

Journey



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD



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60 YEARS**

**PARADISE
LOST:**

Church slams PNG plan

HOPE
ON THE MARGINS

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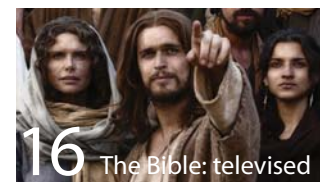
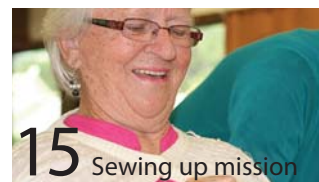
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Journey

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Signs of hope

It is interesting to see the common themes between stories that emerge when putting together an edition of *Journey*. Sometimes they are intentional, but often they appear entirely on their own.

This month, while thinking about the 60th anniversary of Blue Care, I was reflecting on the different ways we express ourselves as a church. We planned many of the articles around this loose theme, hoping to stretch our received understanding of what church is supposed to look like.

But then, just before we went to print, the Federal Government announced a new policy on asylum seekers who come to Australia by boat. We included a last-minute report on these changes (page 5) and doing so has made me look at this edition of *Journey* in a new light.

Now I see this edition as being about signs of hope on the margins of society, something Ash Barker, International Director of Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH), talks about in his profile (page 10). Our cover story about Blue Care (page 6) fits this theme too, as we think back to how the service began as one congregation's desire to serve vulnerable people in their community.

There's also an article about Art from the Margins (page 8), a creative initiative by Wesley Mission Brisbane which gives an outlet for artists who are homeless, living with mental illness or physical disability; a reflection on forgiveness (page 12) and a profile of the Leichhardt Patrol (page 14), which provides ministry to people in rural areas often overlooked by those in the cities.

Perhaps following the call of Christ and imagining the church in new ways inevitably leads us to the margins—if we are not there already. It's worth thinking about.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor



Grace at work

Some years ago we received a business card in the mail from a car salesman looking for business. I recognised the unusual name on the card and remembered that he and my father had once been friends. They had parted with ill feelings because my father had lent him a significant amount of money and it had never been paid back. It had been 30 years since they had last spoken.

I rang my mother to ask her whether she thought Dad might like to make contact again. Dad rang his number and they renewed their friendship. It seems that the relationship was more important than the money.

Debts forgiven, relationships restored and grace experienced: these are the themes of Christian reconciliation.

Sometimes in scripture forgiveness seems to be paired with other words—repentance and forgiveness, forgive us as we forgive others—making it sound conditional.

Amazingly, God's grace is sometimes at work even when there is no repentance, even when we have not adequately forgiven others for the hurt that we have experienced.

Extending forgiveness sets free both the forgiven one and the one who offers forgiveness. It provides a chance to move forward rather than being held to a past circumstance.

Nevertheless, sometimes it is prudent to forgive but not forget, in order to protect the vulnerable ones, to provide space for the broken ones and to establish clear boundaries for perpetrators. Where there has been abuse, forgiveness might also require truth telling and restitution.

I have had a fortunate, sheltered life. I cannot imagine how much pain is felt by some families. Dr Izzeldin Abuelaish, a Palestinian gynaecologist, spent years working in an Israeli hospital when his home in Gaza was bombed on 16 January 2009. His three daughters and a niece were killed in the bombing. I heard him interviewed on the radio at about the time he published his book, *I Shall Not Hate: A Gaza Doctor's Journey on the Road to Peace and Human Dignity*. His story is inspirational because of his decision to forgive rather than hate, and to continue to practise medicine in an Israeli hospital.

Hurt, pain and disappointment are inevitable in life. Knowing that Jesus has forgiven me and that I can forgive others provides us with a response to hurt, pain, disappointment and tragedy that enables us to find our way to a future of fresh possibilities.

Rev Kaye Ronalds
Queensland Synod Moderator

Moderator's diary

4 August
Opening of Karana Downs
Uniting Church's extension

5 August
Launch of Mal Coombes' book

18 August
Burleigh Heads 90th anniversary
celebration

23 August
Governor's reception for
Blue Care's 60th anniversary

26 August
Leading South Moreton retreat

Monday Midday Prayer

*Lord of many cultures,
bring us together, reconciled,
healed and forgiven, living out
our calling in Christ.*

Amen

Paradise lost: Church slams PNG resettlement plan

The Uniting Church in Australia has expressed concern about plans to send asylum seekers to Papua New Guinea (PNG) for assessment and resettlement. **Dianne Jensen** reports.

The policy was announced by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill in Brisbane on 19 July. The agreement, which will be in place for at least the next 12 months, means that maritime arrivals will be sent to Manus Island or elsewhere in PNG for assessment; those found to be refugees will be resettled in PNG while the remainder will be sent back to their own country or to a third nation.

President of the Uniting Church Assembly Rev Dr Andrew Dutney described the policy as an "abdication of responsibility" by the Australian government.

"We now see firmly entrenched in our political system an approach that seeks to circumvent the spirit of hospitality and compassion codified in international treaties and obligations," said Dr Dutney.

Dr Dutney pointed to recent United Nations High Commission for Refugees reports criticising the processing centre on Manus Island. After a second visit in June, commissioners said that the facility still fails to meet the terms of the memorandum of understanding between Australia and Papua New Guinea agreed to when the facility was established.

Currently, about 145 people are housed on the island. The last children were removed in early July following ongoing concerns about the suitability of the accommodation and services. The new agreement includes a significant expansion of the centre to house 3000 people, up from the original capacity of 600.

Dr Dutney described the choice of PNG as "burden-shifting at its most base".

"We also know that the ongoing human rights violations and extreme poverty in Papua New Guinea mean it is not a safe option for permanent resettlement of refugees," he said.

National Director of UnitingJustice Rev Elenie Poulos, who is also chairperson of the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce, rebutted the notion there was such a thing as a queue for asylum seekers.

"The queue is a fabrication. There is no queue if you're a person in Syria who's had to flee your home. There is no queue in Afghanistan, in Iran and Iraq," she said.

Rev Kaye Ronalds, Queensland Synod Moderator said, "If we are not prepared to offer a home to asylum seekers in our own country, why would we expect that of our near neighbours who have limited capacity? I find myself asking, who is my neighbour?"

Figures from the Department of Immigration show 15 610 people on 220 boats have arrived so far this year.

The Gillard government reintroduced offshore processing in Nauru and Manus Island in 2012. The detention centre at Nauru, which houses 540 asylum seekers, was the scene of a riot on 19 July which caused \$60 million worth of damage and destroyed 80 per cent of the buildings.

25 August is Refugee and Migrant Sunday, a celebration of the dignity of people who are refugees and migrants and the contribution they have made to life in Australia.



Asylum seekers escorted ashore
Photo: DIAC Images, Creative Commons



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(L-R) Trudi Chester-Freeman,
Darren Clarke, Irena Wilde
from Merriwee Court Aged
Care Facility in Hamilton
Photo: Sheen Media

Celebrating vision, compassion and faith

60 years of Blue Care

What started as a congregational initiative in 1953 is now one of the country's largest aged care, community care and retirement living providers. **Mardi Lumsden** explores what happens when people respond to the needs of their community.

As Sister Olive Crombie climbed aboard a tram in Brisbane's West End to visit a patient in their home on 24 August 1953, she wasn't thinking of making history. That trip marks the official start of the Blue Nursing Services which began out of the West End Methodist Mission. Today, Blue Care is one of Australia's leading not-for-profit service providers, with 10 600 staff and volunteers assisting more than 13 000 people a day and was voted a Q150 icon. Sister Crombie, now Olive Smith OAM, lives in a Blue Care retirement village, receiving the care she initiated.

Initially Mrs Smith worried about leaving a secure hospital setting to test an untried, unfunded venture in the community, but founder Rev Arthur Preston and his team had a contagious vision.

"We had no vehicle and very little equipment, but we did have a plan to meet the needs of people in the community," she recalls.

"At first I said no, but I am a believer that you should be where God wants you to be and I decided

if Arthur (Preston) asked me, perhaps it was God prompting me to do that."

Blue Care Executive Director Robyn Batten says the dedication of Blue Care's first nurse, along with her skill and compassion, is echoed in each of the community nursing and care services Blue Care provides today.

"Our team reaches out across communities to support people, regardless of their socio-economic, ethnic, religious or spiritual background," Ms Batten says.

"Our 60th gives us a great opportunity to see how far we have come and to refocus the organisation for the challenges of the future."

West End Methodist Mission had a passion for being the church in the community and Rev Dr Noel Preston says his father, Rev Arthur Preston, was a dreamer and a visionary.

"We can't understand Blue Care today without understanding the vision and the hope that it arose from," says Dr Preston.

"The world has changed a lot and the role of the church in it has changed a lot too, but I think there is a recipe that was part of the foundation of the Blue Nursing Service which can still speak to faith communities and churches in terms of their relationships and their service to the community."

Church being church

UnitingCare Queensland Director of Mission Colleen Geyer said Blue Care began as, and continues to be, the church being itself: searching for ways to serve the community.

"It is about looking around in the communities in which it is serving and in which it exists and asking, 'How can we share God's love with the people in this community?'" she says.

Blue Care Director of Mission, Rev Heather den Houting, agrees.

"What is it that nobody else in this world is able to provide, or is providing. Where is the need?"

"There is always continual room for that expression of church."

Few organisations survive as long as Blue Care has and there are joys and challenges in that.

"We have to look at what a 60-year-old organisation looks like and behaves like and retrace or reconsider what our primary purpose is," says Ms den Houting.

She also says it is important to ensure you are listening to the voices on the ground and being fiscally responsible.

"But for me the key is to reclaim and rediscover your mission."

"The broad theological task is to continually ask, 'How do I live out the gospel of Christ today, in this place, in this time? What do the hands and feet of Christ look like in the world?' Not discarding heritage and not ignoring it, but also knowing that every generation has to find its own voice."

Ms Geyer says Blue Care is grounded in the constant "commitment to understanding itself as being part of the mission of the Uniting Church".

Healing old wounds

The pain of centralising the administrative oversight of the Blue Nursing Service is still felt in some places, despite happening nearly 20 years ago. Some people felt the church was no longer at the core and that local congregations were alienated from the services. Some services felt abandoned by church members who had previously been integral to their activities.

Ms den Houting says increasing compliance and legislative regulations made centralisation essential.

"There is an incredible amount of work needed to be done to keep our caring services compliant. As part of the church, I am grateful and overwhelmed by the level of expertise provided centrally by Blue Care. It seems to me that it was inevitable that this had to occur," she says.

"There is certainly still significant pain around that area and I have been reflecting on that and wondering whether it is because a new narrative has never been developed."

Ms Geyer says that while the old narrative exists, the church misses the opportunity of celebrating the true reach of the Uniting Church in Queensland.

"Just because oversight doesn't sit at a local level, it doesn't mean the church isn't involved in this work," she says. "That holistic understanding of the impact that the Uniting Church is making in Queensland, we miss a bit of that because we don't tell those stories or we don't see that as part of our local congregation because we're not involved in a management committee."

A vision for the future

Examining the rapid growth of Blue Care over the last 60 years, it is hard to predict where the organisation, as a mission of the church, will be in 60 years. Ms Geyer hopes we can't.

"That is pretty exciting if we say as an organisation, as part of the church, we will be open to seeing what that might look like and evolving as the need is there."

"My hope is that in 60 years the church will still be being itself. It will still be looking for the gaps ... reaching out to the communities in which we exist and serve and just being ourselves, spreading God's love."

Ms den Houting says for any organisation to survive, including Blue Care and the church, there is that constant need to respond to the world around it.

"We are in the middle of extraordinary change ... making sure we keep our fingers on the pulse of medical and information technologies is going to be essential for us."

"There is a sense of humility that comes with that approach. Rather than saying we have the answers, the humility is saying, 'Well God, where are you leading us next?'"

bluecare.org.au

Blue Care Sunday will be held on 25 August. West End Uniting Church, Brisbane, will hold a celebration service for the 60th anniversary of Blue Care on Sunday 18 August. For more information visit westendunitingchurch.org.au. Extended audio from these interviews is available at journeyonline.com.au

"The broad theological task is to continually ask, 'How do I live out the gospel of Christ today?'"

Rev Heather den Houting

"Our 60th gives us a great opportunity to see how far we have come and to refocus the organisation for the challenges of the future"

Robyn Batten



Peter Rowe: "I want people to know that there is a mind inside even the most disabled person"
Photo: Wesley Mission Brisbane

Art overcomes adversity

"A work of art is a scream of freedom", says environmental artist Christo. Using art to overcome the challenges of adversity is at the heart of Wesley Mission Brisbane's creative initiative, Art from the Margins (AFTM). *Journey* explores.

Each year AFTM offers creative support and an artistic outlet to hundreds of artists who are homeless, living with a mental illness, physical disability or are challenged by similar adverse circumstances.

Beginning in 2008 as a program to support homeless artists, the idea of AFTM was born in a Brisbane city park beside a coffee van when a member of the Albert Street Uniting Church's Servant Network was talking with an artist living in isolation. The artist spoke about the challenges artists living with disadvantage face when they try to display their work or participate in the wider arts community. Wesley Mission Brisbane made the commitment to support these artists, and Art from the Margins was created.

The program has gone from strength to strength since.

Anthony Anderton, AFTM Manager, says a highlight of this year was the launch of a documentary film and photographic project exploring the link between creativity and improved wellbeing and greater social engagement.

"We set out to explore how creative activity can make a positive difference in overcoming the challenges of mental illness, homelessness or physical or intellectual disability," he says.

A documentary, *Art > Adversity*, was produced by local film company Graetz Media, accompanied

by an in-depth photographic narrative by leading photojournalist Glenn Hunt. Funded by the Ian Potter Foundation, the documentary project features candid personal profiles and interviews with artists, their supporters and Brisbane community arts groups.

"These stories are reminders that for most of us our day-to-day lives are like clearly written pages; however, for many of the artists AFTM works with, those same pages can be impenetrable. They continually struggle to overcome stigma and barriers associated with disadvantage. It is inspiring to see how each artist has used creativity to create their own journey of hope, recovery, courage and renewal—and how creative programs like AFTM can support them," says Mr Anderton.

This year continues to be busy for AFTM. Five new art exhibitions have already been staged, a program of art workshops has been rolled out, a new website launched and the appointment of the inaugural AFTM patron, the Hon Paul de Jersey AC Chief Justice of Queensland has been made. In September AFTM will feature in the Brisbane Festival program, showcasing over 400 artworks at venues across Brisbane.

Through celebrating people's art, rather than their disadvantage, AFTM is working towards a more just, compassionate and inclusive society.

For information about AFTM and its art programs, visit artfromthemargins.org.au
To view the documentary *Art > Adversity* visit tinyurl.com/ArtAdversity

Discipleship



Start with Jesus

When we think about discipleship, we often dwell on the things we think we should be doing but are failing to do. But Christian discipleship—Gospel discipleship—doesn't start with us, it starts with Jesus and goes out from there, says Rev Shane Kammermann.

As a young man, Christ met me and changed my life. I have never gotten over it! But it didn't happen in a vacuum, there were people involved—normal, everyday people who belonged to a crucified Lord and who lived in his powerful and sometimes unusual fellowship. It was through human words and action in the power of the Holy Spirit that brought about that transformation.

The *Basis of Union*, the foundational document of the Uniting Church in Australia, is a document all about mission. It's a document grounded firmly in the scriptures.

Paragraph 4 of the *Basis of Union* places our part in making disciples squarely in the ongoing work of Jesus. He is present and active—the Word of God. He personally addresses people bringing forgiveness, new life and a hope beyond human vision. He forms disciples and he is building his church.

Who makes disciples? Jesus does—and he uses us, who are his disciples, to do it!

In Matthew 28 there is a very similar pattern. Jesus' clear commission to the church is founded in his ongoing presence as the Lord of all the nations.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," Jesus says, "Therefore, in your going make disciples of all nations."

It's Jesus who has all authority, and it's Jesus' word and spirit that empower and sustain his people. Union with Christ through baptism and faith involves teaching the word of Christ. This happens powerfully in the shed, paddock, kitchen, shopping centre and in a boat up the creek. It happens in Christian worship and teaching in buildings. It happens through crises, conversation, mundane work and celebration. It involves all of us, all the time! Jesus wastes nothing.

So let's not lose hope, and let's not neglect our heritage or the scriptures. Jesus is making disciples and is building his church! Rather than ask what Jesus would do, we could look to see what Jesus is doing and be part of that. Rather than ask him to help us, maybe we can ask if we can join him. Crikey, it might even be good!

Shall we go with him?

Rev Shane Kammermann
Uniting Church minister in Ingham and Halifax, and Lay Education Convener for the Presbytery of North Queensland.

Basis of Union

Paragraph 4, 1992 edition:

4. CHRIST RULES AND RENEWS THE CHURCH

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of the God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist. Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.

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Hope on the margins



Far left: Thailand slums
Photo: UNOH
left: Ash Barker
Photo: Wolf and Lamb Productions

Ash Barker is the International Director of Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH), a missional order with the aim to release neighbourhoods in Asian-Pacific cities from urban poverty. Teams of UNOH workers can be found in cities across Australia, New Zealand and Thailand, and they continue to expand. Rohan Salmond reports.

When Ash and Anji Barker started working with young people in the Melbourne suburb of Springvale in 1992, they did so out of a desire to follow the radical call of Jesus.

"Initially it was with Youth for Christ working and trying to prevent young people from going to prison, so we worked in those neighbourhoods where they were coming from," says Mr Barker.

They founded UNOH a year later with a broader mission to help relieve urban poverty. UNOH became part of the Churches of Christ, but workers come from diverse Christian backgrounds.

"We really had this sense of call that Jesus cares about those on the margins, on the edge, and that call to discipleship calls us to follow Jesus there," he says.

"Then we had this sense of call to the majority world, particularly with the rise of urban slums. We wanted to see if the kinds of things that were happening on a small scale here in Australia could work in more intense places."

A call to the margins

So in 2002, after spending ten years living in Springvale, Ash and Anji moved to a slum in Klong Toey District, Bangkok, Thailand—not just to work for a short time, but to settle down and live.

"Like all Urban Neighbours of Hope we immerse ourselves in the life of the neighbourhood. We try to seek transformation through Jesus from the bottom up, so that looks different over time," he says.

"Particularly we look for what God is already doing in the neighbourhood—the strength and efforts

of the community. So one of our neighbours for example, her name is Poo, is a terrific cook who made food to sell out the front of her house ... but when the price of rice went through the roof she was making a loss on each plate and getting into debt.

"So Anji said to Poo, 'Why don't you start a cooking school?'"

The Cooking with Poo school began as a small enterprise, but has since become one of the top tourist attractions in Bangkok. Poo's cookbook, also called *Cooking with Poo*, has sold over 11 000 copies.

"The phrase 'Cooking with Poo' has been Googled over 25 million times. You'd hope that was for the cookbook, but on the Internet you never know!" he laughs.

"For me that's the sign of God's grace and hope. It's not just about how do we get people to church, it's about how people can express the gifts that God has given them and how people's passions have a chance to fly.

"How can we see God's Kingdom come in our neighbourhood as in heaven? And this is all part of it. People actually get to express their God-given identities."

Loving our neighbours

UNOH is continually expanding, but the demands on UNOH workers are extensive and there is a rigorous discernment process in order to join. Not everyone is called to live this way, but the command to love your neighbour is universal.

"If you're an average person wanting to love your neighbour, you still have to create space; whether it's the way we do it or if you find your own way, you have to let go of a whole lot of things. [We need to] empty ourselves so we can embrace the things God has for us," he says.

"I'd also say you can't do it alone, whether you have a formal covenant like we do with members and expectations or not, you can't do it by yourself.

"A disciple is someone who loves and obeys Jesus and a church is a group of people who love and obey Jesus together.

"Community really is about a sense of belonging. It's the fruit of common commitment. It takes time to build that up and most of us are in a hurry. Consumer culture thinks we can consume community, but that's not possible."

Mr Barker and the other UNOH workers have a much broader view of poverty than most people living in the West.

"I mean, when people think of it they probably think, 'Oh, it's just cash. Cash will fix it' ... No, poverty is far more sinister than that," he says.

"Poverty's not just cash, it's a lack of freedom to live as God intends.

"It's about oppression ... and in that sense all of us will become poor at some point in our lives.

"How people internalise this poverty and how the cycles of poverty just keep pulling people back; that takes time and energy and solidarity in deep places to see change."

A sign of hope

The challenge of responding to poverty, particularly in an urban context, seems overwhelming, but Mr Barker is pragmatic.

"You don't have to be the solution to everything. You don't have to fix everything. You don't have to be perfect in everything, but you can be a sign of what God wants done. That sign is really significant, not just for ourselves and not just for the people we engage, but for the broader world: that the world sees God hasn't abandoned the lost and the poor and the broken," he says.

The important part is being willing to let our beliefs affect the way we live, pushing us from our comfort zones and forming relationships with people we wouldn't otherwise get to know.

"The gap between what people say they believe and how they behave is huge in Australia, particularly for Christians, who say we are followers of Jesus. His call to serve the poor was so central to how he lived his life ... yet very few Christians know poor people in Australia," he says.

"So the challenge is how do we get to know people? Not as projects, or part of some mechanism to get people into church, but actually as neighbours and friends, and that we actually share lives with other people. Particularly those who are not like us and those who may not even like us!

"Those are the real challenges, I think, that every Christian in Australia needs to face."

A book, Voices of Hope, celebrating UNOH's 20th anniversary, was launched in July. More information about the book and Urban Neighbours of Hope can be found at unoh.org. Audio from this interview is available at journeyonline.com.au

“You don’t have to be the solution to everything. But you can be a sign of what God wants done”

Forgiveness: not for the faint-hearted

Sick of turning the other cheek? Dianne Jensen explores what it means to forgive, and to be forgiven.

Rev Julie Nicholson is known worldwide as the vicar who couldn't forgive. The Anglican priest stepped down from her position because she was unable to forgive the suicide bomber who had murdered her daughter at Edgware Road tube station in London in July 2005.

She could no longer speak the words of reconciliation which were fundamental to her role.

Christian prayer and liturgy is rich with the themes of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus makes a specific link between God's forgiveness and our forgiveness of others. In Luke 17 we are enjoined to forgive those who sin against us and repent, even if it happens seven times in one day.

But what does it mean to forgive, or to be forgiven?

The Christian concept of forgiveness is sometimes viewed by the secular world as a mark of sycophantic goodness. It's a spineless, cheek-turning forgiveness which lets the offender off the hook. Ms Nicholson, full of unforgiving rage, has been excised from this meek flock.

Similarly, God is regarded as something of a soft touch. In the 1967 film *Bedazzled*, written by and starring Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, the devil bemoans the sneaky last-minute repentance of sinners: "I lost Mussolini that way, all that work, then right at the end with the rope around his neck, he says, '*Scusi. Mille regretti*, and up he goes!"

Yet the Christian concept of forgiveness is both powerful and challenging. It recognises evil and demands truth, and walks a soul-searching journey towards reconciliation.

Sorry about that

As a nation, saying "sorry" has become a political strategy to acknowledge the wrongs of the past. In 2008 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered an apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples, followed in 2013 by an apology to victims of forced adoption by Prime Minister Julia Gillard.

The Uniting Church has done a fair bit of apologising. In 1994 the Church entered into a covenant relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, recognising and repenting of our complicity in the injustices perpetrated on Australia's Indigenous community.

In 1997 the Uniting Church made a formal apology to the Stolen Generation, and in 2004 we apologised to those harmed while in the care of institutions of the Uniting Church and its predecessor churches.

This year, several synods and Uniting Church agencies apologised for their complicity in forced adoptions, and the Uniting Church in Australia asked the Pacific Conference of Churches for forgiveness for the divisions and pain caused to Pacific communities in the past.

The link between repentance and forgiveness seems to be assumed, as though to do otherwise would be mere truculence.

Miroslav Volf, in his book *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* points out that "the heart of forgiveness is a generous release of a genuine debt, relinquishing retribution".

In forgiving, we absorb the injury, he says, and our forgiveness is predicated on nothing perpetrators do or fail to do.

"Forgiveness is not a reaction to something else. It is the beginning of something new."

Truth and justice

Sometimes there may be no repentance and no reconciliation, as Adele Dingle knows from her experience in the area of domestic violence and grief and loss counselling. She was the chair of the first Uniting Church Sexual Abuse Complaints committee in Queensland and a project worker for four years for the Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Project (JCDVPP).



Ms Dingle says that special care should be taken when dealing with the issue of forgiveness in relation to the survivors of abuse. In this context, she says, forgiveness is about empowerment. It does not mean forgetting, and may not bring immediate reconciliation or final restitution; nor does it mean that we accept the behaviour of the other person.

"The person who forgives is able to regain the power. Forgiveness means moving ahead with your life rather than being controlled by the past."

The JCDVPP training resource underscores the link between forgiveness and justice.

"Forgiveness must maintain integrity," it says. "We can't do a whitewash job, we can't avoid naming things. There can be no reconciliation where there is no truth."

The link between truth, justice and reconciliation has been recognised at an international human rights level by bodies such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, tasked with investigating human rights abuses committed under apartheid.

Closer to home, The Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor have heard testimony from witnesses and victims of human rights violations.

In Australia, the royal commission to investigate institutional responses to child sexual abuse, appointed in January 2013, will hear about the

management of and response to allegations and instances of abuse.

The truth will make difficult reading and demand a courageous response, yet we recognise that it is elemental to healing.

The road to healing

Forgiveness as part of the journey out of victimhood is an integral component of *The F Word* exhibition, a collection of images and personal narratives from South Africa, America, Israel, Palestine, Northern Ireland and England launched in London in 2004. The exhibition is now part of *The Forgiveness Project*, which uses the real stories of victims and perpetrators to facilitate conflict resolution and to promote behavioural change.

Founder and director, Marina Cantacuzino writes "I began to see that for many people forgiveness is no soft option, but rather the ultimate revenge. For many it is a liberating route out of victimhood; a choice, a process, the final victory over those who have done you harm."

Rev Ruth Hill, a retired Uniting Church hospital chaplain, knows that forgiveness sometimes comes too late. She has seen many people struggling with unresolved anger and bitterness after the death of a family member.

"It is possible to separate forgiveness from apology, because you may never get that apology," she says.

Ruth points to the importance of working through the Prayer of Confession used in the funeral service

in *Uniting in Worship 2*. The words are simple, yet powerful: "Father forgive us if there have been times when we failed [name]. Enable us by your grace to forgive [name] anything that was hurtful to us".

"I always talk about the prayer with people. You have to help someone get to that point of saying 'God we forgive them' if they have been really wronged, and to leave it to God to deal with justice."

She recalls a counselling session which included a former prisoner of war in Changi, who felt alienated by what he perceived as the Church's insistence that he forgive his torturers.

"We accepted him, and he came back the next week, and later started coming to church. In the end he told us his story."

"Sometimes it is offensive to suggest forgiveness to people. They need to know that God's love for us continues, even when we can't forgive others."

Miroslav Volf reminds us that we forgive as sinners, not as the righteous; words echoed in former slave John Newton's *Amazing Grace* (1779):

"'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

No ordinary church

The Leichhardt Patrol is not a “congregation” in the traditional sense, but rather an initiative of the Presbytery of the Downs that provides pastoral care to rural properties as well as regional congregational bodies. Rohan Salmond spoke with patrol minister Rev Graham Slaughter.

What is the Leichhardt Patrol?

The Patrol covers part of the area known as the Surat Basin, taking in Taroom in the north through to Goondiwindi in the south as well as areas east and west of the Leichhardt Highway. It is an expression of the church as people involved in worship, witness and service rather than just a building. In fact, church buildings at Taroom and Wandoan have recently been sold to help provide ministry which extends well beyond those communities.

How does the Patrol differ from traditional ways of doing church?

I don't have any congregations as such. I'm nobody's minister in the traditional sense, but I do have a connection with the Uniting/Lutheran congregation at Wandoan. I lead worship there once a month and provide some pastoral care and support to and with the congregation. I also have a connection with congregations at Goondiwindi, Yelarbon and Yuleba but this is more in a support role with their lay ministry teams. Providing pastoral care and support through visitation on properties is a larger component of what I do than direct connection through already established congregations in the area.

What role does ecumenism play in the life of the Patrol?

The Leichhardt Patrol is a gift to the whole church, not just our denomination. Ecumenism is of vital importance because I am working with people of different denominations to build the broader church in the area surrounding the Leichhardt Highway.

There is an already established spirit of cooperation and generosity between denominations here and I am finding clergy and people from other denominations are involved in this as well. When the Wandoan Uniting Church was sold, the Anglicans offered their church building for use. Formal agreements are being put in place, and there is a grassroots movement from the people on the ground to be the people of God, no matter their denominational background.

What are your hopes for the Leichhardt Highway area?

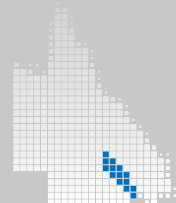
That people on properties and rural communities will know that the church is alive and active, ready to listen to their stories and to discover and be part of what God is doing in this area.

Please pray for continuing goodwill as denominations grow closer together in meeting the challenges faced by rural communities. This includes the mixed benefits of a rapidly expanding mining industry.



Patrol minister
Graham Slaughter
Photo: Graham Slaughter

Leichhardt Patrol



Fast facts:

Community:

- > 52 500 square kilometres
- > Mixture of rural and mining with some communities experiencing decline whilst others experience rapid expansion
- > New and exciting expressions of what it means to be church
- > Coal mining and coal seam gas fields make up a large part of the region's economy along with grazing and agriculture and associated support industries

Values:

- > Working ecumenically to facilitate ministry care and encouragement in rural communities

Social media:

- > facebook.com/UnitingChurchLeichhardtPatrol

Mission all sewn up at Elanora

Christian women coming together can be a powerful force for mission. Dianne Jensen visits a booming community program at Elanora Uniting Church.

Is this the biggest craft group in Australia? Elanora Uniting Church on the Gold Coast opens its doors every Wednesday during school term to around 280 people who gather to share skills and fellowship.

The Leisuretime ministry started more than 20 years ago, when church members visited local caravan parks to invite interstate visitors and young mothers to a safe meeting place where they could learn new skills.

This term there are 37 electives available, ranging from embroidery to painting and Mahjong.

President Maureen MacMaster leads the committee of 12 people, each with a designated role, which she describes as key to the effective delivery of such a large program.

“Our committee, teachers and helpers are all volunteers,” she says. “Many of our helpers are from other churches in the area. Thanks to the Border Council of Churches, we have many ecumenical friends.”

The program operates under the umbrella of the Elanora Uniting Church, with a weekly charge of \$4 for participants plus an annual \$2 registration fee.

On the morning of our visit, the huge, packed car park was the first indication that Leisuretime is something special.

The dozens of women and some men clustered in small groups across the sprawling church facilities were engaged in a dazzling range of traditional

and contemporary crafts. Many are long-time attendees, drawn mainly from the large retiree community on the Gold Coast, plus the annual winter influx of people from the south.

The informal networking which takes place at Leisuretime is important, says Ms MacMaster, especially for those who may be isolated.

“At morning tea everyone's birthday is recognised with a card, and ‘Get well’, ‘Sympathy’ and ‘Thinking of you’ cards are sent out where appropriate, often signed by the whole class the person is in,” says Ms MacMaster. “People seem to feel loved and secure.”

Group members contribute to community projects such as Frontier Service hostels, Mission without Borders, the White Butterfly Foundation and the Samaritan's Purse initiative. At the end of each year, donations are made to church and local charities.

It's an approach to church which Rev Ian Lord, minister at Elanora, describes as “recreational ministry”. He provides a regular, low-key presence, a familiar face to whom many without church connections turn when crisis or loss occurs.

Ms MacMaster also sees a flow-on effect.

“Many of the Leisuretime people attend our church functions, and some with no church affiliation have joined our congregation.”



Elanora Uniting Church
Leisuretime participants
Photos: Holly Jewell

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Big book on the small screen

The Mark Burnett-produced series, *The Bible*, aired on Channel 9 in July to 1.2 million viewers and was the number one show in the timeslot, beating *Winners and Losers* and *Master Chef*. It also trended well across social media in the lead up to its broadcast. Some would say airing it after the Country Women's Association-friendly *The Great Australian Bake Off* is savvy marketing, but perhaps it's the pedigree that encouraged viewers to tune in.

Mark Burnett's stock-in-trade over the last decade is to craft reality television into hugely successful drama. His pioneering *Survivor* program, now in its 27th season, is a ratings juggernaut in the United States. Since launching that program, most of the popular reality television formats have been devised by Burnett, the most recent being the hit program, *The Voice*.

Burnett is nothing if not in touch with what people are watching, and with his wife Roma Downey (best known for the lead role in ten seasons of *Touched by an Angel*) they firmly believe people want to see *The Bible* and are willing to spend a whopping ten hours to watch it.

From its engaging opening, with Noah retelling the creation story during a storm in the great flood, the first episode was both gripping and rendered like an action movie in parts. Perhaps the less said about the samurai sword-wielding angels in Sodom and Gomorrah the better, but Genesis and Exodus were mostly well represented. Some

heavy summarisation saw history jump decades at a time until, at the end of episode one, we stood with Joshua at the impending battle of Jericho.

If viewers are hoping for a comprehensive treatment of the Bible over ten hours, they will be disappointed. Early on it was decided to cherry-pick which stories would be included and future episodes will cover some of the better-known stories in more detail.

In the United States, the series had a 100 million-strong audience and its purpose, said Ms Downey, was to "give permission to talk about their faith around the water cooler".

Bringing the Bible to the small screen has been done before, but Downey and Burnett felt they could bring something new to this iteration.

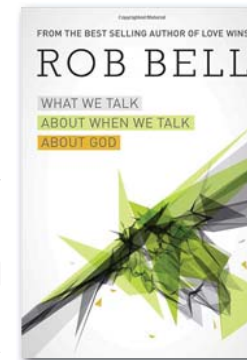
"We felt it was very important to tell the story in a way that brought deep emotional connection with people. The characters in the Bible are us, in many ways," Ms Downey told *Christianity Today*.

Both Downey and Burnett are Christians and claimed there was a lot of soul searching and praying before committing to write and produce *The Bible* for television. The most significant point about the series, for Burnett, is its timing.

"Our greatest hope is that this series will affect a new generation of viewers and draw them back to the Bible," Mr Burnett had said of the series.

Adrian Drayton
Uniting Resources NSW/ACT Synod

Dancing between faith and matter



What We Talk About When We Talk About God
Author: Rob Bell
Harper Collins Australia
RRP \$22.99

Two friends immediately spring to mind when reading Rob Bell's new book *What We Talk About When We Talk About God*. The first would call himself an atheist. One might say he is potentially intrigued by the idea of God, but utterly unconvinced of the existence of God, especially from a scientific point of view. My second friend is a pastor. He is a man who has great faith in Jesus Christ, so much so that he will often claim to know exactly what is on God's heart to say to people.

The space between these two contrasting worldviews is difficult, and it is through that space Bell helps us navigate. He identifies so clearly the human condition and Western cultural position, understanding that most people's experience is becoming increasingly blurry and messy. Yet into this blurry mess God not only speaks, but descends and points us toward something more satisfying. Written in classic Rob Bell conversational fashion he brilliantly choreographs a dance between theology and science, heart and logic, faith and matter.

Bell skillfully uses what we know to be true from science, logic and matter to reveal it is highly possible for the spiritual to coexist. According to Bell, God not only exists but is involved with that which he has created.

His intention is clear: make accessible that which history, science and religion so frequently have made inaccessible. Through the metaphors of seeing something new, and waking up to that which is already happening, he writes to renew our understanding that the seemingly non-spiritual is actually intricately connected to its divine roots of Jesus Christ. He does this in a way that demands your attention page after page; to jump ahead would leave you confused.

In this potentially controversial theological-cultural commentary, Bell reveals the invitation of God, who is present in everything, to find whole integrated lives of freedom in Christ. For this reason both of my friends need to read this book. It short-circuits both worldviews, leaving in its wake an opportunity to observe and engage with God in a fresh and unique way—a manner that our culture is pining for.

Rev Ralph Mayhew
Young Adults minister at Newlife Uniting Church

Reviews available at journeyonline.com.au



Mary Meets Mohammad
Directed by Heather Kirkpatrick
marymeetsmohammad.com
2013



Man of Steel
Directed by Zack Snyder
Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013



Voices of Hope
Compiled by Ashleigh Newnham
UNOH Publishing, 2013
RRP \$25



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Marguerite Marshall
Uniting Church
member and presenter
for Beyond Zero
Emissions with the
University of
Melbourne Energy
Research Institute.

Reining in loose change

A movement to divest of fossil fuel shares as a means to limit global warming is gaining momentum. Marguerite Marshall encourages Christians to steward their finances to support care of the earth.

Divesting of our fossil fuel shares and investing in clean renewable energy goes to the very heart of our lives as Christians to care for God's creation and to love one another.

That's because, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), to achieve a relatively safe climate with a rise of two degrees Celsius, two-thirds of the currently known oil, coal and gas reserves must be left in the ground.

The Uniting Church in Australia is setting an example in the Queensland Synod, which has no fossil fuel investments. The Synod of New South Wales and the ACT also recently decided to divest of theirs.

As individuals we can do the same. The Vital Few and Market Forces are divestment campaigns which run websites on how to contact our superannuation fund and lobby the four big banks.

According to a report compiled by researchers from Australian, American, British and Canadian universities, an overwhelming 97

per cent of climate scientists agree that the major cause of climate change is greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels. The Uniting Church is in line with this consensus by accepting humans are causing climate change.

Barbara Stocking, chief executive of Oxfam GB and Global Humanitarian Forum board member says climate change brings severe and frequent natural disasters.

"Climate change is a human crisis which threatens to overwhelm the humanitarian system and turn back the clock on development. It is also a gross injustice—poor people in developing countries bear over 90 per cent of the burden through death, disease, destitution and financial loss, yet are least responsible for creating the problem," she says.

Divesting of fossil fuel shares is in line with the international Go Fossil Free campaign led by US award-winning environmentalist and Methodist Sunday School teacher, Bill McKibben. In the United States, ten cities including Seattle and San Francisco

have announced plans to divest of their fossil fuel shares.

Divesting of shares can be very powerful and effective as it targets the financial system which funds the fossil fuel industry. Action by the international community on the anti-apartheid divestment movement significantly contributed to the fall of the South African apartheid government, according to Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Over 2600 Australians recently signed an open letter to the big four banks demanding that for the sake of the environment and economic responsibility they should stop funding new fossil fuel projects.

What can the ordinary person do? We can divest of our shares in fossil fuels, buy green power and install solar panels on our roofs. You can also contact your local member of parliament telling them to support the rapid development of renewable energy and to stop subsidising fossil fuels.

To read and sign the open letter visit openletter.marketforces.org.au



NAIDOC Family Day celebration at Musgrave Park, Brisbane. Rockhampton's Verdelle Fisher stands with her artwork for the Prayer Tent organised by Zillmere Uniting Church.
Photo: Mardi Lumsden

Outdoor advertising inquiry

The Uniting Church in Queensland's submission to the Queensland Government Inquiry into Sexually Explicit Outdoor Advertising is now available on the Queensland government's website.

The full submission can be read at tinyurl.com/outdooradvertisinginquiry

Frontier Services Great Outback BBQ

As spring approaches, barbecues across the country will fire up for a good cause as the Frontier Services Great Outback BBQ begins in September.

Every Great Outback BBQ event will help Frontier Services go the extra mile for people in the outback by raising money to support its remote ministry and vital community services.

If you can't host a barbecue, why not hold a Billy Morning Tea with fresh scones or damper? Make your event as simple or creative as you like. Everyone who registers will receive a BBQ host pack with recipes, fundraising ideas and other materials to get you started.

In the last two years, more than 180 Great Outback BBQs were held across the country, raising \$140 000 to ensure Frontier Services can provide a network of care and support in the most remote areas of Australia. Help Frontier Services make this year even bigger!

Register your event and download resources at www.greatoutbackbbq.com or phone Great Outback BBQ Coordinator Charlotte Caress on 1300 787 247.

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You count—Uniting Church national census

The Uniting Church Assembly is seeking to re-establish a database of national statistics on Uniting Church congregations and ministers. Currently there is no record of how many Uniting Church congregations or ministers there are in Australia.

During August two different census forms will be distributed among congregations and ministers. The first, of which online and paper options will be offered, is to be completed by a congregational representative. The other is a brief online census for all ministers whether or not they are in placement, including retired ministers. The synod general secretaries are collaborating in this project.

Gathering stories of the Church's community services

UnitingCare Queensland is gathering material for a history website which will tell the story of community services provided by the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches and then the Uniting Church, up to 2000. If you have any information, stories, experiences, photographs or artifacts that would help tell the story of the origins and history of UnitingCare Queensland, please contact Dot King on 07 3205 2009 or email dot.king@ucareqld.com.au

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Speaker: Rev Dr Glen O'Brien (Booth College, NSW):
The Use and Misuse of John Wesley on the Authority of Scripture

For more information about the conference, the Assembly of Confessing Congregations, including on-line issues of the ACC Magazine: ACCatalyst, see our website: confessingcongregations.com Post: PO Box 968 Newtown NSW 2042 Email: accoffice@confessingcongregations.com Tel: (02) 9550 5358

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