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# What is the Gospel?



There is a 2000 year old truth that is both life changing and earth-shattering and we sum it up by calling it "the Gospel". At the start of 2008 *Journey* explores what "Gospel" means and how we might begin to understand it.

By Bruce Mullan

AMONG CHRISTIANS and others there is a good deal of confusion over the exact definition of the term "the Gospel".

Although a central concept in Christian thinking and study, "Gospel" has a variety of meanings, and interpretations are as broad as the spread of Christian theology and doctrine.

The Gospel is God's historic action in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through which God reconciles people to God's self.

But this is not exhaustive, as the term is also used to describe both the biblical and non biblical account of that life, the theological understandings behind it, and much more.

The New Testament does not have a single all-encompassing theology, so it is hardly surprising that different theological conclusions have been reached and diverse doctrines have been drawn from it.

Nothing has shaped the history of the world as greatly as the life of Jesus Christ, but the main source we have for knowing about that life is a set of documents that are more theological than historical in intent.

This issue of *Journey* may only scratch the surface but we had better get to know what the Gospel is, because it is what we must believe in order to be saved.



## More about the Gospel

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# The irresistible Jesus

MY FIRST conscious memory of Jesus being an important part of my life comes from age seven.

The image relating to that memory is still vivid.

My father and I, as we regularly did on a Sunday afternoon, were visiting my grandmother and aunty.

My aunty and I were at the piano singing:

*Jesus loves me, this I know,  
for the Bible tells me so.  
Little ones to him belong,  
they are weak, but he is strong.*

I knew at that moment that Jesus loved ME!

More than that, in my seven-year-old heart I knew that I loved him.

It was a theophany.

I was just a boy, but Jesus was calling me into a relationship that has shaped my life and determined its direction ever since.

Quite soon after that, as I recall, my first real introduction to the Gospels came in the form of a Christmas present.

It was a substantial rendering of the life of Jesus in comic-book form, an effective way of introducing young readers to stories of Jesus.

I was already an avid reader by that time and the drawings were an added attraction. I read the book from cover to cover on numerous occasions.

There is no doubt that in my own childlike way I was immensely attracted to the Jesus who came to life for me through those stories.

Over the years I have come to describe that attraction as irresistible.

There is an amazing scene in the movie *Amistad* in which a Negro slave, who cannot read or write, recounts the story of Jesus to a companion entirely on the basis of the pictures in a copy of the Bible that has been given to him.

That is part of the power of the Gospels.



Down through the centuries that is why there have been those, like Mahatma Gandhi for instance, who have greatly admired Jesus even though they found many aspects of the Christian religion as practised by his followers to be abhorrent!

I believe we are most at risk, in regard to both faith and conduct, when we lose touch with the message and spirit of Jesus as the Gospels reveal that to us.

That is why I often turn to the Gospel of John and read chapters

**“We are most at risk when we lose touch with the message and spirit of Jesus as the Gospels reveal that to us.”**

13-17 as a whole, just the way I think John intended.

This is because the prayer of Jesus in chapter 17 is the culmination of all that is contained in chapters 13-16: the washing of the disciples' feet, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the teaching about the Good Shepherd and the sheep, and the vine and branches, and the exhortation to love one another.

All of these themes are gathered up in this prayer of Jesus for his

disciples, and the essence of his prayer is that everything he has taught them will take root in their hearts and minds and be expressed in and through their life together.

In John's account, this is the last intimate moment that Jesus and his disciples spend together before he goes out to face his arrest, trial and crucifixion.

We all need to take to heart the enormous significance of what Jesus says and does in those final hours of his earthly life.

Here we have a vision of the unity of the people of God, a people who truly have become one in the Body of Christ.

There is no clearer or more compelling insight anywhere into the nature and purpose of our relationship with God in Christ and our relationships with one another, both personally and in Christian community.

The Gospels tell of a God whose love can be experienced.

They promise a transformation of the relationships between human beings who accept Jesus.

God, living now in our midst, communicates with us through the love relationships that develop.

The Christian community's acceptance, forgiveness, and commitment to one another, gives God's love living and visible expression.

What could be better than that!

## From the Editor

Much of this issue of *Journey* is devoted to examining the Gospels and what Jesus said, and might not have said.

All good and interesting stuff, but I kind of like the little craze that spread around the world last decade called "What Would Jesus Do" (WWJD).

Of course there is a very tacky side to it all with not just WWJD wrist bands but also fridge magnets, key rings, bumper stickers, Bible covers, numberplate frames, lapel pins and even pewter dog tags.

You can check it all out at your local Christian bookstore or on eBay and it all smacks a bit of me-and-Jesus-style market-place evangelicalism, but there is something attractive about a focus on Jesus as a person of "action" as well as a person of "words".

Maybe the question would be better phrased, "What would Jesus want me to do?" but WWJD does help us zero in on the concept of imitating Christ.

It was in 1989 that youth pastor Dan Seaborn from Michigan in the USA was searching for a motivating and bonding name for his Wesleyan Church youth group and chose WWJD.

He had read the 1896 classic Christian novel *In His Steps* by Charles M. Sheldon, where a homeless man interrupts a service of worship led by the Rev Henry Maxwell and challenges him to take seriously the imitation of Christ.

The man expressed difficulty understanding why so many Christians who enthusiastically sing hymns about Jesus ignore the poor.

"I kept wondering as I sat on the steps outside just what they meant by it. It seems to me there's an awful lot of trouble in the world that somehow wouldn't exist if all the people who sing such songs went and lived them out," the man said.

"It seems to me sometimes as if the people in the big churches had good clothes and nice houses to live in, and money to spend for luxuries, and could go away on summer vacations and all that, while the people outside the churches, thousands of them, I mean, die in tenements, and walk the streets for jobs, and never have a piano or a picture in the house, and grow up in misery and drunkenness and sin.

"I suppose I don't understand. But what would Jesus do?"

It's a good question.

Bruce Mullan

## Sign of the Times



NEWLIFE ROBINA Uniting Church congregation has installed the latest in high tech signage in front of their church property.

Situated on one of the main Gold Coast thoroughfares the message on the sign changes regularly.

Newlife Robina Business Manager Barry Jeffriess said the sign is capable of displaying hundreds of different messages.

"We only use a few messages at a time so as not to distract motorists.

"Currently we have been advertising our church services, the op shop and Crossroads," Mr Jeffriess said

The messages on the sign can be changed from the church office.

Email your Sign of the Times photos to [journey@ucaqld.com.au](mailto:journey@ucaqld.com.au)

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# More than madness - it's growing faith

By Bruce Mullan

THERE HAS been nothing like it since the 1980s as 300 young people and leaders from 30 youth groups across Queensland came together at Alexandra Headland for a weekend of Summer Madness.

Billed primarily as a spiritual growth opportunity with great teaching, discipleship development and worship, Summer Madness was a cooperative venture between Queensland Uniting Church Youth Workers and lay leaders with the support of the Synod Youth and Children's Ministry Unit (YACMU).

YACMU Director Michael Jeffrey said he believed the event would be a kick start for congregations' youth ministries for the year.

"We believe it was a blessing to the young people participating in the camp and that they grew in their faith and developed in their faith practices over the weekend," he said.

Redcliffe Uniting Church Minister Rev Peter Armstrong said Summer Madness reminded him of the great camping days of old, and described it as a fantastic weekend with a good variety of speakers who stepped up to the mark in terms of connecting with young people, creativity and realness.

"It was the best event I've been to in the Uniting Church that focused on growing disciples," Mr Armstrong said.

"Everything pointed to following Jesus in the world, doing it together and sharing Jesus with others."

Young people who attended echoed the sentiment describing the weekend in glowing terms.

Daniel Green (14) from Edmonton Uniting Church in Cairns said Summer Madness had

affected his relationship with God "immensely".

"I feel closer to God than ever before, and know that I am never alone and God is with me 24/7," Daniel said.

Jessica Swindon (16) from Indooroopilly Uniting Church said, "Summer Madness has really given me an open mind to understand that there are different ways to have a relationship with God."

Emily Crabtree (14) also from Indooroopilly said, "Summer Madness has helped my faith grow because I believe it has exposed me to what God is really all about, through having friendships with others that believe in the same things I do and the small group discussions gave ideas of how to have a healthy relationship with God."

Marda Pitt (16) from Old Mapoon Uniting Church said Summer Madness had strengthened her relationship with God and she had been blessed to be there.

"The small group discussions helped me to be more open with sharing my faith with strangers which is something I wasn't able to do."

Sean Patton (15) from Indooroopilly found Summer Madness an inspiration for the practical outworking of his faith.

"I hope that my faith will grow more, because my new aspiration for the future is doing charity and, to me, that is spreading the word," Sean said.

Youth Ministry Worker Alison Cox challenged the young people to respond to what God was saying to their lives.

Ms Cox asked young people if they wanted to follow Jesus, be part of what God is doing in the church and to love and serve the world, to stand up. Seventy percent did.



Sam Nad (17) from Aspley Uniting supporting Kyle Tokic (13) from Sandgate at Summer Madness.  
Photo by Andrew Johnson

Mr Armstrong said for him it was a great experience of hope and vision for what God is doing in the Uniting Church in Queensland.

"Meeting some of these young people who are so passionate and real about their faith really surprised me."

## North Queensland is blown away

By Bruce Mullan

NORTH QUEENSLAND Presbytery Minister Rev Bruce Cornish said his presbytery has been overwhelmed by the generosity of Uniting Church congregations in response to the Thursday Island Manse Appeal.

"We are a bit used to being wind blown in the North with cyclones and low pressure systems, but this time we have been blown away by the generosity of the people of God throughout Queensland."

Mr Cornish said it had been a long wait for Rev Lawes Waia and the congregation on Thursday Island as the Presbytery had first begun the process of looking to renovate almost three years ago.

The Thursday Island Manse Appeal has reached its target of \$50,000 less than two months after the official launch in December

and Mr Cornish said it was quite remarkable as the presbytery was aware that Christmas was not the best time of the year to launch an appeal.

"Your generosity reflects the generosity of God who sent Jesus to be our Saviour."

"We are so grateful. This means that the manse at the top of Queensland will be able to be renovated to be comparable with manses in the rest of Queensland."

"It also means that there are some funds for ongoing maintenance," he said.

Mr Cornish said the builder and his four man crew will be on site on Thursday Island on 26th February to commence the basic renovation work.

"We have also been blown away by the willingness of people to volunteer to come and give a hand."

Work parties are still being finalised and will be particularly focusing on the painting work.



North Queensland Presbytery Minister Rev Bruce Cornish.  
Photo by Osler Lau

## 40 days of change

THIS YEAR'S Lent Event is inviting Uniting Church members to make a small stand against the injustice of world poverty for more than 800 million people in our world who do not have enough food to sustain a healthy life.

Lent Event coordinator Sarah White is challenging people to forgo a luxury item or two and donate the money saved.

"The beauty of it is that we do not need to spend an extra dollar," Ms White said.

"Lent Event is about changing the world by changing the way we live in the world, for example, forgoing Friday night takeaway or giving up that pick-me-up coffee."

"The beauty of Lent Event is that our small sacrifices remind us every day of the difficulties faced by some of our brothers and sisters in impoverished communities."

Ms White is asking Queensland Uniting Church members what they could give up for 40 days.

[www.lentevent.com](http://www.lentevent.com)



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# Discovering Jesus at camp

By Bruce Mullan

"THE BIGGEST and best activity at camp was canoeing," said Michael Pitcher (12) of Wellers Hill Uniting Church after his week at the annual Discoveries Camp in January.

Over 100 campers, leaders and helpers participated in the week long camp, which is an activity of the South Moreton Presbytery, at Lake Perseverance Recreation Centre at Crows Nest.

One of the Discoveries Camp Directors Jonathan Andress said a big part of the program is the Leadership training aspect which runs simultaneously with the main camp.

"The trainees, who are all in Grade 10 and usually past campers, participate in leadership training course work, observe the leaders running activities and have the opportunity to lead parts of the program towards the end of the week," Mr Andress said.

Denika Moes of Maryborough said, "I really enjoyed coming back to camp as a trainee leader and learning different ways to look after kids and have fun doing it."

"Some of it was really hard

work; learning the theory and then putting it into action with kids.

"I learned to have more faith in God particularly when learning to lead others. I had to trust God more," she said.

Erin Park (9) from Broadwater Road Uniting Church said her favourite camp activities were the Messy Games on Sunday night.

"I also enjoyed making a movie using Lego people. There was also a bushdance and a campfire," she said.

Keiran Shelden from Coopers Plains was a Discoveries Camp leader.

"The most positive thing I heard was from one kid. Even though they don't go to church, they really enjoyed camp, and felt they understood God a little better.

"Working with the kids also helped me think through some of the faith questions that I had and strengthened my relationship with God."

Mr Andress, who first joined the team as a leader in 2002, said Discoveries Camp had been operating since 1991.

"The children of the original directors are now attending as campers."



Charlotte Bye (12) from Bayside Uniting Church and Nicole Thomas (13) from Newlife Robina Uniting Church enjoying some time out at Discoveries Camp. Photo by Geoff Chamberlan

## Hope from under the church

THERE IS a new congregation under the St Paul's Uniting Church in Macalister Street Mackay.

They were described by the local *Daily Mercury* newspaper as, "Paint-sniffing youths who terrorise nearby residents and then return to a life of squalor beneath the church."

Minister Rev Jan Whyte said no-one actually lives beneath the church but some young people go there when the place is empty to do their chroming because it's a dark quiet space.

"Homeless people in Mackay are a community problem, not just a St Paul's problem," she said.

"A growing group of congregation members are working with them to try and find alternative accommodation, develop literacy and grow some hope."

On Saturdays the congregation hosts a BBQ lunch and a time of informal outdoor worship for homeless people in Mackay.

There was also an enthusiastic reception for a recent screening of the *Choir of Hard Knocks* video.

Church members have provided one person with a typewriter and assistance to write her family's history.

Ms Whyte said the church only wanted to move at the rate the people wanted to move.

By Bruce Mullan

## Lifting outback spirits

WHILE DROUGHT still ravages rural Queensland, Burke and Wills Patrol Minister John Case has found a way to soothe the souls of some of the families who reside in his 300,000 square kilometre parish.

Late last year, Mr Case organised a series of classical and jazz concerts held on properties in Quilpie and beyond.

Assisted by a Uniting Church Foundation grant, the Queensland Synod and the congregation of St Andrew's Uniting Church in Brisbane, Mr Case organised music group Viva La Musica to perform.

The concerts were a raging success with the audiences and musicians themselves.

Melanie Doheny played at the Bunginderry concert and said she went home richer for the experience.

"We all know it's dry, but when you see the real drought in outback Queensland, it's something that we in the city will never grasp," she said.



Burke and Wills Patrol Minister John Case with members of Viva La Musica. Photo courtesy of Frontier Services

"Travelling beyond Quilpie and meeting these people was inspirational, an experience that I will remember for the rest of my life."

Sophie Smith said from her station south of Quilpie that the concerts also had an outback feel to them.

"The band was absolutely superb and will no doubt have a few tales to tell of their 'gig' out West, playing on a floodlit tennis court with a dust-storm threatening and the wind howling in the mikes," she said.

"The solo performance by Mareeka the camel kicking up his heels in time to the music added to the outback character of the night and had us all roaring with laughter."

Mr Case said although technology has decreased isolation in the outback, loneliness is still prevalent.

"Loneliness is greater than ever," he said.

"I think that's why this concert idea took on a life of its own.

"The drought was my excuse to get people together to have a good

time. I could never have anticipated the outcome.

"One older bloke approached me and said with his eyes shining, 'I thought you'd just have half a dozen students here. I'll never forget tonight'."

At the same time Robin Case, John's wife, was organising events of her own in Greenvale, Quilpie and Clermont called the Big Days Out.

The project aimed to offer families with young children an enjoyable, free day out in a nearby rural centre and featured health and allied health professionals, a massage therapist, craft, children's activities and musical entertainment.

"The days were designed to give rural clients of our Remote Area Families Service something extra," said Ms Case.

"It was a chance for the whole family to participate. A day like this lifts their spirits and offers something apart from the ordinary."

For more information on Frontier Services visit [www.frontierservices.org](http://www.frontierservices.org)

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# Meet new Synod staff



Rev Douglas Jones

THE OCTOBER meeting of the Synod appointed Rev Douglas Jones as General Secretary of the Synod. The General Secretary provides strategic leadership for the Uniting Church in Queensland and has a management responsibility for the Synod Support Staff.

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

"That document's emphases include: the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ, readiness to go forward in sole loyalty to Christ, unity, and a loving and joyful acknowledgement of one another as believers in a common Lord.

"Living into and out of that vision focuses and energises the church's life and activities.

"My hope for the position of General Secretary is 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."

Mr Jones has served as Minister of the Word in the Tablelands Parish (North Queensland), Director of the Department for Community Service (the precursor to UnitingCare) and most recently as Director of Old Testament Studies at Trinity Theological College.

prisons, hospitals, military, police and emergency services, education, tourism, sport and recreation.

Mr Cox sees the role bringing together his passion for Christ and his passion for serving through offering strategic leadership within the life of the church.

"I am enthusiastic about the exciting forefront ministry of Chaplaincy, as it continues to be an expression of Christ to the world," he said.

"The gospel of Jesus Christ is one which is expressed to us in word and action in Christ himself.

"Our expression of the Gospel is found in the way in which we love, and the way in which we give expression to that love through all that we do."

Mr Cox commenced in January having served as a Minister of the Word at Bald Hills / Bracken Ridge, Emmanuel and Ashgrove West Uniting Churches.



Rev Dr Robert Bos

THE COUNCIL of Synod has appointed Rev Dr Robert Bos to the new position of Director of the Pilgrim Learning Community which will conduct lay education, as well as continuing education for those in specified ministries.

Dr Bos is excited about the possibilities Pilgrim can offer the church.

"My first aim is to consult closely with all the Presbyteries across the Synod area, to help set the priorities for Pilgrim for the next few years," he said.

"We also want to identify church members with special expertise who might then be available to resource any Congregation or Presbytery where they are needed.

"I expect that before long we will see a range of learning opportunities available, from half day workshops to weekend intensives, to distance learning, to on-line learning – delivering growth opportunities for people right across the Synod area."

Dr Bos will take up his position in March having previously served as Principal of Nungalinga College (Darwin), Co-ordinator of Wontulp-Bi-Buya College, founding Director of the Yalga-binbi Institute, founding Principal of Coolamon College and most recently as National Consultant for Theology and Discipleship with the Uniting Church in Australia.



Rev Dr Geraldine Wheeler's portrayal of Jesus falling in the Stations of the Cross exhibition at St John's Cathedral. Photo courtesy of the artist

## Art features at the stations

By Mardi Lumsden

ARTWORK DEPICTING the Stations of the Cross will be displayed in a Lent and Holy Week exhibition at St John's Cathedral in Brisbane.

Fourteen artists from around Queensland were chosen to each depict one of the Stations of the Cross through their artwork.

Uniting Church artists whose work is included in the exhibition are Rev Dr Geraldine Wheeler, Cees Slidrecht, and Gwenda Branjerdporn.

Mr Slidrecht's work has become an Easter tradition at Albert Street Uniting, with the church hanging

his breathtaking works for the last four years.

Dr Wheeler, a retired Uniting Church minister, has taken a modern approach to the station 'Jesus falls' depicting the fallen figure of Jesus in the centre of one of Brisbane's busiest places, the Queen Street Mall.

"While I was doing the work I read of a man who was ill and had fallen down in the Mall, but whose needs were ignored by the passers-by," she said.

"It was reported that one man walked right over the fallen person and took a photo on his mobile phone as he did so."

Dr Wheeler said her stencil print points to the way that a community can ignore Jesus' suffering and in a parallel way can also treat their own members uncaringly.

All fourteen of the artworks depict the traditional stations or story of Jesus' way to the cross.

The exhibition will be open to the public daily from 5 February.

Some services at St John's Cathedral will use the works liturgically.

St John's Anglican Cathedral is at 373 Ann St, Brisbane City.

For more information visit <http://stjohnscathedral.com.au>



Rev John Cox

THE COUNCIL of Synod has appointed Rev John Cox as Synod Chaplaincy Coordinator, resourcing a team of well over 100 Uniting Church chaplains working across Queensland in areas of aged care,



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# What to expect - 2008 Religious Trends

By Bruce Mullan

*JOURNEY* LOOKS at what is likely to be happening to the church world wide and in Australia in 2008.

## Growth of the home church movement

This year will see continued growth in the world-wide movement towards home churches which, thanks to the Internet, is much better networked and resourced than previously.

While regional churches draw attenders from across a wide area, other Christians are wanting to meet together on a more personal level.

There are reportedly as many as 30,000 home churches in the United States and Director of OIKOS Australia Bessie Pereira says the momentum is increasing in Australia.

OIKOS is a networking ministry supporting and encouraging Australian home churches both within and independent of the traditional church and Ms Pereira said she receives enquiries about home churches every few days.

Home churches are usually led by laypeople, and members typically meet together in home settings for fellowship, worship and Christian education.

## Religious involvement in politics changing

The election of self-avowed Christian Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister has coincided with a renewed desire by Australian Christian leaders to engage with government over matters of public policy.

Meanwhile in the US Presidential election, the once right-leaning evangelical Christian political pressure groups have splintered.

Marvin Olasky, editor of the US evangelical magazine *World*, said there was a time when evangelical churches were largely and almost exclusively "the Republican Party at prayer", but now sees the opportunity to lock up that constituency as lost.

The influential *New York Times* spoke late last year of a new generation of evangelical pastors — including the widely emulated preachers Rick Warren and Bill Hybels — who are pushing the evangelical movement and its theology in new directions.

In 2008 Christian input into political decision-making will go well beyond



Pacific Parks Uniting Church congregation on the Gold Coast meets each week in a home and does not employ a ministry agent.  
Photo by Bruce Mullan

traditional concerns about personal sexual morality and bioethical issues, to include questions of climate change, immigration, global and domestic poverty, and human rights.

## Greater ecological concern

Responding to increasing concerns in the global community about climate change, more churches are now developing policies on environmental issues and seeking to operate in more ecologically sustainable ways.

The Uniting Church has been at the forefront of the "green church" movement and Scots Uniting Church in Adelaide was the first in Australia to appoint an eco-minister, Rev Dr Jason John, a former chaplain at the University of Queensland.

Member of the World Council of Churches Working Group on Climate Change Dr Jesse Mugambi said, "Faith communities are addressing climate change because it is a spiritual and ethical issue of justice, equity, solidarity, sufficiency and sustainability."

In 2008 even more churches and religious institutions will be going 'green' either by introducing energy-saving changes into existing church properties or developing eco-friendly contemporary church architecture

such as the new Wesley House development in Brisbane Central.

## More churches torn apart on sexuality

While the Uniting Church in Australia has been engaged in sometimes heated debate on the question of people in same sex relationships since the 1970s, arguments about gay and lesbian people exercising leadership in the church community are now taking place in many denominations.

The worldwide Anglican/Episcopal church is heavily conflicted as are both the USA Presbyterians and United Methodist denominations, while Catholic and more conservative traditions hold to the historical Christian belief which rejects all same sex behaviour regardless of the nature of the relationship.

In 2006 the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved a policy which opened the way for the ordination of homosexual people but gave local church organisations more freedom to determine whether homosexual people can be ordained as lay deacons, elders and clergy, provided they are faithful to the church's core values.

The Anglican debate has been boiling since August 2003 when the US Episcopal

Diocese of New Hampshire elected an openly gay priest, Gene Robinson, as bishop.

The Sydney Anglican Diocese led by Archbishop Peter Jensen strongly opposes same sex relationships but is regarded as overly conservative by many Anglicans in the West, while in 2008 Third World Anglicans, particularly in Africa, are threatening to split the church over the issues of homosexual marriage and ordination.

## Increased lay leadership

While those churches firmly committed to apostolic succession will hold strongly to ordained clergy as the basis for church leadership, 2008 will see even more lay leaders across many Australian churches.

Declining numbers of ministry candidates is a common factor in most mainline denominations and the Catholic Church in Australia has been "importing" priests from Vietnam and Africa to maintain liturgical leadership for its many congregations.

In the Uniting Church ministers are retiring in much higher numbers than the rate of new ordinations, and the average age of ordained ministers continues to rise.

As is the case in other churches, many Queensland Uniting Church congregations are now led by lay people and we can expect this to continue throughout 2008.



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Applications close 14 March 2008

## Atherton festival explores Good Samaritan Story

PARTICIPANTS IN Atherton's Xplore Arts Festival 2007 were encouraged to address the question 'Who is my neighbour?' through visual and performing arts.

Festival Coordinator Margaret Russell said entries ranged from traditional representations of the Good Samaritan story to confrontational contemporary collages and song.

Ms Russell said the Uniting Church and other churches in Atherton hosted the festival so people from all walks of life could respond to the message of the arts "from deep within and embrace an expression of faith in ways they may not as they just listen to a sermon from the pulpit".

"There are many people in our churches and community who have something of faith that they long to communicate with others that they can best do using an art form they feel at home with," she said.

In addition to exhibitions of work in the Anglican and Uniting Churches, artist and story teller Lynton Allan from Melbourne delighted audiences with his on-the-spot paintings and thought provoking messages.

Artist Bill Mackay from Noosa held daily workshops on various aspects of painting and musician Andrew Ironside from Sydney held workshops on leading worship with music, culminating in a concert on Saturday night.



Fibreart work "I Walk Not Alone" by Margaret Russell was one of the artworks on display



Uniting Church President Rev Gregor Henderson. Photo by Osker Lau

## President in India

THE PRESIDENT of the Uniting Church in Australia, Rev Gregor Henderson is currently visiting the Church of South India to participate in its biennial General Synod.

Mr Henderson said there is a long history of partnership between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Church of South India and he was honoured to be named chief guest of the Synod in Vishakapatnam, where he will preach at the opening service.

"It has been some 100 years since Australian Presbyterian missionaries first went to India and our relationship with those communities has been maintained ever since."

## Uniting Church welcomes end of Nauru detention

FOLLOWING THE Federal elections last year the National Assembly of the Uniting Church welcomed the Rudd Government's initiative to end the detention of asylum seekers on the island nation of Nauru.

National Director of UnitingJustice Australia Rev Elenic Poulos said the Uniting Church was fully supportive of dismantling the Pacific Solution, set up by the previous Federal Government.

"The Pacific Solution has placed us in breach of our international refugee obligations and adversely affected our reputation as a

country committed to upholding human rights.

"It has been a cruel policy and its detrimental effects on individual refugees, some of whom were detained for more than three years, have been well documented. This policy, which has cost millions of dollars, has seen refugees languishing on Nauru and Manus Islands for years with no access to proper services and appropriate representation, and no clear hope for future resettlement, as the Government played politics with their lives.

The Uniting Church has spoken out against the Pacific Solution since its inception.

YOUTH WORKERS, a doctor, some students and a school chaplain were just some of the Bayside Builders team who spent their holidays building a home and classroom for AIDS orphans in Uganda.

Coordinated by Bayside Uniting Church youth worker Tim Griggs, twenty-five people aged from 15 to mid-60s from nine churches made a two-week visit to Uganda to support Watoto Child Care Ministries.

Mr Griggs said the Bayside team came together as a result of visits by the Watoto Children's Choir, a choir of children from Watoto villages who tour the world singing African Christian songs, telling their stories of loss and hope, and encouraging support for the Watoto vision.

"After the choir sang at Moreton Bay College in 2004 and 2005, Jenny Busch, the college's secondary school chaplain, became passionate about the idea of providing a home for children who didn't have one, and how a relatively modest amount of money in Australian terms could make all the difference to children in Uganda, said Mr Griggs.

"A group of us got together and put forward a proposal for a building team, the school and the

church supported the idea, and it went from there."

People from as far afield as Caboolture, Enoggera, Sunnybank, the Bayside area, Capalaba, Kingaroy and Armidale signed up and, as building teams need to raise enough funds to pay for their building project, they committed themselves to 12 months of intensive fund-raising.

"We were blown away by the generous response to this," Mr Griggs said.

"In the end we raised around \$80,000 which enabled us to build a group home and a nursery school class room, and to leave funds to pay for the final work needed to complete the buildings."

Once in Uganda at the end of last year, the group split into two teams to work on both sites simultaneously at Bbira village.

The teams learned labouring and brick-laying skills from the Ugandan builders working with

them and played soccer and talked with village children in meal breaks.

This all provided rich experiences of cross-cultural interaction.

Work each day began with prayer and singing and on the final day the two buildings, completed to roof height, were dedicated by the Bayside team and the local builders.

Mr Griggs said the daily team meetings and final debriefing indicated that participants found the overall experience to be confronting, challenging, inspiring and highly rewarding.

"In Kampala we came face to

face with the desperate need of so many people and yet we saw great hope and energy and a commitment to community," he said.

"It challenged our values, our assumptions and our faith. We realised how hard some people in Uganda are working to rescue and restore their country's lost children and how even a little from us can make a huge difference – there is so much that we can do."

ABC Radio National will broadcast a program about the Bayside Builders' visit to Watoto on Encounter on Sunday, February 17 at 7.10am



Rachael Currie of Bayside Uniting Church turns her hand to brick laying at Bbira Village. Photo by David Busch

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# Jesus: the greatest threat

By Scott Stephens

LITTLE HAS changed in the eighty years since Bertrand Russell demonstrated just how adept the church had become at functioning as though Jesus had never existed.

His point is as valid now as it was then. For instance, consider the fact that few of Jesus' sayings fit within our truncated, sanitised version of Christianity.

There is something profoundly unsettling still about the unconditionality of his call-to-follow ("Let the dead bury their own dead!"), or his own dark sense of purpose ("Do you think I have come to bring peace to this land? No, I tell you, but rather division!"), or the sheer impossibility of the way of life he envisions ("Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return").

Most of us find it hard to imagine the contours of the Christian life or the communal ethics of the church under the condition of such statements.

Everything seems to work much more smoothly when Jesus is treated in abstract – as the path to salvation, as the immediacy of God's presence, as the symbol of the little bit of the divine in us all.

Historically, it has been the official task of theology to abstract Jesus beyond recognition, while any real engagement with the substance of his message or his concrete practices is left to New Testament scholarship.

But New Testament scholarship so often brings abstractions and palliatives of its own, and any sense of the weight of Jesus' message is soon lost.

It's not often that one comes across a serious theological engagement with Jesus' own moral vision, much less a robust defence of the determinate character of his call-to-follow for the Christian life today.

One remarkable exception to this rule is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *Discipleship*.

Ten years after Russell's searing indictment, Bonhoeffer launched an attack of his own on

the theological orthodoxy which abandoned Christ and bastardised his message, all the while professing a "pure doctrine of grace".

For Bonhoeffer, this kind of bland orthodoxy – which he branded "pseudotheology" – was a preposterously complex way of ensuring that we never have to take too seriously the commands of Jesus which gave shape and expression to the Kingdom of God.

"Anywhere else in the world where commands are given, the situation is clear," Bonhoeffer said.

"A father says to his child: go to bed! The child knows exactly what to do. But a child drilled in pseudotheology would have to argue thus: Father says go to bed. He means you are tired; he does not want me to be tired. But I can also overcome my tiredness by going to play.

"So, although father says to go to bed, what he really means is go play."

Thus Jesus' call to radical discipleship is emasculated – stripped of both moral consequence and theological integrity.

All that's left in its place is the worst kind of idolatry: the invitation to remain secure and unperturbed in the inoffensive embrace of a Messiah of your own making.

However accustomed we've become to hearing this sort of drivel from the pulpit, Bonhoeffer was right to denounce it as signifying an abandonment of the way of Jesus Christ that leads inexorably to the cross.

I believe our personal and corporate preparation for this Lent season must begin with the recognition that the greatest threat to the flaccid beliefs and inane practices that have come to define the church is Jesus himself.

Our repentant decision to follow the way that leads to the cross necessitates the abandonment of all those pathetic idols that have become enshrined in our church services as much as they have in our own lives.



Image from Churches Advertising Network Easter 1999 [www.churchads.org.uk](http://www.churchads.org.uk)

If the church is truly to be Jesus Christ existing corporately and visibly in the world, then this is the only Lenten journey that matters.

Scott Stephens is minister at Forest Lake Uniting Church and teaches ethics at Trinity Theological College

Pushing the issue even further is the Jesus Seminar, a group of 200 Christians including some leading biblical and theological scholars who have popularised research into the historical Jesus.

They claim there is a distinction between the historical Jesus and the "Christ of faith" and have developed a controversial method of voting with coloured marbles to determine what Jesus as an historical figure may or may not have said and done.

Starting with red marbles, the voters indicate they believed Jesus did say the words quoted or something very much like them, pink, that Jesus probably said something like the word, grey, that Jesus did not say them but they contain Jesus' ideas, and black, that Jesus did not say the words but they come from later admirers or a different tradition.

Mr Campolo said that the Red Letter Christians give the words of Jesus priority over all other passages of Scripture and focus on his teaching particularly in regard to social issues.

"We believe that you really cannot rightly interpret the rest of the Bible without first understanding who Jesus is, what he did, and what he said.

"Likewise, we believe the morality in the red letters of Jesus transcends that found in the black letters set down in the Pentateuch."

Mr Campolo said Jesus himself made this same point in the Sermon on the Mount when he said his teachings about marriage and divorce were to replace what Moses taught.

"Don't you think his red-letter words about loving our enemies and doing good to those who hurt us represent a higher morality than the "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" kind of justice that we find in the Hebrew Testament?"

particularly disparaging of this aspect of their work accusing them of being overly critical of the four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) but uncritical of when it comes to the non-canonical Gospels.

Many traditional evangelical Christians reject the work of the Red Letter Christians and particularly the Jesus Seminar because they fail to take seriously the authority of the whole Bible.

Renowned New Testament scholar and Anglican Bishop of Durham N. T. Wright said most evangelicals take for granted that scripture should have the primary place and that everything else has to be lined up in relation to it.

"Most scholars who have written about Jesus—whether they are Jewish, Christian, agnostic or whatever—never signed on to the Jesus Seminar in the first place," Mr Wright told the satirical magazine *The Wittenburg Door* last December.

"Most have held aloof, rightly seeing it as a wacky distraction from serious scholarship."

Critics of the Red Letter Christians believe that Mr Campolo and Mr Wallis are using their "red letters" to justify their more left leaning stance on issues of public policy.

While debate about which words Jesus actually spoke is an interesting discussion, if we are to give the "red letter" words a heightened prominence it will create a radically different Christian agenda than most of the church is currently engaged with.

How we read the red could determine the future of the church.

# The Gospels: a detective's work

*WHO ACTUALLY wrote the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? Journey asked Director of Studies New Testament at Trinity Theological College Rev Dr Malcolm Coombs for an explanation. This article should definitely be read with Bible in hand.*

To be honest, we just don't know for sure who wrote the Gospels in our Bible – the Gospels themselves don't specifically tell us.

That statement may shake some of us who were taught in Sunday School that Matthew was written by a tax-collector, Luke was a doctor and so on.

I've found that I have had to question some things I was taught in Sunday School and it's not always easy.

But, by doing a lot of detective work we can understand a great deal about how the Gospels came to be written down.

This detective work, which I find exciting, can deepen our understanding of the great message which the Gospels offer.

The beginning of Luke gives us some clues.

*Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.* (Luke 1:1–4 NRSV)

The writer of this Gospel (we'll call them 'Luke' even though we're not 100% sure) notes that others, in fact "many", have already set about writing an orderly account about Jesus.

So we know there are other written accounts that Luke knows of before he writes his own.

Luke also notes that stories and sayings have been "handed on to us" from the original eyewitnesses which seems to suggest that Luke himself wasn't an eyewitness.

So as Luke now wants to write his own orderly account it is likely that he will use the other traditions to do this.

The detective work continues! Unfortunately we don't have the original records, the other "orderly accounts" which Luke was reading. Or do we?

Let's look at Mark's Gospel for some clues.

We'll pick an example such as Mark 1:9–11, Jesus' baptism and compare it in detail with Luke 3:21–22.

Surely both are describing the same event. Most of the words are the same but there are one or two subtle changes. (Matthew also has this story but the words of the voice are slightly different – Matthew 3:13–17).

As it turns out, when comparing Mark and Luke we discover that about 90% of the material of Mark occurs in Luke. The same happens with Matthew.

Could Luke and Matthew have used Mark as one of the sources? Or perhaps Mark and Luke had access to similar sources. So what?

Let's look at some of the differences between them.

Did you notice how Luke has an extra comment about Jesus being in prayer at his baptism?



Dr Coombs enjoying his Gospel detective work. Photo by Osker Lau

If we had time to do further detective work we'd find that this is not the only time Luke seems to add some emphasis to prayer. It also happens in at least six other places in Luke.

There are other similar accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke and by looking at the way in which these Gospel writers may have used their sources, we can get some insight into what particular emphases they wish to highlight in their writing.

Thus we see Luke's emphasis on prayer and the Holy Spirit. That is not to say that the other Gospel writers didn't think these issues were important, but they were particularly important for Luke when he wrote his gospel.

Similarly, when we look at how Matthew may have used the sources available for that account we see Matthew's emphasis on the teaching of Jesus as the new revelation.

Since Matthew and Luke contain most of Mark, and since they have most of their remaining material in common with each other, most (but by no means all) "detectives" deduce that Matthew and Luke had access to two main sources (amongst others).

These were Mark plus another document containing largely a collection of sayings of Jesus – unfortunately we don't have any copies of the latter document.

This theory represents the gathering of the various traditions of which Luke spoke.

Hopefully all these different emphases of the Gospel writers are in keeping with what we were taught in Sunday School, but by doing some detective work and digging a bit

deeper we can increase our understanding of the Gospel accounts.

We can see what the Gospel writers particularly wished to stress, allowing our faith in Christ to be deepened as we seek to increase our own understanding of how Jesus was seen by these ancient writers.

Rev Dr Malcolm Coombs is the Academic Dean and Director of Studies in the New Testament at Trinity Theological College in Brisbane

## Spot the difference

Mark 1:9 – 11

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Luke 3:21 – 22

Now when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Matthew 3:13 – 17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptised by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

## What is the Lectionary?

The Lectionary is a three year cycle (beginning on the first Sunday of Advent) of scriptural texts recommended for use in weekly worship.

Generally included each week are a reading from the Old Testament a Psalm, a reading from the Epistles and a Gospel reading, which provide a focus for the week's service and reflect the church's liturgical year.

Alternate readings are often offered in the Old Testament and the Psalms that are thematically linked to the Gospel reading for the week.

The Uniting Church uses the *Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)* which was produced in 1992 by the Consultation on Common Texts (CCT) an ecumenical group

of liturgical scholars and representatives from around 20 denominations in the United States and Canada that has been meeting since the mid-1960s.

Each year focuses on the texts of one of the Gospels, Year A on Matthew, Year B on Mark, and Year C on Luke. Readings from John's Gospel are found throughout.

During the Easter season, the reading from the Old Testament is often replaced by a reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

In Australia, the Lutheran and Anglican churches also use the RCL.

In 2008 churches will be using texts from Year B.

For more information on the RCL or the CCT visit [www.commontexts.org](http://www.commontexts.org) By Mardi Lumsden

# Why read the rest of the Bible?

*If the four Gospels contain the stories of Jesus why do we still read the rest of the Bible? Journey went to the Principal of Trinity Theological College Rev Dr David Rankin for some answers.*

IN SOME Christian traditions the four Gospel books of the New Testament are more privileged than other books of the Bible.

In these churches the non-Gospel readings will be read from the lectern without particular fanfare but the Gospel text will often be led in procession to the lectern and while it is read out the congregation stands to underline the significance and priority given to that reading.

Even in our own tradition the Revised Common Lectionary appears to give the Gospel reading a somewhat honoured position.

So given this special status for the Gospels, how do the other books of the New Testament and those of the Old Testament assist in interpreting the Gospel accounts?

In the very early church, before the development of the traditional collection or canon of recognised New Testament writings, the writings of the Old Testament were regarded alone as holy scripture and were acknowledged as such in the writings of the New Testament.

These 'scriptures' were seen as



pointing to the coming of the Christ and of the Church.

In the emerging oral tradition of the Church these promises were seen as having been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

As the actual writings of the New Testament began to emerge and become widely circulated and accepted as authoritative texts alongside those of the Old

Testament, there were some Christians such as Marcion of Pontus in the second century who wanted to abandon the Old Testament.

Marcion saw the Old Testament as witnessing to another God, an inferior Creator God concerned only with judgement and terror, and saw the New Testament as witnessing solely to the God who

is the Father of Jesus and who was a God, not of judgement, but of love and mercy.

But the early Church Fathers successfully challenged these claims and declared that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament was one God who was both just and good.

They saw God being equally concerned with creation and re-

creation (redemption), making real in the New Covenant, through Christ and the Spirit, what he had foreshadowed and promised in the Old Covenant.

In this way the Old Testament, claimed and appropriated by the early Church as 'holy scripture', provides an account of the promises of God, and the Gospels tell of the realisation of these promises.

In the New Testament, the four Gospels were not written first but were recorded after much of the rest.

They were seen then, as today, as providing the basic account or narrative of the coming of God into human life and experience in the person of God's Son.

The epistles of Paul and of others in the remainder of the New Testament provide a commentary and interpretation, originally of the oral accounts and then of the written Gospels.

They expand on the coming of Jesus Christ and what that meant for the liberation, reconciliation, and redemption of fallen humanity.

Though often without direct reference to the historical details of the life of Jesus, the other books of the New Testament thus provide commentaries on the significance and meaning of that life and ministry.

Rev Dr David Rankin is Principal of Trinity Theological College in Brisbane and Director of Studies in Church History

## Some Gospels didn't make it

By Mardi Lumsden

MATTHEW, MARK, Luke and John are not the only Gospels; they are just the only ones to make it into the Bible.

As the biggest selling book on earth, people have always been fascinated with the Bible's history, origins and possible manipulations, but many are unaware of the texts that didn't quite make the cut and why.

The Catholic Church closed the canon in the early 400s but debate was still raging about which books should be included and it took four official declarations for a decision to be made.

According to Dr Rick Strelan, senior lecturer in Studies in Religion at the University of Queensland, there are around 35 known Gospels, some of which have survived only through being quoted by others.

"The Church thought that the four Gospels as we commonly know them were the best ones and the ones that should be passed on to future generations for instruction, teaching, preaching etc," he said.

"That already seems to have been the case for the majority (but not all) of the churches by the end of the second century.

"The so-called 'lost' Gospels are an indication that the traditions about Jesus were relatively fluid and not fixed or bound. Oral traditions probably also existed alongside written ones."

To begin with, the issue of authority gave some texts more importance. Later the idea of 'inspired' writing added more fuel to the discussion.

"The first authority for a long time was the 'Old' Testament, then the words of Jesus and the prophetic word (maybe received by some kind of 'inspiration' or spirit experience), then the writings of Paul and the four Gospels, then some others," said Dr Strelan.

"Usage was one factor in authority; countering heretics was another.

"Matthew and John were far more 'authoritative' Gospels than Mark and Luke for the first two centuries at least."

With oral tradition often comes the loss or self interpretation

of information. How much information has been lost or reinterpreted over the years?

"I doubt whether much 'information' has been lost. I personally think the four Gospels we know are the oldest anyway. There might be a few sayings from Thomas that are early as well, but nothing that is earth-shatteringly different," said Dr Strelan.

"Most of the other Gospels almost definitely are from the third century, if not later.

"They might contain some 'facts' that are not in the Gospels, but many of them look like deliberate attempts to fill in the gaps left by the four Gospels; or they appeal to later revelations – they are nearly always revelations given by the Risen Jesus whereas the four Gospels are nearly all pre-Easter revelations."

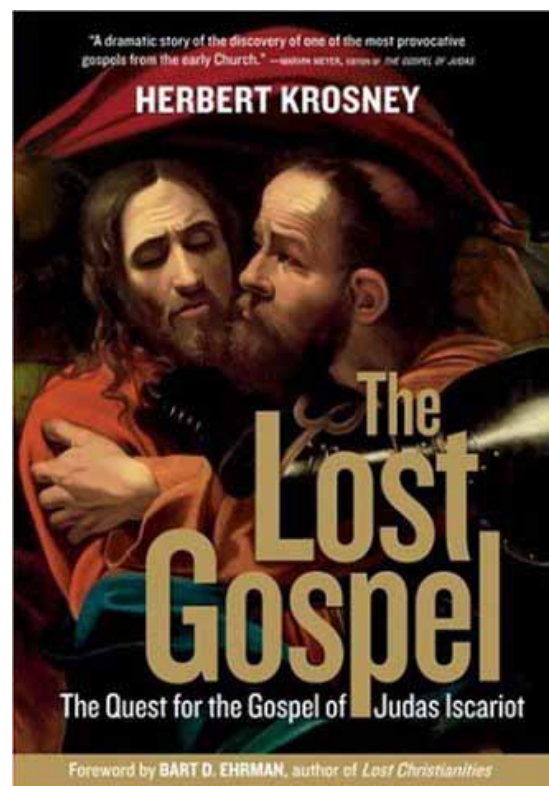
Dr Strelan said in his opinion the Gospels of Mary, Thomas and Judas are later writings.

"The tendency seems to have been to ascribe Gospels to lesser known apostles or to other apostles besides Matthew and John."

He credits their popularity partly to the distrust of institutional authority.

"The authority (the church) insists only on certain texts; we don't like the authority, so let's use the fringe texts and make them central/authoritative."

"The Gospel of Thomas is a text that defies authoritative explanation. It is very 'spiritual' and



the spiritual cannot be tied down by institutions and authorities," said Dr Strelan.

"It speaks to my spirit and I will interpret it as I like.

"It partly explains why the Gospel of John is also so popular –

it has a spirit element that is beyond 'historical' questions and beyond authoritative interpretation.

"Most anti-authority, anti-institutional groups like the Gospel of John. I've never heard of a similar group going crazy about Matthew."

# For King and country

By Mardi Lumsden

IN RECENT years in Australia we have heard the word 'patriotism' thrown around in the press with a degree of spite.

In the wake of the 2005 Cronulla riots the front pages of newspapers all over the world brandished images of adrenalin fuelled young men wrapped in the Australian flag and calling for violence, and the words 'Aussie Pride' drawn in the sand.

Is this true patriotism?

*Journey* spoke to two Australians who understand patriotism and act it out through their faith and their work.

After serving in the Australian Army in the 1970's Sunnybank Uniting Church member Robert Lippiatt had nothing to do with the defence force for twenty years. He is now the President of his local RSL club.

For Mr Lippiatt there is a blurring between how he behaves as a Christian and how he shows pride in his country.

"Patriotism to me means accepting that I am very blessed and privileged to live in the country I live in, and that others before me have paid a price to give me this privilege," he said.

"So I need to honour that, maintain that and in time hand it on to those who will come after me, at least in as good a shape as I found it and hopefully better.

"To me that is the basis of what patriotism is about and it's being prepared to admit that not everything is right and true and good."

Mr Lippiatt prefers to use the word 'citizenship' over 'patriotism'.

"The problem is that 'patriotism' has been given bad press by people who have used it for the wrong purposes. You have to spend a lot of energy in redefining the word.

"For me I would say it is about 'citizenship'... Jesus said you are a citizen of heaven."

Commonwealth Games weightlifting gold medallist Deborah Lovely has received many awards for being an outstanding citizen.

The Ipswich local is active in the Presbyterian Church and is in demand as a motivational public speaker. She said being a good citizen is about living out her faith.

"You've really got to balance that desire to help other people more than yourself and to look at other people's needs and help the community and other people around you, but you also need to help yourself and be good at what you do," she said.

"I guess being a good citizen is doing your best in everything, in what you want to achieve and also doing your best for other people.

"I feel that the fact that I have been successful in my sport is a platform God has given me to be able to reach the community.

"Now I have achieved something, I can speak and people actually listen to me."

Without a doubt one of Ms Lovely's proudest moments was winning the gold medal at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

"That was pretty amazing because it was the first time I have ever won something really big.

"I saw the cameras were trying to get really close to see if I would cry, but I was actually laughing because I was in disbelief.

"The first thing that went through my head was, 'I can't believe God let me win this competition'.

"All I could do was look out at the crowd, at my parents, family and coach and realise how much support they had given me.

"When you are representing your country you are proud as anything because you are wearing the Australian uniform, everybody knows that you are an Australian, but deep down I still feel that number one, I am a Christian and however much patriotism I am feeling, which is a lot, it is overridden by that feeling that I am even more important because I am a child of God."

Having fought for his country and working daily with people who have done the same Mr Lippiatt sees events like Australia Day and

Anzac Day as opportunities for churches to share their common heritage with local communities.

"The Christian faith is not necessarily inconsistent if we see patriotism as the great gift we have been given, not only the country and all that we have, but we also have another gift.

"Most of the things on which our communities and nation are built are in fact Christian principles.

"They aren't secular processes, they didn't just happen, they were faith people who articulated these things and were prepared to stand up and argue for them.

Many of the things we take for patriotism actually come out of that Christian foundation.

"My grandmother used to say it is more important to do and to be than it is to speak and I just wish so many people in the church would get out there and be and do."

Ms Lovely agrees.

"I really believe God has blessed Australia a lot. We have a Christian heritage, and for me that is where it is special to be an Australian. I feel like I am part of carrying on that Christian heritage."

Mr Lippiatt said that being prepared to defend your country is an important responsibility, but not necessarily with force.

"You need to be ready to defend it, but not always with a rifle or a bomb. It is about being prepared to speak out against injustice, speak and stand with those who are being bullied and oppressed, and be willing to help those who don't enjoy the same things that you enjoy. That is what courage is."

And that is living out your faith.

Left: Deborah Lovely stands on the podium after winning a gold medal at the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

Photo courtesy of Griffith University Sports College



Kennedy Terrace Uniting Church has closed. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

## Thanks for the memories

By Bruce Mullan

AFTER MORE than 120 years, the Uniting Church at Kennedy Terrace, Paddington closed on Sunday 23 December.

Now a Cleveland Uniting Church member, John Whitlock commenced attending the Kennedy Terrace Sunday School at the age of three on 16 May 1937.

"Memories really do fade as you get older, but coming together like we did to the place where we grew up, certainly brought back some memories that had probably been long forgotten.

"It was a service of thanksgiving, but also became a service of rejoicing as we were able to rekindle old friendships," he said.

Mr Whitlock said the kindergarten met in the larger section under the Church building, and sat on little stained wooden chairs with small tables and sand trays where they were allowed to position the figures in the sand."

"Latecomers were able to look through the side windows and make faces at us.

"We looked forward to the day when we would be old enough to go over to the 'big' Sunday School which met in the hall, because we would then be one of the big kids."

Mr Whitlock said the large green and black motor for the Church organ was just inside the door of the under-church section.

"If the organ motor ceased to work, the organ had to be pumped by hand behind the actual organ, and we boys would enthusiastically volunteer to do the pumping, solely because it got us out of singing.

"At Kennedy Terrace we had a Decision Sunday each year, and I committed my life to Jesus Christ at a very early age, and I rededicated my life each year thereafter."

Mr Whitlock was encouraged to become a local preacher at Kennedy Terrace and first assisted in a church service in 1952.

"I conducted my first service on Sunday 29th November, and on looking now at the notes from my early services, I realise how much the people of this Church tolerated.

"The local preachers of this Church took me into the pulpit with them, encouraging and giving me training by announcing the hymns and reading the scriptures."

Mr Whitlock said he was truly thankful for the Kennedy Terrace Church and its people.

"The Church may be closing, but its influence will live on for ever in the lives of lots of people."



UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA  
MORETON RIVERS PRESBYTERY

PRESBYTERY EDUCATION OFFICER

The Moreton Rivers Presbytery is seeking a full-time Presbytery Education Officer. The purpose of the position is:

- To build Christian formation and education programs, skills and opportunities available to Lay People throughout the Presbytery.
- To encourage lay people to discover their ministry callings and to address the education needed to respond to God's call on their lives.
- To encourage and train ministers in addressing the educational opportunities within their placements.

Applicants are invited to apply by addressing the selection criteria identified in the Position Description and Specifications available by download from: [www.moretonrivers.unitingchurch.org.au](http://www.moretonrivers.unitingchurch.org.au) or by contacting the office:

Moreton Rivers Presbytery Office  
P.O. Box 192, Cherside, Qld 4032  
Phone (07) 3359 9642  
Email: [sara@moretonriverspresbytery.org.au](mailto:sara@moretonriverspresbytery.org.au)

Please forward applications marked "Confidential" to:  
The Chairperson, Moreton Rivers Presbytery at the above address.  
Applications close Friday 29th February 2008.



UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA  
PRESBYTERY OF PORT PHILIP WEST

### WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

#### What face of Christ will we project in this community?

Great opportunities for exploration of community connections and emerging church in a creative team.

New Areas Ministry: full time Minister of Word and Deacon positions in Melbourne's north and west.

Presbytery of Port Philip West

Information: Rev David Mills,  
[millsfam@majestic.net.au](mailto:millsfam@majestic.net.au), (03) 9307 8732  
Closing Date Feb 29, 2008

# WHAT'S ON

**February 2, 2pm. Ordination of Mr Bruce Raymond** (MOW Intern) at Ipswich City Uniting Church, Ellenborough Street, Ipswich. All welcome.

**February 10, 9am. Induction of Mrs Jeanette Gillam** (MOW Intern) at Longreach Uniting Church, Galah Street, Longreach. All welcome.

**February 13, 7.30pm. Induction of Rev Ian Smallbone** at Karana Downs Uniting Church. Swenson's Road, Mt Crosby. All welcome.

**February 15 – June 3. Lifeline Telephone Counsellor training course**, Bundaberg. Improve your counselling and communication micro skills. Professional training for \$50. For an application kit call Lifeline Coral Coast Capricorn Bundaberg on 4153 2000.

**February 19, 9.30 - 11.30am. UCA International Mission Support Group (Qld) meeting** at St Andrew's Church Hall, Ann Street, Brisbane. For more information contact Judith Finau on ph 3711 4622 or email [ljfinau@dovenetq.net.au](mailto:ljfinau@dovenetq.net.au).

**February 21 – 22, 8.30am-3pm. Wheller Gardens Auxiliary rummage sale** at Uhl Hall 930 Gympie Rd, Chermanside. Preloved clothes, books and knick knacks. Also open Saturday 23 February, 8am to noon. For more information contact M. Herbert on ph 3857 4668 or email [bilmer@bigpond.com](mailto:bilmer@bigpond.com).

**March 21. Good Friday**

**March 23. Easter Sunday**

**April 8. Ministry to/with Seniors river tour** on the Murray River. Seven day tour of Adelaide and the Murray River. Aimed at those who may be helped by widening their circle of friends, those recently bereaved or retired, or feeling lonely. Contact Lew Born on mobile 0409 347 224 or ph 5580 0338 or email [lewbrown@bigpond.com](mailto:lewbrown@bigpond.com).

**April 25. Anzac Day**

**May 9, 5.30pm. QCT ecumenical worship service** at the Cathedral of St Stephen, Elizabeth St, Brisbane. A service to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Week of Christian Unity. For more information or to find out how to organise your own service contact Jela Virzi at QCT on ph 3369 6792 or email [gensec@qct.org.au](mailto:gensec@qct.org.au).

**June 28 – July 14. Global Walking Bali Exposure Trip to Bali.** Tour includes visiting and staying in orphanages, going to a jail, ministry with street kids, an introduction to the Bali church, and a visit to the Bali bombing site. For more information contact Tanya Richards on ph 0430403783 or email [rossetiger77@hotmail.com](mailto:rossetiger77@hotmail.com).

Want to promote an event?

Go to [www.journeyonline.com.au](http://www.journeyonline.com.au) and click on 'What's On'



Staff of the Assembly of the United Church in Solomon Islands re-enact meeting the first western missionary to visit the Solomon Islands. Photo by Bruce Mullan

## Newlife Robina continues Solomon partnership

By Bruce Mullan

"OVERWHELMED" BY hospitality," was how Newlife Robina Uniting Church Minister Rev Stuart Cameron described the visit by seven Australian church members to the Western Province. "For six of us this was our first

visit to the Solomon Islands, but it certainly will not be our last," said Mr Cameron who is also Chair of the Uniting International Mission Reference Committee.

Asked why the group had gone to the Solomon Islands, Mr Cameron said, "Because we believe God called us to be there."

The participants saw the visit as a continuation of a 105 year partnership between the original Methodist Churches and the now United Church in Solomon Islands (UCSI) and the Uniting Church in Australia.

The Newlife Robina group met with UCSI congregations in Roviana and Gizo and visited Helena Goldie Hospital, Goldie College and Tabaka Bay Rural Training Centre.

Rev Cameron said Newlife Robina had a strong commitment to youth and children's ministry and was keen to make that commitment a cornerstone of the congregation's partnership with the UCSI.

"We see that your churches are filled with children and we pray that your young people will come to a deep faith in Jesus and a strong relationship with the United Church," Rev Cameron told the UCSI Assembly staff.

Chairperson of the Newlife Robina Congregation and businessman Mr Doug Mayes told the Assembly staff that his church would like to support the Assembly in developing sustainable business projects that would ensure ongoing funding for the UCSI.

"Whatever we do will provide ongoing employment for Solomon

Islands young people and support the development of infrastructure in the Western Province," Mr Mayes said.

"We are particularly concerned about the provision of adequate water supplies for homes and communities."

Mr Mayes said whatever projects were undertaken in conjunction with the UCSI, he wanted to see Australians and Solomon Island Christians working alongside each other in partnership.

Rev Cameron expressed the wishes of the group to see ongoing exchanges of people between the UCSI and the Newlife Robina Congregation.

"We particularly want some of your young people to visit with us and some of our young people to visit here," he said.

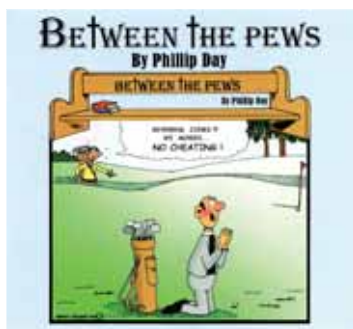
"It is through such exchanges that friendship and trust develops and faith is strengthened."

Mr Cameron said a highlight of the visit was a trip to Nusa Zonga Island where members of the Assembly staff and Kokeqolo Congregation, dressed in traditional costume, re-enacted the meeting between Solomon Islanders and the first Australian missionary to the Western Province, Rev John Francis Goldie in 1902.

"We were very surprised to be greeted by what seemed to be fierce warriors with axes and shields."

"It was a great relief to see that one of the warriors looked like UCSI Mission Support Program Secretary Mr John Sasabule and that the axes were made only of wood," Mr Cameron said.





**Between the Pews**  
By Phillip Day  
Self published  
RRP \$15.00

After many years of seeing Phillip's wonderful cartoons published each month in *Journey*, reading the *Between the Pews* collection of cartoons was like bumping into a very entertaining old friend.

Star of the book is our friend Rev Seymore W. Jones aged 54 whose favourite colour is dull grey and whose greatest achievement to date is finishing a sermon in less than forty minutes.

"Dad, does God ever tell you what to say in your sermons?" asks one of Rev Jones' children.

"Why, yes he does," Rev Jones replies.

"Then why do you keep scratching some of it out?"

This book is brim full of things you always wanted to say at the door of the church, comments you were afraid to make at church meetings and conversations you wish you had overheard.

As Rev John Mavor says in his forword, Mr Day has a gift of helping us laugh at ourselves as he strips away the layers of the behaviour of church people.

"Phil Day has used his ability as an artist and observer of life to help people see themselves more clearly," he said.

The book is self-published and is beautifully presented with abundant cartoons, mostly full page and many in colour.

This collection of the best of Phillip Day's cartoons over fourteen years is a light-hearted look at church life and the comical ministry of the dedicated but slightly boring Reverend Jones.

It's a great book to enjoy or share with a friend. Highly recommended.

To order *Between the Pews* email [philday1@bigpond.com](mailto:philday1@bigpond.com).

Reviewed by Bruce Mullan,  
editor of *Journey*

### An Uncommon Lectionary: A Companion to Common Lectionaries

By John Beverley Butcher  
Polebridge Press  
RRP \$31.95

The title of this book certainly reflects its contents – for many this would be a very uncommon lectionary.

The readings for this year-long lectionary (included in the book) are from The Didache, The Odes of Solomon, the Q Gospel (a book believed to be source material for the four Gospels in the Bible), and other Gospels and material including The Gospel of Thomas, The Acts of John, The Infancy Gospel of James and The Gospel of Mary, as well as readings from books of the Bible.

The book follows in the tradition of contemporary scholars from The Jesus Seminar who have questioned to discover more about the historical Jesus and the life of the early church.

Some might think *An Uncommon Lectionary* is more suitable to scholars, the curious or mavericks but, used thoughtfully, this lectionary could provide opportunities for exploration and deepening of faith.

The book suggests a number of ways this lectionary could be used, e.g. as a fourth year, a replacement for one of Years A, B or C, as additional / supplementary material within the regular three year cycle, or as sermon material.

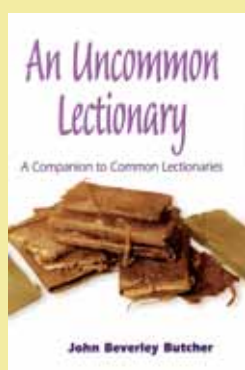
Eucharistic prayers based on some of the writings are also provided.

The translations use contemporary language, while still keeping to the peculiarities of the material (i.e. readings appear to reflect a desire to maintain the integrity of the message of the original text causing some to be somewhat wordy and unfamiliar in phrasing).

Additional notes are sometimes added for explanation, e.g. on a particular translation chosen.

I would encourage leaders to use this book but the teacher in me would add some cautions. I think the use of this material could be a great opportunity for discussion and learning, provided opportunities were also provided for deepening of familiarity and knowledge of the texts of the Bible and exploration of how the Bible came to be as we now know it.

Reviewed by Mel Perkins, a student at Trinity Theological College



## REVIEWS

**The Once and Future Jesus**  
By The Jesus Seminar  
Polebridge Press  
RRP \$31.95

*The Once and Future Jesus* is a collection of nine keynote addresses from a gathering of the Jesus Seminar in 1999.

These essays surprised me as the range of theological and philosophical views expressed highlights that the Seminar is not a unified voice. Here are a few themes and issues worth highlighting.

First, for the most part the authors are writing in reaction to fundamentalist / literalist approaches to the scriptures.

In his chapter Marcus Borg attributes the source of both fundamentalism, and much of what drives the Seminar, to modernism and its obsession with factuality. There is some irony in this.

Second, both within the Seminar and within more conservative Christian circles the notion of speaking of the Church as if it has ever represented one view is at best naïve, at worst dishonest.

Some of the essays paint a narrow view of what is considered 'orthodox' Christianity and fail to recognise a diversity and depth of thought that exists, particularly amongst contemporary scholars.

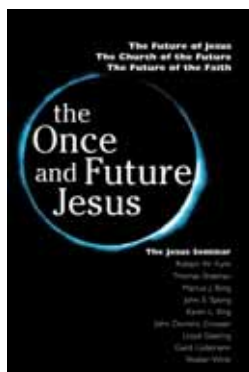
This is especially the case with Robert Funk who too readily dismisses critiques of the Seminar as inept in their methodology and betraying an elitist arrogance.

Others openly acknowledge that there has never been a time when the whole church has given a unified witness, and make helpful comments about the formation of this diverse faith community and the beliefs which surround it.

Third, is to acknowledge that the search for truth and knowledge is tempered by the reality of our human limitations.

The invitation to keep open minds is made in this context, although I would want the Seminar members to stay open to the possibility of such things as the incarnation of God in Jesus and his resurrection.

Wherever you find yourself on the spectrum of biblical authority and theology, the essays of this book can serve to sharpen what you think about God, Jesus and the church.



This is not to say that you will agree with the authors, in fact it is more than likely that you will find many unsettling statements within the pages.

In the process of engaging you may also find that your own faith and understanding may be strengthened.

Reviewed by Rev Peter Lockhart,  
Minister with Clayfield and  
Hamilton Uniting Church  
congregations in Brisbane



**Symmetry**  
By Edwin Derricutt  
Pure Entertainment  
RRP \$29.95

New Zealand singer, Edwin Derricutt has released his third album titled *Symmetry* and it is in no way monotonous or common.

With a New Zealand country-style background, he leaves his listeners relaxed, enchanted and at peace with these unique tracks.

Based on relationships with God and with a significant other, the songs spell out the importance of a Christian-based relationship and the love that emerges through it.

Most of the tracks, however, can be easily related to either party, which allows for both imaginative interpretation and versatility of the lyrics.

Derricutt has been described as sounding similar to Ben Harper and Jack Johnson, to whom he looks for inspiration.

The guitar complements his subtle tone and the instrumentals boast perfect compatibility with his voice.

The recording is clear and timed faultlessly, along with the use of a wide range of sounds from the acoustic and electric guitars, violins, bass, piano and percussion.

Although not an entirely new sound, Derricutt has perfected his art, and the lyrics are cleverly and originally put together in a combination that flatters all of the tracks on *Symmetry*.

His vocal abilities are not lacking and he uses his range effectively to support the statement he desires in each song. He does not strain his vocal limits so all tracks are pleasant and easy to listen to.

The best display of his ability is in the final track titled 'A House to Die For' which complements his capabilities with subtle acoustic guitar and an echoed feel to his voice.

If seeking an easy going, laid back and peaceful sound, *Symmetry* is the one to look out for.

His beautiful and clear recordings can be loved by just about anyone, so check it out when you get a chance.

Reviewed by Danielle Stith, a  
Year 12 student from Brisbane

**Bella**  
Directed by Alejandro  
Monteverde  
91 mins  
Rated PG

Staring Mexican soap opera actor Eduardo Verástegui and highly acclaimed television actor Tammy Blanchard, *Bella* is an appealing film with a decidedly family-friendly and pro-life focus.

Surprising winner of the People's Choice Award at the Toronto Film Festival, this is a spiritually literate film exploring two troubled people's responses to an unplanned pregnancy.

The increasingly honest and restorative conversations between sensitive chef Jose (Verástegui) and the newly pregnant waitress Nina (Blanchard) are sustained in the context of a dynamic and loving Hispanic family.

Filmed in New York in just three weeks by a team of a first-time director, producers and screenwriters, both director Monteverde and actor Verástegui recently made a renewed commitment to their Catholic faith.

For Verástegui, a trip to Rome to meet Pope John Paul II and receive a blessing for the film was an important part of its success.

While *Bella* is not polemic about the issue of abortion and doesn't preach at the audience, it does allow Blanchard's accomplished acting to help the viewer develop an empathetic connection with a single woman facing the termination of her pregnancy.

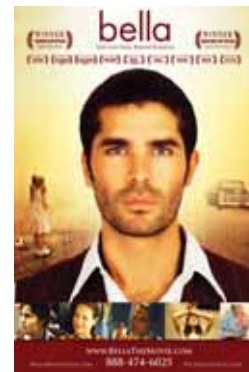
Writer-producer Leo Severino said the movie was about understanding rather than judgement and his team has succeeded in making a film that will engage both pro-life and pro-choice viewers.

"Our hope is that when people leave our film on any side of an equation they're going to love more and judge less."

Whether or not *Bella* is a box-office success, watching it is a morally uplifting experience and it is a beautiful ('bella') film.

*Bella* is due for release in cinemas on 21 February

Reviewed by Bruce Mullan,  
editor of *Journey*



10 February:  
St Mark's Mt Gravatt

St Mark's is a busy congregation located in Mt Gravatt.

The area would once have been called suburban Brisbane but as the city spreads, Mt Gravatt has become part of the urban sprawl of Brisbane City.

In general the people who live here have either been here all their lives or they are new to the area, choosing for many reasons to live close to the city.

Schools are a true reflection of the multicultural nature of this area with many different forms of religion being practised.

The congregation is made up of people from all age groups and the ministry at St Mark's reflects this. Ministry with children has been a focus for St Mark's over the years with Girls' and Boys' Brigades and other ministries with children and youth playing a significant part in the faith journey of our families.

Please pray for St Mark's as we seek to:

- address the need for more space, especially for storage and office
- provide leadership in all areas of ministry, particularly ministry with high schoolers and young adults
- reach out to the unchurched of the area where God has placed us
- work together with other churches and denominations
- talk with other Uniting Churches in the South of Brisbane region as we discuss ways that we might better work together.

Please pray for our leaders as they seek continually to discern the way God is calling us and then to action those things we believe to be our calling.

17 February: Uniting Church International Mission Support Group (Queensland)

More than ninety years ago the Overseas Missions Auxiliaries of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches began supporting mission staff in the field.

They came together after the formation of the Uniting Church and continued to operate as the Uniting Church International Mission Auxiliary in Brisbane.

The last meeting of the Auxiliary was held in November 2006 when members agreed to join with the

## PRAYER DIARY

Synod Mission Support Group established by Rev John Mavor.

The Uniting Church International Mission Support Group (UCIM) aims to:

- develop and maintain the interest of members of the Uniting Church in regard to International Mission
- encourage Uniting Church members to pray regularly for the work of International Mission
- assist in recruiting personnel for specific forms of service in International Mission
- maintain contact with and support for persons engaged in the work of International Mission
- maintain close working links with UC Queensland Synod Staff who have particular responsibility for International Mission
- support International Mission projects and programs, especially those associated with the Uniting Church's Partner Churches.

The UCIM Support Group meets at 9.30am at the St. Andrew's Hall, Creek Street, Brisbane on the third Tuesday of February, April, June, August and October with the AGM being held in November.

Please pray for the ongoing work of the Uniting Church International Mission Support Group in disseminating information from our Partner Churches to the Congregations of the Queensland Synod.

Please pray for International Mission projects to be supported during 2008 in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, South India, Tonga, Aurukun and East Timor.

Please pray for our Synod International Mission Advocate, Andrew Johnson, as he continues to work with the Support Group in promoting International Mission to the congregations across Queensland.

Please pray for the Chairperson of the UCIM Support Group, Mrs Beth Clarke, and the members of the group as they continue to support Uniting Church sponsored staff working in our Partner Churches and other mission areas in Asia, the Pacific and beyond.

24 February:  
Dalby

Dalby is located on the Warrego Highway about 80k north west of Toowoomba in the heart of the Darling Downs.

This was a predominantly a farming area, majoring in cotton and grain crops.

Dalby has become one of the fastest growing areas on the Downs, due largely to a number of mining ventures and the large number of mine and associated workers living and working in the area.

Ongoing drought has been a major issue for farmers who are struggling to remain afloat.

While recent rain has been a benefit to some, there has not been anywhere near enough to consider the drought broken.

The Dalby Uniting Church, together with other churches in the area, has the enormous task of ministering in this challenging and rapidly changing context.

We ask for prayer for:

- the Elders and Church Council and their ongoing work and ministry with our local congregation

- Sam Fromm, our part-time youth and children's ministry worker and part-time school chaplain at Dalby High School

- the recently appointed local primary school chaplain

- the youth and children of our church – that they might discover the reality of Jesus Christ in their lives through the worship and teaching of the church. Pray also that they might find levels of involvement that are stimulating to their faith and enable them to be included in the life and worship of the congregation.

- the town of Dalby as mine workers and others with ancillary services move into the area; for the influence that this has for Dalby and the opportunities this presents for ministry

- congregation members, that they will be encouraged in their ongoing spiritual life through our worship and teaching through home groups

- the Ministers' Fraternal of Dalby as they work together to share the gospel, not only with their own congregations, but with the wider community of Dalby and surrounding districts.

We give thanks for those who willingly take on responsibility within the life and ministry of the congregation and for those who continually go the 'extra mile' in their work and service with the congregation and the wider community.

## Lifeline Gold Coast: Organisation of the Year

By Soraya Gonano

LIFELINE GOLD Coast was awarded the Community Organisation of the Year as part of Volunteering Gold Coast's International Volunteer Awards Ceremony in December.

Chosen out of eight finalists, organisations were judged on their benefit to the community, length and service of commitment and recognition of volunteers.

Lifeline Gold Coast General Manager, Peter Loughnane, said the award came as a pleasant surprise.

"We certainly didn't expect to win, but we are so pleased to be recognised as the Community Organisation of the Year," he said.

"The calibre and commitment of our volunteers is inspirational.

"They are the lifeblood of our organization. This award is in honour of them.

"With more than 16,000 calls per year on our 24-hour telephone counselling service, which is manned entirely by volunteers, more than 4800 face to face counselling sessions in the past year and 2440 enquiry calls made to their reception each month, there's no doubt there is a need for Lifeline's services within the community."

Two of Lifeline's longstanding volunteers, Aletta Seibel and Cathy Hulme, were also nominated in the Volunteer of the Year category.



Rev Alamo Lavaki presents the chalice to Margaret Ferguson.  
Photo courtesy of Nobby Uniting Church

## A cup of thanks from Nobby

THE EASTERN Downs Parish held a service of recognition for one of its valued members recently.

Rev Alamo Lavaki officiated at the service, held at Nobby Uniting Church in September, which included a dedication ceremony of a chalice presented by Margaret Ferguson and her family in memory of her late husband, Graeme Lindsay Ferguson.

Mr Ferguson had a life-long association with the Nobby Church (formerly Presbyterian) from his baptism, through Sunday School, PFA, and then as a Sunday School Teacher.

In 1972 Mr Ferguson was inducted as an Elder, a position which he still held at the time of his passing.

During the Service Mr Lavaki also baptised Graeme and Margaret's youngest Grandchild, Lilly Arabella Ferguson.



Vale Rev Jeffrey Robinson

RETIRED MINISTER Rev Jeffrey Robinson passed away on 6 January 2008 in Manningham Centre in Doncaster, Melbourne.

Mr Robinson was in ministry in Queensland at various placements including Toowoomba, Bundaberg, Redcliffe, Yeppoon, and Cooloolgatta.

He was an overseas missionary in PNG and moved to Melbourne in 2007.

## Off Compass

We refer to the article 'Compass: off course' (December *Journey*) which quotes a number of church leaders who were critical of the program.

They claimed that it presented a distorted picture of the Uniting Church.

It emphasised the disunity and diminishing membership but said little about the good things that are happening.

We don't agree with the article's assessment of the program.

The preamble to the program stated quite clearly what its focus would be.

"Over the past decade its constituency has divided, fractured and fallen off...Tonight we examine the unfolding story of a modern, disunited church."

The program was never intended to give a comprehensive view of the Uniting Church but was raising the question of how a church which is so deeply divided can survive.

We think the overall picture it portrayed of the Uniting Church was not too far off the mark. Yes, it's depressing, but it is true that we are a deeply divided church. It is also true that we have a rapidly diminishing and aging membership.

We have heard our church leaders talking in such an uncritical way about the state of the Church that we have wondered whether they were talking about the Uniting Church which we know and love and seek to renew through our witness.

An example of this unrealistic view of the church is that there appears to be a complete inability to see the discord that Resolutions 84 and 108, and the departure by church leaders from basic doctrines of the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, have caused in the life of the Church.

It is a measure of how far the Uniting Church has strayed from the orthodox faith and the *Basis of Union*, that an organisation such as the Assembly of Confessing Congregations can be described by the Rev Graham Slaughter as an extreme of the liberal/conservative divide.

The Assembly of Confessing Congregations is an organisation that was formed after the 2006 Assembly to give members of the Uniting Church who saw Resolutions 84 and 108 as being in serious error, a means of expressing dissent whilst still staying within the Uniting Church with a good conscience.

There would have been a far greater exodus of members from the Uniting Church were it not for the ACC.

The purpose of the ACC is to campaign for the return of the Uniting Church to the traditional faith of the church and to the *Basis of Union*. This, amongst other things, involves the reversal of Resolutions 84 and 108.

There has to be a return to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. That authority is exercised through the scriptures

as interpreted by the Creeds of the Church and in the case of the Uniting Church by the *Basis of Union*.

The time for experimentation for the sake of diversity and change is over.

**Rev Denis Conomos, Oxley-Darrah  
Rev Ivan Kirk, Coopers Plains  
Rev Dr Charles Noller, Forest Lake**

A short reaction to your appraisal of the *Compass* program.

I also think (as a layman in this area) that it was poor journalism and had very little depth.

Your description of the people being interviewed as representing the extremes of the liberal/conservative divide is wrong.

To describe Max Champion as extreme means you do not understand what he stands for.

Max Champion is no fundamentalist, but represents, I believe, the belief of the vast majority of Uniting Church people.

What was missing from the program was any mention of the large number of Uniting Church people who feel disenfranchised and the ministers who have been off work through stress leave, and/or who have left the UCA - directly because of Assembly resolutions.

**Donald McKay  
Samford**

## Bible Honesty

I share some of the concern of Rev Kaye Ronalds about the 'crisis for children' who are taught Bible stories such as the six day creation story, and also encounter scientific explanations such as the millions of years evolution theory.

However, as a Religious Education teacher, I feel deeply concerned at her inference that 'we are setting them up with a choice between stories'.

Let fellow Christian educators feel daunted, I would like to add value to Bible stories for children (carefully selected and maybe sanitised) which enrich their enjoyment, their heritage and their Christian ethics.

Imagine the impoverishment of children, withdrawn from RE, who enjoy stories such as Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer without ever experiencing the awe and wonder of costumed re-enactments of the nativity stories to help them recognise and celebrate the birth of Christ as the true meaning of Christmas.

Even 'progressive' Bishop Spong approves of nativity plays.

Let us by all means 'talk to children about how the stories are handed down to us'.

Might it be helpful rather than harmful to add a 'some Christians believe this/some Christians believe that' approach? And of course we need to juxtapose 'then' and 'now' cultural attitudes.

I pray that I will effectively teach my RE students with honesty and with confidence in a way that avoids the 'risk' but retains the value.

**Jan Hunter  
Chermside West**

Presbytery Minister Rev Kaye Ronalds' challenge to Central Queensland Presbytery is timely and indeed, might well be taken seriously by the Church in general.

Bible myths taught in Sunday School served their purpose for young minds but the danger is that if carried into adult life "as then understood" their whole belief system could later be seriously affronted by current scientific thought.

They may be led to either abandon their allegiance to the Church or to quietly suppress their qualms merely to feel "safe" in their little church group.

Either decision would be a festering problem for church life.

The answer would be to encourage robust discussion on these topics not only inside theological colleges as at present but also outside.

I am reminded of an old American Indian proverb which says, "A tree must bend in a strong wind or be torn out by its roots".

**Basil Gillespie  
Beachmere**

## No X in Christ

I write to express my disgust at the headlines of the December *Journey* - "Xmas...Looking for Jesus".

At a time when the Christian Churches are striving to bring CHRIST back into the lives of the community, it is disappointing, to say the least, that you have chosen to delete Christ, and substitute his holy name with an X.

Since my earliest days, I was always taught that Christmas be spelt out in full, whether it be on a Greeting Card or in other communication. The substitution of Christ with an X, is an indication that Christ has no meaning or relevance in our lives.

I trust that all staff in the Synod office from the Moderator down, will put Christ back into Christmas, and set an example for all Christians to follow.

My hope is that we will never see such a violation of Christian principles in the future.

**Russel R Vickers  
Mt Gravatt**

Shame! Shame! Shame!

Your front page headline of the December 2007 *Journey* was disgusting.

If *Journey*, the newspaper of the Uniting Church, can leave "Christ" out of "Christmas", what hope do we have of getting the general population to remember "Christ" is not spelt with an "X".

Please apologise!

**Carol Ross  
Riverhills**

## Green debate

I refer to the article entitled "Uniting Church: green from the start" (December *Journey*).

This article states: "The Uniting Church is convinced of the scientific evidence on global warming and its potentially disastrous impact is now indisputable..."

Clearly these words refer to the

# LETTERS

idea that the earth is warming and that this warming is caused by the actions of man. This idea is not indisputable and is disputed by a number of very good scientists.

Lance Endersbee is an Australian University Professor, now retired, and a past President of Engineers Australia.

He has spent his lifetime in scientific enquiry and in contrast to proponents of the global warming theory such as Al Gore and Tim Flannery is trained in science and has spent his life engaged in science.

There are, of course, a number of other eminent Australian scientists who are prepared to publicly question the conventional wisdom on this issue to say nothing of scientists throughout the world.

The Uniting Church has no scientific expertise and can only look ridiculous in expressing an opinion on a complex scientific issue.

The community would be better served if the Uniting Church could address moral issues such as the approximately hundred thousand unborn children whose life is snuffed out in this country each year because that life happens to be inconvenient to those who have power over it.

The silence from the Uniting Church on this issue is deafening.  
**Warren Brown  
Hendra**

The four green pages in the recent Christmas *Journey* are certainly a thorough scientific outline of the threatening world environmental situation.

The Uniting Church surely must respond to the threat. But surely any such outline should have featured the sovereignty of God.

The future of creation is sovereignly in his hands.

Advent had the eschatological part, the second coming as well as the first.

The end is not the world's environmental extinction. It is the end glory of God.

Without this, as a church we replace our Lord's good news with some sort of good riddance which has no hope.

**Bruce Gulley  
Moggill**

## Indigenous action

Following the previous Government's intervention into Indigenous communities, I wondered how our church would react.

Would it back the intervention, or would it stick to its outdated ideology. It has decided to back our AMP's (Aboriginal Misery Prolongers) and torpedo the intervention.

Having had work related visits over many years to various remote and not so remote communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and more recently a three

months intense involvement with the Mornington Island people, I have experienced the miseries, degradation, and hopelessness which is the norm amongst aboriginal people.

In order to give back their dignity and functional families, we need to get rid of alcohol abuse, and protect their children and women from vicious assaults in the meantime.

It is the only way to address their rights and responsibilities.

Governments are feeling their way through all of this, in a genuine attempt to do the right thing.

All our past efforts (including churches) have failed our Aboriginal brothers and sisters.

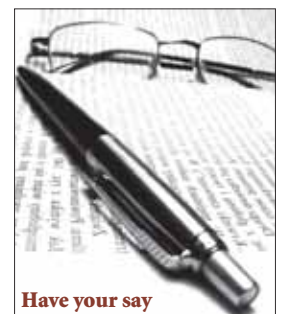
I urge that we support Governments in their endeavours to get down to the nitty gritty by mobilising UnitingCare or Frontier Services to assist in picking up the pieces of human misery (currently discarded) in the process.

Please, my Church, this is no time for face saving excuses, it is too important for that.

It is now time to part with our useless stance on Aboriginal issues and get down on our knees to where the people are.

Jesus would have.

**Ben de Nys  
Toowoomba**



## Have your say

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

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# JOURNEY asks...

*What is your favourite story from the Gospels and why?*

Belinda Hooper

*If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.  
(Mark 5:28)*



Depending on the events going on in my life, different Gospel stories have meant different things to me.

A story which has resonated with me recently is that of Jesus' healing in response to faith – the message of grace and healing, not just of the body but of the spirit, is beautiful.

A woman who had lost everything – her place in society, her money and her very own self-respect through a physical affliction she had no control over, braved the masses for her only chance of healing.

She was an observant Jew, and so believed in the laws which classified her as ceremonially unclean.

She suffered the shame and lowliness of her place in society fully believing she was deserving of it yet, despite her despair, she

still had faith that Jesus could bring her healing.

So she approached Jesus, timidly touching his robes and received the healing she had needed for so long.

How many times have we felt the burdens which our society places on us? Do we fit the parameters of success; are we worthy of our place in society?

This is why the story means so much to me.

Jesus felt the woman being healed as she touched his robes, and turned to face the crowd asking who it was who touched him.

The woman timidly admitted that it was she, an outcast.

In the midst of the very crowd who had shunned this woman for so long, Jesus gave her his direct and undivided attention.

Why did she not simply ask for his healing? Because of her shame, she did not feel worthy to ask him directly.

Jesus did not rebuke the woman, but instead proclaimed to the crowd that she was now healed, and so reclaimed her place among them.

This story reminds me that, although we may feel shame and embarrassment through our deeds, we should not allow this shame to come between us and God.

God knows we are imperfect and still welcomes us to bring to him all our weaknesses so that we also may receive his healing grace.

Belinda Hooper is a member of the South Rockhampton Congregation in Central Queensland

Harold Kilah

*I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. (Mark 8:2)*

Among my favourite Gospel stories is Jesus feeding the five thousand from the lunch box of a small boy.

I vividly remember in Sunday School drawing baskets the size of large drums to contain the scraps after the people had been fed.

For a child, the more the amount of leftovers the greater the miracle.

While the miracle of feeding five thousand people has great appeal I am more attracted to the emotion behind the miracle.



Jesus says to his disciples "I feel compassion for the multitude" or, "I feel sorry for these people."

The word compassion is particularly important to me because it simply means "to have a gut feeling", (the original word referred "to have the bowels yearning").

But, the feeding of the people is only part of the story. What impression did Jesus have on the people?

Though the Gospel accounts do not say, it is accepted that the crowd would have been influenced or encouraged to believe or trust in Jesus too.

It is Jesus' feelings or emotion that encourages me to believe in his purpose.

Through his compassion all my needs are met in great abundance, or in ways which themselves are miraculous.

So, my response to the miracle is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, my Lord and Saviour.

Also, I am to be a compassionate person too.

Genuine compassion involves the inner sense of personal commitment. Anything I should be and do should reflect the inner feelings or desire of Jesus.

As an act of grace, and as a more genuine response, I trust my life and ministry does reflect the non-judgmental, compassionate Jesus.

The miracle of God happens when I can both experience and reflect the compassionate Christ.

Rev Harold Kilah is Chaplain at the Salvin Park Nursing Home and Hostel and the Carramar Complex

Rebeka Wein

*But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)*

There are just so many lessons waiting to be learnt from my favourite New Testament story that I believe I could never say, "I fully understand that story in its entirety"

The younger son asked to be given his share of the estate and his father complied – seemingly willing to let him go and party his inheritance away.

He had the nerve to ask for the money, and then he just went and wasted it all – I'm sure it was one hell of a party, but that's beside the point!

Then, the famine disaster reminds me that if you make silly rash decisions there are consequences.

Because of his bad decision he ended up with a job which in those days was about as low as you could imagine.

The bit where the son is forced to feed the pigs is the part I like and can relate to – sometimes you need to hit rock bottom to realise what you had to start with.

When the son came back, his great surprise was that his father was forgiving and happy to see him.

Best of all, and like the father, God takes us back every time if we come asking for forgiveness.

This story reminds me that we do always need God and if we choose to wander off down a side track, God will let us.

God never forces his presence into our lives but when we fall down in a heap of misery



God always welcomes us back – no matter how far we might have wandered away; no matter how dirty or grotty we might be.

God, like the father in the parable, is simply happy – delighted – to have us return to him; and that's what makes this story so special to me.

Rebeka Wein is a member of the Emerald Congregation in Central Queensland

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