.

Friday is God in solidarity with us, in injustice, or suffering, even when caused by our own hand. Solidarity even with those whose hands hold the nails.

Saturday's silence is the waiting that people experience all the time; waiting for COVID – or other – test results; waiting for justice, or for hope; waiting for the struggle, or grief, to end.

Sunday is always more than we expect: death defeated, life proclaimed. Forgiveness for all who seek it. Mercy to quench all those who thirst. Christ's resurrection transforms history and creation, and each of us.

Hold this promise carefully, offer this hope gently, because many live in Friday's grasp, or Saturday's hiatus.

Jesus' first words in Mark's Gospel "the reign of God has come near" are most completely true at Easter. On Friday's cross, in the silence of Saturday and when the triumph of Easter is revealed, God, in Christ Jesus, has come close.

Here, wonderfully, from Jesus' birth, and life, and death, and life, we sing Emmanuel 🕊

HOLD THIS
PROMISE
CAREFULLY,
OFFER THIS
HOPE GENTLY



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

#moderatorinsession
#AllOfThisIsUs

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COMMENTS

your say ONLINE

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

IN RESPONSE TO A LETTER IN YOUR SAY | 2020 SUMMER INSIGHTS

In the “Your Say” column of the Summer *Insights*, Bev Plaizier from Leura Uniting made comment about the “women members at Gordon Uniting have been making stoles for recently bereaved women for comfort in their loss”. I would just like to expand on that a little.

For many years the Stitching Group based at Gordon have, at the suggestion of one of the founding members, Mary Cripwell, operated what we know as a “Shawl Ministry” whereby some members make knitted/crocheted shawls (or scarves for men) and give them to those in the community known to be grieving or struggling in some way to let them know they are in our thoughts and prayers. The shawl is accompanied by an appropriate verse and note of explanation.

The Stitching Group and some others, including now students at Ravenswood School, have for the last several years been involved with the “Wrap With

Love” organisation where completed rugs made of 28 knitted squares are sent all over the world where disaster has struck, to bring help and comfort to the struggling survivors.

THE STITCHING GROUP BASED AT GORDON HAVE OPERATED A “SHAWL MINISTRY”

the WWL organisation of the amazing work they do.

To-date, Gordon has contributed more than 200 completed rugs, and probably have another 40 ready to take out to them when the Covid disaster allows us to do so.

ROSEMARY WATSON
GORDON/PYMBLE UNITING

For the last couple of years we've hosted a Wrap With Love Knit-in, similar to that the ABC used to hold, where members of the public come and join us and also hear first-hand from a member of



WHY IS THE AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN LOBBY WAGING A CULTURE WAR OVER LGBTQ ISSUES?

We need to distinguish between two ideas:

1. How I want to live in my community (faith)
2. I will make everyone obey me by making laws (power).

This first is right of religious freedom – people have a right in groups to agree on a certain lifestyle, the second is power politics. Power over others is an intoxicating drug and misses the point of religion and grace over rules (power wants it the other way around). Throughout history there are many people who will wield the sword of the state to smite people that do not agree with them and this generation of humans is no different.

LLOYD ROBINSON

SHOULD CHRISTIANS CELEBRATE VALENTINE'S DAY?

Why do we ‘celebrate’ Valentine’s Day? They didn’t for 11 centuries after Valentine’s life and death. Only after Geoffrey Chaucer in about 1375 wrote a poem called *Parliament of Fowls* did it take off. In the poem, birds of all kinds gather “on St Valentine’s Day” to find a mate. In the northern hemisphere, late February is near the end of winter and spring approaches.

Apparently, since then Valentine’s Day has been celebrated as the time when the gloom of winter begins to fade and, as Tennyson later wrote, young men’s fancies could ‘turn to thoughts of love’.

So, don’t let anyone dismiss this great day. It’s origins are many, but all the tales, legends, historical truths and poems come together because human love matters.

My wife (of almost 40 years) and I have always celebrated on this day. I suppose it’s our own mini parliament of birds!

WARREN BIRD



news

SYNOD CLIMATE ACTION

FUTURE DIRECTIONS CONFERENCE 2021

Saturday March 20 | 9am-5pm

Centre for Ministry (16 Mason's Drive Nth Parramatta), or via Zoom.



Keynote speaker
Chris Gambian

We are excited to announce the NSW and ACT Synod Climate Action-Future Directions Conference.

This will be an action focused gathering to workshop and plan for the next stage of the Synod Climate Action Strategy. At the conference we will:

- **Connect with like-minded people**
- **Hear inspiring stories, and**
- **Learn from effective action others in our church and beyond have taken**

Keynote speaker Chris Gambian, from the Nature Conservation Council, will feature among a range of engaging and thought provoking presentations and workshops.

Together, we will consider what difference our church can make in the challenge to live out our commitment to care for creation in the face of the challenges posed by climate change.

The conference will be a hybrid event with people able to participate face to face or on-line. 📺

JON O'BRIEN
SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATE



REGISTER:

[TINYURL.COM/FUTUREDIRECTIONS2021](https://tinyurl.com/futuredirections2021)



For more information contact Alice Salomon, Social Justice Lead at Uniting at asalomon@uniting.org or **0438 207 708**.

Uniting
Uniting Earth

Empowering leaders to follow Jesus

Dr Matt Anslow started in January as the new Educator for Lay Ministry at Uniting Mission and Education.

This role focuses on providing and coordinating training and education for anyone involved in lay ministry in NSW and ACT.

“So that might mean worship leaders, lay preachers and presiders, youth leaders, pastors – basically anyone leading in a Uniting Church,” Dr Anslow said.

“The Vital Leadership team here at UME is dedicated to helping leaders grow in discipleship that is lifelong and whole-of-life. We want to see leaders that are passionate and equipped to follow Jesus. My role is to help by providing opportunities to go deeper into the Scriptures and theology, to learn new skills, and to better understand the ethos of the UCA.”

Dr Anslow holds a PhD in theology from Charles Sturt University and has a wide range of experience in church roles.

At the end of his first week in the role, he said that he was looking forward

to experiencing the Uniting Church's breadth and diversity first hand.

“The Uniting Church is both broad and deep, and I'm looking forward to travelling around to meet all the different kinds of folks within it. There really are few other churches that can claim to be as diverse as the UCA, and I'm excited to delve into all that variety.”

“Besides that, I'm looking forward to getting into training laypeople. The challenges of the Church are many, but so are its opportunities. I really believe the ability of the church to embrace these opportunities is bound up with how well we disciple and send out lay leaders (and the work of the Spirit, obviously).”

**WE WANT TO SEE
LEADERS THAT
ARE PASSIONATE
AND EQUIPPED TO
FOLLOW JESUS**

Dr Anslow told *Insights* that he would like to hear from “anyone and everyone” about how they see the future of church discipleship and leadership.

“I'd also encourage any lay preachers to look into the Living Our Faith series of courses, as well as our upcoming event PreachFest which will equip and inspire everyone who participates.”

Preachfest runs from 1 to 3 June. More details will be released soon. 📌



Sydney celebrates the legacy of Keith and Carol Garner

Heartfelt messages of personal thanks from the Prime Minister, NSW Premier and General-Secretary, the unveiling of a world-class portrait, and musical performances (where masked guests could actually sing along thanks to recent easing of COVID restrictions) proved that not only have Rev. Keith Garner AM and wife Carol packed plenty of impact into a 15-year tenure as CEO of Wesley Mission, but they also pack a lot into a farewell party.

"I'm so honoured to add these few words of thanks," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said in a surprise video message broadcast during the special event at Wesley Mission one of many marking Rev. Garner's retirement in February 2021.

"I do so not just as a Prime Minister, but I do it personally because I have been blessed personally by Keith's prayers, encouragement and support, and so have so many members of own family – my late father John, my mother Marion, my late father-in-law Roy and my mother-in-law Beth – all of them were greatly blessed by the pastoral role that Keith has played in their lives."

"Keith has planted, he's harvested and built so much. He's lived out the ethos of Wesley Mission, continuing the work of Jesus Christ."

General Secretary of the Uniting Church Synod of NSW and the ACT Rev. Jane Fry delivered some words on behalf of the Uniting Church.

"Fifteen years is a very long time to be in a pastoral relationship with not

just this congregation but a group of congregations as well as all of the people that Wesley Mission touches through all of its ministries," Rev. Fry said.

KEITH HAS
PLANTED
HE'S
HARVESTED
AND BUILT
SO MUCH

"It's a really significant relationship both the congregations and all of their members and you and Carol have been shaped by this relationship over that time."

Video messages flowed in from reverends overseas, in South Africa, Ireland, and England - with one reverend quipping that "behind every good man is a surprised woman" as he acknowledged Carol.

Carol took to the microphone to say it has been an absolute joy and privilege for her to work with a team of such committed volunteers. She said thank you for the love she has received over the past 15 years.

"Anything I might have contributed to the life of Wesley Mission I've certainly gained a hundred, two hundred, a thousandfold from you all and from the

people we've helped to serve together," Ms Garner said.

The room was roused by a moving message from Keith.

He said that as his time draws to a close it is an opportunity to remind ourselves of what lies at the heart of our mission.

"In an increasingly secular world we have a distinctive role to play in the life of this city," Rev. Garner said.

"One of the greatest needs we have in our community is still to know Christ."

He used the analogy of how married couples often come to look like each the longer they live together to illustrate how the more you live with Christ the more you start to look like him.

Rev. Garner also touched on the modern-day obsession with restructuring the church.

"It's not our restructuring that matters it's our foundations that matter. Once we lose our foundations any restructuring will be useless," he said.

He urged others not to forget the call of the vulnerable and paid tribute to the leaders who came before him.

"You can't have success without succession," Rev. Garner said.

Rev. Stu Cameron will replace him following a time of handover. 🕒

ASHLEY DONNELLY

Insights

to mark
30 years



Insights will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2021.

The magazine of the Uniting Church NSW and ACT Synod first released on 11 August 1991, as part of the new Synod Communications Unit.

It has since won awards for religious journalism in Australia, been featured on *Media Watch*, and served as a launch pad for young writers' careers.

The *Insights* website launched in 1996 and has since grown to incorporate daily news and feature articles.

Insights will mark the anniversary this year with online articles on the looking at key events from this time, interviewing some of those involved along the way about their memories. There will also be a special commemorative issue of the magazine.

Insights is circulated to over 450 Uniting Church congregations in NSW and the ACT. 📄

JONATHAN FOYE

MOD ELECT 2021

Do you know anyone you think would make a good Moderator?

NOMINATIONS FOR MODERATOR ELECT WILL OPEN SOON

The Moderator Elect Joint Nominating Committee will soon be seeking nominations for the position of Moderator within the Synod of New South Wales and the ACT.

The Committee is tasked to bring three nominations to the Synod 2021 August meeting for discernment and decision.

The Moderator is elected to give prophetic and pastoral leadership to the people and congregations of the Synod of NSW and the ACT, by assisting and encouraging expression of our hope in Jesus Christ, offering challenge and hope, and reminding the church of its call and the God who calls each and every person.

Can you think of someone who has the gifts and skills to lead and is confident to be the spokesperson for the Uniting Church?

Further information will be shared via e-news, presbyteries and congregations.



Uniting Church
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT

A simple trick?

Empathy and where we find the strength to care



"If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it." **Atticus Finch**

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, HARPER LEE, 1962.

They're some of Harper Lee's best known and loved words, and they're at once disarmingly plain and devilishly difficult. How do we get inside the skin of another person? Do we even want to? It's uncomfortable and unfamiliar, and it forces us to confront ourselves and our feelings in ways we'd probably rather not. And after a year hollowed out by COVID-19 and the havoc it continues to wreak, do we really have the capacity to take on more?

Almost exactly a year ago, I sat in front of a rattling fan in about a thousand percent humidity and plotted my escape from a room full of men eating a very hot curry. The place was Kalmunai, on the East coast of Sri Lanka, and the occasion was a visit to the home of a teacher in the disability education project the Uniting Church supports.

I was tired, and did I mention hot? Walking around in the skin of others was low on the agenda. Instead, I snuck off to the kitchen where I'd noticed a few women and children watching from the doorway with shy curiosity.

They had little English. I had no Tamil. As pots steamed, and the children snapped off a few selfies on my phone, we laughed

our way through a conversation punctuated by wild hand gestures and facial expressions. I discovered that one of the young women was a teacher, and that she was anxious about the very early news of the pandemic. WhatsApp numbers were exchanged, and I went home for a cold shower. Done.

WHAT ABOUT THE FACT THAT QUITE OFTEN, EMPATHY IS DRAINING, TIME CONSUMING AND OVERWHELMING?

Except: every few days since I've returned to Australia, for a whole year, my WhatsApp chirps. It's Yohini, the young teacher from Kalmunai. She's been teaching on and off throughout the year as lockdowns wax and wane. And the simple exchanges we make: "How are you? What are you doing?" drop me back into another person's life, another person's skin. I look at the selfies the kids took. I remember the curry, the sound of dishes being washed, the rattling fan. And my mind fills with both memory and imagination – I'm in a place where COVID-19 has whisked tourists from the streets and stripped income, food and hope from the people.

➔ CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Imagination, it's pretty well accepted, is a key part of empathy. You take your own frustrations with lockdown, or your anxiety about the job prospects of friends and family, and the power of imagination transfers them to another place – somewhere lockdown happens without Netflix; where jobs lost mean growling bellies and sick kids.

The WhatsApp messages are an essential part of the chain of connection, imagination and empathy. I'm lucky to have them.

But what about those for whom the connections are more difficult to make, the imagination more severely stretched? And what about the fact that quite often, empathy is draining, time consuming and overwhelming?

It's actually one of the reasons I really like the season of Lent. It's sometimes written off simply as an outdated Catholic tradition, dragging behind it a bad rep for dour faces, deprivation and self-denial. But it was originally envisaged as a time of refreshing – 40 days to reset in preparation for both suffering and new life.

And that's the kind of season we all desperately need. It's a clearly defined period – 40 days – to work and rest in God's presence. Lent allows us to sit with sadness and grief; it encourages us to turn both inward and outward. It calls us to imagine a world renewed by the risen Christ, and recommit to being part of it. It gives us permission to say no, to give things up, to examine our priorities.

Lent builds us up. It exercises the muscles of reflection, introspection, imagination, empathy and faith. It's part of the answer we need to the sense that life is hard, and perhaps we can't cope. The discipline of Lent brings life.

For me, UnitingWorld's Lent Event provides some of the focus I need to refuel my empathy, and more importantly, my hope. And it's a practical way to

respond to the realities of a world where 150 million people are at risk of being pushed backwards into extreme poverty because of COVID-19. A world of suffering needs a love stronger than death, and as I anticipate Easter, I'm able to find again the grit I need to keep walking with others, both at home and far away.

A simple trick, Scout? Probably not, but in the footsteps of the God who climbed inside the very skin of humanity as the ultimate act of love, it's pretty compelling. 🧐



EMPATHY RELIES ON BOTH MEMORY AND IMAGINATION: ALEX BAKER, RAJ AND CATH TAYLOR IN KALMUNAI, SRI LANKA.



Check out Lent Resources online through the National Assembly Website and get involved in giving or taking up something to stand alongside those who live with less at www.lentevent.com.au

Josephine Inkipin

SEEKING DEEPER LOVE, FAITH AND JUSTICE IN THE POST COVID WORLD



From 1 March, Rev. Josephine Inkipin will be the new minister at Pitt Street Uniting Church. An ordained Anglican priest, Rev. Inkipin has received permission to serve as a minister in the Uniting Church.

Originally from England, Rev. Inkipin has called Australia home for 20 years, since emigrating for her twin daughters' health. Ordained in St Paul's Cathedral London as what she calls, "a priest for the world", she has lived and worked in a variety of contexts and ministries, including eight years in Sydney with the NCCA and NSW Ecumenical Council.

More recently she has worked as a lecturer in church history and as a senior tutor at St Francis College Brisbane (with UTC, part of Charles Sturt University's School of Theology) and co-chair of the local Anglican diocese's Reconciliation Action Plan.

Rev. Inkipin is married to Rev. Penny Jones, and counts running, walking, travel, and sport among her hobbies.

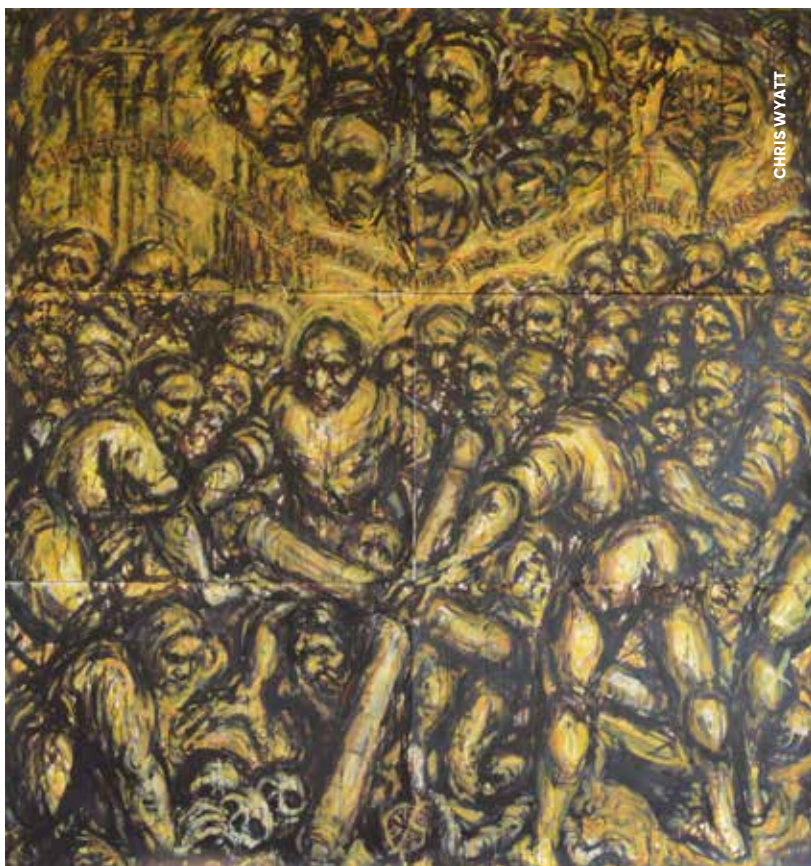
Rev. Inkipin told *Insights* that she was looking forward to the move.

"Pitt Street Uniting Church stands for so many things which have been central in my life that I have a powerful sense both of 'coming home' and of beginning an exciting fresh adventure with new friends and companions," she said.

"Penny and I rejoice at the opportunity to pray and work with others in the Uniting Church in seeking deeper love and faith, justice, and sustainability in the post-COVID city and wider world we are invited to create."

"It is also a delight to anticipate renewing friendships and partnerships with many old friends in other churches and communities in NSW and the ACT, and, not least, to live so close again to our, now delightfully expanded, family." 🧐

JONATHAN FOYE



STATIONS *of the Cross*

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS ART EXHIBITION IS SET TO RETURN IN 2021

The exhibition will take place at the Northmead Creative Arts High School from 22 March to 4 April. It features the work of artists from a wide variety of faith traditions and styles, focusing on their unique takes on the stations of the cross.

Artists featured this year include Harrie Fisher, Chris Wyatt, James Drinkwater, Joe Furlonger, Lesley Salem, Chris Auckett, Toni Hassan, Jeannette Siebols, Jennifer Little, John Forrester Clack, Reg Mombassa, Matthew Calandra, Euan Macloed, and Tony Mighell.

Rev. Dr Doug Purnell is one of the event organisers, as well as an artist whose work will be included in the exhibition.

He said that he hopes the exhibition helps people approach Easter in a fresh way.

“One of the questions for me, as the pandemic restrictions begin to lift, is just how we generate energy in our communities again,” Rev. Dr Purnell said.

“One way is to find some things that we can do together as groups, and especially outings.”

Exhibition organisers are offering guided tours with commentary, by request.

COVID safe protocols will be adhered to during the event.

The Stations of the Cross exhibition has run since 2007. The 2020 event was cancelled due to the pandemic. 📌

JONATHAN FOYE



The Stations of the Cross art exhibition takes place at Northmead Creative and Performing Arts High School daily from 10am to 4pm. It will open on 22 March. There will also be a wine and cheese night from 6:30 to 8:30pm on Thursday, 25 March. The exhibition finishes on 4 April.

For more information, contact Northmead Uniting Church on **(02) 9890 5813** or Northmead Creative and Performing Arts High School on **(02) 9630 4116**.



Growth

THE 2019 SYNOD MEETING

AGREED TO A MOTION TO

PRIORITISE GROWTH

IN ALL FACETS OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE.

THE PROPOSAL REFERRED TO SEVERAL KEY AREAS:

GROWTH IN
DISCIPLESHIP
IN
RELATIONSHIP
IN
NUMBER
AND IN
IMPACT



WE HEAR FROM SOME UNITING CHURCH LEADERS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED GROWTH IN THEIR MINISTRY CONTEXTS. FROM SYDNEY'S CHEIL KOREAN CHURCH TO UNITING CHURCH SCHOOLS, WE SEE WHERE THE UNITING CHURCH IS GROWING, AS THEY TELL US WHAT GROWTH HAS LOOKED LIKE, WHAT HAS PROVEN TO BE SUCCESSFUL, AND THE CHALLENGES THAT GROWTH OFFERS UP.

Growing the C

At its June 2019 meeting, the NSW and ACT Synod agreed to prioritise growth in the church in all of its activities. Growth, as the proposal makes clear, is not merely about getting more people to attend church on Sunday. It has a number of dimensions: growth in number, growth in commitment, and personal growth.

With the 2021 Synod meeting set to further explore what growth means for the Uniting Church, and how to foster this, *Insights* spoke to people in various ministries across the Synod and asked them where they see growth in the church. While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected a number of key aspects of church life, it has not deterred churches...and may even pose opportunities for growth.

Located in Concord in Sydney's inner west, Matt Kang is the Pastor at Sydney's Cheil (Korean) Uniting Church.

Pastor Kang said that the Cheil church had seen "significant" numeric growth in the past 12 months.

"Amongst other reasons, I think the main reason for our growth is simply: our church members inviting their friends to church," he said.

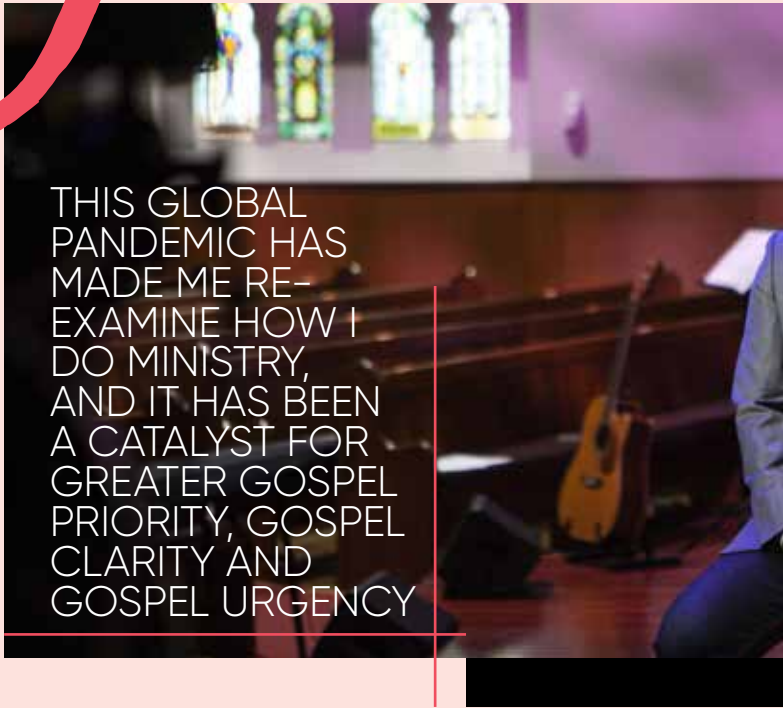
Rev. Dr Jon Humphries is a Chaplain at Ravenswood School for Girls. While his ministry is not attached to a church congregation, he said he had noticed some growth in the school's own ministry context.

"I have seen growth in interest in ministry in such places outside of congregations. At Ravo we have seen growth in numbers of enrolments, which means that more young people are being connected to the Uniting Church every day, and I am particularly very appreciative of Mrs Anne Johnstone who continues to grow the awareness with our community that we are a part of the Uniting Church."

"In the Synod we have seen a growth in the relationship between schools and the Church as part of the journey towards the incorporation of schools. In terms of numbers of people coming to God, we are a seed ministry, being a mission place, but it is hard to track membership of a Christian community, and even if we could the girls do connect with God in this place, they transition through the school and leave."

Rev. Dr Elizabeth Raine is the Minister at Tuggeranong Uniting Church. Located in the ACT, it is a church with an active congregation that recently underwent a process of mission planning.

Rev. Dr Raine told *Insights* that this has led to some recent growth for Tuggeranong.



THIS GLOBAL PANDEMIC HAS MADE ME RE-EXAMINE HOW I DO MINISTRY, AND IT HAS BEEN A CATALYST FOR GREATER GOSPEL PRIORITY, GOSPEL CLARITY AND GOSPEL URGENCY

"There has been some growth in my congregation with new people joining us at Sunday church and special outdoor services, and also new people joining some of our hospitality and social groups" she said.

"We have developed very good connections with a number of community groups in our area, and are working with them in some innovative collaborations (eg our SpringFest in partnership with sustainability group SeeChange). Our Christmas Event attracted around 400 people from the community and was a very positive experience for them and us, and we have plans to capitalise on this and develop it. We have five mission groups, one of which is a community liaison group, and they are working to build relationships in new ways with those we have encountered at our events and outdoor services."

Rev. Alimoni Taumopeau is the Minister at Strathfield Uniting Church, and works with Uniting Mission and Education.

Rev. Taumopeau pointed to discipleship, fellowship, mission, and service as the four pillars of a growing church.



church



PASTOR MATT KANG

"To see growth, congregations need to grow in these four areas," he said.

"Discipleship is the meaning of our faith. What we believe and why. Of course if we don't know what we believe, how can we share its good news to others."

"Fellowship, is the relationship we build one with another in the church. That is who we are as Uniting church members. Not only we baptised people to belong, but we grow in relationship with each other to belong. We are proud to be UCA members because of the relationship we form and develop in the church within and outside."

"Mission: We have a Gospel (our God-story) to share. And

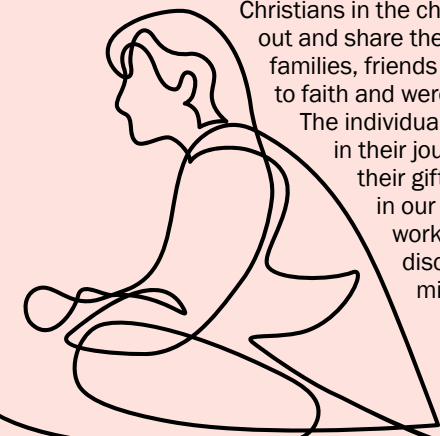
we invite others to come on a journey with us as we share their story as well. This is our mission or often called as evangelism which is active sharing of our stories."

"Service: To make an impact, we offer service to one another. Servanthood is the church's call."

Rev. Taumopeau said that wherever his ministry had taken him, whenever churches had responded well to these four areas, there had been growth.

"I have seen growth in Strathfield UCA in the last six years as individuals dare to practice these four areas," he said.

"I have seen transformation of individuals making a faith decision and willing to be discipled and as they grow in their faith journey, so is their relationship with other Christians in the church. These individuals went out and share their new found faith with their families, friends and co-workers. Some came to faith and were willing to be discipled as well. The individuals I spoke about earlier, step up in their journey finding a ministry where their gift of grace suited them to serve in our local church. The growth cycle works. And the church grows in discipleship, in fellowship, in mission and in service."



THE GROWTH CYCLE WORKS. AND THE CHURCH GROWS IN DISCIPLESHIP, IN FELLOWSHIP, IN MISSION AND IN SERVICE



REV. ALIMONI TAUMOPEAU

THE SYNOD'S Growth PROPOSAL

The Synod meeting in June 2019 agreed to prioritise growth in multiple areas.

Rev. Jon Humphries said he welcomed the proposal.

“I really connect with the proposal thought in that it is comprehensive and holistic. It is flexible and visionary in that it is about prioritising the growing of relationship and discipleship, not just attendance numbers,” he said.

“I also like the idea of a growing impact, which for me is about the real living out of the Kingdom of God (which is my way of saying Kingdom) and seeing it grown.”

While Rev. Dr Raine said that she welcomed the proposal, there were some challenges that it posed, and that growth will not look the same throughout the church.

“I did [agree to] this proposal, and dutifully downloaded the recommended book, which was interesting and had helpful ideas,” Rev. Dr Raine recalled.

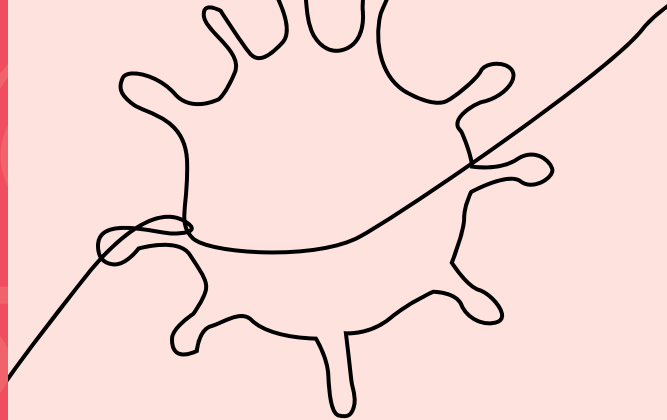
“But I cannot help but wonder whether growth can be legislated in this way, and whether congregations have the necessary resources to implement a strategy of growth.”

“I know we have a UME team that have people attached to Presbyteries to help congregations, but transitioning congregations from their usual ways to different ways that will encourage growth is time-intensive and requires a specific skill set. I am not sure a centralised team has the necessary capacity to do this in meaningful ways across the board.

“A lot of time and energy has been invested in Mission Shaped Ministry training, and this may well work as a growth impetus in some congregations wanting to try a fresh expression of church, but it isn't a growth panacea nor will it suit all congregations.”

This year's Synod meeting, which will be conducted via a number of smaller online meetings from February to August, will consider further ways to prioritise growth, and to resource this priority.

Insights will continue to provide coverage on this, and all other Synod proposals.



COVID THROWS A SPANNER IN THE WORKS

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be widely challenging, with each ministry agent reporting to *Insights* that putting in place appropriate safety provisions had meant reconsidering their plans.

Despite this, they all also said that the pandemic had also offered up a number of new possibilities for growth.

“COVID-19 was the greatest challenge we will all face in our lifetime,” Rev. Taumopeau said.

“This came in as a bigger challenge for the church as we depends a lot on voluntary attendance each week in and out. So it gave us an opportunity to create ourselves in new ways of doing church.”

“Online services were up and running. Church services, meetings and visit are done on the phone, by email, via Zoom or Facebook Live. All of these had its positive and negative effect. But people were still being reached and we notice because online was open especially when it was out on Facebook Live. More people were viewing our services than when we were physical service in the past. All in all, I believed we grow in our attendance each week and the number of people we ministered to than ever before.”

“COVID has been a challenge as we weren't using our buildings very much, and our services have been via Zoom,” Rev. Dr Raine said.

“But it hasn't stopped us holding outdoor events which have been well attended by the congregation and the community. As our website is now our new front door, we have really concentrated our efforts on keeping it informative, up to date and attractive for us as well as community people.”

EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE
EXCITING PATCHES OF GROWTH
THINKING; CHANGE IS HARD AND
GROWTH TAKES A LOT OF CARE
AND EFFORT

“People (maybe surprisingly) have found us using search engines and have investigated our Sunday services and also watched our services and other videos on YouTube, where we have our own channel. Tuggeranong Uniting Church is putting considerable effort onto this technology as we think it will be very significant for the future of our church and will help us to grow – though we are not sure what this will ultimately look like.”

Pastor Matt Kang said that the pandemic had led to him considering “what really matters.”

“This global pandemic has made me re-examine how I do ministry, and it has been a catalyst for greater Gospel priority, Gospel clarity and Gospel urgency,” he said.

TRANSITIONING CONGREGATIONS FROM WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN USED TO, AND ENCOURAGING THEM TO TRY SOMETHING THAT ISN'T A PROGRAM IS VERY HARD WORK



REV. DR ELIZABETH RAINE

"For the members of my church, I think there has been a reawakened zeal to see those we love to come to a saving faith in Jesus."

"COVID-19 has helped some of our members really "step it up" in their personal evangelism and their own prioritising of reaching the lost with the Gospel."

GROWING PAINS

It should be noted that growth is something that takes effort, and can even be a source of discomfort for church congregations. Several ministry agents that *Insights* spoke to indicated that there was some difficulty that they had noticed.

One such challenge that Rev. Dr Humphries indicated was that congregations often needed to change the way that they operated in order to grow.

"As great as the vision for growth is and the goals around it, the reality is that it is a big change for many congregations which have had so long to become fixed in mindsets, habits and traditions," he said.



REV. DR JON HUMPHRIES

"Christendemic thinking is still prevalent in many of the churches, even though there are exciting patches of growth thinking. Change is hard and growth takes a lot of care and effort, and for some places there just isn't the energy or vision for how such a gritty vision could be brought to life, even with the help and inspiration of God."

"So whilst we may dream big and see great potential, in some places the growth, like the Parable of the Sower, will be underwhelming and stunted. However, in some places all the hard work will pay off and God's vision takes root and the fruit that will come to be will be beyond our expectations."

"Implementing a growth strategy is difficult work," Rev. Dr Raine added.

"Transitioning congregations from what they have been used to, and encouraging them to try something that isn't a program is very hard work and requires a skill set that both ministers and congregational leaders often lack."

"Understanding congregational systems, how they react to change and transition and useful strategies to harness this might be something worth teaching to ministers and leaders."


Despite the pandemic, and challenges associated with the task of growth, Rev. Taumopeau believes the Uniting Church is well positioned at this time.

"I believe we are in an opportune time to grow the church," he said.

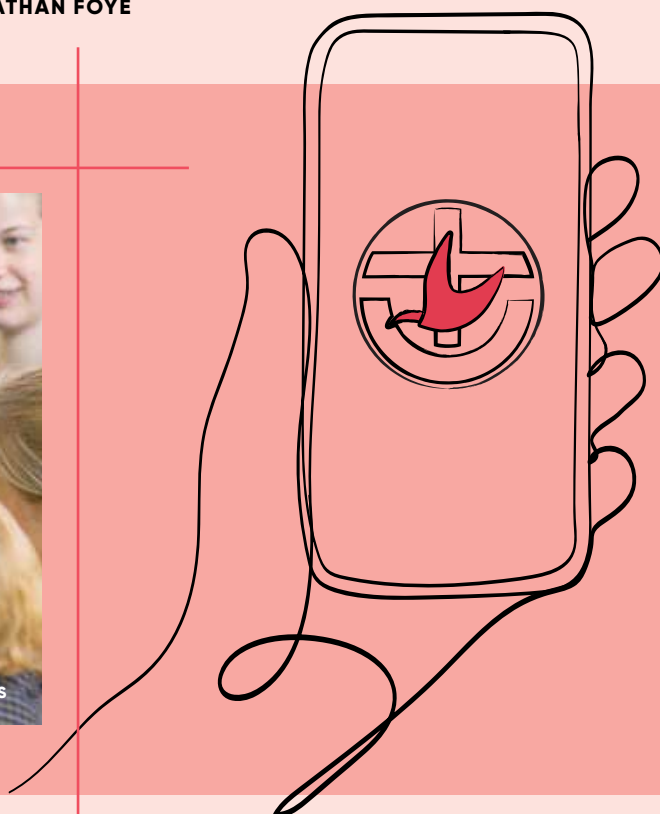
"This is one of the greatest tragedies people today had ever faced. They are asking a lot of questions about life and how we live it."

In this harrowing context, Rev. Taumopeau believes the church has something to offer, "a good news story to the heart and mind of many people."

"A lot of people are listening, or willing to hear our story once again," he said.

"Maybe we need to create church that can meet physically as well as online. Greater opportunity for growth is available for us." 

JONATHAN FOYE



Forty years in ministry

A number of Uniting Church ministry agents recently celebrated significant anniversaries. Two such figures include Rev. Dr John Squires and Rev. Terence Corkin. *Insights* caught up with these two ministers to ask them about what they had learnt during their time in ministry and their hopes for the future.

Rev. Dr John Squires was ordained in the Uniting Church on 3 December 1980. At that time, it was a new denomination three years removed from union in 1977. In the decades to follow, he would take on doctoral studies and a number of key placements in academia and church congregations, including as Principal of Perth Theological Hall and now as the Presbytery Minister (Wellbeing) for Canberra Regional Presbytery.

Rev. Terence Corkin was ordained slightly later, in 1981. He has since served the church in a number of roles, including as the General Secretary of the

Uniting Church Assembly from 2001 to 2015 and as a congregational minister. He remains active in the church through his work as an accredited Mediator and through his ministry supervision work.

The Uniting Church that these ministers were ordained into was a somewhat different institution to the one that exists nowadays. Rev. Dr Squires remembers a lack of inclusive language in the wording of the ordination service. Nor, for that matter, was there any reference to First Australians or the Basis of Union itself.

Looking back over the course of four decades, *Insights* asked Rev. Squires and Rev. Corkin to consider what else they had taken away from this time.

According to Rev. Corkin, his near four decades in ministry has taught him, “to accept the thanks of people when they offer it, to be more brave and confident in God’s provision when confronted by new and challenging situations, and to be more understanding, accepting and appreciative of people who are different to me.”

For Rev. Dr Squires, the recognition that ministry agents need to work as

part of a wider team was something he said he had recognised over time.

“Ministry leadership is best when it works with people to bring them together into a cohesive, co-operative, energised and enthusiastic group working for a common goal,” he said.

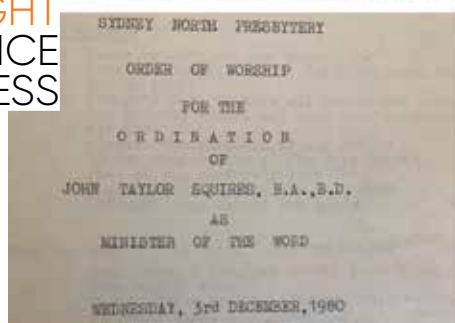
“Solo ministry by the hero agent is not at all useful or helpful.”

“You can never offer enough opportunities for people to explore their faith, deepen their understandings of scripture and theology, expand their horizons about Christianity, and grow in



I WANT TO SEE A CHURCH THAT GETS THE BALANCE RIGHT BETWEEN SERVICE AND WITNESS

REV. TERENCE CORKIN



Seaforth: new and old preache

BALGOWLAH SEAFORTH parish has known of its first UC ordination this month. Rev John was ordained in a ceremony at which Rev Keith presided and Rev G. Hughes of United Theological gave the ordination charge.

Following the service, Mr Squires gave thanks to the Sunday school teachers and church leaders of Seaforth, whose faith had encouraged and clarified his call to the ministry.

FORWARD

24th

YOU CAN NEVER OFFER
ENOUGH OPPORTUNITIES
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THEIR FAITH, DEEPEN THEIR
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REV. DR JOHN SQUIRES



spiritual maturity. Education has been at the heart of so much of my ministry, and it feels like there is always more to be done, and more willingness to learn and grow, in the people amongst whom I serve."

Rev. Dr Squires mentioned a number of lessons that he wished someone had imparted to him earlier, that he hoped new ministers might grasp. These included the importance of being clear headed and aware in the midst of conflict, something that he learnt later in his ministry through Transitional Ministry training.

On another, more practical level, Rev. Squires indicated that it was important that ministers be diligent in administration—usually not the favourite aspect of any minister's work.

"I maintain that regular attention to organisational matters paves the way for all

manner of flourishing ministry opportunities," he said.

THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT

Both ministers told *Insights* there were things that they would have done differently, with the benefit of hindsight.

Rev. Corkin said that he wishes he had developed the ability to be assertive with congregations earlier.

"I would have developed a healthy ability to be more assertive and challenging of people much earlier in ministry because congregations have always needed to change and adapt," he said.

"I don't think that I pushed some of them hard enough to do so."

Rev. Dr Squires said he wished how to pace himself more thoughtfully, as well as how to, "bite my tongue at a couple of critical moments over the past four decades."

Both ministers expressed similar hopes for incoming Uniting Church ministry agents.

Rev. Corkin said he hoped, "That they always experience the place where they are in ministry as the place that they are meant to be - even when it is hard."

"I hope that they experience the faithfulness of God's provision and love the people among whom they minister," he said.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Some four decades on from when they were ordained, *Insights* asked what they hoped for for the church in the next four decades.

"I want to see a revival of confidence in, and the experience of, God's involvement in the lives of people," Rev. Corkin said.

"I want to see a church that gets the balance right between service and witness,

which in the case of the UCA means a massive uplift in attention to evangelism in the healthy expression of this witness and invitation to faith."

Rev. Dr Squires expressed his hope for the church in four key areas.

"A church where active discipleship is valued far more than passive membership," he said.

"A church where grace is the benchmark, the keynote, of who we are when we gather in community."

"A church where the heart of the Gospel is known to be justice for all, where we work towards that goal, where we value that as paramount."

"A church which takes seriously those fearsome words that we pray all-too-easily, 'your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.'"

JONATHAN FOYE



GOD COMES CLOSE

I did not grow up in a Christian family. While I often had a sense of awe in nature, God did not seem close, or even to exist.

When I came to faith as a teenager (a story for another time) I moved into a sort of second family, a faith family. I remember my times in youth groups, coffee shops and drop-in centres with great affection. God did indeed feel very close. Even though Christian “coffee shops” only served instant in the 1970’s, God still managed to turn up.

I particularly remember how God seemed close to many young people at youth fellowship camps or house-parties, especially when there were potential partners around. It’s amazing how the

attractiveness of the person one was praying with made God seem close.

Youth groups in the 1970’s may seem like another country, for many reasons. I am taking us back there as this was a time in history, or a stage of life in any decade, when the life-pattern of one’s faith is shaped.

For many people God seems close when things are good. If things get tough, we feel that God has deserted us. The worse things are, the further away God seems to recede. Like many of the Psalms, we ask “where are you, God?” or “why are you letting this happen?”

Our issues that make us feel that God is far away may be deeply profound or just “first world problems”. It’s our take on

the situation rather than any objective degree of pain that has us in a place of darkness.

Nevertheless, some situations seem godless by any standard. The Jewish writer, the late Elie Wiesel, was 15 years old when he was an inmate in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald Nazi death camps. In the 1950’s Wiesel wrote about his experiences, which came to be translated into English as “The Night” in 1960. In a famous passage Wiesel described the hanging of three prisoners, two adult men and a boy. Here is the conclusion to that narrative:

“Where is God? Where is He?”

someone behind me asked. Total silence throughout the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting.

“Bare your heads!” yelled the head of the camp. His voice was raucous. We were weeping. “Cover your heads!” Then the march past began. The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive...For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed. Behind me, I heard the same man asking: “Where is God now?” And I heard a voice within me answer him: “Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows.” That night the soup tasted like corpses.

Wiesel was Jewish, but his words speak to any person who has wrestled with God. The words are especially poignant for Christians at Easter where the gallows-cross parallel is strong.

For Christians specifically, Jesus told us in Matthew

25:31-46 where he will be: among people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, lacking clothes, sick or in prison. You want Jesus to be close? You know where to find him!

At Easter, we can also remember the powerful symbol that Christ was crucified outside the gate.

For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. (Heb 13:11-14)

WHERE IS HE?
HERE HE IS
HE IS HANGING
HERE ON THIS
GALLOWS

Who else is outside the gate? This is where we leave the 1940’s, 50’s and 60’s that we have explored to find God. In the 2020’s we will find Jesus when we embrace climate refugees or people in the developing world who are the last in the queue to receive COVID vaccines. Hebrews also hints that it is not just humans who are with Jesus outside the gate, but all of creation. We will be close to God among over-fished species, on deforested land, whether for palm oil in Kalimantan or housing developments in NSW.

Our Synod theme for 2021 is “Where the wild God is”. God is outside our domestic and domesticating houses and churches.

God is always close, but perhaps closer to others than to us. If we want God close to us, then we have to go close “to the others”, outside the gate. Will you go? 📍

REV. DR ROB MCFARLANE



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☎ 0428 640 258

Cowra

📍 75 Brisbane St
🕒 Fri 9am-12pm
☎ (02) 6341 4011

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🕒 Delivery only
☎ (02) 6343 1809

Tamworth

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☎ 0407 148 185

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🕒 Mon-Fri 10am-12pm
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Gungahlin, ACT

📍 108 The Valley Av
🕒 Thu 11am-1pm & 6-7pm
☎ (02) 6242 5001

Tamworth

📍 1/19 Wallamore Rd, Taminda
☎ (02) 6766 5311

Wagga Wagga

📍 17 Johnston St
🕒 Tue & Thu 10-11am
☎ (02) 6921 4275

SOUP KITCHENS

📍 **Leura**, 142 Katoomba St
🕒 Tues 10am-12.30pm
☎ (02) 4784 2160

Mt Dromedary, 134 Wagonga St

📍 Narooma
🕒 Wed 12-1.30pm
☎ 0448 464 468

Newtown, 280A King St

🕒 Tue-Fri 1-3pm
🌐 newtownmission.org.au

Orange, 212 Amson St

🕒 Wed approx. 4-6pm
☎ 0476 142 464

Sydney CBD, 197 Macquarie St

🕒 Mon-Fri, 7-8am
☎ 0422 146 369

Wollongong, 3 Court Ln

🕒 Mon-Thu 11.30am-1.30pm, Fri 11.30am-1.30pm
☎ (02) 4229 2117

Parramatta, 119 Macquarie St

🌐 parramattamission.org.au
🕒 Mon-Fri 8-9am, 11.30am-1pm

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from The Rev. Bill Crews Foundation

🌐 billcrews.org/free-meals-sydney

📍 **Ashfield**, 180 Liverpool Rd
🕒 Daily 9–9.45am, 11.30am–12.45pm

📍 **Campsie**, North Pde
🕒 Thu 12–12.45pm

📍 **Lakemba**, 206–210 Lakemba St
🕒 Tue 12–12.45pm

📍 **Liverpool**, 28 Pirie St
🕒 Daily, 10.30–11.15am

📍 **Miller**, 16 Woodward Cres.
🕒 Mon, Wed, Fri 12–12.45pm

📍 **Redfern Park**, Baptist Fountain
🕒 Tue 12–12.45pm

📍 **Warwick Farm**, Hart Park
🕒 Sat, Sun 12–12.45pm

📍 **Woolloomooloo**, Yurong Parkway
🕒 Nightly 7.30–8.30pm

MULTIPLE SERVICES

📍 **Lismore**, 80 Keen St
Food barn & schools program

🕒 Thu 9.30am–12pm
Drop-in centre & Red Dove Cafe
Mon–Fri 10am–3.30pm

☎ 0497 905 008

📍 **Manning**, 29 Albert St, Taree
🕒 **Foodbank**, Fri 9.30am–12.30pm
Red Dove Cafe,

🕒 Tue–Thu 9.30am–2pm & Fri 9.30am–12.30pm
☎ (02) 6552 3850

Food barn = Low-cost items sold to approved customers

Food bank = Pick up or drop off point for free food

Soup kitchen = Free food service

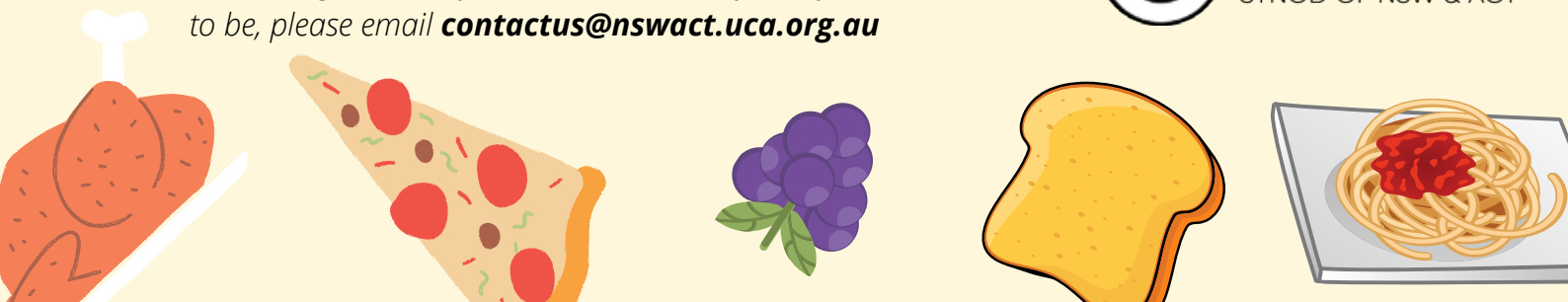
Community cafe = Low-cost cafe

Drop-in-centre = Access food or services

If you are currently operating a food service that is not yet listed in the Uniting Church's food services directory and you would like it to be, please email contactus@nswact.uca.org.au



Uniting Church
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT



Rollback of COVID supplements adding to demand for meals

The Moderator of the Uniting Church NSW & ACT, Rev. Simon Hansford, said in February that a permanent \$50 a fortnight increase to the JobSeeker wage is insufficient to help people who are looking for work and is unlikely to prevent an expected surge in demand for the church's emergency food services.

The Moderator said demand for food support at church locations across the state and territory has closely mirrored the increase and then reductions in COVID-19 supplements to the jobless.

"The initial \$500 a fortnight COVID-19 supplement made a real difference in people's lives, allowing them to pay for medicines and fresh food for the first time in many years, it allowed them to get back on their feet," Rev. Hansford said.

"People who had previously relied on food support just to survive, stopped coming to our centres as the full supplement meant they could finally support themselves. But we have since seen a winding back of these supplementary payments and with that there has been an increase again for our services."

Rev. Hansford said a planned increase of \$25 a week was patently insignificant to make an impact in the lives of people who did not have a job. "Applying for jobs requires more than significant courage and self-belief. Candidates need decent, clean clothes, perhaps a haircut and a recent meal. All of this costs money."

He said "It is not often we are in harmony with the Business Council of Australia, The Reserve Bank and ACOSS but we are about the need for a significant permanent rise in JobSeeker. This minimal increase represents



a lost opportunity to make the nation's welfare safety net about justice for those most in need. It must seek to provide dignity to those who have been profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, many of whom were already struggling before COVID-19 struck.

"The reality is that people who may not have interacted with us or the welfare system before the pandemic will really struggle as the previous support payments are wound back. We are expecting a surge in demand for food and other emergency services as families fail to make ends meet," Rev. Hansford said.

Rev. Hansford said the good work of the Jordan Cafe and The Rev. Bill Crews Foundation are just a few examples of how the Uniting Church NSW.ACT food services have had to adapt quickly to ensure the

needs and safety of our communities are balanced with our basic human need to keep connected.

Demand for meals at the Jordan Cafe in Sydney's inner-western suburb of Newtown spiked by almost 30 percent after the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Pastor Sam Stamos said close to 250 meals have been handed out on their busiest days.

"Since COVID, we transitioned quite quickly to being a takeaway only service. We have seen an increase in need, people coming in for a meal and coming in for support.

Meanwhile, Rev. Bill Crews says this year risks being especially bleak for many Australians, especially those hit hard by the COVID downturn.



"As JobKeeper and JobSeeker are wound back I'm anticipating a surge in demand for our food services," Rev. Crews said.

"Already our food vans are visiting more locations than ever and we're distributing more takeaway meals than ever. I worry the divide between the haves and have nots could grow wider in 2021."

Meanwhile, Armidale Uniting Church's Rev. Jo-Anne Smalbil said demand for food support rose after cuts to the supplement. "There had been a significant drop in demand for our food service after the pandemic began," Rev. Smalbil said. "I imagine it'll just go back to what it was before once JobSeeker is cut altogether." Parramatta Mission's Meals Plus service is also bracing for an increase in food support and anticipates visitors who relied less on food support due to the supplements will return.

The service quickly converted to takeaway delivery at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and reported first-time visitors due to job loss, as well as temporary visa holders and international students. 📞

ASHLEY DONNELLY



To make its food services more visible the Uniting Church NSW.ACT Synod Office has published a directory to help those in need to find food support in NSW and the ACT: findafeed.uca.org.au

If you run a Uniting Church food service and would like it to be added to this directory please email contactus@nswact.uca.org.au

SYNOD 2021

Change & Opportunity

HARNESSING OPPORTUNITIES
IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY

It is impossible to ignore the sceptre of COVID-19 that hangs over us today. And there is simply no guarantee of when this global pandemic will end and our lives can return to resemblance of normal.

"If we are honest as we start a new year, we still really have no idea of what a church service will look 12 months from now. Will there be singing, will it be a hybrid model of face-to-face and virtual gatherings?" Moderator Rev. Simon Hansford said.

Instead of a weekend of meeting together, Synod 2021 will be a rolling virtual Synod that will span several months, beginning in February and running to August.

Rev. Hansford said we cannot let the uncertainty of the current age paralyse us.

"In Jeremiah's letter to the people carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon (Jer. 29), the Lord told them to live their lives, to build houses, to plant gardens to marry and have sons and daughters ... he told them to live in way that brought peace and prosperity to city they were in," Rev. Hansford said.

"In the same way, we must not let anxiety and fear put our lives on hold. We must live in this new era and live in a way in which the church and grow and prosper and in turn bring blessings to our society."

Rev. Hansford said the new format Synod was a microcosm of this exhortation to embrace and thrive within these unsettling times.

"It is our deepest hope that as Synod goes virtual, it will enable many more people to be engaged, it will bring a new transparency to the process of key decision-making and it will provide the time for issues to be properly considered," he said.

WE MUST NOT
LET ANXIETY
AND FEAR
PUT OUR LIVES
ON HOLD

"In the same way we are seeking to do all we can to bring Synod to as many people as possible in our worship with services planned across the Synod in Terrigal, Cronulla and Parkes.

Rev. Hansford said while COVID-19 has been both devastating and tragic, it has led to a greater focus on caring for our neighbour.


"For example there is an acceptance in mask wearing that I am not only protecting myself from infection but I am protecting others and they are doing the same for my health and safety," Rev. Hansford said.

"And the shutdown that COVID-19 has caused has had some positive impacts on our planet and helped reduced the carbon load our world is ailing under."

But Synod will also help wrestle with the question of 'where is God amid the COVID-19 pandemic'.

The Synod theme "Where the Wild God is" seeks to reflect the reality of a God who is with us in the chaos.

This year, Synod will have the pleasure of hearing from thinker and theologian, (Dr Sathianathan Clarke, Bishop Sundo Kim Chair for World Christianity and Professor of Theology, Culture and Mission at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington DC.

Dr Clarke will bring a series of Bible studies that will lead us through the reality of a God who is not only close and present in the chaos but who is working powerfully. 

MARTIN THOMAS
MEDIA LEAD

*Where
The Wild
God is*



A Thirty Year Journey

REV. SIMON HANSFORD REFLECTS ON THIRTY YEARS OF MINISTRY

When *Insights* called Moderator Simon Hansford, he was on his way to Canberra for a Saltbush event, that would see several people ordained.

"We've created some really good initiatives in ministry that other churches are astonished by. I think Saltbush is one of these," he said.

When he was ordained, the service took place in what was then known as Kuringai Presbytery (now known as Sydney Central Coast Presbytery).

Rev. Hansford recalled that he came to faith in a youth group in St Ives in Sydney, later working as a young adult in youth ministry in Miranda.

"I loved my time in college," he said.

"Both the cohort I came up with and the faculty"

Among others, Graham Perry, Myung Hwa Park, and Graeme Gardiner were in his cohort.

"There were lots more ministry candidates back then," he said.

"The church into which I was ordained looked very differently especially in terms of ordained ministry."

"We knew there would be alterations, I guess we didn't expect to see the number of ministers ordained to be so much smaller."

CHANGES

Rev. Hansford nominated the growth in popularity of the internet and mobile phones, felt acutely during the pandemic, as the biggest shift that took place during his time in ministry.

"The nature of communication and the way people gathered was so much different," he said.

"The internet and mobile phones were just not the case when I was ordained."

"The essence of ministry remains the same, being community, forming community, advocating for justice, and the place of god in the wider world."

The conversation about how to do ministry in the post-Christendom world, where fewer people regularly go to church, was something that had advanced during this time.

"We were talking about the post-Christendom world when we were at college," Rev. Hansford recalled.

"Rather than an accepted part of the world we are now missionaries in the world."

"In many ways it reminds us who we are supposed to be."

HOW DO WE BEAR WITNESS TO CHRIST IN A SOCIETY THAT DOESN'T KNOW WHO THAT IS ANYMORE?

"I think our place is best suited at the edges of society."

The church, Rev. Hansford said, must now learn how to better communicate with people who are fourth or fifth generation un-churched, which has implications for its ministry, how it works alongside the wider community, and how it expresses its understanding of the gospel.

Accordingly, he drew attention to times when the church spoke to wider society as being the highlights of his past thirty years in ministry.

"For me, the highlights I would speak of would be when the church engages in conversation...and people in the community see that as a valuable conversation," he said.

Rev. Hansford cites the Uniting Church's discussions regarding marriage, drug law reform, and community initiatives such as the heroin injecting centre in Kings Cross.

"The fact is, discipleship and people coming to faith means much more in a community where people don't see themselves as church," he said.

"The essential question for the church is, how do we bear witness to Christ in a society that doesn't know who that is anymore?"

"How do we proclaim our faith in Christ when the whole church has not lived up to its calling?"

The wider community, Rev. Hansford said, now has a greater mistrust of institutions than was the case when he was first ordained.

"One of the advantages of the Uniting Church is that we have always talked about not being an institution," he said.

"The decline of the church is a marked thing for us. We are a church most notably in conversation with the world around us."

THE NEXT THIRTY YEARS

Looking ahead, Rev. Hansford said he hoped the next thirty years might see the church find new ways to express the gospel to the wider community, that he would, "love to see the church find new wineskins into which to put the wine."

"We have to find the ways to articulate our faith in the world around us," he said.

"We have to marry our significant work with the community with the gospel to which we proclaim."

"I'm incredibly thankful for the footsteps in which I walk."

"I'm thoughtful for those folk who come after me."

With his home in Tamworth, Rev. Hansford often makes long journeys to the likes of Sydney and Canberra. He expressed gratitude for his family's understanding, as he frequently has to be away.

"My girls are both adults. Fiona's been incredibly gracious and has affirmed my call," he said.

"I want to thank the friends who have covenanted to care for her in my absence." 🙏

JONATHAN FOYE



Uniting Church
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT

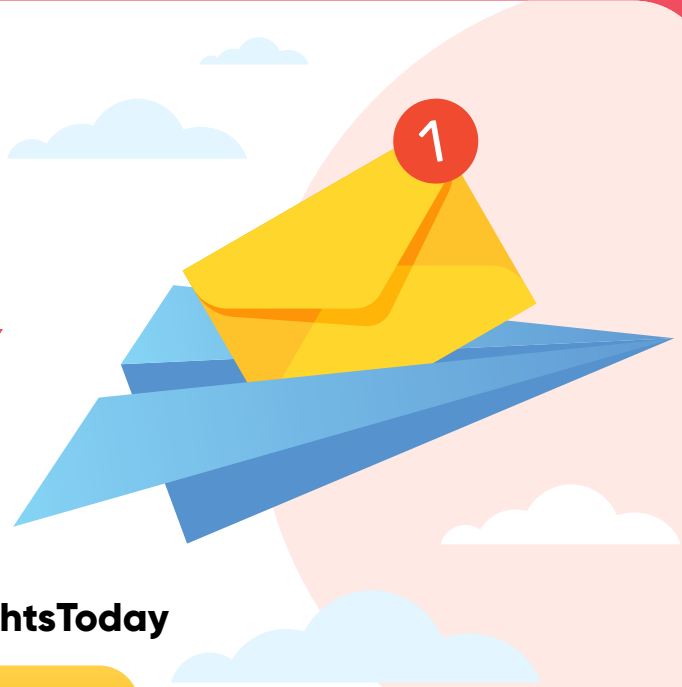
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FAITH IN ACTION

7 & 8 MAY



TRANSFORM BELIEF INTO **PRACTICE**

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**MORLING
COLLEGE**

SYNOD 2021

WHOLE OF CHURCH EVENTS

ACROSS THE SYNOD IN 2021

These events will be held in Churches across the Synod and led by the Moderator. The services will be livestreamed on the official Uniting Church Synod of NSW and the ACT Facebook page and the Synod's YouTube Channel and will be available on both of those platforms after the events for on demand viewing.

*Where
The wild
God is*

SUNDAY 23 MAY 2021

Pentecost "The Possibilities of the Wilderness"
Sydney Cheil Uniting Church | 7.30pm

SUNDAY 8 AUGUST 2021

Transfiguration Sunday "Changed in the Wilderness"
New Beginnings Uniting Church | 7.30pm

SUNDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2021

Christ the King Sunday "A Home in the Wilderness"
Parkes Welcome Uniting Church | 7.30pm



WHERE YOU CAN WATCH EVENTS



The Uniting Church Synod of NSW and ACT Official Facebook page:
facebook.com/unitingchurchnswact



Watch the YouTube live stream using the following link
nswact.uca.org.au/live

SYNOD 2021

Bible Studies Leader

SATHIANATHAN CLARKE



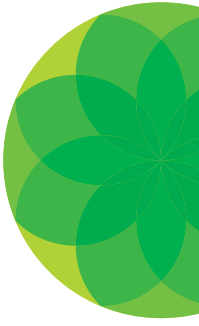
Sathianathan "Sathi" Clarke has been confirmed as Bible Study leader for Synod in Session in April, June and August.

Sathianathan "Sathi" Clarke is Bishop Sundo Kim Chair in World Christianity and Professor of Theology, Culture, and Mission at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. He also serves as Assisting Clergy at the Church of the Epiphany, Diocese of Washington, where he facilitated a bible study among homeless friends from 2010. His vocation has been a unique blend of the joy of Church ministry, passion for working with communities of the poor (in the Church of South India and the Diocese of Madras) and other religious faiths, and love of academic research and teaching. Clarke bridges the world between establishment and the marginalised, the global and the local, and academy and the congregation and for the last twenty years, he has taught and lectured on global Christianity, contextual theology, World Christianity, Christian mission, and interreligious dialogue across the globe.



Sathianathan Clarke's Bible studies will be available after each meeting to view on demand on our Vimeo Channel:
vimeo.com/nswactuca

The Current Crew



Often forgotten in sermon series on Paul's letter to the Romans is his finale. After 15 chapters of deep theology and important practical life lessons, the list of cheerio's that Paul sends to his mates in Rome in chapter 16 can seem like an anti-climax.

It isn't. Paul was never about theology for its own sake. His passion was for people to know God and when he saw that happening he was effusive in his acknowledgement of them. Read Romans 16 carefully and imagine you were one of those people – what an encouragement it would be for the apostle Paul to say those things of you! I'd be more than happy with an epitaph that said 'Warren worked hard in the Lord', or that I 'stood the test'.

Hearing about real people bringing their abilities and passion to the task of serving God's people is never anti-climactic. That's why, following on from my last article that mentioned some of the people who've made money matter for the Uniting Church in the past, in this article I want to acknowledge some of my colleagues and friends at Uniting Financial Services (UFS) today.

These are the current crew of leaders within UFS who are working passionately to ensure that UFS continues to serve the Church in 2021. I can honestly say that the people I'm about to tell you about make up the best leadership team I've ever worked with – and I've worked in some excellent, dynamic, successful companies over the years.



Matthew Moore

Matthew is one of the world's most experienced ethical investment professionals. He is one of the pioneers of the Australian funds management industry's take-up of the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment.



Linda Johnson

Linda's technical knowledge, commitment to service and people management skills have helped us to navigate a tough couple of years



Ian Perry

Ian left one of Australia's most successful fund management firms to come to UFS





Michael Noakes

Michael is a very experienced commercial banker who set up the risk function for a well-known bank in his former life

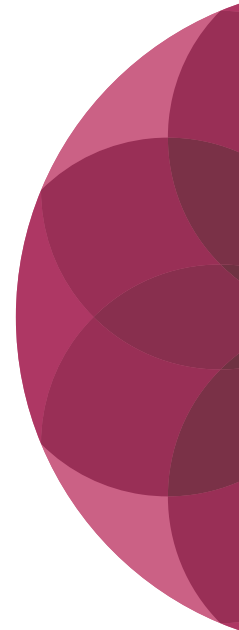


John McComb

John has a roving brief to roll up his sleeves and help to solve problems and run projects within any part of UFS that needs his guidance



PEOPLE LIKE
MATTHEW,
LINDA, IAN,
MICHAEL
AND JOHN,
ALONG WITH
THE MEMBERS
OF THEIR
TEAMS BRING
SKILL AND
DEDICATION
TO THEIR
WORK AT UFS



I'll start with the longest serving individual, our Head of Ethical Investments, **Matthew Moore**. Matthew is one of the world's most experienced ethical investment professionals. He has a wealth of knowledge and expertise in this field and is one of the pioneers of the Australian funds management industry's take-up of the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment. Matt could walk into a senior role at any investment firm in the world that takes ethics seriously, but we're privileged to have had him with us for the last 20 years, championing the Church's ethical approach. His zeal does not flag for this important aspect of what we do at UFS.

Known to many of you, especially congregational treasurers, is **Linda Johnson**. As Head of Partner Solutions and Support, Linda manages the UFS team that handles all our church relationships, helping you to solve issues with your investments with or your loans from us. An experienced banker before joining UFS – including a decade or so managing various bank branches – Linda's technical knowledge, commitment to service and people management skills have helped us to navigate a tough couple of years. Look no further than the way her team has hardly skipped a beat since we shifted to working remotely when COVID hit to see the value that the Church gets from having Linda with us. Linda's team have often told me what a great leader and supportive person they find her to be and we hear back from some of you quite often thanking her and the team for their assistance. So it's now my turn to say 'thank you' to

Linda for bringing her heart and mind to work each day in service of the Uniting Church.

Two of the more recent additions to the UFS leadership group are our Chief Finance Officer, **Ian Perry**, and our Chief Risk Officer, **Michael Noakes**. These two each had high calibre careers in funds management and banking before joining UFS just over three years ago. Michael's a very experienced commercial banker who set up the risk function for a well-known bank in his former life, while Ian left one of Australia's most successful fund management firms to come to UFS. Both have brought not only their talent and experience to the table in their respective areas, but an energy and enthusiasm to help UFS and the Church succeed. And they're both just outstanding people, with a compassionate and collaborative approach to everything they do. It's wonderful to have them on our team.

Finally, but by no means least of all, is my 2IC **John McComb**. Having worked for most of his career in the capital markets areas of Tier one banks or start-up fund managers, John has devoted the last 10 years to applying his financial expertise to Christian church organisations, the last five with UFS. John has a roving brief to roll up his sleeves and help to solve problems and run projects within any part of UFS that needs his guidance, while also supporting me with strategic thinking and implementation. He's a great professional support for me, as well as being a true Christian friend, a man of prayer and discernment.

Did you know that, in the last couple of years, UFS has made a distribution of \$9 million per annum towards the activities of the Synod? Activities such as the great work of the Communications team which produces Insights, but also the full range of services and support to the Church such as training and placing ministers, funding the Moderator and General Secretary, property support services, IT support, etc.

This happens because people like Matthew, Linda, Ian, Michael and John, along with the members of their teams, bring skill and dedication to their work at UFS. They are a real blessing. They all want to help UFS to manage the Church's pooled assets and the funds entrusted to us by other investors in a way that benefits us all and that grows the financial resources available to the Church to make a Jesus shaped difference in the world. Like me – and like Roy and Ed and many others before us – they want to make money matter. Will you please pray for me and for them, that the Lord will prosper us in that endeavour? 🙏

WARREN BIRD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR | UNITING
FINANCIAL SERVICES



No, the Bible was not written for you



You've probably seen it before on social media. A Bible quote in the context of someone's personal social media page, to describe a current personal situation. Or perhaps in a discussion about the Bible, you may have encountered the argument that the Bible was written to be read by everyone.

There are a few classic examples of this phenomenon. Perhaps the one that sticks out the most is Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."

This verse has been widely used as inspiration, including as part of Shawn Michaels' ring gear when he returned to the WWE in 2002. In such contexts, it is used to suggest a version of Christian triumphalism: namely that believers are strengthened by their faith and can do strong things.

Even read in a surface level way, with an eye only to the passages before and after 4:13, however, Paul had something else in mind when he wrote this part of the letter.

The passage from here goes on, "For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

Pretty far from the impression that the verse gives by itself.

Of course, the question could be asked as to why this matters. If Philippians 4:13, say, gives hope to a Christian in times when that person needs it, then maybe the verse has served its purpose, even if it's not entirely accurate in its appropriation?


Yes and no. Beyond risking being inaccurate (and not dealing with how the text was read in its own time), reading the Bible as our own personal source of #inspiration is arguably

a narcissistic approach. It prevents us from reading some of the text's more difficult messages or finding some of the deeper nuances that lie beneath the surface of the Bible's 66 books. All of these texts, despite appearing in a convenient single volume translated into English, were written in languages that many of us do not understand, by authors with very different lived experiences to our own.

The text was not written for us. Acknowledging that we don't possess scriptures tightly, as the arbiters of its meaning, means acknowledging that we are limited in our efforts to understand it (as with any human endeavour to understand God, we should acknowledge our limitations). This means we need to work to understand it and this process is one that takes effort and time.

Thankfully, we are not without resources that can help us grapple with scripture. As the Uniting Church's Basis of Union points out, "...God has never left the Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, God's living Word."

"In particular the Uniting Church enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith."

This brings us to a point for the church to consider, namely that we don't inherit key pieces of scripture on our own. Many parts of the Bible were intended for groups to read (Paul's letters, for instance, were intended to be read aloud to a large gathered community). We would do well to treat scripture as something we need one another's help with. 

JONATHAN FOYE

READING THE BIBLE AS OUR OWN PERSONAL SOURCE OF #INSPIRATION IS A NARCISSISTIC APPROACH

What's on?

REGISTER NOW! WWW.UTC.EDU.AU



22 APRIL 2021

UTC MAY MACLEOD LECTURE

Lest we forget? Memory and Scripture in Australia

Can religious history reframe how we imagine Australia now? In the midst of heated public debates about both religion and race, what kind of memory does this moment require? What role might Christian communities play in cultivating it?

REGISTER NOW! UME.NSWACT.UCA.ORG.AU

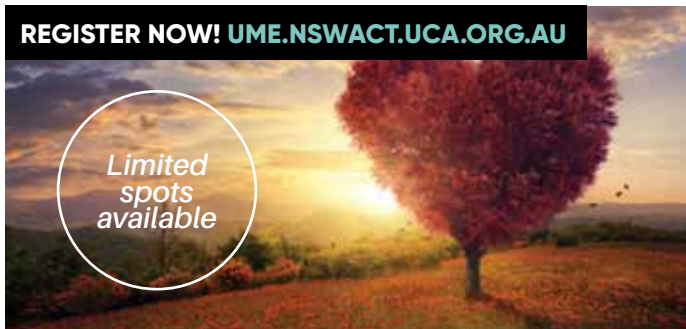


20-21 MAY 2021

Living Our Values

Living Our Values is a course designed to inform attendees about the history, polity and ethos of the Uniting Church. You'll learn about how the Uniting Church came to be, its journey so far, how we make decisions together, how we understand and nurture leadership as a 'Pilgrim People on the Way'.

REGISTER NOW! UME.NSWACT.UCA.ORG.AU



23-26 MAY 2021

Women in Ministry Retreat

You are invited to give yourself time for Rest, Nurture, Spirituality & Community. A retreat for women active in the roles of: Minister of the Word, Deacon, Pastor & other specified ministry roles within the Uniting Church in Australia's Synod of NSW & ACT.

COMING SOON



1-3 JUNE 2021

PreachFest!

PreachFest is a 3-day festival created to inspire and enliven the craft, art and vocation of preaching across churches in Australia. With an impressive line up of speakers, this is an event you don't want to miss!

TO FIND OUT MORE AND TO REGISTER GO TO:
ume.nswact.uca.org.au | www.utc.edu.au



Journey through Lent

Lent is the season leading up to Easter – it is 40 days and is often connected to Jesus' 40 days in the desert. It is an opportunity to put something aside to draw closer to God. This is an opportunity for the whole church, young and old, to take time and think about how we would like to see things differently; what things get in the way of us just being with God. The key theme is about justice: justice towards God, justice towards self, and justice towards neighbour or our world.

These concepts are a great framework as we explore what is possible particularly when we are thinking about Emerging Generations.

Justice towards God encourages us to take time to connect more deeply with God. It might be about doing a bible study or a daily or weekly devotion or taking about a new spiritual practice. There are many great resources to reflect on but we do not need to be limited to traditional forms of practice.

A couple of years ago as a Lenten practice I decided to make time to draw the lectionary readings for the week. I did line work and then shared it with my congregation for them to colour in as part of their spiritual practice. The surprising thing was the insights I gained around the reading by trying to draw it into reality. I wonder what new insights we would gain if we invited the people of our church to draw a reflection on the lead up to Easter. Everyone has different gifts and ways to encounter God what if we were to share them as a community as we prepare ourselves for Easter.

Justice towards ourselves is about taking time to have a sober look at ourselves, and to be realistic about how we are going on our journey with God as followers of Jesus. It is a time to confess to God those things that we may be doing well but also those areas we could do better in and making a plan for change. For some people that is about needing to step up and do more, for some it is about stopping doing something that is not bringing honour to God, for some about stepping back and letting others have a

go. I wonder how it would go if the first week of lent we were intentional about looking at our lives and seeing what we might need to work on and then put in place new habit to make it so. This could be a great conversation as a family about new habits you might like to try.

Justice towards our neighbour includes our world. Over the last couple of years I think we have all realised that to only care for the people on our planet is not enough, we must care for the whole earth and everything in it. In the past during Lent we have practiced random acts of kindness, seeking to bring God's light into the world every day and yet as Christians I think that sometimes we don't appreciate the power we have to bring about change particularly when we do it together.

The most recent Synod our church decided to prioritise Climate Change as an issue that God is concerned about in our world and is calling us to action in. Uniting Earth have some great resources and ideas about how you can go about this.

We know that living in Australia we are very blessed to have the infrastructure we have to support us during difficult times, others are not so lucky. Uniting World also have great resources for you to be able to use.

In all of these opportunities why not stop and think about how you can include children in the conversation and the actions you take. How can you explore issues of justice and help them find their voice in bringing God's kingdom to come?

God cares about the things that are happening in our world and as Christians not only are we called to be the hands and feet of Jesus but also the voice. 🗣️

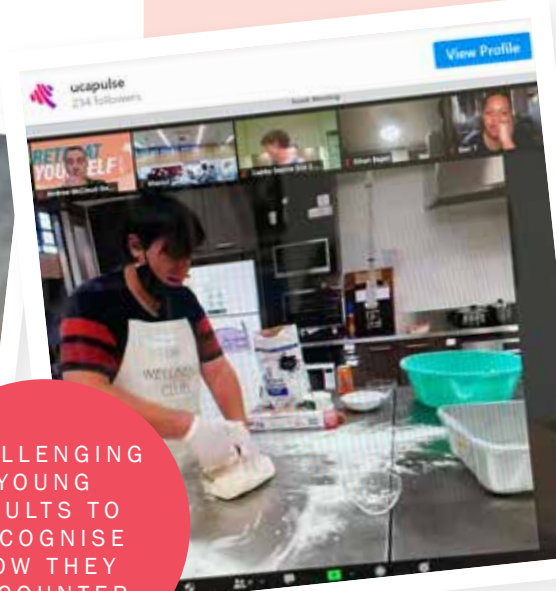
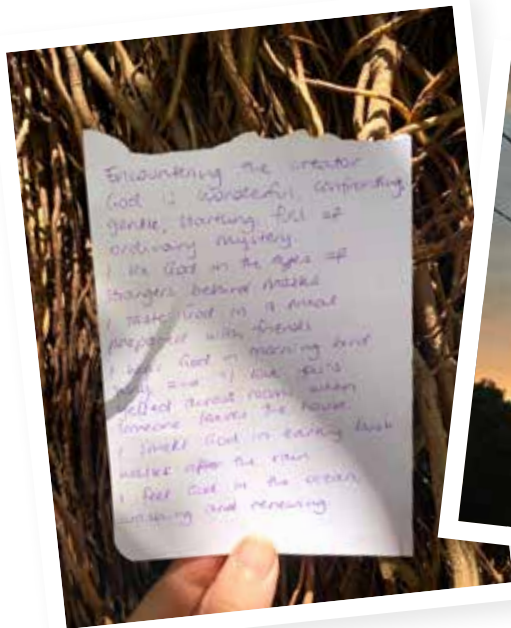
KAREN MITCHELL-LAMBERT
IS ORDAINED IN THE MINISTRY OF DEACON
AND IS THE TEAM LEADER OF PULSE



I WONDER HOW
IT WOULD GO IF
THE FIRST WEEK
OF LENT WE WERE
INTENTIONAL
ABOUT LOOKING
AT OUR LIVES AND
SEEING WHAT WE
MIGHT NEED TO
WORK ON?

Retreat Yourself

2021 RETREAT YOURSELF 2021 (#RY21) HAS BEEN RUN AND WON, AND WHAT A GLORIOUS SUCCESS IT WAS!



CHALLENGING
YOUNG
ADULTS TO
RECOGNISE
HOW THEY
ENCOUNTER
GOD

Working in partnership with Uniting Church Tertiary chaplaincy and Christian Students Uniting, PULSE hosted the second annual young adult retreat in mid-January 2021 via a hybrid model that involved Zoom and a number of small in-person groups.

Challenging our young adults to recognise how they ENCOUNTER God in various ways in their day-to-day lives was an important part of this year's retreat, and it offered a number of challenges which the nearly 50 young adult participants met head-on with big smiles and full hearts.

The group first gathered on Friday night 15 January for the first Friday Night Cook-Off™, hosted by Andrew McCloud (Leichhardt), and Doo Ah Leeming (Wollongong) with the crew at Keiraview Uniting Church. Young Adults from all around connected on Zoom and gathered in their kitchens to be taught how to make burek ("Just add more filling to make it better"

– thanks Danny!), and enjoy a pre-prepared menu they'd cooked including a curry and nasi goreng. Even the new minister at Keiraview Rev. David Stuart and his family took part in the cooking fun times.

On Saturday 16 January the group re-gathered in a number of locations across the Synod including Port Macquarie, Westmead and Terrigal, or from their homes for worship, bible study, and an opportunity for a deeper ENCOUNTER.

A challenge was set to gather photographic expressions of how participants see God at work in their lives and their community, all shared on Instagram. The

various locations shared lunch together, and then re-gathered again online in the afternoon for closing worship led by Pastor Ofa Foiakau and Rev. John Dacey.

The PULSE team are thankful for all involved in the planning and delivery of this important and now annual event for young adults within the NSW/ACT Synod, and we look forward to connecting with young adults across congregations and communities in 2021, offering the opportunity to develop stronger relationships with each other and deeper relationships with Jesus Christ. 🙌

STEVE 'MOLK' MOKKENTIN IS THE SENIOR FIELD OFFICER (NORTH), AND RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY AS A PART OF THE PULSE TEAM.



YOU CAN KEEP IN TOUCH WITH PULSE BY SIGNING UP FOR OUR MONTHLY NEWSLETTER, OR FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT OUR TEAM VIA EMAIL, FACEBOOK OR TWITTER.

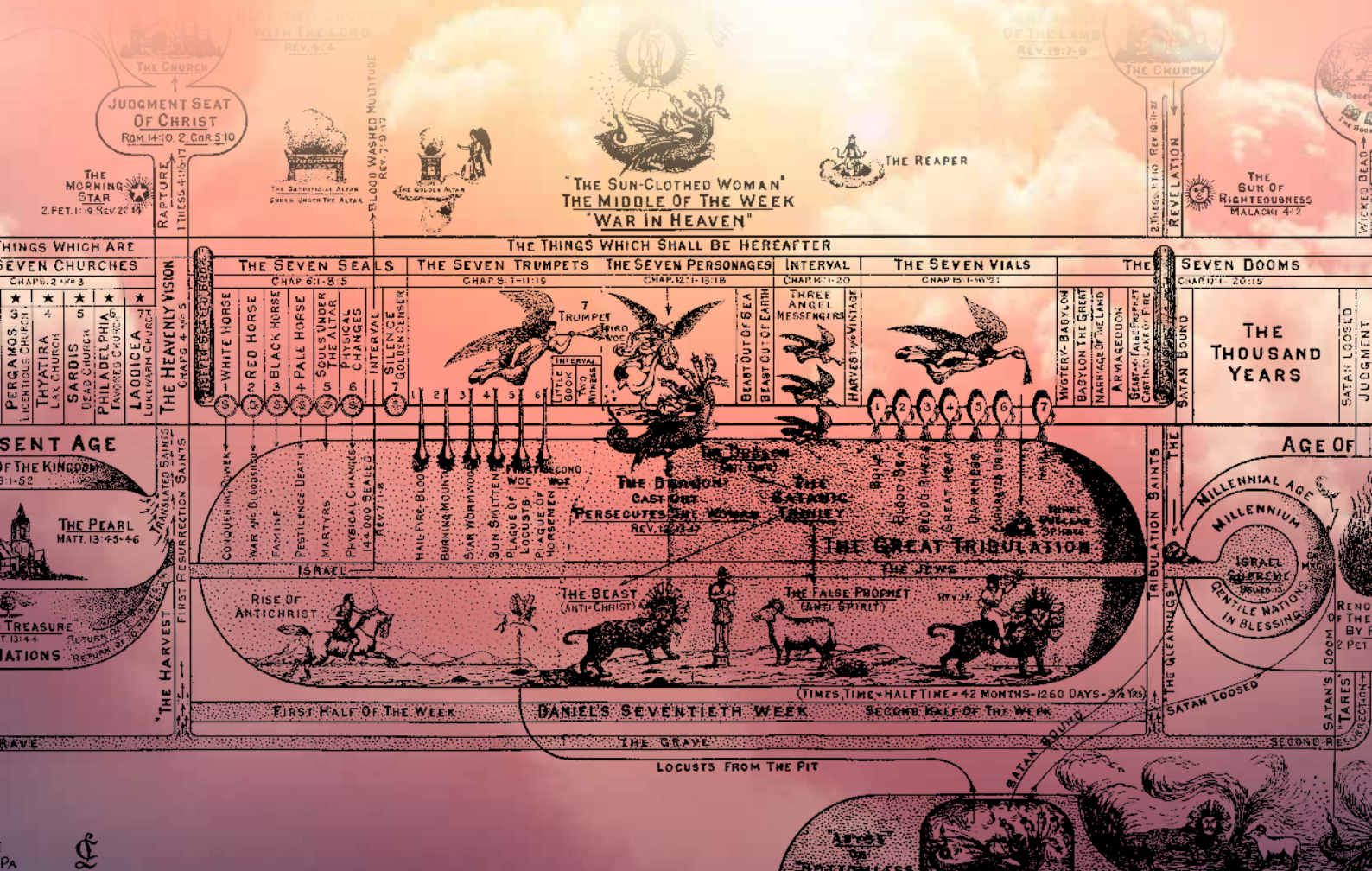
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THE STRANGE BOOK OF REVELATION

ONE OF THE LEAST-UNDERSTOOD BOOKS OF SCRIPTURE...



At some point in the early first century BCE, John of Patmos wrote an apocalypse that has puzzled the church in more recent centuries, served as part of longstanding predictions about what the future has in store, and provided fertile debate for biblical scholars.

John's Apocalypse would eventually become a part of the biblical canon as the Book of Revelation...but not initially. When the Council of Nicea laid out consensus about what books of scripture would appear in the Bible in the fourth century, the book did not make the cut. Later, its inclusion was a matter of protracted debate, with more than one church denomination refusing to include it in their editions of the Bible.

On the other hand, Revelation (no s) has enjoyed times of popularity, especially as the basis of speculative Christian fiction (the likes of the *Left Behind* series). With its terrifying eschatological vision and dense metaphors, the book is a terrifying one that is invoked as a prediction of how the world will end. In a year as tumultuous as 2020, it is easy to see why the book enjoys a particular cache during trying times.

And yet, it is worth acknowledging that there is no scholarly consensus about Revelation, with theologians differing widely on the author's intent and the underlying theology surrounding the work. That said, biblical scholarship remains constantly interested in the Book of Revelation, if not in agreement about it, and we are fortunate enough that these scholars have provided some ways of approaching this strange text.

The author, John of Patmos, identifies himself early on in the work as a 'servant'. A long-held church tradition suggested that this is the same figure as John, the disciple for whom John's gospel was named. It is unlikely that the two works shared a common author, however, with an analysis of each book's vocabulary suggesting that they are more dissimilar than any two other books in the New Testament.



THERE IS NO SCHOLARLY CONSENSUS ABOUT REVELATION WITH THEOLOGIAN'S DIFFERING WIDELY ON THE AUTHOR'S INTENT



Like most of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation originally appears in koine Greek. Unlike other texts from the time, however, such as the Gospel of Luke, Revelation's Greek is renowned by scholars as being particularly low quality.

For anything that Revelation lacks in its use of language, the book provides rich and terrifying imagery to describe a cosmic clash between the forces of Sin and empire and Jesus Christ. Like other books in its genre, John's apocalypse features language that describes certain spiritual and political realities using end-of-world imagery, a technique that we see elsewhere in scripture.

As is the case with the apocalypse genre, the book features a narrator who has a strange vision full of symbolism. An interesting area of this is the way it draws on numbers. Symbolic numbers play a big part, with repeated use of seven (the seven scrolls, for example) and 666, the infamous number of the beast (which may be an opaque reference to the Emperor Nero).

While the latter part of Revelation offers an image of a future where Jesus has overcome this battle, at least most of the book describes events that have already taken place in the world of its author.

Revelation will continue to inspire and revile the church, and will no doubt always be invoked during times when it seems that the end of the world is here. But this does not mean that Christians need fear the book. ②

JONATHAN FOYE



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7 MARCH

EXODUS 20:1-17

"The 10 Commandments" is a text often treated as if it exists in a vacuum; an abstracted and neat set of teachings that can be lifted up and moved around without sacrificing any of its utility. However, like just about everything in Scripture, these commandments are only truly legible when held within the narrative of God's dealing with the world, after all the reading begins with a "then." These teachings do not invade the story from without but emerge from within. Their very existence depends upon God's already-demonstrated fidelity, the promise that God will be Israel's God and they will be God's people, a promise fulfilled through the mighty acts of liberation and provision of manna from heaven that mark the story of the Exodus.

It is problematic when these commandments are picked up from page within the Bible and plunked down, for instance, on a stone outside a courthouse. This movement enforces a vacuum, an abstraction, that hides the whole and much more wonderful nature of their giving: commandments gifted within a relationship, so that Israel might not be tempted to resemble the ways of their oppressors in Egypt but be a people who witness to the generous and just love of God.

14 MARCH

NUMBERS 21:4-9

If you've ever flown on a plane (back when we could do that) you will have undoubtedly experienced a most strange human ritual. The plane has come to a complete stop, the seatbelt light flicks off, and people hurry to release their belts, stand in the aisle, and contort their bodies to extricate their bags so that

they can stand and wait and wait and wait for the doors to open. The miracle of flight, of having travelled 1000km in the space of an hour, does nothing to quell the desire to scrap and scrape one's way to a prime position to exit the plane. We do not like to wait, like to be held from reaching our destination, from moving from 'arriving' to 'arrived'. And so we read, "the people became impatient on the way".

The Israelites, wandering through an endless desert, quickly forget the miraculous way by which they have come and begin to pine for Egypt, the land of their oppression. Then come the serpents. There's something mystical about their emergence, especially when we think back to Genesis 3 and the role of the serpent in introducing doubt, division, and discord. This allegorical nature is heightened in how the serpents are dealt with: not obliterated or cast off, but transfigured. Even after the repentance of the people the serpents remain within the camp. And yet, they need but look upon the bronze serpent, provided by God, and they will be healed. The serpents remain, a symbol for the burden of waiting and wandering, the restlessness and unsettledness of their life, but a new way of relating to them is introduced, one where they need only look to what God has provided to be made well.

21 MARCH

JOHN 12:20-33

It is helpful to have last week's reading from Numbers (the serpents/bronze serpent) in mind as we read today's gospel passage. Jesus positions himself as the bronze serpent, who in his crucifixion will be lifted up from the earth, elevated and



WE FIX OUR EYES ON THE
CROSS, ON THE GLORY
OF THE SON, WHO CASTS
OUT EVIL AND DRAWS ALL
THINGS TO HIMSELF

glorified so that the ruler of this earth (Satan, generally associated with the serpent) will be driven out and all people will be drawn to Jesus (much like the eyes of Israel were drawn to the bronze serpent in order that they may be saved). Throughout his gospel, John, frames Jesus' crucifixion as an enthronement - a glorification of the Father through the Son - the hour of this crucifixion is the hour not of defeat, but of the victory of God, the judgment of evil, and the salvation of the world. In this season, even if we feel surrounded by serpents, we fix our eyes on the cross, on the glory of the Son, who casts out evil and draws all things to himself.

28 MARCH PALM SUNDAY

JOHN 12:12-16

The disciples witness the crowds sing Hosannas and watch Jesus climb upon the donkey but are unable to interpret what this means. It is only after his glorification that they interpret these

scenes properly. This serves as a reminder to all of us, that the life and ministry of Jesus is read back through his death and resurrection. Because of his unexpected execution and yet continued presence amidst the disciples, his life lived up to that moment takes on paramount significance. Jesus' teaching, his fellowship and friendship, his ministry of healing and exorcisms, his very person is something that comes into clarity in the wake of his crucifixion and resurrection. Palm Sunday turns our eyes to the coming passion, but Easter imbues all of this with significance. There is no way to interpret the life of Christ or formulate a vision of his significance that ignores or suppresses the fact that this man was crucified. It tends to be that when Christians forget the crucifixion of their Lord, they find it most easy to ignore the crucified in their midst. ②

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

APRIL

Children of God



A CHILD OF
GOD SET ON
A PATH TO
BECOME THE
LIKENESS OF
THE SON

of generous love has adopted us and made us a co-heir with Christ. We do not confess to an uncaring, unbiased judge, but to a nurturing parent who seeks only to help us correct our path. When we approach the Scriptures, we come as those wishing to be formed further into the image and likeness of our God, an image and likeness which (in its perfection) is our end.

25 APRIL

1 JOHN 3:16-24

We are children of God, now act

4 APRIL

JOHN 20:1-18

"Mary." She hears her name. She hears his voice. He has risen. In the calling of her name the voice reaches out to touch her heart, and it is explodes with joy. Where she had asked for the smallest of mercies she has received the greatest of gifts: an encounter with her friend, her hope, her Messiah. In the voice of the good shepherd, who in this moment vindicates his teaching, showing her his power to lay down his life for others and take it up again, she hears the truth of her own life: It is the Lord's. Her life, her name, her self, her past and future is claimed by Christ and entrusted to the heralding of his kingdom and glory.

11 APRIL

JOHN 20:19-31

There's a lot of post-resurrection excitement in our lectionary readings this week, and yet, buried in all the huzzahs is the not-to-be-overlooked detail in the Gospel of John that the one who has conquered death is the one whose body still bears the scars. The risen Christ is the crucified Jesus. It should never be never be underplayed how strange it is that the crucifixion remained so central to Christian imagery and proclamation. Even when proclaiming resurrection the disciples never unshackled it from the cross. We cannot help but be excited post-Easter- but we cannot forget that the resurrection and the life comes through the suffering and humiliation of Jesus who stood in solidarity with all who suffer, all who are degraded and dehumanised by the violence of our worldly

systems, all who suffer the desolation and dereliction of feeling abandoned by God, all those vulnerable and victimised by those they thought were friends. Because we cannot forget that Jesus is with those huddled masses living lives of quiet desperation, we cannot forget them.

18 APRIL

1 JOHN 3:1-7

We are children of God. Beloved, hear again, we are God's children. Now. Already. We may not know the fullness of what that means or what we will look like in the age to come, but we know this: we will be like the Son, imbedded in the life of God. There's no way to dwell too long on this most remarkable of truths - we are children of God. In this truth the entire life of our faith is reframed. When we seek to worship we come not to a distant deity to be placated, but to a loving parent who out

like it. This is the powerful and necessary extension of last week's reading. Having been adopted into the family of God, a child of God set on a path to become the likeness of the Son, our lives and love should now, already, be in the likeness of the Son. If last week was about the comforting truths, this week is about the hard truth: Whoever does not love abides in death. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Of course, there is a comforting truth and the climax of this teaching. A rather helpful reminder when this charge seems too onerous to achieve: the Spirit has been given to us. We are not alone, we can love, we can live, because the spirit abides - call on the Spirit, who will not fail you. ☉

LECTIONARY REFLECTIONS

MAY

We are transformed

2 MAY

1 JOHN 4:7-21 AND JOHN 15:1-8

Our passage today paints a picture of a perfect ecosystem of love. Because of God's primary and preceding love we are then able to love, and when we thus love we abide in God and God in us, and because of this abiding and love we are compelled to keep the commandment to love one another. This is the ecosystem Christians live within, the love of God which makes all subsequent love possible and necessary. It is an ecosystem perfectly balanced to generate the fruit of the Spirit in order that our lives, those of our neighbours, indeed the life of whole of the created world may flourish. When things feel out of whack, consider if we have somehow isolated ourselves from this ecosystem, and allow the pursuing and attracting love of God to draw you lovingly back in.

9 MAY

JOHN 15:9-17

It is easy to conceive of commandments as onerous, exacting, and dry; a burdensome curtailing of what should be a freeing relationship with God. In this passage, however, Jesus remarks that his commandments are given so that the disciples may love one another. This commandment, like those throughout the breadth of Scripture, sprout from the same seed: God's loving desire that we would

order our collective lives in a way that precipitates love. I think it asks us to approach commandments with a generous heart to ask how they might have appeared as an outworking of God's desire in that community at that time, and to also use this lens to

seated at the right hand of the Father to whom all authority over heaven and earth has been given, and this very Jesus prays this prayer over all who follow him - unbound by time and location. Jesus prays this prayer over you and me at every moment.

to adopt in order to experience the fullness of the Spirit's gift.

30 MAY

ROMANS 8: 12-17 AND 22-27

Reading this passage we come to see that prayer is less about something we do (or the words we say) and more about what we are letting God do in

us. It is God's Triune nature that makes this work possible.

We do not know how to pray as we ought, and so the Spirit helps us in our weakness, interceding with sighs too deep for words. Prayer is a movement of the Triune God happening within us - "God answering God in and through the one who prays" (Sarah Coakley). It is a call-and-response of the

divine desire to see us grow into Christlikeness.

The work of God in us is not based on our grit, holiness, or eloquence but resides solely in the relations of the Trinity. We never need fear that we don't know how to pray. We never need to worry that we haven't been on enough retreats - for in simply attempting to pray, the work of God begins within us; deep calls to deep, and we are transformed. ☪

These reflections have been prepared by

REV. LIAM MILLER



PRAYER IS A
MOVEMENT OF
THE TRIUNE GOD
HAPPENING
WITHIN US

look at the commandments in our churches and society to test whether they too fit the brief of a gift given to help us love one another.

16 MAY

JOHN 17:6-19

The book of Hebrews describes Jesus as our great high priest, and here, in this passage from John, it is on full display. Jesus, praying intercession over his friends, praying that though he is about to depart from them physically they will be held eternally in the loving arms of the Father. Jesus also prays as one who knows the trials and testing of this world, as one who fully understands what his disciples are to face. Jesus, the great high priest, is also the eternal Son of glory,

23 MAY

ACTS 2:1-21

There is no barrier to the radical in-breaking of the Spirit and the subsequent gifts and fruits that the Spirit brings. No particular cultural form, language, or identity marker is raised above another or required for adoption in order to experience the Spirit and receive one's charge to proclaim good news. It is not that these particularities suddenly cease to matter or that we should stop celebrating their uniqueness, history, and beauty - the holy fire of the Spirit burns through any desire to elevate one over the others, to establish one as more befitting the work of God, to enforce one as necessary

NEWS FROM UNITING CHURCH
ADULT FELLOWSHIP (UCAF)

Fellowship news

Welcome to 2021 and hopefully a year when some Rallies and Gatherings can take place.

UCAF

The NSW/ACT Synod Committee met in February for the Annual Dedication Service and this year it was with a difference as we were on Zoom. Special Guest and speaker was Moderator Rev Simon Hansford and UCAF National Chairperson Janet Woodward from South Australia joined us. The Zoom service meant many of the Representatives we invite did not attend but instead for the first time we met contact people from throughout the Synod who do not travel to meetings in Sydney because of distance. We welcomed Bronwyn and Bruce Guy from Canberra Presbytery, Ailsa Braid- Mid North Coast (North), Lorraine Furze- New England (Northwest) Margaret Rumens-Riverina and Lyn Drabsch- Sydney Central Coast. Life Member Norma Chambers and ACW Uniting Church Delegate Isabel Hewitt also joined in.

APPRECIATION CERTIFICATES

Appreciation Certificates continue to be a valued contribution of the Synod Committee with regular requests received by Secretary Laraine. In Nyngan (Macquarie Darling Presbytery) four 90 Year certificates were presented at a special Celebration dinner. Certificates are available for 80, 90 and 100 year olds who have been active and involved in your Congregations.

SYNOD COMMITTEE

The Synod Committee has prepared a discussion paper on the future of visits by Committee members to Churches encouraging Fellowships and get togethers. These will be on hold till COVID-19 issues resolve.

RALLIES AND GATHERINGS

Rallies and Gatherings have been tentatively prepared in some Presbyteries with dates for a few listed:

Illawarra Presbytery

Corrimal UC 27 May
Paramatta-Nepean
Grantham Heights UC 31 July
Mid North Coast (South)
Wauchope UC 8 September
Macquarie Darling
9-10 October Cowra UC
(Encouragement Weekend)

The Presbytery's earlier Molong Weekend has been cancelled.

STAMP COMMITTEE

The Stamp Committee continue to meet at Pilgrim House Pitt Street Tuesdays 9am-12md and first Fridays of the month 9am-11-30am. Sales for 2020 were \$18659. Volunteers are always welcome. Please continue to save your stamps. Grants for 2020 were deferred till 2021.

Applications for new Grants open 1 July 2021 and close 31 July 2021 and are for existing Community/Outreach programs involving volunteers from the Congregation to a maximum of \$1000.

YEAR BOOK

The new "Year Book" is available for 2021 and has been sent electronically to Presbyteries and contact people. Please contact Laraine Jones for information on this and the Newsletter. The first *Connexion* Newsletter has also been sent to contact people for distribution.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Many Churches will have celebrated "World Day of Prayer" on the 5th of March. The country preparing this event was Vanuatu with the theme "Build on a Strong Foundation". Funds from offerings this year will go to the Bible Societies Trauma Healing Program which brings understanding, care, healing and hope to over 60,000 women victims.

Consultation is still planned for Adelaide in April. Three Synod members will attend. It is also hoped to have our next UCAF Synod meeting in April at Pitt Street. 📍



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

Theologian delivers on latest book

REVIEW: WHAT CAN LOVE HOPE FOR?

Bill Loader is widely-known, much-consulted, and greatly loved across the Uniting Church. He has had a fine career as a leading biblical scholar, teaching for decades at Murdoch University and publishing prolifically with prestigious international publishers.

This academic career has sat alongside an active involvement in the Uniting Church, preaching in local Congregations, teaching regular sessions with lay leaders, and forming ministers and deacons for their ministries.

His website, with its scholarly yet accessible discussions of lectionary texts, attracts regular readership, not only from Uniting Church people, but from preachers right around the world.

Out of this wealth of experience comes this slim but rich offering: ten succinct chapters (most only ten to twelve pages long) on topics of key theological import: the significance of Jesus, the good news for the poor, how to understand the cross, the place of other faiths, God's wrath and God's justice, the place of the Law, miracles and faith, God and love, and, of course, marriage and sexuality. All in 110 pages.

Each chapter ends with a focused "question for reflection", to encourage ongoing consideration of the topic at hand. The book itself ends with a bonus afterword, setting out Bill's personal journey "from fundamentalism to fundamentals". The afterword concludes, "we all walk with some grit in our shoes in religious and cultural contexts where its awareness is possible even if, by and large, its removal is not" (p.130).

Loader seeks to work with the irritants provided by this "grit" in a constructive and hope-

filled way, to indicate how, in the midst of contentious discussions, people of faith are able to discern "what brings life and health." In Chapter five, whose title also provides the title of the book, he concludes that we ought "to be a just and caring society that is inclusive and to care for the world and its future inhabitants" (p.46).

It's no surprise that the enduringly contentious issue of marriage and sexuality is addressed (in chapter 10, the longest chapter). Bill Loader has made many contributions to the long-running discussions of these matters: leading workshops and producing resources pitched at a popular level, undergirded especially by the academic research and writing undertaken during his five years as a professorial fellow with Australian Research Council funding.

This chapter makes clear the two key pillars of his well-considered views: one, that Paul reflects the common first century belief that "all people are heterosexual", so anyone identifying as homosexual is "in an unnatural state of being as a result of sin" (p.111); and two, that in some circumstances "it is not appropriate, indeed it is irresponsible, to apply what Paul says" to contemporary situations (also p.111).

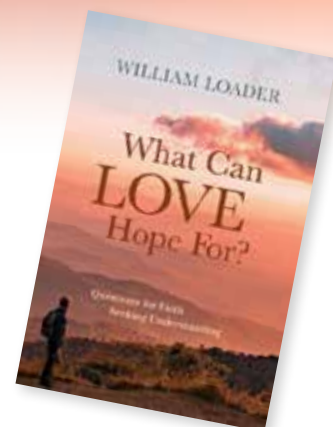
Thus, Loader affirms that "the Bible does not tell it all

on these matters any more than it did on matters of women and divorce" (p.112). Such honesty about matters hermeneutical is to be commended. As is the case in each chapter, the reader is invited to give serious personal consideration to how biblical passages are to be brought into engagement with contemporary situations and considerations.

But the book is not just about marriage and sexuality. There is much more that is explored in its pages.

Chapter five (whose title, as we have noted, provides the title for the whole book) begins with a further observation about the process of interpretation: "There is a 2,000-year gap between believers in today's twenty-first-century world and those of the first century," such that "to engage the writings of the New Testament is to engage in a cross-cultural encounter with all the respect and opportunity for learning and enrichment which that entails" (p.35).

Starting with the fact that New Testament texts expect a return of Jesus within the lifetime of those then alive, the chapter canvasses the eschatological vision of the kingdom, various parables of Jesus, the function of the risen Jesus, and the resurrection body, leading to the conclusion that we, today, are to "reconfigure our



approach to hope, retaining the central [first century] substance, but not their notions of timing and manner of its achievement" (p.45).

In this way, Loader models the task of the interpreter, be they preacher, Bible study leader, scholar, or individual disciple. Immersion into the culture, customs, languages, perspectives of the ancient texts is as important as thoughtful, reflective consideration of what is heard and seen in the text, in the light of contemporary understandings, insights, and perspectives. (Somewhat like what paragraphs 5 and 11 of the UCA Basis of Union affirms.)

There is much more to be said about this delightful book; but only one comment needs to be made here. This is a book worth buying, reading, studying (alone or with others), and engaging with wholeheartedly. 📖

JOHN SQUIRES
PRESBYTERY MINISTER (WELLBEING)
FOR CANBERRA REGION
PRESBYTERY

SUCH HONESTY
ABOUT MATTERS
HERMENEUTICAL
IS TO BE
COMMENDED

All is not what it seems...

REVIEW: WANDAVISION

In the event that you've been living under a rock, or simply avoiding TV spoilers on Twitter, *WandaVision* is the newest television show from Marvel, streaming on Disney Plus. The show combines an American sitcom style with a dark fantasy narrative.

The premise behind *WandaVision* is easy enough to describe, but difficult to grasp at first without being disoriented. The show features Wanda/The Scarlet Witch and The Vision living together in a suburban dream home, with each episode taking on the style of a different decade of American sitcoms. The first episode, for example, resembles 1950s shows, with The Vision trying to keep up the façade of being a human worker angling for a promotion. Later episodes take a number of tropes from their own decades. The 2000s episode, for example, draws on the popular mockumentary style made famous in that decade, with the actors' pieces to camera fitting in nicely.

visitors, and how some characters seem to know that they're in a show. There's also the question as to how the Vision is even alive, given that the character's fate was sealed by Thanos in *Infinity War*.

As all of this might suggest, *WandaVision* is a show that takes a number of deliberately disparate elements and throws them together into a surreal mix. It's a story where the sitcom setting and trappings from past TV clash with the constant feeling of dread.

WandaVision is visually spectacular, with special attention given to ensuring that each episode has subtle nods to shows from years gone by. Long-term Marvel comics readers will also find enough Easter Eggs to tide them over until April.

Driving all of this is a cast that fleshes out the material, drawing from the acting styles of the given decade that the episode takes place in. Elizabeth Olsen shows a wide range as the protagonist, while Paul Bettany plays up to the strangeness of the role. Perhaps the show stealer here, however, is Kathryn Hahn, who plays the couple's odd neighbour Agatha.

If there can be a complaint, it's that the show's wonderful weirdness is reigned in a little too early by a revelation in the fourth episode. Given how impressive the setup is, and the ways that the show initially hints as to what is really going on under the surface, the intrigue could have been sustained for a few more episodes (or the entire first season).

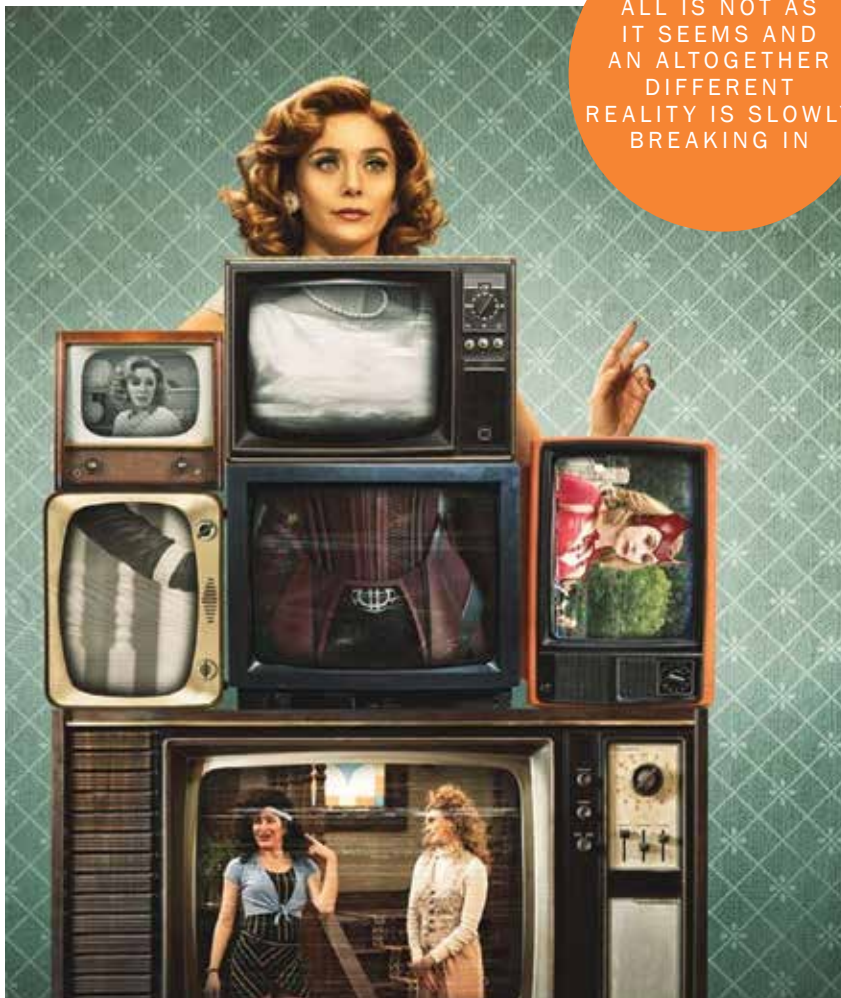
In saying that, the sixth episode of *WandaVision* has a major reveal that may have major implications for the future of Marvel's franchises, as a certain forbidden door is opened. More weirdness can be expected, and that is a good thing here.

For Christians, there is plenty to note while watching *WandaVision*. While the show does not explore faith per se, there is more to consider. The way that the show takes a seemingly idyllic suburban setting where people put on a false face and pretend all is right with the world is a reminder of the false consciousness the likes of Brueggemann

argue the church is tasked with calling out as part of its prophetic vocation. To suggest that all is not right with the world, and to query as to who is responsible, is a task not best left to fictional Avengers. 🕯️

WandaVision is streaming now on Disney Plus

JONATHAN FOYE



As the show progresses, the viewer garners the impression that all is not as it seems and that an altogether different reality is slowly breaking in. Beneath the veneer of the peaceful idyllic picket-fence neighbourhood, there seem to be whispers that people do not trust Wanda. All the while, the question is there as to who is responsible for the strange

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