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"Along with most of the town, St George Uniting Church members worked tirelessly to help others get their belongings out of flood reach." **Rev Michael Brumpton**

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"Every day we transform lives and offer compassionate care bringing hope and healing." **Rev Robyn Kidd**



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MEETING OUR MAKER

By Phil Smith

AS WE CELEBRATE the Easter season, particularly the resurrection, we can also reflect on our own mortality and the hope we have in Christ of eternal life.

In contemporary society we don't discuss death very often. Talking about death is seen as negative and depressing but it is, as the saying goes, one of the certainties of life.

With our ageing population, death and what happens next is not something Australians can continue to ignore.

Many 21st century Australians hope for a fairytale afterlife, based on wishful thinking rather than a biblical idea of eternity with their creator God.

Palliative care chaplain James Stevenson said his experience indicates people near to death

are more likely to embrace superstition than the nihilism of the new atheism.

"Even people with no faith experience cling to the idea that there must be something after this," he said. "Nothingness is not acceptable and they need to feel their lives must have counted for something."

"That something emerges primarily from the significance of relationships with loved ones. The idea that they will never be seen again is intolerable, so there remains hope in the 'something'."

With such diverse and vague hopes it is difficult to define a single contemporary view on death.

If contemporary attitudes include the rise of secular views, it's worth noting that a funeral

service for secular celebrants was published by Monash University in 1979.

In 2005 Judy McNicol from the Monash School of Historical Studies wrote in the *Eras* online journal about the "cultural default" toward secular funerals.

Ms McNicol said in England it was still normal for clergy to conduct funerals, but that in Australia the "cultural default" was to a civil ceremony.

"In Australia ... approximately 50 per cent of funerals are conducted in secular venues by civil celebrants."

Funerals, like marriages and baptisms, become events rather than services of worship: hatches, matches and despatches. This self-centred view of death clashes with a Christian theology of worship that puts Christ as the central focus.

So is there a contemporary Christian view of death? The reality of Christ's death and resurrection remains central to the church's view of death.

Our understanding is the same today as it was when Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are the most unfortunate of all people. But Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep."

Our view of death is not a morbid personal reflection on the end of human life. It is a view through the Easter event. That perspective alters life before and after we stop breathing.

Contrary to the contemporary secular view, this isn't about us. Nor is it only about what comes after this earthly life.

In his book *Surprised by Hope*, the Anglican bishop of Durham, Nicholas (Tom) Wright said, "The Christian hope is that what God did for Jesus in raising him from the dead, is what God will do for us as well."

Afterlife is redefined by uniting it with Christ's resurrection, a life lived in Christ. James Stevenson describes that as a seamless integration of the gospel: a now and forever view.

"Dualist terms such as Heaven and Earth make it easier for those outside the Church to think of pie in the sky when you die."

Death should be a transition from our experience of new life in Christ now, to the fullness of eternal life.



My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

WHEN JESUS quoted Psalm 22 to express his agony on the cross he entered into the depth of experience of many people over thousands of years.

This same cry has come from the lips of millions of people who have experienced natural disaster, financial ruin, war, abuse, unemployment, homelessness and many other crises.

Almost all people experience times when there seems to be no light ahead.

I don't know how you respond in such times, but I find myself becoming frustrated and even angry that God seems to remain silent.

Jesus himself did not hear any voice of affirmation from his Father while on the cross.

Instead, in the silence, he reached a point of surrender as he placed himself into the hands of the silent God.

This was an astonishing act of faith in the face of certain death.

We stand on the other side of the resurrection and therefore can fail to see just how painful

and difficult it must have been to come to a point of trust in the face of the apparent absence of God.

Yet Jesus was able to die saying, "Into your hands I commit my Spirit".

The Uniting Church in Queensland faces some serious challenges to our life.

We are facing a situation in which the Christian faith is seen as simply one religious option in a smorgasbord of religious experiences and ideas.

We view the dying of activities or even congregations as failures, rather than a surrendering that may lead to new life.

We are faced with serious financial challenges that mean that although we have billions of dollars worth of property we can't find the money to sustain, let alone grow, our mission.

We desperately try to hold onto what we already have; fearing that letting go will be certain death.

We view the dying of activities or even congregations, as failures rather than a surrendering that could lead to new life.

We hope for immortality rather than trust that in dying we might be born to eternal life.

While Jesus' death was painful, unjust, and even frightening, he was able to see it as the completion of his mission. Yet it was not the final word.

Jesus' resurrection shows that death is never the final word from God's perspective.

This Easter I encourage all congregations to look at what property is held that might be surrendered for the wellbeing of the whole Church in Queensland.

I know people have worked hard to purchase and maintain property in the hope that it would enable them to fulfil the mission of Christ.

However so much property is not used effectively for mission.

It may be time that it was sold and the income used to fund something entirely new.

Message from the Moderator

Rev Bruce Johnson



If we hold onto all our property we will die in failure.

If we surrender some property now, we will find ourselves being filled with new life.

When Jesus died on the cross the world thought that Jesus had been defeated and that the power of evil had finally won.

Christians believe, however, that Jesus willingly died so that through his death and resurrection all people might have the power to become God's children.

It seems to me that this principle of life being born from death applies not just to our eternal relationship with God,

but to all aspects of life in God's reign.

As you spend time this Easter reflecting upon the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, I pray that this will not only be a revisiting of history, but also that the truth and power of those climactic events will permeate your whole being.

I pray that no matter what you face in your own life or within the life of your Church community, you will find confidence and hope in knowing that God is the source of life and that death need no longer hold fear.

Christ is indeed risen. Alleluia.

Sign of the times



The cult of celebrity death

DO YOU know where you were when J.E.K or John Lennon were assassinated?

What about when you heard of the deaths of Princess Diana, Mother Teresa, or in recent years Steve Irwin, Heath Ledger or Michael Jackson?

Contemporary western society has an obsession with celebrity deaths.

We are fortunate to live our lives relatively sheltered from death, unlike those in developing nations where, due to famine, drought or war, death is way of life.

So why do we feel moved by the death of someone famous?

Even though I don't care I still find myself trawling online news sites for information after someone famous dies.

Is it because we feel like we knew them personally or because celebrity deaths are so often seemingly untimely?

Perhaps it is because we put celebrities on pedestals, thinking of them as super-humans who are perennially beautiful, slim, fashionable and perfect.

But when the only one who was perfect was nailed to a cross, what did the people do?

Did they start a Facebook group and pour out emotional goodbyes?

Like so many people, Jesus died a lonely death.

However in his death we can celebrate what comes next – the promise of eternal life.

Despite continual sightings of the long-departed Elvis Presley, I am sure no celebrity, other than



Jesus, has ever come back to life to give the world the promise of eternal life.

Mardi Lumsden
Editor

AS COMMUNITIES around Charleville and Roma were battered with strong rain and floods in March, St George Uniting Church minister Rev Michael Brumpton decided to reassure the people of his community that God was with them.

This is a message that continues to remain relevant as rough seas and cyclonic winds hit coastal Queensland and our neighbours in the Pacific.



Sign of the Times is sponsored by Blackstar Coffee. The chosen entry will be contacted by Blackstar to receive their prize of freshly roasted organic fairtrade coffee. www.blackstarcoffee.com.au.

Church leaders voice concerns about Christmas Island

UNITING CHURCH President Rev Alistair Macrae and Anglican Archbishop of Perth, the Most Rev Roger Herft, have voiced concerns for the wellbeing of asylum seekers on Christmas Island following a recent visit.

A delegation of church leaders visited Christmas Island in late February to see first-hand the conditions under which asylum seekers are detained, and to meet with key personnel and asylum seekers.

Mr Macrae described the facilities as "basic but adequate for short-term needs" but said overcrowding was clearly evident.

"It is disturbing to approach the detention centre, which is surrounded by a high electric fence topped with electrified wire. It looks like a high security prison," he said.

"Asylum seekers being processed at a reasonable speed appeared to be happy enough," said Mr Macrae.

"However there is a high level of anxiety amongst those whose cases have taken longer to process."

He said those most distressed had been detained on Christmas Island for seven months or more.

The Uniting Church is a strong

advocate for closing the detention centre on Christmas Island and processing asylum seekers on the mainland.

While recognising that the Detention Centre is unlikely to be closed in the short term, Mr Macrae called for families and unaccompanied minors to be immediately transferred to the mainland for processing.

"There is no reasonable justification for vulnerable children to be held in such a remote facility," he said.

Archbishop Roger Herft said it was encouraging to see that asylum seekers were treated with dignity but the remote location made it difficult to deliver necessary services, such as pastoral and spiritual care for detainees and the staff, legal aid, translation services and regular visitation.

"How we [as Australians] receive people is of utmost significance," he said.

He said the group was concerned that, despite Australia still having a relatively small number of people seeking asylum by international standards (Australia received 4750 asylum seekers in 2008 compared to 35,200 in France and 30,500 in the UK), there was increased fear-



Rosemary Hudson Miller, Associate General Secretary (Justice and Mission) for the Uniting Church Synod of WA and Chair of the Coalition for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees, Uniting Church President Rev Alistair Macrae, and the Most Rev Roger Herft, Anglican Archbishop of Perth at the Christmas Island Detention Centre. Photo courtesy of the National Assembly

mongering about boat people.

"Under no circumstances should we ever use a group of people for political point scoring," he said.

"The fact that asylum seekers come to us fleeing terrible

situations asking us for protection only increases our responsibility to care for them," he said.

The delegation will now seek to meet with Minister Chris Evans to discuss specific issues arising from the visit.

The delegation included Rev Alistair Macrae, The Most Rev Roger Herft and Rosemary Hudson Miller, Associate General Secretary (Justice and Mission) for the Uniting Church Synod of Western Australia.

Outcry over welcome slur

By Mardi Lumsden

THERE HAS been public outcry over comments made by Opposition Leader Tony Abbott and other Opposition members in March concerning the acknowledgement of traditional Indigenous ownership of land as ignorant and destructive.

Uniting Church President Rev Alistair Macrae condemned Mr Abbott's criticism that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and his Ministers were engaging in "tokenism" and unnecessary political correctness when they acknowledge traditional owners while speaking at functions.

"Such comments reveal a concerning level of ignorance about the significance and function of

the regular acknowledgment of the traditional owners of land," said Mr Macrae.

"They are extremely unhelpful in building bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians."

Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) National Administrator Rev Shayne Blackman and UAICC Chairperson Rev Ken Sumner said the "venomous and archaic comments" by Mr Abbott and backbencher Wilson Tuckey were "deeply offensive to all Indigenous people" and would unravel any goodwill the opposition may have made in recent times.

"It is now clear that the Opposition Leader and his learned underling have no

genuine understanding of how to politically or culturally align themselves to Aboriginal people and their struggle and regrettably their comments and stance will cost them down the line," said Mr Blackman.

Mr Sumner said such media driven comments cut to the heart of the respect and recognition for which Indigenous people have been struggling.

"Wilson Tuckey deriding the weight of some Welcome to Country dancers is unhelpful and indicative of an individual who has no understanding of the very real health issues facing Indigenous people not having equitable access to good nutrition in remote communities," said Mr Sumner.



UAICC Chairperson Rev Ken Sumner addresses the 12th Assembly meeting last July. Photo by Kim Cain

"We would have hoped for a responsible opposition party that sought to outline alternative policy to address the socio-economic plight of many Indigenous people - one of them being obesity linked to improper nutrition, not via derision and mockery."

Mr Macrae said the Welcome to Country is an important part of

Uniting Church events.

"For the Uniting Church in Australia, repeating that acknowledgement in an attitude of deep respect whenever we gather serves to remind us that we are committed, together with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, to the ongoing work of reconciliation.



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Roma in flood, March 2010.
Photo by Rowan Bestmann.
www.rowanbestmann.com

Flood recovery



By Mardi Lumsden

LIFELINE COMMUNITY Recovery teams and Frontier Services teams raced to assist the communities of Roma and Charleville after devastating floods in early March.

The Lifeline Community Recovery program is specifically designed to support individuals and communities affected by disasters.

Community Recovery Manager Richard Johnson said hundreds of homes have been damaged in Charleville.

"Lifeline mobilised a team of 15 staff for the immediate support of people in the Roma and Charleville districts and will continue to assess the needs for the medium to long term," said Mr Johnson.

"Having to sleep away from your home and belongings knowing they are susceptible to further damage is often a hard thing to endure."

Frontier Services Outback Links co-



ordinator Davida Melksham and her team helped evacuate residents of an aged care hostel. Because of the flooded roads, some residents had to be removed by heavy machinery.

Frontier Services' Remote Area Families Services team, based in Charleville, set up a mobile playgroup at the evacuation point at the showground providing a much needed distraction for children and a chance for parents to get things sorted out.

McKay Patrol flying Padre Rev Garry Hardingham was also able to assist some people cut off by flooded roads.

The McKay Patrol, a self funded service, and Mr Hardingham have been common and welcome sights in recent difficult times of drought and flood in outback Queensland.

For more information or to donate to the McKay Patrol contact Rev Garry Hardingham on 4742 1441 or visit www.mckaypatrol.ucaqld.com.au



Far left: A Charleville resident moves possessions to higher ground. Photo by Jennifer Claydon

Centre: Supermarket staff in Roma throw out thousands of dollars worth of spoiled food. Photo by Rowan Bestmann

Left: Frontier Services' Davida Melksham helps evacuate people from an aged care hostel in Charleville. Photo courtesy of Frontier Services

Church follows its mission

By Michael Brumpton

IN THE first week of March St George received an extraordinary 250mm of rain. The Maranoa River, Bungil Creek, Amby Creek and Muckadilla Creek all experienced record flooding causing over 300,000 megalitres of water per day to flow down the usually tranquil Balonne River.

In preparation, approximately half the town moved house in a day. Most households lifted fridges and furniture up onto tyres or bricks. Along with most of the town, St George Uniting Church members worked tirelessly to help others get their belongings out of flood reach.

They took in the homeless, fed the hungry, and offered support to the needy.

It was marvellous to see how the whole town was involved. I could truly see how when God could look at all his creation and say, "It is very good".

The Easter story can be really sad if we remain in Good Friday.

Good Friday is made bearable because we look forward to Easter Sunday. In a town whose lifeblood is water and subsoil moisture, the flood has been a bit like Good Friday, but we look forward to the coming season and all of God's provision.

Rev Michael Brumpton is the minister with St George Uniting Church

Sights and sounds

By Jennifer Claydon

BRADLEY'S GULLY floods, Charleville, 2-4 March 2010.

Rain, rain, rain; not much warning;

water rushing down the gully; sirens blaring; cars and trucks rushing to and fro; traffic jam; police directing traffic; emergency services cars with lights flashing; SES boat; front loader with

people on the scoop; very large council truck going through a metre of water – horn blaring as if saying "Anyone else to rescue?".

Dogs frolicking in the water; man walking through thigh deep water with little girl on his shoulders.

Puzzled faces; heads shaking in disbelief; crowded evacuation centre;

silent people; helping hands; refuge given. Cleaning up a second flood, but a metre less in height than the one before and more warning so less panic.

Piles of sodden possessions patiently waiting on footpaths; some people coping, some not; anger and questions; life and living continues.



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Radio spots put Church at the top

THE NORTH Queensland Presbytery has been busy producing a series of 60 second life-coaching radio spots with the theme *At the Top*.

An initiative to connect local churches with their communities, the Presbytery has recognised the power of local radio.

Community and local radio stations, like Home Hill's *Sweet FM*, wanting solid, professional life-coaching content have often only had American voices to rely on.

At the Top applies Jesus' gospel message to matters including work/life balance, the need for forgiveness, how religion goes bad and how we consider death and will be offered free to community radio stations.

Written by Rev Paul Clark and now retired minister Rev Gordon Burley *At the Top* consistently encourages abundant life – life at the top.

The series of approximately 50 spots is tagged as "Sixty seconds with your coach",

with the aim of catching the ear of seekers as well as believers.

Written in Mount Isa and Ayr, voiced in Brisbane and Townsville, produced in Pine Rivers, it will reach a range of audiences.

CD kits will be available for congregations to purchase and will include both male and female versions.

"*At the Top* is a long term effort to remind residents that their local church is a great starting point for all manner of things from friendship to purpose and support," said Presbytery Minister Bruce Cornish.

"The connection with local radio might enable the church to offer fresh interview talent with a gospel perspective on a wide range of local issues and news stories."

For more information contact Bruce Cornish on bcornish@bigpond.net.au. Hear an audio sample at www.journeyonline.com.au



Burdekin Uniting Church minister Rev Paul Clark at Home Hill's *Sweet FM*. Photo courtesy of *Sweet FM*

Giving in need of commitment

By Phil Smith

EASTER IS many things but two key words are central to the season: sacrifice and commitment.

Many Christians wonder why Christ would sacrifice so much for us and how might that be reflected in our lives.

While there's no comparison to God's commitment to His people and His creation, our own sacrifices on behalf of others may give a clue according to the Head of Spiritual Engagement for World Vision, Rev Rob Kilpatrick.

On a recent visit to Queensland Mr Kilpatrick was asked why Australians donate to disaster appeals, sponsor children

and give to charities. He said why we give and what we're prepared to sacrifice has a lot to do with our understanding of and commitment to the kingdom of God.

"It has to do with justice, equality and care for one another, and this goes beyond the personal to an idea of community," said Mr Kilpatrick.

This is why the seemingly simple idea of child sponsorship has developed so powerfully since it first appeared during the Korean War.

A commitment to individuals must translate into a commitment to community.

Asked, "What motivates us?" Mr Kilpatrick said, "A glorious hope of a

community that represents things such as justice and compassion and the fulfilment of an individual's potential, both here and in what is to come.

"It's not a guilt thing."

World view changes the world, according to Mr Kilpatrick, who said the western world is out of step in the way we compartmentalise the physical, spiritual, emotional and political parts of our lives.

"Probably 85 per cent of the world sees life as an integrated whole, where they see spirituality, faith and world view as very much affecting their political, economic and social realities and structures."

His experiences throughout Asia draw Mr Kilpatrick back to very personal

experiences that reflect the linkage between giving and commitment.

He told of an encounter at a Bangladesh railway station where a 13-year-old boy tugged at his trousers.

"This begging child was twisted, he had spent his entire 13 years crawling on his stomach," recalled Mr Kilpatrick.

"I bought him off with five taka, about 40 cents, and I felt as I walked away from that child that I had failed him and failed myself.

"I hadn't connected with him as a person. I hadn't looked him in the eye. I hadn't sat down on that dusty platform and communicated with him.

"I saw him as an object of charity."

If we give without commitment, no matter the seeming sacrifice, and if there is no connection we short-change one another.

Australians uniting New Zealand church

By Phil Smith

THE UNITING Church in Australia has been helping unite churches in New Zealand.

Rev Bryan Gilmour from the Gold Coast and Rev Evan Stenlake from Toowoomba have answered an unusual call.

Late last year four Presbyterian parishes in Timaru (a city of 47,000 people, south of Christchurch) combined to become the Timaru Presbyterian Parish with several congregations.

This was the culmination of three years of prayer, vision, inspiration, and hard work in developing personal and corporate relationships.

The last 18 months were under the guidance of Mr Gilmour their team leader.

The separate parishes found themselves

each without National Ordained Ministry and in the process of preparing Profiles for the Call process.

With Presbytery approval and support they agreed to consider other ways of being the church in the 21st Century.

Through sometimes difficult discussions the congregations worked towards closer cooperation and unity and the possibilities which that could bring.

It was at this stage that Mr Gilmour was appointed to work with all four congregations while also acting as supply minister with the St Paul's church.

It was agreed that the new ministerial team should complement each other with differing ministerial gifts.

At this time two of the Parishes (St Stephen's and Trinity) joined under a Memorandum of Understanding and

called two ministers, Rev Chris and Rev Mary-Jane Konings.

Rev Evan Stenlake was called as Transitional Minister for the Chalmers Congregation.

With further opportunities for study and worship together the congregations moved towards a Summit Day and produced a recommendation that they become one Parish with several congregations.

"This was not an easy process," said Mr Stenlake.

"But with much prayer, wisdom, good will and courage, the new Parish was established on the first Sunday in Advent, 2009."

The third ordained minister and leader of the new team, Rev Dr Susan Jones, began her ministry in February.

Bryan and Dorelle Gilmour returned

to Australia in January. Evan and Alicia Stenlake have accepted a supply position with St Paul's until September while the Parish seeks the fourth member of Timaru's ordained team.



Rev Evan and Alicia Stenlake, Rev Ian Hyslop (Presbytery Moderator), Rev Chris and Rev Mary Jane Konings, and Rev Bryan and Dorelle Gilmour at the Timaru Presbyterian Parish Inauguration Service

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Hospitals make a world of difference

By Mardi Lumsden

TWO BRISBANE based UnitingCare Health hospitals have made a world of difference in the lives of two people each flown to Brisbane for specialised surgery.

Papua New Guinean woman Matilda Nirenga now faces a bright future after she underwent major reconstructive surgery following the removal of a tongue cancer at St Andrew's War Memorial Hospital in Brisbane.

The mother of two could not communicate or eat properly before the surgery and faced possible death from the cancer.

Thanks to the generosity and compassion of St Andrew's Hospital, and plastic surgeon Dr Del Hinckley, Ms Nirenga is expected to return home in late April to normal life in the village of Wabag in Enga Province.

Dr Hinckley, who has worked at St Andrew's as a visiting medical practitioner for 35 years, approached the hospital's director

of medical services, Dr Ian Brandon, to ask the hospital to help Ms Nirenga after the Royal Brisbane Hospital said it could not afford to offer the necessary treatment.

UnitingCare Health Director of Mission Rev Robyn Kidd said this was just one example of how the mission of the Church is expressed through Uniting Church hospitals.

"Every day we transform lives and offer compassionate care bringing hope and healing to our community, both near and far," she said.

Numerous Wesley Hospital staff have recently been involved in the treatment and care of 13-year-old Philippino boy Rey Vitalla.

Through the Rotary Oceanic Medical Aid for Children (ROMAC) program Rey first underwent maxillofacial surgery at the Wesley in October 2009.

After initial surgery to correct a facial deformity that caused him difficulty eating and speaking Rey



Thirteen-year-old Rey Vitalla, of the Philippines, and his family with some of the Wesley Hospital staff involved with his surgery. Photo by Emily Bonney and Bridget Brown

returned to Brisbane for more surgery in February this year.

Such a project is only possible with the support of Wesley staff members including many nursing staff, specialised surgeons, physiotherapists, paediatric specialists, and support staff.

Oral and maxillofacial surgeon Dr John Arvier said that what

many take for granted was what Rey could only dream of.

"In his mind a major goal is that he can walk in the streets without people staring at him and that he no longer feels that he has to wear a mask all day which he does now," said Dr Arvier.

Rey is looking forward to returning to school in the

Philippines in June.

For a number of years, the Wesley Hospital has been assisting the ROMAC program in providing medical treatment for children with profound injuries or deformities from developing countries through the provision of free surgical and rehabilitation services.

Centre for Social Justice scans disadvantage

By Dot King

UNITINGCARE QUEENSLAND'S Centre for Social Justice released a report in March that lays the foundations for addressing entrenched disadvantage in Queensland.

The report, an update to a 2006 version, shows the continuing "locational" nature

of disadvantage and calls for place-based partnerships across community, government and business as a critical response.

Using 2006 Census data and the ABS SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage the report clearly demonstrates that the benefits of prosperous economic times and sustained growth were not evenly

distributed across Queensland, with some places clearly lagging behind.

Some larger areas, such as Wide Bay – Burnett, emerge as relatively more disadvantaged with significant pockets of disadvantage also highlighted within areas of Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast.

UnitingCare Queensland CEO

Anne Cross said the report highlights that some communities face more challenges than others.

"That is why UnitingCare Queensland is seeking to work with government and other business and community partners to expand our current efforts and to seek new ways of working together that will make a difference and will help to reduce the level of concentrated disadvantage in specific areas," she said.

"Of greatest concern is the extent that Indigenous communities are over-represented among the most disadvantaged areas.

"We are heartened by the response received from meetings with various State Government representatives, which have focussed on forming practical partnerships to tackle and reduce concentrated disadvantage in Queensland."

Blue Care partners in \$28m research project

By Hayley Campbell

BLUE CARE staff will again be at the forefront of evidence-based, best practice research as a key partner in an eight-year,

\$28 million wound management research project.

Blue Care Executive Director Stephen Muggleton highlighted the project during Wound Awareness Week in March.

Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr granted \$28 million to the Co-operative Research Centre for Wound Management Innovation, led by

Professors Zee Upton and Helen Edwards at the Queensland University of Technology.

"As Australia's largest not-for-profit provider of community health and residential aged care it is exciting to align with universities, state-wide health organisations and our alliance

partners to carry out informed research into wound care," Mr Muggleton said.

"Chronic wounds account for almost 50 per cent of Blue Care's community nursing – a significant figure considering our nurses and carers make more than three million visits a year."



CHAPLAIN

St. Andrew's War Memorial Hospital

Applications are invited for the position of Chaplain to St. Andrew's War Memorial Hospital. This is an exciting ministry opportunity that is diverse, on the edge, Spirit filled, and mission driven. The successful applicant will be a member of a dynamic ecumenical pastoral care team, and will minister within the Gospel driven Values of UnitingCare Health.

The appointed chaplain will be a suitably qualified Minister of the Word, Deacon, or Pastor and will have education and experience in Hospital Ministry and Pastoral Care. For an information pack, please contact **Rev Robyn Kidd** robyn.kidd@uchealth.com.au. Completed applications should be sent to **Rev Dr. Marian Zaunbrecher**, Associate General Secretary Qld Synod, GPO Box 674 Brisbane Q 4001.

Applications close 27th April 2010.



MANAGER (PASTORAL CARE DEPARTMENT) The Wesley Hospital

Applications are invited for the position of Manager of the Pastoral Care Department – The Wesley Hospital. This exciting opportunity offers the successful applicant leadership responsibility for a highly trained, committed pastoral care team, and the leadership of the department in line with the Values of UnitingCare Health.

The appointed Manager will be a suitably qualified Minister of the Word, Deacon, or Pastor; will have education and experience in Hospital Ministry and Pastoral Care, will hold suitable leadership and management qualifications and/or experience. For an information pack, please contact **Rev Robyn Kidd** robyn.kidd@uchealth.com.au. Completed applications should be sent to **Rev Dr. Marian Zaunbrecher**, Associate General Secretary Qld Synod, GPO Box 674 Brisbane Q 4001.

Applications close 27th April 2010.



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At the cross of Jesus

By Rev Rod Horsfield

ONE OF THE traditional ways of presenting the death of Jesus is to describe it as a sacrifice. That is problematical for many people in contemporary society.

The church's great theologians through the centuries proposed various theories to explain how the death of Jesus saves us.

Some of these old theories survive today and are still used to test a person's orthodoxy.

For myself, I find those old atonement theories brave in trying to explain the mystery of the cross. But I find none of them completely satisfying.

The fault in most of them is that they drive a wedge between God and Jesus.

They make it sound as if a ruthless God had to be bought off by the sacrificial death of Jesus.

As if God made the demand that "someone's got to pay for the sins of the world".

They make it appear that God then let his Son pay the full price God demanded to "save people from their sins."

I find that offensive.

Any wedge between God and Jesus does not help my understanding, nor is it faithful to the whole witness of Scripture.

So what are we left with? We are left with Jesus on the cross.

We are left with a man in whom God was fully present, dying as a result of our shared human evil and the feral ways that flow from our alienation from the Creator of life.

On the cross, I believe that God is fully present in Jesus Christ to the bitter end.

On the cross I see God in a man who experiences not only physical agony but spiritual desolation.

Therefore I am left with a God who will die for us. A God who, in loving us, will bridge the gulf of alienation at all cost.

After many decades of faith, and professional theological study, I still do not understand the "mechanics" of God "reconciling the world to himself".

I have no neat theory to replace the old ones, though people like Jurgen Moltmann, James Allison and other contemporary theologians are attempting new "theories of the atonement".

At the cross I am forced to live with a wonder I cannot explain.

Many of our old hymns have atonement theories that less than adequate. However Brian Wren's graphic hymn, 'Here hangs a man discarded' (*Together in Song* 356) is worth contemplating.



Photo by Glenda Powers

*Can such a clown of sorrows
Still bring a useful word
Where faith and hope seem
phantoms
And every hope absurd?*

*Life emptied of all meaning,
Drained out in deep distress,
Can share in broken silence
My deepest emptiness;*

*And love that freely entered
The pit of life's despair
Can name our hidden darkness
And suffer with us there.*

God with us and for us. A gulf bridged, a world saved. I cannot comprehend it or explain it, but I dare to believe that much.

Thanks be to God.

Rev Rod Horsfield is a minister in the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

This article first appeared in *Crosslight*, the newspaper of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes

By Phil Smith

THE AIRLINE industry is not the only one offering customers the opportunity to reduce their carbon footprint.

The funeral industry is next.

If one considers the fleet of hearses, refrigeration at the mortuary, materials used for coffins and urns, let alone the emissions from crematoria, the issue becomes significant.

According to Jason Poole of Kenton Ross funerals, developing eco funerals is difficult.

"Plenty of people request cardboard receptacles – coffins or urns – but that final part of the process doesn't make a big difference.

He said cardboard degrades more quickly and generates fewer emissions than MDF and particle board coffins held together with glue.

His company is about to conduct an audit to determine a carbon baseline for an average funeral.

Aside from the use of fuel and electricity, strict government health regulations don't help simplify funerals.

The nearest 'eco cemetery' to his Brisbane based business is outside Lismore, in Northern New South Wales.

In a patch of bushland beside

the main graveyard it is possible to dig a grave by hand to a minimum depth and bury a body wrapped only in cloth.

The site is located by satellite positioning systems and marked by a simple rock with a plaque attached.

However, the body must be brought to the site in a coffin, which must then be destroyed elsewhere.

Tim Connolly of New Haven funerals in Mackay and Brisbane said shallow burial is a key issue.

He said about one in 500 clients

request a 'natural' burial.

"Shallow earth burial is good because the decomposition of the deceased is more rapid," said Mr Connolly.

"Ultimately there might be re-use of the land.

"The lack of usable land is a big issue in large cities."

The next major development in Australia may be the hydrolysis process in use in some western nations.

Aquamation dissolves the human body to liquid using acid and pressure.



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**The Australian Research
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is inviting applications for grants for 2010 – 2011.

The purpose of these grants is to support theological research and education for formal academic research, new projects or other related concepts.

Further information regarding the Foundation and detail of the application process can be obtained directly from :

our website - www.artfinc.org.au
in writing to - The Administrative Officer
A.R.T.F. Inc.
PO Box 7418
Geelong West Victoria 3218 or
by email to - inquiries@artfinc.org.au

Applications* must be received by the end of May. Notification of Grants will be made from the end of July.

*Applicants are requested to provide one emailed application and one paper copy as outlined in the application form.

Climbing the stairway to heaven

By Mardi Lumsden

A NEW study by the Pew Research Centre, a non-partisan "fact tank" in America, called *Religion Among the Millennials* has found that despite fewer than 20 per cent of people aged 18 to 29 attending regular church services, about three-quarters of them believe in an afterlife - about the same rate as older generations.

In our growingly secular society the concept of the afterlife may have more credibility than the means to get there.

Linda McWilliam is a specialist palliative care chaplain at the Wesley Hospital in Brisbane.

She said death raised questions of the meaning and purpose of life, but these days it was not talked about often.

"Previous generations spoke about death easily, however in contemporary society the subject tends to be avoided if at all possible."

She said many people tended to seek out or believe in a divine power when they were facing an extreme threat, such as the end of their life.

"Others will begin to question their existing belief system in a God due to the nature of their suffering."

"At one time people seemed to

think that saved souls would float around on clouds playing harps.

"Probably the dominant view today is the immortality of the soul.

"At the point of death the soul or spirit leaves the body and goes to the place where it lives on eternally."

And what of previously held concepts of purgatory and limbo?

Kenmore Uniting Church minister Rev Heather den Houting said there are many understandings of the afterlife.

"Protestants usually dismiss the idea of purgatory," she said.

"It was a doctrine that was developed by the church to explain what happened to people who had not necessarily been bad, but had not had last communion or observed the appropriate religious rites or were sufficiently purified.

"The reformers dismissed it as doctrine because it is not biblically based."

In his book *A Lodging Along The Way* retired Uniting Church minister Rev Ron Ramsay explored the notions of experiential knowledge, life after life, near death experiences, what happens to someone who has committed suicide and the possibility of after death communication.

While these topics may spark strong reactions, they are



Photo by Alyson Costa

important enough not to dismiss.

A 1992 Gallop poll said that over 22 million people in the United States alone remembered having a Near Death Experience (NDE).

A 2005 Roy Morgan phone survey concluded that 8.9 per cent of the Australian population had experienced a NDE.

With such a large portion of our society experiencing these life changing events the Church

would be wise to address them.

Logan Central Multicultural Uniting Church minister Rev Dr Apichart Branjerdporn said humans die as a physical and a spiritual being.

"The whole person does not die, only the body.

"The soul lives on, either to await resurrection or to enjoy its natural immortality free from the bodily life.

"The New Testament speaks of Christians as sleeping rather than dying.

"Jesus died that humans may live.

"Therefore for those who are in Christ death has been transformed, so being dead is more than sleeping.

"Our goal as humans is to live a long and full life and to die in peace."

Exploring more than life and death

By Heather Den Houting

THE DAY before I wrote this I heard Peter Gabriel's song *Solsbury Hill* on the radio.

That night I told my husband that that was the song I wanted played at my funeral.

Now apart from completely categorising me as a new romantic, this song says a lot about my understanding of life and death.

Mr Gabriel wrote the song about a choice he was making - about moving into a place where he might find "home".

The last lines are: "You can keep my things; they've come to take me home."

There is a sense of stepping out of an old skin, something that is not adequate for the task and stepping into a new tomorrow - unknown, unseen, undetermined - but a life that captures the fullness of existence that is available to us.

This means I don't find categories of "this life" and the "afterlife" meaningful. Instead, I find the deeper biblical explorations of time and the nature of creation to be more revealing.

The creation story as God speaks existence into being: the cosmic consciousness to be found in the prologue of John's Gospel.

Such passages are not recipes

or blueprints for how creation works, but explorations of the nature of our existence as created beings.

Karl Barth's claim that Christ is at the centre of history also feeds into this - our historical existence is not seen as linear, but rather always looping back into the heart of our revelation of God through Jesus Christ.

Add to this the amazing explorations of the nature of time and the search for a "theory of everything" that were produced at the end of the last century by Stephen Hawking and the like, and a series of questions about birth, death and life that are captured in a linear framework do not seem adequate.

My understandings of life and death are about time and existence looping in and out of Christ's life, death and resurrection - which means there is no "after" life - instead there is life.

Life for all, here and now, yesterday and tomorrow - life in all its fullness - life that can be found when you leave your things and turn for home.

Rev Heather den Houting is minister with the Kenmore Uniting Church in Brisbane

Wesley Mission Brisbane carves end-of-life care path

By Aileen Wallace

ACCORDING TO a recent ABC report seven out of ten Australians die what might be called an 'expected death'.

Yet until recently the focus of medicine, even for those in palliative care, has been to try to prolong life as long as possible, despite the unintended discomfort this may cause.

Wesley Mission Brisbane's Bethesda Caring Centre at Corinda in Brisbane was part of a ground breaking study to change this and to allow people space and time for a "good death" - that is, a death that is dignified, pain free, and not in an impersonal hospital bed in unfamiliar surroundings.

Bethesda had such good results in implementing the end of life pathway that Wesley Mission Brisbane applied for and has been given a substantial grant to put into operation an End-of-life Care Pathway for those living with dementia in residential aged care and community services within both their aged care services.

The heart of the End-of-Life Care Pathway revolves around being able to recognise when a person has reached a palliative stage within their life journey and then making that life period as comfortable as possible for both themselves and their families.

Wesley Mission Brisbane's Aged



Photo courtesy of Wesley Mission Brisbane

Care Director Peter Sydes said the Pathway sat well with their aged care philosophy.

"The End-of-Life Pathway is a natural fit for our services which are all about empowering people within their lives - no matter what stage of life that is," he said.

"Walking alongside people in the very last stages of their life journey, and providing them with the information they need to make informed decisions fits perfectly with both Wesley Mission Brisbane's mission and with the Eden Philosophy which all of our aged care communities embrace."

The outcome of the Bethesda study is the first Australian evidence that shows an end of life care pathway lowers the numbers

of deaths in hospital and allows residents to die in their homes with loved ones and familiar staff caring for them.

With the help of the End-of-Life Care Pathway grant this pathway, which includes special education programs for staff, will be implemented throughout all Wesley Mission Brisbane aged care services, both within their residential communities and their community care programs.

Bethesda Director of Nursing Sandra Larkin said the Pathway enables people to make their own decisions about their end of life.

"Death is an integral part of life and the End-of-Life Pathway allows the elderly and their families dignity and peace."

Called with one foot in the grave

By Mardi Lumsden

BEING A funeral director isn't necessarily a job you grow up wanting to do.

Journey spoke with three funeral directors who explained that it is more of a vocation or calling than a job.

Bethel Funerals' Queensland Branch Manager Steve Burnett had been attending the Bible College of Queensland in the early 1990s when he felt called to help the grieving.

"I had not long before buried my grandmother so I thought I would start with asking the funeral director who buried her how to go about getting into the business," he said.

"I started working for him immediately and have been funeral directing ever since."

He learnt the trade from on-the-job training and uses relationship skills acquired at Bible College.

"The job hasn't changed my views on death but it has made me more aware of the need for others to have this hope that only Christ can give," he said.

"It has made me a lot more aware that we need to cherish every day we have because as I have seen time and time again, life can be taken from us in an instant and we can't turn back the clock once a loved one leaves us."

Of course Mr Burnett has planned aspects of his own funeral but prays he has more time to think about it.

He said there were many Christian songs which mean a lot to him that he would like played.

"But I think I will leave that up to my family; after all the

service is for them not me.

"On a light hearted note, *Already Gone* by the Eagles always brings a smile to my face when I hear it as I think if that was played at my funeral it would be me speaking from the grave: 'I'm already gone, and I'm feeling strong, I will sing this victory song'."

Graham Clarke was working in a hospital for the terminally ill when a friend told him of a vacancy at Cannon and Cripps Funerals.

"That was in September 1979 and I'm still there," he said.

"I was very fortunate to have two very good mentors.

"It was 'Old School' training and you were taught how to do things properly."

Mr Clarke said being a Christian helps him prepare for the inevitable.

"Working in this industry for almost 31 years I am conscious of the fact that death can occur at any time, without warning and without discrimination.

"I know I am ready."

Mr Clarke said he wanted his funeral service to be as joyful as possible with plenty of hymns including *Blessed Assurance* and *To God be the Glory* plus something to reflect his love of motor sport.

"At the end of the service the minister is to say the immortal words: 'Gentlemen, start your engines'."

"At that point the pallbearers will take me out of the church to the sound of the race cars screaming down the Gold Coast highway.

"As the hearse leaves everyone can wave a chequered flag: I have won the race!"



Graham Clarke of Cannon and Cripps funerals feels called to his career. Photo by Osker Lau

After Annette Lourigan, now of Metropolitan Funerals, organised a memorial service for a friend in 1997 the local funeral director asked her to work for him.

"I told him no way and spoke to my parish priest about the strange job offer," she said.

"He told me that I was not getting offered a job, I was being given the chance to work within a vocation that I would find rewarding and that I would love the ministry."

"I started off washing the cars, making cups of tea for families and trimming coffins."

She was also nurtured in the career by on-the-job training.

"I will always be grateful that I have been shown my vocation

by some of the real gentleman who spent a lifetime caring for others.

"The information passed down from long-term funeral directors is invaluable.

"They teach you the importance of never allowing our flag to touch the ground, bowing after placing flowers and the honour and tradition of leading a hearse."

Ms Lourigan believes she is a better person for being a funeral director.

"I have more respect for death than I did before I became a funeral director, which also means I now have more respect for life.

"All of us have an incredible story to tell, a funeral put together

with love and time allows those stories to be shared.

"I am blessed every time I get a snippet of someone's life."

The night after her friend's funeral Ms Lourigan planned her own.

"It sits in the kitchen cupboard, has crossed out bits and added bits."

Jason Mraz' song *I'm Yours* has been added to the list recently.

"The words are wonderful, all about love, that we are all part of one big family and that life is too short to make it complicated.

"My Parish priest was right; it is a vocation and I do find it rewarding being of service to people during such an intimate time in their life's journey."

Committing their spirit

By Paul Clark

I'D ONLY been in town a few days and here I was driving to a house I had never been to, to meet a family I didn't know, to arrange the funeral of a person I had never met.

I asked myself, "What on earth am I doing?"

The urge to turn around was quite real.

Yet at the same time I felt like this was exactly where I was supposed to be.

It was my first funeral in my first parish.

I had only attended a handful previously.

Fortunately I had officiated at a funeral in my training, with my hand held by my supervisor, but now I was it – the 'expert' about all things funereal.

Five years later, still in the same parish and having conducted more than 100 funerals, I have a bit more experience, although I wouldn't call myself an expert.

I conduct every funeral as an individual event.

While there are various prayers and orders I recycle to keep things manageable, I cannot do a one-size-fits-all service.

At a funeral we come to honour and respect the person who has died and I take this very seriously.

I also come to a funeral service with something to bring – the message of the gospel, hope in the resurrection.

I take that very seriously as well.

The majority of funerals I conduct are for people who no longer attend worship, but still have an attachment to faith.

I look for how this person's life intersects with the gospel.

Virtually everyone's story somehow connects with the good news of Jesus.

Be it their quality of honesty, their love of fishing, their position as one of 'the least of these' or even their nickname.

I tell their story and I end with how I see it connecting with God's story in Jesus. Their life is often the 'text' for the gospel.

I have found this to bring much comfort and hope to the family.

The more I talk about the loved one, the more people are open to hear what I have to say about faith.

This means I have to listen intently to the family and the story they tell to get a sense of the person, to enable myself to make the funeral personal.

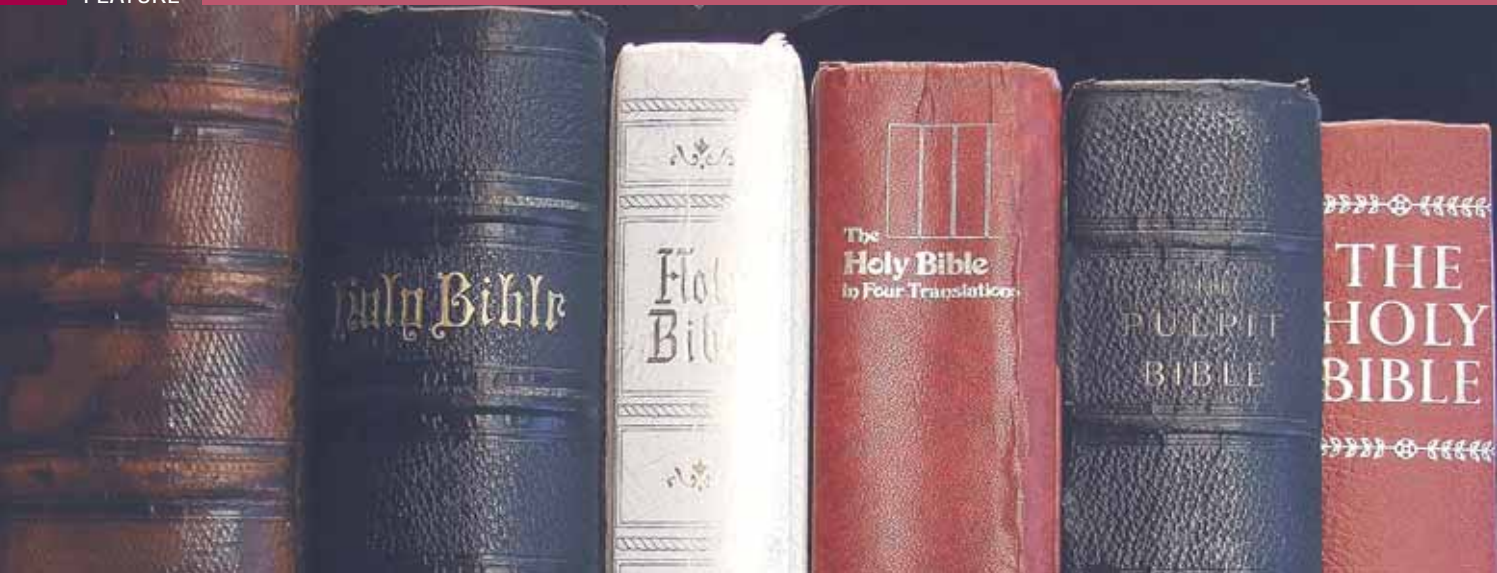


Rev Paul Clark

As I write this I'm preparing to conduct my 107th funeral; a lady who loved dolphins.

What do dolphins have to do with the gospel? You'd be surprised.

Rev Paul Clark is a children's book author, creator of the *Car Park Parables* DVD, and minister with Burdekin Uniting Church in North Queensland



Exploring biblical authority

Journey looks at Brian McLaren's second question that is transforming the church: the question of biblical authority.

By Mardi Lumsden

THEOLOGIAN AND Brisbane based Uniting Church minister Rev Peter Lockhart said the *Basis of Union* boldly states that the Uniting Church "has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated".

Mr Lockhart said this seemingly innocuous statement sought to steer a path for the Uniting Church, and so also the catholic (universal) Church, out of the "false dichotomy" produced by the enlightenment.

"The *Basis of Union* offers an alternative to the post-enlightenment confrontation of liberal and literalist readings, both of which are a reduction of truth to a set of facts," he said.

"Instead, it reminds us that the authority of scripture is not derived from its literal accuracy nor is it undermined by the difficulties of the text in terms of historical and scientific research.

"Why? Put simply, because the

Bible was not written to be factual scientific or historical proofs.

"It is precisely as the *Basis of Union* puts it: 'unique prophetic and apostolic testimony.'"

Mr Lockhart said the scriptures are where we listen for God speaking to us.

"The Bible's authority is revealed to us as we hear the Word of God (Jesus) speaking to us.

"Sadly, what has essentially been an enlightenment debate over the authority of Scripture has been the catalyst for many people to exit the church, either because we are too literalist or not literalist enough in our approach.

"If we are to face the world and share the good news as being what is real and true, rather than simply using 'my' approach to the Bible to laud it over others, maybe learning to listen together for the word of God speaking to us through the Scriptures would be a more helpful approach."

Sandra Jebb is a Minister of the Word Intern in the Moreton Rivers Presbytery. She said

understanding how the Bible was put together helps clarify what we mean by biblical authority.

"The Bible as we have it was put together because these accounts were reliable witnesses of the Christian story.

Its authority comes not because it was dictated by God, but because, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, human beings sought to share the saving message of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord.

"John Webster talks of the biblical texts as human communicative texts which have been annexed into the communicative activity of Father, Son and Spirit.

"The Bible's authority for us today comes through the work of the Spirit illuminating and confirming God's Word in the lives of Christians."

"The Bible's authority should not be expressed just in terms of some sort of ethical instruction book.

"The different types of literature that make up the Bible make it necessary for us to understand what genre we are dealing with.

"Is it narrative, poetry, a parable, a letter or a piece of apocalyptic literature?"

"When we define that, then we can begin to interpret how

"No consideration is given to the historical context, the genre of the text, the context within the book, and the context of the Bible as a whole.

"The poor interpretation that follows, known as eisegesis, results in a person reading into the text some preferred bias that does not reflect the true meaning."

She said we all bring our own personal and religious history to reading the Bible.

"Remember that most of us read an English translation of the Bible.

"The Bible was written mainly in Hebrew and Greek which can carry more than one meaning.

"Determine biblical authority based on the Bible as a whole.

Ms Jebb said that as well as individual reading, it is important to read the Bible in church communities.

"In this way, as the body of Christ, we can more wisely understand and apply the Bible's authority."

The Bible was written mainly in Hebrew and Greek which can carry more than one meaning.

biblical authority is expressed.

"The Bible's authority is most clearly expressed when hearts and lives are transformed and changed."

Ms Jebb said the Bible's authority can be misused when it is taken out of context and used as a pretext.

"History is littered with the misuse of texts to endorse oppression and violence of all kinds; for example the acceptance of slavery and The Crusades.

Being uncommon this Mother's Day

UNITINGWORLD urges people to consider mothers all around the world this Mother's Day.

Millions of mothers in Africa, Asia and the Pacific lack access to basic needs like clean water, health care, and sufficient food for themselves and their families.

There are women and girls who, due to issues of gender inequality, must walk hours daily to fetch water for their families.

In Thailand and Indonesia Mother's Day recognises the plights of all women.

In Western society Mother's Day began in America in 1912 with a woman called Anna Jarvis.

As retailers increasingly took

advantage of the occasion, Ms Jarvis became a vocal opponent to its increasing commercialisation, and it's easy to see why.

Each May Australians spend a staggering \$6.5 billion on gifts: about \$170 million on flowers, \$94.5 million on perfume and pampering packs, and \$35.3 million on chocolate.

With sales figures that rival those of Christmas it is easy to wonder if we have lost sight of what really matters.

UnitingWorld Communication Coordinator Tom Ganderton said with only five years remaining before the 2015 deadline to meet the Millennium Development

Goals, supporting UnitingWorld's overseas projects by purchasing a gift from the *Everything In Common* gift catalogue one can make a huge difference to mothers around the world.

"By spending the money on something that will create positive change in the lives of another mum and her family, I feel like I'm showing my mum just how important her influence has been on my life," he said.

Visit UnitingWorld's *Everything In Common* gift catalogue at www.everythingincommon.com.au



Looking for a Uniting gift for mum this

Mother's Day?

Gifts from Everything in Common support the overseas work of the Uniting Church and make a difference to communities most in need.

Phone 1800 998 122 or visit www.everythingincommon.com.au






To receive a gift card before Mother's Day, please order online by Tuesday 4th May.

Practising what is preached

By Mardi Lumsden

AUTHOR, SPEAKER and United Church of Canada minister Rev Gretta Vosper will be in Australia in April and May to speak at the Common Dreams 2 conference in Melbourne.

Her 2008 book *With or Without God: Why the Way We Live is More Important than What We Believe* was met with both acclaim and fury from people inside and outside the church.

In 2009 Ms Vosper was named as one of *More* magazine's most compelling women in Canada.

Journey caught up with Ms

Vosper before she embarked on her journey to Australia.

She said belief systems set the course for how we live, but that it is time to break down some of the barriers that have been created.

"Too often we judge and are judged on our religious beliefs or lack of them.

"There was a time when that served its purpose and created safe communities in which individuals could live out their lives.

"In the 21st century, maintaining those boundaries is counterproductive.

"We live in a world in which our interactions, relationships,



Rev Gretta Vosper

and ability to connect to one another across religious and cultural boundaries is crucial."

Ms Vosper said for the church to have a real impact in contemporary society it needed to make "contemporary Christian scholarship accessible to the people in the pews and not just those in the pulpit".

"If we want to influence the world, we need to speak, sing, challenge, shelter, celebrate and lament in language the world understands.

The phrase "progressive Christianity" has certain connotations in Australian church

communities. Ms Vosper said she used the word "progressive" to define a willingness to take the next step.

"Taking the next step requires one to be open to the possibility that one's own perspective is not absolute, that it can be and should be informed by the perspectives of others and by one's own experience.

"We can't move forward if we don't seek to apply what it is we have come to know."

Ms Vosper said the question of biblical authority is the basis for much of the debate over contemporary issues in the church.

"I think the conversations on sexuality and leadership, inclusiveness, and progressive thought are all rooted in one single question.

"The question is this: Is the Bible the authoritative word of God for all time?

"If it is, then we have a lot of work to do because liberal Christianity, for the past century, has been reneging on the evangelical mandate the Bible sets out.

"If, however, it is not ... those other questions become contemporary issues that need to be considered using the same principles of progressive thought we apply to all the other issues and disciplines in our lives.

"The principles of the early Christian communities come into play in a rich and supportive way: what are we to do in the face of poverty, illness, death, hatred, fear?

"That's the only question that remains. The answer, though simple, is infinitely complex: love. We're to love."

She said one of the biggest challenges facing society at the moment is population growth in developed countries.

"Even with supposed falling birth rates, we're the culprits.

"By the time our children reach the age of four or five their footprints, in terms of the resources they consume, will outstrip those created by the whole lifetime of an African or Indian baby."

Ms Vosper said the church has a new purpose that is just preparing for the afterlife.

"I believe it is this: creating communities of compassion and respect where people can be cared for and in turn care for others; where they can be exposed to challenging issues, grapple with them, lament when they fail to live up to the ideals we know are increasingly important, and recommit to loving one another despite brokenness and fear."

Ms Vosper will also be speaking in Brisbane. See *What's On* for details

Tweeting the gospel

By Phil Smith

Journey continues our series on churches using social media to interact with members and the wider world. This month the topic is Twitter: www.twitter.com

TWITTER IS a free social networking site, accessible from computers and mobile phones, that functions as a personal micro-messaging tool.

Users have only 140 characters to say what they're doing right now. That limitation can lead to triviality or pithy story telling.

Twitter users 'follow' each other.

Celebrities have thousands of 'followers'. Others may have a few friends reading their tweets.

It is as random as people walking into a church service and the choice to welcome and engage them (or ignore them) is exactly the same.

While it's possible to be overwhelmed by the global reach of social networking, it can build connections locally.

Some Brisbane talk-back radio programs now gain as much input from Twitter as from the telephone.

The challenge is to turn what is very one sided into a two-way conversation.

Popular blogger Rev Duncan Macleod said social networking media needs to be "social".

"You can use Facebook, MySpace and Twitter to send one way messages, but these media were developed to encourage interaction," he said.

"While we may have official Twitter channels and Facebook groups, I suggest that our focus should be on building the community of networkers."

Late last year Pine Rivers Uniting Church (PRUC) established a presence on Twitter @PineRiversUCA.

Among PRUC's followers are congregation members, other churches, local businesses and a photographer in the Netherlands.

The church deliberately began following local media outlets on Twitter and now three radio stations follow them and the church is listed on a community news list promoting events in its area.

Other Uniting Church congregations and agencies using Twitter include New Life Uniting Church in Robina on the Gold Coast, the 12th Assembly meeting last July and nyc11.

Author of *Why your church should twitter*, Anthony Coppedge, likes Twitter's ability to target different groups through different Twitter streams.

"In a small church there may be little need to create specialised Twitter accounts due to the



limited number of ministries," he said. "However, creating individual streams of information makes sense.

"There's simply no point in sharing single adult activity information with married adults."

Mr Coppedge pointed to Australia's high uptake of texting.

While churches often seem to focus on talking to themselves through pew sheets and e-groups, Twitter should be leveraged for its outreach potential.

Mr Coppedge suggested tactics for reaching out.

"With Geo-Tagging you can find people who tweet and mark their location at the time of their message," he said.

Church tweets can be inane chatter on the web or significant kingdom conversation.

The Great Commission may have been to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth, but your local suburb is your mission field.

Read more about Twitter and ministry at churchjuice.com

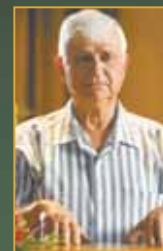
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April 9-11

Elanora Uniting Church art show, Gold Coast.



An exhibition by local artists opens at 7pm on Friday 9 April with wine, cheese and presentation of awards (small charge). Saturday and Sunday (free entry) from 10.30am-4pm.

Feature artist is Metka Skrobar, left.

Contact Dianne Malimonenko on 5522 5102.

April 2-4. North Queensland Easter Convention at Mt Louisa House of Praise, Townsville. Contact Anne Harley on 4774 6089 or anniehaha@dovenetq.net.au.

April 11, 2.30-4.30pm. Redcliffe City Choir's Silver Concert series at Redcliffe Uniting Church. Featuring Faure's *Requiem* and selected opera choruses with orchestra and professional soloists. \$17, \$15. Contact Janet Franklin on 3889 3195.

April 11, 8.30-10.30am. Watoto Children's Choir at Pine Rivers Uniting Church. For more information contact Brett Kennedy on 3285 6126 or office@pruc.org.au.

April 16-17. Art-Craft-Quilt Show, Market Day and Car Boot Sale at Mudgeeraba Uniting Church. Works by local artists, Mothers' Day gifts, and much more. Car boot sites \$15. Contact Anne and Victor on 5525 1039 or mudgeeuc@bigpond.com.

April 17, 6am-12pm. Giant Garage Sale at Paradise Point Uniting Church. Enormous variety of books, clothing, craft, electrical goods, furniture, plants, toys and much more. Contact Peter Alfredson on 5529 3669 or office@ppuca.org.au.

April 17, 9am-1pm. Bremer Brisbane Presbytery Ministry Expo at Glebe Rd Uniting Church. Displays, encouraging speakers, and resources. Contact Jenny Brecknell on 3378 5281 or jenny@brecknell.name.

April 17, 10am-3pm. The Gap Uniting Church April Fair. Games, ponies, jumping castle, second hand books, stalls and a variety of food and entertainment. Contact Scott McDonald on 0419 927 988 or you_got_what_i_want@hotmail.com.

April 17, 2-4.30pm. Musical afternoon at Bracken Ridge Uniting Church. Robert Manton, professional florist, and Bracken Ridge Uniting Church Choir present an afternoon of inspiration. Contact Marilyn Linnett on 3269 3282.

April 18, 11am. Lamington Uniting Church 100th Anniversary. Worship service followed by a shared lunch. Bring lunch and a chair. RSVP 5 April. Contact Mrs Val Hillier on 5544 8193, Mrs Dinah Buchanan on 5544 8194 or Mr Percy Arthy on 5544 8174.

April 18, 3-5.30pm. Cool & Classic concert at Kenmore Uniting Church featuring jazz band Pepperazz, followed by refreshments. For more information visit www.kenmore.ucaweb.com.au or call Carolyn on 3374 1647. \$25/\$20. Children 3-12 \$5.

April 21, 9.30am-12pm. UnitingWorld Synod Support Group Qld meeting at Wesley House, 140 Ann Street, Brisbane. Contact Judith Finau on 3711 4622 or ljfinau@dovenetq.net.au.

April 21. Uniting Church Adult Fellowship National Celebration at the Greenhills Conference Centre, Canberra. Contact Denise and Allan Secomb on (02) 4951 6885.

April 24, 8am-12pm. Beachmere Uniting Church Jumble Sale. Cakes, plants, books, clothing, craftwork, videos, records, and much more. Contact John and Marj Horchner on 5496 8371 or marjanhorchner@bigpond.com.

April 24, 9am-1pm. Bremer Brisbane Presbytery Ministry Expo at Centenary Uniting Church. Displays, encouraging speakers, and resources. Contact Jenny Brecknell as above.

May 1-2. Greta Vosper visits Brisbane. 10am and 7.30pm 1 May at Wesley House 140 Ann St Brisbane. 2 May, 6.30pm at St Mary's Community in Exile and West End Uniting Church, Brisbane. For more information visit www.layforum.unitingchurch.org.au. Register with Rodney Eivers at eiversrh@Telstra.com.



The banner made by members of the Geebung – Wavell Heights congregation for Kinglake West Uniting Church. Photo courtesy of Ian Caitens

Finding hope after fire

By Ian Caitens

IN FEBRUARY last year our congregation, along with the rest of Australia, was shocked by the extent of the Victorian bushfires.

In addition to contributing to the appeals we at the Kairos Uniting Church, Geebung – Wavell Heights congregation, wanted to show support in a targeted, tangible way.

So the idea of making a

banner for one of the badly affected congregations emerged. A talented member of our congregation designed it.

Most of the work is hand done, by many people, so the banner has been passed around for almost a year and now is finally completed.

We hope it will indeed bring hope to our brothers and sisters in Christ at the Kinglake West Uniting Church.

Date claimer

MODERATOR REV Bruce Johnson encourages congregations around Queensland to set aside 20 June to pray for the *Together on the way, enriching community* journey and the future of the Church in Queensland.

More details and resources will be available on www.ucaqld.com.au closer to the date.

Haigslea calls for memories

HAIGSLEA UNITING Church will celebrate its centenary on 20 March, 2011 and are calling for any photos or clippings relating to the Methodist and Congregational Churches. Contact Joy Faulkner on 5546 4118 or write to 688 Thagoona Haigslea Rd, Haigslea QLD 4306.

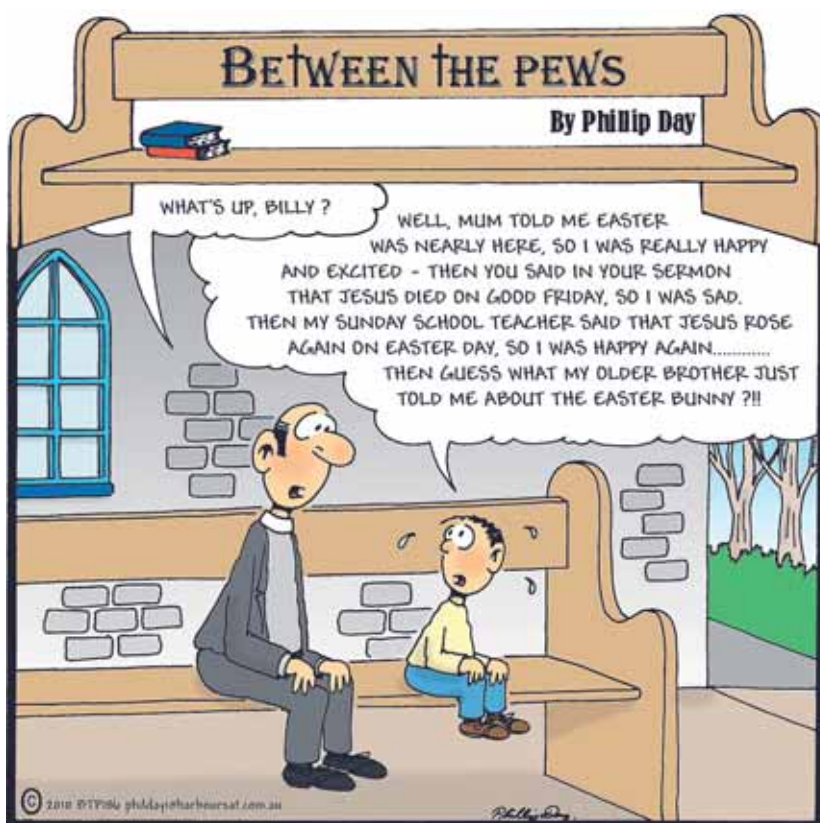
28th Synod meeting

THE 28TH Synod meeting of the Queensland Synod will take place at Alexandra Park Conference Centre between 21-25 May, 2010.

Papers are now available on www.ucaqld.com.au.

125 years of service

The Uniting Church in Clermont and Capella will celebrate 125 years of service to their community with a dinner in Clermont on 26 June followed by a 10am service on 27 June and lunch. Contact David Ferguson on 4983 3445 or david.ferguson@dovenetq.net.au.



Upload your 'What's On' entries at www.journeyonline.com.au. Items may be shortened due to space limitations.

Prayers and Rituals at a time of illness & dying:

The practices of five world religions

By Pat Fosarelli, Templeton Foundation Press, 2008, RRP \$24.95

Reviewed by Rev Lloyd Beynon, a chaplain at The Sunshine Coast Private Hospital, Buderim, who is interested in spiritual and pastoral care and in particular palliative care.

THIS WELL written small handbook presents the spiritual beliefs, practices and prayers of the five major world religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism) surrounding illness, dying and death.

This useful book has been written with pastoral carers in mind who need easy access to resources that are both readable, concise and practical.

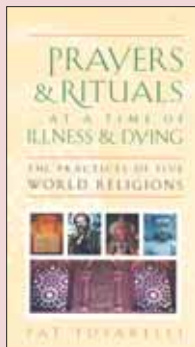
It would be 'usable' when sharing with patients and families of people from the different religions.

After a brief introduction on each religion, a summary of beliefs is concisely presented and followed by ideal practices in times of illness and death.

It is important to have a basic understanding of these practices, for example, rituals required in handling the body after death.

For Western hospitals the author also includes useful suggestions about what not to do or say in respect to different faith traditions.

The prayer resources for each religion are well researched and provide prayers that would be able to be shared.



The prayers also provide a good insight into each of the religion's beliefs on life and death.

Ms Fosarelli achieves her purpose in providing a readable, useful and practical resource that is worthwhile and easily accessible.

The Missional Leader: Equipping your church to reach a changing world

By Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, Jossey-Bass, 2006, RRP \$32.95

Reviewed by Karyl Davison, Rural Ministry Coordinator for the Central Queensland and Mary Burnett Presbyteries.

FOR MANY people, their congregation is little more than a haven from the world, a dispenser of religious goods and services; the ministry agent primarily a caregiver who looks after the private, personal needs of individuals.

Congregations that meet the needs of these people become insular, distant from the communities in which they reside and irrelevant.

In this book, authors Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk are offering an alternative model of church.

In this model congregations

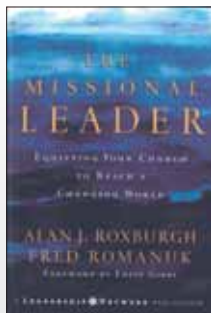
seek to engage the wider community in new and relevant ways and, in doing so, discover that God's spirit is alive and well in the community.

The authors not only set out clearly the reasons for a change to a missional focus, but also outline the character and skills required in such a leader.

The Missional Leader includes a process for leaders seeking to engage congregations and practical ways of engaging others in the process.

It provides a framework and examples of the leader as cultivator for the missional imagination.

Their strategies are



theologically sound, socially relevant, and ecclesiologically prudent.

Although the primary audience of the book is leaders of congregations, it is also helpful for those at the margins of the church seeking to start something new.

This is an excellent book that will help guide the church into much needed missional thinking and action.

Facing the Future: Bishops imagine a different church

Edited by Stephen Hale and Andrew Curnow, Acorn Press, 2009, RRP \$29.95

Reviewed by Karyl Davison, rural ministry coordinator for the Central Queensland and Mary Burnett Presbyteries.

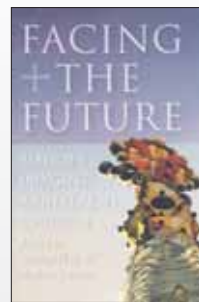
RECOGNISING THAT the church faces a challenging future with declining and ageing congregations this collection of short essays brings together 22 bishops of the Anglican Church in Australia seeking to give clear indication of some options for the way forward.

Essentially all contribute towards the shift in perspective from the church and mission, to the church's essential involvement in God's mission.

Editor Stephen Hale, formerly Bishop of the Eastern Region of the Melbourne Diocese, reflects on the need for parish renewal including stepping out in faith to build something new in order to reach those who don't go to any church.

Stuart Robinson, Bishop of Canberra-Goulburn and Wayne Brighton, researcher and secretary of Fresh Expressions Australia, explores some fresh expressions of church that might engage the non-churched.

From Trevor Edwards, Assistant Bishop of Canberra Goulburn, we hear about the



necessity for bishops who lead the way by providing an environment that supports and encourages missional churches and fresh expressions of church.

Phillip Aspinall, Primate of Australia, reminds us of the missional potential of church schools, while Len Eacott, Bishop to the Defence Force, explains the unique position fulfilled by 'outsider' chaplains in the Defence Force.

Most helpful is a chapter by Mr Hale on the new type of leadership required to bring about the missional church.

He said church leaders today need to be adaptive leaders.

Although *Facing the Future* gives insight into current thinking in the Australian Anglican Church, there's not a lot that's new here.

However it does remind us of the need for all churches to be intrinsically missional and to be thinking strategically to ensure that this happens.

Spiritual Steps on the Road to Success: Gaining the goal without losing your soul

By Linda Seger ThD, Monarch Books 2009, RRP \$22.95

Reviewed by Rev Dr Noel Park, a retired minister in the Nambour congregation.

LINDA SEGER writes with an ease of style which encourages the reader to press on to the next chapter.

Ms Seger sets out to discuss success, measured by a variety of criteria, and the ways in which one can have that and still remain true to one's faith.

She concentrates on Christian faith but demonstrates that the conclusions can apply to other faiths as well.

Spiritual Steps on the Road to Success is an illustration of the principles she espouses.



Ms Seger has drawn her theological ideas from a wide range of denominational sources, having been involved in a number of them either as worshipper or theological student.

Her discussion on wealth and possessions is a breath of fresh air after much of the so-called prosperity theology.

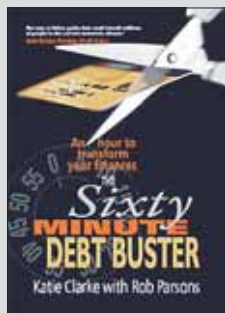
Ms Seger's broad theological approach will be sure to engender reactions for many different reasons but readers can be sure that this book will set them thinking.

This is a really readable book which includes pertinent discussion questions at regular points making this a valuable resource for personal study or for use in group situations.

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

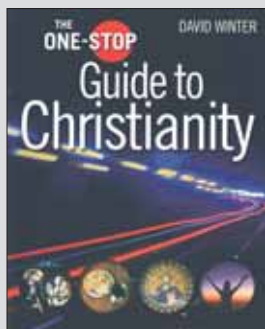
The Sixty Minute Debt Buster: An hour to transform your finances

By Katie Clarke with Rob Parsons, Lion Hudson, 2009, RRP \$14.95



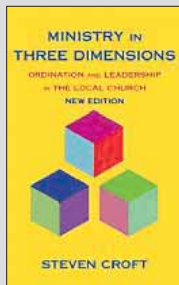
The One-Stop Guide to Christianity

By David Winter, Lion Hudson plc (Oxford), 2009, RRP \$24.95



Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and leadership in the local church

By Steven Croft, Darton, Longman & Todd (London), 2008, RRP \$47.95



Books available from ...

Many of the titles reviewed in *Journey* are available from St Paul's Bookstore or Christian Supplies in Brisbane city. Books can usually be ordered from Vision Books at Broadwater Road Uniting Church, Mansfield, or may be available from

Hearing Aboriginal Preamble perspectives

By Roberta Stanley

I WOULD like to bring an Aboriginal voice to the discussion regarding the Preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution.

This voice belongs to our Forefathers and Mothers.

This document is about their struggles, hardships, dispossession, and disappointments (e.g. the stolen generation and stolen wages).

This is our history of sadness, hardship, lost identity and lost culture, yet through it all Creator God had nurtured

and sustained the first peoples of this country.

The Aboriginal and Islander peoples continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning "sovereign" in the language of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.

We can discuss doctrinal issues, contextual theology and debate words; however, we cannot get away from our history in this nation.

This [the Preamble] is a living document that speaks about lives that have been

dishonoured, damaged, dispossessed, and discounted.

The voices of our Forefathers and Mothers speak through these documents, asking for recognition, for acknowledgement of their existence, recognising that their Creator God sustained, nurtured and kept them and that some members of Uniting Churches with good intentions stood with them in the name of justice, considering their well being, culture and language as the churches proclaimed the reconciling purpose of the Triune God found in the good

news about Jesus Christ.

I would like to remind us of the 1994 Covenanting Statement which in essence states: "Because it is pleasing to God to love one another, and it is our commitment to do so, we invite you on behalf of Congress members to develop a new relationship by entering into the struggle of those issues that presently are the cause of continuing injustice resulting in broken relationships.

"We come to this covenanting table with our gifts of Aboriginal spirituality, our culture, our Aboriginal way of loving and caring, our instinctive concern and a willingness to share and teach our history and every good aspect about being Aboriginal and Islander.

"We pray that God will guide you together with us in developing a covenant to walk together practically so that the



Roberta Stanley. Photo by Meera Atkinson

words of your statement may become a tangible expression of his justice and love for all creation.

"We ask you to remember this covenant by remembering that our land is now also sustaining your people by God's grace."

Roberta Stanley is Deputy Chairperson of the UAICC

Mangofest planting hope seeds

By Jenny Sims

A GREAT afternoon of jazz and good food attracted a crowd on Sunday 14 March at Chermiside Kedron Community Church's Mangofest.

Opened by State member Stirling Hinchcliffe Mangofest raised over \$2500 for Project Jima, a joint World Vision and Presbytery of Moreton Rivers project supporting the people of south-west Ethiopia.

The project is subsidised by the Federal Government, \$3 for every \$1 raised, so around \$10,000 will be sent to the Komosha-Assosa Market Linkages Project which helps increase household income through mango production.

Farmers in Komosha and Assosa produce a magnificent number of mangoes each year



Gaynor and Aileen Kyle sell homemade condiments at Mangofest. Photo by Glenn Mulcahy

but this is not enough to support poor households and to provide food security as communities do not have access to the markets to sell their produce or the facilities needed to provide a consistent income throughout the year.

Associated with World Vision's Komosha and Assosa Area Development Project, this project aims to help local farmers gain access to those markets and to strengthen the existence of

agricultural cooperatives which will support the industry.

World Vision will also be involved in the installation of processing and transport facilities to supply the domestic market.

Mangofest was proud to have local jazz band MangoJam provide wonderful music alongside the delicious treats for sale including mango crepes, pikelets topped with mango jam and homemade mango jam and chutney.

Lifeline announces new Executive Director

BOB GILKES has been named as the new Executive Director for Lifeline Community Care.

Mr Gilkes, who is currently Blue Care's Director of Organisational Development, will begin his new role in June.

UnitingCare Queensland CEO Anne Cross said Mr Gilkes has 25 years experience in the health and community service sectors.

"He has spent the last 10 years working in Blue Care with a clear focus on improving client-centred services as a Regional Director, as Principal Advisor, Community

Engagement and in his current role as Director of Organisational Development," she said.

He has also had extensive experience working with the Tasmanian Department of Community and Health Services where he was state Director of Child, Youth and Family Support.

During this time he managed a Parliamentary enquiry into Tasmania's stolen generation as a result of past adoption practices.

He was also Program Manager for aged and disability services in two regions of Tasmania.

Sunday 25 April: Oxley-Darra Uniting Church

OXLEY-DARRA Uniting Church consists of two active worship and ministry centres – one at Oxley, the other, a growing Vietnamese congregation at Darra.

A key missional thrust for the church is: "Showing Christ, Growing in Christ, Going Christ's Way", with the locality experiencing a significant degree of urban renewal and housing development, especially around Darra.

Six ministry areas encompassing the diversity of congregational and missional life are proactive in seeking God's best ways forward for Oxley-Darra.

Children, youth and young adult ministries are important to Oxley-Darra's life, with the mid-year Funfari and Day Camp drawing hundreds from the church and wider community.

In recent years Oxley has developed its community focus through an emerging Foodbank hamper ministry.

This ministry is increasingly

networked through our youth and children's ministries and via local school chaplains.

Please pray for:

- ministry staff: David MacGregor and Ken Acworth (Oxley) and Lan Ho (Darra)
- Oxley's Congregational Leadership Team and Ministry Area Coordinators, as they discern God's directions for the coming years

- ongoing discipleship equipping across the congregational demographic

- the many youth and children's groups, that these may be vehicles for both the nurturing faith and developing community connections

- the June holiday Day Camp and Funfari programs

- the planning leading to the establishment of an attractive and helpful church website

- ongoing development of networks of compassion with the Oxley and Darra communities

- possibilities to enhance existing men's ministry

Sunday 11 April: Glasshouse Country Uniting Church

GLASSHOUSE COUNTRY Uniting Church is situated in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast and is the southernmost congregation in the Mary Burnett Presbytery.

The Church is an amalgamation of four congregations from Glasshouse Mountains, Beerwah, Landsborough and Mooloolah.

We are situated in an area of rapid population explosion and plan to build a hall alongside the church this year to give more space for the many activities of the church.

The weekly worship service is attended by 50 to 60 people each Sunday. We have a few children involved regularly

on Sundays but an active Youth Group meets each Saturday.

One of the main features of the congregation is the large number of small groups.

These include, Playgroup, Dot Com (Youth), Adult Fellowship, Garden Interest Group, Men's Shed, Sewing Group, Jewellery Group, Computer Group, God's Gang (Sunday School), Connexion Friendship Group, Ensemble Singing Group and Bible studies. Congregational members are encouraged to get involved in one or more groups and invite members of the community to attend. Please pray for:

- members of the congregation as they seek to use our groups to reach out to the community

- the congregation as it seeks to find ways of connecting with children in the community

- the ongoing work of the hall building committee

- celebrations at the end of the year marking 10 years since the church was built

- our Christian community that we will love one another that others will see Jesus in who we are

- the congregation as it seeks to offer leadership roles to younger members of the congregation

- the congregation at Peachester which is supported by our Minister and Minister in Association



Irish Methodist Church Youth Ministry Coordinator and ncyc11 speaker Gillian Best

Irish youth worker to speak at ncyc11

By Rebekah Polley

YOUTH MINISTRY Coordinator for the Irish Methodist Church Gillian Best has been announced one of the headline speakers at ncyc11 to be held on the Gold Coast from 29 December 2010.

For those attending ncyc11 Ms Best's advice is simple.

"Be expectant that God will surprise you and willing to allow Him to have His way," she said.

"If you are willing, God will take you on the most amazing adventure."

Ms Best describes her mission work as love in action; fighting for justice for people whose voices do not get heard.

Ms Best runs and speaks at events and leads mission activities for young people, including the gap year program 'Teams on Mission' and volunteering with Habitat for Humanity.

Ms Best's goal is to build up, equip and then send out teenagers and young adults to their own environments, ready to live for God.

"It's great to see young people realise their gifts and then use them," Ms Best said.

"It really is a humbling experience and a privilege to work with them."

Find out more or register at www.ncyc11.com.au

Clarifying the call

GEOFF THOMPSON'S rejoiner *Defending the Call* (March *Journey*) to my earlier missive exhibits the theological clarity and sound judgment that many of us have come to expect and admire from him.

I do want to correct a few slight misreadings, though, in order to get to the heart of the matter.

Nowhere did I claim that "church patriotism" is the cause of our decline.

The cause of our decline is our abandonment of the historical faith of the Church and those constituent practices (such as evangelism, repentance, and theological exegesis) that bear the promise and possibility of renewal.

My point about "church patriotism" is that it obscures the reality of our situation: by such ungainly self-satisfaction we have convinced ourselves that we are rich, when in fact we are pitiable and poor. (Rev. 3.17)

My point about our status as an alternative to evangelicalism, etc., is not that

we must choose between one of these alternatives, but that this is how so many of us see ourselves: we are not Hillsong, not Sydney Anglican, etc.

The only way for us to stop being the lowest common denomination is by defining ourselves solely by fidelity to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

My musings about God's role in our decline was not meant to sound a note of fear, but rather to take the warnings to the churches of Rev. 1-3 seriously.

But more than that, is it really satisfactory that we spend more time wringing our hands over the demographic and economic shifts that have impacted our church than we do examining ourselves over whether or not we are being faithful to that which God has entrusted to our care?

I'd rather reflect on what it means to be a church in the hands of an angry God than at the mercy of a fickle culture.

Scott Stephens
Sinnamon Park



Pregnancy loss grief eased by chaplain

I HAVE recently been given a copy of the September 2009 issue of *Journey* with the article *Complexities of the unborn* in it and would like to thank you for talking about this sensitive issue.

Last year I had a planned pregnancy and found out through CVS that the baby had Down Syndrome.

After much grieving, talking with my husband, medical advice and counselling we made the very hard decision to terminate the pregnancy.

As a Catholic I held deep feelings of guilt but believed that Christ would always have forgiveness and compassion for me.

I had been advised that my request for a blessing/prayer with a Catholic priest prior to the surgery would not be available as they did not recognise terminations.

I felt abandoned by my

church in my hour of need. My own denomination's priest would not bless me or the baby, and would not pray with me when I needed it the most.

Then the hospital sent me an angel in the form of a Uniting Church Minister.

From the moment she walked in I felt the love and compassion of her and of Jesus Christ.

Rev Iris Reedman held my hand and prayed with me.

We said blessings together and prayed for a safe surgery and lit a candle for our unborn child.

Her faith, strength, love and compassion got me not only through the surgery, that day and the following days, but got me through the whole experience and all the long painful grieving process along the way.

The hospital has special services for the loss of a pregnancy and it was such

a beautiful service and so important in the path of our grief.

I can only support and reiterate the words of Ms Kidd in the article in that, "Our first response must always be to show the compassion of Christ ... The loss of a pregnancy, through choice or otherwise, demands one response only - demonstrable human compassion."

I would like to think that Jesus would have sat and prayed with me and not abandoned me, held me in contempt and judged me as I felt in my own church.

I cannot thank the Uniting Church and its ministers (especially Iris) enough for their faith, non judgement, love, compassion and support in my darkest hour.

Jane Smith
via email



Revising the Basis?

IN DEFENDING against Scott Stephens charges about the Uniting Church, Dr Geoff Thompson places great store on the 1977 *Basis of Union*, and its "theologically profound, even daring, Christological core".

The *Basis* is, indeed, a most important historical document for the Uniting Church.

I am surprised that a contemporary theologian makes no reference to the possibility in 2010 that the *Basis* of Union and its theological core may need rethinking.

It is not unfair to suggest that the theology of the drafters of the *Basis* was orthodoxy in

the 1960/70s, not cutting edge.

This means that 50 years of scholarship in biblical and systematic theology are missing from the *Basis of Union*.

Australian society in 2010 is profoundly different from what it was in the 1970s.

Union was made possible by that earlier context and it was for that context that the *Basis* of Union made sense for the new church's operations.

Multiculturalism now has a very multi-faith character.

The prosperity of the 1960s and early 1970s has been alarmingly up and down.

A War on Terror has become a continuing part of life and, when immigration is higher and more needed than ever, the small

number of refugees seeking asylum are treated badly and with suspicion.

Science and religion, a laid-to-rest issue then, has become a divisive sport for the media.

The digital revolution threatens to replace wisdom with information. Since 1977, process theology, feminist theology, contextual theology, liberation theology, together with rich new means of analysing the biblical text, are now well developed offering insights attractive to increasing numbers of the thinking laity.

They could well be drawn upon to revise the *Basis* of Union so that it takes on a contemporary freshness and usefulness.

Peter Fensham
Em. Professor of Science Education, Annerley



CLASSIFIEDS

Accommodation

London B & B. Easy city access; lge double room, ensuite, self-catering. Reas rates. rachel@brockleybandb.fsnet.co.uk
Ph/Fax: 001144.2086946538.

Holiday unit, modern, pool. 100m from Kings Beach Caloundra from \$360/wk. Ph Ray 0427990161.

Boulder Creek Holiday Centre – the ideal place for your next Church or Family group camp. Catered accommodation for up to 100 persons. Self cater available for small groups. Check www.bouldercreek.com.au for more information or ph 5483 5221. 281 Hill Rd, Mothar Mountain, via Gympie.

General

Fresh Steps in Faith. Info on progressive Christianity and the UCA email eiversrh@telstra.com.

Email your classified advertisements to journey@ucaqld.com.au

Send your letters to journey@ucaqld.com.au or Journey GPO Box 674, Brisbane QLD 4001.
Letters may be edited due to space limitations.

Please keep letters to a maximum of 250 words.

What happens after you die?

James Stevenson

MANY YEARS ago my son, then aged four, asked: "Daddy, does it hurt to die?"

It was a question that still has me thinking.

I guess it depends on what we mean by hurt.

I came to the conclusion that it isn't the dying that hurts, but the living before we die.

In a culture where most of the images of death and dying we see are mediated to us in dramatic portrayals be it in the news, tele-dramas or computer games, to experience a real death one has already been preconditioned by these brutal, theatrical and expository depictions.

The cry from those around me is that they are not afraid of dying, and death itself does not worry them.

What creates the anxiety is the idea of pain and suffering.

This is experienced differently by the one who is dying and those who are sharing their journey.

For some, death is seen as blessed relief from the sufferings of this life.

It is a reunion with loved ones who have gone before; the idea that someone is waiting to meet you is of great comfort.

Death is such a solitary act. To sit by the bed of one who has just died is sacred mystery indeed.

When we think of the afterlife we think also of the other side to which we cross over, the beyond of which we are given a glimpse, of light, love, family and friends, of callings and longings that break into us even now.

Heaven is much closer than we think.

In many respects the death of Jesus is like no other. And yet it is like every experience.

It is with these words, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit", the whole plight of despair, lostness, anonymity and wishful thinking are resolved.

We do not vanish into an impersonal void, our identities are not extinguished with our dying, and our thresholds are crossed through our prayers of commendation and committal, in our letting go and in God's taking hold.

Jesus speaks of preparing a place, making a way, and accompanying us to where he is going and already is.

This is the mystery of space and time and the love of God in Christ who transcends and traverses them both.

What happens when we die?

We are met and embraced by the God who embraced us in Jesus Christ.

Rev James Stevenson is a Blue Care chaplain in Bundaberg

Audrey Aumua

IN REALITY when we die we see that we are put into man made coffins, buried in the ground and are never to be seen again.

However as Christians we believe that after we die our souls are risen up into the skies and into another life - the afterlife.

The afterlife means that we are with our heavenly father for eternity.

I believe that when we leave this world we go to live with our Father in heaven.

Even though our bodies are left in this world our soul and minds are elsewhere.

Audrey Aumua is a nursing student and member of Logan Central Multicultural Uniting Church

Noel Preston

THE NOTION that death leads to life is intrinsic to the Christian gospel, just as it is imprinted in nature's evolving processes.

On Ash Wednesday I am reminded that I am dust and to dust I will return, a reminder that ending one form of existence returns our creaturely substance to the processes which ultimately contribute to life in other forms.

In the past, Christianity has constructed various doctrinal images like "heaven and hell" to confront this reality.

Frankly, for me, eternal life only makes sense in terms of the eternal quality of love.

Respected theologian Jurgen Moltmann comes close to defining my belief and hope: "We don't die into the eternal nothingness or infinite silence; we die into the eternally bounteous God and the wider space of creative love".

Though there is a mystery about the continuance of consciousness and what happens beyond one's death, that state will not include the survival of my physical self or my present self-awareness. Indeed, while my genetic inheritance is passed on and my influence might live through others for a short time, in a profound existential sense, my death is the end of me.

However, I also trust that my death will be a type of homecoming, following the path of my ancestors and a reunion with "the ground of all being" of which my self is a part - a reconnection with the divine love which does not let us go.

Like many, I may be fearful as I "walk through the valley of the shadow of death".

Even as I have confronted many "little deaths" throughout my life, I hope that when I am crossing the ultimate boundary I will be assured that even death is part of the gift of abundant life.

Rev Dr Noel Preston is an ethicist and retired Uniting Church minister

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