

December 2006

JOURNEY

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The Sunday Mail
got it wrong

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A fair
day's pay

Page 5



95 and still
preaching

Page 11

CHRISTMAS WE ARE NOT ALONE

" The Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. We have seen it. We give witness to it. God lives in anyone who agrees that Jesus is the Son of God. That kind of person remains joined to God. So we know that God loves us. We depend on it. "

1 John 3:14-16a New International Reader's Version

As you approach the wonderful festival of Christmas the team at *Journey* and the Uniting Church Queensland Synod staff pray that you will do so with a sense of confidence.

We are not alone at all – that is the message of Christmas. We are never alone for God has come among us to give us the assurance that our lives do count, and that we can make a difference individually and together.

May God's peace be your gift at Christmas and your blessing throughout the year.



More about Christmas

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Christmas: it's Good News

I DID IT again this week! On a whim, I typed the words "good news" into the search engine of my computer and was directed to 860,000,000 internet web sites.

One of the best is a site called *The Good News Network*. It is entirely devoted to collecting good news stories from around the world.

If you are wearied by the passing parade of bad news stories in newspapers and on TV, you might like to connect to *The Good News Network*. It will warm your heart!

Here's one of the stories posted this week.

An Australian man noticed a swerving tractor-trailer truck on the other side of the road on his way to work.

He turned his car around, sped up to the truck and confirmed his suspicion that the driver was in trouble - slumped over the wheel.

The man parked his car, ran toward the truck and climbed inside it to pull the hand brake.

An ambulance officer called to the scene said, "In my 10 years in the service I have never seen or heard of anything like this."

"He is an absolute lifesaver. Even though the truck was not travelling at a great speed, it is an enormous vehicle."

"Me and my ambulance partner had to climb on board this huge truck while it was stationary, once, and it was hard. I could not imagine how difficult it would have been while in motion."

Long ago, John the Baptist stood on the banks of the River Jordan and proclaimed the good news, "It's time: the Lord has come!" Luke tells us that John "went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Luke 3:3)

The language John used seems harsh and unrelenting, and yet, Luke describes this preaching as "Good News"!

In dealing with the realities of everyday life, it's unusual to find



Message from the Moderator

Rev Dr David Pitman

anyone who wants to hear the bad news.

From time to time I have been in that daunting situation of having to be the bearer of bad news, one of those things in ministry that we would rather avoid, but have to do.

We all know that in tragic circumstances platitudes, however pious, are trite and inappropriate.

Yet, as those entrusted with the gospel, the "good news", it is our privilege and responsibility to share the truth and power of God's love and grace.

The gospel is good news.

I have always been puzzled by those who say we have to tell people

"It is our privilege and responsibility to share the truth and power of God's love and grace."

the bad news of the gospel before we can share the good news.

How can the gospel ever be bad news? That is a fundamental contradiction!

From the very beginning, the message regarding Jesus was good news.

During these weeks leading up to Christmas we remember and celebrate again the coming of Christ.

It is a time to be focused, in heart and spirit, in worship and in witness, on our identity and purpose as followers of Jesus.

The apostle Paul wrote, echoing the words of the prophet Isaiah, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." (Romans 10:15, c.f. Isaiah 52:7).

Bruce Prewer develops this theme in his book *More Australian Psalms*:

*How beautiful among the mountains
are the feet of gospel speakers,
who proclaim reconciliation and peace,
the wonderful news of liberation,
declaring the incomparable good news
that God has come among us.*

The God who comes to us in Christ is not Father Christmas, but Immanuel, "God with us", who demands repentance, offers forgiveness, embraces us in relationship and leads us into faith.

This is the source of our joy. It's Good News! And it's meant to be shared.

Expo ignites children's ministry

MORE THAN 40 displays of children's ministry resources and 40 training workshops for leaders will pack the program for IGNITE, the ecumenical children's ministry expo to be held in Brisbane on 3 March next year.

Youth and Children's Ministry Unit (YACMU) Family Ministry Coordinator Mr Paul Yarrow said this is a "not to be missed" event designed to inspire, challenge and resource children's workers and leaders.

Mr Yarrow said one of the highlights will be on-stage presentations by children's ministry performers who can be booked for local congregations and special events.

"IGNITE is the major project of the Queensland Children's Ministry Network which was launched in 2002 to raise the profile of children's ministry within Queensland churches and local communities," Mr Yarrow said.

Contact Paul Yarrow at YACMU on 3377 9866 or email Paul.Yarrow@yacmu.ucaqld.com.au

From the Editor

A PREGNANT girl travels with her fiancé to the distant city of Bethlehem to pay their taxes and she gives birth to a son in less than adequate circumstances.

A fat old man in a red suit comes down the chimney with a bag of presents.

What Jesus and Santa Claus have in common is that they represent unconditional love: they give of themselves to others without expecting anything in return.

Unfortunately this real meaning of Christmas has been supplanted by rampant hedonism and commercialism.

Rather than a celebration of unconditional love, we spend more money, eat more food and even drink more than we know is good for us at the obligatory office parties and family gatherings.

This is not to suggest that we shouldn't celebrate at this time of year: we've earned that pleasure.

But let's remember the truth in the old proverb, "It's the thought that counts, not the price ticket".

Christmas isn't just a time to shop, party, decorate our homes and give gifts.

As we negotiate the gaudy, tasteless commercialism, and the over-indulgence of Christmas perhaps we could take more time to practise unconditional love with our family, friends and the whole of humanity.

Perhaps it would be interesting to ask, if we didn't decorate or exchange gifts this year would Christmas be the same, or mean the same to us?

If the answer is no, then perhaps we have lost the real meaning of Christmas.

My favourite Christmas hymn is Mary's Song from Luke 1:46-55, sometimes known as the *Magnificat*.

Somehow it takes the focus away from the sentimentality of the season and brings us back to some basic questions about the call to unconditional love.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

This year I will be reflecting on the real meaning of Christmas and trying to make it last a little longer than 24 hours.

Mardi, Osker and I offer our prayer that this Christmas might be significant and life-changing for you and that whatever holidays come your way might be nourishing and refreshing.

Bruce Mullan

Sign of the Times



The church sign at Bracken Ridge Uniting Church reminding the community that we are not alone. Photo by Reg Harris. Email your church signs to journey@ucaqld.com.au

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Government kicks in for school chaplaincy

By Bruce Mullan

THERE HAS been a mixed response from churches, politicians and educators to the Prime Minister's announcement of the National School Chaplaincy Program offering \$90 million over the next three years for government and non-government school communities to engage the services of a chaplain.

The Federal Government has established the program to support the contributions that chaplains provide to the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of school communities nationally, and also to support school communities that wish to engage the services of a school chaplain.

The Government says that while chaplains will not be expected to have a religious background, they will be required to provide religious support to students.

School communities will be expected to contribute to running costs through cash and/or in-kind support.

The announcement of the program follows a similar scheme in Queensland where Premier Peter Beattie committed \$1 million a year for three years, up to \$10,000 for each state school, to help vulnerable students.

Prime Minister John Howard said the new Federal Government program was not an attempt to force-feed religion to children.

"Students often struggle to come to terms with the loss of school friends, and a chaplain would help them manage their grief," Mr Howard said. "But I cannot stress enough that it will be up to the students themselves to seek help. There will be no compulsion."



School Chaplain James Thorburn (centre) with students from Loganlea State High School.
Photo by Gordon Grace courtesy of Scripture Union Queensland

Response from the Labor side of politics was varied. Opposition education spokeswoman, Jenny Macklin, said Labor supported the chaplaincy program, but said: "Any new chaplaincy program must be flexible enough to take into account the diversity of religious beliefs in our school systems."

Brisbane Anglican Religious Education and Chaplaincy in State Schools Officer Jonathan Sargeant said, "Because of the doctrine of the separation of Church and State enshrined in Section 116 of the Constitution, it is difficult to see how this policy can avoid controversy."

According to the government, the choice of chaplain and chaplaincy services, including

religious affiliation, is a decision for the school community and the services provided by a chaplain should be appropriate to the school community and student context in which he or she will operate.

Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop told the ABC's *Religion Report* that she would expect the school community to consult widely and deeply, particularly with parents, as to how this program would operate in that school context.

The guidelines for the program are yet to be finalised but chaplains will be expected to provide general religious and personal advice and support to all students and staff, regardless of their religious denomination.

Uniting Church representative on the Queensland Government's Religious Education Advisory Committee Rev David MacGregor said the reality is that all school chaplains will be working within the accountabilities and structures of the state school system.

"The soon-to-be-released Education Queensland chaplaincy policy acknowledges that while a chaplain will unavoidably bring their faith into their chaplaincy context, at the end of the day their position is primarily a pastoral one."

Queensland Synod Youth and Children's Ministry Unit director Michael Jeffrey was cautiously welcoming of the National School Chaplaincy Program.

"Having seen the work of chaplains in Queensland State Schools and in our own Uniting Church schools first hand, I believe in the contribution Chaplains make in the lives of young people and the broader school community."

"Any move by the government to invest in the welfare of young people is a good thing, but when the Government puts their money into a project, they are going to expect something in return."

Ethicist, Theologian, Social Commentator and retired Uniting Church minister Rev Dr Noel Preston was particularly concerned about any possibility that this might be seen as a way to 'enhance values in schools'.

"This is unfortunate, partly because it confuses the role of chaplains in any school who, if they become the champions of the school's values and code of conduct program, might be slotted into the guise of 'moral policeman' or erroneously represent the fact that to be ethical one must adopt a certain belief stance."

"Credible, effective whole-school ethics education, even in a church school, must equip a school community for living in a multicultural, multi-faith, pluralistic, liberal democracy."

Scripture Union Queensland is the largest provider of chaplains in Queensland state schools and SU CEO Tim Mander welcomed the Federal Government announcement.

"The real cost of providing a full time chaplain is over \$50,000 per annum [so] churches, communities, corporates and individuals will still play a critical role in supporting the full cost of delivering chaplaincy," he said.

Queensland churches pray for rain

By Bruce Mullan

A CROWD of 300 people assembled for an ecumenical service to pray for rain at Brisbane's St John's Cathedral in November.

The gathering, which included politicians from all sides and the heads of 10 Christian churches, called Queensland churches to a special time of prayer for water in response to the dire need for rain.

Archbishop Aspinall said that church leaders gathering to pray would probably be seen as a naïve attempt to manipulate God to do something that God wouldn't otherwise do.

"If I were a gambler, I'd bet that what we are doing today will be misunderstood," he said.

The Archbishop called for a less superficial assessment of the power of prayer, which he claimed was neither opting out of human responsibility nor an irrelevant but otherwise harmless pastime to keep the religiously inclined off the streets.

"Prayer is like a partnership; a subtle interplay between God and



Anglican Archbishop Philip Aspinall, Premier Peter Beattie and Catholic Archbishop John Bathurst looking for an answer to prayer.
Picture by Lorraine Page, *The Catholic Leader*

human beings the result of which is God's will being done, not ours."

A joint letter to the Christian Communities in Queensland signed by Uniting Church Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman and nine other

heads of churches said they were aware of the challenge for the community to be worthy of the water that has been entrusted to us and undertook to change wasteful and destructive practices.

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The Sunday Mail: incorrect and alarmist says UnitingCare Director

By Bruce Mullan

UNITINGCARE Queensland Director Anne Cross has said that the article "Aged Care Disgrace" printed in *The Sunday Mail* (22 October 2006) was both incorrect and unnecessarily alarmist and that all Blue Care aged care homes identified in the article are fully compliant with accreditation standards.

Selective comments from audits conducted as long ago as 2003 were used to imply that the nursing homes were not satisfactory.

"All Blue Care aged facilities identified by *The Sunday Mail* were fully compliant at the time of the first assessment or have met their timetable for improvement set by the Accreditation Agency to reach full compliance," said Ms Cross.

"Only a few of these sites needed to follow up issues in areas of resident care.

Ms Cross said all the sites identified by *The Sunday Mail* have also undergone a rigorous follow up process (including unannounced visits) by the Accreditation Agency to ensure the standards were met.

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing confirmed that all Blue Care facilities named by *The Sunday Mail* were fully compliant with the Accreditation Standards.

"Blue Care has a commitment to continuous improvement and high standards of quality care and welcomes the accreditation process as a way of identifying areas that need improvement," Ms Cross said.

"Given the size and number of homes run by Blue Care, the real story is very impressive and a tribute to the dedicated and committed staff who provide care and manage the services provided by Blue Care throughout the state."

Ms Cross also rejected the suggestion by *The Sunday Mail* article and editorial that the Moderator was not prepared to comment.

"Our established protocol for responding to media enquiries is to refer the enquiry to the most senior staff member who is accountable for the issue being raised."

In line with this protocol, The Moderator, the Director of

UnitingCare and the Executive Director of Blue Care met to discuss the request from the journalist.

"Having discussed the matters raised by the journalist and reviewed the evidence, it was decided that it made sense for Blue Care Executive Director Steve Muggleton to be the key spokesperson as he had the most in depth experience of the processes and the issues raised by the journalist.

"This was conveyed to *The Sunday Mail* journalist."



UnitingCare Queensland Director Anne Cross



Mapoon congregation member Atu a.k.a Ronald Waia shares the washing up duties with Ministry Development Worker James W. Hughes III

Church alive and well in Mapoon

THE CHURCH in Mapoon (far North Queensland) is very much alive and meets on the verandah of the Health clinic for worship, as they do not yet have a church building.

Worship life is vibrant and the congregation has a number of children and young people who have grown strongly in their faith and actively participate in worship through their prayers, confident scripture reading and enthusiastic singing.

If ministry development worker James Hughes is late picking them up from their houses (up to 10km away), they start walking to church along the dusty road and the young people who live nearby start setting up the chairs for church.

"Sometimes we have our worship service down at the beach especially at the site of the original church mission in Mapoon," said Mr Hughes.

"Easter morning services have been held at this site for the last two years with quite a number of people attending worship.

"It is a humbling experience to be worshipping in this place where people have lived for thousands of years and worked and worshipped through the time of the missions for many years as well."



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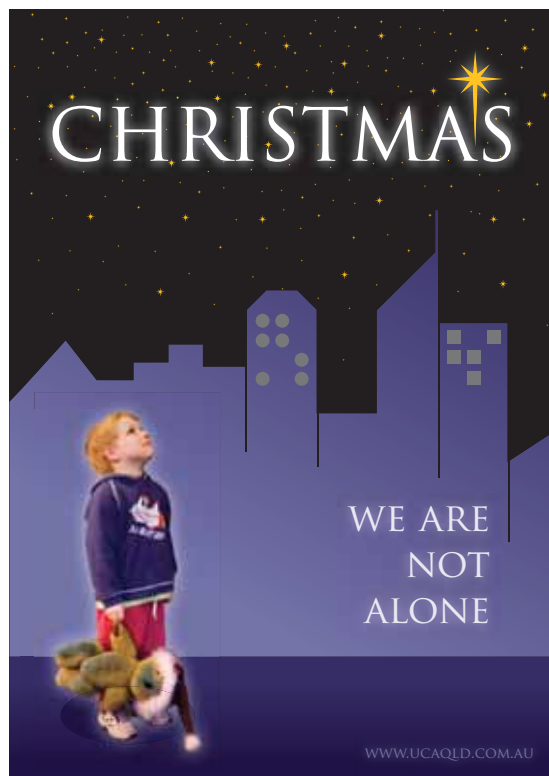
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300,000 invitations sent

WE ARE certainly not alone as post cards and posters inviting people from the wider community to attend Uniting Church Christmas services and events have been prepared for distribution across Queensland.

With some congregations ordering 9,000 cards and posters being displayed on noticeboards across the state the community will certainly know that Uniting Church congregations are inviting them to be part of their Christmas celebrations.

If your friends or family elsewhere in Queensland are looking for a Christmas service to attend, details are available at www.ucaqlid.com.au.

Church calls to provide a fair day's pay

By Mardi Lumsden

MODERATOR REV Dr David Pitman and Queensland Synod Social Responsibility Advocate Andrew Johnson told the Senate Inquiry into Stolen Wages in October that the original compensation offered by the Queensland Government was insulting.

The inquiry and report focus on Indigenous workers whose paid labour was controlled by the Queensland Government between 1904 and the 1980s.

In 2002 the State Government offered a total of \$55.6 million for monetary compensation to individuals who had their wages and savings controlled under the "Protection Acts" but this sum has been criticised as a fraction of the money taken from Indigenous workers at the time.

Author of *Trustees on Trial: Recovering the Stolen Wages* Dr Rosalind Kidd said the compensation offered ended up being only \$4000 or \$2000 per person. The Inquiry cited one family who are owed over \$100,000.

"A glance at the underpaid wages in any one year shows clearly that this buy-off is an insult."

Mr Johnson agreed. "We believe the offer by the Queensland Government was grossly inadequate, both in its magnitude and its manner," he told the Senate inquiry.

"The offer was quite generic and took no account of individual circumstances. We see it as a quick fix to what is really a very complex issue.

"Our submission is not an analysis of the detail...but advocacy

of a principle of justice for those who have suffered the effects of injustices in so many aspects of their lives for so many years. Others use the language of 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work'.

"The Uniting Church believes the Indigenous people have a unique contribution to make to

"A glance at the underpaid wages in any one year shows clearly that this buy-off is an insult."

Australia as the first peoples of this land, and therefore we believe that in order to create true and lasting reconciliation the truth about this issue must be told and, as far as we are able, redressed."

Dr Pitman said the original offer was not going to solve the long term problem.

"They [the government] were hoping that this matter would go away - that the offer that was being made would be an end to the matter. And that was reinforced by the fact that there was a clear closing date that was set for people making application...Either it would be taken up or it wouldn't and then a line would be drawn to say, 'This is over'.

"A considerable sum of money, I think in excess of \$30 million, was not disbursed because many Indigenous people had no knowledge of the offer or were not in a position to be able to make an application for payment or chose not to because to do so would have meant signing off on any future opportunity for this matter to be addressed again.

"The Premier has agreed that that money will be kept aside."

Dr Pitman drew the inquiry's attention to the commitment the Uniting Church has made to Indigenous people and the relationship formed with the

"We urge governments to provide a public forum in which Indigenous people can tell their story."

United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

In response to the possibility that the church also withheld wages from Indigenous people in church-run, State funded missions over the same period Dr Pitman stated he would not claim that the church has always been "lilywhite in this regard" but said from the evidence available the church "treated people fairly".

Mr Johnson appealed for the inquiry to consider the recommendations made by the Uniting Church.

"We urge governments to

provide a public forum in which Indigenous people can tell their story; secondly, to provide adequate resources to systematically and comprehensively investigate and report on the available records; and, based on those two recommendations, to provide just and fair compensation to those whose wages were controlled by a succession of governments in this State," said Mr Johnson.

Explaining the issue is not purely based on monetary compensation, Dr Pitman drew attention to the need to sit with and listen to Indigenous people.

"The experience of Indigenous people for 200 years has been that people in faraway places have made decisions about their lives and they have had no opportunity to participate.

"Part of the response we have received from Indigenous people in relation to this matter is that it is not just about the money; it is about more than that... It has to do with their identity, their autonomy, their self-respect and their place in our society."

One of the major problems faced by people wishing to claim compensation is the lack of records of employment.

"We live now with the sad reality that, clearly, a number of the people who might well have been eligible for payment have died, there are no records with regard to their employment and the only access we have now is information from their families.

"But I think that is just one of the really difficult things that we are going to have to live with," said Dr Pitman.

Mr Johnson said that this was an issue that needed to be addressed publicly.

"Through raising awareness of the issue throughout the Australian community, we believe Indigenous people can finally receive recognition for their contribution to the development of this State."



Queensland Synod Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman and Queensland Synod Social Responsibility Advocate Andrew Johnson at the Senate Inquiry into Stolen Wages in October. Photo by Osker Lau

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Should clerics shut-up about cover-up?

By Mardi Lumsden

COMMENTS MADE during a Ramadan sermon by Australia's senior Muslim cleric Sheikh Taj Aldin Alhilali regarding the morality of women who dressed provocatively sent shock waves through the Muslim and non Muslim communities alike.

Response from around the world has both condemned and commended the comments and while Sheikh Alhilali has publicly apologised for any offence taken (and criticised *The Australian's* translation of his sermon), he refused to back down from his comments saying the "presentation related to religious teachings on modesty...this does not condone rape".

Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Pru Goward said the Sheikh should be deported and Prime Minister John Howard said the comments were "appalling and reprehensible" and "quite out of touch with contemporary values in Australia".

In a poll by *The Age*, 88% of the 8700 people surveyed said Sheikh Alhilali should be sacked after his comments.

But out of these comments we have seen something previously not recognised by the Western world... that not all Muslims think the same things.

New York-based journalist and Muslim Mona Eltahawy in her column for *The Daily Star* was grateful that the imam's comments had brought to light the diversity of opinions within Muslim communities.

"Because these radical imams who have failed to integrate in the West have unilaterally appointed



themselves as our spokesmen - and are so readily accepted as such by the media - their shortcomings are easily projected onto the community as a whole," she wrote.

"The imams who are sent from Arab countries usually only speak Arabic and arrive with a suitcase full of stale ideas that are woefully out of touch with the concerns of the congregations they have been sent to tend to, and even more out-of-sync with the culture and mores of their new homes."

The imam is not the only church

leader to express concerns about the modesty of women's clothing.

Perth's Catholic Archbishop Barry Hickey told the *Sunday Times* that scantily dressed women risk attracting unwanted sexual attention and that young people were failing to appreciate the link between modest dress and the dignity of women.

While distancing himself from Sheikh Alhilali's comparison of immodestly dressed women to uncovered meat, Archbishop Hickey said the risks of women dressing revealingly is that "sometimes they might not want that attention that they will get".

"There's a case for modesty of dress to do with the dignity of women and maybe young people growing up haven't quite got that understanding," he said. "Dress is something to do with presenting oneself to the world and that dignity of womanhood should be part of life, not just sexual allure."

Queensland Synod Social Responsibility Advocate Heather den Houting said the issue about what women wear is much broader than just morality.

"The difficulty with making generalised statements is that you deny the complexity of issues that surround the choices women make about what they wear," she said.

"Everyone is faced with messages and roles that shape their self identity. Often their public appearance reflects this."

"Statements that reflect the expectations of one sector of society should never be used to create doctrinal standards for all members of society."



Stephen Peake (UCIS) presents gifts to graduates Brian Kickbusch, Jeanette Gillam, and Bruce Raymond. Photo by Osker Lau

Trinity sends out new ministers

THREE STUDENTS completed formal studies at Trinity Theological College in October and are looking forward to working together with the congregations they will be serving.

Ministry of the Word students Jeanette Gillam, Brian Kickbusch and Bruce Raymond all step out into placements in January and are excited about their new phase of ministry.

Jeanette Gillam will head out west to Longreach. After growing up on the Darling Downs and being a registered nurse for many years, Ms Gillam is well equipped for her ministry in a rural placement.

"My hopes and dreams are to form a really good relationship with the people out there, to work with them in their journey in life and in their faith journey and to encourage them through this tough time that they are going through."

Ms Gillam said her passions were teaching and preaching.

Former policeman Bruce Raymond said his call to ministry took a little while to get through.

"It took me a couple of years

before I understood what God was telling me," he said.

Mr Raymond will be in placement at Bulimba Uniting Church in inner-city Brisbane.

"Just because I am going to be a minister aged 58, don't expect I am going to think and act like a 58 year old minister, whatever that might mean."

Brian Kickbusch is particularly looking forward to being in a team ministry environment.

"I am looking forward to serving with the people of the Bald Hills and Bracken Ridge congregations as we together seek to explore what the kingdom of God looks like for those communities and to actually be expressions of Christ's love within those communities."

To congratulate them on their achievement, the Uniting Church Investment Service presented portable communion sets to the graduates.

Stephen Peake, UCIS Senior Manager of Loans & Customer Service, said, "We recognise that it's a very special time for them in their ministries, and the gift is (hopefully) a practical tool for them as they start out."

Mardi Lumsden

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- Willingness to plan and coordinate the youth program in line with the ministry goals and ethos of the Church eldership.

Valued:

- Professional youth leadership experience.
- Strong communication skills which will lead to opportunities for preaching.
- Qualifications in theology or youth ministry
- **Ability to commence full time employment early in 2007.**

Please contact Pastor Isaac Khan Westside Church of Christ on 07 3279 1570 or via email: admin@westsidechurchofchrist.org.au or by post via PO Box 211, Mt Ommaney Qld 4074

Discerning positive possibilities for the rural church

THIRTY PEOPLE from four rural presbyteries joined the Moderator and General Secretary of the Queensland Synod for a Rural Summit at North Rockhampton in November.

Process facilitator Rev Dr Graham Beattie said there was an emerging consensus of the need to move from institutional maintenance of church programs, including traditional worship expressions in some contexts, to becoming the witnessing presence of Christ to communities in change.

"Alertness to ecumenical opportunities, exploring emerging technology options, experimenting with alternate ministry models and a system that is owned and managed by rural people themselves were identified as critical aspects," Dr Beattie said.

Dr Beattie believes the Summit discerned positive possibilities for the future of rural ministry.

"Overall there was recognition of the need to do church differently in many rural contexts."



Rev Dr Graham Beattie at the Rural Summit

Get out your winter woollies... it's Christmas

By Mardi Lumsden

IS IT just me or does anyone else think it is somewhat of a contradiction that we sing Christmas carols about chestnuts roasting on an open fire and decorate our houses with 'icicles'?

Particularly in Queensland, with the fire bans in summer, you won't see too many chestnuts roasting on open fires.

But a traditional family Christmas lunch at my house usually consists of a hot roast with all the trimmings and hot pudding (as well as ice-cream pudding) moving back to the only air-conditioned room in the house between courses.

So many of our Christmas traditions (particularly the carols we sing) come from the northern hemisphere.

Slowly, Australia is developing its own Christmas traditions, including carols. As well as the humorous *Six White Boomers* or *Aussie Jingle Bells* we have some of the most beautiful Christmas music in the world.

One of the most haunting is *The Three Drovers* (lyrics by John Wheeler and music by William G. James - 1948).

I was introduced to this stunning carol through an arrangement by Australian composer Stephen Leek.

With Leek's vocal ensemble The Australian Voices I travelled the world singing Australian music, including *Drovers*.

Standing in a little stone church in Leeds the week before Christmas, with the snow falling outside and the heaters not working inside, I remember singing of the summer heat and the starry sky of home.

It reminded me of the ridiculousness of singing about blazing Yule logs and shopping centres piping out *Let it Snow* during a Queensland summer.

Maybe one day we will all have an appreciation of the unique Christmas we have in Australia.

The Three Drovers

Lyrics by John Wheeler,
music by William G. James,
1948

Across the plains one
Christmas night
Three drovers riding blithe
and gay,
Looked up and saw a
starry light
More radiant than the
Milky Way;
And on their hearts such
wonder fell,
They sang with joy. 'Noel!
Noel! Noel! Noel! Noel!'

The air was dry with
summer heat,
And smoke was on the
yellow moon;
But from the heavens, faint
and sweet,
Came floating down a
wond'rous tune;
And as they heard, they
sang full well
Those drovers three. 'Noel!
Noel! Noel! Noel! Noel!'

The black swans flew
across the sky,
The wild dog called across
the plain,
The starry lustre blazed on
high,
Still echoed on the
heavenly strain;
And still they sang, 'Noel!
Noel!'
Those drovers three. 'Noel!
Noel! Noel! Noel! Noel!'



Preliminary Notice

Kamp Stacey is 50 in 2007!
Saturday 21 April 2007 10am-3pm

Come one, come all to celebrate and share lunch and memories.

Lunch will be catered on site at a cost of \$12.50 per person, or \$20 per couple. Numbers are limited so book early.

If sufficient interest is shown for the hiring of a bus from Brisbane on the day this could be organised but will depend on early advice - contact **Kamp Stacey** on **07 4666 1240**.

Peace on earth...goodwill to all... batteries not included

By Bruce Mullan

IN 2005 Australian consumers committed over \$22 billion for Christmas spending and with a record 13.1 million credit cards in Australian wallets that is only likely to increase in this year.

Almost one third of Australians spend over \$500 on Christmas gifts for family and friends while over 10% spend between \$1000 and \$2000 and many businesses rely on Christmas spending to break even or make a profit for the entire year.

The preparations for the Christmas rush have already begun and people will frantically flock to the shops to purchase the latest fad or gizmo.

MP3 portable music players will be the Christmas gift of choice again this year topping most adults' and teenagers' wish lists with prices ranging up to \$500 plus accessories.

This will be closely followed by digital cameras, DVD recorders, laptops, videogame systems, mobile phones, camcorders and high-definition televisions.

Many Christians see each year's Christmas hype as a little more dazzling and the commercialism more tasteless as the holidays which are intended to celebrate values like community, family and spirituality are lost in the acceleration of consumer activity.

Claremont/Capella minister Rev Andrew Gilles told *Journey* that we sometimes try to prove our love for our family and friends by "wandering around shopping centres until our feet almost bleed, just to find that special gift."

Many are troubled by the blitz of Christmas spending when half the world - nearly three billion people - live on less than two dollars a day and, while we worry about what gift to buy, subsistence farmers in Africa face bigger worries - like staying alive.

Clayfield/Hamilton minister Rev Peter Lockhart said the increasing commercialisation of

Christmas is not about the Spirit of Christmas, but the spirit of consumerism.

"Enjoy the incessant round of Christmas carols lilting in the background and hear the bells jingling as they tinkle in time with the ring of the cash register. Feel good about yourself and each other - but most of all spend your money," he said.

Mr Lockhart urges us not to fall for the lies of sentimentality at Christmas.

"Our meaning in being created is found in relationship with the one who created us.

"It is found in relationship with Christ through whom all things were created."



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It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas

Christmas myths busted

THANKS TO traditional stories and Christmas songs many myths about what happened on that first Christmas have become part of the accepted Christmas story.

Journey looks at the biblical basis for some of the myths.

Myth 1: Mary travelled to Bethlehem on a donkey. Truth: There is no biblical evidence to indicate this.

Myth 2: The innkeeper told Mary and Joseph there was no room in the inn. Truth: The Bible doesn't mention an innkeeper (see Luke 2:7).

Myth 3: Jesus was born in a stable. Truth: The Bible doesn't say (Luke 2:7).

Myth 4: The baby Jesus didn't cry. Truth: The Bible doesn't say but there is no reason to think that he wouldn't.

Myth 5: There were animals present in the stable where the baby Jesus was born. Truth: The Bible doesn't specify.

Myth 6: Three wise men came to see Jesus. Truth: No one knew how many there were (see Matthew2:1) and according to most commentaries they were astrologers or "star gazers".

Myth 7: The wise men visited Jesus in the stable. Truth: They visited Jesus in a house (Matthew 2:11).

Myth 8: The Christmas story is found in all four Gospels. Truth: The story is only found in Matthew and Luke. Mark begins with John the Baptist, John with "The Word".

Gifts of love

DON'T NEED another pair of socks this Christmas?

Here are a few ideas for alternative Christmas gifts for friends and family this year.

Many respected charities have gift catalogues that provide gift options like buying a pair of chickens for a farmer in Vietnam. You can request a card be sent to you listing the donation to give to the person you bought it for.

World Vision Australia has the Smiles Gift Catalogue with gifts starting at \$24 for blankets in Zambia to over \$1000 to provide clean drinking water for a whole community. www.worldvision.com.au/smile.

Tear Australia has the Useful Gifts Catalogue ranging from \$5 for eye care and glasses to \$2000 to build a school building. www.usefulgifts.org.

Oxfam unwrapped gifts start at \$10 for a pair of chickens or HIV/Aids awareness books and range to around \$500 for a buffalo. www.oxfamunwrapped.com.au.

Uniting International Mission also has the Gifts of Love Catalogue at www.uim.uca.org.au/ucoa.

Other Aid organisations with Christmas gift catalogues

- Baptist World Aid www.shareanopportunity.org
- The Leprosy Mission Australia www.leprosymission.org.au
- Samaritans Purse (which runs operation Christmas Child) gift catalogue www.samaritanspurse.org

Websites outside of Australia

- www.buynothingchristmas.org (take your sense of humour when you visit this site).
- UK based Christian Aid has <http://shop.christianaid.org.uk>

Other ideas

CARE Australia hosts an Art Auction on 14 December. Details at www.careaustralia.org.au or www.christineabramsgallery.com.au.

Caritas Australia has produced a calendar for their Global Gifts project. More information at www.caritas.org.au/howtohelp/globalGifts.htm.

Energex has new options to purchase green power (Earth's Choice) which means the recipient's power will come from renewable energy such as solar and wind. Go to www.energex.com.au for more information.

'Adopting a polar bear' is just one of the options available at www.lastminute.com. Other gifts include enabling the World Land Trust to purchase and protect One Acre of critically threatened rainforest. You can even, apparently, go and stay on the acre you helped save.

This is by no means a definitive list, but just a few of the options for alternative Christmas presents.

Compiled by Mardi Lumsden



Photo by Jerry Galea/OxfamAUS

Why we deck the halls

By Catherine Mullan

MULTITUDES OF Christmas traditions are practised around the world, but many people do not know the origins of these seasonal festivities. Many Christmas traditions practised today were developed only in the last 200 years.

More than just a repetitious melody with a list of odd gifts, *The 12 Days of Christmas* was

reportedly sung by Catholics in England during the period when being Catholic was illegal. *The 12 Days of Christmas* was used as a catechism song to help young children learn the fundamental aspects of their faith.

The tradition of kissing under mistletoe comes from either the Viking association of the plant with Freya, the goddess of love, or from the ancient belief that mistletoe was related to fertility. Generally the mistletoe became a powerful life

symbol because it grew berries in winter when other plant life seemed dead.

The Evergreen Christmas tree stems from Germany where Saint Boniface cut down a sacred oak, worshipped by pagans. To make peace, Saint Boniface offered to replace it with a fir tree.

By the late 1800s the tradition had spread through Germany, England and the United States of America via German immigrants.

The tradition of decorating the

Christmas tree began in Victorian times with many hanging sweets and cakes with ribbon.

The ornamental craze grew in 1880 when *Woolworth* first sold Christmas tree ornaments.

Martin Luther is credited as being the first to decorate a tree with candles, but it was 1882 when the first electrically lit Christmas tree appeared.

Although it is widely despised as leaving the 'Christ' out of Christmas, the abbreviation of the word Christmas to Xmas originates from the Greek word for Christ, Xristos.

became the central focus of Christmas.

Rudolf the Red-nose Reindeer was an advertising gimmick for Montgomery Ward in 1939.

Originally written as a poem, Santas worldwide gave away 2.4 million copies of the booklet. It was 1949 when Gene Autry turned the poem into a hit with a musical version.

Although it is widely despised as leaving the 'Christ' out of Christmas, the abbreviation of the word Christmas to Xmas originates from the Greek word for Christ, Xristos.

Since the development of the Santa Claus story, gift giving

Will the real Saint Nicholas please stand up?

SAINT NICHOLAS was born to wealthy parents in Lycia (a city in modern day Turkey) in the third century.

He was orphaned as a young man when his parents died of the plague.

Ordained as a priest and later Bishop of Lycia, Nicholas' name apparently appears on some of the lists of attendees of the Council of Nicaea.

Bishop Nicholas was renowned for his generosity and care, particularly for children and the poor.

The tradition of leaving Christmas stockings by a fire place stems from one of the most famous stories about St Nicholas.

It is said that a poor man was upset because he could not afford to provide his three daughters with a dowry so they could marry.

Bishop Nicholas felt the father's pain so late one night he threw three bags of gold into the house.

Each landed in a stocking drying by the fire, providing the three daughters with dowries.

The Dutch took the legend of St Nicholas to America in the 17th Century in the form of Sinterklaas.

As early as 1773 his name appeared in print in America as St. A Claus and in 1809 Washington Irving (writing under the pseudonym Diedrich Knickerbocker) published his satirical *A History of New York* which painted a picture of Santa Claus riding a horse.

New Yorker, Clement Clarke Moore, wrote a series of verses to read to his children on Christmas Eve in 1822.

His poem was published a year later as *An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas*, more commonly known by

its opening line, "'Twas the night before Christmas".

Images of a rotund Santa appeared in Christmas issues of Harper's magazine from the 1860s to the 1880s courtesy of illustrator Thomas Nast who added details such as Santa's workshop at the North Pole.

Artist Haddon Sundblom created

the first Coca-Cola Santa in 1931 for the winter advertising campaign. The Coca-Cola Santa images were so popular any changes made to them would create endless streams of mail to Coca-Cola headquarters. Once, Santa wasn't wearing his wedding ring and people wrote to ask what happened to Mrs Claus.

Some say the Coca-Cola

Company invented the current image of St Nicholas / Santa as the round, jolly man in a red suit.

Others say the company just consolidated the many different images and names given to the Christmas gift giver.

Apparently Shirley Temple stopped believing in Santa Claus when she was six because Santa

asked for her autograph in a shopping center.

Mardi Lumsden. Written with information from www.stnicholascenter.org, www.ponddoc.com, www.lycianturkey.com, www.snopes.com, www2.coca-cola.com, and www.the-north-pole.com



The first Coca-Cola Santa image emerged in 1931. Image courtesy of Coca-Cola

A time of solace

CHRISTMAS IS not a time of joy for everyone.

For some, Christmas can be the loneliest time of the year.

It may be their first Christmas without a loved one, they may be without family or close friends, they may be swamped by debt or any number of things that can make celebrating difficult.

Some Uniting Churches recognise that the festive season is not always festive for all and the tradition of holding a Service of Solace is becoming a more common occurrence over the Christmas period.

Rosemary Costello is the Pastoral Assistant at Emmanuel (Enoggera) and Ashgrove West Uniting Churches and has been organising services of solace for many years.

"Although it is a simple, gentle service it really does seem to give people some strength to move on," she said.

Ms Costello emphasised the use of music and preparing the space.

"We pay much attention to setting up a comfortable space, and use lots of fresh flowers and some Christmas symbolism like a nativity scene."

During a time of quietness, participants are invited to light a candle in memory of the person or event they are grieving.

Using material mostly adapted from *Seasons of the Spirit* a going out prayer prepares participants for the rest of the Christmas season, but

Ms Costello said it is not just the service that helps people.

"The sharing that happens over a cuppa is most important."

Go to www.ucaqld.com.au for more information on services of solace and other Christmas events at Uniting Churches around Queensnald.

"Lord, as we part and go our different ways it is our prayer that you will give us, each in our own way, the passion for living and loving, the courage for daring and hoping, the freedom for growing and changing."

The capacity for giving and receiving, the humility for learning, the tenderness of understanding, the strength for enduring, the trust for believing."

What do we tell the children?

By Bruce Mullan

FOR CHRISTIAN parents one nagging question is what to tell our children about Santa Claus.

Journey asked the Queensland Synod's Youth and Children's Ministry Unit about how to deal with the issue.

Family Ministry Coordinator and parent of two young children Paul Yarrow said there are a number of reasons why people include Santa in their family Christmas celebrations.

"Many people grew up believing in Santa and it didn't do any harm. Childhood is a time of imagination, fantasy and 'make-believe'. There is also lots of pressure for our children not to be different from their friends," he said.

"Many parents don't want their kids to grow up too fast and Santa is a lot of fun which adds a special 'something' to the excitement of Christmas for households.

"When our kids do raise questions about Santa Claus it provides an opportunity to have a conversation about fables and truth."

Mr Yarrow also acknowledged the problems of participating in the Santa charade which can blur the distinction between truth and fantasy.

"If we go along with the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy and Santa who we can't see and then eventually our kids learn the truth, what will they think about Jesus?"

"When Christmas focuses on Santa, gifts and holidays it can potentially diminish the story of the birth of Christ and the real message of Christmas. We begin to emphasise getting rather than giving.

"Difficulties may arise in families where parents have separated and children have two homes with differing practices about Santa. Communication between parents about what each plans to do will assist children in this situation."

Journey spoke to two families about what they told their children.

One told their children from an early age that Santa was based on the life of St Nicholas who did good works and helped the poor but the Santa who lives at the North Pole, rides in a flying sleigh pulled by reindeer and comes down the chimney on Christmas Eve is not real.

The children were told that the story about Santa was a special game that parents and other adults played with their children.

Their children knew that other parents may not have told their own children and so agreed not to tell their friends what they knew about Santa.

"Santa still visited our house every Christmas Eve to deliver presents under the tree just like he did for other houses but everyone knew we were playing along with a special game."

The second couple went along with the myth of Santa while the children were very young leaving out a biscuit and a drink for Santa on Christmas Eve and a carrot for the reindeer.

There was a small present from Santa in each child's stocking on Christmas morning but no big deal was made about Santa.

The children helped set up a manger scene as part of the family Christmas preparations and the story of the birth of Jesus was read on Christmas Eve. There were no visits to Santa or photos taken in the shopping centre.

"When each of our children began to ask about Santa around age eight we asked them, 'What do you think?' and 'What are your friends saying?'"

"The children had already begun to work it out for themselves and so we told them the truth about Santa and introduced them to the tradition of St Nicholas.

Throw out the baby ... keep the bathwater

By Scott Stephens

THE TIME of year is fast approaching when the church traditionally throws out the bathwater of its murky rituals and convoluted theology, and invites all comers to gather 'round and adore the 'babe in the manger'.

Here we present a stripped down version of the faith, or, to paraphrase Bill Gates, a kind of 'frictionless Christianity' – anything that is incidental, any off-putting accretions are removed so that people can experience the pure, heart-warming immediacy of God-with-us.

Now, not wanting to sound too much like Ebenezer Scrooge, I have no problem with our hosting Christmas celebrations or indulging in the usual expressions of Yuletide cheer. I just have a problem with our belief that we are being Christian when we do so.

If anything, the truth of Christianity lies in these so-called 'accretions', in the very things that we feel must be stripped away in order to give people access to the original simplicity of the Christian message.

The problem, in fact, lies with the very idea of Christianity's pristine beginnings: that it was initially a kind of spontaneous, populist



spirituality based on belief in God's unfettered presence and the desire of 'good will to all' ... but then centuries of soulless doctrine and ecclesiastical wrangling encrusted this simple soft faith within a hard dogmatic shell.

Probably the best way of explaining this problem is by means of a quick detour through Dan Brown's mega-bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code*. Why was it such a success? (Because, let's face it, it's not a very good book!)

The key to the book's appeal is the way that it provides an energetic rendition of the prevailing religious sentiment of our times.

As we all now know, the punchline of *The Da Vinci Code* is that Mary Magdalene is the lost Grail, the true foundation of the church, a kind of primordial sacrifice who must be forgotten for the Christian faith as it stands to exist.

For Brown, her fate acts as a parable of the erasure of the sacred feminine from Western life, and his book stands as a testament to her gentle nobility against the harshness of Western religion.

We shouldn't miss the significance of the use of gender in this book. The sacred feminine, of course, denotes an inclusive spirituality that nurtures and sustains all life. This is in sharp contrast to the conniving 'back-room boys' and power-brokers of organised religion who have an interest keeping such a free, universal spirituality secret.

And here we have the clearest statement of the kind of conspiratorial faith that most people adhere to these days. That organised religion is founded on the corruption and dissimulation of the purity of its own origins.

The spontaneous popularity of the book should have convinced church leaders to abandon their hackneyed diagnosis that the real problem today is people's lack of faith, and their fixation on what they can see, touch and buy.

The determining factor of our culture isn't rampant materialism – it's that sloppy, sentimental spirituality that we all implicitly adhere to, but that fails to pose any real challenge to the way we live.

And shouldn't it be clear by now that we are pandering to just this insipid religious sentiment in the way we offer our Christmas services? And that we are distorting the Christian message almost beyond recognition by our sentimental portrayal of 'the babe in the manger'?

At the beginning of Christianity, there is no cuddly, all-embracing life-force. Instead, there is the *skandalon*, the stone that causes offence, the final rejection of all those obscene, idolatrous spiritualities that we amass for our own sense of security.

In other words, the central problem of Christianity is *Christ himself*. And the history of the church is the story of so many failed, though sometimes heroic, attempts to come to grips with the scandal of its own beginnings.

I would even suggest that, instead of all those baroque paintings of baby Jesus in arms, surrounded by the menagerie of onlookers, perhaps the work of art that best captures the spirit of the season is one by Andres Serrano: a Cibachrome photograph of a plastic crucifix immersed in Serrano's own blood and urine.

When one first looks at the image, the effect is uncanny. It seems to radiate, almost glow with a divine aura. And yet one can't help but feel affronted by its content, by one's knowledge of what the image in fact is.

Remarkably, Serrano grasps simultaneously the radical Christian identification of God with that which we find most repelling.

So, the paradoxical message of the photograph is, *Ecce Deo!* Here is your God!

This sense of estrangement is perhaps closest to the intended effect of the Christian message. We are confronted, not with an immediate confirmation of our innermost beliefs, but with the demand to renounce those idolatrous beliefs themselves.

This is the time of year to throw out the baby of soppy religious sentimentality, and to own the bathwater of radical faith. Seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ requires nothing less.

Scott Stephens is an author, theologian and minister at Cherside Kedron Uniting Church

Virgin birth: more than a miracle

By Peter Lockhart

IN RECENT years there have been a growing number of Christians who have raised the question whether or not Jesus' birth was in fact a virgin birth.

This question has been around since the beginnings of the church but in more recent times it is often tied in with scientific and historical understandings of the text.

It should be noted that Jesus' birth was not the first virgin birth ever claimed; Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, were born through a vestal virgin; Adonis' birth was through a virgin, as was Buddha's.

In each case the claim of a virgin birth is made to emphasise something about the child.

Nevertheless, to deny the virgin birth is highly contentious and it is not surprising that there has been a fairly strong backlash among Christians who believe that if Jesus' birth was not a virgin birth then the whole biblical story falls apart.

For many people who approach their reading of the scriptures in this way, there is a desire for a kind of scientific and historical accuracy from every word in the scripture.

It is an accuracy that is simply not there.

For example, there are significant inconsistencies between the two genealogies of Jesus recorded in Matthew and Luke.

Are there mistakes in one and not the other?

This is a good question but a better question is, not whether one or other is inaccurate, but why the gospel writers bothered putting them down in the first place.

Is their purpose more important than their accuracy?

For those who hold to the truth of the virgin birth because it is scriptural it can be quite easily argued that in claiming the virgin birth we deny Jesus' biological connection to the line of David through Joseph, which according to the Bible means that Jesus is not the Messiah.

That's a pretty big inconsistency and Jews who argue against the idea that Jesus is the Messiah are quite happy to make that point.

Of course, Joseph accepts Jesus as his son and it could also be argued that, because he is legally recognised as Joseph's son, the lineage is consistent. But one must accept this on faith.

Personally, I do not see much point in questioning the validity of the virgin birth because the stories are recorded to make the point that Jesus is God incarnate.

The incarnation of Jesus is both an entirely universal and incredibly personal event.

Jesus comes to take away the sin of the world but he also comes to be with us and embrace each one of

us in a renewed relationship with God.

So, the crux of the story is not the virginity of Mary, the crux of the story is found in Jesus' name – Emmanuel 'God is with us' – Jesus, 'The Lord is our salvation.'

If this is the case, a question for those with more liberal views of the scripture might be: 'If you can't accept the miracle of a virgin birth, how can you accept the possibility of incarnation, which is a far more important claim?'

And, for those with more conservative views, the question might be: 'If the whole Bible stands or falls on the virgin birth, is your faith in written words or in a living saviour?'

The importance of Jesus' birth as a virgin birth is because it teaches us that Jesus is God with us who has come to reconcile and renew all things.

Rev Peter Lockhart is minister at Clayfield and Hamilton Uniting Church Congregations



95 and still preaching

By David Hargreaves and Bruce Mullan

POSSIBLY Queensland's oldest Uniting Church minister Rev Ralph Ellis Bramley is still an active and energetic minister and enthusiast for life and the church.

Growing up at the Margaret Marr Memorial Home for Boys at Wynnum after the death of both parents before his 10th birthday Mr Bramley was converted at 16 and convinced of a call to ministry commenced his preparation for the Local Preacher's Examination.

He was accepted for Home Missionary training at 18 years, as a candidate for the ministry at 21, ordained at 27 and amazingly had retired from ministry before Church Union.

Nephew, Tom Bryant, said he thought that "I've been everywhere man" should be Ellis' theme song, because he really has been.

"I doubt if any other minister has served in as many places as he has been able to do."

Although trained as a French polisher with just a few days of training at the Brisbane Dental Hospital, Mr Bramley also performed some amateur dentistry during his time in the outback.

"One time on Yampi Sound I was asked if I pulled out teeth. I asked, 'Which one?'"

"He said, 'The lot, so that I can get a full set in Perth.'"

He also helped out with haircuts.

"I said that we couldn't have it in the dental surgery but in the hairdressing salon, so we moved up to the other end of the log."

With an ever-present smiling face and weathered hands Mr Bramley still works with wood as a hobby.

"Over the years I have found that being a French polisher has been very useful in building pulpits, setting up worship centres or making furniture – mostly for friends."

Mr Bryant said, "All over Queensland there are families with beautifully restored pieces of furniture, lovingly pulled to pieces, reassembled or new pieces constructed, and holding pride of place in their homes."

"Some pieces were only fit for the garbage and it is astounding how this artisan can re-create beauty from rubbish."

He also brought beauty to the lives of many he served.

One legendary story tells of a young couple he was about to marry not having wedding rings.

Mr Bramley dashed home and returned to perform the service

with two shower curtain rings.

Since his retirement the indefatigable Mr Bramley has served in 28 supply ministry appointments and credits his multiple heart by-pass seven years ago for a new lease of life.

Humble as always Rev Ellis Bramley is still preaching and looks fit enough to be doing it at 100.

"Ministry has been a great opportunity to serve my Lord and Master according to my capabilities without striving to be a renowned Minister of the Word," he said.

"I have made many friends over the years and offer my thanks to God for his continued grace."



Possibly Queensland's oldest Uniting Church minister Rev Ellis Bramley.
Photo by Bruce Mullan



Doing Christmas differently

By Catherine Mullan

AS CHRISTIANITY spread throughout the world, various Christmas traditions developed in every country.

In most European nations Saint Nicholas doesn't have anything to do with 25 December.

His birthday is on 6 December and on that day he visits all children.

In Belgium Saint Nicholas visits children twice to find out who has been good and bad.

When he returns, children who have been good receive presents and those who have been bad are left twigs.

Italian children are delivered presents by a kind, ugly witch called Befana, who rides on a broomstick.

Legend has it, when Jesus was born she was delayed and so she missed the star and has been flying around ever since, leaving presents at every house in case he is there.

In Russia the traditional Christmas present giver is Babushka.

According to tradition she declined to go with the wise men to see Jesus because of the cold weather.

However, she regretted her decision and set off to try and catch up, filling her basket with presents.

She never found Jesus but still visits each house, leaving toys for good children.

Children in Spain have their presents delivered by the three wise men.

Children leave their shoes out, filled with straw and barley for the camels.

In the morning they wake to find the shoes are filled with presents.

The Spanish also honour cows around Christmas because they believe the cow in the stable breathed on the Baby Jesus to keep him warm.

In various parts of England and the United Kingdom, boar's heads are used as a traditional Christmas dish.

This is based on the legend that a boar attacked an Oxford University student while he was studying.

The student saved himself by shoving the complete works of Aristotles down the boar's throat.

The boar choked to death and the student cut off its head and took it back to his college.

Before the existence of the pudding, originating from a Celtic legend, frumenty, a spiced porridge, was served at Christmas and enjoyed by both rich and poor.

In Costa Rica, nativity scenes are so big that they fill the room.

In the Czech Republic young girls put a cherry twig in water on 4 December.

According to tradition, if the twig blossoms before Christmas Eve the girl will marry sometime during the year.

Due to the separation of church and state in the United States of America, in Illinois government workers are forbidden from saying the words "Merry Christmas" while at work.

**On the
threshold of
joy...**

**Meditative prayer
for Advent using the
songs and prayers of
the Taizé community.**

St. Philip's Anglican
Church, 115 Cornwall
St., Annerley.
5.30pm Sunday
November 26 to
December 17.

Enquiries to
James Macdonald 3391
3915.

LOGAN UNITING CHURCH EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY!

Logan Uniting Church is a contemporary church passionate about "Drawing People into a life transforming relationship with Jesus Christ."

Looking for a motivated Worship and Creative Arts Coordinator/Pastor to join a committed leadership team, your role will be to assist us in worshipping God and reaching out to the community in culturally relevant ways. While the role will have a primary focus on corporate worship (currently 400 to 450 people in worship every weekend), part of the dream is developing the creative arts as a context for outreach. The role will be for 30 hours per week.

For Position Description and Selection Criteria please contact
Logan Uniting Church 07 32901277 or loganuc@tpg.com.au



Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of Western Australia



General Secretary

Applications are invited from members of the Uniting Church, either ordained or laypersons, to fulfil this senior executive position within the church.

The task embraces a dual function as Secretary of the Synod and of the Presbytery.

The Synod is seeking a person who is able to apply a theological perspective to the mission directions of the church; can then plan strategically towards the achievement of those objectives; and is able to marshal the resources necessary for their implementation. It is a challenging role for a church embracing challenging times.

A sound knowledge of and commitment to the ethos and polity of the Uniting Church is essential.

The full information pack is available via our website
www.uca.wa.org.au

Applications will close on Friday 2nd March 2007

WHAT'S ON

December 1-2. Christmas Craft Bazaar at The Gap Uniting Church, 1050 Waterworks Road. Friday 2-8pm, Saturday 9am-3pm. To book a stall or for more information contact Vanessa Marlow on 3848 1968 or email thegapuc@inet.net.au.

December 2-23, 10am-3.30pm. Montville Uniting Church Christmas Display. Main St Montville. Theme: Songs of the Season... Truth or Tradition?

December 3, 2-4pm. Service of Solace at Emmanuel Uniting Church, 249 South Pine Road, Enoggera. A service to acknowledge the losses people have suffered and to provide a quiet space for reflection. Contact Rosemary Costello on 3355 2162 or email rosemary@ucaqld.com.au.

December 4-24. Lifeline Brisbane Christmas Wrap at Indooroopilly Shopping Centre and Myer Brisbane City Store. Proceeds to Lifeline Brisbane's 24-hour Crisis Counselling Line. Contact Melannie Burgess on 3250 1934 or email melannie.burgess@lccq.org.au.

December 8, 4pm. Musical Christmas Dinner at Moorooka Uniting Church. Entertainment by Chansons. \$15/person. Bookings required. Phone 3848 6168 or 3848 6220.

December 10, 9am. Celebration & Thanksgiving service for Labrador Uniting Church, which closes at the end of 2006. Worship followed by morning tea. 55 Billington St, Labrador. Contact Rev Sue Page on 5529 1869 or suepage@optusnet.com.au.

December 10, 2pm. Highlights from Handel's Messiah at Bayside Uniting Church, 420 Wondall Rd, Manly West. Acclaimed guest soloists and choirs. Contact Annette Brown on 3396 7194.

December 10, 6pm. Caloundra Uniting Church Annual Carol Service. Beginning with a sausage sizzle in the Church hall, cnr. Queen & Ulm Streets. Everyone welcome.

December 11-15. Southport Uniting Church Christmas Tree Festival. Cnr Scarborough & Short Sts. Free, includes Christmas cake and cuppa. Official opening by Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman, 10am Monday 11 Dec. Coach bookings essential. Contact 5532 5915.

December 11-23. Christmas Lights at Sandgate Uniting Church. 116 Board Street Deagon. Refreshments, gifts, craft, face painting, and a free entertainment program. Lights from 6.30- 10pm. Contact Rev Peter Clark or the Sandgate church office on 3869 0277, email sandgateuc@pfcs.com.au, or visit www.sandgate.unitingchurch.org.au.

December 16-25. 10 Days of Christmas at Emmanuel Uniting Church, 249 South Pine Rd Enoggera. Contact Emmanuel Uniting on 3355 2162 or visit www.emmanueluc.unitingchurch.org.au.

December 19-21. Stroll through Bethlehem at Indooroopilly Uniting Church, Musgrave St entrance. Celebrate the true meaning of Christmas with this free event. Live animals. Contact Wendy Mallett on 3870 7975 or email cliffwendymall@yaboo.com.au.

December 19-20, 6-9pm. Follow the Star Bush Christmas Festival. Glasshouse Country Uniting Church. Walk through the bush, bush poetry & tales, free sausage sizzle, puppets & more. Contact Elaine Ewin on 5439 0282.

December 25. Merry Christmas from the team at *Journey*: Bruce, Osker and Mardi.

December 27-January 4. Uniting Church Family Camp at Alexandra Headlands. Summer at the beach without breaking the budget. All meals provided. Contact Debbie Pollard on 3621 6600 or email debbie@retirewealthy.com.au.

January 14-19. Discoveries Camp at Lesley Dam Recreation Centre. More information at www.discoveriescamp.com or contact Paul Yarrow on 3377 9866 or email Paul.Yarrow@yacmu.ucaqld.com.au.

February 18, 10am. St Luke's Uniting Church Centenary celebration. Formerly Hamilton Methodist Church. More information contact Joan Lynn 3268 1477, Annette Lynn 3268 4131 or Terry Staney 3256 0175.

Want to promote an event?
Go to www.journeyonline.com.au and click on 'What's On'



Ray McDougall from St Andrew's Anglican and Group 61 Spiritual Adviser Rev Ron Wilson from Brisbane North Churches of Christ. Photo by Roy Hunter

Synod forms multi-cross cultural committee



Cross cultural committee Chair Rev Dr Apichart Branjerdporn. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Ethical progress

IN AN effort to build a 'just and compassionate Australia', the Centre for an Ethical Society (CES) was launched at Pitt St Uniting Church in November by Sir Gerard Brennan.

CES chair is Bishop George Browning. For more information visit www.ces.org.au.

A NEW multi-cross cultural committee has been set up within the Queensland Synod.

Chairperson Rev Dr Apichart Branjerdporn thanked Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman for his support in the creation of the committee.

"The establishment of the committee brings joy, enlightenment and hope to the culturally and linguistically diverse people and other overseas church ministers or workers coming into our shores," he said.

"We have established this unique and very important body to serve as a means to promote partnership in mission in the life of the Uniting Church and the community as a whole."

Mrs Jocelyn Bush has been appointed as secretary.

Contact Dr Branjerdporn on branjerdporn@hotmail.com or phone 3391 1355 or Rev Leva Pat on email leva.pat@ucaqld.com.au or 3377 9816.

Mental health brings churches together

YOU MAY never see them, but they are there, people living by themselves, depressed, anxious or confused – people battling a mental illness.

A group called Group 61 has formed on Brisbane's north-side as a multi-denominational response to mental health issues.

The group supports 30 people with a team of 40 volunteers, a number of whom come from Chermide-Kedron Community Church, a Uniting Church congregation where Group 61 is an integral part.

Moreton Rivers Presbytery minister Rev Murray Fysh said the church has a long association with the group and it was an important activity within the congregation's life.

"It is important for any congregation because the church has a responsibility to stand up for the poor, the oppressed and the sick. It just has to do it," he said.

"They meet there and members of the congregation felt led to stand in solidarity with these people."

Support group coordinator John Fox said all denominations behind the group provide excellent assistance.

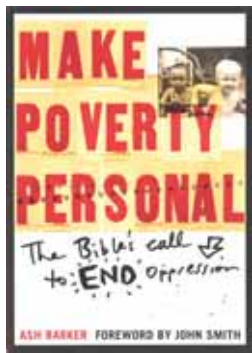
"The support the group gets from all churches in the area is phenomenal."

Group 61 was a nominee in the 2006 Business Achiever Awards from Quest Community Newspapers.

The already strong Management Committee would like to see an experienced manager join their leadership team.

For more information contact John on 3359 4089 or Yvonne on 3353 5620





Make Poverty Personal

By Ashley Barker
Urban Neighbours of Hope
RRP: \$25.00

There is no shortage of contemporary Christian authors who have been lavish in their praise of this latest book by Ashley Barker from the stable of Urban Neighbours of Hope.

The list includes Walter Brueggemann, Michael Frost, and Tim Costello - to name just a few.

Barker is the founding director of UNOH, a Christian community seeking to transform urban poverty by engaging with people in their day-to-day circumstances and living out the hope of the Good News.

For the past five years Barker and his wife Anji, with young children Amy and Aiden, have lived in Klong Toey, the largest slum in Bangkok, Thailand, so the contents focus very much on people caught in the stark and unrelenting realities of extreme and chronic poverty. The personal experiences and inspirational stories arising from that context inform the in-depth Biblical and theological insights that I found confronting and challenging.

Each of the eight chapters is presented as a series of Bible studies on the theme of poverty, with questions for discussion and a personal exercise at the conclusion of each study. There is a wealth of useful material here to delve into.

A key conviction expressed is that it is time to address poverty as a personal issue in the way the God of the Bible does. Barker asserts that: "Poverty is not just a lack of cash, medicine or technology. It is also about the confidence, skills and belief that people can use what they have for the community's good."

The oppression of the poor is as much about issues of personal identity, meaning and belonging as lacking material goods; and sharing God's hope is certainly vital if the world is to be rid of the conditions that perpetuate it.

Ray Reddcliffe is Presbytery Minister for South Moreton Presbytery

Acting on Conscience

By Frank Brennan
University of Queensland Press
RRP: \$34.95

Over twenty years ago Fr Frank Brennan, advisor to the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference, and I became good friends as we collaborated on efforts to obtain justice for the Indigenous people of Queensland. At the time I was the Director for Social Responsibility in the Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church.

Sadly, our friendship was sorely tested during the 1998 debate on the Wik amendments to the Native Title Act of 1993, which the Government, led by John Howard, was trying to pass through the Senate. Frank was advising Senator Brian Harradine and I was the Australian Democrat's spokesperson on Native Title. Brian Harradine held the "balance of power" in the Senate so, whatever he was able to negotiate with the Government, was destined to become law.

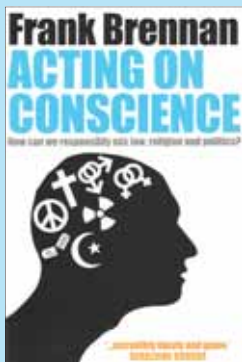
In the introduction to his book Frank explains why he advised Senator Harradine to move an amendment to the legislation which the Native Title Working Group and I regarded as weak. It is an interesting footnote to Australian political history, therefore, that two clergymen were so deeply involved in this debate in the Federal Parliament.

It is also why Frank's important and latest book is such a useful contribution to the debate about law, religion and politics in Australia, which the subtitle to his book puts in the form of a question. His answer to those who think religion and politics should not mix is well-reasoned and carefully researched.

He argues cogently for the primacy of individual conscience and also for the need for an Australian bill of rights to balance the competing claims of individual liberty and community security.

Acting on Conscience is highly recommended.

Rev John Woodley is a retired Uniting Church minister and a former Australian Democrats Senator



REVIEWS

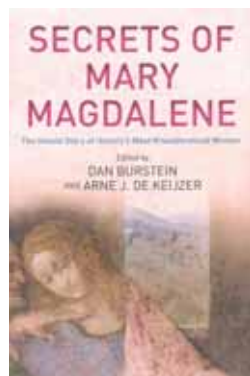
Secrets of Mary Magdalene – The Untold Story of History's Most Misunderstood Woman

Edited by Dan Burstein and Arne J. De Keijzer
Weidenfeld & Nicolson
London
RRP: \$29.95

The title heralds an in-depth exploration of what has been hidden. Who was Mary Magdalene? Prostitute, Mrs Jesus or 'The Apostle to the Apostles'?

Pope Gregory in 591 chose the first, which influenced religious thought until the twentieth century, when the Vatican changed its mind!

Consensus opinion now is that labelling Mary as a prostitute has no scriptural basis. Ancient manuscripts re-discovered, other Gospels previously rejected, legends and stories from France, Egypt



and England, have had researchers sorting fact from fiction for years.

Did Mary travel to any of these countries and begin a ministry there? Which of the biblical 'Marys' was Mary Magdalene?

Dan Burstein, intrigued by Dan Brown's story *The Da Vinci Code* gathered an eclectic group with diverse opinions already researching the life of Mary Magdalene.

These writers (male and female) are theologians or researchers or both, as the Bibliography shows, and they explore Gnostic secrets, Christian origins and the struggle over the feminine in Christianity. In one book we can explore the range of research, views and opinions, and make up our own minds.

The book is divided into nine sections, each containing essays, interviews and an occasional round-table discussion. It has 16 colour plates of artists' depictions of Mary, and useful appendices.

There are 350 pages, so it's a long read, and changes style with each writer. The interviews, however, give a conversational tone, and Dan Burstein introduces each writer with a paragraph, which helps to give continuity to the book.

The last two sections show how Mary Magdalene has become the patron saint of feminists and others who see her as the quintessential marginalised woman in the struggle for equal acceptance and participation in church life.

This may prove a down-side to traditionalists, but it is an important part of twenty-first century life, and needs to be addressed. The book is a good exploration of Mary's changing image.

Joan Cook is a retired teacher of Speech & Drama, part-time lecturer in speech at Trinity Theological College and a lay member of Wavell Heights

Who Killed the Electric Car?

Directed by Chris Paine
Documentary Film
Rated PG

Did you know that 100 years ago there were more electric cars on the road than there are today?

What surprised me was that there were any electric cars on the road 100 years ago. What surprised me even more was to realise this is not 'pie-in-the-sky' technology. The film argues that these clean, green, and economic vehicles have been a reality for at least 15 years but their progress has been halted by the oil and automotive industries.

Clearly made by electric vehicles enthusiasts *Who Killed the Electric Car* is well made and entertaining and explores the possible reasons behind the demise of EVs (electric vehicles) after such promising prototypes and strong support from US Government organisations in the 1990s, particularly in California.

Opening with a mock funeral for General Motors' original electric car, the EV1, the film has an impressive list of interviewees including engineers who worked on the project, S. David Freeman a former Energy Advisor to Jimmy Carter, California State Senator Alan Lowenthal, former Chairman of California Air Resources Board Alan C. Lloyd and actor Mel Gibson.

Parts of the film did look like fancy advertising for a car that didn't exist and some may dismiss it as feeding conspiracy theories, but it forces us to ask the question: Why were the EVs were all taken off the road and destroyed?

A brief comment about insurance companies refusing to insure the prototype cars after their lease had expired could have been more deeply investigated.



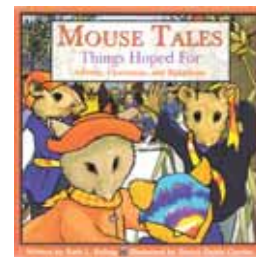
The irony of the demise of the EV is the current craze in hybrid vehicles.

I got the eerie feeling that this film will only reach the ears of the converted, especially since I knew all nine people in the cinema.

One EV enthusiast said it best in a giant bumper sticker that asked, "What would Jesus drive?"

I wonder.

Mardi Lumsden is Associate Editor of Journey



Mouse Tales: Things Hoped For Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

By Ruth L. Boling Illustrated by Tracey Dahle Carrier
Westminster John Knox Press
RRP: \$25.45 from MediaCom Education Inc.

Things Hoped For is set in a world of talking mice, in and around a church in the town of Hillsborough. The action centres on a Sunday school class as they travel through Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.

As well as learning about each of these seasons and their themes (e.g hope and expectation), the young mice learn how to welcome strangers, appreciate each others' differences, and work together to rewrite and perform the annual Sunday School play.

In these well-crafted stories, we see each of the characters face particular spiritual challenges, growing in faith and spiritual maturity as a result.

These challenges are also relevant to the church as a whole, and you will recognise many of the characters in the diverse personalities (and the roles they play) belonging to any real-life church fellowship.

Wherever Hillsborough is located, it is in the northern hemisphere, far from the equator. Much is made of the wintry setting - snow and ice-skating feature prominently.

The book is aimed at older primary school children. Younger children will find it a little too wordy.

Even for children who know their way around a church, you will find yourself having to explain terms like 'chancel', 'pulpit', 'sanctuary' etc., not to mention 'sanctification' and 'benediction'.

However, one of the points of these stories is learning about what all this 'church talk' means, and how, in particular, someone new to church can come to terms with the strange ways of doing and talking in church.

Joel Corney is a physicist and an elder at West End Uniting Church who is helping raise two young children

PRAYER DIARY

3 December: Southside Cooperative

Just over a year ago, a number of South-East congregations of Moreton Rivers Presbytery have been working together to form Southside Cooperative Congregations which include Coorparoo, Morningside, Camp Hill, Norman Park and Mayfield Uniting Churches.

We have recently completed the initial appointment of our ministry team and look forward to the future together. We are hoping that by sharing our individual resources and gifts our churches will be a vital part of our local communities, sharing with strength and conviction our faith in Jesus Christ. We would ask for prayer as we travel this road together, in particular for:

- The members of each congregation, as they take this step of faith trusting that God in Jesus is our strength and guide. Give thanks with us for those who founded these churches in faith to the glory of God, and for the strong witness they have been to these communities.

- The continued witness of Balmoral Uniting Community Centre, all the staff and volunteers within this community, and all the new opportunities that will be open to us in the future days.

- Our ministry team (Rev Yvonne McRostie, Mr Peter Smale and Mr Alan Anderson) and the leaders within each congregation - that they would continue to know God's love and be strengthened in their faith so that they discern and lead these communities. Give thanks for the God-given gifts each one brings to this place. Pray that our Heavenly Father will use their obedience to bring about a Kingdom reign in this community.

- Our Leaders' Retreat Day - 9 December - that our leaders will grow in faith and be refreshed with a shared vision.

- Our local communities and our friends from other Christian churches, that they will be witnesses to the grace of God through their connections with us, and that we may see God already working in our local streets.

- Our Presbytery as it resources and gives guidance to our congregations in this new venture.

10 December: Central West Uniting Churches

Central West Uniting Churches cover four shires with an area of approximately 200km x 250km, including the towns of Blackall, Barcaldine, Alpha, Aramac and Jericho. The total population in this area is no more than 6000 - a lot of land with few people.

The Aramac Uniting Church was sold last year, and now holds services by arrangement for the two members.

Jericho congregation will hold a closing service for its building on 10 December. The congregation of seven members has decided to enter into a shared use agreement with the local Anglican church.

Within the next few years Alpha, also a small congregation, will have to take a prayerful look at their future. Ideally this would take place in the context of discussions with the Anglican and Catholic congregations in town.

Blackall and Barcaldine both have weekly worshipping congregations, with local leadership taking quite a bit of responsibility. Sometimes this can become quite draining.

One of the challenges in all places is to work out how to be the church locally in creative and relevant ways, extending beyond the regular Sunday worship times.

One initiative in Blackall is to experiment with a school breakfast one morning per week.

There are a number of concerns in the local communities. One is the 'sucking' of local trades people from the communities by the mines.

Another is the ongoing drought with its life-sapping influence and flow-on effects on the wider community.

Our prayer points:

- Effective and creative leadership in various aspects of the life of the congregations.

- A willingness and courage to be open to God's Spirit in the area of connecting with the local community.

- To accept that 'small' is OK, but not to let being small be an excuse for not seeking to grow.

- Seeking God's will in the Blackall State School breakfast program for 2007, and leadership for Barcaldine's Kids' Club.

- God's guidance as the Jericho congregation moves to a new 'home' in the Anglican building.

- Wisdom and guidance for the Alpha congregation as it seeks direction for use of church property.

- How to be available to drought-affected property holders and workers.

17 December: Morayfield Community

Morayfield Community Uniting Church has just celebrated its first year in the demountable worship and community centre on the site of Blue Care regional office, Respite Centre and Blue Care Caboolture.

Please pray for the continuing partnership between our church and Blue Care, for the development of our combined unmet needs program, and for God's direction in future planning as we seek to integrate with and serve in the local community.

We want to praise and thank God for the various small groups meeting throughout our

congregation. May God continue to challenge the members, bringing understanding, wisdom and a deeper desire to follow in his ways.

We thank God for growth in the Boys and Girls Brigade and in Sunday School, for those who are coming from non-church families and for the large number of families in our congregation whose children participate and whose parents serve faithfully in these mission outreaches.

Through these ministries, may God continue to bring more children and youth to a personal relationship with Jesus and increase the number of committed leaders and helpers to serve in these ministries.

Please also pray that we might develop more ways to link with and serve the families of children with whom we come in contact.

Please pray for God's direction for the elders and leaders council as we meet to clarify our goals and strategies, and to plan our program for 2007.

24 December: Logan

At the moment Logan Uniting Church is preparing for the next phase in its growth. In December we begin looking for a full-time Youth and Young Adult's Pastor.

This arises out of a vision to focus youth ministry on evangelising and discipling young people so they in turn evangelise and disciple other young people.

We will also be looking for a Worship and Creative Arts Pastor for 30 hours per week.

We run five worship services on the weekend and have a growing drama and creative arts ministry. While this ministry is focussed on corporate worship, it also contributes significantly to other dimensions of church life, including leadership training and evangelism. Please pray for the right people to assist us in growing in these areas.

Next year we will engage in a 9 month "strategic dreaming" process in order to map out a framework for the next 5 to 10 years. This will be led by a team under the authority of the church council. We are passionate about "drawing people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ". For three years now, we have focused our mission on 25 to 45 year olds and their children, but believe God is calling us to stretch into a "cradle to the grave" outreach focus with at least six strategic foci:

Disadvantaged and disempowered, children and young families, youth, young adults, early and active retirees, and intercultural ministry.

As part of the strategic dreaming process we will develop Big Hairy Audacious Goals around reaching people for Christ and discipling them in each of these areas. We are also looking at the possibility of planting satellite congregations.

Please pray for the team being drawn together to oversee this journey, and for the congregation, that we will hear and be faithful to God's call.

Financial help to study theology

BRISBANE COLLEGE of Theology, which incorporates Trinity Theological College, has been granted Higher Education Provider status by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

The college is an ecumenical initiative of the Anglican, Catholic and Uniting Churches through their respective colleges - St Francis' Theological College (Anglican), St Paul's Theological College (Catholic) and Trinity Theological College (Uniting Church).

It offers government accredited university level programs in theology and Christian ministry to ordained and lay people.

The new status means that some Brisbane College of Theology students can apply for Commonwealth funded loans through FEE-HELP to cover the cost of undergraduate and postgraduate tuition fees.

This is a loan given to eligible fee-paying students to help pay for all or part of their university tuition fees.

For more information phone 3377 9951 or email tt@ucaql.com.au.



Rev Ossie Dale

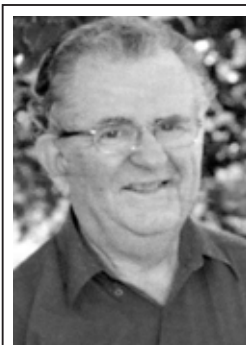
THE DEATH of Ossie J. Dale on Sunday, 12 November, brought to an end a vigorous and varied ministry that spanned over fifty years, first in the Methodist Church and then in the Uniting Church.

Ossie worked in the church for two years after completing his schooling at Ipswich Grammar, testing his call before he offered himself as a candidate for the ministry in 1954.

Ossie also served for 16 years in Papua New Guinea.

Friend and colleague Rev Ron Potter described Ossie as a vigorous, dedicated and practical minister who served both the Church and his Lord with distinction.

"When he said two weeks before his death that he was not afraid of dying but expected the ride to be a bit bumpy until he got there, no one imagined that the time would be so short but, altering the old hymn a little, we can say that we rejoice with a brother deceased, for our loss is his infinite gain."



Rev Rob Saunders

MINISTER AT the Queensland Synod's most southern congregation Banora Point, Rev Robert Saunders died tragically just days before his retirement in November.

Born in South Australia in 1943 and brought up a Methodist, Rob trained to be a primary school teacher before entering the ministry.

He was an effective minister who knew how to grow congregations and develop administrative systems.

Fellow student in Bible College of South Australia Rev Don McKay said his family and congregation will feel his loss greatly.

"His forte was teaching and he was a widely read theologian of some depth," Mr McKay said.

"I remember Rob for his quirky sense of humour, his wisdom, his brilliance as a musician with a wide appreciation and understanding of music."

"While the Uniting Church has lost a godly leader, heaven has gained a new citizen."

Celebrate Human Rights Day

CONGREGATIONS, faith communities and small groups in the Uniting Church are being encouraged to reflect on and celebrate international Human Rights Day through a suite of internet based resources being made available by UnitingJustice.

International Human Rights Day is celebrated on December 10 each year and commemorates the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted unanimously on 10 December 1948).

UnitingJustice National Director Rev Elenie Poulos said, "Human Rights Day is a time to celebrate how much has been achieved in bringing this vision to reality, and also to reflect upon how much remains to be done."

The resources can be downloaded from <http://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice/transformingsociety/humanrights/UNhumanrightsday2006.htm>.

Halloween hopes

The Editorial in the November Journey is great - I dislike the whole concept of Halloween, and discourage its "celebration" on every possible occasion.

I would like to add a little more to the history of this "feast". 31 October in the Roman Catholic Church is the Feast of All Souls.

The teaching was that these are the souls of the dead in purgatory waiting for people still alive to pray them out of this hell-like punishment for their sins - venial as opposed to mortal, which takes the sinner directly to hell.

Those sinners with no one to pray for them would manifest themselves and haunt the living on that night. This coincided with the Celtic belief of spirits roaming the earth on that one night. It became a night of fear and dread.

Praise God that in Jesus Christ we do not have to enter into this superstition and fear, we have mercy and forgiveness of sins through His death and resurrection.

Rosalyn Smail
Toogoolawah

I share your disdain for Halloween and empathise with your situation as I have fought a similar fight against the celebration for many years.

Are people simply looking for a community event they can celebrate together? If so, the church can respond easily.

Every church that I have been a member of in America has hosted some alternative to Halloween.

Harvest festivals, concerts, Oktoberfest and community events are held in competition to Trick or Treating.

I have spent many youth group sessions teaching youth and young adults the history of Halloween and that Halloween does not suit the Christian community.

Maybe the reason is the liberal Western society that advances materialism and "empty" wealth, leaving young people searching for "life" in less than virtuous ways like egging houses. This definition of the problem would be something that churches in Australia could respond to by holding street parties with a Christian band and free food. And when asked why we are doing it, we can say, "Because God loves us, we are able to demonstrate that love by offering this to you."

This is a fight that the church could win, if they took it on as community.

Linda Hamill
The Gap

Challenging dams

The letter from Doug Robertson (August Journey) cannot go unchallenged.

Like almost everyone else he has missed the point about the proposed dam on the Mary River.

LETTERS

The decision to build it is 100 per cent politically inspired.

All the science is against it - lack of yield; lack of suitable foundations; and lack of depth meaning a shallow dam with high evaporation and high algal blooms (expensive to build and expensive to treat).

Then there is the loss of arable farming land. We really haven't learnt much from history have we?

The Mayan empire, for example, disappeared from the face of the earth within a couple of hundred years of building on the arable land and farming the hillsides instead; similar to what we do in South East Queensland.

There are other more suitable locations for a dam, but they don't fit the political agenda.

Ian Mowat
Yarraman

A Journey of Hate

'Hate' is a powerful word. It's surprising to me for this reason that the idea of 'hate' is a recurring theme in November Journey.

It appears in the lead article on Saints, quite offensively in the headline of the Bonhoeffer article and in the editorial.

The idea of 'hating' someone or something seems to me out of place in the context of the articles, and indeed in a Christian publication.

Have we fallen into a mindset where extreme language is regarded as part of normal communication?

Peter Robinson
Paradise Point

Breath of fresh air

Some meat at last! Thanks for the wonderful and penetrating article by Scott Stephens 'Living vicariously with the Saints' (November Journey).

Stephens was spot on and speaks to the real heart.

Until we come to terms with ourselves and our pitiful self-centred Western culture, we will not come to terms with Jesus' commands.

John Steele
Charters Towers

Letters in brief

In his letter in October Journey, Rev Aubrey Baker appears to be suggesting that "the acceptance of those of a different sexual orientation into the ministry" is a new move comparable to the early Church's preaching of the gospel.

I find this difficult to understand.

There is much talk about "getting on with the mission of the Church". That certainly must primarily be

the proclamation of the Gospel. That proclamation according to the Bible includes a call to repentance and faith.

Do we now have a gospel which does not require repentance?

A schizophrenic Church is not a credible church.

Val Pym
Mackay

Friends, our children are in danger of losing part of our heritage in the fading out of the King James version of the Bible.

If born before the 1960's, we grew up in Sunday School learning some passages by heart. Even if we didn't consciously memorise them our minds have absorbed the oft repeated passages because of the grace of the language.

It is poetry and we can recall it from our memory at appropriate times.

We don't throw out antique furniture. Indeed, it becomes more valuable with age, as it was well built with fine materials.

Heritage homes are treasured and people love to go to see them and learn how our forebears lived.

Let's find a way into the new without tossing out the old forever.

Jenefer Duncan
Aspley

CLASSIFIEDS

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Parramatta Mission Superintendent Minister

Parramatta Mission is seeking a Superintendent Minister to provide vision, direction and leadership of the Leigh Memorial Congregation in the Parramatta CBD. This is an exciting position for a Minister of the Word who will be committed to quality preaching, pastoral care and the spiritual development of this Congregation within Parramatta Mission.

The Leigh Memorial Church seeks to be a dynamic place of worship and service responding to the needs of the City and its people.

The Superintendent Minister will share a collegiate relationship with the pastoral team and the General Manager of the Mission so as to ensure the proclamation of the Gospel through word and deed across the Mission's diverse services and ministries.

The successful applicant will be able to work with our various stakeholders in the community including all tiers of government and the corporate sector.

This position calls for a person with enthusiasm, sound theological scholarship and a compelling desire to connect the community with the Gospel.

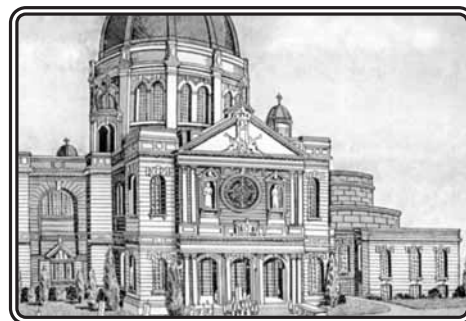
For confidential enquiries or to receive an information pack, please contact Ian Gray, Chairperson, Joint Nominating Committee on 02 9630 5085 or email igray@bigpond.net.au

Closing date for applications is 19th January 2007.

www.parramattamission.org.au



Historically Speaking



THE CATHEDRAL WHICH NEVER WAS

It was to have seated 4,000, its Romanesque basilica dominating Brisbane's skyline. Inspired by a cathedral of the same name in Chicago, the Cathedral of the Holy Name had been the vision of Catholic Archbishop James Duhig.

The long-serving archbishop, known as James the Builder, laid the foundation stone of the cathedral in 1928. Such was his passion for the project, he was prepared to demolish his own residence, the imposing Dara, to ensure the realisation of his vision.

For many years, the city held its breath, awaiting word of the commencement of construction from within the sandstone walls. But in the late nineties, the site was sold for a multi-unit development.

All that remains of the vision are the architectural drawings for the cathedral that never was.

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JOURNEY asks...

Tell us how Christians from your culture celebrate Christmas.

Deanna Pienaar

My thoughts on Christmas have indeed been on a journey for over four decades now.

Growing up in colourful, apartheid South Africa, I was conscious of an 'us and them'.

My most vivid memory of 'them' on Christmas morning – at my darling grandmother's house in the small, country, sheep-farming town of Graaff-Reinet – is of a band of jostling, jiving Xhosa children.

Early on Christmas morning, they would African-dance and pennywhistle their way through the streets on dusty black feet in torn, hand-me-down clothes with huge, white smiles – hoping for the left-over Christmas coins and lollies from white homes.

It was this sound each year that signalled for me: Christmas Day. I still miss it.

After church we'd open our gifts in an excited blur. Preparations for the cold lunch feast would have been done the day before but there was always a buzz of activity on the day.

The menu never changed. Nobody wanted it any other way. Beef tongue was tradition and delicious. Trifle by the truckload was a must. The serving of the Christmas pudding was the biggest deal of the meal.

The holy grail was the wrapped-up R50 note 'tucked' into the pudding. It took me years of bowl-swapping and bargaining to realise



it all was rigged. Isn't Christmas rigged?

I loved the gift prepared each year by my mother-in-law: homemade apricot jam, the world's best fudge and 'van der Hum by Mum' – all made from homegrown products.

But, it was in my twelve years working with orphaned and abandoned children of all colours

where I came to understand, for the first time, the unparalleled love in the gift of Jesus and the hope it holds for all.

I need nothing else now.

This will be the 8th Christmas in Australia for Deanna and her husband Pierre, and her children Jeanné (15), Jean-Pierre (13) and Richard (10)

David Won Kim

'우리 주 예수 그리스도께서 태어나셨습니다. 다 같이 기뻐하며 경배합시다!

Merry Christmas!' This is what you would hear wherever you go and with whomever you are if you were in Korea during Christmas season.

It simply means 'Our Lord Jesus Christ has come! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!'

Christmas has become an everybody's celebration/event in Korea.

I remember when I was a high school student, one of my school friends who was a Buddhist gave me a card on Christmas day. There was no picture of Buddha but of baby Jesus lying in a manger.

It is a simple story, but it shows how Koreans celebrate the birth of Jesus together regardless of their religious backgrounds.

We still do street/house carolling between the Christmas Eve service and the Christmas Day service.

Carolling groups sing at local service stations such as the police station and church members' houses. Imagine groups of people walking through the streets and singing carols all over the peninsula.

God would be able to hear thousands of people carolling together, right? How joyful it would be to God!

Sometimes we are inundated by the beauty of 'White Christmas!'

The one night you must not sleep in Korea is Christmas. There are so many things happening during the Christmas season in churches, on the streets, at home and in people's hearts and minds.

So for this coming Christmas I invite you to celebrate like Koreans do: getting together with family members, church friends, neighbours, and with the Lord and singing carols for the joy of the birth!

메리 크리스마스!



Rev David Won Kim is minister of the Korean Language congregation at Sunnybank Uniting Church.
www.abidingwaycommunity.org

Viliami Mila

When Christmas approaches, Tongans take time off from studies and work to spend time with families.

It is a time for family, friends and loved ones and a time of rest from hard work throughout the year.

It is also a time for family to share a traditional meal [Hangi] with church members, families and friends to celebrate and reflect on the significance of Christmas.

During this time, most Tongan men drink Kava – a traditional ritual for men to gather and talk and sing music. It is a social gathering.

The Queensland Synod theme for Christmas this year: "we are not alone", very much sums up Christmas time for Tongans because no one is ever alone – there is always room at a Tongan's festive table for everyone.

The majority of Tongan Christians attend Church on Christmas Eve where the Sunday School children and youths

perform a Christmas play and sing carols, not only as a part of their Christian faith in celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, but upholding the value and the significance of Christ's birth into the world.

Christmas Day is a time of worship and praise for the Tongans



just as much as it is a day of getting together and sharing an island meal.

The night of New Year's Eve until the first Sunday of the New Year is an important week of worship for the majority of Tongan families.

It is a time of thanksgiving to God for the previous year as well as looking forward to a New Year with God's continual protection, guidance, blessing and hope. This week of worship is very important for all Tongan Christians.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a blessed Christmas and a joyful and gracious New Year.

'Ofa ke mou mau ha Kilisimasi fiefia mo ha ta'u fo'ou fonu kelesi'ia.

Viliami Mila is a candidate for Minister of the Word currently undertaking his Field Education Placement with Logan Central Multicultural Congregation