

May 2008

JOURNEY

www.journeyonline.com.au



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Who is my neighbour?

The 2006 Census figures show there are 340,000 Muslims living in Australia of whom 20,000 are Queensland residents – this month *Journey* asks, “Who is my neighbour?”

The world changed at the beginning of the seventh century when a respected merchant in Mecca called Muhammad Ibn Abdallah (c. 570-632) received his revelations from God which have been recorded in the Qur'an.

Beginning as the faith of a small community of believers, Islam rapidly became a major religion which now has over 1.5 billion adherents world-wide.

Alongside the growing number of ordinary Muslims living peaceful loving lives, there has also been a rise in the activity of Islamic terrorists who have appropriated legitimate concerns and responded with consistent violent action guaranteed to be broadcast over and over on television screens around the world.

In a report to the Queensland Synod Ecumenical Relations Committee, the then National Consultant for Theology and Discipleship for the Uniting Church in Australia Rev Dr Robert Bos said it is crucial to

distinguish the actions of a small violent minority from the aspirations of ordinary Muslims, many of whom bear the burden of Islamist intimidation in their own communities.

Reporting on conversations with Muslims in North India, Dr Bos said most Muslims are “embarrassed about the corruption of Islam by political extremists, which has sometimes led to the identification of Islam with violence and terrorism”.

Formal dialogue between Christians and Muslims has been going on for many years but since 9/11 the current socio-political realities and increased media attention have ramped up the question of how the two great faiths relate to one another.

Here in Queensland where many Muslims are regularly being subjected to verbal harassment and discrimination, Christians are asking themselves what it means to “love our neighbours”.

By Bruce Mullan

More about living with Muslims

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More than neighbours

THE MATTER of relationships between Christians and Muslims is now of such national and global importance that it makes this issue of *Journey* particularly timely and relevant.

Conversation about this relationship in the past has often been distorted by ignorance and prejudice, along with the fear that invariably accompanies them.

In more recent times the issue of terrorism has frequently been associated with Islam by all manner of people in a completely irresponsible manner.

It is surely obvious to us all by now that the great majority of Muslims, like the great majority of Christians, are responsible individuals and citizens who want to live in peace, raise their children in a secure and stable environment, and make a positive contribution to the society that nurtures them.

In that regard we have to be able to distinguish in our minds between the faith and tradition of the Islamic religion and the way some individual Muslims behave, just as we always want to be sure that others distinguish between the faith and tradition of Christianity and the bad behaviour of some individual Christians from whom we would want to distance ourselves.

As Christians, our first responsibility in relation to Muslims is to seek to take time to learn about the faith that undergirds and guides their lives.

This means having at least a basic knowledge about the history of Islam, about the life and influence of its founder, Muhammad, and the central place of the Qur'an and its key teachings.

We can obtain this information in various ways, but the best way is by means of personal conversation.

That is now a real option in many parts of Australia because of the growing numbers of Muslims now living amongst us.



Message from the Moderator

Rev Dr David Pitman

What we discover when we make the effort to do this is that Muslims, like the rest of us, are human beings first of all, and that means we have a great deal in common.

All the things that connect us within the human family provide

They honour Jesus, too, as Word of God and Spirit of God.

This respect for our shared heritage offers us a great opportunity to enter into a dialogue that can lead us, at an appropriate time, to begin to explore the significant ways in which we are different.

It is in the context of relationship that we most appropriately follow the advice of St Peter (1 Peter 3: 15-16) to give an account of our faith whenever the opportunity arises, but always gently and respectfully.

I had the opportunity earlier this year to participate in a joint gathering of Christians and Muslims, in a Christian context.

Our guests sat respectfully while we worshipped in the Christian tradition and celebrated Holy Communion, and then asked a number of relevant and searching questions about what they had observed and what it meant to us.

We then shared in a meal together and further fellowship and conversation.

Understanding and relationship, then, are the key factors in any ongoing dialogue with our Muslim neighbours, who always have been, and always will be, more than neighbours!

the basis upon which we build relationships that allow us to talk honestly and openly together about the faith by which we live.

When it comes to faith the first thing we learn is that Christians and Muslims are more than neighbours!

We are all children of Abraham.

Our religious heritage takes us back to a common point in history.

Muslims honour the great leaders of the Old Testament story and the prophets of Israel.

“As Christians, our first responsibility in relation to Muslims is to seek to take time to learn about the faith that undergirds and guides their lives.”

From the Editor

Growing up in white Anglo-Australia with an extended family of origin who at times displayed an alarming degree of political incorrectness and blatant racism, I have had to consciously and consistently work to develop a healthy attitude to our increasingly multi-racial society.

I diligently have tried to rid myself of racial stereotypes and prejudices and adopt what I believe is a Christian framework for interacting with people whose appearance, culture and faith is different from mine.

Up until 9/11 I thought I was doing OK, but the barrage of media coverage now given to the rampant acts of terrorism around the world has been a major set-back to my hitherto sensible perceptions.

Almost subliminally, the constantly repeated television images of planes flying into the Twin Towers, bomb wreckage in Bali and double-decker buses torn apart in London had played on my psyche.

In airport lounges and on the streets of my city I found myself looking at any back-pack-carrying young men of so-called “middle Eastern appearance” as a threat to my very existence.

I found myself living with constant low-level anxiety and in fear of crowded communal spaces, significant landmarks, public transport, strangers of different ethnic backgrounds and even people of other faiths.

Without realising it I had become alert *and* alarmed, and was losing any rational perspective on my relationship with my neighbours.

So, it was back to the drawing board and back to conquering again the unreasonable and disproportionate fears of my childhood.

I am so indebted to my Uniting Church, which in its *Basis of Union*, commits itself to transcend “cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries” and lives that out in special relationships with churches and wonderful people from across the world.

I am also absolutely indebted to the grace of God who has allowed me the opportunities of visiting many diverse parts of the world, and to meet and develop friendships with the most amazing array of Christians and people of other religions whose cultural and faith experiences are so different from mine.

It is my burden to carry with me the shadows of my childhood and the recent damage done by media and political leaders.

These still surface from time to time and have the potential to elevate my perverse anxieties, but I don't have to accept that and can rise above it as a witness to the power of the prevenient grace of God to sanctify a Christian life.

Bruce Mullan

JOURNEY

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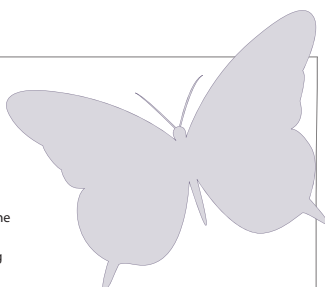
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Sign of the Times



THIS MESSAGE was last week's note from the Windsor Uniting Church in Brisbane. Email your Signs of the Times church signs to journey@ucaqlld.com.au.

Life without chocolate - Don't trade lives

By Bruce Mullan

CITING INDIA and China as the world centres of slavery, a corporate social responsibility guru has challenged Queensland Christians to become abolitionists.

Professor of Ethics and anti-slavery campaigner David Batstone is author of the book *Not for Sale: the Return of the Global Slave Trade — and How to Fight It*, and estimates up to 27 million people worldwide are currently enslaved as bonded labourers.

Mr Batstone, who studied theology in Switzerland alongside World Vision Australia's CEO Tim Costello, is visiting Australia to promote the anti-slavery campaign "Don't trade lives".

He described how he stumbled into his calling as an abolitionist when he discovered that his favourite Indian restaurant in San Francisco was the centre of a trafficking ring which had brought around 500 young women and men from India who were forced to work all day, their documents taken, and their families at home threatened if they tried to escape or leave.

"Girls and boys, women and men of all ages are forced to toil in the rug loom sheds of Nepal, sell their bodies in the brothels of Rome, break rocks in the quarries of Pakistan, and fight wars in the jungles of Africa," said Batstone.



World Vision CEO Tim Costello behind bars at Elmina Castle in Ghana, the place from where hundreds of thousands of African slaves were sent to Europe and the Americas. Photo courtesy of World Vision

"Do you know what the going price for a child is on the border of Thailand, Cambodia and Burma today?" Mr Batstone asked. "Three dollars – you can buy kids for three dollars."

World Vision has taken up the campaign in Australia and the focus is on 600,000 children working in the cocoa fields of the Ivory Coast in Africa producing the raw products used in chocolate.

"The Christian church has a particular claim to credibility and social relevance when it comes to the issue of slavery," said World Vision CEO Tim Costello, who recently visited the Ivory Coast to look at child exploitation in the cocoa industry.

"William Wilberforce is one of us; 'Amazing Grace', the song we sing, is our anthem so we've been able to say, 'that was a Christian out there in the public who did fantastic work', and that's true."

"So it's a little disturbing for us to discover that slavery is back, that it wasn't completely abolished."

"Well, this is what the message is: no country has legal slavery thanks to the efforts of William Wilberforce and others. We don't see people in manacles in a market where a person with a title can actually openly trade them."

"Nonetheless, slavery is here, driven now by those invisible links we call market processes."

Mr Costello believes, as consumers Australians have the right to pressure the market processes to offer fair treatment of those producing the goods that we like to buy cheaply.

Mr Batstone said the campaign's focus on chocolate was focussing on our personal connection to a supply chain around the globe – "how we drive the demand".

World Vision is providing online coupons for Christians to share with local supermarkets.

These simply say, "I love chocolate, but I don't want to feel guilty eating it because children in West Africa are working in dangerous conditions – and sometimes trafficked – to harvest the cocoa used to make it. Don't trade lives. Please support and include ethical chocolate in your stock."

Mr Costello described the process for *Journey*: "You print off the coupons [on page below], you hand it to the retailer where you buy your favourite chocolate and, while you are at it, let them know why you want your chocolate produced ethically."

Access information and "Don't trade lives" coupons from www.donttradelives.com.au

Stolen wages – "Not good enough" says Moderator

THE MODERATOR of the Uniting Church in Queensland Rev Dr David Pitman believes the final payment to indigenous claimants of stolen wages announced by the Premier in March is inadequate.

Dr Pitman said the Government, both in its initial response and now in this latest offer, has chosen to ignore the rights of Indigenous Australians and reject the findings and recommendations of the Senate Committee set up to investigate the matter across the nation.

In 2002, the government set aside \$55 million for Indigenous Queenslanders whose wages had been in state control and either defrauded or lost, but only \$20 million has been paid in claims to around 5,500 people.

Premier Anna Bligh announced that claimants would receive a further and final payment of \$3,000 to those who initially received \$4,000, and \$1,500 to those who received \$2,000.

The rest of the money plus another \$10 million will be used for an Indigenous scholarship fund

"Not only are the payments being offered completely inadequate in comparison with the actual amounts still owed, many Indigenous people legally entitled to compensation are still excluded from the process altogether," Dr Pitman said.

The Moderator had made a detailed submission to the Senate Inquiry into Indigenous Stolen Wages in July 2006 stating that, "The Uniting Church believes Indigenous people have a unique contribution to make to Australia as the first peoples of this land."

Dr Pitman said these token payments to a limited number of people represent a completely inadequate response to the scandal of the "stolen wages".

"In this matter of conscience and justice the State Government continues to abdicate its responsibility to act morally and compassionately."


"Its actions perpetuate the paternalistic and demeaning policies that created the problem in the first place."


"In these circumstances the outrage and distress expressed by Indigenous leaders is entirely understandable."

"They deserve our full support."



Rev Dr David Pitman





Retailer Alert: Don't Trade Lives!

I love chocolate! But I don't want to feel guilty eating it because children in West Africa are working in dangerous conditions – and sometimes trafficked – to harvest the cocoa used to make it.

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Kids lent a hand

CANUNGRA UNITING Church Sunday School followed the children's Lent Event program and had a Lent Event Stall on Palm Sunday after the church service.

Robyn Lee, Sunday School Co-ordinator, said the children enjoyed getting involved in the event.

"The children tied balloons



Members of the Canungra Uniting Church Sunday School at the Lent Event stall. Photo courtesy of Robyn Lee

along the fence at church to bring people's attention our way.

"We had advertised our stall on a couple of shop windows and did a letterbox drop of the immediate streets around the church."

Over the course of half an hour the group raised \$142 for Lent Event.

"We were extremely pleased with this outcome," said Ms Lee.

College serves at Easter

MIXING SERVICE with faith, Year Seven students from Moreton Bay College delivered 700 Easter egg parcels to aged people, and sang well-known hymns and songs in local nursing homes.

Primary Chaplain Narelle McNamara said the school's 'Easter Eggs for Others' project is an annual activity providing opportunities for each girl to grow in their relationship with Christ.

"All the girls make cards for elderly people in the local area, as well as bringing in Easter Eggs.

"The Year Seven students helped with the packaging of the eggs into parcels and the attachment of cards," Ms McNamara said.

Parcels of eggs were delivered to the elderly at Pleasantville, Wondall Gardens' Units, Nazareth House, Lota House, The Pines, Janoah Gardens and Moreton Bay Nursing Home.

A further 500 Easter parcels were delivered to Meals-on-Wheels centres at Wynnum-Manly, Capalaba, Cleveland and Carina.

"At Easter, the college seeks to provide opportunities for the girls to be involved in practical Christian and community service activities," said Ms McNamara.



Moreton Bay College Student Ebony Kettle delivers Easter eggs to Nazareth House resident Mrs Marion McCollm. Photo courtesy of Moreton Bay College

Vellore: a film of healing

By Mardi Lumsden

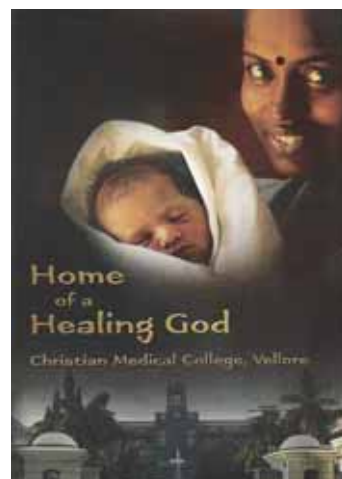
THE CHRISTIAN Medical College in Vellore, South India, is no stranger to the Uniting Church.

Many Uniting Church people have visited and worked at the hospital and training college since its humble beginnings, and several of those people work tirelessly as the Friends of Vellore to help raise funds for the hospital.

Now in its 50th year of operation, Vellore is one of the most respected hospitals and colleges in India, with more than one million people receiving outpatient care and 60,000 people admitted for hospital procedures each year.

People travel from all over India and neighbouring countries to go to Vellore.

One of the main reasons for this



is that the 5000 plus staff at Vellore serve the rich and poor alike.

No one is turned away for lack of money.

Groups of staff also take medical care out to remote villages.

Sydney film producer Tim Nicholls and his team spent several weeks in Vellore to create the DVD *Home of a Healing God*.

The film takes viewers through a day in the life of the hospital and its residents.

Home of a Healing God is a touching reminder of what can be done when people put good intentions into action and shows both the human impact and the technological advances of the hospital and college.

Presbyteries in the Queensland Synod have each been given a copy of *Home of a Healing God*, but copies are also available for \$10 each through Rev Brian Lee on jblee19@bigpond.net.au or 19 Glencoy St, Ferny Grove, QLD 4055.

For more information about the Christian Medical College in Vellore visit www.cmch-vellore.edu or the Australian Friends of Vellore at www.australianfov.net.au

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Associate General Secretary

NOVEMBER 2008 COMMENCEMENT

The UCA Synod of Victoria and Tasmania (the Synod) is seeking to fill the position of Associate General Secretary that will become available in November 2008.

The person appointed will be a lay or ordained person who is a member of the Uniting Church. Should the position be filled by an ordained person, the position will be recognised as a ministerial placement.

The Associate General Secretary will act as Secretary of the Synod's Placement Committee and as such will provide oversight of ministerial placement processes. He/she will also be responsible for the support of other ministry services. A member of the Senior Leadership Team of the Synod, the Associate General Secretary acts for the General Secretary in his/her absence.

The person appointed will have extensive pastoral experience. Knowledge of Uniting Church regulations and processes is essential, along with excellent communication, interpersonal and organisational skills. Theological qualifications will be well regarded.

To apply, please request an application package from: Ms Robyn Hansen, Executive Assistant to the General Secretary, by phone on (03) 92515215 or email robyn.hansen@victas.uca.org.au

Applications close Friday, 13 June 2008



Uniting Church in Australia
Office of Victoria and Tasmania

Feast of Easter fun

By Hayley Miller

IT IS THE largest celebration of Easter in this country; it heralds a kaleidoscope of music, debate, art and extreme games in one destination, and has people from around the globe flocking to southeast Queensland.

In 2008, this event turned ten, embraced a new name and evolved...no longer just a festival at Easter; it's a festival about Easter.

Easterfest CEO Isaac Moody said it was difficult for some to let go of the 'AGMF' (Australian Gospel Music Festival) title.

Each year, Queen's Park in Toowoomba is kitted out as a multi-stage compound across the Easter weekend. But this year organisers say they saw an opportunity - the ability for this festival to house a celebration of the Easter message en masse.

"When the festival started ten years ago, I don't think anyone thought it would be as big as it is today," Mr Moody mused.

"We're on a journey, a realisation that the festival is about Easter itself, and that's really exciting because it's worth celebrating and doing it with tens of thousands of people is a lot of fun!"

Another reason for the name change was to identify that the festival was no longer just about music, nor was it only for the youth (a common misconception). Easterfest is, and has always been, about diversity and it certainly had plenty of this in 08.

The festival's headline bands pumped out energy-driven shows across the three nights.

Thousands turned out to hear Easterfest 'Mystery Artist', 2007 Australian Idol runner-up Matt Corby, do his thing.

Newsboys were a crowd-puller and crowd-pleaser, proving themselves great for all ages.

Gold Coast band Alabaster Box returned from the States (which they now call home) for the much-anticipated launch of their new album, while US band Jars of Clay closed the festival on Sunday night.

A number of guest speakers were incorporated into the line-up, with a veritable melting pot of issues being stirred around the festival.

One of the most talked-about was the XXX Church's Pastor Craig Gross. XXX Church's mission takes them inside the world of pornography, as they reach out to the industry with their "Jesus loves porn stars" message.

Also chewing big issues was Australian Christian Lobby's Brigadier Jim Wallace (a former SAS Commander). Women's Forum Australia's Melinda Tankard Reist challenged audiences on the over-sexualisation of culture.

The Chai tent looked like a throwback to the 'Jesus freak' seventies, while in the Scripture Union coffee shop politicians discussed Jesus and agenda, God and gender, salvation and sexuality.

"And just for fun we also had BMX stunt bikes and skateboarders and free rides," Mr Moody said.

"And things like the Iona Passion Play and Stations of the Cross, which have a very real and obvious link to Easter itself."

But none was as poignant as Sunday night's Combined Church Service.

This year the service drew more than 15,000 people.



Craig Burnett of SCAT performing at the Fancy Pants Ball.
Photo by Matt Gees



A JC Epidemic biker at Easterfest 2008. Photo by Adam Weathered

"It's the real start of us being proud of the fact that Easter is an incredible time to celebrate and to reflect upon, and it's important for us to uphold this in the foremost part of our mind as we move into the future.

"We think the festival has come of age. There are many things we will leave the same, but we don't want to just rest on our laurels. We feel young and energetic about the future, and more focussed on this celebration of Easter," Mr Moody said.

"The festival is getting a reputation around the world as one of the best festivals to house Christian music so we're finding a lot more artists really want to come out and perform."

For the outside world, it's easy to see Easterfest only as it appears on the surface, many unaware of the commitment from the army of volunteers who work across the weekend.

"There were about 1,500 crew at least on site," Mr Moody exclaimed.

"It's amazing because we sometimes wonder how on earth

we're going to get a team of 80 people just to pick up rubbish all weekend! But we were really blessed this year - the number of people who wanted to help actually exceeded the number of positions we had available.

"I think people are getting a sense that something great is happening and want to be involved."

When it's all done and dusted for another year though, the only word to encapsulate an event of this magnitude and diversity is 'Easter'.

Hayley Miller is a member of Pine Rivers Uniting Church

Scat show fancy pants

By Matt Gees

EASTERFEST 08 had some amazing acts, huge amounts of fun and plenty of people wandering around enjoying the atmosphere of this festival.

The Uniting Church also had some of its members putting their own unique spin on this festival.

One of the most popular Easterfest events happens after the main stage has stopped and the café is winding down. But regular festivalgoers know there is still one more event at Easterfest that demands their attention.

The Fancy Pants Ball was hosted

by Brisbane jazz band SCAT featuring Logan Uniting Church's Creative Ministries Co-ordinator Craig Burnett on lead vocals and Rev Tim Robinson from Enoggera in the horn section.

"Fancy Pants Ball is really just a big after party for Easterfest," explained Mr Burnett.

"Basically the big acts finish, everyone's had an awesome weekend and then they head down to the Big Top and we just have a party for an hour.

"We supply some jazz tunes and people get dressed up in some nutso gear from the Lifeline Op shop on site."

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Distress at government withdrawal of Mt Isa support

By Bruce Mullan

AFTER 15 YEARS of the Mt Isa Uniting Church congregation providing accommodation for women from remote communities during the final weeks of pregnancy, the Moderator of the Queensland Synod has expressed deep disappointment at the decision of the State Government to withdraw its support for the facility.

The service to pregnant women has been provided using Department of Housing flats which had originally been scheduled for demolition.

Despite years of maintenance and care by the congregation, the service faces closure following a request from the Housing Minister asking the church to vacate the premises by August 2008.

In a letter to the Housing Minister Robert Swarten, the Moderator Rev Dr David Pitman said, "The Uniting Church is uniquely placed to provide this service because of its strong community links within the community of Mt Isa through the local congregation and with the remote communities surrounding the town through the patrol ministry."

"We note the public commitment of the Premier to represent and act on behalf of all Queenslanders and wonder what that means in relation to this particular situation."

"There is a real shortage of accommodation in Mt Isa and at this stage there is no apparent alternative," Dr Pitman said.

"We believe it is quite inappropriate to address this problem in Mt Isa by imposing a further burden on those who so much need the service now being provided by the Uniting Church."

"This means the existing service, which is highly regarded in the community, will probably have to be terminated if the action you propose is taken."

Since the news of the impending closure reached Mt Isa, local Uniting Church Minister Rev Gordon Burley has been overwhelmed by the response.

"We have received over 100 letters in less than a week from across the remote communities," said Mr Burley.

Many people have expressed their appreciation for the use of the units and the ministry provided by Mr and Mrs Needham who run them.

One person who had used the flats said, "I cannot stress enough the importance these units have to the outback communities."

The Moderator has called on Mr Swarten and the local member to meet with him to seek a solution which allows the ministry to continue.

"I urge the support of the Church in Queensland for this vital ministry and ask members and congregations to be in contact with their local representatives and the Minister asking that this vital service continue."

Celebrating unity through prayer

ONE HUNDRED years ago a movement was born to celebrate Christian unity and pray for more of it for eight days each year. In Australia, this is directly before Pentecost.

This year the centenary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will be celebrated from 4 to 11 May across the state.

Prayer cards for the Week of Prayer and posters to advertise your events are available from Queensland Churches Together on 3369 6792 or admin@gct.org.au.

For more details visit www.gct.org.au and go to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity link and What's On.



IN PAPUA New Guinea the Uniting Church has supplied more than 50 rural villages with safe water over the past ten years.

The simple action of installing clean water transforms communities, dramatically reducing the time women need to spend collecting water, freeing them up to send their children to school on time and earn a living.

Access to clean, safe water can be the difference in whether or not they escape poverty.

Uniting Church Overseas Aid (UCOA), the relief and developmental division of Uniting International Mission, has a long history of providing clean water to those who need it most.

Through this year's Water of Life appeal, UCOA hopes to provide water to eight more villages in the Pacific giving around 8,000 more people access.

The cost of doing this is low – based on past experience it will cost \$25 to provide safe water for each man, woman and child.

To give to the Pacific water appeal, contact Amy Elizes on (02) 8267 4266 or go to www.overseasaid.org.

Over one billion people, roughly one third of the world's population, live without access to clean water.

Water borne disease is the second biggest killer of children worldwide.

1.8 million children die every year as a result of diseases caused by unclean water and poor sanitation – around 5000 deaths a day.

At any given time, almost half the population of the developing world is suffering from one or more of the main diseases associated with inadequate provision of water and sanitation.

Source: World Health Organisation

National Uniting Church news

THE AGENCIES of the National Assembly have established practical SMART Goals to achieve the Assembly's five Key Directions of reconciliation with Indigenous Australians: peacemaking; evangelism; doctrine and identity of the UCA; and polity and governance.

A Task Group consulting on the Uniting Church's Constitution is looking at Aboriginal law is another way of hearing Christ and shaping the Uniting Church in Australia.

A small group of theologians has drafted a *Brief Statement on Ordination* to help resource the church, particularly those groups responsible for the selection, training and oversight of ordained ministries.

The Assembly Working Groups on Doctrine and Worship have prepared some draft *Guidelines for Uniting Church Funerals* as a resource for use by ministers, lay people and church councils regarding the conduct of funerals.

The new *Regulations for the Specified Ministry of Pastor* will take effect 1 July 2008 and are available at www.assembly.uca.org.au/resources/pastor.

Plans are afoot for changes to the way distance theological education



is provided for the Uniting Church and negotiations with Parkin Wesley College in Adelaide are under way to ensure delivery of the goals of Coolamon College.

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) is working to encourage people to get involved in the daily lives of others and learn to walk with them in the hope of rediscovering the spirit that God instilled in the Aboriginal people.

The National Working Group on Doctrine organised a consultation on Sexuality and Leadership in the Church in February which demonstrated a high level of graciousness and a genuine concern for wanting to move forward on the issue.

The Uniting Church is exploring how it might develop closer relationships with members

of our partner churches that have immigrated to Australia, while maintaining their connection with their previous church.

UnitingJustice Australia has presented a report advocating a National Charter for Human Rights and is developing a Human Rights Education Kit for use in presbyteries and congregations.

UnitingJustice Australia also presented a report on the Australian Citizenship Test, suggesting that the Test should be discontinued. The report said the test is "redundant, trivial and excluding".

Following a presentation by the President and the General Secretary on their ecumenical visit to Palestine and Israel, the Assembly Standing Committee endorsed the "Nine resolutions on the Holy Land" adopted earlier in the year by the National Council of Churches in Australia.

The name of the Synod of NSW will be changed to include the ACT. The new name is the Synod of New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory.

The Uniting Church presented a major report on global corruption to the new Rudd government at Parliament House in Canberra.

Religion fights terrorism

By Bruce Mullan

COMING FROM a family background that is both Christian and Muslim, Pakistani born Anglican Bishop of Rochester (UK) Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali is well qualified to speak on the subject of the so-called "Clash of Civilisations" between Christian and Muslim nations.

At the well attended 2008 Rollie Busch Memorial Lecture "Conviction and Conflict: Islam, Christianity and World Order" Dr Nazir-Ali said Christianity and Islam account for more than half the population of the world and this is increasing.

"The rest of the world has a proper interest in how their relationship with one another is managed," the Bishop said.

Dr Nazir-Ali also met for conversation with the Director of the Griffith University Islamic Research Unit and Co-Director of the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies in Australia Dr Mohamad Abdalla at the Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre.

During a wide-ranging dialogue between the two scholars and the assembled audience Dr Abdalla was asked how the theology of Islam, which ensures the protection of religious minorities, and the practical outworking of the Islamic faith in Muslim nations such as Pakistan could be so out of step.

"We are as confused as you are," said Dr Abdalla.

"The truth is that most Muslim countries happen to be Muslim countries and not Islamic countries.

"There is a distinction between the ideal teachings of the faith and the practical manifestations of the teachings of that faith in the lives of people. And this goes for Christians and Muslims and Jews and Buddhists and everyone."

Dr Abdalla said the honest answer was that Pakistan is not an Islamic State and that many Muslims can see that.

"Pakistan can claim day and night that they are an Islamic state, but the truth is that they are not an Islamic state. They are a tyrannical oppressive regime that not only oppresses minority groups such as Christians but oppresses their own people."

Dr Nazir-Ali agreed: "My reading of the Sunnah is that when the Prophet of Islam was insulted he forgave those who insulted him, but in his name this draconian law of blasphemy has been passed which proscribes a mandatory death penalty for insulting the Prophet.

"I ask you, is this an Islamic law or is this an un-Islamic law? And if it is an un-Islamic law then there ought to be a fatwa condemning it.

"If a clash of civilisations and clashes within civilisations are to be avoided, the Sharia, or Law of



Pakistani born Anglican Bishop of Rochester (UK) Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Islam, must be shown to be flexible and adaptable."

Dr Nazir-Ali has been a consistent critic of UK government policies on multiculturalism which he claims are, "An agenda which still lacks the underpinning of a moral and spiritual vision.

"Of course we have to recognise difference; of course people have the right to worship in the way they wish to in their own homes.

"But you need much more than that if you are going to be a cohesive nation.

"You need some sort of subscription to a common vision, to shared values, and that has been neglected, not so much because of the presence of other faiths but because of the spiritual and moral vacuum that has come to be at the heart of British society."

Dr Nazir-Ali also explores the relationship between terrorism and poverty.

He said the population explosion in many Muslim countries has created a large, young and male section of the community which is relatively well educated, or at least literate, but also frustrated.

"Many of these young people

have only a tenuous grip on Islamic tradition as a whole," he said, claiming this left them open to a determined and well-financed indoctrination.

"Only a small proportion of these men, however, are drawn to religious extremism, though more may be involved in moderate Islamic activity."

Dr Nazir-Ali acknowledged there is a security task that has to be carried out and that, "Those who are involved in extremist activity need to be identified and, if necessary, dealt with in accordance with the principles of natural justice."

He sees the long-term solution to be found in dialogue between Islam and Christianity and argues for a wide exchange between cultures and countries, but always with respect for the integrity of religions and cultures.

He also recommends providing economic aid that will reduce the numbers of the poor and unemployed who are exploited by extremists.

Religion, he suggests, will be an important part of finding a solution to the current problems of violence and terrorism.

Don't just talk

IT IS THE political leaders who gain the most from tensions amongst religious faiths, said a Bishop of the Church of North India who visited Brisbane in March.

Rt Rev PK Samantroy, Bishop of the Diocese of Amritsar, said in his country the mixture of religion and politics has been a most dangerous thing.

"If a mosque is attacked it doesn't take much time for people to change their attitude towards each other," he said

"You are close friends now and the next thing you are up in arms against each other. It is the common people who suffer and die."

Mr Samantroy said in his experience of working with Muslims, beginning a dialogue in an artificial situation means people are probably too tense about the whole thing.

"I feel that you should put aside the context of religious issues and talk about life as it is shared.

"That will make it more comfortable for people to talk.

"We are bringing leaders of all faith communities together and we're not discussing religion but are engaged in working towards issues which are important to all communities."

The Diocese of Amritsar covers the three northernmost states of India where the Christian population is proportionally smaller than in many other parts of India.

Mr Samantroy is the eighth bishop and has filled that role since 1999.

By Bruce Mullan

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Interfaith: on the ground

By **Mardi Lumsden**

LAST YEAR the Maleny Uniting Church helped stage the first National Interfaith Festival.

The event was a huge success and brought attention to the many groups within the Uniting Church in Queensland that are working together with people of other faiths.

Rev Garth Reed has been involved in interfaith relations for more than 30 years. As chaplain of Brisbane Boys College he used to take students to a Mosque as a way of teaching them about other faiths.

Now, as the minister at Aspley Uniting Church, Mr Reed is surrounded by people who are interested and excited about learning more about other faiths.

In 2003 the Aspley Uniting Church began an interfaith dialogue. The first event, an evening focussing on prayer with members

of the Bald Hills Mosque and local Jewish community, proved to be a fascinating and sought after event by members of all communities.

“I think interfaith is capturing some of the imagination of people today in the way the ecumenical movement did a generation or two ago,” Mr Reed said from the wide verandah of the Bald Hills Mosque.

“It has got the same sort of motivation, spiritual awareness and concern for reaching out to the people of the world in love and hospitality without necessarily an evangelistic (in terms of converting the other) term. There is room for evangelism... but it is not the only means of expression of mission.

“I believe interfaith is a fundamental expression of the Christian's calling through Christ to love the world.”

Imam Ikraam Buksh of the Bald Hills Mosque said the importance of interfaith relations is respecting each other's differences.

“We have differences with every person whether it be religion, status, understanding or career, but at the end of the day we are all humans and we have to leave our differences outside,” he said.

“We are not going to agree on our differences (that is the bottom line), but we can agree on those things we can unite on.

“I think at the end of the day the differences will never be solved, but every mature person understands that everybody has a difference, even a mother and a son, a daughter and a father, but they leave their differences aside and live in harmony. Why can't two religions do that?”

Mr Reed agreed the differences between the two religions need to be understood, but should not stand in the way of a personal connection with others of a different faith.

“It is too simplistic to say we both believe in Jesus,” he said.

“We believe fundamentally different things about Jesus as the Christ and we need to talk about that.

“We still need to respect and love each other by acknowledging those differences and not trying to argue the other one into accepting our set of beliefs.”

Dave Andrews has been working together with people of other faiths for many years including assisting to resettle refugees in Brisbane for the past 20 years.

“We haven't really related to them as Muslims, rather as Iraqis or Afghanis,” he said.

Through his involvement in many organisations (including The Waiters' Union, the Micah Challenge, and TEAR Australia), Mr Andrews has worked together with the Muslim community in Brisbane through organising joint events including a dinner at West End Uniting Church and a discussion and screening of the film *The Imam and the Pastor*.

“I think it is important to do interfaith things because Jesus suggested that sometimes the people that can be our greatest example of a Godly life are not people in our own tradition. That is the moral of the Good Samaritan story and we should take that seriously,” said Mr Andrews.

“With the growing anti-Muslim propaganda over the last few years we decided to do a few things that are specifically relating to Muslims and Christians.

“During the last Iraq war I went to the Mosque and said we need to reaffirm that we are people with an Abrahamic tradition and we need to stand against these people who are trying to divide us,” he said.

Bald Hills Mosque Chairman Ali Kurban said since 11 September 2001 he has noticed a shift in the attitude of the general public.

“Twenty years ago no one asked any questions. We worked together. Now we are watched.”

However, Mr Kurban said there was a great relationship between the Bald Hills Muslim community and the Aspley Uniting Church.

Mr Kurban and another Mosque member Ismail Ebrahim said the key to interfaith relations was to create peaceful communities.

They both agreed there are a lot of comparisons between Christianity and Islam.

“It is the same God, just called different things,” said Mr Ebrahim.

“We want people to be aware of each other's religions and respect them.”

Mr Ebrahim also said the Muslim community in Queensland is very multicultural.

“Some people get Islam confused with custom,” he said.

Mr Kurban talked of plans for a Mosque open day.

“We want to create an openness. Everyone is welcome to come and see and ask questions.”

He also assured *Journey* that the tea is better at the Mosque than at the local Uniting Church.

Copies of the film *The Imam and the Pastor* are available from Grosvenor Books on (03) 98221218 or email grosvenor.books@optusnet.com.au



UK Chair of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists Dr Anas Sheikh-Ali officially delivering *A Common Word* to the Archbishop of Canterbury the Rt Rev. Dr Rowan Williams in Lambeth Palace on 11 October 2007. Photo from www.acommonword.com

Looking for a common word

By **Bruce Mullan**

CLAIMING THAT without peace and justice between Muslims and Christians there can be no meaningful peace in the world, an ad-hoc group of 138 Muslim clerics and scholars from around the globe last year appealed to world Christian leaders “to make peace and to come together in harmony.”

Called by some “Islam's Olive Branch”, the plea came in a letter entitled *A Common Word Between Us and You* signed by Muslim leaders in such diverse places as Egypt, Turkey, Russia, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and war-torn Iraq.

Addressed to some of Christianity's most powerful, including Pope Benedict XVI, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the heads of the Lutheran, Methodist and Baptist churches, the Muslim leaders declared the basis for peace and understanding already exists and is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths – love of the one God, and love of the neighbour.

“These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity.

“The Unity of God, the necessity of love for him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity,” the missive declared.

“The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.”

The group included a former Prime Minister, a Sultan, judges, government officials, and numerous professors, muftis, sheikhs, ayatollahs and imams.

The document has been welcomed by Christian leaders across the globe.

General Secretary of the World Council of Churches Rev Dr Samuel Kobia hailed the initiative and encouraged member churches everywhere to engage constructively and positively with their Muslim neighbours.

Dr Kobia said that in the complex history of Christian-Muslim relations there has been much rivalry and war and the rich and fertile encounters in the realms of life and ideas alike are often forgotten.

“Unfortunately, one of the features of our historical memories has been the way in which conflicts overshadow peaceful experiences and accusations drown the voices of understanding.”

Catholic Archbishop of Sydney Cardinal George Pell said the letter had raised “the intriguing possibility of Christians, Muslims and Jews co-operating to help secular society address its radically diminished ideas of the human person, and the fragmented and incoherent ideas it has about the meaning and value of reason, freedom and love.”

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair said, “This is the only way, in the modern world, to make sense of different history and culture, so that, instead of defining ourselves by reference to difference, we learn to recognise the values we share and define a shared future.”

The letter described the “common ground” as love of God and love of the neighbour.

“Whilst Islam and Christianity are obviously different religions—and whilst there is no minimising some of their formal differences—it is clear that the two greatest commandments are an area of common ground and a link between the Qur'an, the Torah and the New Testament.

“As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them – so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes.

The Muslim leaders asked that the differences between Christianity and Islam not be the cause of hatred and strife between the two religions.

“Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works.

“Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to one another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.”

Living with those who are different

By **Bruce Mullan**

WHEN LIVING with Muslims, many Christians experience uncomfortable tension between respecting their neighbours' faith and a deeply entrenched obligation to evangelise them.

This experience raises a whole raft of theological, spiritual and missional questions for Australian Christians as they ask what it means to be followers of Christ among an increasing diversity of faiths.

The Assembly Doctrine Commission presented a theological statement to guide the Uniting Church in Australia in an increasingly multi-religious society to the Ninth Assembly of the Uniting Church meeting in Adelaide in 2000.

Titled *Living with the neighbour who is different – Christian vocation in a multi-faith Australia*, the statement affirmed that Christians are called to love the neighbours who are different, and acknowledged that the Christian church does not have a consistently good record for respecting and valuing those who we see as “different”.

The Doctrine Working Group claimed that the development of hospitable and respectful relationships with those of other faiths is the proper response to Christ in our society and called on Uniting Church members to engage in conversation with people of other faiths.

The traditional response of the church has been to see its position as exclusivist, denying the presence of saving truth in other faiths and holding to an uncompromising affirmation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

A more pluralist approach tends to deny the claim to Christian uniqueness, says humans can never fully grasp the mystery of God and should accept that all faiths, including Christianity, have only partial knowledge of God.

Theologian, member of the Relations with Other Faiths Reference Group and writer of the report Rev Dr Keith Rowe said, “Pluralists are shocked by any theology that consigns

seventy per cent of the human race to hell because they lack faith in Jesus.”

He points to the strength of the exclusivist position as the “unswerving affirmation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.”

The Doctrine Working Group saw arguments in support of both theological options and affirmed that the Spirit is present in all of life and that the life and work of Jesus does not exhaust the work of the Spirit or exclude the presence of the Spirit in other faiths.

The group described God's purpose as drawing creation into an inclusive wholeness and that unity in Christ does not destroy difference, but robs difference of its power to divide.

While affirming that in Jesus Christ God touches human history in a decisive and particular expression of grace, the statement said Jesus was portrayed as one who “welcomes outsiders, forgives error, accepts Samaritans as faithful, heals a Canaanite woman.”

While affirming the evangelical imperative, the Working Group rejected coercive or manipulative evangelism and called for mission to be enacted in an atmosphere of respect, listening and appreciation.

“We must repent of that series of errors, and purge from our motivation for evangelism any sense of a revival of imperialism, even Christian imperialism,” the Statement said.

“The Working Group believes that the Uniting Church has an important role to play in creating the conditions within which peoples of many faiths can live and work together in appreciative harmony.”

Chair of the Assembly Working Group on Relations with Other Faiths Rev Sef Carroll said her group and the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine are developing a new theological statement which will be presented to the 12th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia for considerations in 2009.



Water and olive trees build bridges with Muslims

PROVIDING CLEAN piped water in eastern Rwanda and planting 1000 olive and fig trees in Israel are two practical examples of Christians and Muslims working together to build stronger relationships.

Anglican Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini said providing clean water was one way to make amends to Muslims in the East African country who have been marginalised by Christians.

In the past, Muslims were often excluded from education and government jobs since they had no place in the majority Roman Catholic Church in Rwanda.

As a result, Muslims were largely confined to engaging in minor trade. This meant they were also held in low regard, because traders are not highly valued while farmers are.

"We Christians see it as one way of saying, 'We are sorry'," said the Archbishop, referring to the water project in the Gatore sector of Rwanda's eastern district of Kirehe.

"This project signifies more than bringing water to those who lacked it before," said Sheikh Yussuf Bizuru, the grand imam of Rwanda's Eastern Province.

"It offers to the rest of Africa and the world a model of harmonious interfaith cooperation for development."

The interfaith water project serves an estimated 21 600 people with filtered clean water collected in concrete reservoirs, and distributed through 39 kilometres of pipelines and at 156 water points.

In Jerusalem, Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan joined people from the Palestinian-inhabited village of Biddu in planting 1000 olive and fig trees next to the Israeli barrier which separates them from their



land, to show that Christians and Muslims can work together.

"We went to be in solidarity with the people," said the Bishop "It is good to make contact with these villages. It builds bridges."

Israel says it needs the 400-kilometer barrier in order to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks emanating from the West Bank and Gaza.

While some sections of the barrier are made of towering cement slabs, the section in Biddu is a wire mesh fence with a yellow gate through which the farmers must pass to work their land.

The villages of the area once had 600 hectares of land, but some 400 hectares have been confiscated for Israeli settlements.

By Fredrick Nzwili and Judith Sudilovsky (ENI)

What Muslims believe

THE BASIC belief of Islam is that there is only one God, whose name in the Arabic language is Allah, and who is the sole and sovereign ruler of the universe.

Muslims believe in the Prophets (special messengers) including Adam, Ibrahim (Abraham), Musa (Moses), Dawud (David), Isa (Jesus). Muhammad is the final prophet.

The Muslim scripture is the Holy Qur'an. Muslims believe it is "the word of God". Muslims treat the Qur'an with great respect because they believe that the Qur'an is from Allah, and every word and every letter is sacred.

Muslims regard the Qur'an as the unaltered word of God.

Muslims are required to pray five times a day, wash themselves before prayer and face in the direction of Mecca (Makkah) while praying.

Living with taboos across faiths

By Rev Dr Apwee Ting

I HAD TWO good friends when I lived in the Indonesian city of Solo.

Andi was a son from a very devoted Muslim family; Chris was a son from a very faithful Catholic family; and I was a son from a pious Buddhist family.

We played together because we were neighbours and our families were good friends.

On one particular day when we visited Chris' home, Andi was watching a statue of Mary which was on the table.

After a few moments, he touched the statue.

Immediately Chris shouted, "Don't touch it, Andi".

Andi pulled his hand away as fast as he could.

He looked at Chris and said, "Why not?"

Over the next few minutes, Chris and his family tried to explain to Andi and me the importance of Mary for them.

The statue of Mary was very sacred for Chris' family; therefore please accept and respect it.

Andi and I did not understand it.

Later, Andi and his sisters told Chris and me that, in their faith, they couldn't have anything that reflected the image of God.

He said Muslims only have Qur'an as their sacred book and people are only permitted to touch, open and read the Qur'an after they perform a purification (washing ritual).

Andi also explained that it is taboo for Muslims to touch unholly animals, such as dogs and pigs.

It is not because these animals were sacred but because of 'haram' — something forbidden according to Islamic belief and traditions.

As we explored each other's faiths, Chris and Andi asked me about the things that my Buddhist family considered sacred and/or taboo.

This childhood conversation has led me (for more than 30 years) to explore in detail the relationship between religions; the understanding of taboos in religions; and the universality underlying this understanding.

Taboos are things that are prohibited in communities supported by religious beliefs, tradition, culture and social structure.

Something may be prohibited because it is believed to be dangerous and could bring a curse to its community.

A taboo implies the notion of the "unknown", "unspoken" or "mystery" that a community needs to accept.

It may have reasons, or may not at all.

Taboos may be able to provide and sustain some sort of identity to a community.

Taboos can unite a community in its own laws and regulations.

For example, those who do not observe or obey the taboo will receive punishments from their own community.

There are things that can be regarded as sacred such as the Hindu Scriptures, Bible, Qur'an, Torah, Laws or any other sacred books or traditions.

There are people or structures that protect these taboos, usually a chief, priest, leader, monk or mufti; someone who receives authority as the guardian of the community.

Each religion sees and believes things according to its own particularity and universality.

A taboo is particular because it depends on its own context, history and source of authority.

For its community, a taboo is also universal; it binds them as part of their own identity.

As a son of a Chinese Buddhist family, I still need to preserve my family honour regardless of where I live and regardless of what my belief is.

It is taboo (unacceptable) for a Chinese family to call older people by their first names; it is taboo (forbidden) to mention death to parents; it is taboo (not permitted) to talk about sex in public.

With different reasons, we also find that these (ethical) taboos are also taboos for many families from different religious or cultural backgrounds.

It is important here not to define what is ethical and what is a religious taboo as a separate function in community.

The relationship between ethical, religious and social taboos is mixed; they complement each other; you can't mention one without the others.

In a multi-faith and multi-religious society like Australia, it is important to remind ourselves that what is acceptable for one faith community may not be acceptable for others.

As part of a wider community, we need to respect a particular community's understanding about taboos, acknowledge that our understanding may be limited, and recognise that people may not understand our own taboos.

Rev Dr Apwee Ting is the Chairperson, Indonesian National Conference and Chairperson of the Uniting Church in Australia Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry. This article was originally published in The Transit Lounge, www.thetransitlounge.com.au



Uniting Church in Australia
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*To be bonded in Christ
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Looking for ways to talk about God

By Dr Val Webb

GOD IS CURRENTLY a hot topic with Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion* and Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great; How Religion Poisons Everything* on bestseller lists, dismissing God as irrelevant, harmful and non-existent.

Their Rottwieler-style attacks are aimed at the traditional theistic God, the all-powerful, all-good, unchanging transcendent Being beyond the universe controlling everything from without and usually depicted as an over-worked, elderly, bearded male.

Many progressive Christians today agree with much of what these men say because this image of a Being changing the laws of the universe at will to aid some and not others no longer fits comfortably with twenty-first century scientific knowledge.

A desert tribal God annihilating neighbouring clans in order to annex land for the chosen ones would inevitably face an international war crimes tribunal today and contemporary ethics have no time for a God who fails to condemn the "righteous" Lot for offering his virgin daughters for gang rape in order to protect his male house guests.

Christian dogmas down the centuries have continued this mentality with a God of love who killed his own Son as a blood sacrifice in order to appease his own Divine offence and wrath over inevitable human sin.

Those offended by such critiques need to realize that, in order to take the Bible seriously, it is not enough to quote tired, out of context proof-texts and humanly constructed atonement theologies while simply ignoring or explaining away these uncomfortable stories.

Since no one has seen God in order to draw a composite picture, anything said about God is a metaphor, a language attempt to describe the Divine in words and images familiar to those in a particular place and time.

Such images are necessarily culturally bound and, like any metaphors, may not work in a different setting.

Today we take great pains to explain a Palestinian shepherd to urban children so they can call God the Good Shepherd, yet when that metaphor first surfaced, everyone would have nodded in affirmation at familiar imagery for God's protective care.

Not only are our God descriptions metaphorical, but sacred texts across all religions contain not just one but a plethora of Divine metaphors – wind, breath, spirit, rock, fortress, mother hen, shield, sword, midwife, potter, archer, friend, destroyer, voice and warrior.

Neither one, nor even all of these metaphors together can describe the Unseen yet somehow



Dr Val Webb back in Queensland to promote her new book. Photo by Bruce Mullan

we have ignored such diversity to fish from a shallow metaphorical pond, such that God has been limited to a literal father, king or judge and endowed with culturally specific characteristics assigned to such human images.

Why is this metaphorical exclusivity a problem? Because our Divine metaphors matter! How we imagine God determines how we live.

If the Divine is an all-seeing Judge on high, we live and act in fear of exposure and punishment. If God is a faithful friend, we are courageous in such a Presence.

If God is Wind, Breath and Spirit within and around us, enlivening the universe and ourselves, then, as part of that Divinely infused universe, we are in this sense, divine.

Just as tribal people living in fear of natural elements and enemies imagined a more powerful God-in-their-corner, so our Divine

images must arise from within our contemporary world view.

Consequently, progressive Christian thinkers have moved away from the theistic God images (which Dawkins and Hitchens attack) to descriptions of a Divine Ground of all Being, a Life-Breath, Lure or Energizer of the Universe, affecting and affected by all that happens within it.

These images are not foreign – they recover the sense behind many biblical metaphors of Wind, Breath or Spirit energising and giving life, images Jesus affirmed within himself and offered to his followers.

When today's questions demand different answers from those of biblical times, such answers are not rebellion or heresy but an acknowledgement of contemporary encounters with what inspired our ancestors in their day.

The question is... can we live with such openness to the new?

IN A WORLD where libraries and bookstores groan under volumes of God-books, NSW based theologian Dr Val Webb struggled with why she should produce another book on God.

"Why would anyone spend years doing such a thing?" said Dr Webb who is concerned by the current rash of books in the popular market which are hell-bent on consigning God to the rubbish-bin.

Former chair of the Queensland Synod's Commission of Education and Communication Dr Webb paid a quick visit to her old stamping ground for a speaking tour promoting her provocative new book *Like Catching Water in a Net: Human Attempts to Describe the Divine*.

Dr Webb said the central message in her book is that anything that can be said about the Divine is a metaphor and metaphors matter.

She sees the current problem with theology is that one or two of the God-metaphors from ancient texts which have become cemented in our doctrines and creeds are really obsolete imagery.

"These ancient metaphors have become literal and sacred, such that they obliterate or devalue all other metaphors and bring with them all the cultural baggage that goes along with those particular images."

Journey is pleased to publish this small taste of Dr Webb's work.

This article was first published in *Insights* and Dr Webb's book is published by Continuum. See *Reviews* page 13



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Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Synod Liaison Minister, Tasmania

NOVEMBER 2008 COMMENCEMENT

The five-year review of the arrangements following the formation of the amalgamated Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has affirmed the need for a continuing Synod placement to be based in Tasmania.

This key leadership position will provide the principal link between the Synod offices in Tasmania and Victoria, manage the Synod office in Launceston, and exercise responsibility on behalf of the Presbytery of Tasmania for the pastoral care of ministry workers in Tasmania.

The person appointed will be a lay or ordained person who is a member of the Uniting Church and has a good knowledge of UCA regulations and processes. Excellent pastoral, communication, interpersonal and organisational skills are essential and theological qualifications will be well regarded.

To apply, please request an application package from:
Ms Robyn Hansen, Executive Assistant to the General Secretary,
by phone on (03) 92515215 or email
robyn.hansen@victas.uca.org.au

Applications close Friday, 13 June 2008

WHAT'S ON

April 28-May 2. National Lay Preachers Conference at Karrajong NSW. For more information visit www.elm.org.au.

April 29, 10am. Meeting of all retired ministers, their spouses and widowed members at The Gap Uniting Church. Morning Tea available from 10am. Lunch from Noon. \$13.50 per person. The guest Speaker will be The Queensland Synod General Secretary, Rev Douglas Jones. For more information contact Jim and Jill Tame on 3891 6462 or email jnjtame@bigpond.net.au.

May 3-5. Round-About Arts and Crafts show at Bulimba Uniting Church. For more information contact Wendy on 3399 8657.

May 4-11. Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. For more information visit the National Council of Churches website www.ncca.org.au.

May 9, 5.30pm. QCT ecumenical worship service at the Cathedral of St Stephen, Brisbane. A service to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Week of Christian Unity. For more information contact Jela at QCT on 3369 6792 or gensec@qct.org.au.

May 9. June Journey deadline.

May 15-16, 8.30am-3.30pm. Wheller Gardens Rummage Sale at Uhl Hall, 930 Gympie Road, Chermerside. Pre-loved clothes, books & knick knacks. Also open Saturday 17th 8am to Noon - half price sale, except craft. Contact M. Herbert on 3857 4668 or bilmer@bigpond.com.

May 17-18. 8am-2pm. Mentoring Workshop with John Mallison at Sunnybank Uniting Church. Internationally known Christian educator John Mallison will focus on modelling, teaching and promoting mentoring. He is an enthusiastic, inspiring teacher with a sense of humour, ability to make the profound simple and the skills and practical know how to help you develop confidence in this important ministry. Registration forms at www.sunnybankuc.org.au. Contact Karen Ross on 32734433 or contact@sunnybankuc.org.au.

May 18, 10am. Beaudesert Uniting Centenary celebration. Guest preacher Rev John Mavor. Worship, book launch, catered lunch to follow. \$10pp, \$25/family. RSVP by 5/5/08 essential. Contact Vey Payne on 5541 1980 or Rob Packer on beaudesert@radiantglory.com.

May 18-24. Simply Sharing Week. For more information visit www.simplysharingweek.org.au.

May 24, 11am-4pm. Uniting Church Safaris 25th Celebration at Sunnybank Uniting Church. Reunion of all past travellers. Please bring mementos and enjoy lunch and fellowship. Contact Doug Fergusson on 3273 2689 or doug_fergusson@hotmail.com.

May 27, 7-10pm. 'Global Watching' fundraising event at Dendy Portside cinemas, Hamilton, Brisbane. See the movie The Jammed and help raise money for Global Walking and international mission. Hear Pauline Coll talking about human trafficking. \$20 per person. Contact Jason Bray on 0407 574 883 or jgibray@tpg.com.au.

June 1, 9am. Mount Sylvia Uniting Church 99th Anniversary celebration service. Former members and friends very welcome. Contact 54622 859 or 4698 7824.

June 12-13. Prepare/Enrich Course at Chapel Hill Uniting Church, Brisbane. Are you working with premarital or married couples? The Prepare/Enrich program and resources are designed to assist clergy, celebrants, counselors and educators as they work with couples. For more information contact Graham Cole on 3309 3558 or gcole@bbc.qld.edu.au.

June 20-22. Trinity Theological College, NQ Short Course, 'Walking Free' at Emmanuel Uniting Church & Edmonton Uniting Church. Contact Hedley Fihaki on hedley@cairns.unitingchurch.com or Marcia Cowen on jmcowen1@bigpond.net.au.

June 26, 10.30am. Mission Thanksgiving Service at St Andrew's Uniting Church, Ann St Brisbane. Guest speaker Paul Bartlett, Frontier Services Sydney. Bring your lunch and meet for fellowship after the service. Tea/coffee available. Supported by Frontier Services Queensland support group. Contact Lorraine Bettenay on randlbettenay@bigpond.com.

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

Two Milestones for Camp Hill

IN 1978 Rev Godfrey Williams formed a Senior Fellowship attended by 18 people at Camp Hill Uniting Church.

After 30 years this Fellowship still meets monthly with an average attendance of 40 and is truly ecumenical, including members of six different faiths. People always enjoy a great time of fellowship.

The 30th anniversary was celebrated with a special meeting addressed by the founding Minister followed by lunch.

In 1958 a Men's Society was formed at the Camp Hill church with a four square program: devotional, educational, social and physical.

Over the years this society assisted with the finances and maintenance of the church.

Eventually women were invited to join what eventually became the Camp Hill Uniting Church Indoor Bowls Group.

The 50th anniversary was celebrated with a reunion of former bowlers.

By D. Miller

Grannies on the net

COMPUTER CLASSES for beginners is just one way the Twin Towns Uniting Church has been assisting senior members of the community to cope with today's demands for technology.

Demand for the classes has led to a second round of the program in May hosted from the Mustard Seed Fellowship Centre at Coolangatta - or was it the morning tea provided by the ladies from the congregation?

Care is never remote

"MY BUSINESS card says 'nurse' but it should read nurse-social worker-teacher-ambulance driver-airstrip monitor!"

Anna Burley is not exaggerating when she describes the range of tasks that typically face Frontier Services' Remote Area Nurses scattered around the Outback.

Job descriptions can be pretty fluid when you're one of only a handful of nurses (no doctors) looking after 60,000 square kilometres of Far North Queensland.

Ms Burley's patients live in Queensland's Etheridge and Croydon Shires which are dotted

with small communities, family-owned cattle stations, mines and mango plantations. There is a significant Indigenous population.

Then there are the visits to stations, the first aid and human relationship classes, the odd stint driving patients to the coast - and ensuring that there are no cows or kangaroos on the airstrip when the Flying Doctor is coming in.

Ms Burley has firm ideas about her role. "We aim for prevention rather than cure."

"Our work is very much about getting people to prevent or manage 'lifestyle illnesses'."

"Prevention also extends to mental health issues associated with stress and depression, relationship problems, and our regular quota of farm injuries," Ms Burley says.

"I also run human relationships classes for primary school kids."

So what's the appeal of remote area nursing?

"I'm not much of a bureaucrat - I'm very much 'hands on' and that's what this work is all about."



Community Nurse Anna Burley. Photo courtesy of Frontier Services

JOURNEY

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Deadline for June Journey is Friday 9 May





Pastor Pain: my journey in burnout

By Steve Bagi
Self-published
RRP \$16.00

"I signed on, fought hard, won victories, but now sit on the sidelines unable to get back in," wrote Steve Bagi who, after 21 years in pastoral ministry (including cross-cultural missionary work and a senior pastor role), burned out.

In the midst of his recovery journey, Mr Bagi (a Queensland pastor) decided to process the personal, role and local church dynamics that brought him to this place of immense pain and loss.

In so doing, he has recycled his pain and made something positive out of it.

With refreshing honesty and

an earthy, conversational style, Mr Bagi holds up a mirror to his own burnout-prone style of ministry and then directs much of the book to church leaders and congregations urging them to consider their contribution to pastor pain.

Indicating that he knew from the beginning that ministry would cost him and his family, Mr Bagi touches on 'churchworld' culture - from the 'nice people' to the 'saboteurs' - concluding that they each contribute to 'unnecessary and avoidable pain' for ministers.

He states that it was this and the destructive 'fine print' of ministry that most undermined him, the unwritten expectations and cultural norms of 'churchworld'.

"It wasn't the job description that I couldn't fill, but the fine print."

Pastor Pain is local and current, adding something fresh to the clergy literature market.

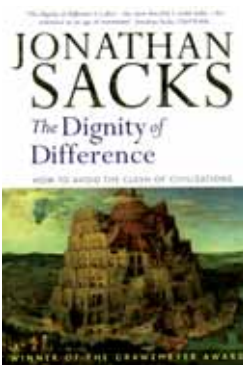
This short book is a good read for ministers, but it is particularly helpful for church councils seeking to understand and protect their minister (and manse family) from the unnecessary costs of ministry.

Indeed, Mr Bagi states that he wrote this personal journey 'for the church', rather than for pastors.

Pastor Pain is available through
www.actuateconsulting.com.au

Reviewed by Meryem Brown,
a psychologist and member of
Redcliffe Uniting Church

REVIEWS



The Dignity of Difference - How to avoid the clash of civilizations

By Jonathan Sacks
Continuum
RRP \$29.95

The Dignity of Difference, a new book by the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, is a conciliatory and compassionate plea for a wider understanding between religious communities, nation states and other conflicting forces of our time.

Unlike most other religious leaders, Mr Sacks has a wonderfully unbigoted attitude; he thinks and writes with great eloquence supported by an amazingly broad range of sources and reading.

He is just as likely to quote philosophers, economists or business leaders as he is the Jewish scriptures.

He can explain difficult concepts with clarity, such as when he equates modern mathematical theory with the tenets of the Bible.

Anyone familiar with Mr Sacks' books will be aware of the emphasis he places on moral reciprocity (a covenant) in contrast to a contract (a legal undertaking) as the essential component of understanding and tolerance.

This applies on every level, be it individuals, tribes, business partners, governments, nations or religions.

He believes no one religion is paramount. The differences in religions must generate understanding rather than a desire to exclude others.

This is a sentiment which has often gone against the course of history - the very opposite of, say, Islamic fundamentalism - and an unorthodox view which has with this book brought him into conflict with his own community.

Naturally, his view is that the world faiths embody truths unavailable to economics and politics, but this is not a 'religious' book in the usual sense.

Mr Sacks' conclusion in what he describes as 'a covenant of hope' is both a dire warning and an upbeat aspiration.

Reviewed by Jill Curtis, a senior psychotherapist in the UK and author of books on parenting issues. Visit her website at www.familyonwards.com

Like Catching Water in a Net: Human attempts to describe the Divine

By Val Webb
Continuum
RRP \$34.95

Val Webb is a writer, teacher, artist, theologian and scientist who weaves knowledge and experience together as she encourages the reader to open themselves to a myriad of metaphors, symbols and images that reveal the divine across cultures, religions and centuries.

But this is far more than an historical journey.

Like catching water in a net invites us to re-image the divine in ways which are relevant for our contemporary, multi-faith contexts as links, connections, similarities and commonalities in the ways in which God is imaged across religions.

Dr Webb acknowledges the magnitude of the task: "How can one speak of the Divine when every word, every utterance, every picture, every expression falls pitifully short of the task?"

Even so, speak she does, beginning with the challenge of "The God who is not..."

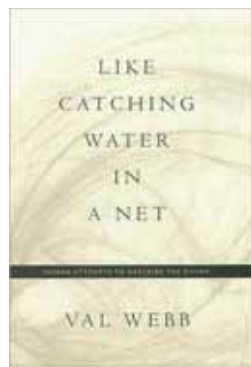
Dr Webb's conviction that the divine mystery defies description leads her to the claim that God cannot be limited to any one creed.

Dr Webb proposes that we "hardly have enough information to form a complete image of Jesus, let alone God."

She seeks to address the concern that many name as the reason they are no longer part of a worshipping community: that the God proclaimed from the pulpit is a stumbling block rather than an aid to belief because it asks them to leave their minds in an earlier time.

This book will appeal to those who long for our liturgy, preaching and speaking about God to be freed from (what they experience as) the confining, narrow and lifeless language of Father, King or Lord.

It will appeal to people who long to embrace, within the Christian community, the richness of metaphorical language for God which is tied neither to human images nor the Christian story.



Like catching water in a net is an invitation to the journey, to the questions of life, and to the adventure of being fully alive.

Reviewed By Carol Bennett,
Assistant General Secretary
of the Uniting Church
in Queensland



The Ten Commandments

Directed by Bill Boyce and John Stronach
Promenade Pictures
Rated PG

When I saw Promenade Pictures were releasing a new animated version of the story of Moses my first thought was, 'Why?'

The Academy Award winning *Prince of Egypt* is barely 10 years old and has set the standard high for family movies on the topic.

Inevitably this new movie was always going to sit in the shadows of the Dreamworks classic, so it was a risk for Promenade to make this their first of what is to be a collection of 12 animated biblical epics.

Thus my expectations for this movie were low when I sat down to watch with my six-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter.

I was pleasantly surprised, and my kids enjoyed it and even asked to watch it again the next day.

While the influence of the Dreamworks version is obvious in the storytelling, this is its own movie.

The Ten Commandments traces the story of Moses from his birth to his death on the verge of Jordan.

To cover so much territory in 88 minutes means that this is a very simple, straight version of the story, one that young children will enjoy, but which adults might be content to leave to the kids.

Obviously made on a budget, the 3D computer generated imagery is at times jumpy, although my kids were impressed with some of the sweeping scenes that try to give it an 'epic' feel.

The voices were fine except that Christian Slater (Moses) had a very flat tone that limits his emotional expression.

There is also some over-protectiveness for Miriam and Aaron who both fail in the biblical account, yet are easily excused in this version.

A handy resource for children's ministry, but not really an epic.

Reviewed by Rev Paul Clark,
Minister with the Burdekin
Uniting Church

U23D

Directed by Catherine Owens and Mark Pellington
National Geographic
Rated G

After premiering at the Sundance Film Festival earlier this year *U23D* has taken the world by storm.

Shot during U2's visit to South America on the *Vertigo* tour, this film really is more than a record of a concert; it is a work of art.

In one moment the audience is taken from standing right in front of Bono to the back of the enormous stadium to take in the scene.

I was completely transported and found it very hard not to cheer at the end of each song.

Playing a mixture of hits and new material, this film is a great reminder of how good this band actually is; how those 20-year-old guitar riffs that start so many of their hits can still send tingles of anticipation through your spine.

It is hard to remember that U2 are just four people.

Yes, The Edge has a guitar pedal set-up to die for, but essentially U2 are still four lads from Dublin making music and having fun. Their affection for each other is obvious and touching.

There was apparently no fixing of the sound in post-production, which gives the audience a true representation of seeing the band live.

The 3D effects take nothing away from the film itself. Many times I forgot I was even wearing the 3D glasses.

The background video screens were a work of art using graphics and words to add to the meaning of the music at every turn.

Animated scribble drawings were also great, but only used in two songs so they seemed a little out of place.

I am a huge fan of the 1988 U2 film, *Rattle and Hum*, the pinnacle of which I believe is the song *Sunday Bloody Sunday*.

In *U23D*, *Sunday Bloody Sunday* is once again a highlight with Bono chanting, "Mohammad, Moses, Jesus... all sons of Abraham", a powerful moment that reflects the political and religious vigour of U2 and their ability to inspire and make people accountable for their actions.

With the standard price of stadium concert tickets upwards of \$100, *U23D* is a great family night out for U2 fans and new fans alike.

Reviewed by Mardi Lumsden, the associate editor of *Journey*

May 4: Pine Mountain Uniting Church

Pine Mountain Uniting Church came into being named after Pine Mountain Road on which it was situated.

The church purchased a former sports centre and has since carried out a range of activities including regular worship services.

During 2007 it was identified that God had been changing us as a congregation and that our existing logo did not represent who we were.

In the process of finding a new image the name Living Faith Uniting Church emerged representing what God was doing in and through us as a part of the Body of Christ.

Over the last few years there has been considerable spiritual growth in the lives of congregation members which has resulted in it becoming a growing congregation numerically as well as spiritually.

The facility God has given us has become a community centre with a wide variety of activities.

We have been able to give a local conservation group free use of the facility as part of our commitment to the area due to God's generosity to us.

We are currently making connections with local community users including providing a coffee shop ministry to dance group parents two mornings a week.

This ministry has been greatly appreciated by the parents.

Thanks to Vision for Mission for their contribution to this ministry.

We currently host Agape International Church, an English/Mandarin service primarily for international students.

Our Mission statement is Spreading Love, Giving Hope, Building Faith.

Join us in praying for:

- Continued outreach into the community through a variety of ministries
- The upgrading and maintaining of the facility for the growing use by the church and other users
- God's continual presence in the lives of the people who make up the Living Faith Uniting Church
- The continued growth of each of the current leaders and emerging leaders in our strong and vibrant Leadership Team
- God's will to be done in and through Living Faith Uniting Church.

PRAYER DIARY

May 18: Frontier Services

For more than 95 years, Frontier Services has sought to provide a 'mantle of safety' for people who live and work in outback Australia.

Today, we are the major provider of residential and community aged care, health and community services, migrant services and pastoral support across 85% of the continent in regional centres, and on Aboriginal communities, isolated properties and mining sites.

In Queensland, Frontier Services has over 70 staff who deliver a range of services including:

Remote nursing and health clinics at Bollon, Georgetown and Mt Surprise;

Assistance to isolated families, including childcare and early childhood education out of Charleville, Longreach, Mareeba, Mt Isa and Emerald;

Student accommodation at Charleville and Atherton;

Provision of short-term volunteers to assist families in need through Outback Links coordinated from Charleville;

Patrol ministries out of Charleville, Weipa, Cunnamulla and Hughenden;

A recently moved Regional Office now at 41 Cadell St, Auchenflower behind the Synod Offices.

Without your active support this work could not continue.

Please join us as we give thanks to God for this work, as together we build a healthy heartland for our country.

Please uphold in your prayers:

- Marina Izatt our Queensland Regional Manager and all our Queensland staff
 - Rev Dennis Cousins who has just moved to the Cunnamulla Patrol
 - Mrs Rosemary Young our National Director
 - Rev David Thiem, our Associate National Director
 - The people of Charleville and Emerald, including our Patrol Minister the Rev John Case, whose houses were recently flooded.
- Frontier Services will be the focus of the Annual Mission Thanksgiving Service on 26 June at St Andrews Uniting Church, Ann St, Brisbane at 10.30am.

May 24: St Lucia Uniting Church

Situated in the centre of our suburb, St Lucia Uniting Church is blessed with a loving congregation, including members of the Indonesian community and University of Queensland students.

With the Ironside State School immediately across the road, we value our connection to it through Friday morning Religious Instruction and some of the children who attend Sunday School.

The Lady Gowrie Child Care Centre has also resided in our lower hall for many years now, so children are a special part of us.

Our minister David, his wife Julie with their two little daughters Emma and Jessica blend nicely with this.

The Brisbane Indonesian Fellowship worships monthly reaching out to the Lord with heartfelt prayers and a wonderful sense of true Christian devotion.

From this year the International Full Gospel Fellowship has begun sharing our church for its weekly services.

Another welcome addition in 2008 has been our student minister Lyn Chew and we pray for God's hand to guide her learning and bless her family.

With so many blessings we give thanks to God for:

- The presence of the St Lucia Uniting Church in our community
- The rich variety of gifts that members of our congregation bring to our worship and life together
- We ask you to join us in praying for:
 - Young people, especially those away from home in the University of Queensland colleges
 - Older people in Aveo and other aged care facilities in our area
 - Migrant families; that they find a spiritual home as they settle in a new country
 - Insight, to find the work of God, not where it fits but where it is, not in comfort but in justice, not in cosy security but in our risks
 - The risen Lord Jesus to watch over us and renew us as he renews the whole of creation.



Divisional Commissioner 6th Brisbane Elaine Marjoram, Courtney Longhurst and Hayley Searle, and Captain 1st Pine Rivers Girls' Brigade Leanne Close. Photo by Rebecca Cathcart

Pioneering young women awarded

IN FRONT of a packed church, two young ladies were recently honoured for their faith in action. At Pine Rivers parish, Courtney Longhurst and Hayley Searle received the highest National Award that can be received by girls in Girls' Brigade: the Pioneer Pin.

Many months of faithful study, training and service were required, including leadership of younger Girls' Brigade members. Referred by their local church and assessed by a national-level panel, Hayley and Courtney received their Pins from Mrs Elaine Marjoram, Divisional Commissioner 6th Brisbane.

Both Courtney and Hayley are in the Queen's Award program.

Leader of 3rd Bundaberg Girls Brigade Mrs Vanessa Dart, from Bundaberg Uniting Church, was also recently commissioned as the new Assistant Divisional Commissioner for Wide Bay.

By Phil Smith

Celebrating a Cherbourg saint

AILEEN BRADY was born 4 August 1927 at Barambah station (later Cherbourg Aboriginal reserve) and died 23 March 2008 in Cairns.

Mrs Brady was born to Henry Willis, of the Kalili people in South West Queensland, and Eunice Willis.

Entering Singleton Bible College was her ticket of release from the requirements of the Queensland Acts which restricted the movement of the Indigenous residents on aboriginal reserves.

Aileen and husband Don Brady ministered from Fingal to Kingaroy, arriving in Brisbane in the 1960s to serve the Methodist church.

The Paddington parsonage became their home and a haven for scores of 'lost souls' who shared whatever Aileen and her children had.

A funeral service was held at West End Uniting Church.

The Brady family has taught profound lessons of the heart while providing an inescapable challenge to address the unfinished task of reconciliation and social justice.

Taken from an obituary by Rev Dr Noel Preston

New spirituality doesn't make you happy

MOVING AWAY from traditional religious beliefs to trendy, self-focused religions and spirituality is not making young adults happier, according to new Queensland research.

A University of Queensland study based on surveys of 3705 21-year-olds born in Brisbane found that young adults with a belief in

a spiritual or higher power other than God were at greater risk of poorer mental health and antisocial behaviour and had higher rates of disturbed and suspicious thoughts and paranormal beliefs than those who rejected this belief.

Young people who held non-traditional beliefs were up to twice as likely to feel anxious and depressed than those who rejected this belief.

Their religious backgrounds were also assessed from questions answered by their mothers when the study began in the early 1980s.

Study author School of Population Health PhD graduate Dr Rosemary Aird said her research was the first in Australia to examine young adults' mental health, thoughts, and social behaviour according to their religious and spiritual beliefs, involvement in church services and religious background.



Don't mention the war

The April edition of *Journey* contained lots of Christian pacifist material, but the bottom line comes (appropriately on the last page!) when the question is posed "Should Christians take up arms?"

Three people were asked and the answers came back, yes, yes, and yes!

I believe these people are just being practical. I am sure we all know in our hearts, as Christians, the answer is no, no, no!

Of course we all compromise because of our fears, weakness, and lack of faith. But we should not compromise the most basic Christian message of nonviolence.

When we do we end up with such amazing contradictions as Kevin Rudd proclaiming the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, while at the same time praising the most famous war criminal/terrorist of our times George Bush.

Gandhi, perhaps the most famous practitioner of non-violence, credited Jesus as the foremost teacher.

Not a Christian himself, Gandhi declared that it seemed Christians were the only ones who read the Gospels and missed the obvious fact that Jesus was a pacifist.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer himself never renounced his pacifism, despite being part of a plot to kill Hitler. He feared for the fate of his immortal soul, taking the course he did in plotting to kill another human being made in the image and likeness of God.

He never denied the Gospel message of nonviolence as Kevin Rudd and most Christians since Constantine have done.

As a father of seven beautiful children, I have often thought of what I would do if their lives were threatened.

Would I kill some crazed maniac, or enemy soldier, or others threatening them? Who knows? Perhaps I would in the end.

But I would never betray Jesus to the extent of building a theology around my actions to justify it.

I think this was the fatal flaw of the just war theory, originally formulated to limit the horror of war.

It has sadly served the purpose of being used by Christians to justify any and every war since.

Apologies to every Christian in the Australian armed forces, to every Christian who ever fought in a war, whether for Hitler, George Bush, or more noble leaders, but Jesus gives us the final answer, his last message to his followers on being captured, "Put away your guns!"

Jim Dowling
Ocean View

Apologies to Jim and the Pine Gap4. Our article said they served two years in jail – they actually waited two years for trials to finish. They each spent some time in jail, but only four to ten days. Ed.

Thank you for addressing the vitally important issues of peace and war.

I was concerned, however, to read the piece entitled "Churches condemn the 'War on Terror'",

The article refers to a document produced by the National Social Responsibility and Justice Agency (now UnitingJustice Australia), giving the impression that it is a newly issued report.

It was in fact written in 2001 following the invasion of Afghanistan.

This invasion concluded with the overthrow of the Taliban and the current military action in Afghanistan is now one that supports the government of Afghanistan, protecting the security of the people and rebuilding the nation.

While the Uniting Church will always advocate for an end to war and violence, the National Assembly has not made any recent public comment on the situation in Afghanistan.

The Uniting Church, like all other Australian churches, condemned the invasion of Iraq and, more recently, the National Assembly has made comment about other aspects of the so-called 'war on terror', including the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and Australia's anti-terrorism legislation.

LETTERS

It should also be noted that the language of "war on terror" is used by the media and political leaders to refer to an ever-increasing range of actions and situations.

As a church, it is important that when we engage in advocacy and report on the history of our involvement in public issues, we speak with clarity and accuracy so that we do not add to current misunderstandings, misperceptions and the tendency by media and political leaders to over-simplify and generalise such complex and difficult situations as the current one in Afghanistan.

Rev Elenie Poulos
National Director UnitingJustice Australia

Journey was not aware that the information in the report was outdated and apologises to UnitingJustice for indicating that it was current. Ed.

It seems the last edition of *Journey* takes a pacifist stance that flows from UCA culture.

It helps shape a good question: How will we be peace makers?

There were praiseworthy examples of protestors and peace activists, and one of a number of our ministers who have become left-wing members of parliament.

I had lunch with my Dad, and read a newspaper article about a Toowoomba Uniting Church celebrating the memory of 180 people on the church's honour roll.

Dad was one of thousands still in our denomination who put up their hands and said, "I'll go".

His generation said, "Fascism will not rule the world. Evil will be opposed, by force if necessary".

Today I was awarded the Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal.

It will be worn alongside others as I stand with thousands of service men and women, including Christ followers, who have disarmed factions in civil war, repaired communities after earthquakes, lifted land mines, and fought terrorists.

Who makes peace, and enforces it?

Nehemiahs like Sgt Michael Lyddiard who returned to Townsville from Afghanistan minus half an arm, one eye and a couple of fingers. He was disarming a bomb.

Former colleagues came under fire again recently while repairing yet another school for girls previously denied an education by the Taliban.

In my head I can't balance wearing a military uniform with "turn the other cheek" and "thou shalt not kill".

In my experience I don't know of any viable alternative to the military force Australia has applied in places such as Bougainville, East Timor and Banda Aceh.

Phil Smith
Pine Rivers

What impeccable timing!

In the very week the nation and the families of the crew receive some appreciation of the horrific battle that ended in the sinking of HMAS Sydney, the voice of the Queensland Uniting Church advocates pacifism.

It was also only weeks from ANZAC Day when we remember with deep appreciation all those who accepted the need to go against their peaceful inclinations, and take up arms to defend the peace and freedom we enjoy today.

By all means, try to live at peace with all people, but realise that some will simply take that as evidence of weakness and seek to exploit it.

Jim Uhlmann
Living Faith Uniting Church

So sorry... there's more

Scott Stephens' remarks in his article "An apology without guilt" (March *Journey*) ring true at such a high pitch that it hurts hearing.

We shouldn't be surprised by his claim that the apology is more about us than Indigenous Australians, given that it is the human propensity to avoid guilt rather than accept it.

So often critical thinkers have accused baby boomers, Gen X and the rest as being completely self-absorbed.

I mean, we have a global crisis from the abuse of our natural resources on our hands.

Doesn't that tell us something about our capacity for sincerity?

For goodness sake, let's be a bit honest about our condition.

How can we assume that we can put our self obsession aside and engage in a national apology that has any hope of real long term social turn around for the refugees of the European invasion?

For real, we can't even sustain lasting compassion and unity in the white society because of our human sinfulness. Why do we think that our motivations in this ring would be any better.

Australia has entrenched racism in its social DNA. It's a safe bet that the apology is more about us than Indigenous Australians.

If I'm wrong I guess I'll see lots of White Australians having dinner with Indigenous Australians and learning about how they might bring love and community into their neighbourhood.

Craig Mischewski
Townsville

March *Journey's* letters should have put closure to the Sorry Day story, however Scott Stephens' reply in "Cleansed by Jesuits" shows that his judgmental attitude has missed the point again.

Just a spectacle for all non-indigenous viewers? And remember Mr Stevens, not all non-Indigenous Australians are white.

How many of those non-Indigenous Australians, who were in Parliament, in the square outside, or like myself in front of big screens in the cities of Australia, have stood with Indigenous Australians for up to almost sixty years!

Are you too young to remember the struggles leading up to the referendum which recognised Indigenous people as citizens - for seats at theatres, the right to swim in public pools?

Do you remember the street marches and arrests of those who protested against the land-grabs of the Bjelke-Petersen Government?

Many of us were moved to tears by Sorry Day, not because of the 'spectacle' but because the didgeridoos and the warm embrace symbolised the beginning of a new relationship.

Alan Renton
Magnetic Island

I applaud Scott Stephens' courage of his convictions to make public comment in "The Apology and the moral significance of guilt" (March *Journey*).

Those of us who formed life-long friendships with Scott and his wife during his (too) short time with us at Chermide Kedron would not be surprised that this man of great integrity would not let the momentous occasion pass without taking the opportunity to remind us there is nothing straightforward about ethical or moral acts.

At the same time Mr Stephens' care and concern for all acts of injustice (observed or subtle), in particular our Indigenous population, are further acts of daily following Jesus whatever the cost.

Jan Elcock
Chermide

Scott Stephens' criticism of the apology (March *Journey*) argued that the whole ceremony 'reeked of kitsch, empty ceremony and pretence'.

Published commentators in the April *Journey* suggested he was wrong.

Unfortunately I suspect he was right, but not for the reason that Mr Stephens suggested.

Mr Rudd, in common with many current political leaders, has a tendency towards populism.

Queensland's Goss Government (in which Mr Rudd had a central role) was more notable for its pretensions than for its performance.

John Craig
Centre for Policy and Development Systems

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

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I am an 87 year old veteran of World War 2, with six years service in an infantry battalion.

I acquired, and still have, respect for the teachings of the Risen Christ, but I must confess to problems with "Love your enemy" and "Turn the other cheek" and, in particular, "Forgive and forget".

Although I am in broad agreement with the theme of peace, I find myself completely confused by the use of a photo of a German soldier (front page, April *Journey*) to illustrate the point.

From bitter experience I can state that the army of the Third Reich was the very antithesis of peaceful co-existence.

Although not identified as such, I suggest that anyone carrying a Gewehr, model 32 Mauser rifle, and wearing a German 'coal scuttler' helmet can reasonably be identified as a German soldier of WW2.

Am I missing something obvious here or should I just assume that the photo was selected in ignorance?

Yours, more in sorrow than anger.

Roger Devey
Wynnum

You are absolutely correct. The photo was selected in ignorance by an editor who was born after the conclusion of the Second World War. Please accept our apologies. Ed.

JOURNEY asks...

What has been your experience of living with Muslims?

Fuzz Kitto

It's just after 5am in Cairo and through my sleeper haze I am conscious of the early morning call to prayer coming from the streets.

It is a strange and yet beautiful sound that divides the day and, after a while, it goes to the recesses of the mind.

As I walk out the door of the apartment and across the small street every morning for my prayers at the Cathedral, I say "Salam" to the Muslim guard and smile.

He smiles back and says "Salam" – he knows little English and I little Arabic, but we are friends and joke non-verbally with each other everyday.

Next to the apartments is a little dry cleaner where the Muslim owner tries out his English on me and occasionally I understand what he is saying.

I try out my Arabic on him and I am sure he understands less of my Arabic – we laugh and we are friends but he still charges me more than the locals.

When children are born they are registered as Muslim or Christians and while proselytising is illegal in Egypt, as in most Muslim countries in the Middle East, it is acceptable to evangelise people who are registered as Christians.



My favourite checkout man smiles at me when I come into the shop and loves to ask me questions about Australia and Christianity.

As I walk the streets and as I travel around Lower Egypt, people stare at the beard and look at the cross and wonder if I am a Bishop.

As soon as I smile and offer Salam most smile back and want to engage in conversation.

I find almost all Egyptian Muslims to be very hospitable and "welcome to Egypt" are generally the first English words they learn.

It does not take long to realise we are humans together and when relationships are formed and friendships made they are highly respected.

Egypt is a very Muslim culture – an intoxicating culture that reveres hospitality, study of the Book (Qur'an and Bible) and the giving of money to the poor.

I see God in the rituals of prayer as the traffic stops on Fridays at lunchtime and the taxi drivers and all get out of their cars on the insane motorways and bow in prayer.

Even driving on the roads is a spiritual experience based on Inshaallah – the will of Allah.

Living amongst Muslims is crazy, frustrating, sad and wonderful.

It makes you wary and, at the same time, want to learn more Arabic to discover and communicate more about how Muslims connect with God, see life and express their spiritually yearnings.

It is a very different faith from mine yet there is much in common and, as monotheistic Abrahamic faiths, we believe it is the same God.

Fuzz Kitto is a Youth Ministry Consultant with 25 years of full-time experience in youth work with local congregations, regional denominational churches and para-church organisations. Visit his website at www.spirited.net.au

Katie Manning

I first moved to Nizamuddin, New Delhi, India in 1993, with my husband Greg. We made our home in a single room on our landlady's rooftop.

We spent three years in this fascinating old Muslim village which had been swallowed by the city on all sides.

Later, in 1999, we returned after the arrival of our two eldest children and stayed in the adjacent suburb for the next 8 years. We returned to Australia last year.

The lady who helped me clean our house was Muslim, my children's friends and schoolmates were Muslim, and some of Greg's colleagues were Muslim.

We became very close to a number of families who included us in their households with joy. Three of these families were Muslim.

They prayed frequently, they had a profound awareness of God's presence in the world and trusted him with their lives.

They fed us (delicious Moghul food), they prayed for us and our extended families, and they advised us.

I learnt how to care for my youngest baby without the use of nappies past her third month, and hence we saved money and were spared nappy rash!

They accepted our many differences and failings while encouraging us to pursue our best, and God's hopes for our lives.

They respected their mothers very highly, and consequently teenagers and young adults sought me out for wisdom and care.

Hot topics were guidance in raising children with limits and connectedness,

managing personal stress and frustration, as well as the many and varied health issues they were facing.



Katie Manning with Hasina and Rukhsana, two of her closest friends in Delhi

Were they very different from us? Yes, in many ways. But, we expected that. After all, we are Aussie Christians and they are relatively poor, traditional Indian Muslims.

But I want to say in a loud and clear voice, we were never threatened or attacked. In fact, we were promised refuge if ever we did perceive danger.

I was never sexually harassed; rather I was respected as a mother.

The 'Them and Us' divide existed so much more around our access to resources than around our practice of faith.

My experience living with Muslims in Delhi has left me profoundly upset by the media's portrayal of 'Muslims' as aggressive and dangerous, and by the general population's distrust and dislike for people different from us.

Katie Manning is a former fieldworker with TEAR Australia. She and her family are part of the Waiters' Union community in West End in Brisbane

While two people responded to the question, Journey asked a young Muslim woman about her experience of living with Christians.

Homa Forotan

Very positive indeed.

I was aware of the Christian faith before I came to Australia but I hadn't experienced living with Christians as much as I am doing now.

I had a Christian friend at college. She was the only Christian girl in our class and we had no issues. In fact we had a deep understanding and respect for each other's faith.

As I see it, partly the respect came from – as a Muslim – my own belief in Jesus (PBUH)*, the holy Bible and the same God that we all are creatures of.

We used to wish each other on our religious events such as Christmas and Eid**.

I remember watching movies on Mary and Jesus (PBUH) and always marvelled at the greatness of their personality, and my teachers reading the accounts of Jesus (PBUH) from the Holy Qur'an.

Hence Christianity and Jesus were never alien to me.

Here in Australia, I have met wonderful people from this faith.

Of course there are bad people in every society, bad followers in every religion.

It is the goodness in the vast majority of people that dissolves the bitterness in the

ignorant behaviour of a few others who think Muslims are all terrorists and anti west.

Such behaviour is particularly typical towards a Muslim woman due to the way she dresses.

However, over the years that I've lived here, in my new home, I have learnt that it is the mentality that matters the most.

I think the victim mentality should be abandoned so that the practical goodness can shed all the prejudice.

I believe that all of us just by mere fact of being fellow humans have enough in common to be able to not only respect but cooperate with each other.

Homa Forotan was born in Afghanistan and came to Australia at 18 years of age. She wants to practise medicine and is currently studying in Bachelor of Biomedical Science program at the University of Queensland

* PBUH is "Peace be upon him", a phrase that Muslims often say after saying the name of a prophet of Islam. In Arabic these salutations are called *salawat*. "Peace be upon him" is abbreviated to SAW or PBUH.

** Eid is an Arabic word for festival.

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