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Joy to the world the Lord is come

Sue Fairley

THIS Christmas carol is one of my absolute favourites because it sums up why Jesus came to earth — to bring joy, and it also mentions our response to this good news which is to “let every heart prepare Him room”.

Every time I sing it, I think about how I have prepared room for him in my heart. The melody is such a joyful one that it also helps to communicate this message of joy.

Joy is such a wonderful euphoric feeling which seems to come from deep within us. It is the joy which Jesus speaks about in John 15:11 when he says “Let my joy be in you that your joy may be complete”.

This kind of joy is not superficial joy which depends on our circumstances. It is the joy we can experience even in the face of difficulties. We are only able to know this kind of joy because Jesus came to earth.

Joy at Christmas time is reflected in all kinds of ways including being warmly greeted by strangers with the words “Happy Christmas”. These greetings lift the human spirit. People seem to be less impatient and more courteous.

I have had many different experiences of joy in my life, from the birth of a new niece or nephew, to watching young people make a lifetime commitment to each other in marriage, to enjoying an amazing sunset or listening to the sound of the crashing ocean.

As I now approach my retirement, I have been reflecting on some of my experiences of joy.

One of my greatest joys has been working with young people in a variety of settings — camps, leadership courses, teaching, training, and most recently at Grace College within the University of Queensland. I love their idealism, their desire to make the world a better place, their willingness to give of themselves to help their visions become reality. It has been a joy to see so many young people grow and mature in their faith and take on leadership roles in the church and community.

So I encourage all of you this Christmas, when you sing this carol, to think about the experiences of joy in your life and reflect on how you make room in your life for Jesus who is the joy giver.

Dr Sue Fairley, Principal of Grace College at the University of Queensland, will retire at the end of this year

MONTHLY PRAYER

God in community,
make yourself known to us in our
preparations to celebrate Christ's coming.
Help us to be instruments of hope,
spreading joy to the world.
Amen

December 2012

Survivor guilt echoes the Christmas story

I perch on the floor hugging my knees watching as the Indian Ocean tsunami turns paradise into hell.

On Christmas night from a cosy hut on the top of snow-capped Swiss mountain, news of the disaster that destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives bursts into our warm Christmas bubble of joy.

Just 72 hours earlier I was there. I was on that Thai beach, swimming those crystal waters that are now dark, churning and horrible.

It was the most joyous and peaceful Advent I have experienced. In Thailand there are no Christmas sales or holiday stresses.

It was life as normal with cows grazing by the dusty, potholed road. The occasional Happy New Year sign opposite fields of lanky trees slowly dripping rubber into jars was the only hint of the year's ending. Gentle pulses lapped at rotting piers steadying my heartbeat.

Slowness opens my soul to the movement of the spirit. Rural, beachside Thailand is perhaps the most joyous place on earth.

But that day, slowness was replaced with nature's brute force and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it.

I was glad we were no longer there; but yearned to help. Joy was far from mind.

Survivor guilt is a hard feeling to shake.

When Christ came into the world, it was a crazy place; probably much like it is now.

But Christ came to bring joy, peace and hope to all people.

How can you do the same for your family, friends, community and world this Christmas?

Sometimes it takes destruction or a life-changing event for us to appreciate the simple, joyful moments in life.

The joy we feel welcoming the Christ-child is underpinned with sorrow.

We know how the story plays out for this child.

Christmas bells toll for Easter people.

This child's birth, death (and resurrection) has been documented, sung about, painted, and retold more than any other in the Western world.

This child, through sacrifice, became the hope of the world. That is certainly something to be joyous about.

From the Uniting Communications team we wish you a joyous Christmas season. We look forward to bringing you a new, improved *Journey* in 2013.

Mardi Lumsden, Director,
Uniting Communications

Brimming with joy

Kaye Ronalds

THE carols announce that Christmas is near.

That is, just in case you had not noticed the calendar filling with end-of-year events and letter boxes bursting with junk mail. The shops have been stocked with Christmas decorations and Christmas food for weeks.

While we need to guard against the seduction of consumerism, I am reminded that at Christmas time small business owners hope their takings will help them recover from some lean months, teenagers look forward to working extra hours, and the hospitality industry appreciates a boost in income.

In her book *Kitchen*

Theology, Diana Roberts from the Methodist Church in New Zealand recalls participating in an event at which three women from different faith traditions talked about how they each embraced the season. Jewish, Christian and Islamic women all

became busy preparing for family gatherings, cooking special food and maintaining rituals.

Each festival provided a means of teaching a new generation about how these rituals began, and what meaning we take from them.

I find that I need to make a conscious effort not to crowd out the joy and meaning of Christmas with the busy program and pressures of the season.

Although I have never studied it, I have learned that there are three different words for joy in Latin.

The first one, *gaudete*, sounds like a loud shout or a rich dessert.

Gaudete represents the sweet joy of looking forward to something.

A good example of this is the joy of a child looking forward to a birthday. Counting sleeps is a measure of the anticipation.

At this time of the year there may be a few adults counting

sleeps until their annual holidays.

In Advent we read again the Scripture stories that reveal the joy of anticipating the coming of the Messiah. The crowds who gathered at the Jordan River listened to the preaching of John the Baptist and began to anticipate the arrival of the one who would come after him, bringing great relief and joy. Mary expressed humble

joyfulness at being chosen to carry the Christ child who would turn the tables for the poor.

The second kind of joy, *laetare*, captures the joy of reaching an oasis in the desert. For a time there is rest

from the rigours of the journey and refreshment to carry on. *Laetare* Sunday occurs in the middle of Lent. For some people in our world every day is hard.

Isaiah chapter 61 was written at a time when Israel was in exile, in a wilderness of life and faith.

I need to make a conscious effort not to crowd out the joy and meaning of Christmas.



Mrs Ivy Heck, 91, of Fernvale-Lowood Uniting Church, presented a knitted nativity scene to the Moderator, Rev Kaye Ronalds, and General Secretary, Dr Shirley Coulson in November. A knitter since childhood, Mrs Heck also loves making premmie baby clothes for the Ipswich Hospital. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Snap that!

THIS month's *Snap that!*, celebrates the theme *Joy to the world*.

Thanks to Jonathan Hunter for sending us this joyous photo of Phyllis Titre, runner-up of the 2012 Virgin Islands JoyFest Gospel Artist of the Year competition for her powerful rendition of *You Are God Alone*.



Those promises of good news for the poor, release for the captives, healing for the broken hearted and comfort for mourners acted like seeds of hope that joy would one day come again.

This is a season when we have an opportunity to provide a little *laetare* for people in our world.

Maybe you will choose to do that locally by donating towards a hamper for a struggling family, volunteering to serve Christmas lunch to homeless folk, or sharing hospitality with someone who will be on their own for Christmas. Perhaps you would prefer to donate a goat for a family or money to provide mine clearing from farmland.

Our gifts through projects of UnitingWorld and the Christmas Bowl bring joy to the world in a very practical way.

The third kind of joy is called *jubilare*. It makes me think of the voices of carollers and the sound of Christmas bells. However, *jubilare* is not a momentary wave of joy like music lost in the night air, but rather the deep abiding joy that transcends the circumstances.

Some have said that *jubilare* is the joy that belongs to the Easter season and the celebration of the resurrection. For Christians, the joy of the people of God who celebrate a God who takes on human form is fulfilled in the joy of Easter.

"Joy to the world," announces the nearness of God.

May you and your loved ones experience many kinds of joy in this season of preparation.

Rev Kaye Ronalds is the Moderator of the Uniting Church in Queensland

Where's the Moderator?

This month Rev Kaye Ronalds will be at many events, including:

6 December
Synod office Christmas thanksgiving service

11 December
Covenanting Committee meeting, Brisbane

12 December
Queensland Heads of Churches meeting, Brisbane

18-21 January
Summer Madness youth camp, Sunshine Coast

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Valuing all Australians

Tara Burton

IN which country can a child expect to wait more than two years for a wheelchair? Australia.

As Australia moves towards developing the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), UnitingCare Community is urging advocates to find the courage to question the assumptions that underpin the NDIS as a reform.

Valmae Rose, UnitingCare Community NDIS readiness project manager, says people should ask what research questions and evaluation frameworks are being used by the national design teams.

"We can engage our own communities around conversations that inform the work, whilst looking into our own organisations and communities and being willing to let go of organisational structures, policies and practices that won't serve us or the people we serve in the future under an NDIS"

As part of the National Disability Strategy, the Australian Government commissioned an inquiry into a long-term care and support scheme for people living with disability.

Following this inquiry, in August 2011 the Prime Minister endorsed the implementation of the NDIS.

Essentially the aim of the NDIS is to provide a new model of disability support which will replace the existing funding arrangements.

With increasing numbers of Australians with disability, the disability support system faces pressures on several fronts.

Ms Rose emphasises that there is important work to do and that it cannot be achieved alone.

"This must be inclusive of every person in every place, in every role, in every part of the organisation and in the communities in which we operate.

"This needs to be done with time and space for people to recognise that the invitation to contribute is real, and time for people to think and talk, then to make sense of the ideas that emerge.

"The work we are doing in the NDIS readiness project is about just that; raising awareness of what's ahead with the NDIS, and asking good questions."

According to the Department of Families, Housing,

Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, governments around Australia make a major contribution to supporting people with disability.

However, there is still a significant level of unmet demand for disability services within Australia.

Consequently, this impacts greatly upon the lives of people with disability, their families and their carers.

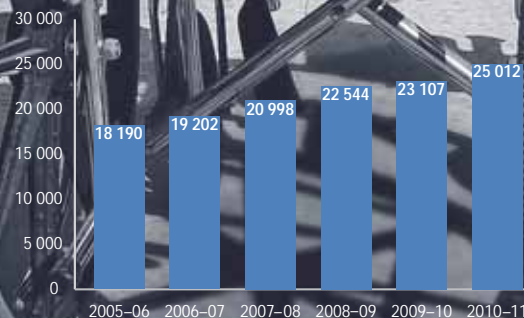
UnitingCare Community says that no matter how well the NDIS is designed, it will be unable to solve all of the current issues surrounding disability support, nor will it reach every single person who needs support within the country.

For more information visit everyaustraliancounts.com.au

Sources: Disability support service users in Queensland from 2005-06 to 2010-11 data comes from aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737422881

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data comes from fhcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/government-international/inquiry-into-a-national-disability-long-term-care-and-support-scheme

Disability support service users in Queensland from 2005-06 to 2010-11



The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that around

2.3 million

Australians will have a high level of disability by

2030

image courtesy of zeevvez's photostream

Christmas Bowl helps refugees head home safely

KAMALA and her husband fled war-torn Sri Lanka with nothing but the clothes on their backs. After five years in a refugee camp in Tamil Nadu, southern India, during which their daughter was born, they have returned home.

Support from churches around Australia for the Christmas Bowl has helped this family and many like them to survive, and is assisting them to rebuild their lives now that the conflict has ended.

The Christmas Bowl is the annual appeal of Act for Peace, the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia.

Hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankans were forced to flee as a result of the civil war which gripped their country between 1983 and 2009.

Sri Lanka now faces a huge challenge in resettlement and reconciliation between

ethnic communities, as well as rebuilding basic infrastructure.

Act for Peace supports programs in the refugee camps which equip refugees for their return. They are provided with health care, and participate in self-help groups to support community leadership, peace building and human rights.

Act for Peace, working with a local project partner, also helps provide refugees with the documentation they need — like birth and marriage certificates — to ensure that they can prove their Sri Lankan citizenship and obtain the benefits they are entitled to on their return to Sri Lanka.

Act for Peace Executive Director Alistair Gee says Australian Christians have been supporting people like Kamala for more than 60 years, ever since the Christmas Bowl began. "Act for Peace sees first-hand

the devastating effects of conflict on innocent people — but also the incredible difference that the right support can make.

"Act for Peace's life-saving work around the world simply would not be possible without the support of people around Australia."

Last year more than 2000 churches from over 19 denominations took part in the Christmas Bowl, raising almost \$2.5 million. Uniting Church congregations in Queensland contributed more than \$150 000.

Funds raised through the Christmas Bowl will help Act for Peace project partners in countries including Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Burma/Myanmar.

For more information call 1800 025 101 or visit actforpeace.org.au/christmasbowl



Christmas Bowl gifts help fund vital health care in refugee camps and prepare refugees to return home safely from India to Sri Lanka, with a special focus on vulnerable women and children.

Photo courtesy of OFERR



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Creating leaders for challenging times

Tara Burton

FOUR theology students graduated from Trinity Theological College in October.

Acting Principal Rev Dr Malcolm Coombes says that Trinity graduates are moving on to exciting and challenging times.

"This year we are seeing Fa Ngaluafé and Stephen Rothery exiting and have seen Craig Batty and John Dansie exit halfway through the year.

"Queensland will certainly benefit from all their enthusiasm, their willingness to think outside the square, their passion for the Gospel, their grasp of the Gospel tradition which has faithfully been passed on to them, and their administrative skills.

"They all carry with them capacities to relate to a variety of age groups and we look forward to seeing their ministry keep developing," he says.

Dr Coombes suggests that our world is no longer Christendom-oriented, and that the Trinity exit students will need to consider fresh ways of engaging with people in the Gospel message.

"This is often challenging in our culture and it is why we will be urging our future candidates to explore options in their training which may take them out of their comfort zone."

Recent graduate Fa Ngaluafé says that in her time at Trinity she has learnt more about herself, and her identity in Christ.

"I now have a deeper understanding of God, Christ, salvation, church and what it means to be church.

"My hope and excitement as a future Minister of the Word is meeting and building more relationships with God's immense family all over the world; even with those who don't



Trinity Theological College graduates John Dansie, Stephen Rothery, Fa Ngaluafé and Craig Batty. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

know God, but still belong to his family."

Trinity College staff are urging anybody who is considering ordained or lay ministry to act now.

"We are aware that our candidate intake has dropped this year, and so we are urging

our presbyteries and folk in congregations to think about who may be called by God into ordained ministry," says Dr Coombes.

"It is even more important in these times for the church to have well-formed leaders amongst us."

Ms Ngaluafé adds, "I would recommend to those who have thought about studying theology at Trinity to come expecting to be challenged, come wanting to question, come with an open mind and an open heart."

For more information visit trinity.qld.edu.au

Rocky fundraiser benefits Mwandi children

SOUTH Rockhampton Uniting Church launched their November fundraising drive for the UnitingWorld supported Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) project in Mwandi, Zambia, with a trivia

night that raised over \$1300.

Around 35 per cent of the Mwandi population are living with HIV/AIDS and there are an estimated 1300 orphans and vulnerable children.

The OVC project provides

educational, social and nutritional support to over 270 orphans and vulnerable children.

The project also works to build HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

UnitingWorld volunteers Don and Sylvia Wright worked with the children and staff at the OVC in 2011 and have assisted South Rockhampton Uniting Church to develop a partnership with the Jerusalem Church, United Church of Zambia (UCZ), Mwandi Consistory, which administers the OVC.

For more information visit mwandiovc.com or unitingworld.org.au

2013 calendars (\$17 each) featuring the children are available from Sylvia Wright on (07) 4933 6490



United Church of Zambia, Jerusalem Church members present Sylvia and Don Wright with a banner for South Rockhampton Uniting Church. Photo courtesy of Don Wright

Dalby church celebrates

THE planting of an olive tree signified the hope for a long future for the Dalby Uniting Church at its centenary celebrations on 11 November.

The former Methodist church sprang to life with a packed

service, inspiring worship with a great blend of old and new music, cake and delicious food; all the ingredients for a wonderful celebration of 100 years of worship.

Over 180 people joined in the festivities. Tongues wagged as old friends returned for the day and caught up with each other.

A piece called *Little Church on the Corner* was written for the occasion by in-house composer Noeleen Johnson and focused on the faithfulness of God who will lead the congregation on into their second century.



Left: Rev Jenny Sims, Marshall Hamilton, and Glenn Ogden plant an olive tree at the Dalby Uniting Church centenary celebrations. Photo by Ian Williams



Young Families Minister

Ipswich congregations Full-time

The Uniting Church in Australia congregations in Ipswich are seeking to grow their ministry with young families, and are looking for someone to journey with them.

We're looking for a person to resource us, encourage us, and help us discover how we can be a blessing to young families through our congregational life.

For further information contact Rev David Baker on presmin@bremerbristbane.org.au or (07) 3201 0750.

Please lodge expressions of interest with Rev John Cox, Synod Ministries Coordinator, at john.cox@ucaqld.com.au by 17 December.



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Finding belonging with L'Arche

Sue Hutchinson

SHEENA Semple is passionate about belonging to the Bulimba Uniting Church and looks forward to Sundays. She recently enjoyed the congregation's weekend family camp at Mount Tamborine, supported by her parents Bill and Alison.

At the heart of Bill and Alison's lives and faith is a deep desire to see that Sheena, who has a disability, is listened to, valued, included and loved.

This desire motivated the couple to become involved in the L'Arche movement in the early 1980s.

They immediately recognised that this deeply spiritual community would have the potential to provide a meaningful and loving life for their daughter. Bill and Alison worked for about 20 years as part of a group building a L'Arche community in Brisbane.

Now L'Arche Brisbane has been Sheena's home for nine

years. She and the five other core members of the community share life with a group of assistants who have made the radical choice to live in community with people with intellectual disability.

The L'Arche movement is worldwide, founded in France by Jean Vanier in 1964. There are now 137 communities in 40 countries, with communities in Brisbane, Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, and Sydney, and Friends of L'Arche in the Hunter Valley and Perth.

L'Arche is an expression of living community, building relationships that are mutually transforming, where each person becomes their most true self.

Assistants in L'Arche Brisbane households in Morningside and Alexandra Hills come from far and wide including Europe, Asia, North America and Africa as well as from around Australia.

The communities are supported by an active membership of friends and associates.



Alison, Sheena and Bill Semple at L'Arche Morningside. Photo by Sue Hutchinson

The regular community gatherings are times of welcome, ritual, recognition, music, prayer and celebration. The core members remain at the heart of the community.

Bill and Alison know that Sheena is valued and deeply cared about in her home at

L'Arche. There is a sense that L'Arche is not a "service", but is a place where people are living together, developing relationships and experiencing personal growth. Each person is celebrated and welcomed.

Living in such close quarters often takes individuals out of

their comfort zones, but people help one another to manage life. This becomes an opportunity to view themselves and their relationships differently. Living in L'Arche has the potential to profoundly change lives.

To find out more about L'Arche visit larche.org.au

Aussie hospitality hits the spot for international students

Dianne Jensen

SITTING on Snapper Rocks at the Gold Coast, listening to the waves and eating sandwiches and lamingtons out of a plastic container is an ordinary Australian family activity.

Inviting an international student to share the experience can be a simple way of providing friendship and a sense of family to a young person who is far from home.

Emmanuel College Vice-Principal Liza Allen and her husband have shared picnics, barbecues, and even short trips with the students they have taken under their wing as part of the Aussie Mates program at the University of Queensland (UQ) in St Lucia, Brisbane.

The program, administered through UQ Student Services, matches international students with host families willing to share our culture and family life.

The idea originated from the Mission and Outreach Vision and Action Group at Indooroopilly Uniting Church, where Ms Allen is a member. The group was seeking ways to connect with their local community, which includes the St Lucia campus.

In consultation with Uniting Church university chaplain Mark Cornford and UQ Student Services, Ms Allen helped create Aussie Mates, which launched in June 2011. Initially, a dozen or so families were recruited from Indooroopilly Uniting Church.

The student response was overwhelming, with 100 students from across Brisbane signing up for the program. It was clear that the new program had touched a real need within the international student community.

"The students absolutely love it," says Ms Allen, whose family hosted an initial four students.

"They come from another culture, and they tend to live in small cultural groups, speak

their language and eat the same food. Their only contact with Australians can be at UQ."

And it's the small things that they appreciate, she adds, like meeting for coffee and discovering vegemite, trifle and pavlova.

One of her students is Joan Hu, from Urumqi city, Xinjiang, China.

"The best thing my Aussie family has brought to me is the feeling of home," says Ms Hu.

"Every time we get together, we can feel they are truly wanting to make us happy. They told us customs in here, some common Australian slang. I can talk with them about my family, my hometown or even my relationship happening in Australia."

The most recent program, launched in September this year, has placed 30 students.

There are, however, many more students looking for host families and Ms Allen encourages Brisbane congregations to get involved in the program.

To register for Aussie Mates in Semester 1, 2013, visit uq.edu.au/student-services/mates-uq



Joan Hu, a UQ student from China, shares a cup of tea and some lamingtons with Liza Allen, Emmanuel College Vice-Principal and her Aussie Mates host. Photo by Holly Jewell

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The Uniting Church in Australia
Queensland Synod

Change campaigners enrich communities

Mardi Lumsden

FIVE finalists have been announced in a new Wesley Mission Brisbane initiative, Campaign for Change, designed to support those in need through enriching Brisbane communities.

The winner, to be announced in February, will receive \$30,000 and valuable support and expert mentoring from Wesley Mission Brisbane to establish their own community support program.

The other four finalists will each receive \$5000 and a mentoring workshop.

Wesley Mission Brisbane Executive Director, Geoff Batkin, says the organisation saw an opportunity to further support Brisbane communities by pulling in external resources to facilitate this initiative.

"We have been very fortunate to secure the financial support of PBS Building and, combined with the beneficial expertise we have in community services, we are hoping to initiate not just one but several much needed additional and alternative support

mechanisms for the people of Brisbane," he says.

With nearly half a million Queenslanders now living below the poverty line, Michelle Skinner, Wesley Mission Brisbane Director of Community Service, says Campaign for Change is a brilliant opportunity both for the people who want to start a community initiative and those who will benefit from it.

"Through our work in the community, we are constantly coming across people who either know of, or have themselves a great idea for a community initiative that could really make a difference, but they simply don't know where to start or don't have the funds to get it up and operational," says Ms Skinner.

The five finalists – Serge Loode, Katherine Coory, Miranda Mason, Lucy Lott, and Evie Ryder – have a range of innovative ideas.

Mr Loode has been working on a project called Community Cafe that aims to connect people from minority communities in the greater Brisbane area.

Ms Coory wants to set up a weekend respite service for children living with a disability.

Ms Mason's idea is for a Community Nonnas Program. She wants to support families by matching local retirees and isolated women to new mothers for regular support at home during the early years with new children.

Ms Lott wants to create an inclusive youth theatre company with a focus on youth who may be isolated, at risk or living with a disability.

Ms Ryder wants to create a peer support service run by volunteers who have been through a transgender process and are trained to offer support to people new to the process.

Ms Skinner says tapping into this wealth of ideas and helping people get their projects up and running is at the heart of the campaign.

"Not only will the Campaign for Change finalists and the community they are supporting benefit from this campaign, but we also anticipate it will



Kath Coory, pictured with her daughter Lara, hopes to establish a sleepover-style weekend respite service for children living with a disability. Photo courtesy of Wesley Mission Brisbane

alleviate some of the pressure on government bodies by providing additional avenues for those requiring support," she says.

For more information visit wmb.org.au/campaignforchange

Blue Care launches Ashgrove Men's Shed

BLUE Care Rangeview, which provides respite and social support in Ashgrove, Brisbane celebrated its 25th anniversary and the opening of its new Men's Shed on 2 November.

Blue Care Rangeview Service Manager Caroline McCormack says the event will not only celebrate the centre's past 25 years, but also the changes which have taken place to ensure the services offered remain current and valued in the local community.

"The Men's Shed is an example of a modern service which will reconnect men with their community and give them an exclusive area to socialise and take part in male-orientated activities.

"Dreams really can come true – but not without wonderful community support and the generous funding from the John Thomas Wilson Endowment managed through Perpetual.

"The Lions Club of Ashgrove has been involved with this project right from day

one and this community connection has been essential to get the Shed to what it is today."

Shed membership is open to all men in the local community. Members can enjoy features such as a large-screen television, library, barbecue and outdoor facilities, work shed and gym.

Mrs McCormack said that much had changed since the centre first opened in 1988 in terms of how services are delivered.

"Our services now have a wellness person-centred focus where the primary thing we look at is helping clients reach their potential physically, emotionally and cognitively," she said.

Blue Care Rangeview services are available for people who are cared for by a friend or family member, or who live alone. For more information contact (07) 3514 4900



Ashgrove Men's Shed member Rod Cottle and Blue Care Respite Assistant Coordinator Darryl Jones at the official opening. Photo courtesy of Blue Care

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Bailey and Max get ready for the nativity play at Oxley Darra Uniting Church, with the help of Sharyn Sinnamon, pastoral care coordinator. Photo by Holly Jewell

Shepherds watch and angels sing

WHEN it comes to the annual nativity play, Oxley Darra Uniting Church is one of many churches that are passionate about continuing a much-loved tradition.

The buzz starts in November, says Sharyn Sinnamon, pastoral care coordinator, and putting together the play is a key part of the project.

"Of course, the 'must haves' are Mary, Joseph and the innkeeper.

"Then the cast grows. Have we got enough children to have wise men included?"

"How many angels will be in 'a host'? How many shepherds huddle around the fire? Will there be a Roman Soldier this year?"

The final script largely depends on the children she says, and what the young participants might reasonably be expected to do and say.

"While our play may not be

professional, the children see and experience the real heart of Christmas as it comes alive for them by centring on the birth of our Saviour and Lord.

"Our celebration is not for a day on the calendar, but the event of the Word made flesh.

"It's for the gift of the baby in the manger, and not the gifts under the tree, and not for the sentiment of Christmas past, but for the reality of Christmas present in our hearts and lives."

Making room for Santa in the stable

Dianne Jensen

"THERE was more than one lobster present at the birth of Jesus?"

Emma Thompson's classic line in the 2003 film *Love Actually* resonates with everyone who has ever pinned the paper wings on a pint-sized angel.

It's a poignant reminder of excited children, harried Sunday School teachers, beaming parents and much-loved hymns and Bible passages.

The nativity play is always something of a historical and theological muddle. Wise men mingle with shepherds, and angels trip over the swords of Roman soldiers.

We accept and celebrate each colourful and inclusive version of the story because we understand that what unfolds is far more than just the simple narrative.

Rev Kaye Ronalds, Queensland Synod Moderator, agrees.

"The biblical accounts are not so much about the facts but about the symbols and story-telling that help the reader understand how the birth of Jesus fulfilled the hopes and dreams of generations of people longing for a Saviour," she says.

Faced with the challenges of a post-Christian society, churches are finding creative ways to tell the Christmas story to new generations.

There are Aussie interpretations, contemporary thematic plays, puppetry and rap versions. New technologies deliver clever digital versions of the story and dazzling graphics.

Many congregations, usually working with other local churches, are partnering with community groups to ensure that the Christian story is included in public events such as carol nights and Christmas parades.

Faced with the reality of the biblical tableau becoming sandwiched between marching

girls and Christmas elves, most church groups are taking the secular world in their stride; even inviting that ubiquitous chap in the red outfit into the stable.

Rev Jeanette Gilliam from Longreach reports that last year at the community carols, organised by the Longreach Regional Council, the local Churches Together group was determined to include something of the Christian story.

"The Catholic priest was Santa, and when the children brought him into the Civic Centre, one of the other clergy met them and took them around

from one scene to the next of the story of Jesus' birth. Because we had a Santa who was clued up, he asked questions and there was dialogue as

they went along."

Bayside Uniting Church, in Brisbane, hosts the annual community carols in the church grounds. The event is steered by church leaders and involves the

The biblical accounts are not so much about the facts but about the symbols and story-telling.



Tahlia, Seth, Allan and Rachel enjoyed being part of the Cooroy / Pomona Uniting Church float in the annual Christmas parade. Children and parents made up the live nativity scene on the back of a ute, while members of the Cooroy and Pomona congregations handed out pencils with "Happy Birthday Baby Jesus" written on them. Photo by Linda Hanson

local community through a range of activities including photo opportunities at a live manger scene and a concert.

"The Christmas story is presented in an interesting balancing act/dialogue between Santa and Baby Jesus," says Rev Lu Senituli. "We try to make sure that Santa doesn't push Jesus out of the crib, but also make it relevant to young people."

At Redcliffe Uniting Church, the community and the congregation are prepared for just about anything, thanks to the creative energy of Rev Paul Clark.

The author of *Car Park Parables* and a number of puppet shows on Christmas themes has been known to deliver the sermon dressed as the angel Gabriel, or to illustrate the Christmas story as he preaches.

Other churches have created nativity settings which have become local events, such as the Stable on the Strand in Townsville, a five-night ecumenical event that attracts around 40 000 visitors.

The event commenced in 1999 as a small production at Mt Louisa House of Praise using the

talents of a few local churches. In 2002 the Townsville City Council approached the organisers and invited them to use Strand Park.

Why do we keep telling this disarmingly simple story? Charles Wesley sums it up in his hymn:

"Let earth and heaven combine, angels and men agree, to praise in songs divine, the incarnate deity, our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man."

Together in Song, 305

Position vacant Cross-platform editor/producer Uniting Communications, Queensland Synod

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Uniting Communications is responsible for producing a monthly cross-platform magazine, *Journey*, as well as strategic communications and marketing (online and print) for the Uniting Church, Queensland Synod office.

The successful candidate will possess:

- a background in journalism, communications, or similar with a minimum of five years' experience and a nose for news and/or a good story
- the ability to work well in a small, flexible and energetic team
- excellent knowledge and use of cross-platform media (e.g. podcasts, infographics, etc.)
- an understanding of and the ability to work within the ethos of the Uniting Church in Australia

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Applications close
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QUEENSLAND SYNOD

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Uniting Communications
and featuring Moderator,
Rev Kaye Ronalds.

The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Operation Santa unites retailers and community

UNITINGCARE will join forces with Target again this Christmas to bring joy to disadvantaged Australians through Operation Santa.

The annual appeal provides Christmas gifts for thousands of disadvantaged people across Australia, with donations made through Operation Santa Christmas trees at Target and Target Country stores.

More than two million people in Australia are estimated to live in poverty, one in 10 of whom are children. UnitingCare agencies are at the forefront of providing

care and support, with thousands of requests for services each day, and increasing demand around Christmas.

"Operation Santa is a great way for local people to help those in our community who are struggling for a variety of reasons. While we may not know them personally, there are many people who need our help," says Anne Cross, UnitingCare Queensland CEO.

Gifts or gift cards can be left under the large red Operation Santa trees at any Target or Target Country store.



UnitingCare and retailer Target have launched their annual Operation Santa appeal to provide gifts and gift cards for needy families. Photo courtesy of UnitingCare

UnitingCare representatives will collect the gifts, and ensure that they are distributed to those in need in the local community in time for Christmas morning.

The appeal is now in its 21st year. Thanks to the generosity

of Australians, 81 463 gifts and \$149 590 in gift cards were donated and distributed last year.

Organisers are hoping to get their best response yet this year, with a target of 100 000 gifts and \$200 000 in gift cards.

Operation Santa runs until 23 December 2012.

For more information visit operationsanta.org.au

Watch the pennies; can the credit card

CAREFUL budgeting will help keep people smiling this Christmas, say UnitingCare Community financial first aid counsellors.

The counsellors are only too aware of the pressures to lash out during the festive season — and the destructive consequences of overspending.

Robyn Underwood, UnitingCare Community Financial Counselling Practice advisor, says using credit cards can be a trap for many as holiday expenses become due just as school begins.

"Individuals and families should consider how much they use credit over Christmas, to ensure they are not in financial

hardship at the beginning of next year.

"It is important to remember what Christmas is really about; spending time with loved ones and enjoying ourselves. You don't always need to spend a lot of money to do that," says Ms Underwood.

Financial counsellors suggest that people plan ahead and set budgets for gifts, and consider low-cost outings and family celebrations.

For assistance, contact UnitingCare Community Financial First Aid Line 1800 007 007, Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm or visit uccommunity.org.au/ffa



2012 Christmas spending forecast

Average Australian spending:
\$1600 (3.9 per cent rise from 2011)

Total Australian spending:
\$28.5 billion

Source: ibisworld.com.au/about/media/pressrelease/release.aspx?id=303



Nyambaka Makuri and his young daughter in rural Tanzania with a seedling, donated through the TEAR *Useful Gifts Catalogue*. Photo courtesy of TEAR

Giving gifts of opportunity

Tara Burton

TEAR Australia launched the very first charity gifts catalogue in 1993.

Nearly 20 years on, TEAR Australia is excited by the new *Useful Gifts Catalogue* for 2012-13.

TEAR Australia National Director, Matthew Maury says one of their most popular gifts is school supplies.

"At only \$5, these are a great alternative to Christmas cards and are very popular with children," he says.

"Also popular are goats and wells, as they seem to resonate deeply with the need to eat and drink."

The gifts are innovative for the person who has everything or those who just don't want to buy more things that aren't used.

"Whatever the reason, a useful gift contributes to meaningful projects and helps to transform the lives of those facing poverty."

Dave Andrews, TEAR Australia Community Empowerment Officer, says the catalogue provides a practical way of responding to the world around us.

"Christmas is about remembering God's gift to us in Jesus, the remembering of gifts that the wise men brought to Jesus.

"This gives us the chance to share our wealth with the people around the world who need a bit of support and help," says Mr Andrews.

TEAR group member Vicki Routledge's family has embraced the *Useful Gifts Catalogue* when buying presents for each other at Christmas.

"Last year we all pooled the money that we would have spent on each other and we gave all that money to gifts in the gift catalogue," she says.

"It meant that we didn't have to go shopping for meaningless gifts for each other. This enabled us to use that money towards gifts that were significant for disadvantaged people around the world."

Ms Routledge says that even though she doesn't know the specific stories of those who receive the gifts, she feels joy when she's helping people.

"We know that there are people around the world who have benefited as a result of us giving our Christmas gifts to them."

For more information visit usefulgifts.org or call 1800 244 986 (toll-free)

Defending doubt: welcoming Christmas questions

Val Webb

THE season of joy is upon us when we sit in church pews hearing about a star that stopped still over a manger, a woman conceiving without a man and heavenly angels talking to shepherds.

For years, I struggled through Christmas squelching my doubts, knowing that, if I didn't believe these stories as literal truth, I was bound for hell. Yet I wondered why, if Jesus' birth story was so central, it was not mentioned in Mark or John, or in Paul's letters written closer to Jesus' lifetime.

There were also contradictions when the story was told. Yet no preacher ever said anything about these elephants in the room and Bible stories read – and still are – as if the biblical writers had watched these events first hand.

Seventeen years ago, I wrote

Religious doubt is not an enemy to conquer.

a book *In Defence of Doubt: an invitation to adventure*. After a lifetime of struggling with such doubts, it was time to put on paper something composting within me — that doubts are signs of health, divine catalysts urging more mature thinking, not shameful secrets to hide while squeezing my feet into someone else's certainty.

Today, hoards walk away from churches, atheists protest in public places and science reveals a universe that confounds many ancient beliefs.

We need to confront our religious stories and discuss from the pulpit how to interpret our Bible for 21st century life.

Unfortunately, many people find more receptive spaces for their questions outside their churches.

When I ask clergy why they are reluctant to share what they learn in theological college, they say, "I don't want to pull

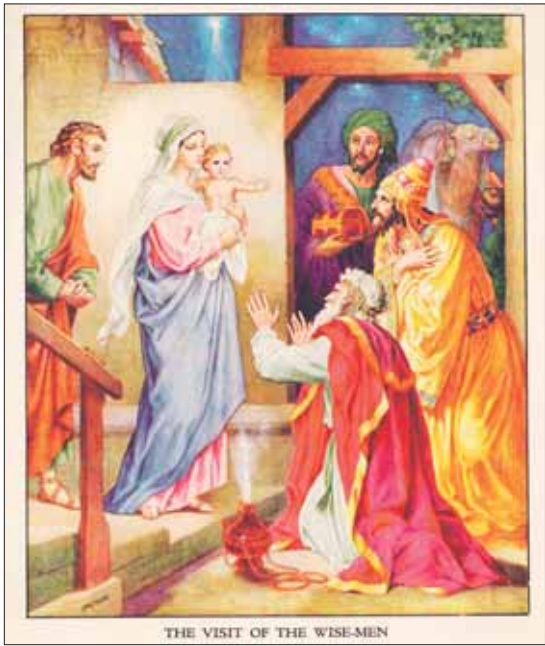
the rug out from laity who have not asked these questions"; yet the rug under many laity is threadbare.

Religious doubt is not an enemy to conquer. In all of life — science, arts, philosophy, experience — doubt leads to better knowledge. The psalmists raged against God, and Job refused to be quiet, yet Martin Luther only challenged his church's teachings after blaming himself for years for his doubts, believing that "there were theologians hidden in the schools who would not have been silent if these teachings were impious".

This should challenge us all not to avoid the hard questions.

An expanded second edition of *In Defence of Doubt: an invitation to adventure* has just been published (mosaicresources.com.au), still celebrating doubt as part of a healthy life.

If we are serious about our faith, we need to verbalise our nagging questions this Christmas — about virgin births, wayward stars and singing angels — and



Bible illustration c.1900. Public domain

not be brushed off as weak in faith. We should never have to leave our minds at the door. Then it will be a joyous season for all.

Dr Val Webb is an Australian theologian, Uniting Church member and author of 10 books

Prison ministry shares hope

Dianne Jensen

IN the season when families come together, gifts are bought and exchanged and traditions celebrated, the empty chair is a potent reminder of an absent family member.

As Christmas approaches, UnitingCare Community Prison Ministry is the first port of call for prisoners and their families across Queensland, many living at the social margins of our community.

The organisation has been working for over 40 years to provide pastoral and material care to inmates and the fractured families that they leave behind.

Christmas time, when the budget may not stretch to gifts or Christmas treats, presents one of their biggest challenges, says senior chaplain and coordinator Beatriz Skippen.

Thanks to support from Uniting Church congregations and individuals, Prison Ministry will once again deliver food baskets, toiletries and gifts to families in need.

The project is made possible by the many churches which help with gathering items, and the teams of volunteers who coordinate the donations.

"To watch a child's face light up as they investigate their surprise is reward enough, but to see a mother's appreciation as she sees her children's joy and knows that she has that something special to brighten the Christmas season for her family is wonderful," says Ms Skippen.

"Sometimes, tears of joy and thankfulness flow because someone cared enough to brighten their lives with an unconditional gift."

Gifts also go to the prison

inmates. In the Women's Correctional Centre, the chaplains are allowed to give a small care package containing toiletries, a calendar, Christmas cards, a diary, a pair of socks, a handkerchief, a packet of sweets and a New Testament to each of the inmates for Christmas.

Ordinary items, but neither affordable nor easy to obtain for many prison inmates, says Ms Skippen.

Prison Ministry is seeking non-perishable groceries for Christmas hampers, toiletries for female inmates, small gifts for children, gift vouchers for teens and mothers on the outside, and donations.

For more information contact Beatriz Skippen on 3867 2550 or visit uccommunity.org.au/prison-ministry



Prison Ministry Queensland Families Coordinator, Robyn Bellen, and coordinator and chaplain, Beatriz Skippen, preparing Christmas hampers. Photo courtesy of Beatriz Skippen



Three wise men and their camels dropped in to visit the playgroup at Indooroopilly Uniting Church on November 19. Pictured are Helen Carvolth and her son Callum, with wise man Rex Niven. Photo by Holly Jewell

Bringing the Christmas story to life

Strolling through Indooroopilly

Hundreds of people are expected to attend the annual Stroll through Bethlehem at Indooroopilly Uniting Church, Brisbane, when the church precinct is transformed into the ancient streets of Bethlehem. The free event will be held on 20-22 December from 6.30pm to 8.30pm. Contact the church office on 3878 9535 or visit indooroopillyuc.org.au.

Chinchilla celebrates the season

The Chinchilla Uniting Church, in the Darling Downs, will present *The Christmas Story* at Clover Hill Ranch, Chinchilla on 19-22 December from 6.30pm to 8.30pm. The event includes live animals, shepherds, angels, plus Joseph and Mary. There will be singers, a sausage sizzle and a gift stall. Admission by gold coin donation. Contact Pastor Iven Hewett on 4662 7848 or ivenhewett@hotmail.com.

Education pioneer begins new chapter

Dianne Jensen

"WHEN are you going to join the real ministry?" is a question that Dr Sue Fairley has been asked often during more than 45 years of service with the Methodist, and then the Uniting Church.

"My answer then, and now, is that I was never called to the ordained ministry. I always felt strongly connected to lay education, and still do," says Dr Fairley, who is retiring as principal of Grace College (University of Queensland) after a career which has encompassed significant achievements in tertiary and theological education.

The young girl who lined up her siblings to play school only ever wanted to be a teacher.

She also had a strong sense, from the age of 16 years, that God had called her to ministry.

Dr Fairley (EdD, MA, Grad. Dip. Higher Educ., BA) began her career as a secondary school teacher, and after two years moved into the Methodist Department of Christian Education as a District Field Officer.

After completing her Masters degree in the US, she established the first course in Australia for training youth workers.

Her passion for education, especially theological education for the whole people of God, led her to challenge some of the bastions of male dominion in the Church.

"When I started in the early 1970s there were hardly any women in leadership. Certainly there were deaconesses, but there were no female ministers in the Methodist Church," she recalls.

Dr Fairley became head of Ministry and Mission at Trinity

Theological College in 1997, and later the first female principal. She was appointed principal of Grace College in 2004.

She is also the first female president of Camps Farthest Out (CFO) International, an interdenominational organisation which hosts camps, retreats and leadership training in 24 countries.

"I believe women have a different attitude to power, and therefore their leadership is different," says Dr Fairley.

"When I did my doctoral studies I was privileged to work with a group of Uniting Church ministers, some female and some male, and it was interesting talking about how they understood leadership, and the qualities of leadership.

"I think that a lot of it is to do with the issue of power.

"[For women] it's not an



Dr Sue Fairley at Grace College, UQ. Photo by Dianne Jensen

aggressive controlling thing. It's more about empowerment."

Sue Fairley credits early mentors such as John Mavor, Lew Born and Jack Frewen-Lord, and later Col Ray, with encouraging her and providing leadership opportunities, something which she has gone on to do for countless other young people.

Now, as retirement looms, Dr

Fairley is enthusiastic about the new places where God is leading.

"I want to take time to be still and quiet, listen and reflect, see what comes out of that.

"It's going to give me the freedom to be involved in the things I love.

"And I hope that lay education or teaching is going to be part of that."

Legacy enables new mission in Redcliffe

THE legacy of one man's life and faith has become a gift that keeps on giving for Redcliffe Uniting Church and the peninsula community.

When lifelong church member Neil Grant died in 2010, he left his estate to Redcliffe Uniting Church, which is using the interest on investments to support a range of mission and community projects.

But it's not just a matter of giving away money, and the Redcliffe Uniting Church congregation has been careful to set up a process and criteria to ensure that the legacy is used wisely and well, and within the spirit of the bequest, says minister, Rev Paul Clark.

"A percentage of the interest is returned to the capital to maintain the real value of the bequest, a percentage is used to stimulate mission in the local church, and the rest is given away to church and community groups to use in ways which adhere to the vision and values of us as a Christian community," says Mr Clark.

"We certainly wanted to ensure this blessing didn't become a curse that caused us to grab and grasp at it, but created a culture of generosity as we intentionally gave a significant amount of it away every year."

A committee which includes presbytery and synod representatives administers the bequest in consultation with the church council.

Funds utilised by the church are not used for core expenses, but to support the congregation as it engages in mission.

The bequest has stimulated a new level of community engagement in a church whose aim is to be at the heart of the peninsula, says Mr Clark.

"We have been able to form an ecumenical puppet outreach ministry that recently did puppet shows in local state schools to 3500 children."

Current projects include a Christmas lights outreach, a festivals team to provide a church presence at events during the year, and a *Giving from the Heart* group to supply home essentials

such as sheets and blankets to families struggling just to pay rent.

"We are also considering the expansion and development of our children and families ministries, a whole-term outreach focus and numerous other initiatives," says Mr Clark.

Local community grants this year will support Chameleon Housing, which provides crisis accommodation for homeless or at-risk teenagers and safe and affordable accommodation in the Redcliffe area for young parents; and the construction of a Deception Bay Men's Shed.

"Redcliffe is a community undergoing transition," says Mr Clark.

"We have some mighty nice mansions in the city, but also families sleeping in cars.

"There are lots of retirees doing it tough on pensions, but an increasing number of children and families moving into the newer areas like Rothwell.

"Once you scratch the surface, it's amazing the problems and hardships that are underneath."



Redcliffe Uniting Church members (from left) Joy Godfrey, Vera Fiddymment, Joy Harris and Rev Paul Clark with items collected for the Giving from the Heart Project. Photo by Becky Clark

Music and Creative Arts Coordinator

Logan Uniting Church

Logan Uniting Church is a vibrant, dynamic body of people who are continually exploring how to live as a disciple-making movement; actively seeking to participate with the Spirit in "Drawing people into a life transforming relationship with Jesus Christ".

We are currently seeking a Music and Creative Arts Coordinator to assist in enabling our corporate worship life at the Springfield Campus to enhance this vision.

The position is for 15 hours per week with further details available in the information pack.

Applications close Monday the 10 December 2012.
Contact the Logan Uniting Church office on
(07) 3387 5777 or
info@luc.org.au
for more information.



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Easter 2013?

How will you enrich your community next Easter? The Easter postcard campaign is a great way to assist our mission in the local community.

Register at ucaqld.com.au from mid-January 2013. Registrations close on Monday 18 February.



The Uniting Church in Australia QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Riding waves for God

Tara Burton

THE biggest challenge in the life of Christian Surfers founder Brett Davies has been feeling ordinary.

"I've been full of self-doubt and uncertainty and wondered what on earth to do next," says the author of the book *Groundswell*.

"Joy, I've discovered, is not just about circumstances, as any surfer knows wave conditions change so quickly."

Mr Davies says that stepping out, trusting God and walking with integrity are what has kept him strong in the challenging periods of his life.

"There has been the challenge of living by faith without a

salaried income for some 27 years."

Christian Surfers staff are volunteers who have to trust that God will provide an income.

"Surfing is such a vital part of my mission with God as it connects me with creation and that inspires me. It also connects me with my surfing community who at this stage mostly worship the creation rather than the creator," says Mr Davies.

Christian Surfers is a movement that was founded in the late 1970s and now has over 500 groups in 35 nations, with more than 1500 volunteers.

"I feel quite amazed at what God has done, because to be

honest, it couldn't be me!" says Mr Davies.

"I also have a sense of such fulfilment in being able to turn my surfing and my life to something bigger and far more significant than myself."

His advice is to be faithful in the small things and God can make them grow.

"Be honest and true, don't pretend to be more than you are and others will appreciate your transparency and help you out. "God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble, so humble yourself before someone else does."

Mr Davies hopes his book *Groundswell: the Christian*

Surfers Story will inspire other unlikely missionaries to step out and make a difference in their world.

"*Groundswell* is the account of how God uses ordinary people in extraordinary ways, and how you can combine your passions with God's purposes. Writing this book has given me much joy as I reflect on how chaotic, unorganised and unlikely our history was, but God's unmistakable fingerprints were all over it."

For more information on Christian Surfers International visit christiansurfers.net or groundswellbook.com



Above: Brett Davies, founder of Christian Surfers, rides a wave.

Left: Brett Davies and friends at the launch of *Groundswell*. Photos courtesy of Brett Davies

Show and tell at Middle Ridge

MIDDLE Ridge Uniting Church has responded to the Queensland Synod Call statement of 2010, and the challenge set by their minister Rev Rob Callow to "do the theme", with the creation of a special banner.

Church member Jan Pennington spent 18 months designing and creating a banner to symbolise the themes of the statement, using hand appliqué.

The completed banner is three metres long and 1.2 metres wide, and is on display in the church auditorium.

Other challenges included: Uniting in Christ – attend a mid-week service at St Luke's or

St Patrick's Cathedrals.

Acting with love – visit a resident of Blue Care Village. Living with hope – write someone an encouraging letter.

Witnessing in faith – discuss with your children or grandchildren the good things you can do and how these help to tell people about God.

Working for justice – with the help of your children or grandchildren, make a card or send a letter to a politician encouraging them to do a good job.

Right: Jan Pennington's banner. Photo courtesy of Middle Ridge Uniting Church



Minister of the Word Iona West Uniting Church Mackay, Central Queensland.

Applications are invited from Ministers of the Word to fill a vacancy at Iona West congregation in Mackay.

The successful applicant will have:

- theology in line with and supportive of the ACC (whether or not a member personally);
- a passion to build up the next generation of believers;
- a leadership style which will allow working with others as a team.

The applicant should be youth and family-oriented, with the ability to also relate to persons of advanced years.

Currently, two services are held each Sunday, traditional (morning), contemporary (evening), with an additional "messy church" format service held fortnightly, specifically for young families.

For further information, contact Rev Brian Gilbert (07) 4926 7958 or 0429 340 057.

Applications should be addressed to:

Iona West JNC, c/- Secretary
Synod Placements Committee
Uniting Church in Australia,
Queensland Synod
GPO Box 674, BRISBANE QLD 4001



The Uniting Church in Australia
IONA WEST

www.ionawest.org.au

EXECUTIVE OFFICER RESOURCES

Uniting Church in Australia
Presbytery and Synod of South Australia

Applications are invited from enthusiastic, exceptionally gifted and highly motivated Christian leaders to this senior position within the Church. Reporting to the Chief Executive/General Secretary and the Church's Resources Board, the successful applicant will have:

- a passion for the mission of God
- exceptional visionary leadership and management skills in areas of resource management, including Finance, Investment, Property, HR, Insurance, Risk Management, Uniting Venues and IT&T.
- the ability to continue to build a high quality staff team
- the capacity to think strategically and manage multiple complex issues at the same time

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Confidential enquiries can be directed to Phil Morton at Morton Phillips on (08) 8210 8510 quoting reference number 2454, or emailed to operations@mortonphilips.com.au

Closing date for written applications is 5pm, 21 December 2012.

stuff kids ask

If Christmas is about Jesus, where did Santa come from?

Written by Paul Clark,
author and minister with
Redcliffe Uniting Church

AS Christians we celebrate Christmas as the birth of Jesus, but a man in a red suit seems to have taken over the season. Where did Santa come from?

Believe it or not, the

legend of Santa actually also comes from Jesus. The short version of the story is that a priest in Turkey named Nicholas, living in early AD300, secretly gave gifts to those who had very little. He would throw these gifts in their windows at night. He was soon discovered and became honoured as a gift giver.

Father Nicholas later became a saint. People would give gifts, especially to children, on his Saint Day in late December. Saint Nicholas (or *Sinterklaas* in Dutch) over many years became Santa Claus.

Even Santa points us to the real reason for Christmas, Jesus.

1 – 23 DECEMBER

Visionaries Advent Art Exhibition, Brookfield Centre for Spirituality, Kenmore Hills. Includes retreat days and official opening function. For more information contact Geraldine Wheeler on 3437 8743 or gwheeler25@bigpond.com.



6 – 23 DECEMBER

Christmas lights display at Sandgate Uniting Church, Deagon. Lights, displays, entertainment and stalls from 13 to 23 December, 7–10pm. Free entry. For more information visit www.sandgate.unitingchurch.org.au or contact Anne Hulbert on 3869 0277 or office@sandgateuc.org.au.

8 – 24 DECEMBER

Festival of Christmas Lights at Elanora Uniting Church. Official opening, 8 December, 5pm. Sausage sizzle, entertainment, carols. Free tea/coffee and cake, with arts and crafts sale. For more information contact Leanne Boyd on 5598 8736 or aussieboyd@bigpond.com or visit elanorauniting.com.au.

9 DECEMBER

The Charters Towers Uniting Church is a vibrant congregation with a growing sense of belonging and connectivity. Our vision is knowing and making known the love of Christ, and we give thanks that we have an alive and growing faith.

Please pray for:

- revival in Charters Towers and its region
- to be a praying people
- for our children and youth to grow in faith
- for boldness to seize opportunities that God gives to outreach, teach, visit, support and care for discernment to recognise and overcome challenges and weaknesses in our faith journey.

16 DECEMBER

Oxley Community Carols at Oxley State School oval, Oxley, 5–8.30pm, featuring Jazz band SCAT! There will be a baby animal farm, glow sticks, free activities for children and a jumping castle, plus sausage sizzle and drinks. Bring your chair or blanket, and a torch. Contact David Greer on 3379 2713 or pie023@bigpond.com.

16 DECEMBER

Please pray for Capalaba Uniting Church, for:

- our minister, Rev Sione Afu, who has just concluded his placement with us to take up a Blue Care chaplaincy position on the Sunshine Coast
- our congregation and its leadership during this time of transition, as we enter a period of supply ministry and reviewing our congregational life and vision
- our Christmas Carols celebration on 23 December, and Christmas lights bus tours, which are an important seasonal outreach to the community

- the CAFFE craft group, Wednesday evening bread run, fortnightly Crossroads group, market days and catering activities, which are key aspects of our mission and service to the wider community
- our forthcoming series of holy communion services on each Sunday of Advent: that, gathered around the broken body of Christ, we may discover again the transforming grace of God which meets us in our brokenness and restores us to God and to each other, preparing us to receive anew in our lives the birth of Christ.



Volunteers working at the Capalaba Uniting Church bread run.

Photo courtesy of Capalaba Uniting Church

23 DECEMBER

Please pray for Northern Cairns Uniting Church:

- give thanks for the many children and young people in the parish, and pray that those young lives we touch may by the grace of God become lives fully given to his glory
- give thanks for the friendship and cooperation enjoyed by many churches and ministers in the northern beaches/Redlynch area of Cairns. Pray that things like our combined Christmas carols celebrations may further manifest a unity in Christ
- for wisdom and insight in dealing with financial issues facing the parish. We have come a significant way in dealing with some of our arrears, but the task is not completed yet
- for decisions about the use, application and disposal of property assets within the parish. Please pray that those decisions will have a long-term, strategic and missional focus – such that the kingdom of God and not just expedient ends are advanced
- please also pray for me (Jim Pearson), that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make clear, without fear, the secret of the good news – Paul in Ephesians 6:19.

27 JANUARY – 1 FEBRUARY 2013

National Young Adult Leaders Conference 2013 will be held at the Naamaroo Conference Centre Sydney. For Christian leaders in the Uniting Church in Australia aged between 18 and 30. Contact Tom Kerr on tomk@nat.uca.org.au or visit assembly.uca.org.au.

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

Sherwood exhibition highlights creative congregation

AN exhibition organised by Sherwood Uniting Church, Brisbane was held at the Inala Art Gallery and Community Centre at the end of November, highlighting the creative activities of the congregation through painting, quilting, needlework and photography.

The exhibition attracted good community support, with congregation members taking the opportunity to provide information about church activities.



From left: Speakers at the opening of the Sherwood Uniting Church exhibition: Rick Formigoni (gallery president), Les Bryant (patron), Rowena Solomon (Sherwood Uniting Church outreach committee chair), Rev David Baker (Bremer Brisbane Presbytery chair), and Rev Peter Hobson (Sherwood minister). Photo by Tim Solomon

Toogoolawah memories

A special communion service was conducted at the Uniting Church in Toogoolawah in November, using an historic hand-embroidered altar cloth inscribed "Toogoolawah Methodist Church - 1st October 1912".

The last 85 years of church life have been documented and published as a book entitled *Memories and Snapshots of Toogoolawah Uniting Church: Looking Back Over 85 Years*, launched in September.

The book is available for \$25 plus \$10 postage from Toogoolawah Uniting Church, PO Box 249, Toogoolawah, QLD 4313.

Feeding those in need

WESLEY Mission Brisbane is seeking financial donations towards their Christmas lunch for the homeless and marginalised. All donations will be used to purchase food for the two-course meal provided for around 250 people.

To donate go to wmb.org.au, click on "donate" and scroll to "Christmas Day Lunch".

UnitingCare wraps up Christmas

UNITINGCARE Community will offer a Christmas gift-wrapping service in shopping centres in Brisbane, Ipswich and the Gold Coast.

Volunteers will wrap gifts in exchange for a donation to UnitingCare Community services.

Milestone for South Moreton presbytery cluster

A service was held on 11 November to celebrate the first anniversary of the formation of the South Moreton Presbytery's Brisbane south-side cluster, and to welcome a new church community.

Participants included presbytery minister Rev Gwen Fisher and chair Rev Ross Mackay, as well as the ministers and lay members of the cluster congregations.

Holland Park Central has joined Wellers Hill Tarragindi, Yeronga, Knox and St David's Holland Park Uniting Church congregations in the cluster.

New website encourages interfaith dialogue

A new website encouraging interfaith dialogue was launched by the North Brisbane Interfaith Group (NBIG) at the end of October at Aspley Uniting Church.

The project provides information and resources for people and groups interested in participating in interfaith activities at a local level.

The site was produced by Aspley Uniting Church member Rev Garth Read, coordinator of the North Brisbane Interfaith Group, and member of the Synod Interfaith Relations Committee.

For more information visit interfaithinaction.org.au

Gumbuli of Ngukurr: Aboriginal Elder in Arnhem Land

By Murray Seiffert, Acorn Press, 2011, RRP \$49.50

Reviewed by Michelle Cook, a Uniting Church deacon working in Mapoon, Cape York

"TWO stories overlap and interweave in this tale."

So begins Murray Seiffert's award-winning telling of the personal faith journey of Gumbuli, the first Aboriginal Anglican priest from Arnhem Land, and the history of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Missions of Groote Eylandt and Ngukurr (Roper River) which have shaped and been shaped by this remarkable Aboriginal Christian Leader.

Mr Seiffert, a former Academic Dean at Nungalinga and regular visitor to Ngukurr, uses archival documents and photos as well as personal interviews, to paint a fascinating picture of Gumbuli and his communities' lives.

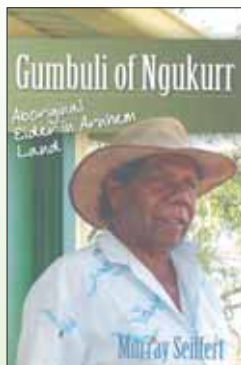
You can almost see the community at Ngukurr shaped before you as you read of the withdrawal of the CMS and the government takeover in the late 1960s, the rise of the land rights movement and establishment of Aboriginal Christian Leaders in the 1970s.

Particularly disquieting is the history of governments, and in some cases the churches, to refuse to properly consult with Aboriginal leaders about decisions that will affect their community.

This history of Ngukurr and Gumbuli's role as both a community and church leader since the 1970s brings this cycle of shallow consultation and imposition of solutions into sharp relief.

Within this context Seiffert has produced a rich picture of Gumbuli's personal faith journey, from his boyhood, his transition to priest and rector of St Matthews and Aboriginal Christian leader in Arnhem Land. Particularly interesting is Gumbuli's understanding of Scripture and traditional ceremony which is often contrasted with the author's view of the understanding of Uniting Church Aboriginal leaders.

A standout story is Gumbuli's role in producing the Kriol translation of the Bible (*Holy Baibul*) – the first full translation



of the Bible into an Indigenous language.

Through Gumbuli's leadership Kriol, a dismissed *lingua franca* of the area, was given new status through use in worship and in the translation work done through the local people themselves.

One way of assessing a biography is to ask yourself: "Would I want to meet this person?" From reading Mr Seiffert's 2012 Australian Christian Book of the Year, I can say that I would love to meet Gumbuli. He is a man who is living and exhorting others to live according to John 10:10 which in Kriol is *Aiban kaman blanga meigin yumob abum det brabli gudwan laif*.

At the Very Heart: 100 Years in Remote Australia

By Storry Walton AM, Wakefield Press, 2012, RRP \$49.95

Reviewed by Bob Warrick

TRAVEL our country from east to west, north to south, or go right round, and you'll pass through Frontier Services territory – 85 per cent of our land mass.

Before you leave, turn to this book, *At the Very Heart*, to read about the activities and services waiting to be discovered on your journey, and where staff still answer the call, seek the opportunity and commit themselves.

This wonderful commemorative volume of over 250 pages – around two pages for every year since the start of the Congregational Church patrols in the 1890s – celebrates the centenary of the dream of John Flynn to provide a "mantle of safety" that would overcome isolation and distance, so necessary

for building and sustaining community in remote Australia.

The author pays a wonderful tribute to John Flynn, with references to his ever-present toolkit, his ecumenical nature, his outrage at the inequalities experienced by the people of the inland and his all-embracing vision – and his photographs which are in themselves text!

This book traces the history and growth of this ministry in a four-page decade-by-decade timeline showing how Frontier Services has continued the task of maintaining this mantle of safety.

It tells the story of not only Frontier Services, but also the development of Australia, as we read of remote projects and places that have shaped our nation.

The story of the activities



of Frontier Services is presented through well-captioned photos – some recent and others from collections. The majority are in colour, and capture so much of the essence and activity of Frontier Services and of life in the inland.

The index of people and place names will add to your enjoyment of your journey around our country.

You may not feel called to patrol ministry, but there's no shortage of other options for contributing to this mantle of safety.

The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2

Directed by Bill Condon, stars: Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, Taylor Lautner, 2012, rated M

Reviewed by Tara Burton

THE Twilight Saga is a four-part romance/fantasy series written by Mormon author Stephenie Myer.

Since its release in 2005, *The Twilight Saga* has made billions of dollars worldwide.

With the release of the final film instalment, *The Twilight Saga – Breaking Dawn Part 2*, many parents question if it is suitable for teenagers.

Ms Myer has embedded recurring Christian themes throughout the series; themes of love, sacrifice, heroism and friendship.

Carlisle Cullen, who is the main character Edward's father figure, was a pastor before becoming a vampire.

The series delves into Carlisle's morals as, even after becoming a vampire, his faith inspires him to save lives rather than take them.

He also feels strongly about the afterlife and the importance of the soul, a prevalent theme in all four books, as Edward doesn't want to turn love interest Bella into a vampire because he wants her to spend the afterlife in heaven.

As for Adam and Eve, the apple symbolises temptation in *Twilight*.

Edward is true to the traditional Christian viewpoint on pre-marital sex

and it's a tale of chastity until they wed.

A pro-life perspective is also prominent in *Breaking Dawn – Part 1*, as when Bella falls pregnant she is adamant about keeping the vampire baby despite the fact that she is putting her own life in danger.

For me, *The Twilight Saga* has never failed to deliver breathtaking books and movies and *Breaking Dawn – Part 2* is no exception.

The series wraps up perfectly with a shocking twist, which leaves fans stunned.

Twilight fans will relish the final instalment of this mystical series that has taken the world by storm.

These movies are not looking at attracting a new audience. They are a tribute to their loyal fans who over the years have waited patiently (and, let's be honest, sometimes frantically), for the release of the next instalment of the series that captured their heart.

For all the 'Two-hards', may we celebrate the release of *Breaking Dawn – Part 2*.

We got our perfect ending, and if like me you shed a tear that it's all over, you know you have witnessed something spectacular!



Books available from ...

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

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

Paper Boats: An anthology of short stories about journeys to Australia

Edited by Yasar Duyal, Cambridge University Press, 2012, RRP \$24.95



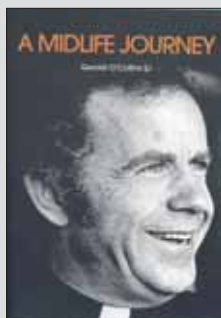
Live to Forgive

Documentary DVD
Directed by Skip Moody, stars: Dean Eric Smith and Rex Bell, Heritage HM, 2009, rated PG



A Midlife Journey

By Gerald O'Collins SJ,
Connor Court Publishing, 2012, RRP \$29.95



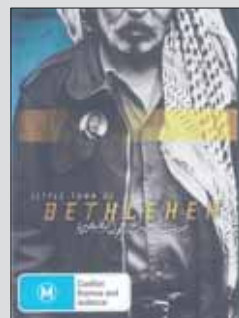
Give Yourself Permission to Shine: Through faith I found love

By Grace King, Balboa Press US, 2012, RRP \$15.99



Little Town of Bethlehem

Documentary DVD, written and directed by Jim Hanon, EGM Films, 2010, rated PG



Beenleigh welcomes Solomon partners

SEVEN lay leaders from the Guadalcanal Circuit of the United Church of the Solomon Islands visited their partner church at Beenleigh, Brisbane, during October.

The visitors were billeted in local homes and took part in a range of activities including computer classes, worship, church camp and sight-seeing.

Beenleigh Region Uniting Church and the Guadalcanal Circuit established a partnership agreement in 2011, facilitated by UnitingWorld.

Rev Bromley Chuchu, Superintendant Minister from Guadalcanal Circuit, spent two months in Australia in 2011, and in April this year 10 members from Beenleigh spent two weeks in Guadalcanal.



Solomon Islands visitors learning new skills. Photo courtesy of Beenleigh Region Uniting Church

A Christmas Gift Idea...

This beautiful coffee table book celebrates the work begun by outback legend John Flynn through the Australian Inland Mission and the continuation of that work through Frontier Services. Weaving together stories and images from across the century, *At the Very Heart* would make a special gift this Christmas.

To order phone 1300 787 247 or visit www.frontierservices.org/frontier-shop

Plus, mention this ad to receive a Centenary Medallion (worth \$25) for only \$15 with any book purchase.

Only \$49.95
(Inc. postage and handling)

Frontier Services
serving remote Australia



A Galilee Basin Great Barrier Reef protest. Photo by Greenpeace/Frank Lin

Reef in danger from coal mining

Katie Lewis

THE Great Barrier Reef is under threat as the enormous expansion of Queensland's coal mining boom continues.

Nine huge coal mines, hundreds of kilometres of rail line and the construction of new coal terminals and expansions have been proposed for the Galilee Basin in the central west of Queensland.

The proposed new infrastructure will extend along almost the entire length of the Great Barrier Reef world heritage area, which will place an incredible burden on the Great Barrier Reef.

The Save the Barrier Reef campaign in the 1960s led to the creation of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. We now face another battle to defend it from

the rapidly expanding coal seam gas and coal export industries.

The Great Barrier Reef is already under pressure from threats such as overfishing and tree clearing, and the dramatic increase in shipping from the coal industry will stress the reef even further. The risk of shipping accidents is greatly increased with thousands more coal ships crossing the reef.

Vital habitats will be dredged from Gladstone Harbour, right through seagrass meadows in a dugong protection area, threatening species such as snubfin dolphins, turtles and dugongs.

With Australia's coal exports expecting to more than double within a decade, disastrous impacts are not limited to just the Barrier Reef ecosystem and marine life, but will also impact

on our health, global warming, and on the local tourism and fishing industries.

Over 100 people protested outside the Galilee Basin Coal Conference in Brisbane on 12 November, calling for a halt to coal development that threatens the Great Barrier Reef and surrounding coastal zones. Greenpeace activists came dressed as marine life, creating a mock Great Barrier Reef.

Greenpeace is calling on the government to invest more in developing renewable energy sources and to move away from coal-fired power.

The world heritage site is at risk of being declared "in danger" by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the UN body charged with protecting world heritage areas.

Over 100 000 people have signed the petition created by GetUp to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Visit getup.org.au to sign the petition.

You can also take action by becoming a Reef Defender by visiting savetherereef.org.au.

Katie Lewis is a research officer with Uniting Communications

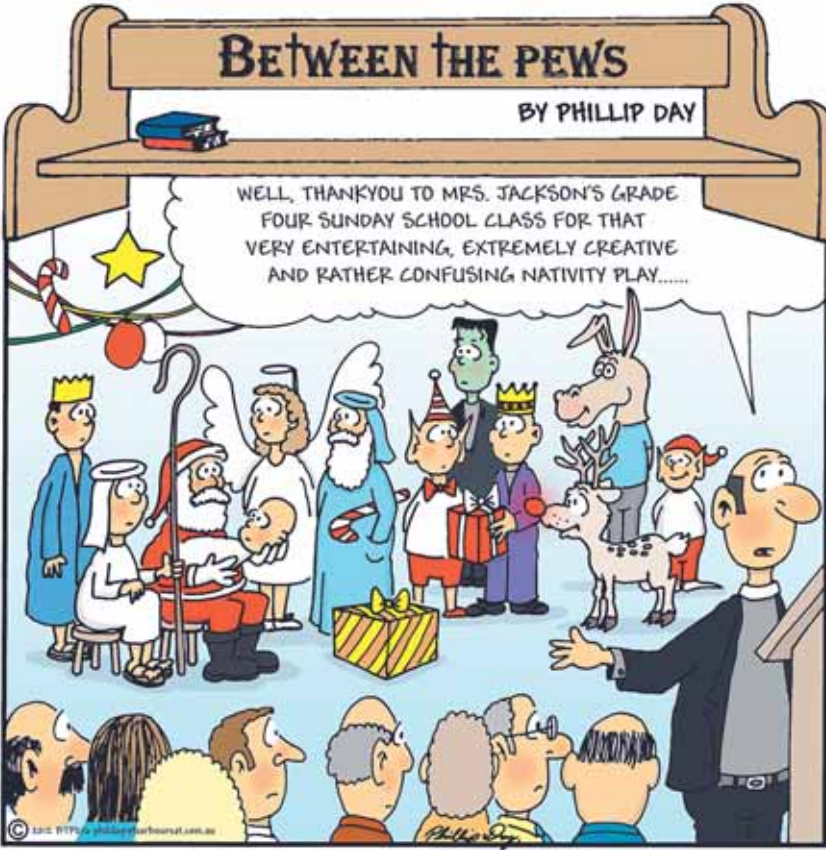
What's your view?
Email journey@ucaqld.com.au

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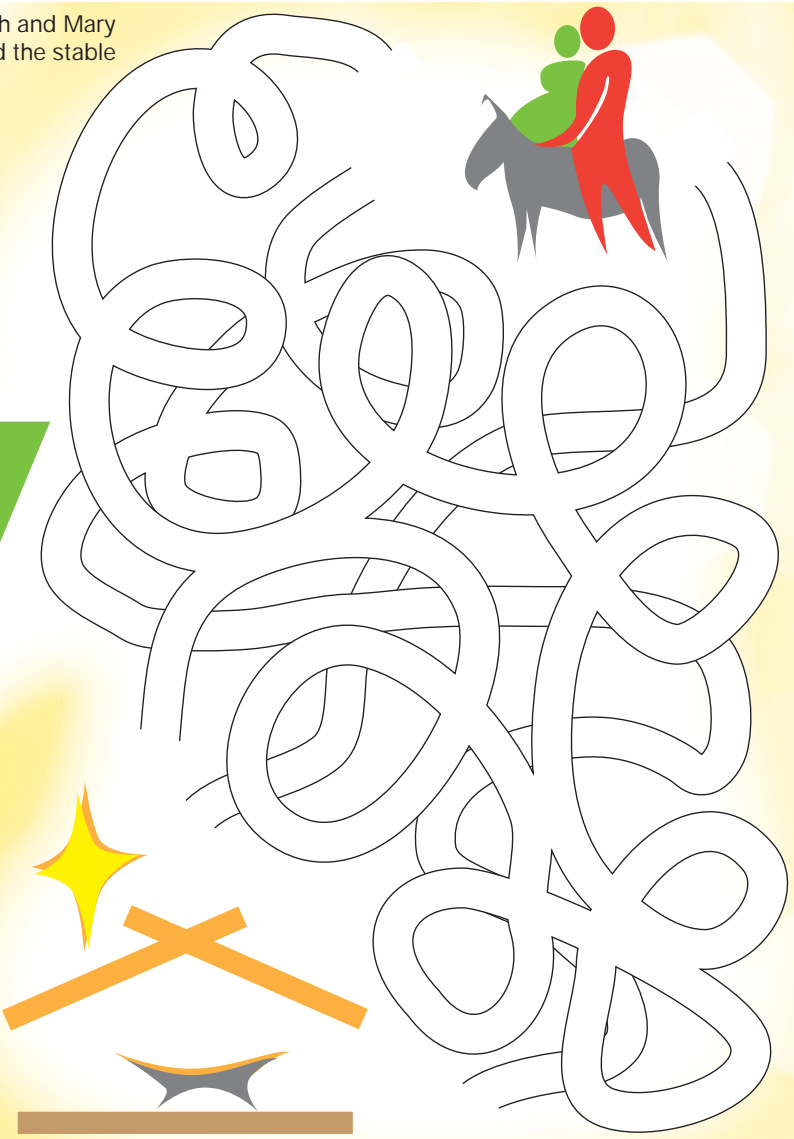
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Help Joseph and Mary find the stable

ENJOY Christmas



Christmas craft idea!

Make a list of names for Jesus and write them onto strips of coloured paper.
Staple the strips together to make a paper chain to decorate your tree or room.

- Some suggestions:
- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| Jesus | Teacher |
| Prince of Peace | Saviour |
| Emmanuel | Messiah |
| Lamb | Beloved one |
| Son of God | Friend |
| Blessed | |

Can you crack the code to find out what the angels said to the shepherds?

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