

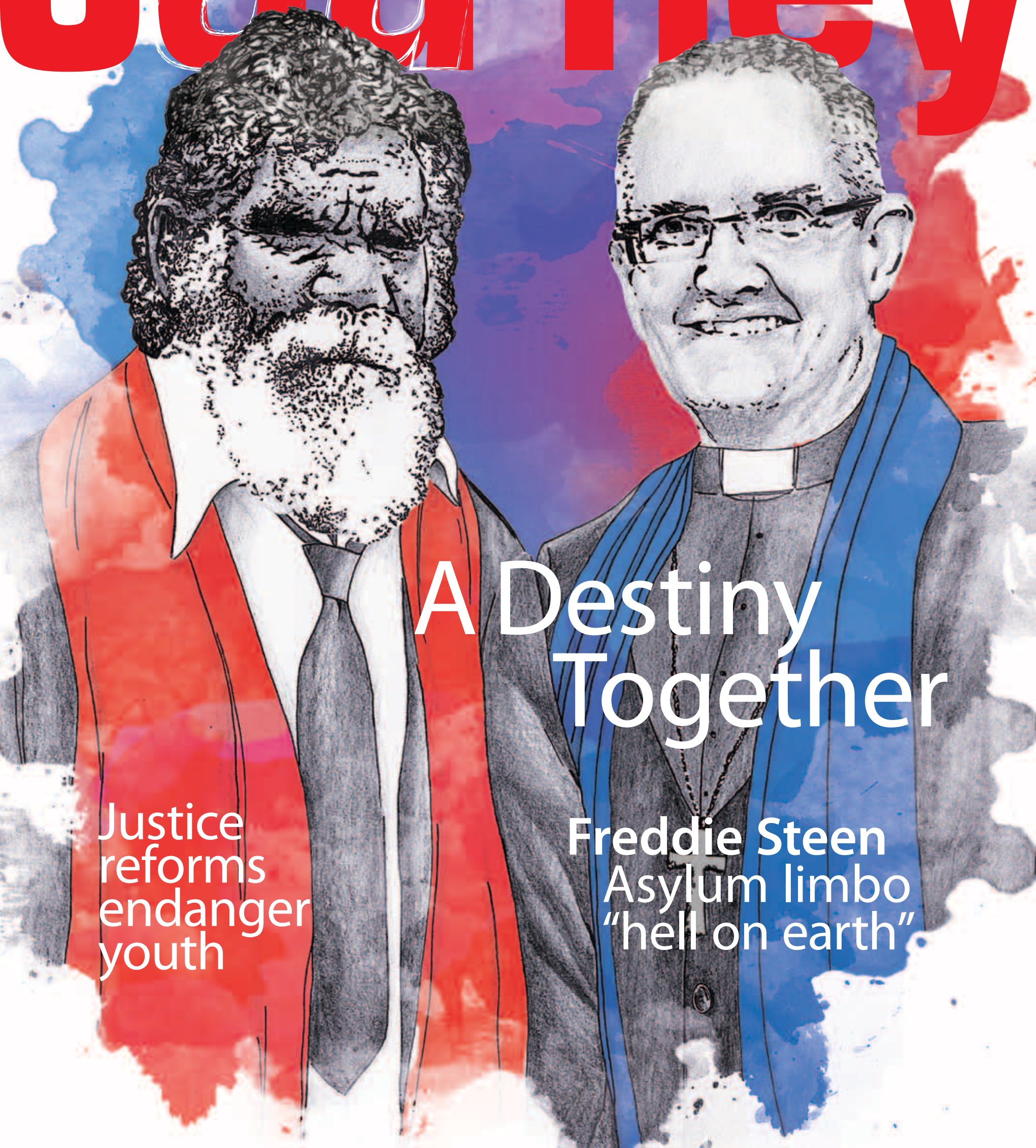


The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

March 2014

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Journey



A Destiny Together

Justice
reforms
endanger
youth

Freddie Steen
Asylum limbo
“hell on earth”



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UnitingWorld is the overseas partnerships agency of the Uniting Church in Australia, connecting church communities in Australia, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Our purpose is to help Australians see the world through our partners' eyes and support them in their life and witness and in addressing poverty and injustice.

UnitingWorld includes a **Church Connections Unit** and a **Relief and Development Unit**. Both units are supported by separate National Committees.

The National Committees draw on expertise in a range of areas including international relations, sustainable development, cross-cultural interaction, finance, human resources, communications, fundraising and public relations, advocacy and social witness and theological reflection.

We are currently interested in expressions of interest from people with strengths in:

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- Marketing, communications, fundraising, human resources and risk management (for Relief & Development National Committee).

For an information pack including the responsibilities of our National Committees and procedures for expressing an interest, please email: UnitingWorld Executive Assistant Jade Lor Chan JadeLc@unitingworld.org.au by 4th April 2014.

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Supporting the Royal Commission



The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod remains engaged with and supportive of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses into Child Sexual Abuse. To read Uniting Church responses to the Commission's issues papers or for more information please visit ucaqlld.com.au and click the link from the home page.

For complaints related to this Royal Commission email complaints@ucaqlld.com.au or call 1300 822 753.

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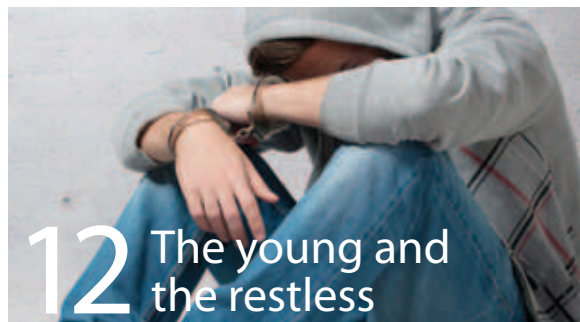


The Uniting Church in Australia
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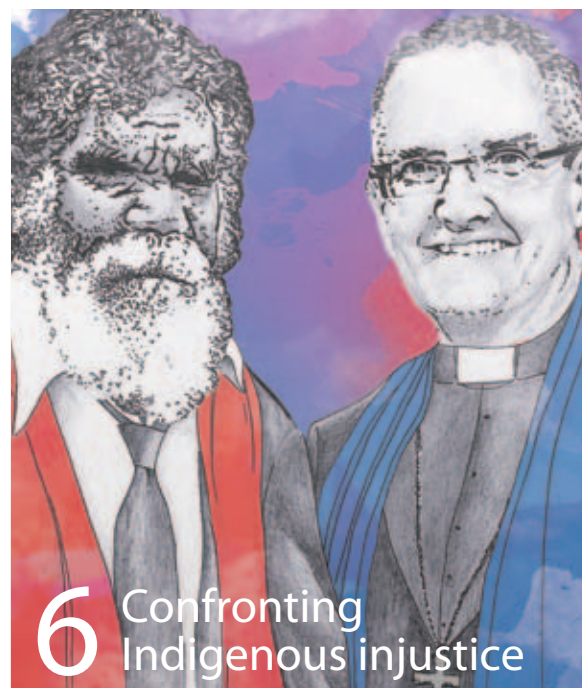
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Journey

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Closing date for editorial and advertising for April *Journey* is Monday 17 March. The next issue of *Journey* will be available on Sunday 6 April.



Stand up, speak out

The Uniting Church in Australia has a reputation for its social justice advocacy.

In its inaugural *Statement to the Nation* in 1977, the Uniting Church made a commitment to speak out on social justice issues saying:

“We will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond. ... We will oppose all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms.”

This issue of *Journey* covers three areas in which basic rights and freedoms of vulnerable people are being infringed. Our cover story (page six) is an overview of the Intervention in the Northern Territory—the issue that initially sparked the upcoming *Destiny Together* week of prayer and fasting. On page 12 we explore the Queensland Government’s amendments to the *Youth Justice Act 1992* and their potentially long-term effects on young offenders, many of whom are from backgrounds of disadvantage.

As I write, we are hearing mixed reports of what actually occurred at Australia’s detention centre on Manus Island in PNG, resulting in the death of one asylum seeker. Now, the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection inadvertently released the details of every asylum seeker held on the mainland and Christmas Island to the public.

The Uniting Church released a statement expressing sorrow and concern over the violence on Manus, but is sorrow and concern enough to achieve the eradication of poverty and racism we announced in 1977? On page ten, refugee rights activist Freddie Steen expresses outrage at Australia’s asylum seeker policy. She channels her indignation into robust confrontation of the Immigration Department’s actions.

How do we, as Christians, let these injustices continue?

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor



Fast track for prayer

A lady came to visit my office this week and told me about the work she was doing as a pastor in her community.

She said that when things get tough they move into a time of fasting and prayer. They fasted for three days like Queen Esther.

The police came past the church and said, "Keep praying, we haven't had to arrest anyone today."

The district nurse came by and said, "Keep praying, I haven't had to stitch anyone up."

Her testimony is that the breakthrough happens when we fast and pray.

I have never been very good at fasting. Maybe I need more practice. It is one of the spiritual disciplines named by Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline*.

In a world where fast food is promoted everywhere it seems countercultural to talk about fasting, but I wonder if fasting is like "upsizing" your prayer?

There may not be a direct transaction between not eating and having effective prayer, but it makes sense to me that if I am not concentrating on what I am

going to eat for breakfast I may be more attentive to the conversation that I am having with God.

In the weeks leading up to Easter it is common to take some time for prayer and fasting. This year during Lent we have an opportunity as a Church to give expression to our covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress by participating in a week of prayer and fasting. I invite the Queensland Synod to set aside some time between 17 and 23 March to take up the challenge of prayer and fasting for the sake of our partners in this covenant relationship.

Not everyone gives up food. Some people give up a favourite television show or some other indulgence.

John Chrysostom, (347–407) fourth century Church Father and Bishop of Constantinople, suggested a different kind of fast. He suggested fasting from gossip and envy and abusive words.

He asks, "What gain is there when, on the one hand we avoid eating chicken and fish and, on the other, we chew up and consume our brothers?"

Food for thought.

Rev Kaye Ronalds
Queensland Synod Moderator

Monday Midday Prayer

God of hope,

Stir us up that we might renew our commitment to work together in Australia so that all people may flourish, and that the disadvantage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be addressed.

Amen

Moderator's diary

4 March
Australian Catholic University 2014 commencement ceremony

7 March
International Women's Day reception

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Judy and Alan with students of a Free Wesleyan Church School in Tonga
Photo: supplied

Caloundra takes action after Cyclone Ian

When Cyclone Ian ripped through the Pacific Island nation of Tonga on 11 January, Caloundra Uniting Church member Judy Morrison’s first thoughts were with her friends on Tongatapu, the southernmost island. **Ashley Goetze** reports.

While the category five storm left no dramatic structural damage on Tongatapu, the north island of Ha’apai, home to the Free Wesleyan Church school and kindergarten, was badly affected.

“Our friends at the Free Wesleyan Church on Tongatapu have been rallying to send goods to Ha’apai on the ferries because things like grocery stores have been ruined,” says Caloundra Uniting Church member Judy Morrison.

Over the past nine years Judy and her husband Alan have helped foster connections between Caloundra Uniting Church and the Free Wesleyan Church, through the help of UnitingWorld.

In that time they have led 17 members of the Caloundra congregation to Tonga on UnitingWorld InSolidarity trips, aimed to grow faith and strengthen partnerships.

“Another aspect of the InSolidarity trips is to help show where the needs are and that people can volunteer through UnitingWorld; that’s really important,” says Judy.

The personal connection the congregation has developed on their visits to Tonga was evident on the Sunday following the cyclone. Judy says

she was besieged by people enquiring after their friends’ safety and well-being.

They gave money to Judy on the spot enabling her to send a total of \$500 to the principal of Peteli Middle School, which has a special relationship with Unity College in Caloundra.

“The main thing for us is to expose people in Australia to a different culture, and to broaden their understanding of different cultures in the world and different experiences of Christianity at work,” says Judy.

UnitingWorld has since launched an official appeal nationwide to support the Free Wesleyan Church as they organise relief efforts, rebuild and care for affected communities.

“It’s an ongoing thing and we are really committed to working alongside them and helping them to develop their own future. Although there are times when you can give like this in emergencies,” says Judy.

Judy is an avid supporter of UnitingWorld, who organised the Morrison’s year-long stay in Tonga back in 2005.

“Our plan is to go again in August this year as we continue to support the kindergarten and other projects.”

‘We are really committed to working alongside them and helping them to develop their own future’
Judy Morrison



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Bound as one body

Confronting Indigenous injustice

The Intervention has caused controversy since its introduction, and Indigenous Australians are calling for genuine respect and partnership. **Rohan Salmond** explores.

At the Uniting Church in Australia's 13th Assembly, members of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) told their stories about what it is like living under the Stronger Futures legislation in the Northern Territory. The Assembly was moved to action and made a public demonstration on the steps of South Australia's Parliament House. Now, from 17–23 March, Uniting Church members across the country are asked to undertake a week of prayer and fasting for justice for Australia's First Peoples.

"The Uniting Church has a very long tradition of solidarity with Indigenous people," says Uniting Church President, Rev Dr Andrew Dutney, "but we need to go deeper in that solidarity and recognise our Indigenous members are indeed part of us; they are not a 'them', they're not the objects of our concern, we are a community."

On 18 March the Uniting Church will host a public vigil on the lawns of Parliament House in Canberra. All Uniting Church members are invited to attend.

"Stronger Futures"

In 2007, in the face of a looming federal election, the Northern Territory government released the *Little Children are Sacred* report, an inquiry into child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. In response, the Howard government implemented a package of legislation without consulting the Aboriginal communities it affected. The flagship bill was the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill 2007* (NTNER) and the package of legislation became known collectively as the "Intervention". The bills received bipartisan support, and have since been replaced by Labor's

Stronger Futures policy. Stronger Futures renewed and expanded the key components of the Intervention.

The lack of partnership between governments and local communities is the root of the problem with Stronger Futures. In a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs in 2012, Nalapaḽmirr Elder and Uniting Church Minister, Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra spoke on behalf of the Yolḁ Nations Assembly.

"The issues of alcohol abuse, violence, sexual abuse, disease, chronic illness, child mortality, life expectancy, overcrowding and poverty are not barriers [of disadvantage]; they are symptoms. Instead, the barrier is external control, either on a systemic level or by the domination of mainstream culture over Indigenous culture," he said.

A licence to discriminate

One of the greatest concerns with the initial Intervention in 2007 was its exemption from the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA). By circumventing the RDA, the measures contained in the NTNER Bill—particularly income management measures—were able to be applied to Aboriginal communities without affecting the rest of the Territory. Income management is a set of measures which quarantines 50 to 75 per cent of a person's Centrelink payment for "priority needs" such as housing, food and clothing. This money is channelled into a "BasicsCard", which is only accepted at a limited number of participating shops.

Brooke Prentis is an emerging Aboriginal Christian leader and Coordinator of the Grasstree Gathering, an ecumenical conference for emerging Indigenous Christian leaders from across Australia. Although she is from Queensland's southeast corner and

‘My people have one policy for our own development. Self-determination’
Djiniyini Gondarra

has not lived under the effects of the Intervention directly, she says all Australians should be paying attention to the stories Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory are telling.

“I think the broader concern is really the way the legislation was passed through the Commonwealth Government. When the Northern Territory Emergency Response went into place, the Racial Discrimination Act was suspended. The fact the Parliament can suspend such an important piece of legislation that protects Aboriginal people and other people ... is a concern for all Australians,” she says.

The expansion of the Intervention under the Stronger Futures policy has since brought income management back under the RDA. However, upon the reinstatement of the RDA in the Northern Territory in 2011, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda suggested that income management was still in breach of the RDA due to its disproportionate impact on Indigenous people. In the 2013 Parliamentary Library Background Note, *Income management and the Racial Discrimination Act*, the Parliamentary Library agreed the BasicsCard scheme was vulnerable to challenge. However, as yet no formal challenge to the scheme has been made to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Brooke is concerned at the scheme’s expansion into other parts of Australia. In Queensland, as of February 2014, the BasicsCard has already been rolled out in Cape York, Rockhampton and Logan, south of Brisbane with further expansion on the horizon.

“As Aboriginal people [in Queensland] it’s affecting our brothers and sisters in the Northern Territory, but it also has ramifications for us here,” she says.

Income management does not represent the entirety of the Stronger Futures policy, but it does capture the essence of the tensions surrounding the larger suite of legislation: some people find it helpful in their situation, while for others it is profoundly disempowering.

A destiny together

The UAICC is outspoken in its condemnation of the process the Federal Parliament undertook to introduce the Intervention legislation in 2007. Unfortunately, the current Chairperson of the UAICC, Rev Rronang Garrawurra was unable to comment for this story due to illness, but is expected to be well enough to attend the vigil in Canberra. Other UAICC members in the Northern Territory able to speak to the issue were also unable to be contacted due to their remote location.

Northern Synod Moderator and Assembly President-elect, Stuart McMillan is clear he is unable to speak on behalf of the Indigenous members of the Uniting Church. However, responding to the Northern Territory Intervention has been a priority for the Northern Synod since the introduction of the NTNER Bill in 2007.

“The Indigenous members of this Synod have said the same thing since 2007 to Territory and Federal governments alike,” says Stuart, “They seek a different form of engagement and a genuine coming together to seek solutions to issues. They ask that governments stop doing things to and for them and engage in a way that might better be described as partnership.”

In his 2011 submission, Djiniyini called for the end of Indigenous disempowerment. “My people have one policy for our own development. Self-determination,” he said. “We await the day when the Australian Government meets our various invitations and negotiates a treaty with our tribal governments. From that day forth we can then begin our journey together as true partners.”

Prayer and fasting

The Uniting Church’s response to the Intervention might come as a surprise to some members. Although fasting is practised by some individuals in the Uniting Church, it is uncommon to see it practised on a broader scale.

Andrew Dutney says fasting is a very biblical response.

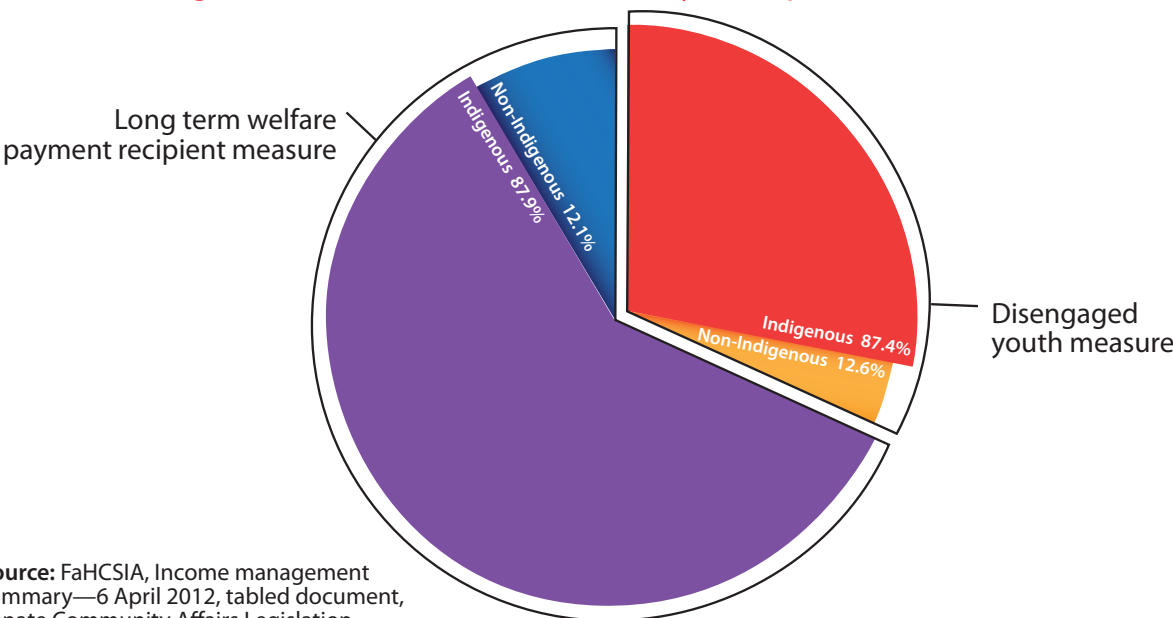
“In scripture fasting is often provoked by something very significant that’s happened: there’s been a death, people are afraid, people are searching for a direction or the community is about to launch into something new. They almost automatically go into a period of fasting while they seek God and plead with God to give them strength and guidance and blessing for this next thing that they’re going to do.

“It’s my hope that [after the fast] the Uniting Church will have a much stronger sense of being one body of Christ. That’s my primary hope. We’ll have a much stronger sense of being the one body of Christ which is focusing on those members who are most disadvantaged and most vulnerable in our community and frankly, those are our Indigenous members.

“It’s as Paul says, ‘If one suffers, we all suffer together.’ It’s high time we felt that as part of our identity.”

assembly.uca.org.au/adeitytogether

Payment recipients subject to “Parenting/Participation” income management in the Northern Territory—6 April 2012



Source: FaHCSIA, Income management summary—6 April 2012, tabled document, Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, Supplementary Estimates 2012–13



Source: Department of Social Services. Figures accurate as of 18 October 2013.

Vicki, Joel, Brian
and Zac Robinson
Photo: Holly Jewell

Giving out for Lent



The Christian tradition of giving something up for Lent could provide a new perspective on life and faith. **Dianne Jensen** talks to families about Lent Event.

Uniting Church congregations don't have much corporate memory when it comes to the Lenten practice of undertaking 40 days of repentance and self-denial, culminating in the joy of Easter Sunday. Frankly, it's been a bit high church for us.

Lent Event has changed all that. Nearly 10 years ago, a Uniting Church congregation in Sydney asked members to forgo a few luxuries and to donate the money saved to support projects in developing countries. The idea was simple and practical—not about hair shirts and introspection—but a vision of how we might participate in bringing about the kingdom of God on Earth.

The relief and development agency UnitingWorld has developed the concept. Over the 40 days of Lent from 5 March until 19 April, individuals and congregations are called to engage in reflection and prayer, to embrace simple living and to learn about specific community development projects.

Lent Event projects for 2014 include training midwives in South Sudan, training women in business and leadership skills in Indonesia and the Pacific and education programs in north India.

Vicki and Brian Robinson and their two sons Joel (13 years) and Zac (10 years) from Oxley Uniting Church in Brisbane have become regular

participants. They host a Bible study and give up lollies and chocolate. Each family member contributes to the Lent appeal donation.

"We realise how blessed we are, and how generous God has been to us and our family," says Vicki. "It is easy to take a lot of things for granted."

"Giving up something symbolises what Jesus did for us," she adds. "Giving money can be easy, but giving up our treats is a tangible experience for us to reflect on and to remind us every day."

For David and Wendy Lowry from Caloundra Uniting Church, the annual campaign is a reminder that Christians are called to work for peace, compassion and justice.

"In this Lenten period we see the cross as a sign of love. In his love for the poor and the marginalised, Jesus spent his life and died at the hands of this unjust world.

"We see the projects of the Lenten appeal as a challenge to go the way of the cross, and to give all that we can for people in need. Some may find 'giving up' something in Lent helpful as they give to a project, but for us this is a call to 'give out' to keep the vision of the kingdom of God before us."

Lent Event resources can be downloaded from lentevent.com/resources. Printed copies can be ordered by calling (02) 8267 4267.

‘In this Lenten period we see the cross as a sign of love. In his love for the poor and the marginalised, Jesus spent his life and died at the hands of this unjust world’

David Lowry



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We can do better, Tony

Will Australia have to undertake a royal commission and make an apology to asylum seekers in the years to come? It is with great concern that **Carolyn Broere** writes to Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

Dear Prime Minister,
I recently saw the film *Philomena* and began to wonder whether we, in future years, will be making atonement for our current treatment of refugees. Will people be shocked when they find out what really went on? Will their hearts ache when they find out that these were desperate human beings and not potentially dangerous “illegals”?

The parts of our history which have been shrouded in secrecy have usually covered up wrongdoing on a shocking scale. I believe such matters have been kept secret because people rationalised about the ends justifying the means but knew in their heart of hearts that these means were wrong. As a consequence, we have had inquiries and royal commissions into the stolen children of Indigenous people, abuse in religious institutions and the forced adoption of the children of unmarried mothers.

In history, we have been shocked by the German peoples' complacency about the treatment of Jews in their society, but the German people were gradually influenced by their government in their attitudes towards the Jewish minority. With public opinion influenced in this way, it was so much easier for their government to eliminate them.

I see a similar approach in the present government's treatment of asylum seekers. It is an issue shrouded in secrecy and shock jocks have free reign to propagate any so-called information they like, which never seems to be refuted by officials really in the know.

How much better it would be if this issue could be dealt with openly, humanely and possibly at much less cost than now? Other countries have huge refugee problems to deal with and ours is miniscule by comparison. Surely we can do it better.

Our society has been built on the hard work and fine contributions of immigrants and refugees. However, I remember some very harsh attitudes expressed about Greek and Italian immigrants and later Vietnamese refugees. And yet, what a contribution they have made to Australia!

Mr Abbott, we do not want in the future to have to make atonement for our treatment of asylum seekers today. I would hate our next generation to have to make amends, always too late, for our short-term expediency.

Carolyn is a member of Mooloolaba Uniting Church.
mooloolabaunitingchurch.org.au

‘Mr Abbott,
 we do not want
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 have to make
 atonement for
 our treatment
 of asylum seekers
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Let my people go

Freddie Steen on the politics of asylum

Like a voice crying in the wilderness, Frederika Steen AM won't be silent about Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. **Dianne Jensen** reports.

"I have looked into their faces, I know their names and I have heard their stories of suffering. What else could I do but speak out?"

Refugee advocate Frederika (Freddie) Steen doesn't mince her words when it comes to speaking out about the treatment of the men, women and children who arrive by boat to seek sanctuary in Australia. She says it's cruel, unjust and un-Australian.

Freddie's longstanding service to the refugee and migrant community was recognised in the 2014 Australia Day Awards when she was admitted as a Member (AM) in the General Division of the Order of Australia.

Previous awards include Canberran of the Year (1984), a Centenary Medal (2001), the Paul Cullen Humanitarian Award (2003) and the Pride of Australia Fair Go Medal (2007).

Freddie spent 12 years in the Commonwealth Education Department, followed by 17 years in the Immigration Department. Her roles included Migrant Women's Coordinator, Director of Settlement Services in Brisbane and Chief Migration Officer in the Australian Embassy in Germany.

After her retirement in 2001 she became a volunteer at the Brisbane-based Romero Centre refugee support and advocacy hub. There Freddie encountered the tide of misery caused by the introduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), as busloads of frightened and disoriented refugees were offloaded at the small community-funded centre.

With growing outrage, she heard first-hand the anecdotes of torture and oppression, and the

frantic pleas of those with family left behind. Underlining the suffering was what she describes as the "hell on earth of uncertainty" caused by the temporary nature of the visas.

She began telling their stories to the Australian community. As information officer for the Romero Centre, Freddie spoke at hundreds of meetings, workshops, schools, churches and service clubs and became recognised as a vocal public commentator on refugee issues.

The kindness of strangers

For the Dutch-born Tasmanian, the narratives of oppression and exile spoke straight to her family experiences in war-torn Europe.

Freddie Steen was born in Nazi-occupied Holland. Her resistance-fighter father and his young son and pregnant wife were in hiding, given sanctuary by a Christian family.

"I was born in the lounge room of a farmhouse. Dad was sitting there at the window with a revolver in his lap in case there was trouble."

The family were betrayed to the Germans soon after Freddie's birth, when a neighbour spotted the nappies on the washing line. The Steens escaped in the nick of time.

The constant anxiety and fear during those years left an indelible mark on all of them, recalls Freddie, especially her father.

"Now we know and give it a name—post-traumatic stress disorder—but there's no doubt in my mind that my father was badly scarred by his experiences. He had lost trust in people and he was subject to dreadful headaches always."

After several unsettled years in post-war Holland, the Steens joined with a group of seven Christian

"I have journeyed with modern day saints, religious and secular, and forged friendships with people who share my abhorrence of injustice and cruelty"



Above: Frederika Steen AM, left: her father's Australian citizenship certificate.
Photo: Holly Jewell

families who migrated to Tasmania in 1950. They were welcomed by the small rural community, and took up the opportunities provided by their new country to make a good life.

That experience of being offered refuge in a time of desperate need, and the chance to rebuild their lives in a new country, still fuels her passion for justice and fairness.

Return to exile

Along with many refugee advocates, Freddie is appalled at the revival of the punitive policies which have left thousands of people living in limbo on bridging visas, most unable to work, while many others languish in detention centres here and overseas.

The decision by the former Labor government to re-establish offshore processing on Nauru and Manus Island (PNG) was “extremely painful” she says.

Freddie had participated in the campaign which helped bring an end to the Pacific Solution implemented in 2001 by the Howard government, with the last 25 detainees leaving Nauru at the end of 2005. The policy was largely dismantled by Kevin Rudd in 2008 but reintroduced by Julia Gillard in 2012. A new policy on boat arrival deterrence, Operation Sovereign Borders, was launched by the Coalition government in September 2013.

“It weighs heavily on my heart that at the moment we have more than 30 000 people living in our community who took that dangerous journey, which is traumatic in itself, of escaping their country. To go all that way through foreign places and get on a boat and survive a boat journey, and then you get at this end and you think you have hit freedom and they lock you up!”

The harsh policy is essentially “a re-badging of that fear of the Yellow Peril coming from the north by boat”, says Freddie, implemented under a cloak of secrecy.

“The majority of Australians do not know that there are women in the detention centre in Brisbane who are awaiting the birth of a child, some of whom are separated from the fathers of their children because the husband was left on Nauru. These mothers and babies will be sent back to Nauru where they were living in tents where the temperature soars to 45, 50 degrees.”

Freddie is appalled by a recent directive by Immigration Minister Scott Morrison that refugees who arrive by boat will be given the lowest processing priority when they apply for family reunions, applied retrospectively to all permanent visa holders.

“This is so divisive of families. I’m an expert on settlement services, having worked in it for a heck of a long time. Until family is reunited and they are focused on here and not over there, people do not settle well. They cannot, they are divided in their loyalties and in their attention and in their emotions.”

Called to justice

Although officially retired from her role at the Romero Centre, Freddie continues to act as an information portal and public speaker on refugee and asylum seeker issues. Silence, she says, is not an option.

“I have journeyed with modern day saints, religious and secular, and forged friendships with people who share my abhorrence of injustice and cruelty. For Christians, for me, there is no escaping that this is about the rights of God’s people.”

Freddie currently attends Indooroopilly Uniting Church in Brisbane, and is involved in the new welcome hub for refugees and asylum seekers set up in partnership with the Multicultural Development Association.

She lives with her partner, Art, and has three step-daughters and five step-grandchildren.

The young and

Taking a closer look at youth justice reform

Life is about to get tougher for young Queenslanders in trouble with the law.
Dianne Jensen reports.

“Tough on crime” has a reassuring ring to the outraged householder who discovers a smashed car window or graffiti on their freshly painted wall. It’s time these kids faced up to the consequences of their behaviour, right?

The Queensland Government is currently considering legislation to enact amendments to the Youth Justice Act (1992) which will have far-reaching implications for young people aged between 10 and 17 years alleged to have broken the law.

‘It is about political theatre rather than asking hard questions about what actually will reduce recidivism and most effectively promote the rehabilitation of young offenders’

Ross Homel

The changes will transfer children to adult prisons when they turn 17 years (if they have at least six months left on their custodial sentence), allow adult courts access to juvenile criminal history when sentencing, “name and shame” repeat offenders and make breach of bail an offence. Most importantly, say critics, they will remove the principle of detention as a last resort.

Trials of the controversial Early Intervention Youth Boot Camps and Sentenced Youth Boot Camps are already underway.

But will these changes make our streets safer and decrease youth crime and recidivism?

Grave concerns about the reforms have been expressed by many organisations working with young people at risk, including the Uniting Church Queensland Synod.

Synod Research Officer Sue Hutchinson has produced an issues paper which has been sent to Premier Campbell Newman, Attorney General Jarrod Bleijie and all state members of parliament, accompanied by a statement from moderator Rev Kaye Ronalds asking the government to undertake consultation with community groups and service providers before going ahead with the reforms.

An uncomfortable truth

Most young people caught up in the system do not reoffend. The core issue is the small group of repeat offenders who are responsible for multiple crimes, and dealing with the root causes of their recidivism requires complex strategies.

The Youth Advocacy Centre research points out that there are disproportionate numbers of young people in detention with developmental disorders, such as learning disabilities, communication disorders and foetal alcohol syndrome.

We also know that 69 per cent of young people in the youth justice system in Queensland as at June 2011 were known to the child protection system.

Young Indigenous Queenslanders are most at risk of entering the system, says Ms Hutchinson, and the Uniting Church is particularly concerned about the disproportionate effect that the new legislation will have on this group.

“It is very concerning that in 2012-13, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders accounted for 66 per cent of young people in detention in Queensland, while making up only about six per cent of all young people aged 10 to 17 years.”

Ms Hutchinson points out that the majority of young people in detention are on remand, and that 70 per cent are Indigenous children who may be locked up simply because they don’t have “suitable” places to stay.

Rev Dr Wayne Sanderson, a Uniting Church minister and former Lifeline CEO with a range of experience in youth suicide prevention and Indigenous policy, says that the scenario for young people is particularly bleak in small towns and in remote parts of the state lacking infrastructure and resources.

He led an Amnesty International study, completed last year, constructing the knowledge base for Amnesty’s current campaign on the Indigenous experience of the youth justice system in Queensland.

“All too commonly, a magistrate sitting in the Children’s Court has this tearaway kid who’s say, aged 14 years. If he lives in a chaotic family environment, and there’s no other responsible adult who can supervise him until the court can deal with the matter, then the kid has to be remanded in custody. If you’re in central Queensland or out in the north-west you could actually be brought under escort to Brisbane.”

photo: stock image

the restless



Amnesty is currently conducting a campaign to bring their concerns before local politicians, and is urging the public to put pressure on the Premier and the Attorney General.

What crime wave?

Youth crime statistics in Queensland were improving, at least until the last year or so.

In his 2011-2012 annual report, Judge Michael Shanahan, President of the Children's Court of Queensland, noted an overall decrease of 6.9 per cent in the number of juveniles whose cases came before the court. However, there was an overall increase in the number of charges against young people, up 9.7 per cent. He indicated that the statistics seem to demonstrate that there are a number of persistent offenders who are charged with multiple offences.

By the time Judge Shanahan wrote his 2012-2013 annual report, charges against juveniles had increased by a further 4651. He suggested that a change in government policy in January 2013 might be responsible, with a substantial drop in the number of cautions being administered by the police and the abolition of the diversionary mechanism of court-ordered Youth Justice Conferencing.

What works (and what doesn't)

Criminologist Ross Homel, Foundation Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University in Brisbane, is blunt in his assessment of the changes.

"It is about political theatre rather than asking hard questions about what actually will reduce recidivism and most effectively promote the rehabilitation of young offenders."

Research demonstrates that punishment and deterrence may in fact be counterproductive in the basic goal of creating citizens, he says.

"The goal with juvenile offenders should be to move them through a pathway toward full citizenship and return to normal society. People are much more useful as citizens and taxpayers and fathers and mothers and all the rest of it than they are languishing in a jail, or in a detention centre or on the margins of society.

Professor Homel's long-term research project, *Pathways to Prevention*, was conducted in one of Brisbane's poorest suburbs. It provides some powerful indicators of what works.

"Essentially, one of the key assumptions of that program, for which we've now got a lot of data and are testing, is that if young people are getting into trouble at school or with the police, it's 99 per cent sure that things aren't too good at home.

"The *Pathways to Prevention* project was all about providing the kind of advocacy and support for the parents and for the children so that the basic underlying causes of the children's behaviour can be dealt with. We've got data and we're publishing research that shows that this is indeed the case and that family support can make quite a substantial

difference, for example, to the quality of their behaviour in the classroom as rated by the teacher.

"There's a whole program of social services, community-based interventions that can be extraordinarily effective in dealing with—and in fact nipping the development of youth crime in the bud. It's about working with families and with communities and with schools in order to strengthen the developmental fabric which makes us human."

Ms Hutchinson agrees. "The experience of the Uniting Church at the community level and through its agencies is that evidence-based, developmental approaches will be most effective in reducing youth crime. Why wouldn't you try these approaches rather than policies which have been shown to be detrimental?"

ucaqld.com.au/social-justice/key-issues/criminal-justice

Seeking refuge in music

The simple idea of starting a music class in the Villawood Detention Centre, Sydney, has created a vast network of instrument donors for asylum seekers in detention. **Mardi Lumsden** explores.



Philip Feinstein with guitars bound for the Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney.
Photo: Philip Feinstein

“Money is something we don’t need. All we want are instruments!”

Philip Feinstein

Sydney-based volunteer music teacher Philip Feinstein established classes inside the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre around two years ago. He has now expanded the Music for Refugees project to include almost all Australian immigration detention centres, including Christmas Island and Nauru.

After fleeing Apartheid South Africa in 1972, Philip appreciates the welcome he received from Australia and wants to share it with others.

“About four years ago I began to realise the terrible plight of refugees in Australia so I made contact with the Villawood Detention Centre,” he says. “I believe music is a wonderful way to help people relieve stress.”

SERCO, the company who manages Australia’s detention centres, was keen but had no instruments. Philip told someone the story and was instantly donated a piano. The piano turned out to be one Philip had sold more than 20 years prior. The project was off and running.

“I ended up getting five pianos for Villawood, over 30 guitars and violins and percussion and so on. Villawood is now chock-a-block with instruments. It now has music rooms and we have jams there.”

Music has been used as a therapy in places of incarceration for years and has proven to reduce self-harm, violence and negativity and to enhance self-esteem.

“A lot of what I do makes them feel good, which is very important, but I’m also thinking ahead. *Advance Australia Fair* is very important; these people will be new Australians so it is important that they know that,” says Philip.

His energy and passion for this project are infectious. Churches (and other organisations) act as drop-off points for members of the public to deliver instruments which are then taken to the various detention centres. The vast majority of drop-off points are Uniting Churches.

“I contacted Uniting Churches all over the country and they all came on board,” he says. “You guys put your money or your prayers where your mouth is and you really do help ... your churches have been phenomenal.”

In Queensland, Chermside Kedron Community Uniting Church in Brisbane is one of three drop-off points.

The Music for Refugees project wants refugees who are no longer in detention to have a musical stress outlet. Community networks to continue music making are also important.

“The instrument collection has to be ongoing,” says Philip. “They should be able to take their instrument with them. It doesn’t mean that because they are out of Villawood that their stress ends.

“Money is something we don’t need. All we want are instruments!”

The donation of small, portable instruments is encouraged (guitars, recorders, ukuleles, violins etc.) but all instruments are welcome. Philip also suggested families contact their schools for any excess instruments that could be donated.

jamwithus.net
musicforrefugees.org



Fielding humility

Humility isn't about being a wallflower; it's about how we position ourselves relative to others, says **Rev Mark Cornford**.

I love cricket, but I don't particularly love Shane Warne. He's an amazing bowler but someone with an ego the size of Uluru. I was at a function a little while ago where I met a guy and got talking about cricket. I mentioned my love of cricket and dislike of Shane Warne. Well, this person had actually met Warney. I think it was at a wedding where Warney was a distant relative. You would think that someone as famous and with the ego of Warney would have no time for ordinary people—but apparently this was not the case.

This guy told me that Warney was hanging out at the bar (of course!) engaging in conversation with whoever happened to be there. Not just telling stories of his famous life but actually just talking with people. He was totally approachable.

We often think of being humble as probably the opposite of Shane Warne, and I am loath to use him as an example of humility, but the story above is also the story of one aspect of what it means to be humble.

Humility is not about being quiet and in the background, but about how you see other people compared to yourself. As it says in Romans 12:3, "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone

among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think". In the story above, Shane Warne didn't think himself as above listening and talking to ordinary people. He positioned himself at the bar as one of them—not a distant superstar.

This idea of "positioning" is central to humility. How do we position ourselves in regards to others? Do we think we deserve acknowledgement, respect or admiration? When we are concerned about how others perceive us and not about how we can love and serve them, we are not being humble. As a church this also has implications for how we position ourselves in society. Do we desire acknowledgement, deference and brand recognition? Or do we position ourselves alongside those who need Good News and love and serve them regardless of how we are seen?

Mark is Project officer for Christian formation at the Uniting Church Queensland Synod. Find more grow faith resources by registering at abigyear.net

‘When we are concerned about how others perceive us and not about how we can love and serve them, we are not being humble’

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Travel guides for the Lenten journey



For many Uniting Church members Lent is a time for spiritual reflection and for participating in Bible study. Lent gives us a special focus in the journey towards Easter as we observe the death of Christ and the celebration of resurrection, writes **Neil Thorpe**.

In the early Church, Lent was a time of preparation for the baptisms which would take place during the Easter period. Today, the Uniting Church resource for the lectionary readings in 2013–2014 describes Lent as:

“A season of preparation and discipline that begins with Ash Wednesday and concludes at sundown on Holy Saturday, the day after Good Friday. During the 40 weekdays and six Sundays in Lent, the Church remembers the life and ministry of Jesus and renews its commitment to him in Christian discipleship.”

Lent is a time of deep reflection and re-commissioning to be a disciple. It is a time in the year when many Uniting Church communities make a special effort to offer studies that take us along the way with Christ towards Jerusalem and the cross. We are challenged to “take up the cross” (Matthew 10:38) and enter into a deeper discipleship.

By observing Lent in this way, we are joining with the many other churches across the world who also observe Lent. There is a sense of sharing together in faith as we focus on Jesus. UnitingWorld’s Lent Event is a good way to especially focus on

this aspect of Lent, with resources which provide information and ideas to support our partner churches in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

Lenten studies usually draw their biblical material from those passages associated with Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem and the events leading up to Easter including Good Friday and Easter Saturday.

There are many Lenten studies available. Congregations often develop their own for local use, but there are others widely available as well.

Whether you can join with others in your local setting or have to study alone, make Lent a time when you focus on Jesus, his ministry, teaching, sacrifice and death and consider your response to him as Lord and saviour.

*Neil is the Director of Pilgrim Learning Community
pilgrim.ucaqld.com.au*

Lent resources

Lent Event
lentevent.com

With you Always: Lenten Studies in Matthew’s Gospel
Robert Bos

Further resources recommended by the Uniting Church Assembly can be found at
tiny.cc/unitingresources

Lent for Everyone
NT Wright

The Last Week
Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan

Another Story Must Begin: A Lent Course Based on Les Misérables Jonathan Meyer



Photo: 20th Century Fox

12 Years a Slave

Directed by Steve McQueen
Starring Chiwetel Ejiofor,
Michael Fassbender,
Lupita Nyong'o
2013, MA15+

Fear and loathing in Louisiana

***12 Years a Slave*, directed by Steve McQueen is a raw depiction of slavery in antebellum America. The film is adapted from the 1853 book of the same name by Solomon Northup, a man who was born free but kidnapped and sold into slavery. His memoir was a bestseller in its time, but later fell into obscurity.**

His story is now an Oscar favourite; it is beautifully shot, featuring flawless performances by Chiwetel Ejiofor as Solomon and Michael Fassbender as plantation owner and slaveholder Edwin Epps. Truly outstanding is Kenyan actress Lupita Nyong'o's portrayal of Patsey, a slave girl caught hopelessly in the conflict between her master and his wife. It's both transfixing and arduous; the film is over two hours long, which feels excessive, although that's kind of the point. The camera lingers unflinchingly on the anguished faces of the slaves as if they are slavery itself personified, staring down the American public.

There's no shying away from the horrors faced by slaves in the American south. They are beaten, raped, tortured and hanged. How could this

happen? The hypocrisy of the slave trade is laid bare. Ford, Solomon's first master, and Epps, his second, preach to their slaves so as to lead them to salvation. But how can somebody rightfully own something—that is, someone—with an eternal soul? Epps quotes Luke 12:47 to justify his possession and treatment of slaves. The injustice presented here is a profoundly religious one, allowed to continue because people of faith were unable to see the humanity in those who are different.

The Canadian abolitionist, Bass is the only white character in the film to challenge the system. "Laws change," he says, "Social systems crumble. Universal truths are constant. It is a fact, it is a plain fact that what is true and right is true and right for all. White and black alike."

The last country to criminalise the ownership of slaves was Mauritania in 2007, although state-sanctioned inequality persists in many forms all over the world. *12 Years a Slave* is hard work, but a pertinent reminder to challenge injustice wherever it is found.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor



Positions Vacant – Committees, Commissions and Boards

Vacancies currently exist in a wide range of governance bodies across the spectrum of church activities.

The Uniting Church is seeking expressions of interest from people willing to volunteer their gifts, skills and experiences. We are particularly interested in hearing from people with expertise in human resources, property, finance, corporate governance, management, investment, accounting or law.

If you are interested in volunteering, please email your resumé outlining your gifts, skills and experiences to governance@ucaqld.com.au

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The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Thanking a colourful General Secretary



The Uniting Church Queensland Synod expresses its gratitude to Dr Shirley Coulson. **Mardi Lumsden** reports.

Uniting Church members from all over the country joined Dr Shirley Coulson for a moving service of the closure of her ministry as Queensland Synod General Secretary on 31 January.

Attendees included Assembly General Secretary Rev Terrence Corkin and Synod of NSW/ACT General Secretary Rev Dr Andrew Williams.

Past Moderator Rev Bruce Johnson spoke highly of the colour, movement and faithfulness Shirley brought to the role of General Secretary since she began in 2008.

"Shirley came among us and brought many gifts that have enhanced our Church's journey.

"Shirley brought colour," he laughed. "I never think of Shirley in black and white, and I know that not only has she brought colour to the Church as a whole, but she has brought colour into many individual lives.

"Shirley visited presbyteries and congregations sharing her passion for the *Together on the way* process and invited everyone to join us on this risky journey.

"On behalf of the Synod of Queensland I want to thank you Shirley for all that you have given us of your gifts, time and your very self. You have brightened our lives, helped us move on and encouraged us in prayer," he said.

Former Associate General Secretary Rev John Cox has been appointed General Secretary by a decision of the Synod Standing Committee to fill the vacancy which emerged upon Shirley's resignation.

John will serve in the role of Queensland Synod General Secretary up to and including the 31st Synod this October. Synod Standing Committee is reviewing the role of the General Secretary and will conduct a selection process with a view to bringing a name for consideration to the next Synod in Session.

Moderator Kaye Ronalds asks people to keep John in their thoughts.

"We pray for John as he takes up this position and I encourage you to give him every assistance as he seeks to serve the Synod Office and the wider Church," she says.

‘Shirley came among us and brought many gifts that have enhanced our Church’s journey’

Rev Bruce Johnson



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Extreme weather relief needed

In wake of the fires in Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria, the Uniting Church Assembly is asking for donations to the National Disaster Relief Fund, says National Disaster Recovery Officer, Rev Dr Stephen Robinson.

“We have well and truly entered into the weather-driven disasters of summer. Following the early fire emergency of October 2013 to the north and west of Sydney, this year has begun with record temperatures over extended periods across our southern states,” he says.

Dr Robinson asks the Uniting Church to remain prayerful for all concerned.

You can donate to the National Disaster Relief Fund at assembly.uca.org.au/donate

South Sudanese-Brisbane pastor home safely

Last month Moses Leth, pastor of the South Sudanese Nuer Faith Community in Coopers Plains, arrived home safely to his wife Elizabeth and their eight children.

What was largely a political dispute spiralled into a violent conflict on 15 December 2013, five days after Moses left Australia to spend Christmas with his extended family before beginning work on a children’s charity project. According to the United Nations, the re-ignition of this ethnically fuelled conflict between the Nuer and Dinka tribes has claimed the lives of thousands of civilians and left some 870 000 displaced.

“They went door-to-door in Juba and killed any Nuer civilian they found. I lost ten of my extended family members, among them were Tut Kang, a 5-year-old boy and Nyakuon Pal, a 14-year old girl,” said Moses.

The Nuer faith community gathered on 22 February to pray for peace in South Sudan.



Photo: Frontier Services

Calling all Australian Inland Mission Nurses

Frontier Services founder, Rev John Flynn once said that without women in the outback there would be no outback.

International Nurses Day is on 12 May and Frontier Services is calling former Australian Inland Mission Nurses to share a story or two. They are asking for photographs and brief biographies including your name, where you were stationed, and contact details.

Please contact Frontier Services by phone on 1 300 787 247, or at netta.k@frontierservices.org



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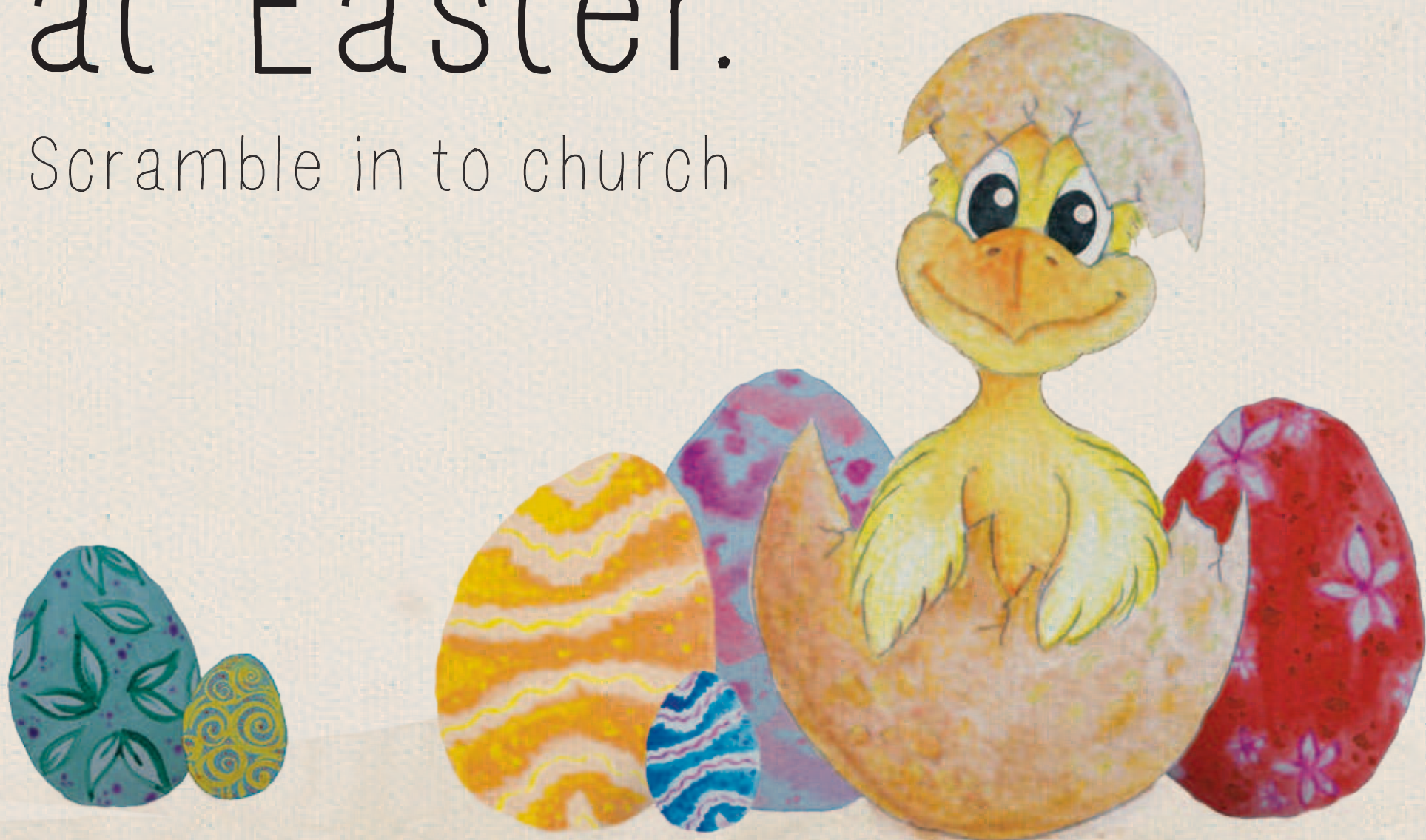
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