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God: our refuge and strength

By Phil Smith

After a combined service to give thanks that no one was killed during the strongest cyclone to hit Australia since records began, Queenie Moyle was glad to be with two hundred other Christians taking a break from the clean up in Innisfail.

“WE PUT OUR FAITH in God and he worked. Didn't he? I mean we're here standing safe and sound!”

From the Innisfail Uniting Church congregation, Mrs Moyle reflected a different outlook to many of the people this reporter interviewed throughout the region during the days following Cyclone Larry's impact.

From Silkwood to Babinda, the most common reactions ranged from, “We never thought this could happen to us”, to “It had to happen sooner or later.” There was as much fatalism as a sense of good luck.

Those worshipping in the shire hall less than a week after the Cyclone crossed the coast acknowledged Uniting Church Minister Rev Glenn Louttit's affirmation that, “Life is what matters”.

Alongside other ministers and pastors, he admitted hot showers are good, electricity is great and so are clean dry clothes. Yet none of these things last forever. The test of community life is how well we manage without these luxuries.

“We're a very close church family,” said Mrs Moyle. “If someone's got a problem there's always someone there to help out.”

“It looks to me like we've had every denomination represented here. I think the whole of Innisfail church community has worked hand in hand.”

Mr Louttit preached from Psalm 46: “God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.”

After six hectic days of being a family man, parish minister and police chaplain, Mr Louttit tallied up.



Cyclone Larry wreaks its destructive force in North Queensland. Photo by Glenn Louttit

“There are fruit trees destroyed and people's livelihoods gone. In worship this morning we had a healing time of emotions and we saw grown men weep and cry. It was very powerful and very emotional.”

“Being a police chaplain I'm getting a double whammy, because four police officers lost everything as well”.

Uniting Church parishes far and wide went into action within hours of the cyclone, sending food and money. Innisfail could use lots more money to help the dozens



of callers on the other end of Mr Louttit's phone. Innisfail and other affected parishes are well aware of the prayers on their behalf.

Presbytery Minister, Rev Bruce Cornish flew over the blocked Bruce Highway to get into Innisfail from Cairns. He was quick to get up to the Atherton Tablelands as well.

“Up on the Tablelands there's been very little damage to Uniting Church properties. From Malanda I received a call offering financial support for Innisfail! So Atherton, Malanda and Mareeba: they're fine. There's been a fair bit of damage to the northern part of Tully, not a lot of damage to church property, but a number of members have lost houses.”

“The support from the wider church is really appreciated in this area, throughout the whole church, that we see each other as family. When I told the congregation (here) in Innisfail that we'd had calls from as far away as South Australia I could see the understanding that we are not alone.”

Cyclone Update

JUST BEFORE going to press *Journey* spoke to Rev Glenn Louttit from Innisfail who reported that while the trees are still bare much of the cleanup had been done and that has lifted the community spirit.

The Uniting Church in Innisfail provided a car park for the Ergon Energy trucks which moved into the area to restore power.

“They did a fantastic job,” he said.

The congregation in Innisfail

continues to be overwhelmed by the generosity and support of the Uniting Church.

The congregation read more than 60 personal letters written by members of the Bayside and St Marks, Mt Gravatt congregations in worship and that was just a fraction of the story.

“It was great to hear from people all over Australia who made contact, and to know that they were thinking of us and praying for us meant so much.”

Read about environment and theology

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It's God's creation and our stewardship

IN THE BIBLICAL tradition, and in the faith of the people of God, there is a strong, recurring emphasis on the role of God in creation.

Creation declares the power and the greatness of God. The beauty and complexity of nature bear witness to the existence of God.

I lost count long ago of the number of conversations I have had with people who have testified to their experience of feeling God very close and very real in the context of nature in the beauty of flowers, birds and butterflies, the vastness of desert or wilderness, the ruggedness of mountains, rocks and valleys, the sound of waves, or waterfalls, or running streams and the stillness of a starry night.

As they encounter the wonder and amazing complexity of creation, many people sense the presence, the power and the peace of God in a personal and compelling way. It nurtures their faith, calms their spirits and helps renew their zest for life.

Many Christians have discovered a fresh and creative sense of encounter with God through the engagement of their senses with the wonder, the beauty, the complexity and the sheer awesomeness of the world God has made for them to live in.

In Australia many people have been led to a real appreciation of the spirituality of our indigenous people, with its strong emphasis on the earth and the central place of story.

For others, it has been the recognition that in the vastness



Message from the Moderator
Rev Dr David Pitman

and ruggedness of this great island nation of ours, with its deserts and mountain ranges, rivers, rainforests, sweeping plains, and beautiful beaches, we have a gift from God to awaken our senses and encourage a new appreciation of the divine presence in our world.

Scripture declares that the world God has made is a gift entrusted to our care. We are called to be good stewards of the earth and all its resources.

The use of the words "subdue" and "have dominion" in the creation story found in Genesis 1 do not infer the right to ravage, exploit or destroy. They are words that establish the biblical notion of responsible stewardship. God not only saw that everything he had made was "good", God entrusted what was good into the care of the human race.

Sadly we have not always been good stewards of the earth and its resources. We have polluted the atmosphere to the point that global warming is now inevitable. We have filled rivers with chemicals and

heavy metals and have decimated forests.

Thousands of species of birds, animals and fish are now extinct because their habitats and their natural sources of food have been destroyed. Huge oil tankers sail our oceans and periodically are the cause of ecological disasters of immense proportions.

In the beginning, God saw that what the divine wisdom had brought into being was "good". We, as the stewards of creation, are entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that it remains so.

In his letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul reminds us that Jesus is the Lord of creation. As Son of God he was present and active in the creation of the earth. As the risen Christ he will be present and active when God brings everything in heaven and on earth to its ultimate and perfect fulfilment.

It is for that reason, in relation to the world in which we live, that our responsible stewardship of the environment is part of our Christian discipleship.

It is one more profound and important way in which Jesus gathers every dimension of our human existence into the relationship we share with him.

From the Editor

It has been a learning experience reflecting on our ecological situation while watching the succession of cyclones, floods and drought beset our state of Queensland.

As an observer of our ecological dilemmas and often guilt-ridden citizen I have spent too little time theologising about my relationship with the earth in which I live and it has only been in researching for this issue of *Journey* that I have begun to understand there are a variety of eco-theologies.

While Christians have traditionally assumed that we are the divinely appointed stewards of creation and alone the bearers of the image of God, Jason John's contribution has helped me see that there are less familiar approaches which describe us as an integral part of the "web of life", one species amongst many, different only in degree from the other animals, rather than being the pinnacle of creation.

The dominant stream of eco-theology in the western church including our Uniting Church is "stewardship" theology which accepts the understandings of Genesis 1-3, regardless of the historicity of the accounts of creation.

The emerging "biocentric" theologies emphasise that people are a part of creation and that while we may be the most self aware species, and the best able to relate to God, we are none-the-less creatures, genetically related to all other creatures.

Like so much of the diversity in our Uniting Church it can be challenging to hold stewardship and web of life theologies in tension but both have a strong theological basis and can equally be seen as valid, coherent systems.

Both approaches are inherent in the Uniting Church's commitment to eco-justice, the practice of extending our concern for other people to a concern for the whole of creation.

Again I thank Jason John for reminding me that our Uniting Church is officially an eco-justice church, and has been since 1988 when the Assembly released a Statement to the Nation which said, "We affirm our belief that the natural world is God's creation; good in God's eyes, good in itself, and good in sustaining human life ... We will seek to identify and challenge all structures and attitudes which perpetuate and compound the destruction of creation."

The Queensland Synod is also an eco-justice Synod having acknowledged in 1990 that "the Synod's responses to environmental destruction are imperative to its proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ in the 1990s" and urged all parishes to choose, implement and support at least one environmentally responsible activity within the church.

I pray we might actually do so.

Bruce Mullan

Sign of the Times What a ripper...

Driving from the Gold Coast to Brisbane, Vision for Mission Consultant Duncan Macleod saw a billboard placed strategically across from the Beenleigh Tavern by local Christians. The sign says "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Read Your Bible". Last month the sign was supplemented by another

billboard, advertising clothes. What do you think?

Go to Duncan's website www.print.duncans.tv to share your views on this billboard and much more.

Have you seen a great sign to share with *Journey* readers? Please email your high resolution picture to journey@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au.



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Spokesperson for the Veteran's Family Centre project Jim O'Pray.
Photo by Duncan Macleod

Veterans centre one vision for church's mission

PLANS FOR a church-based community centre for veterans, their spouses and families is just one of the new vision for mission initiatives of the Queensland Synod.

The Uniting Church Veterans Family Centre will provide a range of professional services, community activities and personal support for veterans and their families, in the first church-based project of its kind in Australia.

Borneo veteran and Uniting Church member Jim O'Pray said many veterans suffered personal and family problems stemming from their experience of military service.

"While the RSL and the Department of Veterans Affairs provide for a range of services and supports, many of us believe the church also has a vital role to play with its community skills and the spiritual dimension it brings to meeting individual and family needs," Mr O'Pray said.

"Many veterans are not well connected to existing networks, and there is a need for more support for spouses and families of veterans.

"This centre will not compete with or duplicate other services, but will play its own distinctive role and meet a great need across the Redlands.

"With service men and women also returning from the Gulf War, East Timor, Afghanistan and Iraq, the needs of veterans and their families will continue to grow."

Community assistance

The Uniting Church Veterans Family Centre will provide offices for professional services such as counselling and therapy, social work, advocacy support, financial advice, and family and marriage support.

It will also offer a drop-in centre, a workshop, classes on practical life skills, arts and crafts courses, social activities, and a children's play area.

A Garden of Peace in an attractively landscaped area is also proposed for the site.

Mr O'Pray said extensive consultation with veterans,

community leaders, service professionals and politicians revealed enthusiastic support for the centre.

The management team is consulting with veterans and the wider community the project develops so they can hear their comments and ideas and begin to involve interested persons in establishing the project over the coming months.

A vision for mission

Support and some initial seed funding will come from the Vision for Mission fund of the Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church.

"Initial site plans have been drawn up, and we're drafting the foundational documents such as constitution and business plan that will give a secure basis for proceeding," Mr O'Pray said.

Capalaba Church Council Chairperson David Busch said it was proposed to base the centre in an existing house on the church property, which would involve only slight modifications to the present structure.

The church and house grounds would also be modified to enhance parking, landscaping and church access.

Mr Busch said there was still a way to go in obtaining the relevant approvals but it was hoped the centre would open later this year.

Synod Vision for Mission Advocate Rev Duncan Macleod said it was encouraging to see a project developing out of an idea seeded at last year's Synod gathering on the Gold Coast.

"The Vision for Mission Facilitation team are looking at the Veterans project as a test case as we prepare to seed other projects around Queensland."

To read more about the Vision for Mission and how people can find support for new initiatives, visit www.visionformission.unitingchurch.org.au or contact Duncan Macleod on 3377 9809 or email duncan.macleod@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au.

Call for urgent changes to specified lay ministry

By Bruce Mullan

A REPORT proposing major changes in non-ordained specified ministries will be one of the big items on the agenda for the 11th Assembly when it meets in Brisbane in July.

The report from the Specified Ministries Task Group appointed after the 2003 Assembly is titled *From time to time, and place to place*, a phrase from Paragraph 14 of the *Basis of Union* which calls the Uniting Church to continued renewal of its ministries.

Convener of the Task Group Ms Colleen Geyer said the group had deliberately focused on questions of lay ministry and chosen to leave issues around the ordained ministries for later conversation.

"The proliferation of non specified lay ministries is an urgent matter for the church to address and working to incorporate these people into the new specified ministry will be a key matter for the church in the next few years," she said.

"The proposed structure had to meet the needs of those in existing specified lay ministries as well as being flexible enough to include all the new lay ministries which are springing up around the nation."

The report proposes the existing ministries of Lay Pastor, Community Minister and Youth Worker be amalgamated into one new ministry called the Specified Ministry of Pastor.

This ministry is ordered to also include all the lay people employed by the church to exercise specific responsibilities such as pastoral care, leadership, worship, service and evangelism in a way that represents the beliefs and practices of the Uniting Church.

Ms Geyer explained that people currently employed as children and families workers, lay parish assistants, lay chaplains and evangelists could appropriately be pastors in the new ministry but it would not include small group leaders, property officers, clerical workers, Sunday school teachers, elders or church councillors.

Those currently serving as Lay Preachers will not be affected.

It is proposed that pastors in the new ministry will be accountable directly to the presbytery which will have responsibility for selection, commissioning, formation, training and supervision.

"Existing Lay Pastors, Community Ministers and



Convener of the Specified Ministries Task Group Ms Colleen Geyer.
Photo by Osker Lau

accredited Youth Workers will have a number of options under the proposed arrangements but no new people will be admitted to those ministries after 2006," said Ms Geyer.

People will be commissioned to the ministry for the duration of their appointment and presbyteries

will determine whether it is appropriate for them to preside at the sacraments during that time.

Task Group member and one of the authors of the report Rev Duncan Macleod said another significant change is the proposal that pastors can undertake their training in a number of different ways and may not be required to complete formal academic studies in a theological college.

"Presbyteries will recognise prior learning and acknowledge that people come to their ministry with significant skills and knowledge," said Mr Macleod.

"They may have achieved these in their professional career path, through involvement in the church or through informal learning in the workplace or life experience."

The recommendations from the Task Group are yet to be endorsed by the Assembly but if they are accepted the new Specified Ministry of Pastor will be up and running by January 2008.

Ms Geyer said, "These important proposals acknowledge current realities of a church in a changing social context and recognise the need for flexibility and simplicity."

A full copy of the report of the Specified Ministries Task Group to the Eleventh Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia *From time to time, and place to place* is available as a download from <http://assembly.uca.org.au/11thassembly/reports/B24-TaskGrouponSpecifiedMinistries.pdf>.

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AGMF: it's the vibe

By Catherine Mullan

FOURTEEN THOUSAND eager individuals wait for the band to begin playing. Chanting, clapping, cheering, the stage lights dim, the crowd jump to their feet and roar as the bright lights flash on. You thought the U2 tour had been cancelled? Which band could possibly stir up this much excitement? It's Newsboys. They have been on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, nominated for four Grammy Awards, have a Billboard Music Award and six Gold Records. The catch? They are performing in front of 14,000 screaming Christians. In Toowoomba.

The Australian Gospel Music Festival (AGMF), Australia's number one event for youth, children and families, happens every Easter in the heart of Toowoomba and this year attracted over 40,000 people. 20,000 tickets were sold and an estimated 20,000 people attended free events held outside the festival gates.

Australian Christian rockers Newsboys headlined after US's Superchick[k] pulled out.

The band that self admittedly started playing "tuneless music" in Mooloolaba in the late 80s, has developed to become one of the biggest bands in Christian music.

Lead singer Peter Furler said he had been anticipating playing at

AGMF all year. "We're so excited and honoured to be playing at Australia's premier festival.

"My parents have been coming to AGMF every year and call me up after and tell us we should play.

"It's great to hear some Aussie accents in the crowd," he said.

Event director Isaac Moody said securing Newsboys was a "huge coup" and set the bar high for the calibre of the 2007 international line up. "We've been working to bring Newsboys to our festival for several years now and after months of negotiation we are honoured to have Newsboys headlining AGMF 06."

Mr Moody said AGMF experienced a 100% increase in ticket sales this year and plans have been made to accommodate more growth in 2007.

"There is really no stopping this event. As long as we still have the infrastructure, we can continue to grow."

This year, headline artists included Channel 10's X-Factor winner Random, Hillsong's Reuben Morgan, Queensland's Soulframe, South Africa's MIC, US Metal Band Pillar, UK DJ Andy Hunter, Ireland's Robin Mark, and Grammy Award winning Australian singer-songwriter Rebecca St James, who arrived at Toowoomba fresh from



The AGMF crowd waits anxiously for Newsboys to take to the stage. Photo by Andrew Coates and courtesy of www.therockacrossaustralia.com

hosting the American Gospel Music Association awards.

Big business

Gospel Music is the fastest growing sector of the Australian music industry, generating over \$30 million annually and representing 5.6% of total industry sales.

Since its beginning in 1999, the AGMF has achieved significant growth, making it one of the fastest growing music festivals in Australia and event organisers are racing to keep up with growth rate.

This year, organisers spent an extra \$10-15,000 on tent flooring and watering the grounds of the venue to combat the dust problem.

Toowoomba City Council's Marketing and Tourism portfolio chair Cr Michelle Schneider said this decision was taken in the interests of public safety following

around 120 cases of respiratory problems due to excessive dust during the 2005 AGMF.

Cr Schneider said that Council took into consideration the benefit of AGMF to the local economy, estimated in 2005 to be about \$6.9 million.

Hillsong wonder-boy Joel Houston said the festival was not all about the music. His goal was to encourage the crowd to "Encounter the living God". Hillsong's youth band United Live flew in and out on a chartered flight from Sydney, but not before performing to a packed out tent on Easter Saturday.

Mr Houston reiterated that AGMF is a non-denominational event that brings together people from all walks of life. He encouraged festival goers to discover together what it means to be Christians and followers of Jesus.

The vibe of it

Punters enjoyed the non-musical aspects of the festival with several mentioning an omnipresent 'vibe'.

Sydney band The View (ex Anonymous Gift) enjoyed the ubiquitous good vibrations and noted the growth in the size of the festival. Front man Chris Collins said, "There is definitely a lot more going on this year; we are enjoying soaking up the vibe, and enjoying Toowoomba." He observed the excellent quality of the road signs, that he is sure will lead The View back to AGMF next year.

Tessa Brown, 17, from the Gold Coast has seen the development of the festival since 2004. "Every other year I've just tried to get out there and see as many bands as possible.

"This year I've spent a fair bit of time absorbing the atmosphere and chilling out in the tents."

Ms Brown believes the beauty of AGMF is that you never know what to expect. "Each year the organisers find more ways to change the festival."

This year saw the inclusion of a Global Village showcasing an array of international food, a separation in Tent City of families and youth (allowing for more and less sleep respectively), extra performance tents, and rides.

Another big hit at the festival was the Red Frog Colosseum where the 'Spam' crew from Brisbane's Citipointe COC, kept festival goers entertained.

A crowd favourite at the Colosseum was early morning "church aerobics" which involved such moves as the Pentecostal jig (hoping from one foot to the other waving raised hands).

However, the fun stopped every hour, on the hour, to hear a Bible passage read by Johnny Cash.

As the dust settles on another year at Queen's Park and 40,000 satisfied attendees drive home, one can only imagine what is in store for AGFM 2007. Numbers similar to that of a Billy Graham crusade? An appearance from Audio Adrenaline, Guy Sebastian, Cliff Richards or perhaps U2 themselves? Or maybe there will just be more fun, a bigger Colosseum and a funky vibe.



International Mission Auxiliary president Pat Riddell. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Mission supporters old but not out

REV BRIAN Lee remembers when he became Queensland State Secretary for Methodist Overseas Mission in 1970, his predecessor, Rev Cliff Williams, confided to him that although the Women's Auxiliary to Overseas Missions had done a good job for many years, its members were elderly and this Auxiliary probably wouldn't last much longer.

Now, 35 years later, the members are still elderly but continue to show exceptional loyalty and commitment.

Current president of what is now called the International Mission Auxiliary, Mrs Pat Riddell, told how returning from the Papuan Islands Region as a young primary teacher on furlough in 1960 her welcome felt like "coming into a group of special grandmas".

The three Auxiliaries which united to become the International Mission Auxiliary in 1977 were all formed more than 90 years ago, initially to support the single women missionaries.

Mrs Riddell said in the past the Auxiliary was a great source of information through its members to their own churches but this is much less so now as numbers decline.

"I feel we must not wring our hands and look back to the 'golden days of the past' but pray and think and discuss constructively what our role should be in the future."

The group is working through a process led by International Mission Consultant Heather den Houting to determine how best to undertake their work into the future.

"What has age got to do with it? I've heard it said that 70 is the new 50 so I suppose that 90 is the new 70. We aren't old enough to give up yet! What we have to consider is how we will function in the future."

For more information about supporting international missions contact Heather den Houting 3377 9805, Auxiliary Secretary Glennis Sabine 3396 2319 or Pat Riddell 5496 7418.



MBC gymnast Chloe Sims shows off her gold medal for the women's all-around competition at the 2006 Commonwealth Games. Photo courtesy of Nicolas Ng www.nkphotos.co.uk

MBC gymnasts leap to the top

By Mardi Lumsden

TWO MORETON Bay College students got a taste of where gymnastics is taking them when they competed in the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in March.

Naazmi Johnston, 17, and Chloe Sims, 15, both represented Australia in their respective sports of Rhythmic Gymnastics and Women's Artistic Gymnastics.

Both gymnasts returned to the Moreton Bay College gymnastics centre of excellence with medals in tow.

For Ms Sims, the games marked her debut as a 'senior' on the international gymnastics stage.

A member of the gold medal winning women's artistic team, Chloe relished the opportunity to perform to a home crowd coming home with a gold medal for the all-around competition. She also placed fifth on vault.

Despite competing in other international events as a senior, the Melbourne games were Ms Johnston's first Commonwealth competition. After Australia placed third in the Rhythmic

team event, Ms Johnston went on to place forth in the all-around competition and place in the top six for all apparatus finals (rope, ball, clubs and ribbon).

Both athletes aspire to representing Australia at the Beijing Olympics. Needless to say, the staff and fellow students at Moreton Bay College are very proud of these outstanding athletes.

Moreton Bay College chaplain Jenny Busch said she is particularly proud of the grace both girls show.

"I'm proud of them not just for their achievements, but for their commitment to their own goals and the daily sacrifices they make to achieve those goals.

"I'm most proud of the type of people they are, for the humility they show in their achievements and the graciousness they show towards others."

The girls had little time off after the games, with Naazmi competing in Hawaii at the Pacific Alliance and both girls gearing up for the National Championships in Sydney in late May.



TiS companion

A NEW software version of the hymnbook *Together In Song* (powered by LabOra) is now ready for release. It will increase the book's accessibility for those who use data projectors or printed orders of service.

It integrates the indexes and *Companion* and provides the capacity for regular electronic supplements of congregational music from around the world.

Since the publication of *AHB II - Together In Song*, the AHB Editorial Committee has continued its work and distinguished Uniting Church scholar Rev Dr D'Arcy Wood has written the *Companion*, which provides extensive information on each item in the hymn book and on the authors and composers.

Together in Song launches on Saturday 20 May 2006 at 7.00pm, at St Andrew's UC, Ann Street, Brisbane.

You are invited to join the launch of these important worship resources.

To RSVP or for further information email secretary@togetherinsong.org

Racing to connect with un-churched teens

SLOT CAR racing might not sound like ministry but for the Teen Spirit Racing team at the Uniting Church Beenleigh Region model cars are the vehicle for Christian leaders to build credible relationships with un-churched young people.

Teen Spirit Racing coordinator Les Hawkey said the club is a starting point for the church to make contact with teenagers and earn their trust.

"Christian people can teach and share the slot car activity while at the same time developing a relationship where they can earn the right to share their faith and beliefs," he said.

An essential part of the program is that the teenagers build their own cars from scratch.

There is a one-design 1:32 scale formula and each week the young people work at fine-tuning their cars in preparation for the races.

Keirren has been in the club for three seasons. "I got the award for

top car last season and came third in the race competition. It's all right racing it but best thing is building the car," he said.

All the racing is done on a mobile, trailer-mounted racetrack with a computer race management program that allows for fast, fair and competitive racing with accurate recording.

"The mobile track allows us to go out into the community and set up at shopping centres or outside the local Mitre Ten to promote Teen Spirit Racing and recruit new members," said Mr Hawkey.

"We also get to speak with parents and interested adults about Teen Spirit Racing and other Beenleigh Uniting Church activities."

"We are limited to working with 12 kids at a time but none of the kids we work with have church links."

Troy in Grade 7 has also been in the club for three seasons and sees himself as being pretty competitive.

"The secret is not to spin out, so it's slow into the corners and fast out," he said.

The only female member of the club Alicia said, "My goal is to beat all these guys and have fun."

Mr Hawkey sees the program as being about much more than just playing with slot cars in a Christian environment.

"Teen Spirit Racing provides teenagers with hands-on fun, learning, competition and fellowship in a safe, friendly atmosphere and at the same time instills in them a sense of pride in what they can achieve for themselves and others."



Lyndon and Tim taking advice from Teen Spirit Racing Program Manager Ernie Porter. Photo by Bruce Mullan

SCHOOLS FOR DISCERNING PARENTS

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Grace College, a residential College for 180 women residents of the University of Queensland, is seeking a motivated and skilled person to fill the role of Business Manager within the College which has a strong Christian tradition. Expressions of interest are being sought for this position which will commence late June 2006.

For information pack and further details, phone the College on 3842 4000 or email: Grace.College@mailbox.uq.edu.au



Christian values on the agenda for care agencies

By Bruce Mullan

VALUES AND THEOLOGY were key topics of conversation at the second joint conference of UnitingCare and the Uniting Missions Network meeting in Brisbane in late March.

Sandwiched between an opening address by Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture Rev Professor James Haire and the closing plenary by renowned social justice advocate and Catholic nun Sister Veronica Brady, a range of Uniting Church leaders explored the place of the church in addressing the needs of the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised.

Professor Haire said identity was the key issue for UnitingCare and the Missions Network to address.

"Our identity is that we are Christian. That is not an arrogant statement. It simply means that we are the ones who bear the name of Christ upon ourselves," he said.

Professor Haire said the Uniting Church historic traditions of Methodism, Congregationalism and Presbyterianism had taken the Judaic heritage of care for widows and orphans and created enormous agencies which saw a million Australians a week pass through their doors.

Minister at Wesley Mission Perth and Trinity Outreach Services in Western Australia Rev Bev Fabb said the Uniting Church took a holistic approach recognising that all people have physical, social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions to their lives.

"In the welfare work of the church the spiritual dimension should not be overlooked, but given equal attention to the other dimensions," she said.

"This spiritual dimension was important in both dealing with staff and attending to the spiritual

dimension when working with clients she said.

Brisbane based Lifeline Community Care Chaplain Rev Robert Harriman also named identity as a foundational issue, during his seminar, "Blessed be the tie that binds... or is it time to cut the knot?"

"The UCA and UnitingCare are bound by a shared commitment to an outward looking approach to mission, a participation with people that is personal, present and committed, faithfully working towards transformation," he said.

"I believe the majority of people we employ are people who want to work for a church organisation because we stand for particular sets of values that they want to travel with.

"They may not believe the same things but they do want to work with the values that we say we stand for."

Executive Director of UnitingCare in NSW/ACT Rev Harry Herbert is opposed to any thought of cutting the tie between UnitingCare and the congregational side of the church.

"I look at some other organisations which had Christian beginnings and did cut the tie and I think they've lost a certain amount of vigour because they've cut that tie, because they've lost the renewal that goes on in the church," said Mr Herbert.

"But it's got to be two way. It can't be the church all the time telling UnitingCare what it's got to do. The church has got to do more to listen to what people in UnitingCare have to say."

UnitingCare National Director Ms Lin Hatfield Dodds sees the work of the UnitingCare network as an expression of the Uniting Church's understanding of God's movement in the world.



Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture Rev Professor James Haire. Photo by Osker Lau

"When we move to stand with those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged we move to where Christ stands," she said.

Director of the Creative Ministries Network in Victoria Rev John Bottomley believes that the Uniting Church is not different from UnitingCare.

"If we look at things in terms of their organisational structure

they are separate, but if we look at in terms of church we are all part of the church and that's the fundamental unity," he said.

Professor Haire concluded that life is about more than government policy and that church welfare organisations should be run with grace, hope and love.

"Your identity is in Christ, not yourselves."

Church vision becomes church mission

By Mardi Lumsden

THE CONNECTION between Uniting Church missions and congregations was a focus issue for the UnitingCare conference in Brisbane in March.

Mr Kym Whittington presented a paper on behalf of UnitingCare Adelaide East Inc explaining how they have planted their services in specific local churches.

He indicated that the partnership approach had the benefit of giving the local congregation contact with their community and helping people see the service as coming from the church, not just UnitingCare.

Placing specific services in available church buildings also saved money on property rental and made it possible to match the needs of local areas.

While the agency still has a near city head office, Mr Whittington said by using local churches, the agency was going back to its roots.

"And our roots are local, responsive, non-bureaucratic and community integrated," he said.

Rev Dr Leslie Underwood, Wesley Mission Sydney Chaplaincy coordinator said that when deciding on agency values the best organisational statement was "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

"If they are your values, you are in a pretty good place," he said.

Trinity opening doors to coming out

By Mardi Lumsden

A COMMUNITY based research project by Trinity Outreach Services (Western Australia) has found that same sex attracted youth are seven times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.

The results of the study, 'Coming Out Alone', were presented at the UnitingCare Australia and Uniting Missions conference in Brisbane in March and looked at issues affecting same sex attracted youth in Western Australia.

The research found that same sex attracted youth were "over

represented in statistics of drug and alcohol use, homelessness, early drop-out from education, assault, family violence, sex work, unsafe sexual practices leading to higher levels of sexually transmitted infection, and tragically, suicide".

Jaye Edwards of Trinity Outreach Services said, "It is not the young person's sexual orientation that places them at risk of these problems, it is their exposure to social stigma, discrimination, isolation from friends, family, peers, congregations and other supportive factors, plus the high level of homophobia in our culture."

Funded by Trinity Uniting Church, the study made 31 recommendations to resource the community, government, church and church organisations to best deal with and support same sex attracted youth and their families.

The recommendations aim to assist communities, and in particular UnitingCare missions, to connect with same sex attracted young people and provide a safe space for these people to explore their identity.

Copies of the report are available at www.justice.wa.uca.org.au



Jaye Edwards Youth Development Officer, Trinity Outreach Services WA. Photo from UnitingCare

Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly
National Director, Uniting International Mission
Re-advertised position

As executive officer of UIM the Director will provide leadership and vision to the Church in international mission and in the development of Church partnerships and initiate, recommend and implement policies and programs within the mandate of UIM.

The Director is responsible for the day to day management of a team of staff working in support of our partners, in international human rights, overseas aid and in the areas of communication and publicity.

This position requires a highly motivated person experienced at working in a team, managing a significant budget and with the capacity to relate to a complex array of issues and networks of people.

The successful applicant will have:

- tertiary qualifications in theology;
- a sound grasp of contemporary mission theory and practice and how this may be connected with the life of the church;
- demonstrated understanding of relief and development issues;

- significant experience in managing people and budgets;
- excellent communication skills, written and oral;
- capacity to work as part of a team of senior national staff;
- commitment to the consultative, inter-conciliatory, ecumenical and multicultural ethos of the Uniting Church.

This is a full-time position commencing as soon as possible after 1 October, 2006. It is open to lay and ordained people and is designated as an Assembly placement. The position will be based in the Assembly's Sydney office at 222 Pitt St.

Applications are to be submitted in writing and should include a full curriculum vitae, specific comment upon how the applicant addresses the selection criteria and the names, addresses and telephone numbers of at least two referees. Applicants are also invited to provide a short statement (up to one page) on why they are applying for this position, and what in particular they can bring to the role and the national life of the church

All enquiries and requests for information packs to the **General Secretary** phone (02)82674201, fax (02)8267 4222 or e-mail terencec@nat.uca.org.au Applications marked 'Private and Confidential' to: **Rev. Terence Corbin, General Secretary**, Uniting Church National Assembly, PO Box A2266, Sydney South, NSW 1235.

APPLICATIONS CLOSE AT 5 pm, 30 JUNE 2006

Deciphering the Da Vinci code

By Simon Gomersall

ACCORDING TO *Time* Magazine, Dan Brown is one of the 100 most influential people of all time. His novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, has sold 40 million copies and the BBC claims it is the best selling novel ever and none less than Tom Hanks will star in the Ron Howard film version being released worldwide on May 19, 2006.

The Da Vinci Code is a white-knuckled thriller that races through some of Europe's most exotic and mysterious locations.

From the opening pages where the Louvre's curator is murdered in bizarre circumstances the chase is on to decipher a trail of cryptic clues and discover the secret the curator died to protect.

This is great material for one of the most controversial novels of our time, with a subplot that makes some challenging claims regarding Jesus and Christianity.

According to the novel, Jesus never considered himself to be the Son of God nor was he particularly Jewish.

In this story, the historical Jesus was a pagan worshipper of feminine deities who lived an earthy life and then married Mary Magdalene.

The novel proposes that in the 4th century AD the Roman emperor Constantine manipulated the church to create a divine Jesus whose words could help the emperor achieve his political goals and the only reason we have an inkling of the true Jesus is that some very early, authentic gospels survived the 4th century makeover, documents such as the Gnostic gospels and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

And if that seems hard to swallow, Jesus and Mary had a daughter who, after the crucifixion, fled with Mary to France where her descendents eventually married French royalty.

This theory proposes that descendents of Jesus are alive today though their identity is known only to members of the Priory of Sion, a secret society sworn to protect them from the murderous Catholic Church (keen to maintain its control over people's beliefs), and preserve the Holy Grail, a stash of secret documents proving all this.

Most of the controversy hinges on the novel's opening page which begins with the word "FACT", followed by claims about the novel's historical integrity including the statement, "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

This is quite serious because I have encountered a significant number of young people whose faith has been shaken by the novel's air of scholarship, and others who have warmly embraced its neo-pagan ideals, such as worshipping the 'sacred feminine'.

It is difficult to critique Brown's use of historical documents without seeming malicious. Perhaps the description 'imaginative' would suffice.

Take the example of Jesus' alleged marriage where the novel's fictitious scholar confidently asserts, "I shan't bore you with the countless references to Jesus and Magdalene's union" (p.247) implying dozens of ancient references to the marriage.

In fact, there are two, located in the *Gospel of Phillip* and the *Gospel of Mary Magdala*. Both these ancient texts are what we call Gnostic gospels, written hundreds of years after Christ's life, very un-Jewish in their form and composition, portraying Jesus

in a dramatically different light to our earliest writings about him (Paul's epistles). Neither actually mentions marriage.

One of these, the gospel of Phillip, is a damaged text. In numerous places holes in the parchment have erased words. In Chapter 63:33-36 it says, "And the companion of the [...]. Mary Magdalene [...] her more than the disciples [...] kiss her on her [...]" The brackets represent missing text. Brown fills in the gaps to make the passage claim Jesus and Mary kissed on the mouth.

Apart from the questionable relevance of the document, there is simply no way we can know what it originally said. Much has been made of the word 'companion'. The novel claims that in Aramaic it means spouse. However the gospel of Phillip is written in Coptic not Aramaic and actually borrows a Greek word for companion, koinonos, a generic word that is rarely used for spouse but often for friend.

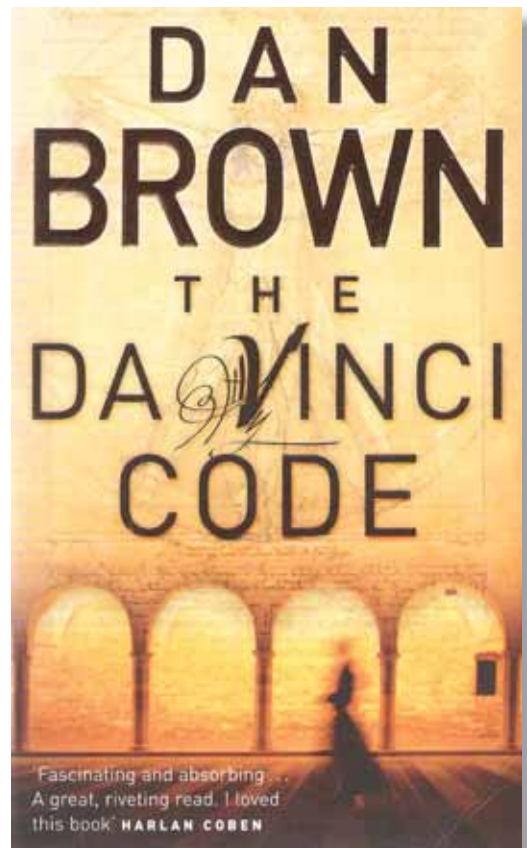
While Brown refers to many historical people, events and documents, he weaves them into his plot without much historical integrity.

Christianity has little to fear from *The Da Vinci Code*, but if we are able to arm ourselves with a few key historical facts, there is opportunity to engage a questioning society to ponder the integrity of Jesus and the Gospels, encouraging people to enjoy the novel, but read it as just that: a novel.

Simon Gomersall runs a consultancy and training business with his wife Selena, a psychologist www.cahootz.com.au

He has been a teacher, youth worker and school chaplain. Simon offers audio visual presentations on *The Da Vinci Code* to churches, schools and community groups.

For more information email simon@cahootz.com.au



Rev Tony Paynter



Mackay minister Rev Tony Paynter died suddenly while mowing his lawn on 29 March. He is survived by his wife Beth, four children and six grandchildren. Colleague and Northside Uniting Church Minister Rev Ian Wilson said, "Tony was an unassuming man, down to earth, always ready to tell a joke, or to recount a story from his past life experience working as a teacher, a taxi driver or a patrol padre in the bush."

Some suggested reading

Michael Green, *The Books the Church Suppressed*, Monarch, 2005

Darrell Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, Thomas Nelson, 2004

Ben Witherington, *The Gospel Code*, IVP, 2000

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PRESBYTERY MINISTER

The Presbytery of Ku-ring-gai is inviting Expressions of Interest for the position of Presbytery Minister. This is a fulltime Placement for a suitable Minister of the Word, Deacon or Lay Person commencing 1 February 2007. Ku-ring-gai Presbytery extends from the lower north shore Sydney suburb of Roseville north to the Central Coast area of Warnervale.

The role of Presbytery Minister will include:

- Pastoral and Administrative oversight of Ministers and pastoral charges
- Coordinating the planning of all Consultations within the Presbytery
- Developing resources for Consultations with a particular focus on Mission Planning.

Enquiries and requests for the Position Package should be directed to:

Mrs Brenda Ohye

Executive Officer, Ku-ring-gai Presbytery,
PO Box 190, Mt. Kuring-gai NSW 2080
Phone: 02 9489 6015

Email: krgpresb@bigpond.net.au

Applications will be received until **31 May 2006**.

PRESBYTERY OF KU-RING-GAI, NSW

Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly National Director, Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Ministry



As National Director of Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry the Director will provide leadership and vision to the Church in issues and matters relating to multicultural and cross-cultural ministry, and initiate, recommend and implement policies and programs within the Mandate of Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry.

The National Director will resource the National Conferences of the UCA migrant communities and provide resources for the education of members of the Church in respect of living in a culturally diverse church.

This position requires a highly motivated person with excellent interpersonal relationship skills and an ability to relate cross-culturally.

The successful applicant will have:

- tertiary qualifications in theology;
- a demonstrated ability to work with people across different cultures;
- experience in developing policies and educational resources;

- excellent communication skills, written and oral;
- capacity to work as part of a team of senior national staff;
- commitment to the consultative, inter-conciliar, ecumenical and multicultural ethos of the Uniting Church.

This is a full-time position commencing as soon as possible after 1 January, 2007. It is open to lay and ordained people and is designated as an Assembly placement. The position will be based in the Assembly's Sydney office at 222 Pitt St.

Applications are to be submitted in writing and should include a full curriculum vitae, specific comment upon how the applicant addresses the selection criteria and the names, addresses and telephone numbers of at least two referees. Applicants are also invited to provide a short statement (up to one page) on why they are applying for this position, and what in particular they can bring to this role and the national life of the church

Enquiries and requests for information packs should be directed to the **Assembly General Secretary**, phone (02) 8267 4201, fax (02) 8267 4222 or e-mail terence@nat.uca.org.au. Applications marked 'Private and Confidential' to:

Rev. Terence Corkin, General Secretary, Uniting Church National Assembly, PO Box A2266, Sydney South, NSW 1235.

APPLICATIONS CLOSE AT 5 pm, 30 JUNE 2006

Ecology : an

Practical action is one way forward

THE EVANGELICAL Climate Initiative submits the following statement as a basis statement for engagement in the emerging battle for the environment.

"The same love for God and neighbour that compels us to preach salvation through Jesus Christ, protect the unborn, preserve the family and the sanctity of marriage, and take the whole Gospel to a hurting world, also compels us to recognize that human-induced climate change is a serious Christian issue requiring action now."

The world is a finite source that can only sustain life for a set period. This is a pretty hardcore statement but there is wholesale agreement in most scientific communities that we humans are having a negative impact upon our world through the over use and abuse of the earth as a resource.

We have been hearing this message since David Suzuki was pushing his wheelbarrow in the 80's and perhaps have become either a bit "ho hum" about it or even a little overwhelmed with the magnitude of the problem.

China and India are coming on line as the largest consumers of energy the world has ever seen, and there is no stopping this juggernaut of capitalism and consumerism.

These two countries are likely to double the amount of carbon output into our environment over the next 20 or so years, which will increase the earth's temperature by about 4%, and have an unimaginably catastrophic impact upon the earth and all of her inhabitants.

We can't stop India and China from enjoying what we have had for years but we can make changes locally to help relieve the problem. Here are a few suggestions:

Stop travelling kilometres to a church that meets your needs, and focus on local mission by going to a church near you. Better still start a faith community; this will save fuel and wear and tear on your vehicle.

Don't support the building of new churches or the redevelopment of old ones that are used only on Sunday, these buildings are a massive waste of energy, rather have multi-use facilities that can be used by big mobs of people and support local community development.

Plant trees as a community outreach.

Use the internet instead of paper.

Share a lawnmower with a friend or neighbour, let's face it how many lawnmowers do we need per household?

There are many things we can all do that assist with limiting this global crisis, and they are all great ways to share our faith, the same faith that is a mandate to care for our earth.

**Former forestry worker
Rev Craig Mischewski
is minister at Townsville
Central Uniting Church.**

Eco-theology is as diverse as any other field of theological enquiry and when Journey asked four Uniting Church ministers with a passion for the environment to share their understanding we found four very different slants on the topic. We pray that as you read these articles you might reflect on your eco-theology and how you understand your relationship with the environment and your responsibility for it.

Christians called to care for the earth

SEVERAL HUNDRED people took the long trek west of Hobart to the Styx Valley, an area of primal forest featuring majestic gum trees that were old when Captain Cook sailed up Australia's eastern coast and for several years the focal point in the forestry debate in Tasmania.

Those making this journey included church goers, forest workers and conservationists. They gathered in the midst of the forest and forestry activity to worship, to lament, to pray for the forest, for animals and people and to commit to share in Earth's healing and to be more responsible in our use of forest resources.

As a Christian I felt led to be part of the planning and leadership group for this forest liturgy and

continue to see such involvement in conservation as part of my calling to ministry.

I believe that our environment is one of the crucial issues facing humanity in the 21st century and that Christians have a unique contribution to make to this discussion and even more so, are called as followers of Christ to that area of ministry.

Ecotheology is a relatively new word referring to the discipline broadly concerned with the intersection of faith and ecology.

This idea is not new. The Hebrew and Christian scriptures are full of passages concerned with this.

Throughout the history of the Christian church there have been those such as the ancient Celtic

saints, St Francis of Assisi and Hildegard of Bingen for whom nature formed a crucial aspect of their faith.

The Bible clearly stating that the world is God's creation, is loved by God and that the saving activity of Jesus embraces all creation.

However, Christians have largely regarded the non-human world as either the neutral and incidental stage for the drama of the God/human relationship, or a burden to be exploited and escaped from.

The Bible teaches that humans are part of a balanced web of creation united in Christ and given dominion over Earth.

But the dominion we are called to is the dominion exercised by Christ; sacrificial servanthood.

We are called to share with all creation in the worship of God and to be open to God revealed and made present to us through nature.

Earth has a strong place within our prayer and worship and with our skills and tools in this area the church has much to offer those active in conservation to enable expression of the spiritual aspects of their engagement and to sustain people in action.

More than just being good members of the Earth community, as followers of Christ we are called to share in the work of caring for and healing Earth; to be involved in environmentalism through practical action and political engagement.

We are creatures called forth from Earth and we are disciples of Christ called to care for Earth.

Rev Paul Chalson is a Uniting Church minister in Tasmania and is completing doctoral studies in ecology and worship.



Rev Paul Chalson relaxing on the summit of Mt Anne, Tasmania.
Photo by Grant Finlay

evolving theology

Proclaiming faith through a biocentric theology

IN 1990 THE QUEENSLAND Synod agreed that we must respond to the environmental destruction around us in order to make any meaningful proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ. Fifteen years on it's worth asking whether we missed the boat.

But it is not only the environmental crisis which we need to respond to. How many of us have really allowed the insights of evolutionary biology, for example, to penetrate our faith and allow us to develop a more meaningful, a more accurate, proclamation of faith in Jesus.

Unless our telling of the Christian story makes sense in the context of the story of the evolution of life on earth, then it makes no sense.

The early Christians, being Jewish, told the Christian story in the context of the creation stories of Genesis. If those stories still rang true, if they were true, we could continue to do the same.

Within a whole spectrum of ecotheologies (theologies trying to connect God and ecology), biocentric theology is an attempt

to proclaim faith in Christ whilst accepting that humans are part of the story of God and life, not the centre of it.

Whilst Genesis states that men alone are the image of God, this is because the book was written by men (many Christians these days interpret it to say that humans are the image of God, but that is not what the text actually says).

Evolution shows us that humans are not a distinct species, but are related on a genetic continuum to all of life.

Life is the image of God. Genesis 1 says that humans were given dominion of earth by God. But if life is the image of God, we would expect life to have dominion of earth. That is exactly what we see. Life existed for billions of years without human assistance.

Even today, it is the microbes and plants which keep earth functioning, not humans. Some rich humans may have temporarily seized dominion, but this is not something God has arranged.

But this humbling of humanity is good news. We are not the image of God, we are not in charge, and it

is not all our fault!

Genesis says that through human activity, literal or metaphorical, pain and death entered the world but we now know that this is completely backwards!

Pain and death are part of the evolutionary process through which humans evolved. Death is not our fault. Pain is not our fault. We never ruined God's perfect world. Childbirth hurts because we are brainy bipeds, not because we are cursed. Agriculture is hard because of our farming practice, not because God cursed the earth.

There is no such thing as original sin. The Jews have known that all along.

Rather, as do all mammals, we have evolved inherent needs for intimate relationships. These start with our nursing mother and move to autonomy where we learn to live independently and put the skills our parents taught into practice.

We have the ability to make meaning of the tension between our need for intimacy and autonomy.

With our huge brains, we have more need for meaning that most.

When we have too little intimacy, or autonomy, or meaning, we act in a whole range of sinful ways, as individuals and as societies.

So our proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ needs to be a proclamation which addresses these needs.

Not a proclamation of a perfect sacrifice, since the Jewish sacrificial system was never something which the God who loves all life ever desired in the first place, but something Jeremiah, Amos, Micah and Jesus pointed out long before the theory of evolution came along. Not a proclamation of a second Adam who fixes the stuff-ups of the first Adam (who never existed, literally or metaphorically).

What is the proclamation then? Once we let the whole evolutionary story become our faith story, become part of our liturgy, our sacrament, our preaching, our service, we will find out.

Rev Jason John is a deacon serving as eco-minister at Scots Uniting Church, Adelaide. www.scotchurch.org.au/eco.

The real crisis is spiritual

THE EMERGING consensus between many theologians and scientists is that we are facing a global environmental crisis and it is becoming increasingly urgent that we should begin to address the "ecocrisis" facing our modern industrial world.

It is not being melodramatic to say that the future of life on our planet is at stake and there are a number of points where we can begin to address the issues.

We can begin with what we ourselves have observed, as scientists chart the progress of global warming in Queensland, but climate change and extreme weather events are just the beginning.

Additional pieces of disturbing information about ozone, the degradation of the soil, our over-use of resources appear with painful regularity on our TV screens and most scientists are convinced that we humans are mostly to blame.

We can begin with theology as this is God's world after all. God created it and called it good but bad theology in the past took "dominion" to mean that destructive abuse of the earth was in order.

But the "image of God" in which we were created means that we are to care for the earth just as God would. Genesis 2:15 spells this out succinctly telling us to "tend (or serve) the earth and keep (or preserve) it."

Whatever else it is, our ecological calamity is a spiritual crisis. In a recent statement on the environment, the National Council of Churches in the USA declared that, "To continue to walk the current path of ecological destruction is not only folly; it is sin."

From a different theological perspective, the Evangelical Environmental Network said, "Because we have sinned, we have failed in our stewardship of creation. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the Creator's work."

The environment needs to be more obviously on the Church's radar, not only on the agenda of the Church at large, but a part of the mission of local congregations as well.

Retired Uniting Church minister Clive Ayre is undertaking post-graduate research relating to ecology and Christian mission in the congregation and would love to hear from any Queensland congregation interested in or attempting to respond to this vital issue cliveandgail@dovenetq.net.au.



Believing God's rainbow promise

Life and faith on the edge as Tuvalu faces a monumental catastrophe

By Dr Mark Hayes

IT IS CONSIDERED good manners in this very polite and very Christian country for a visiting *Palagi* (Westerner, outsider) to attend Church on Sundays.

So I'm standing outside the largest church of Tuvalu's *Tē Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu* on Funafuti Atoll, the nine island country's capital, in my sandals, *Sulu*, white shirt and blue tie, watching locals in their Sunday best, carrying their large and obviously well used Bibles, make their way into the building for service on Sunday, February 26, 2006.

It's a typically hot and humid Funafuti morning, the very clement weather occasionally interrupted by showers and storms, always welcome because they top up the island's water tanks and naturally irrigate the gardens.

A medium-sized horde of Tuvalu's most precious and beloved asset, its delightful children, have been released from their Sunday School in the *Maneapa*, a nearby open sided meeting house, three age related groupings having been sitting in circles around their teacher, their respectful heads bowed over their lessons, occasionally repeating the good words to show they're taking it all in.

But even this horde, this Sunday morning, are pretty quiet as they straggle across the hot square, join their elders, and enter the building to await the service.

Facing uncertainty

Starting later this Sunday afternoon, Tuvalu will be hit with five days of extreme high tides, peaking late on Tuesday afternoon with the highest tide in almost 30 years.

The extreme tides in late January exceeded predictions by several centimetres, and indications are this week's tides will do the same. Such extreme high tides are nothing new here. They're part of nature's cycles, and locals have been coping with them for the 2,000 years people have lived on these tiny atolls and islands.

The highest point of land on Funafuti Atoll is about 3.7 metres above mean high tide. Late Tuesday afternoon's tide peak is predicted to be 3.26 metres, but staff at the Tuvalu Meteorological Office, located across the air strip from the tiny international airport with the best destination code in the world – FUN – calculate the predictions will be wrong.

They're also certain their front yard will be flooded, again, to shin and even knee wading depth by sea water seeping rapidly up through the atoll, pushed by the massive pressures of the Pacific Ocean to the east, and a rising new moon.

A big myth about Tuvalu is that locals should be huddled in fearful dread, eyeing off nearby coconut palms up which they could scuttle, when an extreme tide looms.

Overseas reports suggest Tuvalu's drowning, sinking beneath the rising sea. True; the sea around Tuvalu has noticeably risen in the 13 years detailed measurements have been taken, about 5 centimetres, but these findings are hedged with caveats. Nobody can predict with certainty if, or when, the insidiously growing stresses of global warming will make Tuvalu uninhabitable.

Remembered promise

In his Sermon that morning, the good Pastor preaches from Exodus, reminding his attentive flock how, in spite of all, Moses steadfastly believed and trusted in God to see His people to the promised land.

Or so said the kind woman seated next to me who whispered the gist of the Tuvaluan sermon into my mono-lingual *Palagi* ear.

In the announcements, the Pastor reminds folk that there are extreme tides looming, to take precautions, that the Church, the Red Cross, and the government's disaster *komiti* are ready to respond to any emergency, and to trust in God to protect them.

Many, especially older, Tuvaluans explicitly believe God's promise to Noah, and to humanity, to never again flood the earth.

The glorious rainbows, arching across the horizon, over *Tē Namō*, the wide lagoon, to the west when the conditions are right are a breathtaking reminder of that holy covenant.

For these Tuvaluans, all this talk of global warming, seas rising, and Tuvalu drowning is just *Palagi* stuff. But the elders also tell how the climate's changed, the storms



Dr Mark Hayes on his way to church



Tuvaluan children preparing to steal another *Palagi's* heart. Photo by Dr Mark Hayes

are more frequent and worse, the drought are longer, the reefs are crumbling, fish catches lower, and breadfruit, pandanus, and coconut harvests not as bountiful.

They can't even grow their equivalent of potatoes, a large, slow growing tuber called *Pulaka*, because the deep mulched pits in which they carefully tend the plant are polluted with seeping sea water. The yellow edges on the plant's elephantine dark green leaves are a sure sign the tuber is rotting in its pit.

You see their worry and frustration etched into the old fellows' brown wizened faces as part of their food supply and their traditions are dying.

The author of Matthew's Gospel has Jesus teaching about the good steward to make the point that good stewardship involves responsibly using God's gifts with care (Matthew 25: 14 – 30). The theological term for our bad stewardship of God's good earth, and sea, and air, is sin.

Given their tiny economy, \$US 11 million GDP, and equally tiny population of 11,500 across the nine small islands with 4,500 squeezed on to the 2.79 square kilometres of land on Funafuti, Tuvaluans do need sensitive and appropriate assistance to respond to their challenges.

The national slogan, *Tuvalu mo Tē Atua* (Tuvalu for the Almighty) works as an entry point into discussions and escalating effort to respond to natural, and human-caused environmental assaults.

Global warming and sea level rise just further amplifies those challenges, but Tuvaluans themselves are not causing these added assaults to their very existence as a people.

We are all Tuvaluans

In Tuvaluan, the saying *Tatou ne Tuvalu Katoa* is invoked to remind people that "We are all Tuvaluans" so let's keep working together for the benefit of all Tuvaluans. Many Tuvaluans also allow that "We are all Tuvaluans" can refer to the grave threat global warming poses to the entire planet.

We, everybody, is, in an important sense, a Tuvaluan, each threatened and challenged to properly respond. Tuvalu is just more gravely and immediately threatened because it's so small and remote.

Sitting in church that Sunday morning on Funafuti Atoll, my attention to the service wandering, I was once again meditating on the next passage in Matthew, the 'Judging the Nations' passage (Matthew 25: 31 – 46) that haunts me whenever I think about Tuvalu, its kind and gentle people, and especially the laughing, noisy, playing children whose deep brown eyes you look into at your peril because they'll steal your heart, and dazzle you with their smiles as they do so.

Surrounded by devout Tuvaluans in the packed church, I felt closer to Jesus than I've felt in a long, long time.

This time they survive

While not entirely disbelieving in the power of prayer, I also take good science seriously, so later that Sunday, I braved the ferocious mid-afternoon heat and blindingly dazzling reflected light from the concrete to walk across the air strip to the blessedly air conditioned Met Office to check the all but finalised three day weather forecast.

A convergence zone high in the atmosphere above the group would cause the weather into the extreme high tide week to be calm, hot, and pretty still, with only 5 – 15 knot north to north westerly winds and occasional passing showers. Glorious picture postcard tropical atoll weather.

And so it was when, at 5.30pm on Tuesday, February 28, Funafuti Atoll had a record high tide of 3.48 metres, it caused only localised sea water seepage flooding at several parts of the atoll, and only a few houses had to be temporarily evacuated.

We were very, very lucky the weather was so benign.

Or the prayers we prayed on Sunday actually worked.

Dr Mark Hayes is a Brisbane-based writer and academic who teaches part-time at the University of Queensland.

A much longer article, researched and written during his third visit to Tuvalu will be published in the May 2006 edition of *Griffith Review*.

More information about Tuvalu, including many unique and exclusive pictures, can be found at <http://www.tuvalu.islands.com>.

Growing apostles – one life at a time

THE YOUTH and Children's Ministry Unit is developing an intentional approach to youth ministry which focuses on helping young people develop a mature faith.

Youth ministry coordinator Stephen Kersnovske says *Growing Apostles, Changing One Life at a Time* is a long-term understanding of youth ministry which sees spiritual growth rather than numerical growth as most important.

"At the end of the day it is about helping young people grow as disciples, equipping them to reach their friends, use their gifts in ministry and to change the world for God," said Mr Kersnovske.

"We have fallen into the trap of trying to reach young people through entertainment and have forgotten our first calling, to make disciples."

Mr Kersnovske said that at the end of the day we can't compete through entertainment in today's world but that Christian faith offers something far better than all the entertainment put together.

He said that in the past youth ministry has sometimes shied away from presenting the Word of God for fear of turning young people off coming to our youth programs

"I don't believe we have done this deliberately, we just underestimate that young people are spiritually hungry and that the Word of God is powerful and life changing."

Together with a seventy year old co-leader Mr Kersnovske is currently running a small discipleship group with six teenage boys on a Monday night.

"We play a board game as they arrive, share in a simple meal and then focus on the Word of God.

"It has been amazing to see how much the boys have grown, changed and their level of commitment, enthusiasm to dig into God's Word has really surprised me."

One of the group participants Josh (14) said, "Monday night has changed my life. I now live for God and others, not for myself."

The Youth and Children's Ministry Unit believes a small group setting is ideal for implementing a discipleship based approach to youth ministry and is developing resources which can be used in groups or in a mentoring relationship, and for the individual taking responsibility for their own faith journey

As another "Growing Apostles" group member Glenn (15) said, "God's love is everlasting. It only took me six weeks to realise it."



Youth Ministry Consultant Stephen Kersnovske keen to grow disciples. Photo by Osker Lau



Queensland Bulls batsman Clinton Perren with Retiring Bulls Chaplain Rev Bruce Gulley. Photo courtesy of Queensland Cricket

End of a great innings for cricket chaplain

RETIRED UNITING Church minister and Moggill UC member Rev Bruce Gulley formally stood down after ten seasons as chaplain to the Queensland Bulls cricket team at the end of their successful Pura Cup season in March.

"It was romantic but very challenging," he said.

"There was a mateship that developed with the players and I had a pastoral role with them. I shared in their lives and often in their family lives."

More than survival is the aim

UNDER THE leadership of its newly appointed Chairperson Rev David Baker the Bremer Brisbane Presbytery has embarked on the development of a new strategic plan for the region.

Mr Baker said the plan will address what the Presbytery needs to do to be effective in its mission by the year 2010.

"The question we're trying to answer is, 'Where and how are we being called to participate in God's mission to our communities?'"

"This is not about survival of any of our existing congregations; not about survival of the Presbytery or of the UCA; not about a job; it's about living the gospel.

"When we're satisfied with the present, when we're concerned about our own survival, we are not life-giving, attractive, or faithful," said Mr Baker who believes the

current way we are doing church is untenable.

Mr Baker wants the Presbytery to move from a church that's suspicious and jealous of success to one that is willing to take risks.

"We need to move on from being satisfied with being faithful to seeing that the desire to be fruitful leads to a richer and more exciting life of faith."

The Presbytery has appointed a Strategic Planning Management Team to oversee the work and provided funds to enable the work to commence.

"We want to encourage congregations to bigger visions, and provide leadership and resources to help them realise those visions," Mr Baker said.

"The response so far has been terrific."



Bremer Brisbane Presbytery Chairperson Rev David Baker

Rev David Baker can be contacted on dbaker@gil.com.au

Jan's story - doing theology at the soccer field

ON SATURDAY Jan took her son to his soccer match, part of the Christian Soccer Association fixtures. During the match he played as he normally did, boisterously! The half time whistle went and the children came off the field to get a half time snack. Jan quickly approached her son and reminded him, "You remember that we talked about eating oranges instead of the jelly snakes for energy – they are here next to your water."

Her son complained and looked wistfully at the other kids eating the glucose snacks, but ate his oranges and drank his water.

After the children had gone back on, some of the mums came to Jan and said, "We noticed you brought oranges today - is everything OK?"

"Well" Jan explained speaking to the group, "We've been to a psychologist recently about a concern that perhaps he has ADHD. So one of the things we are doing is modifying his diet. No more sugary snakes I am afraid. I am just so worried about him and don't really know which way to turn."

The parents nodded. They had watched Jan's son over the year and were aware of some of his behaviours. However, one of the mothers said, "You have to be a bit careful about diagnosing ADHD. I know that you go to church - are you asking your church community to pray for you? The Bible does say 'Ask and it will be given to you.'"

Another mum said, "You could bring him to our church on Sunday. Every week we see Jesus' healing

power change the lives of people just like your son."

"You must be feeling pretty stressed at this stage," said another.

"These things are often sent to try us, to help us re-evaluate our lives. We've just done the Purpose Driven life and Rick Warren explains that life on earth is a test. This might be part of the test."

"I'm not so sure about that," said another, "I believe that God is compassionate and maybe you have already found the answer to your prayers with the psychologist who is obviously giving you some direction. We can see God working in all those who help us on our life's journey."

Another mum declared, "I've never thought about the impact of the jelly snakes. I'm going to have a look for some snacks that don't

have the same effect. Until then we could all go back to oranges".

There was a general murmur of agreement from the group and Jan thanked them. "I really didn't want this to be such a big issue, but thank you so much for understanding" she said.

Later as Jan and her son drove off (they'd lost by one goal in the second half) Jan struggled with the idea of life as a test. She wondered who the test might be for, herself, her son, her husband or the whole family.



Who would have thought theological reflection would be done on the soccer field sidelines?

Last month in the home group Jan's friends helped her reflect through the telling of stories.

This time her friends are responding to psychology and medicine through their 'confessional perspectives'.

Some are drawing on the resources of their traditions, including teaching at church and popular books.

For more on everyday theology visit the Theological Understandings and Reflection Network (TURN) website: www.turn.unitingchurch.org.au

WHAT'S ON

Wednesdays (during Term time), 9.15-11.30am. GUCCE – Gap UC Craft Experience, 1050 Waterworks Road, The Gap. Term two is Scrapbooking, Shabby Chic and Card making. Morning Tea and lots of fun and fellowship. \$3. Child minding \$3/child. Contact church office on 3300 2712 or email thegapuc@inet.net.au.

April 20-August 2, Thursdays 6.30-9pm. Living the Questions DVD and Discussion series. West End UC. \$30 for 12 sessions. Contact Elaine or Ray Richmond on 3488 2300, email psnwestend@inet.net.au or visit www.progressivespirituality.net.

May 6, 6.30pm Dinner Dance. An evening of fine dining, dazzle and dance at the Pacific Golf Club, Carindale. Three course meal, demonstrations by "Dance Fever", featuring old-time and new dances. \$55/person. Fundraiser for South Moreton presbytery delegates to attend the NCYC in Perth, 2007. Contact Tanya 0409 326 042.

May 7, 10.30am. Closing and thanksgiving service for the 100th anniversary of the MacLagan Uniting Church building, followed by lunch. Contact Mrs Stella Weedon on 4692 1225 or Rev David Savage on 4691 1080. The congregation now joins with the Presbyterian and Anglican congregations as one group.

May 9-10. Festival of Banners at Nambour UC Complex, Coronation Ave, Nambour. Banners from across Australia are now on tour and will be on show at Assembly in July. Theme: 'Cloud of Witnesses'. Official opening 7pm 9 May cost \$7 inc supper and music. 10 May open 9.30am-4pm. \$4. Craft demonstrations, stalls, food available.

May 17, 10am. Frontier Services Auxiliary and Broadwater Road Fellowship morning tea. Broadwater Road UC, Wishart. Display of banners. Speaker Marina Izatt. Stalls admission \$6. Contact Jessie Logan on 3278 1868.

18 May, 10.15am. Musical Luncheon at Moorooka Uniting Church Hall, Mayfield Road. \$8. Visiting Choir the Wesley Ladies Choir. Variety stall for fund raising. RSVP ph 3848 6168 or 3848 7588.

May 25-27. Aspley Uniting Church 16th Annual Arts & Crafts Show. 748 Robinson Road Aspley. 25th Official Opening and Music by "The Cascades" at 7.30pm. \$10 inc supper. 26th / 27th open 9.30am to 3.30pm. Admission \$5.00 incs morning or afternoon tea. A variety of paintings, cards, pottery, woodturning, mosaic tiling, jewellery and soft craft available for sale.

May 30, 10am-noon. Meeting of the Brisbane and surrounding areas group for retired ministers, their spouses and widowed members. The Gap Uniting Church, 1050 Waterworks Road. Morning tea available. Meeting from 10.30am, lunch at noon. \$13.50/person. Enquiries and replies to Jim & Jill Tame on 3891 6462 or email jnjtame@dovenetq.net.au.

May 30, 6.30pm for 7pm. South Moreton Presbytery Adult Fellowship Annual Dinner, Labrador Youth and Community Centre, Billington Street, Labrador. Featuring the Cloud of Witnesses banners and guest speaker (opera singer) Greg Tomlinson. The Gold Coast Philharmonic Band under the leadership of Mrs Denise Collins. \$20/person. Tickets essential and must be purchased prior to 20 May. Please forward your order together with your cheque to the Treasurer: Mrs Daintry Pohlman, C/- Southport Uniting Church, 23 Short Street Southport 4215.

June 16-18. The Network Of Biblical Storytellers gathering at Youthworks Conference Centre, Deer Park on Port Hacking, Sydney South. A must for tellers of the stories; Christian educators, teachers, SRE teachers, church workers; lay and ordained from all denominations and traditions; anybody who wants to be inspired, up skilled and uplifted. \$200 (deadline May16). Keynote Speaker Rev Dr Tom Boomershine (USA). Contact Mark (02) 8267 4231, Graham (02) 9401 6247 or Philip (03) 9336 3132. Post to 'The Gathering 2006' c/- Mark Hillis, PO Box A2266 Sydney South NSW 1235 or email grawade@ihug.com.au.

June 26-July 1. UAICC national conference, Alexandra Park Conference Centre, Alexandra Headland.

July 5-11. National Assembly meeting of the Uniting Church in Australia. University of Queensland, Brisbane.

August 21-26. Fifth Congress of Asian Theologians in Hong Kong. For further information, visit www.cca.org.hk

Want to promote an event?
Email mardi.lumsden@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au
with the subject 'What's on' or fax (07) 3377 9796.

Trinity Theological College CEM Week

Monday 19 - Friday 23 June

All ministry agents in the Queensland Synod are invited to participate in all or part of CEM week. This will be an excellent opportunity for you to visit Trinity and to explore study options with our Faculty members as well as visit the Library facilities, or simply talk with colleagues.

- Interpreting the Old Testament for preaching with Douglas Jones;
- Baptised to read: reflections on Christ, church and scripture with Geoff Thompson;
- Alternative assessment strategies with David Rankin;
- Christianity: a way of being post-modern without being post-modernist with Geoff Thompson;
- Strategies for teaching adults with David Rankin.

For more details ph 3377 9950 or email ttc@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au

Trinity NQ short courses for the North Queensland region

Worship 1-3 June at Cairns Emmanuel Uniting Church.

The aim of this course is to deepen our understanding of worship, nurture faith development as well as fostering mission and outreach through the church to the world.

Leadership 30 August-1 September Townsville Central Uniting Church.

This course is aimed at lay persons or groups who are exercising



Rev Dr David Pitman presents a Moderator's Community Service to Maude Kersnovski

Moderator awards blue carer

Queensland Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman presented a Moderator's Community Service Award to Maude Kersnovski of St Stephen's Uniting Church in Maryborough after twenty years as a member and office bearer of the Blue Care Auxiliary.

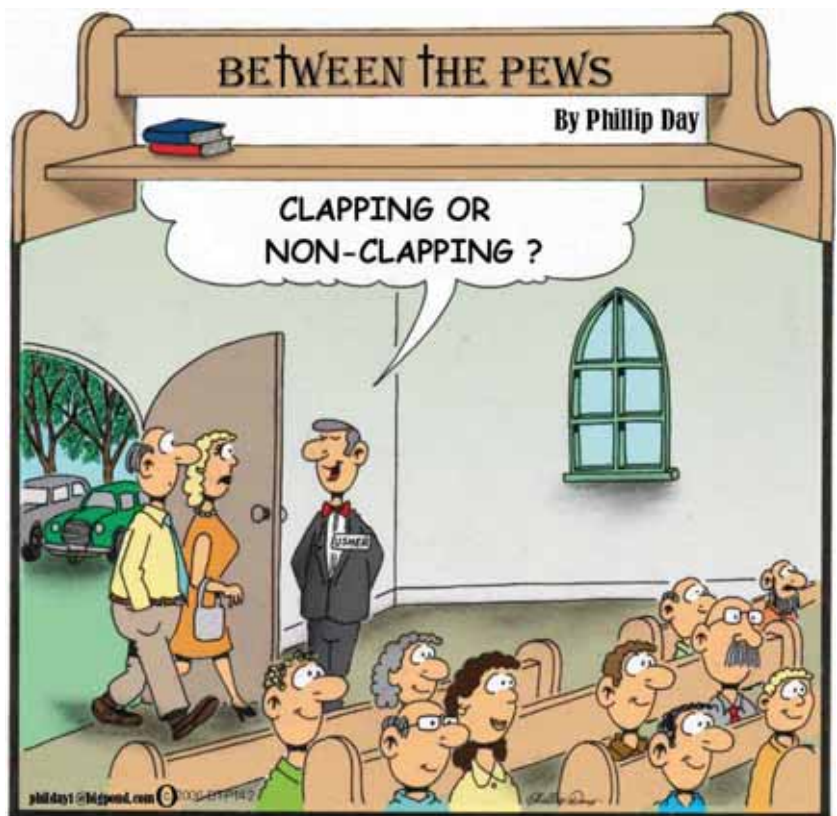
One of Mrs Kersnovski's great achievements has been in working for the provision of better access and facilities for those with physical disabilities. She worked on the development of a Directory of wheelchair friendly venues within the city of Maryborough.

The Moderator's commendation described her as a dedicated, caring, hard-working, creative, reliable, supportive, and loyal lady with good organisational skills and a deep faith.

primary ministry functions in congregations, particularly where there are no ministers. Leadership is about enabling, encouraging, and sustaining the activity of all the members of the congregation, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Trinity NQ is a ministry of Trinity Theological College and the North Queensland Presbytery.

For more details contact Trinity NQ
Co-ordinator Rev Hedley Fihaki
on 07 4032 3966,
mobile 0401 698 934 or email
hedley@cairns.unitingchurch.com



REVIEWS



Secrets of Super Achievers
By Philip Baker
Bookwise International and Lion Publishing
RRP \$19.95

single mindedly getting you to beat your own drum at the exclusion of living with the rest of the world, as you would initially think.

Clearly aimed at people who know Christ (and readable by anyone), Philip, a minister of a large church in Perth, throws in hints about the need for an underpinning faith. The book is "for those who desire to achieve and grow".

I found it easily digestible, even lightweight, yet thought provoking in a punchy sort of way, well grounded, practical and worth a second read. It may even stir me yet to putting some of the thought in practice.

It follows an allied formula to the famous Norman Vincent Peale's "Power of Positive Thinking".

I liked the way the author used everyday examples to illustrate his points.

It is important to note the author's definition of super achiever does not mean everyone should be Prime Minister, CEOs or football captains. The book focuses on understanding what it takes to find and follow the stuff we are made for, whatever it is.

I found the developed discussion a challenge to my "settle for mediocrity - it's comfortable" mind set. As chapter 12 headed "Discipline" is subtitled - "First, you have to get out of bed". Good thing I'm not built for swimming, 4am rising is for the birds.

If you watched the Commonwealth games you will know the Microsoft advertisement in which Kieran Perkins says "I believe everyone can be great at something, for me, it just happened to be swimming".

"I agree" would shout Philip Baker in his book *Secrets of Super Achievers* - maybe a split second behind Laurie Lawrence.

This "read in one plane trip" bookette is well organised and surprising insightful.

Liberal quoting a bevy of achievers, the instruction is not as

Read this if you ever say to yourself, "Is this all?", and 42 as an answer gets boring.

Michael Hewson
Consultant and member of
Bray Park Uniting Church

Soul Whisperers

By Mark Cornford and Craig Burnett
Published by Redcliffe Uniting Church
RRP \$19.95

In this engaging small book of just 80 pages, Mark Cornford and Craig Burnett provide inspiration and encouragement for regular Christians to become mission agents in their everyday contexts.

With strong biblical and theological integrity the authors present mission as an holistic movement that embraces evangelism and action together. To use their own words, Mark and Craig describe the purpose of their book as helping us "develop our spirituality so that we are more aware of what God is doing in the lives of those around us, and to explore how we can work with God in impacting their lives".

From their own experience of youth ministry (in, through and beyond the Uniting Church) and based on their concept of a 'Jesus Centred Spirituality', Craig and Mark offer seven missional practices to nurture a mission focused lifestyle:

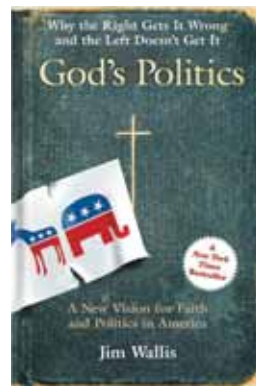
- *Sharing Life*, openness to see what God is doing around us
- *Mustard Seed Living*, small acts of grace that can make a big impact
- *Seeing God in the Everyday*, responding to God's presence in our midst
- *Living the Story*, letting Scripture inform and transform our story
- *Dreaming Dreams of God*, discerning God's dreams and passions
- *Nurturing Community*, relational 'spaces' that express God's love
- *Living in Hope*, letting God's future shape our present.

Crammed with examples and practical 'how to' suggestions every chapter offers realistic suggestions for the reader to engage 'head', 'heart' and 'hand' so that these missional practices can come alive.



Designed for individual reflection, small group study or a small group facilitated by a 'Soul Whisperer' mentor, this book is an ideal resource for small groups of Christians of any age to discover how to engage their communities and networks with the Gospel.

Graham Beattie
Queensland Synod
Mission Consultant



God's Politics: why the American right gets it wrong and the left doesn't get it
By Jim Wallis
A Lion Book, 2005
RRP \$24.95

As a leader of Sojourners, a radical Christian community based in Washington DC, Jim Wallis has been a challenging prophetic figure for decades. *God's Politics*, written against the backdrop of the American Presidential election of 2004, presents the critique of a biblically informed evangelical aimed at both the religious right and the secular left.

His complaint is that the religious right is perpetrating an enormous public misrepresentation of Christianity effectively distorting the way of Jesus as pro-war, pro-rich and selectively moralist. Wallis appeals for commitment to a God who is as focused on the public sphere as well as on personal salvation.

He pleads not for the removal of religious faith from the political arena, but for a faith consistent with prophetic and gospel values. According to the author, while religious conservatives focus on homosexuality and abstinence, Jesus, Isaiah and Micah had much more to say about poverty and economic justice than sexual impropriety.

Disturbed at the failure of what he calls 'secular fundamentalists', those on the left who carry the banner for social reform measures; he reminds them of the resources faith and spirituality provide in maintaining their vision. The impact of the civil rights movement, which was inspired by visionary faith, is cited.

The book predominantly attacks the policies of the Bush regime. In a deeply religious America where

70 per cent say that the President should have strong religious beliefs, Jim Wallis' argument is potent because it is engaging with the dominant discourse.

But what does all this mean for Christians in Australia where religious affiliation is not the fashion?

Tim Costello writes a foreword to this edition which opens up that question. He points to the signs of a growing community debate about values and to the emergence of political groupings explicitly espousing their faith foundations.

God's Politics provides both sound warnings and advice for Australians who wish to translate a prophetic faith into political reality.

Noel Preston
Ethicist, author and
Uniting Church minister



Kokoda

Rated: M 92 minutes,
Directed by Alister Grierson,
Distributed by Palace Films

Kokoda, filmed in Mt Tamborine with a cast of relatively unknown actors, attempts to capture the essence of the collective will which turned back the Japanese invasion of Papua New Guinea during World War 2.

The film follows a small patrol of inexperienced Australian soldiers cut off from their supply lines; Jack, his brother Max, and Darko.

After enduring three days of hell without food, sleep or apparent hope, the group pick themselves up from their makeshift hospital to rejoin the 39th Battalion's pivotal battle for Isurava, a village on the Kokoda Track.

Based on a true story, *Kokoda*, tells this sacred story in Australia's history by focusing on the struggle to conquer fear in an impossible situation where individual willpower is clearly not enough.

The film also pays tribute to the Papua New Guinean servicemen who carried the wounded through the jungle.

Kokoda is a remarkable achievement. While the film may, at times, feel like a drama school ensemble piece, the closing speeches by veteran actors William McInnes (who plays The Colonel) and Shane Bourne (who plays The Doctor) dispel any whisper of amateurism: as did the battle itself.

Kokoda is an important Australian film to experience in the cinema if possible.

Mark Young
Journey film reviewer

www.journeyonline.com.au

Read
more
reviews
online



PRAYER DIARY

It is a privilege to join in what our amazing God is doing in these parts of our Synod. Prayer enables us to do that.

7 May:
Wesley Kangaroo Point

Wesley Kangaroo Point Uniting Church is situated in the midst of the Cricket and AFL at the Gabba. We have had enough excitement for the past five years as God has raised us up from a few people to a sizeable congregation of about one hundred or more. It is very diverse in culture, age, socio-economic background and education.

Kangaroo Point district is very diverse in housing, from hostel type accommodation to the Dockside Luxury Penthouse Apartments.

Our ministry has an holistic approach. We give thanks to God for bringing and adding people into this community of faith. Please pray for:

- Families as they establish stability in their families and in bringing up children that they may understand the priority of their competing pressures in life.

- Our older people, that they can interact well with newer and younger members of our congregation.

- Our musical team both contemporary & traditional that we will continue to enjoy our worship and praise.

- Our two new outreach congregations, the Thai and Fijian speaking congregations and their leaders, that their growth will also experience close fellowship.

- The English Friendship Group as they reach so many overseas students, as they learn English and our culture, as we demonstrate to them God's love.

- Our Friendship / Knitting Group. We have many community ladies involved to give blankets to the needy and marginalised in our society.

- Our Youth & Young Adult Ministry as we help them with accommodation, career guidance and counselling, that they may learn how to put God first in their lives.

14 May:
Eastern Downs

Eastern Downs Parish is a narrow strip on the eastern rim of the Darling Downs between Warwick & Toowoomba. It is a farming community with four preaching places – Allora, Cambooya, Nobby and Pilton.

The majority of our Parish is still experiencing drought conditions and without good general rain in the near future the outlook for winter crops eg. wheat and barley, and stock feed is grim.

Following the departure of our present Minister by the end of June the Parish will be without paid ministry indefinitely. Our lack of finances at this point in time means we can no longer afford full time ministry. Please pray that, together with the help of the Presbytery of The Downs, we will find a forward direction for the Parish and that we will continually seek God's guidance for us. Pray too, that God's Spirit will provide spiritual refreshment to the people of our Parish and that He will send showers of rain to refresh the earth so that our farmers will be able to produce crops and cattle and have a substantial income once more.

Please pray for wisdom and understanding for members of the Church Council, Presbytery and Synod who will meet to have conversations about our future.

Our Parish depends heavily on Lay Preachers from Toowoomba and Warwick. Please give thanks for these people who put time and

effort into providing this service for us and pray God's blessing on them.

21 May:
Victoria Point

Victoria Point in the Redland Shire south of Brisbane is an area with many retirement villages. Our monthly Friendship Group provides our more senior citizens with a morning out, good company and a great morning tea, while the Keenagers group provides stimulating speakers.

The catering group cooks dinner once a month at a retirement village as part of our fundraising. The recent tragic death of an elderly lady at the village where many of our congregation live has unsettled residents. Please pray that local elderly folk will again feel safe in their homes.

Once a farming area, Victoria Point has many new housing developments and shopping centres. Schools are growing and we touch families in the community through our Sunday School, KUCA and Crafty Mums groups.

We give thanks for our caring congregation and for the involvement of so many of our people in various areas of ministry, from making cups of tea to planning worship, gardening, cleaning etc. Our congregation has a need for people willing to be used by God in leadership roles, including elders. We would ask for prayers that a team come forward so that Forty Days of Purpose can go ahead this year, and that workers will be supported as they continue or begin ministering to others.

Please pray for our minister Arthur and our youth minister Beth as they lead us into discovering God's purpose for us.



Rev David Fanning presents Adam Niesler of West Uniting Church, Maryborough, with a plaque for 13 years of perfect Sunday School attendance. Photo courtesy of West Uniting Church

A long time to graduate

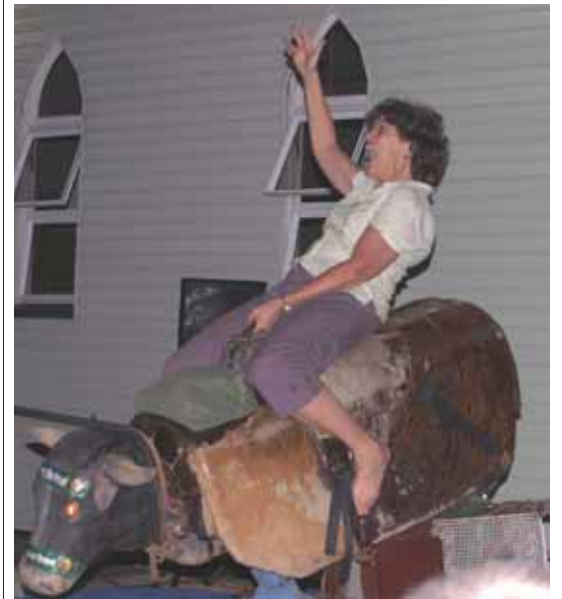
ON SUNDAY, 13 February Rev David Fanning, Mary Burnett Presbytery Minister, presented a plaque to Adam Niesler of West Uniting Church congregation, Maryborough.

It was to acknowledge his 'outstanding attendance at Sunday School and Worship'.

Sixteen-year-old Adam began Sunday School at the age of three. In that time, his attendance has been 100%. The one exception is the Sunday of his Year 11 school camp.

His teachers Gwenda Deem and Averill Collins are grateful for his present role as helper in preparation for a teaching role as from May this year.

Adam has been the OHP operator for church services for several years and also assists his father Peter in the maintenance of the grounds of the church and the hall.



Rev Bronwyn Elvery from Central Burnett took the muster theme seriously

Moving from spectator to bull rider

PARTICIPANTS EXPLORED the issues being faced by church congregations in rural communities at the second Rural Muster hosted by the Central Burnett Parish in Mundubbera last month. The theme for the weekend was "Stop being a spectator and become a Bull Rider" or "Stop being a fence sitter and get off the fence and have a go".

Conference participant Bev Johnson said the muster was an opportunity to explore the shared common ground of small, rural churches and their unique diversity.

"We were inspired by the shared stories we witnessed and heard, and encouraged by the 'power' of God's people working together and resourcing each other in ministry," she said.

Highlight for the weekend was the fellowship on Saturday night, where many tried and some failed to master the art of riding "Mr Blister" the mechanical bull from Banana in Central Queensland.

Rev Bronwyn Elvery and Vicki Diprose, both from Central Burnett lasted the distance on 'the Blister' and their sponsors contributed significantly to the fundraising effort for Frontier Services.



From left: Ellen Roughsey (left), College Principal Rev Michael Connolly and fellow student Evette Pamela Mundraby from Yarrabah.

A long journey to graduate

SEVEN HUNDRED kilometres is a long way to fly just to get to theology classes.

That is what Mornington Island Uniting Church and community elder Ellen Roughsey did every time that she attended her Theology studies at Wontulp B-Buya College in Cairns.

In March Ellen received her Certificate III in Theology.

"There came times I thought I'd quit, but when we talked about the importance of leadership training, that encouraged me to go on and finish," she said.

"I wanted to encourage others to take up studies and develop themselves too."

Ellen has now commenced a Community Organising and Development Course at Wontulp.

Victims' rights not found in Journey

After reading the article "Wake up and smell the coffee" by Duane A. Vachon (April *Journey*), I feel moved to point out that the advocates of victims' rights groups do not "bleat" as the writer claims but rather express the very valid and justifiable concerns of the unfortunates who have suffered at the hands of criminals.

Very often these victims are scarred for life, mentally, emotionally and physically and deserve more respect than Vachon's article gives them.

The work of prison chaplains is praiseworthy indeed but let us not forget the other side of the coin, those who very often feel like the forgotten of society, the victims.

Journey has devoted considerable space and effort to present the prisoners' points of view.

I believe that in the name of simple fairness some effort should be made to present the views of the victims of crime. Anybody who has had dealings with victims of crime can attest that they have their own story to tell, a story just as worthy to be heard.

As a member of the Uniting Church since its inception and the Methodist Church before that, I have listened to many addresses by prison chaplains and by those who minister to the prisoners after their release and have felt proud of the work done by those often unappreciated people.

I have also listened to an address given by a former prisoner who was brought to Christianity by the work of prison chaplains. Hearing that, no one could doubt the value of the work done by these brave and dedicated people.

However, I have never heard a talk given by a member of our clergy about work among the victims of crime.

Maybe such a thing happens but neither I nor anybody I know has heard of it.

As I have stated, these people have their story and their suffering is often a lonely one that goes on long after the trial is over and the sentence, often remarkably lenient, has been handed down. In fact, it often goes on for the rest of their lives and impacts on their loved ones and those around them.

Once again, in the name of simple fairness this lack of concern for the victims should be addressed.

Jeff Matheson
Murarrie

Prisons must stay on church agenda

Thank you *Journey* for opening up the conversation between penal social policy and theology in your last edition.

This conversation, while historically important, has of late been somewhat ignored, marginalised or is absent. For example, the broad policy and practice framework of Restorative Justice (which guides the policy and practice of much government Alternate Dispute Resolution processes), grew out of the reconciliation ceremonies practiced by Maori communities in New Zealand.

While just a sideways glance at the New Testament

reveals many theological and practice frameworks to do with Restorative Justice, very little is cited in the Restorative Justice discourse.

The Church DOES have a vital and important contribution to make to the conversations between social policy and theology. We need however to ensure that these conversations are guided, coherent and accessible theological/socio political frameworks, not naive ideology.

Rev Paul Jensen
Toowoomba

LETTERS

Lent appeals to some

Thank you for the materials, posters, and envelopes for the Lenten Appeal, which arrived here some weeks ago.

Once again we deem it a privilege to be part of supporting the areas of our land and overseas countries in need of our financial support, and continue to give toward this appeal as God calls us.

Anne Brown
Longreach

Oxley youth older

I would like to correct an error in April *Journey*. An article stated that Oxley UCA was celebrating 20 years of Friday night youth group.

I ran or helped run Friday night youth group from 1982-1986 and was a member for at least 2 years prior to that. Previous to that I was too young to join and looked on enviously at a thriving group which was in existence before Union!

During my time, it even had a name: Uniting Fellowship of Oxley (UFO).

I venture to suggest that the group was celebrating more like 40 years of Friday night youth group.

Richard Amos
Gatton

Synod memories

I received an enquiry from a friend in the Broadwater Road congregation with reference to the photograph of the Synod meeting (page 8, March *Journey*).

The photograph was taken on the last day of the meetings of the South Brisbane District Synod. There would have been eight other Synods in session throughout the state at the time. At that stage, District Synods met in late October. The Conference was always held in Brisbane in late February or early March.

Membership of the Synod comprised those ministers who

were serving in circuits within the Synod boundaries as well as lay representatives. The Conference identified the metropolitan Synods with which ministers in departmental roles were to be related. Retired ministers attended the Synod within which they had chosen to reside.

The South Brisbane Synod in 1955 was held in Coolangatta, not Beenleigh as noted under the photograph.

Rev Douglas Kirkup AM
Holland Park

You can read the full text of Douglas Kirkup's letter at www.journeyonline.com.au

Resurrection needed

I am writing in response to the article on re-thinking Easter by Noel Preston (April *Journey*).

Rev Dr Greg Jenks is quoted as arguing that Mark's gospel "draws on cultural myths of the ancient world to recount a story of a 'Divine/Crucified Hero'".

I wonder why *Journey* would promote such a story, taking up almost half a page and with a photo!

The Uniting Church has lost a lot of members over the issue of homosexual leadership, but that is nothing to what will happen if the crucifixion and resurrection are denied or rethought!

Because of the resurrection, we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God and that we no longer need to fear death because He will be with us.

Pat Noller
Forest Lake

You can read the full text of Pat Noller's letter at www.journeyonline.com.au

Joel Corney
West End

Change the right way

Perhaps I agree with what Alwyn Thomas wrote (April *Journey*) about our ideas needing to change, but the crucial issue is how we judge what needs to change.

There is the real danger here of the community of faith letting its agenda be controlled by the secular world, rather than by the Gospel that constitutes the centre of its life, i.e. the news of Christ's completed work.

And are we wanting to change our beliefs because they are hard for modern persons to comfortably accept? Remember for St Paul, the Christian message of Christ crucified was 'a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles'. So we moderns (or postmoderns) are not the first with this difficulty. The central tenets of the Christian faith, such as the physical resurrection of Christ, do not fit into the general ancient or modern world views, secular or religious.

This is not to suggest that Christian faith is irrational - rather, that it is based on a different sort of rationality than what a secular or pagan culture can provide. Neither is Christian faith incompatible with accepting modern scientific truths, though we may be sceptical of certain world views that claim to be based on science.

I have heard it said that there is a tendency for Christians to leave their brains at the door when they enter a Church. Just as much a problem, I feel, is the tendency for Christians to leave their brains at the door when they exit the Church, failing to critique secular attitudes and beliefs in the light of the Gospel. This is the intellectual aspect of living out the Gospel in the midst of our contemporaries. It is by no means an easy task, but it is however a task for which we are freed, called and empowered by the grace of God.

Historically Speaking



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JOURNEY asks...

Where do you find God in the environment?

Krishna Buhler

There I was, sprawled on the floor intent on memorising the workshop on grief and loss I'd been asked to present. It was a bit of time out from palm nursery business as the power had gone off - again! Typical of the North Queensland backblocks whenever there's a hint of rain and wind.

Then it got suspiciously quiet. The radio, by now on battery power,



was suggesting the category 5 cyclone Larry might actually cross the coastline - oh dear!

And then it hit me, of course, instead of talking about grief and loss, the participants might actually be sharing a grief and loss event, a common experience, that was happening all around them... assuming of course that we survived it.

I'm reminded of how often we talk about God - out there, but so rarely and often with difficulty do we share God being in our experiences, in the extraordinary coincidences and the 'crucified as Christ' catastrophes.

As a child growing up in New Zealand, my brothers and I, like many kids of that era, roamed the nearby bush in our free time. So long as we were home for tea no one worried.

Nurtured by nature, our minds naturally filled with shades of green, critters were part of the scene and the mysteries of heavenly undergrowth challenged, and

entertained us.

Instinctively, with overwhelming gratitude I went on to share those early influences through my work, my parenting and relationships.

Only years later, after hearing God's Word, did I realise I'd encountered my Creator up close.

A few days after Cyclone Larry had done its worst I was at the epicentre with the Life Line support team. Devastation to homes and the landscape was awesome. Seeing nature pulped to this extent left me feeling bereft.

For miles and miles there were no leaves, no, not one!

And I wonder how will anyone find heaven there?

Krishna Buhler is a qualified horticulturalist, involved in commercial horticulture for about 35 years and a member of Mareeba Uniting Church congregation. She was named by her father after Krishnamurti, who was giving public speeches in Melbourne in the early 1950's where she was born.



David Hargreaves

During the cooler months of the year, when time permits, I like to "revisit" nature. In particular, mountain walks. Apart from the enjoyment of being out in the open air, it's also great exercise. In my younger days I would frequently visit Cunningham's Gap and climb (or rather "walk") up Mts Cordeaux and Mitchell. The objective of mountain climbing is to get to the top, and that is where the real joy is experienced, the incredible view.



Seeing vast expanses of bush, forests, waterways, and other mountains extending to the horizon reminds me of how impressive God's handywork is. At the same time when I look to the ground I see the smaller examples of God's work, such as ants, lizards, and other natural flora and fauna.

Many years ago I climbed Tabletop (near Toowoomba) with some friends in the middle of winter, in the middle of the night! If anything brings you back to nature, that certainly does! However we were all amazed at how our eyes adjusted to the dark so easily, and after a while no one noticed the near zero temperatures! Upon reaching the top and then seeing the glow of the city lights, the bright moon above and the eerie silhouettes of rocks and trees around us, we all felt exhilarated. Once again more evidence of God's creation.

Most of us take the wonders of nature for granted. From extremes such as active volcanoes to the antarctic ice shelves, nature can be hostile, bleak, and beautiful, but always remarkable.

The immense scope of God's work can be seen in the stars, planets and galaxies which extend for light years in all directions around us. However God is also present in the very smallest as well as the largest of his creations. To see God's hand in everything around us reminds us of how fortunate we are to be part of such a grand design.

David Hargreaves is a member of Emmanuel Uniting Church and a regular assistant with *Journey's* production effort.

Ainslie Davies

It's usually areas of natural environment that I retreat to for periods of spiritual and physical renewal.

Living on the Sunshine Coast, I experience an abundance of natural beauty. The Pacific Ocean's waves breaking on the coast offer a place of refreshment, contentment and at times awe and wonder, all aspects I can attribute to my God. The ocean appears as ever changing, yet somehow the same, beyond our control. Sometimes driven by cyclonic winds, waves cut and carve the landscape, but the same ocean can gently shape the shore line, coaxing and encouraging, but never leaving it. There are quiet times of building up, through the winter as sands are washed and renewed, a time of preparation for the vigour required for the summer.

If we follow the thought train from 'God as creator' two things ensue for me now. One is how can a God of the universe care

for me? And what is God's purpose for having me live here? Am I not meant to be a good steward of the resources around me?

I'm growing in my environmental responsibility; the garbage is sorted into recyclable, compostable and binnable. My light fittings are now mostly energy savers and I'd even consider a hybrid car next time.

I'm just like 'The Girl in the Café' to quote a movie based on the G8 summit held at Gleneagles last July where global climate changes were seriously considered by some of the world's greatest political powers. As the movie portrayed, you don't have to be a G8 leader to make a difference, just have a heart full of love for all people everywhere and a passion for what at times seems an unattainable goal.

If it takes a collective conscience to make a change to issues like global warming, then the challenge is for us all to "be that generation".

Ainslie Davies has a Master of Science degree in podiatry and is Chairperson of the Nambour UC Church Council.

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