



Looking forward
to Lent

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Green Church
Liftout

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in the lab

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Xmas...

Looking for Jesus

Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Saviour was born for you. He is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:10-11 Contemporary English Version

As the Christmas season approaches, the team at *Journey* and the Uniting Church Queensland Synod staff wish you all the blessings of God's great generosity shown to us in the gift of Jesus Christ.

This issue of *Journey* recognises that not everything at Christmas is about Jesus, but points beyond the man in the red suit to the faithfulness of a God who entered our humanity to demonstrate the depth and breadth of God's eternal and constant love.

We pray that the joy and peace you experience this Christmas will last all year as you seek to worship Christ, witness to God's love, and serve with hope and confidence.

More about Christmas

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The language of God

THE CHRISTMAS story, as Luke records it, says much to us about the language of God, for God speaks through this story again and again, and in a variety of ways.

There is a legend from Africa, associated with Christmas, about a boy called Emmanuel, who was always asking questions.

One day he asked the question: "What language does God speak?" No one could answer him.

He travelled all over his own country to find the answer, but no one was able to satisfy him.

Eventually he travelled to many other countries seeking an answer to his question, but no one could help him.

At last, one night, he came to a village called Bethlehem, and as there was no room in the local inn he went looking for shelter for the night.

He found a cave at the back of the inn, but it was occupied by a couple and a little baby.

He was about to leave when the young mother spoke, "Welcome Emmanuel, we've been waiting for you."

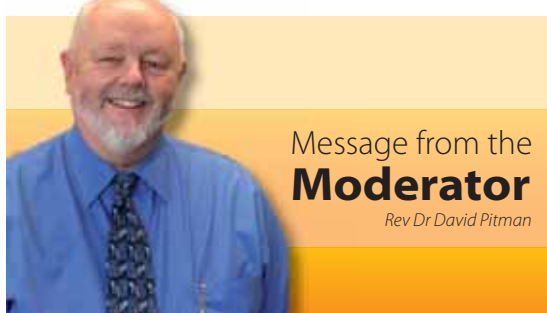
The boy was amazed that the woman knew his name.

He was even more amazed when she went on to say, "For a long time you have been searching the world to find out what language God speaks. Well now your journey is over. Tonight you can see with your own eyes what language God speaks."

"God speaks the language of love to all the world, including you, through this little child, whose name is Jesus."

In Luke 1: 26-38, we are told that God spoke to Mary about the miraculous way in which she would become the earthly mother of Jesus.

Into her ordinary, predictable life, typical of any first century girl living in a rural village in Palestine, God introduced something truly special and remarkable.



Message from the Moderator

Rev Dr David Pitman

The way Luke tells the story, Mary coped calmly and serenely with everything that happened and accepted it all as normal and natural.

It must have been a great deal more complicated and difficult than the story suggests, quite overwhelming in fact for a simple country girl.

“The Christmas story tells us that the language of God is often in stark contrast to the language of the world.”

Nonetheless, Mary was a willing participant in the amazing thing that God did that first Christmas long ago.

And Luke tells us she took everything that happened and everything that was said into her heart and pondered deeply about what it all might mean.

On the night that Jesus was born, God also spoke to some shepherds who were caring for their flocks on the hills outside Bethlehem.

Shepherds in first century Palestine were very low on the social scale. They were mostly rough, uneducated men (and boys).

Generally, they were not the kind of people who were invited to special celebrations.

But into their ordinary, predictable lives, God introduced something truly special and remarkable.

Firstly, they heard the message of the angels, praising God.

Secondly, they were given the unique privilege of being the first people, apart from Mary and Joseph, to see the infant Jesus.

What an amazing experience for those simple folk, so often excluded from the fun and festivities of society, but on that special night gathered in and included in the miracle of Christmas by the grace and goodness of God.

Their response showed how much it meant to them. They went and told everyone they could about what had happened.

Then they returned to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all that they had seen and heard.

The Christmas story tells us that the language of God is often in stark contrast to the language of the world.

At the first Christmas, God declared that the birth of Jesus was a sign of peace and reconciliation: peace and reconciliation between people and God, and peace and reconciliation amongst all the people of the world.

But in all the years since then, there has been little peace.

The love that God poured out in and through Jesus has not always softened the human heart.

Conflicts continue to rage around the world. People go on exploiting, enslaving and killing one another.

How God's heart must weep!

Christmas tends to generate a spirit of tolerance, goodwill and generosity.

If we could all carry that same spirit with us into the rest of the year, what a difference that would make!

This Christmas we have the opportunity to hear God sharing with us once again the message about the meaning and purpose of the birth of Jesus into the world.

Let us, like Mary and the shepherds, ponder deeply in our hearts about what it means for us today, share the message and the spirit of Christmas with as many others as we can, and put the praise and worship of God at the centre of our lives.

From the Editor

If you're thinking of buying me a Christmas present this year – don't.

When someone asks me what I'd like for a Christmas gift I tell them that I honestly already have everything I want. I'm not just being reticent – it's literally true.

I've got enough "stuff" and I really don't need any more and, "bah humbug", I'm over all this Christmas excess.

It's still mid-November and one of my neighbours is already churning out greenhouse gasses to fuel his extravagant and garish display of Christmas lights and soon the white noise of Christmas carols will be filling my ears in every shopping centre.

Christmas wrapping paper which once came in sheets now comes in rolls, the predominantly useless and unnecessary junk that was once called stocking fillers now fills virtual wheelie bins, and our Christmas and now Boxing Day shopping blitz is little more than a self-perpetuating exercise in mass-consumerism.

I once heard that the Christmas season ranks high of the list of things people find stressful and bothersome, and it may be that the happiness felt on Christmas Day indicates little more than relief that the misery of the preceding weeks has at long last come to an end.

I know I'm sounding like Scrooge, but I really like the Mennonite 2007 Christmas promotional campaign which they have called the "buy nothing Christmas".

Their captivating poster has the face of an adult Jesus along with the words, "Where did I say you should buy so much stuff to celebrate my birthday?"

I love the story of God stepping into our world to become our redemption but I'm increasingly desperate to find a way to exchange retail excesses for a positive, peaceful and loving Christmas.

During December, Australians will spend money at the rate of almost \$500 000 a minute with a total Christmas spending of over \$36 billion – almost \$2000 per head.

Meanwhile, more than half the world will go to bed hungry.

On behalf of the *Journey* team, Mardi, Osker and our wonderful volunteers and writers, I wish you a wonderful Christmas filled with the love and peace of our God.

Bruce Mullan

Sign of the Times



Photo by Ray Thomas

IN SEPTEMBER, Tingalpa Uniting Church congregation held a special worship service where South Moreton Presbytery Minister Rev Ray Reddcliffe preached his farewell sermon. A special morning tea following was an opportunity for the congregation to express their gratitude.

Minister Rev Ruth Tracey said, "Ray has always been a great source of help and encouragement to the Tingalpa congregation - especially Christmas 2006, when at short notice he came to preach on Christmas Day.

"We will miss him!"

JOURNEY

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Douglas Jones is new Synod Secretary

By Bruce Mullan

A SPECIAL three hour meeting of Uniting Church members and ministers from across Queensland in October appointed Rev Douglas Jones as the next General Secretary of the Synod.

Chairperson of the Nominating Committee Rev Stuart Cameron described Mr Jones as having the ability to hold the big picture and detail in creative tension.

"Douglas has not been afraid to prophetically speak out when called on issues facing both church and world," said Mr Cameron, himself a former General Secretary of the Synod of South Australia.

"Both from his personality and his training [Mr Jones] seeks to educate as well as inspire, and challenges the church towards positive change."

The appointment of Mr Jones brings to an end a long saga which commenced when the May meeting of the 26th Synod at Alexandra Park failed to appoint a new General Secretary to replace Rev Jenny Tymms.

The 26th Synod had requested the Council of Synod to urgently commence a new search process and appoint a Nominating Committee which would present two names



Chairperson of the Nominating Committee Rev Stuart Cameron congratulates Rev Douglas Jones on his appointment as General Secretary of the Queensland Synod. Photo by Bruce Mullan

to a Special Synod recalled for the purpose of appointing the General Secretary.

Mr Cameron said the Synod had advertised across Australia to find candidates with extensive experience in the management of

large organisations and complex systems and with an understanding of church governance.

Applications were received and, because the Committee considered the pool of applications to be small, additional people were approached

to make themselves available for interview and consideration for the position.

Following an extensive interview and selection process the Committee brought the names of Synod Mission Consultant Rev Dr Graham Beattie and Rev Douglas Jones who is currently Director of Old Testament Studies at Trinity Theological College.

The process for the appointment of the General Secretary was conducted by a written ballot with both names on the voting paper following presentations by the Nomination Committee and nominees.

The Synod spent fifteen minutes in prayer and silent reflection prior to the ballot which was held at midday.

A former professional engineer, Mr Jones has previously served the church as Director of the Department of Community Service, the precursor to UnitingCare, and as a Minister in the Tablelands Parish.

He is currently an active member of Cleveland Uniting Church and father of five adult children.

Mr Jones spoke of the "magnificent vision" that God gave the Uniting Church in the *Basis of Union*.

"My vision for the position of General Secretary is of someone to both strategically lead and serve the Synod, in partnership with the whole Synod team, Presbyteries, Congregations, communities of faith and UnitingCare, as the whole church continues to both live into and live out of that magnificent founding vision.

The Nomination Committee described Mr Jones as "a deep thinker and an insightful conversationalist with the ability to summarise a complex issue and to ask the thought-provoking questions."

The report of the Committee said Mr Jones would bring to the role "extensive experience, trust earned across the diversity of the Synod, excellent management skills, and the ability and experience to work with complexity and a passion for the ministry of the Church."

Mr Jones will commence his new appointment as General Secretary in January 2008.

Compass: off course

ABC TELEVISION'S *Compass* dropped a hand grenade into the Uniting Church across Australia on Sunday, 11 November when it broadcast the program "The Uniting Church".

Asking "How can it survive?" *Compass* examined the story of what presenter Geraldine Doogue called "a modern and dis-united church".

"Over the past decade its constituency has divided, fractured and fallen off," Ms Doogue said.

Reaction around the church has been less than enthusiastic.

Indooroopilly Uniting Church Youth, Children's and Family Minister Rev David MacGregor was one for whom disappointment came quickly. "It was factually bereft right from the start when Geraldine Doogue talked about the Uniting Church OF Australia; a serious mistake."

The program's interviews swapped between Rev Dr Max Champion National Chair of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations and Rev Rex Hunt minister of St James Uniting Church Congregation in Canberra and Director of the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought.

Minister for the Maryborough City Uniting Church Congregation Rev Graham Slaughter said, "Compass worked hard to try and manufacture a sense of conflict by representing the extremes and, in so doing, ignored so many Uniting Church people who are somewhere



Compass presenter Geraldine Doogue. Photo courtesy ABC TV

in the middle and, in a lot of cases, happy to get on with the mission of the church."

In a letter to Ms Doogue, retired Uniting Church Minister Rev Doug Brandon said he was surprised by the "cheap shots that *Compass* took at the Uniting Church".

Also disturbed by the polarised nature of the presentation, Mr Brandon believes the core of the argument has always come down to the doctrine of Scripture, a polemic which has bruised the church for centuries.

"The *Basis of Union's* statements on Scripture provide both sides with a very balanced, honest, and comprehensive way for us to live with the tension."

Director of the Youth and

Children's Ministry Unit of the Queensland Synod Mr Michael Jeffrey was less perturbed by the *Compass* program.

"I wonder if *Compass* was reflecting back to us something of who we are, the bits that, when put together, we don't really like about ourselves and our identity," he said.

"It reinforces a stereotype that many of us forget about because we are involved in so many great projects and exciting developments. Yet this stereotype remains the cornerstone of public perception."

Uniting Church Assembly General Secretary Rev Terence Corkin said many people had expressed concern that the program did not do justice to the breadth and vitality of the Uniting Church.

"We know there is much that is vibrant, hopeful, encouraging and inspiring about the Uniting Church and we would be delighted if that was conveyed in the broader media.

"However, at the very least, a message is being carried that we are a people of hope who play a significant role in the purposes of God for Australia and the world." Mr Corkin said.

"In the year of our 30th anniversary, the *Compass* program has served as a timely reminder that we are a wonderfully diverse church; uniquely placed in the Australian community; and that we should celebrate what it means to be part of the Uniting Church."

Bruce Mullan

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Trinity College graduates Stanley Tuilovoni, Jenny Sims, Jennifer Roberts, Mel Perkins, and Viliami Mila.
Photo by Osker Lau

Graduates span out for church

FIVE STUDENTS completed formal studies in preparation to be Ministers of the Word at Trinity Theological College this November.

Jennifer Roberts, Jenny Sims, Mel Perkins, Viliami Mila, and Stanley Tuilovoni bring a diverse range of talents as they head out to serve the Uniting Church.

Mr Mila will be the minister with the Trinity Ipswich congregation and is looking forward to the joys and challenges of growing into a new community.

"I want to nurture faith in people," he said.

"I want to journey alongside people and be a witness for the hope of Christ."

Jenny Sims, Mel Perkins, and Stanley Tuilovoni are waiting to find placements but each brings different passions to the ministerial field.

Ms Perkins said she was looking forward to the challenges God will bring over the next few years.

Ms Sims said her passion was to be involved in mission in the community.

"I am looking for a place to find new ways of being church," she said.

Mr Tuilovoni's passion is ministering to the Fijian community and helping people grow in their spiritual lives.

"I want to help the way we understand ways of worship. I want to look at how we express our faith," he said.

Ms Roberts looks forward to serving the church after taking maternity leave.

"I hope God opens doors in the future that involve working with children," she said.

This group carries with them a diverse range of skills and passions and is now ready to serve the whole church.

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

By Mardi Lumsden

Looking for a few good men

PINE RIVERS Uniting Church is looking for a few good men from around Queensland to nail down \$20 000 toward an state-wide Uniting Church appeal for assistance to undertake urgently needed repairs to the minister's residence on Thursday Island.

Pine Rivers Men's Ministry coordinator Phil Smith said his group would chip in at least \$1000 by the end of January.

"That's not a lot of money," said Mr Smith.

"If nineteen other men's groups follow the lead, we'll have about a third of the cash needed for the project.

"The blokes of the Uniting Church in Queensland could adopt this project as a great vehicle for building men's ministry, and rebuilding the house on Thursday Island at the same time."

The Pine Rivers men hope that by taking up this challenge, congregations could create fund raising activities that bring men into fellowship, build friendships and even create outreach opportunities.

"How about a dinner in Dalby or a movie night in Moreton Rivers?"

"With hundreds of men committed, this won't be hard," Mr Smith insisted.

"It's time men did more than meet for fellowship and a game of carpet bowls."

Chief Financial Officer for the Queensland Synod Mr Jim Barry said donations are already flooding in for the Thursday Island Manse Appeal.

Many Uniting Church Adult Fellowship Groups have responded generously to a personal invitation from the Queensland Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman asking for support for the Appeal which has a target of \$50 000.

North Queensland Presbytery Minister Rev Bruce Cornish told *Journey* that the builder would be starting work in early February and that he welcomed the Few Good Men challenge.

"Even after the contractor has finished on the island, there'll be painting and other finishing-off to be done," he said.

"If there are men who would like to see the results of their fund-raising efforts, perhaps we can organise a working bee in the dry season."



A successful appeal will see huge improvements in the run-down Thursday Island Manse.

Photo courtesy of the Presbytery of North Queensland



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Please note our new office address, postal address and phone numbers which will be effective from **5th November 2007**

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New office and delivery address:
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New Phone: **07 3025 2000**
New Fax: **07 3025 2099**



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From 12th November UnitingCare Health will move to the same location:

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Hitting a century

BUDERIM UNITING Church on the Sunshine Coast celebrated 100 years in October.

Historically, the church was the first established in the Buderim area.

"In the tradition of John Wesley, the early Methodist Home Missionaries conducted a regular horseback ministry to make their parishioner visits," said elder Alan Butcher.

It was also the centre for support, providing comfort for those in need, especially during those turbulent times in history such as two world wars, the great depression and the Vietnam conflict.

The milestone was celebrated by a dinner, a concert series and a thanksgiving service.

A very special guest was Mr Frank Fielding who has attended the church since his birth in 1907.



Frank Fielding celebrated his 100th birthday around the Buderim Uniting Church centenary.
Photo courtesy of Max Fenn

Other guests included Uniting Church National President Rev Gregor Henderson and Queensland Synod Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman.



Children from Papua New Guinea celebrate the provision of water thanks to the Lent Event. Photo courtesy Lent Event

Moving towards the event of Lent

LENT EVENT volunteer worker Jenny Sanders has been overwhelmed by positive feedback during her weeks on the phone to Queensland churches to brief them on the 2008 Lent Event.

"Almost without exception the replies have been, 'That sounds wonderful or fantastic and we look forward to receiving the materials,'" Ms Sanders said.

She also reported that a number of small and rural churches were grateful for quality (free) resources which they would normally struggle to purchase.

There was particular excitement about the children's resources.

"Apart from Sunday School usage some thought that they would use them in after school activities like Kids Club, a couple wondered about their pre school, and one lady said she would probably utilise them with scripture teaching.

"Youth resources also got a good thumbs up.

"It was wonderful to talk to

some of the congregations' Lent Event coordinators who would rattle off who they were going to hand the resources to.

"It made me feel confident that they were not going to sit in the box and gather dust."

Ms Sanders was impressed by the country churches which still wish to participate despite the drought.

"One congregation is up to level seven water restrictions yet still wants to participate.

"They were interested to know that I am the coordinator for my congregation and that I found the job really easy.

"I tell them that it is only for the period of Lent, unlike other jobs we take on for life.

"They all liked this idea."

However, Ms Sanders' work is not finished yet.

"I will continue to ring the churches as I know this is what God wants me to do."

www.lentevent.com



Cartoonist Phillip Day sits in his imaginary church. Image courtesy of Phillip Day

Reading between the pews

PHILLIP DAY, creator of the Between the Pews cartoon, which appears in *Journey*, has published a book of his cartoons.

The book contains Between the Pews cartoons from 1994 to the present day, mostly black and white with colour pages scattered throughout.

Mr Day said he selected his favourite cartoons for the book.

"It's great to look back at the older cartoons and remember what was going through my head when I drew them," he said.

"Compiling this book has been like a trip down memory lane in some ways."

In a demonstration of the support and encouragement Mr Day has received from the Uniting Church, the book has an introduction by Rev John Mavor and photos by Rev Rob Packer.

Mr Day also thanks his local Uniting Church congregation in Beaudesert.

Between the Pews will be released in early December for \$15.00 plus postage and handling.

To order contact Phillip Day on ph 5544 2181, 0431529514 or email philday1@bigpond.com

Bundaberg youth are in the pink

By Matt Gees

TEENAGE GIRLS, make-up and lots of pink.

All these things seem to go together, but what do they have in common with Priority 1 and cancer research?

Bundaberg's Priority 1 took advantage of an all girl group to meld the theme of friendship and being part of the wider community by raising money and learning more about the issue of women's cancer through The Cancer Council Queensland's "Girls' Night In".

The group of six grade seven girls, three leaders and a member of the local congregation (to help with the make up), joined women of all ages and backgrounds to take part in a national fundraiser and have fun together.

"Part of the term's activities was to encourage the girls to take part in a fundraising project for charity.

"So with October being Women's Cancer Awareness Month and this being an all girl group, Helen, Anna and I agreed that Girls' Night In was a great opportunity," said Girls' Night In organiser and Priority 1 Co-leader Sonya Richardson.

Priority 1 leader Helen Nutley also commented on the idea of Girls' Night In.

"We modified the concept slightly and asked the girls to approach family and friends to donate to the cause," she said.

"It meant that they not only had to reach a pre set target of at least \$25 but they had to be able to explain why they were asking for money."

It wasn't just about money though as Youth and Children's Ministry Worker Anna Mulcahy explained.

"This was about 12-year-old girls realising that they are important members of the community and helping them become more aware of the world around them and the problems that some people face.

"We all had a great time by taking part in a girly pamper night with makeup and hair techniques, pink food and drink and just us girls".

But what did the girls themselves think about it all?

P1 member Emily was particularly impressed with the pink food.

"It was so sweet! We had strawberry slice and cake which we made last week, pink and white M&Ms and fairy bikkies," she said.

Lauren, another member, said the night was about deeper things.

"It was about friendship. We looked at the story of David and Jonathon's friendship from 1 Samuel. About honesty and forgiveness."

Sarah said for her the evening was about, "Thinking about the future" and Teisha said, "Helping the community".

At the end of the night when all was finished and the money was totalled, Bundaberg's Priority 1 group had raised \$525 for The Cancer Council Queensland's Girls' Night In.

Bundaberg Uniting Church youth enjoy a Girls' Night In while raising money for The Cancer Council. Photo by Matt Gees



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Santa: are we honest?

By Bruce Mullan

"THE TROUBLE with Santa is that it reminds us that we are less than honest," said Presbyterian Minister Rev Kaye Ronalds in her Bible study at the recent Central Queensland Presbyterian meeting in Rockhampton.

Ms Ronalds challenged Presbyterian members about some less than honest beliefs the church perpetuates rather than engaging in robust discussion about how stories are handed down to us.

She told how some children pretend to believe in Santa long after they actually do so they can still get presents and asked if we perpetuate a Sunday School approach to

faith stories for the same reason.

"The trouble with Santa is that people play along with it long after they have given up believing because there is something in it for them. They want the goodies or they want the fantasy to last a little longer."

Pointing to the creation story in Genesis, Ms Ronalds asked who benefits from continuing to tell a story that casts the woman as the "tempter" and the man as made before the woman.

"Drawing the parallel with believing in Santa we might ask, 'What are the goodies?' for those who keep telling the story in that way."

Ms Ronalds talked about the crisis for children who have been taught that the world was literally created in six days and then learn in science that the process has been going on for millions of years.

She believes we are in danger of setting them up with a choice between the stories they hear in

Sunday School and the science they learn in class.

"Are we in danger of having them conclude that this stuff about Creation, about Adam and Eve, about Noah is all just fantasy that you leave behind in childhood; like belief in Santa, the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny?"

"Do children who learn the nativity story wait, expecting that one day they'll have to give up believing in Jesus too?"

Ms Ronalds called for the church to create a culture which encourages honest conversation without giving the impression that certain questions are not acceptable.

"The trouble with Santa is that it perpetuates a lie and distorts the story about a Bishop called Nicholas."

"Children often ask if the story true. By that they are asking, is this story based on an event that really happened rather than asking, does the story have a meaning that is real and consistent with what we know about the world and human nature."

Asking at what point we challenge naive beliefs, Ms Ronalds said our desire to belong is sometimes more powerful than our desire to have our questions answered.

"The risk is always that a person may decide that they can no longer belong to this congregation, this Bible study group, this denomination; and in this era of concern about membership and finances we are reluctant to be honest about what we really believe or what we hold as the truth."

"Sometimes we play along so that we don't miss out on the goodies, and even long after we have given up the idea of Santa there is a nostalgic feeling of loss for a time when things were simpler."

"Part of us wishes that we didn't have to grow up. 'But grow up we do.'"



Tuning in to the season

By Mardi Lumsden

WE HEAR them every year seeping through shopping centre muzak, but Christmas carols are more than just joyful tunes for the season.

It is thought the word 'carol' comes from the French word 'caroller', which means a circular dance.

Carols were originally sung by groups of musicians in the streets, and were not permitted inside churches.

The singing of carols was introduced to services in the church by Francis of Assisi in the late 12th century.

Many of the common Christmas carols we sing today are relatively new, with a lot dating from the 1700s.

The main reason for this was that Oliver Cromwell banned Christmas carols between 1649 and 1660 in England, as he believed Christmas should be a solemn day.

Because of this, most of the ancient carols were lost.

One of the oldest and most common carols is *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*.

William E Studwell said of *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* in his 1995 book *The Christmas Carol Reader*, "It was the oldest of carols, it was the newest of carols".

The oldest because the Latin text is thought to date back to a 13th century French manuscript. It

is also suspected the music is from around the 15th century, but this is not proven.

It is called the 'newest' because the two were not combined into a carol until the last 1800s by well known hymn writer John Mason Neal.

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen an old English rhyme, is also one of the oldest well known carols, dating back as far as the 1500s.

Carols were often sung to different tunes as they were published as lyrics only and it was up to the people singing to decide which tune they preferred.

Some very famous composers have written tunes we now sing every year as Christmas carols.

The text to *While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks* was written by Nahum Tate in 1703 and is combined with a melody from Handel's opera *Siroe*.

Handel's *Messiah* also lends a melody to *Joy to the World*.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, written by Charles Wesley in 1739, is now most commonly sung to a melody taken from the cantata *Festensang* by Mendelssohn.

Slowly, new carols are being written to reflect modern Christmas but the carols we know and love will always ring through as they remind us of Christmas past.

Carols are an aural tradition we can continue to pass on for generations to come.



Uniting Church in Australia
Queensland Synod

SCHOOLS' COMMISSION EXECUTIVE OFFICER (0.5 position)

The Synod Schools' Commission is the Uniting Church in Queensland's key contact point within the primary and secondary education sector, and acts as conduit for the Church scoping the educational environment and providing information about possible strategic direction and challenges which face Uniting Church schools.

As part of the Synod's vision to create stronger strategic linkages with church-based and associated schools, it is seeking to appoint a lay or ordained person with passion for education and the church as School's Commission Executive Officer.

The Officer will support the Synod's Schools' Commission to foster the relationship and connection between Uniting Church schools and the wider church, and liaise between the Synod and Schools regarding constitutions, boards, property and other matters.

An application pack is available via the website (<http://www.ucaqld.com.au/job.aspx>) or by contacting **Ana Mila (07) 3377 9709** or ana.mila@ucaqld.com.au. Applications will close **7 December 2007**.

We wish we had a merry Christmas

By Stephen Webb

IN THE months before Christmas, newspapers are full of advertisements for possible gifts. Shopping centres are noisy with Christmas music, usually starting with *White Christmas* or *I'll be home for Christmas* — long before Advent.

In many facilities for older people the weeks before Christmas are spent putting up "jolly" pictures of Santa Claus, pictures of happy family groups around the table, all smiling at each other as Dad carves the turkey, and children open presents near a large Christmas tree.

How do older people feel when they see or hear all this hype about 25 December?

The short answer, says Ruth Bright, is, "Often, very miserable."

Dr Bright, a pioneer in the field of music therapy, spoke on Christmas and later life at the 7th National Ecumenical Aged Care Chaplains' Conference held at the Merroo Conference Centre, Kurrajong, NSW in October.

Dr Bright said Christmas, in its true sense, remains a symbol of hope for all of us and if — through their skills in relationships and counselling — chaplains and carers can help people to gain a sense of inner peace about the losses and conflicts of their private lives, they too will be able to share in the peace and hope which the birth of Jesus brings to all.

Jingle all the way

Advertising blogger Duncan Macleod asks what we should do about Christmas marketing

JUDGING BY the amount of paper coming through our mailboxes and Christmas-related advertising on the radio at the moment, the Christmas season is good news for advertising agencies.

Some of the advertising takes the standard line of "buy your presents from our store".

But there are exceptions.

The MCG in 2005 worked with George Pattersons Y&R, Melbourne, to advertise the Boxing Day cricket match.

A Christmas card with a nativity scene was placed alongside the same setting on the day after – in which all the men have disappeared.

They're off to the cricket it would seem.

World Vision in Australia, through the Stir social action network, is promoting the use of ecards (online pictures) to raise awareness of Millennium Development Goals over Christmas. Messages to politicians in 2006 included, "Be an angel this Christmas. Put something extra in the 2007 budget for the world's poorest people".

Another card reads, "If you're eaten alive by mosquitos this Christmas, think about Africa, where a child actually dies every 30 seconds from malaria."

"This isn't a case of charity anymore. It's about justice!"

The United Church of Canada in 2006 showed Jesus sitting in Santa's seat posing with a child for a photograph. "Would you still take your kids? After all, isn't Christmas supposed to be about Him, not the guy in the red suit? Or can it be about both? Share your opinion at www.wondercafe.ca, the home of lively discussion on spiritual topics, moral issues and life's big questions."

Christian churches do not have a monopoly on Christmas.

Marketers know that Australians have a longing for shared narratives, symbols and language during their few festive seasons.

The Santa Claus experience may not fit our summer barbecue and beach setting but it does connect us with parts of the Northern hemisphere and lends us a sense of festivity and fantasy.

The Christian nativity may not connect with the actual beliefs of all Australians but it does provide us with a shared narrative – a story of birth we can all relate to somehow.

Christian churches have an opportunity at this time to inspire,



THIS CHRISTMAS you can give a gift of care, education, peace building, church planting, clean water, nutrition, health, enterprise and new beginnings.

These are just some of the 'gifts' offered as Christmas presents for the armchair shopper from Uniting International Mission (UIM).

Uniting International Mission Communications Manager Rosemary Cotterill said, "Gifts of Love catalogue options are gifts with a difference. They give back."

"Rather than struggling to think of just the right gift for your loved ones, and they probably have two already, these practical gifts make a real difference by improving the quality of another person's life; someone whose resources are far less than ours."

The Gifts of Love catalogue from Uniting International Mission offers 26 opportunities to support projects in our Partner Churches from the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, West and East Timor, North India, Zimbabwe and many more.

Choose a project and nominate the gift value, some are tax deductible, and UIM will send a card to personalise the gift.

Visit www.uim.uca.org.au/gol or call 02 8267 4269 for a catalogue or 1800 998 122 for credit card orders.



United Church of Canada 2006 wondercafe Christmas advertisement



George Pattersons Y&R advertisement for the Boxing Day cricket match 2005

to remind people of the connection between God and God's world.

Christmas cards may be going out of fashion, with the increase in email and text communication, but the spread of goodwill is still important in Australia.

Companies and organisations with marketing sense are going out of their way to reconnect emotionally with their staff, customers, members and the general public.

This is not the time to

berate the public about their distorted priorities. It's a time to build friendship and start new conversations.

It's a time to reach out with a message of hope, trust, and action.

Now is a good time for Christian churches to be collaborating with local businesses and community organisations to invest in the community.

Rev Duncan Macleod reviews print and television advertising every day at www.duncans.tv

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Home for Christmas

By Mardi Lumsden

WHEN MOST people are sitting down to lunch with family or friends this Christmas, hundreds of volunteers around the state will be serving others at Christmas lunches for those without a home or family to celebrate with.

Wesley Mission Brisbane holds an annual Christmas lunch for the homeless, this year to be held in the Brisbane City Hall.

Wesley Mission minister to the marginalised Tim Hodgson said he is expecting around 400 people to attend the lunch with about 100 volunteers.

"Doing the Christmas lunch is a lifesaver because people who have nowhere to go on Christmas Day, no family to visit, no family to be with, they come to the Christmas lunch and they are able to find a place of belonging and hospitality and feel good about themselves.

"Some people who haven't been able to attend have been absolutely devastated and depressed have actually taken their lives because Christmas is such a tragic event for them."

Mr Hodgson also conducts a Christmas Day communion service

for around 60 of his 'streeties' in a local park.

Journey spoke with a group of men about what it is like to be homeless around Christmas.

Dave has been off the streets for around seven years, but knows how hard a time Christmas can be.

He spent a couple of Christmases on the streets and said it often depends what you make of it.

"A lot of times it is quite fun. The amount of food that is getting around and the amount of fun that is created is quite pleasant."

Despite that, Dave said there are a lot of people who find Christmas a hard time.

"It does get a bit dark. You tend to get a bit hateful towards a lot of things."

He said the Christmas events churches and organisations plan give people hope that there are others who care that they are struggling.

Dave said the Christmas Day lunch was important, "Just to lift up the spirits of the people that are in that situation to give them hope and to try to motivate them to say, 'Well next year we will do something better, we'll do something for ourselves' and try and get their lives back on track."



Dave (left) with Wesley Mission Brisbane Minister Tim Hodgson and John (right). Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Warren agreed these events are important.

"Just so people know there is somebody out there that cares and somewhere to go and spend some time and share the day, have a bit of a smile," he said.

Warren said even when people are invited to Christmas events in other's homes, they may not feel comfortable attending.

"A lot of people know people and are invited to people's places

for Christmas lunch but they are too embarrassed to go because they have got no money or they feel like they are being a burden.

"Christmas is the saddest time for a lot of homeless people because they haven't got any family about.

"A lot of people lock themselves in their rooms and wait for Christmas to be over and the New Year to come on. People that don't have anyone for Christmas find the meal pretty uplifting."

Warren has served at the last two Wesley Mission Brisbane Christmas Lunches.

"It gets my mind off Christmas. It's not my favourite time of year either," he said.

"It's getting pretty big. The more that know about it, the more happy cheery faces there will be."

Many other Uniting Church organisations and other churches also provide assistance to people in need at Christmas.

Pastoral Care Officer



We are seeking an enthusiastic, exceptionally gifted and highly motivated person to join a superb team.

This is a new position in an expanding team and is located in the city of Adelaide. The Pastoral Care Officer's responsibilities will include:

- Overseeing the pastoral care and pastoral relations of ministers and congregations within the Presbytery and Synod
- Resourcing others, including congregations, Mission Networks and Agencies to provide effective pastoral care to ministers, leaders and congregations through the Presbytery
- Working closely with the Executive Officer – Pastoral Relations

A Position Description and Information pack can be obtained by contacting Rev David Buxton, Executive Officer – Pastoral Relations, Presbytery and Synod of SA, GPO Box 2145, Adelaide SA 5001.

Written applications close at 4.00pm on Wednesday 19 December 2007.

Uniting Church in Australia
Presbytery and Synod
of South Australia



Do they know it's Christmas?

By Mardi Lumsden

BEING AWAY from home over Christmas can be hard, but what if you are in a culture that doesn't celebrate Christmas?

The Uniting Church has numerous people serving in mission around the world.

Some are in countries where Christianity is the main religion and others in cultures that pride themselves on the acceptance of all religions.

Leslene Woodward has served in Bali and southern India.

"Christmas is simply another religious festival on the very full religious calendar for the year and tends to be celebrated simply as a religious festival with local customs," Ms Woodward told *Journey*.

"No one interferes; their own next festival is probably coming up soon.

"In Bali, the shops celebrate with enthusiasm any festival of the

Hindus, Muslims and Christians, so no sooner are the Ramadan banners taken down (a big Muslim festival), than the Christmas ones go up," she said.

"We all found this a bit comical, but it did give a quite understated Christmas feeling to things.

"The strangest thing I found was the fact that shops opened on Christmas Day; all festivals in Bali are treated as ordinary commercial days.

"There is a 'split personality' quality to Christmas. Whereas at home you are saturated in Christmas, both commercial and spiritual, in Bali and Chennai it is only the spiritual and personal side you really experience.

"Christmas in Bali is definitely a spiritual thing; gift-giving does not feature among families. The churches have major services in the days leading up to Christmas.

"But every family puts up a 'Happy Christmas' banner, and they

decorate a tree with cotton wool snow! I saw them everywhere.

"Bangkok, where I was lucky enough to spend Christmas week getting my Indonesian visa renewed, was a visual Christmas shoppers delight.

"The city has a huge block of you-beaut shopping malls; every plaza dripped with magnificent Christmas decorations, but nothing really outside in the streets.

"I think the biggest difference for me was that instead of the Christmas commercial atmosphere leading up to the church services of Christmas Day so that Christmas does extend over a period, last Christmas was a short hectic spiritual burst around the day itself."

In 2005 Frank and Ruth Hutton spent six months (including Christmas) in Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka.

"We did not have family or friends with us, it did impact on our celebration of Christmas as it was in some ways a lonely time.

"However, we did not have the distractions typical of our life in

Australia, and could focus more on what Christmas is really all about.

"Because the people are poor, there was no focus on expensive gift giving."

The Huttons also experienced an acceptance from people of other faiths to their Christian festivities.

"Within our experience there seemed to be a tolerance by the Hindus of the Christian faith and practices.

"Children from the House of Hope and the aged people in the Elders Cottage willingly participated in Christmas activities, even though a high percentage were Hindu."

"In late November, the front page of the Jaffna *Daily Mirror* had a colour photo of a little girl practising for the role of Mary, and holding her doll, Jesus.

"Surrounding the photo were reports of increased violence and the threat of breakdown of the cease fire agreement.

"This typified for us how the local people found the joy and peace of the Christ Child in the midst of the turmoil."



Uniting Church Centre for Theology & Ministry
1 Morrison Close, Parkville 3152, Victoria.

United Faculty of Theology - Dean

The United Faculty of Theology (UFT) calls for applicants for the position of a full-time Dean.

In renewing its commitment to ecumenical theological education, the UFT is seeking a Dean who will serve the policies and priorities of the UFT and give leadership in the context of the present opportunities and challenges. The position requires experience in theological education and expertise in working with academic teachers, students and administrative staff.

It is hoped that the position will commence in June 2008, but a later starting time would be negotiable. The position is offered in the first instance for a period of three years.

Applications are due by 25 January 2008

For Position Description and Application Requirements please contact:

The Administration Manager: heather.cameron@ctm.uca.edu.au; Ph 03 9340 8832

Uniting Church Centre for Theology & Ministry, 1 Morrison Close, Parkville 3152, Victoria.



Synod of Victoria and Tasmania
Presbytery of Tasmania

Presbytery Minister – Mission Educator Presbytery Minister – Leadership Developer

The Presbytery seeks two new full time placements in 2008 to stimulate and equip the UCA in Tasmania to minister in the 21st century.

The primary task of the Mission Educator is to assist the presbytery and its congregations to identify and implement new ways of being church, especially in worship and mission.

The primary task of the Leadership Developer is to equip church leaders – lay and ordained – with skills for ministry and to enable new ways of being church.

Expressions of interest should be addressed to: Joint Nominating Committee, 96 Margaret Street Launceston Tas 7250 by 14th December 2007.

Profiles and further information is available from the Secretary of Placements Committee, Rev Allan Thompson: allan.thompson@victas.uca.org.au

Uniting Church: green from the start

"NATURE HAS a right to the protection of its eco-systems, species, and populations in their inter-connectedness," the Uniting Church declared in a resolution of its sixth Assembly in 1991.

From its very first public statement to the nation in 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia expressed what would be an abiding concern with the wellbeing of the planet for the rights of future generations.

"We are concerned with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment," the inaugural statement said.

In the light of the current global ecological crisis the Uniting Church has ramped up its position on environmental issues by releasing a new statement, *For the Sake of the Planet and all its People: a Uniting Church in Australia Statement on Climate Change*.

A theological basis

The Uniting Church's commitment to the environment arises out of the Christian belief that God, as the Creator of the universe, calls us into a special relationship with the creation.

In a 2006 submission to the Federal Environment and Heritage Committee Inquiry into a Sustainability Charter, UnitingCare described this as "a relationship of mutuality and interdependence which seeks the reconciliation of all creation with God."

The church believes that God's will for the earth is renewal and reconciliation, not destruction by human beings.

The foundational document of the Uniting Church in Australia, the *Basis of Union*, expressed this as the very heart of the Church's mission:

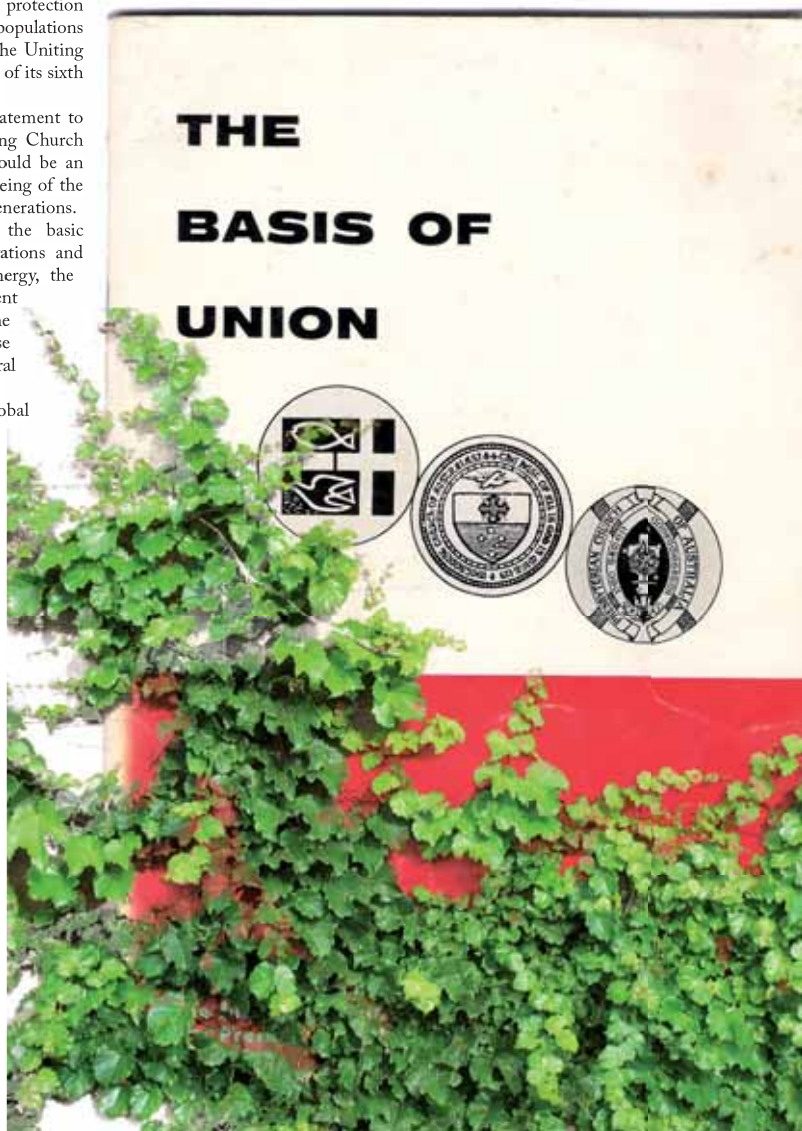
"God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end."

Despite its long held concern about the continued existence of all creatures and plant life and belief that nature is not to be plundered and abused, the Statement acknowledges that the church has been complicit in the abuse of creation.

"We have lived out a doctrine of the domination of nature by accepting and engaging in practices that have failed to safeguard the integrity of creation.

"We have supported systems and structures that exploit the natural environment in the service of human greed.

"We make this confession and we renew our commitment to moving toward sustainable non-exploitative living, believing that God's creation—the earth itself and all the life that it supports—is precious and the earth's resources exist for the good of all now as well as future generations."



Beyond dispute

The Uniting Church is convinced the scientific evidence on global warming and its potentially disastrous impact is now indisputable, and regards climate change as a serious threat to the future and integrity of life on earth.

It believes that the burning of fossil fuels, the subsequent creation of greenhouse gas emissions and the worldwide failure to plan for a sustainable future is seriously exacerbating the problems we face.

The statement offers a fundamental challenge to the way we live.

"If we are to meet and overcome the challenge, we must think creatively about

the organisation of our social and economic institutions, our relationship with each other across national and cultural boundaries and our relationship with the environment."

Taking responsibility

For the Sake of the Planet and all its People states that, increasingly, it is some humans who consume the earth's resources whilst others pay the price.

"As one of the world's major producers of greenhouse gas emissions on a per capita basis, Australia must acknowledge that it has a responsibility to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels.

"As long as we remain prepared to abuse the atmosphere and entire ecosystems for the sake of short-term economic gain for a few, we undermine our own future."

A report prepared for Uniting Church members prior to the 2004 Federal Election said it was important that Australia's social, economic and environmental policies begin to reflect social and ecological justice, and that it makes good economic and political sense to spend money ensuring the long-term well-being of our natural world.

"There can be no security for humanity without a healthy ecosystem."

Call to government

The Statement calls for the Australian Government to set and commit to meeting serious targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions primarily through the promotion of renewable energy sources, measures to reduce energy demand and promotion of energy efficient measures.

It claims it will be essential for this work to be done in partnership with state and local government, business, industry and civil society.

But since the 2002 Assembly Standing Committee Resolution on the nuclear fuel cycle the church has remained unconvinced about the use of nuclear power as a solution to global warming.

"We believe that the continued research, development and implementation of renewable energy are absolute priorities for governments and industry in order to minimise greenhouse gas production.

"As a matter of urgency we must reduce our dependence on fossil fuels."

Not just us

The impact of climate change will affect some of the world's poorest people first and the Uniting Church is particularly concerned with the fate of some of our most vulnerable Pacific neighbours.

The 2004 Otin Taai Declaration by the Pacific Churches called on their sisters and brothers in the Church throughout the world to act in solidarity to reduce the causes of human induced climate change by ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, reducing

energy use and developing clean, renewable energy sources.

"Lives, livelihoods, societies, cultures and ecosystems of the Pacific Islands have already been affected by rising sea levels, diminishing agricultural space, diminishing reserves of fresh water and changing weather patterns including more frequent and unpredictable storms," said the Statement.

In 2003, the Uniting Church's 10th Assembly asked the Australian Government to prepare for Australia to provide assistance for the peoples of the Pacific as they are forced to leave their homes and their land.

"Solutions must be found which ensure that the unique cultural and linguistic heritages of the various Pacific Island nations are not lost."

The Statement concludes that the situation in the Pacific is a clear signal that in order to secure our future, we must change how we live as nations, communities and individuals.

"Now is the time that governments, business, community and faith-based organisations must commit to working together to address the impacts of climate change for the sake of our planet and all its people."

"[We] must commit to working together to address the impacts of climate change for the sake of our planet and all its people."



Seven steps to a green church

Endorsed by the Queensland Synod in May 2007, the Green Church program has developed an education campaign on climate change to assist congregations, members and church organisations such as UnitingCare, the Schools' Commission and Finance and Property Services to undertake energy assessments and seek ways to minimise their production of greenhouse gas emissions.

The program offers workshops on climate change, actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and advocacy for social justice in climate change issues.

These Seven Steps to a Green Church are based on work prepared by the Climate Institute of Faith Communities.

They provide a practical way to turn our sense of moral purpose on Climate Change into action and start leading by example.



Find the passion

Having a passionate facilitator to guide and assist your congregation on this journey is the first step.

Does your congregation have a climate change or social justice champion who is willing to act as your congregation's 'tour guide' on this journey?

As part of this step, your congregation may wish to make a public declaration of your commitment by signing up to The Climate Institute's 7 Steps program <http://www.climateinstitute.org.au>.

Commit to 100% Green Power

Making a commitment to a positive action is a necessary second step.

For the cost of a phone call and a small financial outlay, your congregation can have an immediate reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and show a strong community leadership role.

Green Power is electricity generated from a renewable energy power station that has been built since 1997.

A Federal Government accredited scheme ensures that any electricity produced under the Green Power marketing logo results in greenhouse gas reductions as well as having a net environmental benefit (new large hydro electric schemes do not qualify).

The renewable energy power stations may be powered by the wind, the sun, water, biomass or even your sewage and garbage waste.

When you ask your electricity supplier for 100% Green Power they will buy the equivalent amount of power that you use from a renewable energy generator instead of a coal or gas fired generator.

This not only reduces greenhouse gas emissions, but it also encourages the development of more renewable energy power stations.

The system is transparent and independently audited by both the government <http://www.greenpower.gov.au> and through non-government organizations <http://www.greenelectricitywatch.org.au>.

When you have made the switch, get the green power logo and proudly display it at your place of worship to demonstrate to the broader community that you care about the environment.

Shrink the church's footprint

Having made the commitment to reduce emissions, the third step is to actually reduce consumption.

An 'energy audit' or survey is one step to take to identify where and how much greenhouse gas is emitted from church based activities.

The survey can be as simple as just looking at the church's electricity bill (one kilowatt hour of electricity consumed in Queensland generates 1kg of greenhouse gases.)

More detailed information, such as listing all electrical items within church premises and calculating how often they are used each week, helps to identify key areas to address.

The Uniting Church in Queensland has started this journey by allowing four groups of Queensland University of Technology Energy Management students to carry out audits for a number of Brisbane Uniting Church congregations and the main Uniting Church Centre at Auchenflower.

This information is valuable in assisting the church to identify areas of waste as well as areas where operational and/or purchasing changes can reduce electricity consumption and costs as well as greenhouse gas emissions.

An Energy Audit Kit for congregations and agencies developed by the Victorian Synod can be downloaded from <http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/images/stories/sevensteps/3/handbook.pdf>.

Encourage household action

Once the church has started its journey, step four is to encourage members of your congregation to get active on steps two and three in their own homes.

Queensland households produce greenhouse gas emissions through our electricity, gas and water use, through the fuels we use in our vehicles, through our general consumption habits and through the amount of waste we generate.

Reducing our consumption in each of these areas can dramatically reduce our individual and collective emissions.

Learning how to measure our current energy or carbon footprint can be a valuable first step in working out an individual and family action plan for carbon reductions.

Actions taken at home to reduce emissions from energy use might include:

- reducing standby power by switching off appliances at the wall when not in use
- using compact fluorescent energy efficient light globes
- installing a solar water heater
- maximising the use of natural light and natural ventilation
- installing insulation and window shades
- choosing 5 star appliances when purchasing
- turning the thermostat of air conditioners up a few degrees in summer.

Advocate for others

Our partner churches in the Pacific are deeply concerned about the effects of climate change on their future.

As Christians we have a responsibility to speak up for those who don't have a voice, including our friends in the Pacific, future generations and the planet itself.

You might like to visit your local Member of Parliament or councillor and ask them what they're doing about climate change.

Many environment groups such as the Climate Institute and the Australian Conservation Foundation provide helpful advocacy tools.

Every level of government and the global community as a whole needs to work together to solve this problem.

To read more from our partner churches go to <http://www.otikoumene.org> and search for Otin Taai Declaration.

Spread the word

Many other faith communities are doing similar work on climate change.

Our friends in the Catholic and Anglican churches both have agencies committed to greening their churches.

Talk to your friends and let them know what you are doing. The best way to communicate is by word of mouth.

Many community groups are also responding to climate change.

You could work with your local school, sporting club or community group to audit their property or encourage them to change to Green Power.

For more information on what other faith communities are doing and saying go to <http://www.climateinstitute.org.au> and click on the Community link.

Get inspired

Get inspired by the stories of what others are doing to make a difference.

Tanya Johnson and her house have moved to Green Power, "We just decided to move to Green Power with our local provider."

"To begin with it cost a little bit more but by gradually buying new light bulbs each time we shop, moving to more energy efficient washing machine and using timers on appliances so they are only on when we need them we reduced our cost to about the same."

Maroubra Junction Uniting Church Congregation in Sydney has an entire Project Green Church.

Project Green Church co-founder Geoff Callaghan said they switched to 100% Green Power, installed solar hot water systems, use rainwater and recycled water, and share resources such as lawnmowers and a car.

"Through Project Green Church we aim to be a beacon of faith-based environmental sustainability. We feel we are leading by practical example."

Many congregations in Queensland have already begun and Sherwood and Holland Park Uniting Churches have engaged in the Queensland University of Technology audit project.

They will have reports about their energy usage and how they can reduce it.

Many congregations such as Living Waters at Brown's Plains have installed water tanks with the assistance of grants from the government.

For information about how to apply to the various levels of government for grants go to <http://www.socialissues.ucauweb.com.au>.

How climate change will affect us

CLIMATE CHANGE is one of the most significant challenges facing today's world and the possible impacts for Queensland's environment, economy and communities are significant.

It can seriously affect our water supply, food production, health and economy, and damage some of our more sensitive natural environments.

Bureau of Meteorology data show that Queensland has become hotter and drier since 1910, particularly since the mid-1950s, with temperatures rising faster than the global average.

With Queensland's annual average temperature projected to rise by up to two degrees Celsius by 2030, and rainfall to drop by some 13 per cent, we need to plan for and adapt to our changing climate.

CSIRO projections for Queensland indicate: higher average annual temperatures, with the greatest warming in inland areas, more hot days and fewer cold nights, less rainfall over much of the state, and an increase in



cyclone intensity, a rise in global average sea level, and increased risk of storm surges along Queensland's coast.

The nature, rate and extent of climate change will vary across the state.

In far north Queensland there is likely to be more rain, particularly in summer, and more intense tropical cyclones.

South-east Queensland could

face major challenges as a result of (the convergence of) drier conditions overall, a rise in sea level, increased coastal development, and rapid population growth.

Although more uncertain, the drying trend in central Queensland is likely to continue, while projections are that western Queensland will experience the greatest warming in the state, particularly in the south-west.

The 26th Synod asked the Justice and International Mission Advocate to prepare an education and training package for the church.

The package is now available; it includes three modules of about one and half hours each.

Awareness: *Al Gore's Climate Project* – Information about climate change and its effect on the planet

Advocacy: *A Renewed Creation* – Information and training about how to advocate for action on climate change including policy details and how to communicate with politicians.

Action: *A Green Community* – Training on practical ways to make a difference in your home, your church and your community including auditing your home and changing to green power.

You can have any combination of the modules as each stands alone. For more information go to the JIMA website at <http://www.socialissues.ucaweb.com.au>.

I'd put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don't have to wait 'til oil and coal run out before we tackle that.

Thomas Edison, 1931

Awareness

<http://www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au>

<http://www.climatecrisis.com.au>

<http://www.ipcc.ch>

<http://environment.newscientist.com/climate myths>

Action

<http://www.greenhouse.gov.au>

<http://www.climatesmart.qld.gov.au>

<http://www.climateinstitute.org.au>

<http://www.acfonline.org.au> (Green Home Guide)

Advocacy

<http://www.thebigswitch.org.au>

<http://www.getup.org.au>

<http://www.cana.net.au/socialimpacts>

<http://nat.uca.org.au/unitingjustice>

I don't think God is going to ask us how he created the Earth, but he will ask us what we did with what he created.

The Rev Rich Cizik, vice president of governmental affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals, 2005

We live in constant fear of the adverse impacts of climate change. The threat is real and serious, and is of no difference to a slow and insidious form of terrorism against us.

Saufatu Sopoanga, Prime Minister of Tuvalu, 2003

Climate change in Queensland

Water planning and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More variable and less reliable rainfall and streamflow • Decline in available water • Soil erosion and increased sediments and nutrients in waterways • More biological pathogens such as algal blooms and bacterial growth
Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreases in soil moisture and an increase in evaporation • Increased risk of soil erosion from more extreme rainfall events • Changes in plant growth and productivity • Changes in distribution of existing pests, diseases and weeds • Threat of new pests, diseases and weeds • Changes in the suitability of certain crop varieties, horticulture and forestry • Changes in growing periods • Changes in optimum location and productivity of fruit, vegetable and forestry industries
Human settlements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure of more people and infrastructure because of rapid population growth and development of coastal areas • Increased vulnerability of low-lying coastal areas to sea-level rise and storm surges • Increased flood risk • Increased risk of droughts and bushfires • Change in the reliability and cost of energy and water, with some areas made more vulnerable by competing demands • Increase vulnerability of infrastructure (e.g. pipes, drains, power lines, bridges ...)
Natural environment and landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in plant growth and native vegetation patterns • Changes in the abundance and distribution of pests, weeds and diseases • Reduced streamflow and decreasing water quality in important river systems • Additional stress on already-threatened species and ecosystems • Changes in breeding patterns and life cycles • Reduced viability of species of ecosystems
Emergency services and human health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased risk of food-borne illnesses due to hotter weather • Increased risk of water-borne diseases due to less rain and runoff and declining water quality • Changes in the incidence and distribution of mosquito populations and mosquito-borne diseases • Increase stress or depression following economic hardship or losses
Tourism, business and industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More extreme weather events (disrupting visitor numbers) • Reduced availability of water • Increased heat-related and other health impacts • Possible disruption to the supply of raw materials and the transport of products
Insurance and finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased risks for both insurance and reinsurance • Change to insurance cost and availability • Banks and other financial institutions exposed through their investment portfolios

From *ClimateSmart Adaptation 2007-12*, Queensland Government Climate Change Centre of Excellence, June 2007.

Share Your Story

Tell the church your story about what you're doing to combat climate change by sending it to A Green Church, GPO Box 674 Brisbane Qld 4001

Or email andrew.johnson@ucaql.com.au

Or go to the website

Or SMS 0417 783 495

For every story we receive you'll receive a free energy efficient light bulb.

Jazzing up Christmas

By Mardi Lumsden

INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED jazz musician James Morrison is remarkably down to earth when talking about his 28 year career.

Playing professionally since the age of 13 and with more than 19 recordings under his belt, Mr Morrison has played with jazz legends including Dizzy Gillespie, B.B. King and Wynton Marsalis.

His new album, *Christmas*, provides a magical blend of Christmas carols and jazz with the all important message behind Christmas.

"I thought it was time to do a real Christmas album, by that I mean something a bit more focused on the message of Christmas. So we dispensed with the Christmas songs and it is just carols," Mr Morrison told *Journey*.

The son of a Methodist minister and a church organist, there was no question whether James would be in Church each Sunday.

Mr Morrison has also recorded two albums of gospel music dedicated to his parents.

"They lead lives of Christian inspiration. As a kid growing up, to have a real live example in your

parents, right in front of you, is a very wonderful and valuable thing.

"Being a Christian and loving Gospel music, I've put a track or two on many of my albums. I thought that was a great way to have that message in all the secular jazz albums.

Mr Morrison said playing in church was a great grounding for a career in music as it set him up with values to compare the rest of the world to.

"Young musicians get out there and if they are lucky get in to a professional band early and start playing with some very fine musicians.

"The trouble is that those fine musicians will have their own life philosophy and young, impressionable musicians will often take on that philosophy because they want to be like them musically."

He didn't fall into that trap.

"If I saw them do something questionable, I could go, well wait on, I know some great musicians that I play with every week and they are not like that so obviously, that's not necessary."

Consequently, Mr Morrison now runs an annual scholarship program for young musicians and is patron to six young bands.



James Morrison gets in the swing of Christmas. Photo courtesy of www.traa.com.au

The new album features vocalist Emma Pask, who has worked with Morrison since she was at high school.

"I got Emma Pask to sing on it because I thought it was really important to have the lyrics of the carols too.

"Apart from a Christmas album it is a jazz album, so I tried to choose songs that lent themselves

musically to that as well as having the message.

"It's gone a few places! We've got calypso, we've got a bossa nova, we've got funk, swing... I think it keeps it interesting."

Those attending Stable on the Strand in Townsville this Christmas can enjoy a live performance by Mr Morrison and band, including Emma Pask.

"It is a great time of year to be in that part of the world.

"I love doing concert halls and jazz clubs, but there is something really nice about doing a big outdoor thing in the summer with the atmosphere it has and all the kids there.

"I just know we are going to have a wonderful time."



Women in the Plumtree district of Zimbabwe dance joyfully around their rainwater tank. Photo by Kaylea Fearn

Joy flows in Zimbabwean villages

By Kaylea Fearn

DRIVING DOWN the dirt track into a small village in the Plumtree district of Zimbabwe I could hear a chorus of female voices.

I asked Sipwe Dewa, our Zimbabwe Council of Churches' partner, what they were singing and dancing about, and she translated: "Who's got it? Who's got it? We've got the tank!"

Despite the laborious nature of tank-building, they look back at the process fondly.

Building a tank gave them fresh water for their families, marketable skills and brought the community closer together.

As one woman said, "We found out what Jesus really meant when he asked us to love our neighbour.

"We helped each other build tanks for everyone".

Sipiwe Dewa founded the rainwater harvesting program

in 1996. She says the beauty of the program lies in the sense of empowerment the women experience by building the tanks themselves.

"The women who build the tanks have something to be proud of. These are their tanks."

The villagers say there has been virtually no diarrhoea reported since the tanks were constructed.

This is a remarkable and much needed improvement, considering around 3000 people die each week in Zimbabwe from treatable diseases such as dysentery.

Tests have confirmed that urban and rural water in Zimbabwe is undrinkable. Fresh water is now one of the most expensive commodities available.

"A village having its own source of fresh water, which is not reliant on a Government system, gives it security," Ms Sipwe explained.

Before the tanks were constructed in the village, women were walking for hours each day to find water; there was never a guarantee that it would be clean.

"Now we ask Australians to pray with us for rain to fill the tanks for the next year, because we are in the midst of our rainy season."

The Christmas Bowl has supported the Zimbabwe Council of Churches' rainwater harvesting program. To give to the Christmas Bowl phone freecall 1800 025 101 or visit www.ncca.org.au/cws/give

MINISTRY VACANCY

ASSOCIATE PASTOR - YOUNG FAMILIES, YOUNG ADULTS AND YOUTH

Marion Church of Christ is a large, dynamic, evangelical church serving the southern region of Adelaide. Applications are invited, for this full-time position within the Ministry Team, from interested persons who can also demonstrate gifts in preaching and pastoral care.

Initial enquiries and detailed position description:

John Lunnay, Senior Pastor (08) 8277 7388 or jlunnay@marioncc.org.au.

Applications to **Charles Young**, Search Committee, 28 Dunluce Ave, Brighton SA 5048 or cyou2212@bigpond.net.au.

Closing Date 15.01.2008.



INDOOROOPILLY UNITING CHURCH

(Brisbane SW suburbs)

is seeking to appoint a half-time person to oversee

Youth Ministry

This is an exciting opportunity for a Christian person mature in faith and life experience, with a commitment and passion for ministry with young people aged 12 to young adult.

The half-time church-based role is to develop and strengthen ministry with young people in the church and community and involves a strategic component of weekly leadership involvement.

The position is open to both lay and ordained persons with

- a committed Christian faith,
- a strong Biblical and theological basis for their work,
- qualifications from a recognised Bible or theological college, preferably in youth ministry
- commitment and demonstrated experience in the area of Christian Youth Ministry.

A detailed position description, congregational profile and other supportive information is available from:

Youth Worker Position Indooroopilly Uniting Church

PO Box 47, Indooroopilly Qld 4068

Email: ipillyuc@bigpond.com Phone: 07 3878 9535

Applications close 10 December 2007

Youth leading change in Zimbabwe

By Mardi Lumsden

RASSEL CHISANGO is not your average 25-year-old.

He is the Chief Projects Officer and one of the founders of a Zimbabwean not-for-profit organisation the Royal Youth Organisation (RYO) which provides projects that aim to empower the youth of Zimbabwe to meaningfully participate in critical development issues including the Millennium Development Goals.

He is also a star of the most popular soap opera in Zimbabwe.

In Australia in November for a study tour (assisted by Oxfam International and the International Young Professionals Organisation), Mr Chisango visited many different organisations, including the Uniting Church Queensland Synod, to discuss possible future partnerships.



Rural Resource Ministers

The Presbytery of South Australia has established three Rural Resource Minister placements, commencing from January 2008, to provide resourcing and mission planning functions on a regional basis to the congregations beyond the urban boundary of Adelaide. These placements will join the existing Rural Ministry Team under the oversight of the Mission Resourcing Network of the Presbytery.

Each of the placements will resource a defined geographic region of the state, working collegially with Ministers in placement to resource the whole area. This includes mentoring Lay Pastors, Community Ministers, and other lay ministers, resourcing lay-led congregations in cooperation with Mission Networks, and with other Rural Resource Ministers in developing resources and providing schools of ministry.

Expressions of interest are invited from Ministers of the Word, Deacons, or appropriately gifted and trained lay persons. Please submit by 31 December to Rob Stoner, Mission Resourcing Network, UCA in SA, GPO Box 2145, Adelaide SA 5001, email rob@sa.uca.org.au or phone (08) 8236 4244. Rob can also be contacted for further information, including a detailed job specification.

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While still at high school, Mr Chisango knew he wanted to empower other young people to take charge of the future of Zimbabwe. He said his Christian faith was one of the driving forces behind his desire for change.

"In the Christian faith we talk about having a calling. To me it was a step towards meeting my destiny," he said.

"In the current Zimbabwe situation I find that my Christianity becomes more like inspiration. It gives me strength, it gives me hope, it provides the basis for a vision of a better tomorrow and that gives me energy to continue the work that I do.

RYO is a Christian organisation, but Mr Chisango said it is a service provider for all.

"It is the organisation's inspiration that is Christian faith based, but what we do is development work on the ground and responding to people's needs, prioritising youth and trying to promote and establish a best practice of youth led development.

"We are interdenominational. We work with young people with all sorts of backgrounds, whether they have a faith or not."

The current focus for the RYO is the HIV / AIDS crisis.

Mr Chisango believes controlling the spread of HIV and AIDS is the key to youth development in Zimbabwe.

"We are focusing on HIV and AIDS because it is the most pressing developmental challenge of our time.

"Nobody is interested in hearing about HIV and AIDS so you try and package it in such a way that it is appealing."

As an actor, Mr Chisango uses his status as a television personality to educate young people on HIV and AIDS prevention.

"I basically try to use that as an opportunity... for the benefit of



Rassel Chisango is out to change his nation. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

the organisation because that is my first and foremost priority.

"We realised that we needed to change the means through which we are communicating and interacting with these youth, especially urban youth.

"What we are implementing now is called the Royal Youth Sport Arts Livelihood and Training program (RYSALT) for HIV mitigation and prevention which on a broader scale is also a youth empowerment for development program which we can implement whether there is HIV or not."

The RYSALT program uses the music and film industries to reach

young people and has recently opened a Soccer Academy in Harare.

"Our vision is to groom, mould and build a God fearing and vigilant youth who can audaciously and effectively deal with the challenges and demands of everyday life so as to ensure individual, group and national development."

Despite 85% of the population of Zimbabwe subscribing to Christianity, the churches initially did not approach the subject of HIV and AIDS.

"The church is usually the one that takes the lead whenever we

have a crisis, such as the HIV / AIDS crisis.

"When it came to HIV / AIDS it was really a totally different response. They kind of stood aloof; the church disassociated itself from the problem.

"The church kind of felt immune to HIV and felt like it was a too secular issue for them to be associated with.

"So we realised, as a youth organisation, the church can be a very firm foundation for a massive campaign that will really see a meaningful contribution to the eventual halting of the spread of HIV and AIDS.

"Since the turn of the millennium... you are really seeing the church getting involved. "We still have some headway to make, you still find some people still resisting, quite influential leaders.

"I think eventually, the church as the church, and we are part of that church organisation, we will get there."

Mr Chisango has seemingly simple dreams for the future of young people in Zimbabwe, but when dreamed up in the current political climate these dreams are huge and, if they succeed, will make a massive difference to the future of the country as a whole.

"I look forward to a future whereby we have universal access to both primary and secondary education. I believe education is the key to any sustainable development.

"A future whereby Zimbabwean youth are recognised as key and effective development partners within their local communities.

"And a future where youth have the capacity to be able to determine their future and influence critical decisions that have a bearing on their future."

With people as determined as Rassel Chisango, you just might think they will pull it off.

Sharing the Joy

A PEACE worker and development manager with Uniting International Mission (UIM) has been nominated for Australian of the Year.

Joy Balazo is a former nun who has spent the past 25 years working in the Asia Pacific region, providing peace building and reconciliation programs to some of the world's most conflicted countries.

Her tireless energy has had a significant impact on and provided benefit to the peoples of countries including Indonesia, Sri Lanka, North East India, Burma, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the Solomon Islands.

Joy's outstanding achievements have included a role as the Human Rights Violation Spokesperson for the Philippine Resource Centre

in Australia; the establishment of the Philippine Christian Forum on the issue of human rights; and campaigning for legislation to punish Australian paedophiles involved in child abuse overseas.



Joy Balazo. Photo courtesy of UIM

Added to that, she organised a letter-writing campaign to Australian companies doing business in Burma; a fact-finding mission to the Philippines to see first-hand the countless lives affected by Australian mining operations; and a peace gathering for 700 women in Bougainville, PNG.

In 2001, Joy launched the Young Ambassadors for Peace (YAP) program, which has since engaged thousands in grass-roots peace making in Asia and the Pacific.

Joy's efforts and the YAP network are achieving results in the region where many traditional and legislative approaches have failed, including in the troubled PNG highlands.

Government departments, businesses and community groups have recognised and responded to the efforts of YAP, with improved understandings and relationships.

She said her vision was to change the attitudes of young people susceptible to conflict and war instead of a culture of peace, by establishing genuine understanding of and respect for people's differences in culture, religions, gender, education and politics.

"People always ask, what makes you do it?" said Joy. "Not because I want to go into these dangerous places, that's far from my mind.

"I want to plant the seed of peace. You have to plant it somewhere where it is needed and of course there is always a risk when you do that."

Born in the Philippines, Joy Balazo became a nun but was eventually unable to reconcile her comfortable convent life with her work in the poorest slums of Manila.

Joy has been an Australian citizen since 1994.

Serving Jesus in the lab

"SEEING THE struggle of people in the world's poorest nations of Africa changes my perspective of many things," said 28 year old medical scientist Kathryn Evans who is serving her third term as a volunteer with Mercy Ships.

"The people of Liberia, where the hospital ship Africa Mercy is currently on field service, struggle with poverty and have to deal with issues that most of us are never likely to know anything about," she said.

"They certainly don't worry about having the latest fashion trend in clothes, acquiring the latest gadget, or where to go for dinner. Many don't even get dinner.

"They are fortunate if they have somewhere clean and dry to sleep.

"Many are refugees, remembering times when rebel forces swept through their home villages more than once, killing or maiming family members, even taking their children to become child soldiers during the long civil war.

"Somehow, in the face of all that, our concerns seem a little petty."

Ms Evans, who worships with the Pine Rivers Uniting Church in Brisbane, did not expect to return to West Africa so soon.

She was among the volunteer crew of more than 450 earlier this year, and had been considering returning in a year or two, but received word the hospital ship urgently needed another laboratory technologist.

"That was much sooner than I had been anticipating. I prayed and thought about it, and was certain the decision to return to Africa was a 'God thing'. Everything happened so quickly and smoothly."

It was at a missions conference four or five years ago that Ms Evans heard about Mercy Ships, an international Christian charity now in its 30th year of service, bringing hope and healing to the world's forgotten poor.

She says she felt many years ago while still at school the call of God to work in Africa.

"I wasn't impressed. I didn't want to go to Africa where it is hot, isolated, and teeming with various diseases.

"I conveniently forgot about it while I finished my education and gained some practical experience in the lab.

"God is always right, however, and while I thought being in Africa would be a terrible experience, I really love it."



Medical scientist Kathryn Evans plays her part in the Mercy Ships healing ministry. Photo courtesy Mercy Ships

Ms Evans spends much of her time in the ship's lab testing specimens from patients for a range of things, but readily acknowledges that she is just one member of a team with a huge variety of skills that go into the work of Mercy Ships bringing skilled medical care to correct disability, disfigurement and blindness, as well as undertaking a wide range of community development projects in partnership with local residents and organisations.

"My family and close friends know this is something I have to do,

and they are mostly philosophical about it.

"Others say I am doing a really good thing. But I am sure they don't realise I get more out of the experience than I give.

"While my work as a scientist in the lab is not at the cutting edge of all that is going on, it does make it easier for doctors and nurses to provide better patient care, and sometimes it does make the difference between life and death.

"I don't know about the future as a result of this my third period of service with Mercy Ships.

"The human side of me tells me I would like to know, but I am trying to leave that up to God," Ms Evans concludes.

Mercy Ships is an international Christian charity that has operated hospital ships in developing nations since 1978.

www.mercyships.org.au



Kelly Holcroft receiving her Queen's Award from Governor Quentin Bryce. Photo courtesy Girls' Brigade

Brigade honours top girls

KELLY HOLCROFT from Oxley Uniting Church was one of three from her company and one of twelve young women from Uniting Church Girls' Brigade companies presented with the Queen's Award.

The Queen's Award is the highest achievement for Girls' Brigade members and was presented by the Governor of Queensland Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce.

Mrs Coral Anderson, the National Commissioner for Girls' Brigade congratulated the young women for their commitment to the two year Queen's Award program.

"Through active service in the community and personal development, the Queen's Award prepares and develops participants to strive towards high standards,

empowering them to take responsibility for their life", she said.

"These awardees are our women leaders of tomorrow and will not only go on to serve in their Girls' Brigade companies but also in their community and their church.

"They will often serve in the church through leading worship, teaching Sunday School, leading youth group, or involved in a variety of other ministries that support the work of the church," said Mrs Anderson.

Girls' Brigade is an international Christian youth organisation for girls aged 6 – 21 years and in Australia operates through local churches.

In Queensland Girls' Brigade has 5452 members with over 123 000 members internationally.

Wolston reaches crossroads

IN NOVEMBER Wolston Crossroads in Goodna, celebrated 30 years of service to people with disabilities.

The celebrations service was attended by Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman, UnitingCare Director Anne Cross, Councillor Paul Tully, Crossroads Queensland Director Janet Millward, Ipswich Lifeline's Dianne Bos, and Presbytery Minister Rev David Baker.

Member of the Wolston leadership team Roma West said Crossroads serves the community by "providing Christian fellowship in a social setting where people with disabilities and able-bodied people can share, care and interact as part of the wider community and within the Church family".



Child Care Director

Aspley Uniting Church will open a Christian based Centre in 2008

The successful applicant will need qualifications in early childhood, have a working knowledge of the Uniting Church's mission and values and at least 3 years experience as a director.

Please email your resume to pwaltisb@bigpond.net.au or phone 07 3882 3328



Placement Officer



We are seeking an enthusiastic, exceptionally gifted and highly motivated person to join a superb team.

This is a new position in an expanding team and is located in the city of Adelaide.

The Placement Officer's responsibilities will include:

- Overseeing the placements of ministers in congregations, as well as non-congregational placements within the Presbytery and Synod

- Ensuring that reviews, appraisals and supervision are conducted in a timely, effective and sustainable manner throughout the Presbytery and Synod

- Working closely with the Executive Officer – Pastoral Relations. A Position Description and Information pack can be obtained by contacting Rev David Buxton, Executive Officer – Pastoral Relations, Presbytery and Synod of SA, GPO Box 2145, Adelaide SA 5001. Written applications close at 4.00pm on Wednesday 19 December 2007.

**Uniting Church in Australia
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WHAT'S ON

December 1-23, 10.30am-3pm. Montville Uniting Church Christmas Display. Contact Helen Jackson on ph 5445 7845 or email eshjay@westnet.com.au.

December 1-23, 5.30-11pm. Elanora Uniting Church Christmas Lights Festival. A display, entertainment, children's story telling, free tea, coffee and piece of cake. Contact Mary Flynn on ph 55345817 or visit www.elanora.ucaweb.com.au.

December 2, 2pm. Service of Solace at Emmanuel Uniting Church. A gentle service to remember those people or situations that you have loved and lost. Afternoon tea will follow. Contact Rosemary Costello on ph 3355 2162 or email euca@dovenetq.net.au.

December 5, 7.30-9.30pm. Interfaith Forum at Aspley Uniting Church, 748 Robinson Road. Guest speaker George Negus. Contact Garth Read on ph 3263 8068 or email garthread@ecn.net.au.

December 7-9. Festival of the Christmas Tree and Craft Fair at Ashgrove West Uniting Church. A forest of decorated Christmas Trees to walk through, Café, crafts for sale. Free sausage sizzle on Friday 5-6.30pm. Contact ph 3366 5038.

December 7-11. 6th Biennial 'Treemendous' Christmas Festival. Bayside Uniting Church, Manly West. Christmas lights, nativity, Moreton Bay College Singers lots more. Saturday 3-6pm has cuddly farm animals. Sunday lantern walk. Ph 3890 2392 Monday-Friday or visit www.bayuca.unitingchurch.org.au.

December 9-25. Cleveland Uniting Christmas Light Display. Free entertainment and supper. Combined Churches pageant and carols Sunday 16, 7pm with a BBQ from 5.30pm. Contact Ann Richardson on ph 3286 1904 or email redlanduc@dovenetq.net.au.

December 10-22, 6.30-10pm. Sandgate Uniting Church Christmas Lights. Food and drinks for sale, free face painting for children and entertainment. Contact Bruce Paterson on ph 3265 2412, email jeanpaterson@bigpond.com or visit www.sandgate.unitingchurch.org.au.

December 16, 6.30-9pm. Carols by the Bay at Wellington Point Reserve, Main Rd Wellington Point. Bring a torch and a blanket or chair and sing along to carols and songs. Contact Ian Proellocks on ph 3822 1565 or email ib.proellocks@bigpond.com.

December 16, 7pm. Christmas Carols at Living Waters Uniting Church, Hillcrest. BBQ from 6pm. Contact Mike Kolln on ph 3803 6169 or email buzbox_8@msn.com.

December 17-21, 9am-12pm. Open church at Christmas, Southport Uniting Church. Drop in to pray or meditate this Christmas season. Complimentary Christmas cake, tea and coffee. Contact Audrey Savage on ph 5532 5915 or email sportuc@internode.on.net.

December 18-19, 6-9pm. Aussie Christmas Festival at Beerwah. 'How Australians spend Christmas'. Free entertainment, sausage sizzle, damper, craft stall, coffee shop, kids kave and more. Contact Chris Bell on ph 5494 1555.

December 19-21, 9am-12.30pm. 'Christmas Adventure' for kids in Years 1-7, Indooroopilly Uniting Church. Games, crafts, Christian teaching, morning tea, lunch and a Southbank trip at low cost. Coffee and cake for parents. Contact David MacGregor on ph 0414 392 802 or email dmacgreg@aapt.net.au.

December 20, 7pm. Carols Under the Stars at Southport Uniting Church. Contact Audrey Savage on ph 5532 5915 or email sportuc@internode.on.net.

December 20, 10am. Christmas morning event at Emmanuel Uniting Church, Enoggera. Music program by Warwick Adeney (Qld Orchestra). Morning tea provided. RSVP to Rosemary Costello by 12 December on ph 3355 2162 or email euca@dovenetq.net.au.

January 1-6. Family Camp at Alex Park Conference Centre, Sunshine Coast. Contact Debbie Pollard on ph 3500 9200 or email debbie@retirewealthy.com.au.

January 6-11. Discoveries Camp at Lake Perseverance Recreation Centre. Summer holiday camp for children in grades 3-7 (in 2007). For more information check out our website www.discoveriescamp.com or email info2008@discoveriescamp.com.

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

Poverty scandal

AUSTRALIANS HAVE lost the plot in caring for those most disadvantaged, said Uniting Church President Rev Gregor Henderson while launching the ACOSS Australia Fair program.

Mr Henderson described the latest poverty figures during the current period of economic prosperity and stability as a scandal.

"I call on Government and Opposition to take this latest update of rising levels of poverty very seriously indeed," Mr Henderson said.

"It gives Australia a very poor scorecard - what policies will our political leaders put in place to bring us up the ladder?"

Mr Henderson said that Australians believe passionately in a fair go, in supporting the underdog, in barracking for those who are down.

"We want a more caring society, a more compassionate society, a more just society."



President Rev Gregor Henderson



Lin Hatfield Dodds

Hatfield Dodds honoured

NATIONAL DIRECTOR of UnitingCare Australia and social justice advocate Ms Lin Hatfield Dodds has been named the ACT's winner in the Australian of the Year Awards by Chief Minister Jon Stanhope.

Ms Hatfield Dodds will now compete with other State and Territory winners for the title of Australian of the Year, which is announced in January.

Ms Hatfield Dodds is a psychologist with experience in drug rehabilitation, young people at risk, trauma and abuse. She is President of the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS).

Ms Hatfield Dodds' expertise is nationally recognised and she is a sought-after media commentator on social justice issues.

She champions the views and interests of those whose voices would otherwise not be heard and her contribution to public debates is energetic, well-informed, respectful and professional.

Indigenous action

THE UNITING Church in Australia has circulated letters for concerned Australians to send to their Federal Government representatives, expressing concern about the intervention into Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

An initiative of a Task Group set up in August by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in direct response to the intervention, the letters urge politicians to take immediate action to address the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous Australians.

In a joint public letter National Administrator of the UAICC Rev Shayne Blackman and National Director of UnitingCare Australia Lin Hatfield Dodds outlined key advocacy issues.

"We strongly urge all Australians to advocate for the rights and responsibilities of Aboriginal people; it is time to vote for a positive future for our Indigenous communities," Mr Blackman said.



Rev Shayne Blackman



Lord, Have Mercy: Praying for Justice with Conviction and Humility

By Claire E. Wolfteich
Jossey-Bass
RRP \$32.95

Lord, Have Mercy is refreshing in its attention to integrating our prayer with the contemporary dilemmas and issues we face.

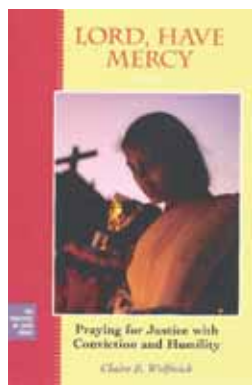
From praying in the context of discerning a wise choice in an election, to looking at various stances and ways to pray on issues of injustice that are about seeking political freedoms and social justice for the oppressed.

This is seen in the stories of linking prayer with faith practices in the situation of faithful leaders and people experiencing apartheid in South Africa and in the Farm Workers movement in South America under Cesar Chavez, in our relatively recent past.

Wolfteich uses ancient faith practices, personal experience, and narrative examples to pose dilemmas, enunciate differences and the struggle to authentically pray via the guiding motif of the ancient prayer of Christian tradition: Lord, have mercy.

She incorporates different ways of praying within the descriptions of stances like prophetic, the acknowledging of divisions within the community and the contemplative stance of communities like Taizé that call us to the prayer of our hearts.

I really enjoyed the call to acknowledge the honest tensions within our prayer and experience,



and the way Wolfteich was able to explore contemporary issues like abortion, in a way that suspended much bias and told of some of the reasons and underlying motives as to why people pray as they do.

I believe this is a very useful book as are others in the 'Practising our Faith' series to encourage anew Christian practices that energise the people of God.

Lord, Have Mercy would be particularly helpful for clergy who are ministering within the diversity and brokenness of community life, with all our divisions and struggles.

The title *Lord, Have Mercy* is one of the treasures of the living Christian tradition and to pray it authentically in the context of our lived experience is to find, as the book says, "A way of life that is in accordance with the purposes for which God has created us".

Reviewed by Lynette Dungan,
a minister with Glen Waverley
Uniting Church in Victoria

The First Christmas

By Marcus J Borg and John Dominic Crossan
HarperOne
RRP \$39.99

As the title suggests, *The First Christmas* is a study of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

The authors apply an historic-parabolic method, meaning that they are studying the birth stories in relation to their historical context and extracting meaning from that relationship.

The two birth stories are seen as overtures, gospels in miniature of the larger story that follows.

Jesus is the new Moses and hence the new law giver and deliverer. Jesus is also the new David, restoring the throne of Israel and extending to all the world.

Above all, though, many of the titles given to Jesus are political. Son of God, Saviour of the World and Prince of Peace were all titles given to Caesar Augustus.

Giving these names to Jesus is seen as a powerful political statement. Not only is Jesus truly these things, but the kingdom he is inaugurating is greater than the Roman Empire.

In the preface the authors insist that they are not judging for or against the historicity of the stories, rather they are interested in the meaning.

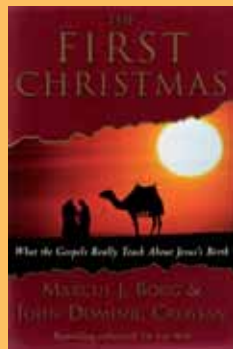
The First Christmas, however, makes it very clear that the authors reject most of the historicity in the birth stories, reading the stories as parables or metaphors only.

Right or wrong, the reader should know that the authors operate from their investments in the Jesus Seminar and its conclusions.

It is a study which applies a particular method and operates from a particular theological position.

The content is valuable and most people will learn a lot, but you needn't share all of the authors' conclusions.

Reviewed by Wayne McHugh, minister with the
Proserpine-Whitsunday Uniting Church Congregations



REVIEWS

Sacred Places: Sites of Spirituality and Faith

By Rebecca Hind
Five Mile Press
RRP \$49.95

You won't find dozens of traditional churches and cathedrals in this splendid coffee table book featuring hundreds of beautiful colour photographs and explanatory text.

Rather, *Sacred Places* is a collection of 60 of the world's most magnificent and awe-inspiring sites, some of which have associations with the world's religions and many which are simply the natural places that speak with power to the soul.

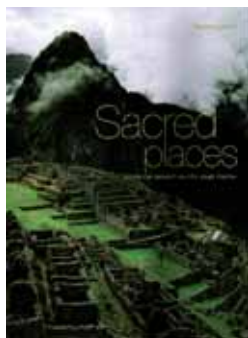
For Christian readers this collection of words and images is a window into the world of Shintoism, Buddhism, Islam, indigenous, prehistoric and other beliefs.

From the towering columns of Canterbury Cathedral where Thomas a Becket was murdered, to the splendour of Uluru sacred to the Anangu Aboriginal people, this book brings the reader back again and again to dream of visiting and experiencing for oneself the significance of each of the sites depicted.

Each of us has our own "sacred places" and Rebecca Hind's collection is wide ranging, stunningly beautiful and delightfully presented.

Sacred Places: Sites of Spirituality and Faith is a great starting place to reflect on those personal and cultural places in our world and in our own personal experience that transcend the ordinary and draw us into a sense of the divine.

Reviewed by Bruce Mullan,
editor of *Journey*



Christmas

By James Morrison
Morrison Records
RRP \$24.95

This 12 track CD presents a beautiful array of Christmas favourites.

Teaming up once again with talented vocalist Emma Pask, James Morrison and his band have captured the intricacies and simple beauty of the songs we hear done so badly so often.

Like Christmas music for grown-ups, *Christmas* seamlessly combines styles from jazz, samba and swing with traditional Christmas carols.

Mr Morrison and company have stripped back some of the carols to beautiful, peaceful works.

'The First Noel' is a standout due to its simplicity. 'We Three Kings' is an excellent example of this too, but adds a hint of cool jazz.

The joyous sounds of 'Mary's Boy Child' will certainly get you in to the swing of the festive season, as will 'Joy to the World'.

These carols are intimate and fun at the same time and will be sure to add a sense of sophistication and beauty to the Christmas season.

Reviewed by Mardi Lumsden,
associate editor of *Journey*

Optimism for Troubled Times: a Reason for Confidence

By Rev Dr Bill Adams
Self published
RRP \$9, or \$10 including postage

This thought-provoking 88 page book is a gem for us all!

A bible study on a modern issue, it is presented in two parts: 'Optimism from the Words of Jesus' and 'Going Deeper-Studies with St Paul'.

However there are also many references to Old Testament passages.

Each chapter ends with six reflective questions making this a significant resource for individual or group study.

Using the Beatitudes to show Jesus' teaching on this subject, in Part 1 Dr Adams has outlined a positive way to approach life, in fact to choose optimism.

The Scriptures point us to the fact that even when we go through troubled times there is "a long term predictability about the way this world works".

Through the book he weaves anecdotes of his personal journey and stories of our time which ground his thoughts to touch our own lives.

He quotes an anonymous person as saying you can't choose your circumstances but you can always choose what your response to the circumstances will be.

In Part 2 the struggles of Paul and his approach to them is explored.

This resource brings Paul's struggles and attitude right to the twenty-first century.

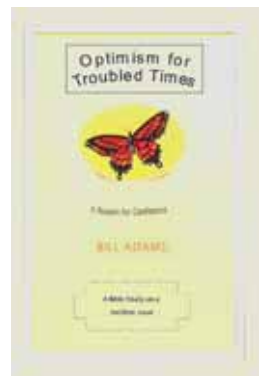
Paul had difficult relationships with many in the church, but continually made strong statements of optimistic discipleship. Surely this is a wake-up call for us.

Above all Dr Adams encourages us to look through the lens of faith at ourselves and be comfortable, to know who we are because of Jesus. This gives us optimism for troubled times.

I would like to see the book published using a different font as I found it difficult to read because of uneven spaces. However this is a booklet for us all!

To order contact Bill Adams, 15 Coolaroo Cres, Jindalee, Qld, 4074, or email bpadams@optusnet.com.au.

Reviewed by Barbara Bailey,
a retired minister in Caloundra



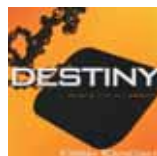
More reviews available at www.journeyonline.com.au including:

Destiny: What's Life all About?

By Krish Kandiah

Both new Christians and those who are thinking about Christianity will find the style appealing.

Suzanne Driver



A Farmer's Year: Daily Truth to Change Your Life

By Angus Buchan

From the moment I read the first entry... I was hooked.

Mavis Gillespie



Park Church Tongan Congregation is in Highgate Hill in South Brisbane and was established in 1976 by Tongan families residing in Brisbane.

They were joined by rugby union players who had come from Tonga to play football with local teams.

In the early years ministers from the Free Wesleyan Church [Methodist] of Tonga who were training at the Alcorn Methodist College acted as caretaker ministers of this new congregation.

On 20 February 1983 our congregation was recognised as a congregation of the Southside Inner-city Parish of the UCA Queensland Synod.

Our congregation continues to nurture many aspects of Tongan culture whilst worshipping in the context of the Uniting Church.

Our current minister is Rev Lulu 'O-Ha'angana Senituli.

Please pray for our Youth Ministry and the development of our Sunday School and youth programs; also for our Youth, Adult and Women's Bible Study groups.

We ask for your prayers for our Core Ministry Teams that look after pastoral care, discipleship, worship, evangelism and stewardship.

Park Church has given full support to Prison Ministry and will provide worship teams and a prison support prayer team from within our congregation.

We value your prayers for this aspect of our ministry.

Our church has hosted, and will continue to do so in the New Year, a number of key learning events and training programs co-facilitated with the Moreton Rivers Presbytery.

Please pray for our training programs and the development of lay leaders, elders and our youth ministry team.

We also ask for your prayers for our special events in December and the New Year: Community Christmas Carols Night on Saturday 8 December; our Watch Night Service on 31 December when we will farewell the old year and welcome the New Year; and following Tongan tradition our congregation will gather for prayer every evening during the first week of the new year.

PRAYER DIARY

We will officially launch our own website in December.

We wish you all a very Happy Christmas – Kilisimasi Fiefia, and a Blessed New Year – Ta'u Fo'ou Monu'ia.

9 December: Ipswich City

Ipswich City Congregation is going through a major transition.

2007 has been a difficult year for some with the move to wind up Wesley Mission Ipswich as a management structure.

The congregation's direct responsibility for the work of Blue Care and Life Line in Ipswich ceased in November and they now come under the direct management of UnitingCare.

They will, of course, continue to serve the community of Ipswich.

Corporate governance and compliance with government regulations can now be better managed; but for the congregation it is a major rift after about 50 years of close association.

This transition was celebrated in the morning service on 25 November.

The service gave thanks for the work of Wesley Mission and was an act of commitment to our future in God's name.

The congregation now has the exciting but difficult task of discerning God's call into the future as an inner city congregation in a rapidly changing urban setting.

2008 is also the year of two significant anniversaries.

It was 160 years since the commencement of Methodist worship in Ipswich and 150 years since the opening of the church building, which is the oldest place of continuous Christian worship in Queensland.

Please pray for:

- The congregation in making the transition and the staff of Wesley Mission as they adjust to the changes.
- The congregation seeking to discern God's call into the future
- The celebrations of the significant milestones in the life of the church
- Those receiving the support of Blue Care and Life Line in Ipswich.

16 December: Geebung and Wavell Heights

Geebung and Wavell Heights Uniting Church Joint Congregations are two lively and friendly fellowships on the north side of Brisbane.

Our Minister is Rev Wendi Sargeant, who is ably supported administratively by Anne McCallum.

Our vision is, "With God's help, we want to be people who are inviting in the way we live, love the way we serve, our openness and inclusion of all; welcoming in the way we help people feel at home; and praying always seeking God's guidance".

Our focus group is over-fifties and to this end we are developing outreach options for a range of people in this age-group.

'Friends' is a warm and interesting group that meets on a monthly basis with guest speakers and activities with everyone invited.

'Basement' is a fun group for people with disabilities.

Comedy nights, elegant afternoon teas, fashion parades and orchestral music programs are features of our busy year and help to contribute funds to the school chaplaincies we support.

We are currently undertaking a Renovaré Spirituality Course which looks at five different streams of spiritual development within the life of the church.

Wavell Heights is celebrating fifty years of worship in our building this year.

A number of activities celebrating this event have taken place, including the placement of a Peace Pole.

Christmas Lights will continue again this year, with carols, Christingle Children's Service and storytelling.

We are grateful for God's love, past, present and future!

Please pray for:

- The outreach to the mature members of our community
- Growth in our sense of God's call for us as a church
- Openness to change and continue to grow in the knowledge and grace of God.



A helicopter arriving at Hann River. Photo courtesy of Michelle Cook

Cheree drops in on playgroup

NOT MANY people go by helicopter to playgroup, but that's how Cheree Callaghan from Fairlight Station does it.

She travelled by chopper to attend the Frontier Services Remote Area Family Service (RAFS) playgroup at Hann River Roadhouse.

RAFS is just one of the ways Frontier Services supports people in remote areas.

Uniting Church Frontier Services minister Rev Michelle Cook cares for people living in Cape York.

"It is a real privilege to sit and chat with people all around the Cape," said Ms Cook.

"I also help them celebrate weddings, funerals and baptisms."

Vale Rev Ian Graham

PROUD SCOTSMAN, humorist and man of God Rev Ian Graham started going to the local Presbyterian Church out of curiosity.

He trained over six years in the NSW Presbyterian Home Mission course serving in Wollongong, Gosford, Harbord and Como-Jannelli before ordination in December 1966 at the age of 32.

Rev Ian Graham became a Military Chaplain and was commissioned into the Australian Army in 1967 serving at Wacol and Enoggera before a tour in Vietnam 1968 and 1969.

Mr Graham continued his Army postings in Enoggera, Townsville, Puckapunyal and Yeronga at the First Military Hospital.

He was discharged from the Army on medical grounds at the rank of Major in 1983 and continued to serve the Church in his appointment to the Fassifern Uniting Church Parish until 1988.

After his retirement Mr Graham suffered poor health and was gradually slowed with the progression of his Parkinson's Disease. He died peacefully on 3 October, 2007.

Rev Ian Graham was a devoted husband of Jean and father of Morag and James.



Photo courtesy of the Graham family

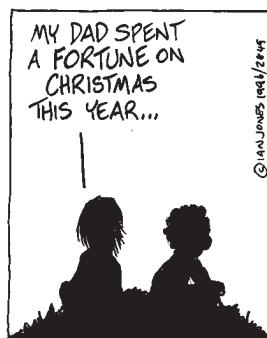
'Burbs help the bush

PINE MOUNTAIN Uniting Church congregation put their 40 Days of Community into practice when Aussie Helpers received a cheque for \$3000, the proceeds from their annual garage sale.

Aussie Helpers was formed to help fight poverty and lift the spirits of those severely affected by drought in the outback.

Pine Mountain Uniting Church Office Administrator Heather Condon said, "When this cheque is spent... not only will the farmers benefit from the goods purchased, so will the local businesses that are also suffering from the effects of the drought."

Aussie Helpers Volunteer Sonya Lawty and Rev Bob Miles



LETTERS

OKs and Comrades

A wonderful gathering of the youth of yesteryear was enjoyed by all at the Reunion of past Order of Knights and the Methodist Girls Comradeship and Rays, on the weekend of 13-14 October at Bundaberg Uniting Church.

As a former member of Rays and Comrades I did not know what to expect, but I was not disappointed.

This reunion was not just a nostalgic journey into the past but rather an opportunity to find people we once knew and also to re-experience the power of the fellowship of these former organisations - to be reminded of, and to re-affirm, the Christian ideals we promised to keep so many decades ago - ideals which are still relevant in today's changing society.

During our meetings, the Church and the hall resounded with the strong confident enthusiastic singing of well-loved stirring hymns and songs.

The weekend was well organised and many, many thanks go to the organiser Don Hutton and the organising committee, Rev Ray Nutley and the Ministry team at Bundaberg, the willing volunteer helpers from Bundaberg for our most enjoyable meals, and the wonderful congregation at Bundaberg Uniting Church, who endured this friendly invasion.

I came away awed and inspired by God's influence through the OKs and Comrades, and by the extent that many lives have been touched and challenged throughout the decades to this present time.

I look forward to the next reunion.

Cecil Nielson
Caboolture

Spong again

It is with sadness that I must disagree profoundly with Noel Preston's assessment of Bishop Spong as having "the positive impact on behalf of Christian faith" (November *Journey*).

While Spong was Bishop of

Newark, the Episcopalians voted with their feet. Membership dropped by more than 40%. That redefines "positive impact".

Spong throws out core Christian beliefs such as the atonement, calling it an "offensive idea".

He denies the bodily resurrection of Christ, yet still wants to say: "I am a Christian. I believe that God is real. I call Jesus my Lord. Yet I do not define God as a supernatural being" (*A New Christianity for a New World*).

Luke T. Johnson, a scholar of New Testament and Christian origins, states that "having a bishop [Spong] with opinions like these is a bit like hiring a plumber who wants to 'rethink pipes'".

Spong imagines that he has escaped his own fundamentalist past, but he has not.

To call his ministry 'prophetic' is an abuse of the word.

Spong's Jesus is no more than regurgitated 19th century liberalism.

"Didn't it happen to Jesus of Nazareth?" Rev Preston asks.

Yes it did, but not for an anaemic Christ stripped of his essence by bishops like Spong.

Spongian 'Christianity' is deadly to church life.

Spencer Gear
Hervey Bay

I cannot help but be deeply impressed with Spong's courage and scholarship.

It saddens me deeply that Leo Newell (November *Journey*) thinks our editor is asleep and calls Bishop Spong a "wolf in sheep's clothing".

When people start name calling we should shudder because it is strongly condemned in scripture and is almost always done in ignorance.

John Spong is a top scholar.

Do you understand the term 'Enlightenment' and what is meant by it in our church history?

I hope you are game enough to do some research and to bring some facts to light.

Len Notenboom
Elanora

A prayer

Lord of space and time, we pray for the continuing contribution of Uniting Church Safaris to the life and work of our church, especially in the remote areas of Australia.

We thank you for past journeys of safe travel over the vast expanses of our island continent.

We thank you for relationships established and good friendships made.

Bless upcoming Safaris especially the Tour to the Top Safari in 2008. May all be enriched.

Guide the Committee in its decision-making - which work to contribute to - in order that we may, in all things, do your will

These things we ask in the name of him who trod many dusty roads - our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Bob Heathwood
Chaplain Uniting Church Safaris



Andrew Williams displays his artwork for the 2008 UCIS calendar.
Photo courtesy of Shalom College



Judy Kerr and Chris Lloyd display rugs made by the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship for the 'Let the Son Shine Through' project. Some 1700 rugs have been collected nationally and will now assist people in places as far away as Zambia, Russia and Mongolia. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Art students share dreams

SHALOM CHRISTIAN College is known for nurturing and developing indigenous culture, and students recently had the opportunity to offer art as an expression of culture.

The Uniting Church Investment Service invited Shalom Christian College to participate in its 2008 Calendar Art Competition.

Students submitted original artworks for the nationally distributed calendar based on the theme 'Hopes and Dreams'.

Shalom Christian College Art Teacher Ms Tegan Nuttall said the art competition provided students with a fantastic opportunity to explore their creativity and produce some amazing artworks.

"The competition encouraged the students to think about their future hopes and dreams and allowed them to express their thoughts through art, providing a glimpse into their lives outside of school," Ms Nuttall said.

"The calendar has recognised some amazing young talent and it's wonderful for the students to see their artwork published and distributed throughout Australia."

Selected students received prize money for their winning entries and in addition, UCIS donated \$650 to the work of Frontier Services with outback and rural communities.



Have your say

Letters to the editor may be edited due to space limitations.

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JOURNEY asks...

Christmas is usually portrayed as a happy family time but for those who have lost loved ones, particularly in the year leading up to the celebrations, it can be a difficult time. This month Journey asked three readers, "How did your faith sustain you in the Christmas after your loss?"

Elaine Shaw

Christmas 2006 would be a difficult time – a space at the table on Christmas Day. I was on my own now, my husband, the love of my life, my closest friend, would not be with us this Christmas – it was real!

I began to realise how hard it would be not having him here with us all on Christmas Day... all the other days since his death were hard enough, but Christmas was a special time for all the family – we would all miss him.

Sending the Christmas cards was especially hard, as there were some of our friends whom we only contacted at Christmas.

How would I put it? What would I write this year in my usual Christmas greetings when only my name would be the one at the bottom of the page?

I was coping okay in the months prior to Christmas, but then I realised how hard it would be celebrating without him.

Brian's words to me just prior to his death were "enjoy yourself" – did he think that it would be that easy, after spending 45 years of my life with him, doing so many things together?

"Do the things you would like to do, travel

and don't stop doing the things you enjoy just because I am gone."

All too soon it became a reality and, as Christmas was approaching, I had to make plans.

I decided to travel to Western Australia

to my family there: that would help me through. I was welcomed with open arms, and Christmas was nice, but not the same.

My faith in God comforted me. If I had not had my faith, I am sure I would not have coped so well.

Brian was my rock and through his love of God he taught me so many things during our life together.

At first I was very cross with God for taking him from me, it wasn't fair, we had such plans.

I questioned God as to why. He was a good and faithful servant; he didn't deserve to die so young. But I knew God had a plan for him, as he does for us all.

Christmas is a time of joy, love and celebration, and we made the best of it but don't get me wrong it wasn't easy; it was very, very hard, and still is.

I still miss him every day and I don't think this Christmas will be any different from the first. It will be just as hard, but maybe this year there won't be cards arriving addressed to us both as there were last year. It may be easier.

I will cope again because I have my faith, and my loving family which helps me to face the future without the man I had loved for so long, by my side.

Elaine Shaw is a member of the Emerald Congregation in Central Queensland. Her husband Brian died in April 2006.



Duncan Macleod

In September 1992 the youngest of our three children, eighteen month old daughter Kristen, died on the road outside our manse, hit by a car.

I was in my first year as a minister, serving in the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand in Tokoroa, a town of 16 000 people connected with the dairy, logging, pulp and paper industries.

A month later, the twenty one year old daughter of the church secretary was killed in a horrific car accident.

As you can imagine we were struggling to deal with multiple layers of grief, as a family, as a

congregation, and as a community.

Coming into Christmas I remember the struggle of being responsible for communicating the love, joy and hope of the season.

As I preached through the nativity stories I was attuned to the down-to-earth struggle of a young couple as they grappled with an unplanned pregnancy and an arduous journey away from home.

I took comfort in God's engagement in our suffering through becoming one of us, in the flesh.

Lloma, the church secretary who shared our journey of grief, was inspired to reach out to others who were feeling lost and alone over Christmas.

Together our families gathered a team to host a Christmas Day dinner for people who were away from their families.

The community responded magnificently.

Farmers, butchers, and bakers donated food for the meal. The local newspaper featured our plans on the front page and challenged readers to invite their neighbours to their Christmas meals.

Celebrating Christmas without Kristen was painful.

It wasn't the memories of past Christmas that we grieved for – it was the lost opportunities of the future.

But as we connected with our community we discovered others with similar experiences.

Together we made God's connection of fragility and joy.

Duncan Macleod is Vision for Mission Advocate for the Uniting Church Queensland Synod.



Andrew Gillies

Christmas has always been a wonderful time of celebration for me. Christmas 2004 was no exception.

This is strange because Christmas Day 2004 was seven months to the day from when my Dad died.

I won't lie, the day was tinged with sadness. For the first time in my 36 years I was not spending part of the Christmas season with my Dad.

Fortunately, I was not alone that Christmas, because Mum came up to visit me for the holiday and we were able to lean on each other for support.

Mum being there was great, but I'm pretty sure the reason Christmas 2004 was still a celebration was because of my faith in Christ.

For me, the most powerful image or idea of Christmas is that Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us, God as one of us.

It's the idea that God really shares and experiences what it means to be a human being.

When God became human in the baby Jesus it meant that he was going to experience all the joy, the

glory, the suffering and the shame that human beings go through.

That includes death and grief and loss.

When dad died after a life time of chronic illness, I'm sure that Jesus travelled with him through that dark valley of the shadow of death to the celebration beyond.

When Mum, my brothers and I wept as we farewelled Dad outside the church, I'm sure Jesus wept with us.

When Dad preached a sermon, stood up for what was right, made the semi-finals of Mastermind, or won the national debating championship, I'm sure Jesus was with him then too, sharing his passion.

On Christmas Day 2004 not only was Mum with me to lean on but so was God in Jesus.

For me that's what Christmas means, God shares all of life with us, from the cradle to the grave and beyond.

Andrew Gillies is minister with the Claremont and Capella congregations in Central Queensland.



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