Digital duo just click

Weird ways to serve your church

Church calls for CSG moratorium
General Secretary
Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod

The Synod of Queensland is seeking a General Secretary to commence from November 2014.

The General Secretary provides collaborative leadership to develop the Synod's capacity for mission and ministry in partnership with presbyteries, congregations and agencies. The General Secretary leads Synod Support Services and exercises the responsibilities of Secretary to the Synod (as per Regulation 3.6.3.4).

Expressions of interest are encouraged in writing (email is appropriate) to the chair of the General Secretary Selection Committee Mrs Sharon Kirk.

For full details of the position including position description please go to personnelservices.ucaqld.com.au/vacancies. Please mark correspondence with the title General Secretary – Expression of Interest to Angela.Maskell-Drew@ucaqld.com.au or Mrs Sharon Kirk, GPO Box 674, BRISBANE QLD 4001

Applications close 2 June 2014.

The Australian Research Theology Foundation Inc.

Is inviting applications for grants for 2014/15.

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

Applications and all inquiries should be emailed to artfinc@gmail.com

Applications must be received by 31 May.

Further information regarding the foundation and details of the application process can be obtained directly from our website artfinc.org.au.

Notification of grants will be made from the end of July.

artfinc@gmail.com | artfinc.org.au

Position Vacant
Presbytery Minister

The Presbytery of Sydney North invites applications for appointment to the full-time position of Presbytery Minister for Ministry, Mission and Strategy.

The appointee to the position will provide key leadership to ensure the efficient execution of Presbytery responsibilities and the advancement of its mission strategy. The Presbytery Minister will be the Team Leader, for established and additional staff.

The position is a five year placement, as per the Regulations of the Uniting Church, and a residence will be provided should the appointee be a Specified Minister.

For a copy of the Position Description or further information contact Rev. David Gore, Presbytery Chairperson at davidgore@me.com

Applications should be sent to: Rev Jane Fry, Synod Associate Secretary, janef@nsw.uca.org.au, 02 8267 4452.

Applications close 30 May, 2014.

The applicant must hold or be willing to apply for a Working with Children Check Clearance. Only people with the right to work in Australia may apply for this position.

FULL TIME YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS PASTOR

Westbourne Park Uniting is a vibrant Christian community for all ages with a strong emphasis on Youth & Young Adults ministry. Our church community is in the inner suburbs of Adelaide.

We are seeking a person with passion and vitality to oversee and grow this area as an integral member of our ministry team.

Ideally you will have a heart for and interest in young people and their faith issues and journey. A strategic approach to raising and nurturing leaders is highly desirable.

For information about the position please contact the WPUC office by email wpuc@intermode.on.net or phone (08) 8271 7066. Applications should be addressed to Rev. Tony Eldridge.

Applications close Monday 26 May.
“Mission” is a funny word. When I was growing up we would describe difficult tasks as “a bit of a mission”, and if someone was looking for something they would say they were “on a mission” to find it.

If you are on a mission, it means you have a task assigned to you by somebody, and in the church that somebody is God. In church, mission is usually synonymous with “service”—by serving others we are serving God. In this sense, “mission” is very close to the idea of “vocation” or “calling”.

We often think of mission in the sense of digging wells, giving away Bibles or coordinating urban renewal projects, but following our mission can take other forms too. Our cover story (page ten) is about an American/Canadian duo who came to speak at Easterfest about their creative work. Neither one is an evangelist, but they have a strong sense that making art is an expression of God’s work in them. It’s part of their careers, but it’s also a service to their audience. It’s their mission.

What’s your mission? You might feel compelled to stand up for something you feel strongly about (page six). You could find a new way to be of service to your local church or community (page eight). Someone might want prayer or need a helping hand (page 15).

Perhaps you are already on a mission and you’ve just never thought about it that way. Let’s celebrate mission in all its forms.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor
From the Moderator

I have never spoken at a public rally before, but I was happy to lend my voice and prayers to support asylum seekers and refugees. But not everyone in the Uniting Church agrees with my point of view.

I certainly didn’t agree with all the people in the crowd, some of whom were wearing T-shirts with slogans I couldn’t support.

Nevertheless, it is worth celebrating that we live in a country where we are free to gather, to protest, to pray and to express our opinions publicly. That is not the experience of those who have left their homeland seeking sanctuary.

These issues were social and moral issues long before they became political issues. The prophet Zechariah put it this way, “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor.” Jesus called his followers to be light, salt and yeast.

So whether the conversation is about asylum seekers, coal seam gas or casino licences Christians can speak up for justice. We can influence the tone of the debates by not simply demonising the opponents. In addition we can be careful about the language we use because it shapes our thinking.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s when I was enjoying my free university education, I read a book by Jacques Ellul titled, Propaganda: the Formation of Men’s attitudes.

Ellul was a philosopher, historian and theologian influenced by the writings of socialist Karl Marx and two theologians Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth. Interesting mixture. He had a dramatic conversion and joined the Reformed Church of France. He continued to comment on social issues throughout his life.

Some writers make the distinction between the personal gospel and the social gospel. For Ellul, his encounter with the personal gospel spurred him on to pursue the social gospel. My journey of faith began as a very personal one as I committed my life to Christ. Along the way I have continued to invite others into that same relationship, but I have also felt stirred by the Spirit to work for justice in the public sphere.

The position of moderator provides a platform from which to speak into the public sphere and it is a great privilege, but I also miss the opportunities in congregational life to witness Jesus changing lives and transforming community.

Rev Billy Graham illustrates one who emphasised the personal gospel, while Rev Martin Luther King Jr characterises those who have emphasised the social gospel. Loren Mead, writer of Transforming Congregations for the Future, describes them both as evangelical giants. The richness of the Uniting Church is reflected in the many ways that people choose to live out and give voice to their relationship with Christ.

Rev Kaye Ronalds
Queensland Synod Moderator

Monday Midday Prayer
Reconciling God,
draw us into your embrace, so that we are strengthened to witness in faith and live out our hope in Jesus.
Amen

Moderator’s diary
17–18 May
North Queensland Presbytery meeting, Cairns
19 May
Official opening of Blue Care Toowoomba Community and Allied Health Centre
29 May
Reconciliation Action Plan launch at Kuril Dhagun, Queensland State Library, Brisbane
Churches key to Solomons’ recovery

Church aid workers in the Solomon Islands are struggling to care for tens of thousands of people affected by deadly flooding in early April. Mardi Lumsden reports.

Flash floods tore through the Solomon Islands’ capital Honiara and the Guadalcanal Province on 4 April after days of torrential rain, strong winds and rough seas, leaving up to 50,000 people homeless and reliant on international aid for food and shelter.

UnitingWorld’s Rev Dr Cliff Bird, Regional Coordinator—Pacific Programs, said almost half of the estimated 28 people killed were children.

“Quite a lot of people are still traumatised at the moment, because of the sudden impact of the loss of dearly loved members of the family and of the community,” Dr Bird told ABC Radio AM’s Brendan Trembath.

“The first step is, you know, basic needs; food, shelter, water, clothes,” he told AM.

Dr Bird said that amid a slow response from regional governments, local churches, including UnitingWorld partner church the United Church in Solomon Islands (UCSI), were playing an integral role in responding to the needs of affected communities, particularly the three UCSI congregations in the Honiara Circuit.

“All three congregations continue to cook dinner for three of the evacuation centres within Honiara. Funds for the meals are provided by the government and the congregations cook and serve dinner and hold evening prayers with the families in each of these centres. The total number of people in these three centres is between 800–850,” Dr Bird said on 16 April.

A 7.6 magnitude earthquake hit the Solomon Islands on 13 April and while there were no reports of significant damage, Greg Grimsich from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, told ABC news the quake could distract aid efforts in the worst-hit flood areas.

“There’s been a lot of effort put into the humanitarian response for the flood victims, who remain in evacuation centres, and support for them to return to their home areas,” he said.

The Solomon Islands National Disaster Management Office says a key concern is controlling the spread of dysentery, malaria, dengue fever and other diseases related to poor sanitation and a lack of fresh water supplies.

Support UnitingWorld relief efforts in the Solomons by calling 1800 998 122 or visiting unitingworld.org.au

Survivors of the flooding in Honiara still need support.
Photo: Cliff Bird
Fracking worries

As coal seam gas mining spreads across rural Queensland, landholders are feeling the stress. Bruce Mullan reports.

A third generation farmer from the Darling Downs looks across the land his grandfather cleared of brigalow scrub in 1908 to see his precious intensive grazing acres cut by roads, pipelines, open trenches and coal seam gas (GSG) mining development.

The Chinchilla farmer, who asked not to be named because he is in negotiation with lawyers and a mining company, is worried about his immediate and long-term future.

“I’m quite a bit past my retirement age and no one knows if these farms are going to sell with gas wells on them or not,” he said.

“I’ve talked to the Valuer General and he said, ‘We can’t give a value on the farms with the wells on because there haven’t been enough sales and we don’t know.’”

The long list of anxieties he shared also included water quality, salt, chemicals, interruption to his grazing business, noise and the visual ugliness of gas wells just 600 metres from his house.

“It’s a big imposition on our time and there is a mental imposition as you’re thinking about it all the time,” he said.

Creating space
In response to tensions in their community around coal seam gas mining, the Presbytery of the Downs has appealed to the Queensland Government to call a temporary halt to gas exploration permits and production licences, citing concerns about safety, fairness and a lack of conclusive evidence about the environmental impact.

Presbytery minister Sharon Kirk said the proposed moratorium would allow all stakeholders to assess the situation.

“We’re not taking sides; our churches contain people who are employed by the mining industry and those who are on the land and in rural communities,” says Sharon.

“We simply want to create a space where we can get the facts on the table, assess the real impacts and get all sides of the debate talking with each other.”

While acknowledging that mining has provided economic growth and employment, careers, and investment opportunities for many Australians, the Presbytery’s statement raises concerns about the continued rapid expansion of the industry in the absence of conclusive evidence about the range and magnitude of the impacts.

“The dangers associated with CSG mining processes and the rapid expansion of the industry are significant and potentially irreversible. To proceed with further CSG mining and expansion of the industry in the absence of definitive information is irresponsible,” the statement claims.

The statement reflects the ongoing concern across the Queensland Synod, with the Downs and the Central Queensland Presbyteries engaging with local communities and church agencies such as UnitingCare Community and Frontier Services expressing concerns about service delivery.

Feeling powerless
In a 2013 report on the impacts of mining and gas operations on its Queensland services, UnitingCare reported that those consciously linking their mental and emotional state to the mining and gas boom appear to feel an acute sense of powerlessness. This was particularly true for long-term residents and people on the land.

Uniting Church Leichhardt Patrol minister Rev Graham Slaughter’s ministry takes in part of the Surat geological basin, a major gas field region.

His engagement with the “blockies” of Tara, a disparate and generally disadvantaged community living on rural subdivisions, has provided him with first-hand knowledge of the issues.

Health problems are high on most people’s agenda, he says, ranging from concerns about noise, dust and traffic to the mining processes themselves, such as the extraction of potentially hazardous groundwater and air-borne chemicals left by the burning off of excess gas.

“They have what they call black rain and white rain which comes on their roofs and can get into their tank water. They can light their cattle troughs because of an increase in gas in the water.”
Graham believes that some concerns have been dismissed by the mining companies and the government because of the alternative lifestyle of many of the blockies.

He likens it to a David and Goliath scenario. “It’s the little people, the powerless people, are the ones caught in the middle and they are the ones who seem to be bearing the consequences.”

“This is where the church comes in, to stand with these people. They know we can’t fix everything but they know we are standing with them.”

Theodore Uniting Church Council Chair Ann Hobson also expressed concern about salts and other so-called “undetectable” amounts of various chemicals, extracted from “associated water”.

“A Santos spokesman told me three years ago that they expected to bring up 500,000 tonnes of salts from one field alone,” she said.

The Downs Presbytery statement recognises this impact. “Whilst mining has been beneficial to our nation, the Uniting Church also recognises that benefit has often come at a cost to the environment, personal and family relationships, rural communities and infrastructure.”

Uniting Church member and PhD candidate Chris Dalton is researching how an Australian theology of land can inform the public debate surrounding the coal seam gas industry and points to the poor track record of policy incrementalism to keep up with rapid industry growth.

He sees policy problems around the coal seam gas industry where governments are playing “catch-up” because the speed of development has outstripped their ability to regulate it.

Chris proposes that the land be recognised as having status in its own right and being vitally interconnected with the human community.

“Land should be respected, valued and related to in terms of its own intrinsic worth, rather than just being objectified as the source of minerals and the garden for agricultural produce, a ‘magic pudding’ that feeds economic development,” he says.

Read the Downs Presbytery statement at ucaqld.com.au/social-justice/key-issues/mining

What is coal seam gas mining?

Coal seam gas is primarily made up of methane and is found in coal seams at depths of between 200 and 1000 metres. Together with shale gas and tight gas, the methane is typically extracted by drilling a well vertically through rock and accelerated by hydraulic fracturing, more commonly known as “fracking”. This process involves injection of sand, water and chemical additives including acids, salts, lubricants and anti-corrosives at high pressure into the coal seam allowing the gas to flow to the surface of the well.

Whilst the gas industry maintains that this kind of gas extraction is safe and clean and has significant economic benefits, opponents express strong concerns about the impacts of fracking operations on land, water and human health. The process uses millions of litres of water, significant quantities of chemical additives and produces large volumes of waste water which can contain a range of contaminants.

In Australia the state owns anything of value under the surface of the land and the landholder does not receive royalties. The landholder may receive some compensation for providing access to mining and energy companies that want to explore and mine on their land. However, thousands of farmers and environmentalists have joined together in the Lock the Gate Alliance formed in 2010 by people raising concerns about the rapid expansion of coal and coal seam gas development. Farmers declared they would “lock their gates” to these industries.

In March the NSW government announced a six-month freeze until 26 September on processing new applications for coal seam gas exploration licences, and the cost of applying will soar from $1000 to $50,000. This is to allow an audit of existing licences and pending applications to be carried out before a new assessment-and-allocation regime is put in place.
 weird ways to serve your church

Did you think serving the church only involves greeting people at the door or pouring cups of tea? Here’s some ways to serve you might not have thought about.

1 Update your church sign
This is one of your church’s most valuable assets, which makes the person with the stepladder and the box of plastic letters pretty important. Your church sign sends an instant message to passers-by about why people trickle in and out of the building during the week and mill about drinking tea in frocks on Sundays. A good sign might even make passers-by want to join in.

2 Pick people up for church
Would you leave grandma out when you had a family dinner? The church is a family, so it’s not complete unless all the members are present. For those people who are housebound, being picked up lets them know they still belong.

3 Be on a board
If you are from the corporate world, from small business or work in the public service you might not think your skills are particularly churchy—but that’s not so! By applying to be on a Uniting Church board, you can bring an important perspective to how the Uniting Church functions. These groups discern how the church is best run and how we engage with our agencies and schools. You can make a difference!

4 Knitting something
Church knitting groups might look pretty harmless, but these knitters can be a powerhouse for mission. Not only do they produce awesome, useful items, they draw in people from all over and wrap them in a cocoon of hospitality and comfort. They’ll even teach you to knit (which is cool now), and if you can’t join, donate wool!

5 Be a member of Synod or Assembly
The Synod in Session and the Assembly are the key decision-making bodies of the Uniting Church. They are vibrant communities of faith which should represent every part of our church from every corner of the state or the country. Sometimes we need to see the bigger picture to be reminded of the enormous scope of the Uniting Church in Australia.

6 Thank your musicians
These people are real troopers. They come in early to set up, get criticised for playing too fast or too slow, and they have to accompany people determined to sing at their own pace anyway. Without them we would have longer sermons and no opportunity to stand up and stretch our legs. They also create moments where we can connect with God in a different way. Not everyone can pick up an instrument, but everyone can say thanks.

7 Be a webmaster
Your church website is the face of your congregation, but if the information isn’t up to date it can make a bad first impression. The first thing most people do when they want to learn about your congregation is google you. Does your church have someone to give the website some tender loving care? Whether young or not so young, it’s easy to learn and a vital part of ministry in the digital age, making new people and visitors feel welcome.

ucaqld.com.au/get-involved
Everyone wants to make a difference but that is easier said than done. “Recovering hypocrite” Rev Dr Schalk Pienaar explains that to change the world we should reform ourselves, not others.

“In which area of life have you failed the most?” This challenging question was asked in a fellowship group and everyone had an opportunity to provide an answer.

I have failed in many areas, but when it came to my turn to provide an answer, it didn’t take long for me to surface one of the areas of my deepest failure—namely the area of relationships.

In the early years of my ministry I tended to barge into parishioners’ lives and cause unnecessary hurt. I had ready answers and easy solutions for the problems of living that are part of every person’s life.

At the same time, however, I neglected my own family through compulsive overwork. I consoled myself that I was doing this for the sake of the kingdom; in reality it was for my own selfish ends. I discovered that the easy answers I was dispensing to others didn’t seem to work in my own life.

Character flaws such as mine are common and come in many different shapes, such as the need to control, explosive tempers, selfishness, racial prejudice, deep-seated untruthfulness and many more. Regardless of the shape they take, they damage us and those closest to us.

Jesus had some tough words for people like me: “You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Matthew 7:5

Fortunately a wise minister took me aside and said, “Schalk, there is another way”. I was keen to learn this way, for it is really difficult to be a dedicated hypocrite.

He pointed me to the way of Jesus as the way to “remove the plank out of my own eye”.

The way of Jesus, I discovered, is the journey from self-interest to compassion and from self-righteousness to mercy. This reflects the heart of Jesus and is the way of true freedom.

So I signed up to the way of Jesus and became a recovering hypocrite. Recovering hypocrites understand the truth that God’s call is for us to reform ourselves and not others. For when we reform ourselves, we do so for the sake of others.

With our eyes on a hurting world, helped by fellow pilgrims, guided by biblical truth and prompted by the Spirit, we can become truly “other-centred” and add new life to a hurting world.

Schalk Pienaar is the minister at Kawana Waters Uniting Church
Find more grow faith resources by registering at abigyear.net

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. Matthew 7:5
After several years, I’ve seen that making God-honouring content instead of God-specific content casts a much wider net in terms of who I can positively influence for Christ.

Shawna Howson

If you are an artist, you no longer need a studio or professional broadcast equipment to get your work seen. Now, almost anyone with an internet connection can use social media to make and distribute whatever they like without relying on traditional ways to connect with audiences.

“Social media is controlled by the user instead of a corporation,” says Shawna Howson, writer, poet and video maker from Ontario, Canada. “All kinds of art is being freely shared through the internet in ways that are rapidly changing and growing.”

Tessa Violet frequently collaborates with Shawna on her video content. Tessa lives in Nashville, Tennessee and is a musician with a rapidly growing fan base. Neither one of them took the traditional route to promote their work, instead opting to distribute and market their art via social media.

Before starting on YouTube they were completely unknown, but now together they distribute to nearly a million people, and their videos have been viewed more than 200 million times in total. In addition to touring around the United States, this year Tessa and Shawna were invited to appear at Easterfest, an arts festival in Toowoomba.

Value of art

Creating things has always been a passion for both Shawna and Tessa. They are probably best known for making music videos and “vlogs”—video diary entries documenting their progress as they travel, or shoot on set. These smaller videos have taught them the skills to take on bigger and more complex projects.

“I started on YouTube when I was 17,” says Tessa. “At my high school you have to do a senior project to graduate—20 hours of work in a field of your

Digital duo just click

value

In today's rapidly changing media landscape, a new wave of writers, musicians and filmmakers are finding their voice and connecting with audiences in ways never seen before. Rohan Salmond spoke to Shawna Howson and Tessa Violet, a creative pair invited to speak and perform at Easterfest.
choice. I was going to Hong Kong that summer and decided I would do a video blog to document it. “My videos were so boring then; no one was watching but I loved doing it so much. So when I graduated high school I started vlogging almost weekly and that’s when it became a consistent creative outlet in my life.”

Shawna says making things is central to her identity. “Initially I didn’t make a decision to target a mainstream audience, I just made things because it is important for me as a person, and a Christian, to create things—that’s how I was made.

“I want to show young Christian artists that it’s okay to just create and to let God work in and through you without feeling the pressure to have every piece of art point directly to Christ.

“Art has intrinsic value; it isn’t just a portal for the gospel. Art is meant to convey truths, and because I believe the gospel is truth then it certainly bleed through.

“Every piece of art isn’t about the ultimate truth (the gospel), and that’s okay, because we are creative beings who are meant to create all kinds of things for different purposes and for the glory of God, just like our creator.

“After several years, I’ve seen that making God-honouring content instead of God-specific content casts a much wider net in terms of who I can positively influence for Christ,” she says.

Radical connections
The new ways social media allows artists to interact with audiences has connected radically different people with each other, leading to changed lives.

“I think honesty is so important,” says Tessa. “Life is good and bad and it’s helpful to get to discuss both the light and the dark.

“It feels really good to get to be honest and vulnerable like that,” she says. “Christian or non-Christian, the human experience is a frustrating one and I think everyone can relate to that.”

Shawna and Tessa have also been impacted by this process of connection. Overt evangelism has never been part of either of their goals, but Shawna’s consistent, positive presence within her online community allowed barriers to be broken down for Tessa. The pair met on YouTube in 2008.

“I used to think Christians were all crazy or stupid,” says Tessa. “But when I met Shawna I thought, ‘Oh wow you’re so normal.’

“She’s just such a critical thinker and I kept meeting more and more Christians and they were all so creative and so interesting, so I started asking questions and that was the beginning of my journey toward Christ.”

The pair rarely make content with explicitly Christian messages, but they are well-known in their community for the matter-of-fact way they talk about their faith. From time to time they even hold informal Bible studies at conventions or stream them online.

“I’ve had such a positive response from my audience about my faith and the content I make and how it has helped them spiritually and emotionally,” says Shawna.

“My faith is an integral part of who I am, how I think, and how I see the world. It definitely comes through in my content, the way I see the world and how I present myself in it.”

Because you’re worth it
Shawna and Tessa draw a diverse crowd, but they are especially popular with teenage girls.

“I’m really encouraged by the young women watching my content,” says Shawna. “Connecting with that demographic is all about honesty and sincerity; they’re a group that’s used to being sold to and they’re sick of it. I love that they identify with fresh, complex or strange ideas that they can feel challenged by or identify with.”

Tessa is especially enthusiastic about her viewers.

“I’m a big fan of my female teenage audience,” she says. “I like to cheer for them and their mental health, and especially encouraging young women to be creative and find their worth in better things.”

Discussions about self-worth often come up in their vlogs and Q&A sessions; something both women feel strongly about.

“Lately I’ve been extra aware of the impulse to let my worth get tangled up in what I create. Sometimes I feel like if I write a really good song then that means I am really good. If I can’t come up with anything then I must not be very valuable.

“But Jesus tells us that we will succeed and fail, but those actions do not affect how incredibly valuable and loved we are by God. Our worth isn’t based in our actions but based in God alone.

“It’s really freeing to come back to that knowledge. It untangles me from the fear of failure—and the pride in success—and allows me to just make things for the enjoyment of making them.”

Onward
Despite attempts to move to the same city to work together on projects on a more permanent basis, Tessa and Shawna have struggled to obtain a Canadian or American work visa.

“Governments have little understanding or sympathy for independent creators in the arts, which means we’re currently living in different places,” says Shawna. “Luckily, we see each other every few months at conventions or on projects.

“Opportunities are starting to appear for us to travel and create together professionally, and we’re both looking forward to what comes of that. Tessa is enjoying pursuing music with all that she has at the moment and I am trying to do the same with film.

“It’s very scary and frustrating a lot of the time, but we’re both trusting that the Lord will take us where we need to be.”

Shawna Howson’s poetry anthology, Isomniatic Dreams is available at tinyurl.com/insomniaticdreams.
Her videos can be found at youtube.com/nanalew
Tessa Violet’s first album, Maybe Trapped Mostly Troubled is available now via iTunes. Her videos can be found at youtube.com/meekakitty
Cornerstones and stumbling blocks
What’s your mission blueprint?

Thinking about making a few changes to your church facilities—perhaps updating the kitchen or building a new hall? Dianne Jensen looks at church redevelopment.

Many Queensland congregations faced with ageing infrastructure or changing demographics have made the decision to redevelop their facilities, with some outstanding examples of clever design generating new ministries. Others have chosen to transform existing areas, creating multi-use zones or turning underutilised areas into community spaces.

As any redevelopment team member will attest, bringing projects to a successful conclusion requires stout hearts and a commitment to keeping the vision alive throughout the long process. A good outcome also depends on a shared understanding of the congregation’s mission in the local community.

Uniting Church members Narelle and Craig Mercer have provided architectural and town planning services to many congregations through their consulting firm Mercer & Mercer.

“The mission statement is a crucial part of the process,” says Narelle. “If every congregation understood clearly what they are trying to do in their community and in their own congregation, it would start to inform their decisions about what to do and flow on to the property decisions they make.”

Shared vision
Rev Melissa Lipsett is Executive Minister at Newlife Uniting Church on the Gold Coast, which has just completed a major redevelopment. She says that the mission statement played a vital role in helping the congregation plan the new facility.

“The mission statement provides the vision—so that everyone knows what they are working toward. The Newlife congregation understood that we needed to extend our facilities to provide empty chairs for those who were yet to come. Shared responsibility for this vision meant a shared commitment to sacrificially contribute to that vision.”

Understanding the mission priorities of the congregation enabled the redevelopment team to make choices about what was most important.

“Newlife worked hard to decide what was worth compromising about and what wasn’t. We have a beautiful space in which to worship God, but we also have modern, clean facilities for our children and young families. Community gathering space was an important part of the redevelopment and we are thrilled with the undercover courtyard space and adjacent playground that enables people to come together in all weather. Good technology—including excellent audio and vision technology—is expensive so it’s really important to get it right, but doing so will pay dividends.”

The Lifeworks Glenvale project in Toowoomba has been a long time in the development phase since the initial go-ahead in 2002 to purchase a 10-acre parcel of land. The multi-million dollar project involves selling a number of church properties, with the stage one Outside School Hours Care service and worship facilities due for completion in May 2015. The second stage will feature a dedicated worship space.

Rev Tim Griggs, Lifeworks Uniting Church team leader, says the church mission statement was a key factor in guiding the congregation.

“The genesis of the project was the realisation that while the city was bursting at the western seams, our congregation was sitting virtually in the city centre, close to other Uniting Church congregations. Mixed in with the fact that our current facilities were not meeting the needs or goals of our Christian Outside School Hours Care service, it became obvious that we couldn’t stay where we are, that we needed to move our base to Glenvale.”

Any major project “must be done from a clear and shared missional goal: providing a space and opportunity to engage with God and with the community in a meaningful and relational way,” says Tim.
Lifeworks building project team member Derek Curnow adds that congregations also need to consider the spiritual commitment of members, the commitment of church and project leaders, and the strength and stability of their budget before embarking on redevelopment.

For the Uniting Church congregations at Fernvale and Lowood, the decision to come together in a new facility was driven by the recognition that the existing buildings, only nine kilometres apart, would soon require significant maintenance. Given the booming residential developments in the area, the facilities had limited capacity for growth.

West Moreton Group minister Rev Brian Kickbusch says that one of the mission priorities for the church was connecting with the local community.

“This influenced the design in a number of ways. The general design is open and welcoming and sits very well within the town landscape, and a kitchen was included to a standard that would allow for catering for community use of the facilities.”

The congregation wanted to grow their children and youth ministries and to encourage differing styles of worship, but also wanted to be able to expand the church seating for larger services and community events, so their final design called for an attached hall which would incorporate up-to-date technology.

The new church, constructed by members of the church and the community, sits proudly on the corner of the Brisbane Valley Highway in Fernvale.

Janise Phipps, an elder and one of the team who undertook the actual building, adds that “unexpected success has come in the form of increased regular attendances at Sunday services, possibly because of the high visibility of the church.”

**Getting started**

The first thing to understand before plugging in the nail gun or engaging architects is that, in a legal sense, the Uniting Church in Australia Property Trust (Q.) is the owner of all Uniting Church property and resources in Queensland. It holds the property for the beneficiaries, who are the members of the church and users of those properties.

Stephen Peake, Queensland Synod Property Resources Manager, explains that because the Uniting Church is an unincorporated body, the Property Trust is the only legal entity into which assets can be vested, and which can enter into contracts.

“But it’s more than just a legal construct,” he says. “It relates to our understanding of the Uniting Church as a collaborative organisation made up of inter-conciliar relationships between diverse groups of people.”

And although the regulatory process through presbytery and synod can sometimes “feel like a handbrake” to congregations keen to get started, Stephen says that it provides an important period of discernment for all stakeholders, and is critical from a whole-of-church risk management perspective.

**Don’t get tripped up**

The regulatory process also allows proper oversight of changes to church property, especially in terms of compliance with town planning and building regulations.

Narelle Mercer says that not understanding the implications of making changes to facilities is a common pitfall.

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**Keep the vision alive**

If this all seems too difficult, Melissa Lipsett reminds congregations that keeping the vision alive, constantly communicating progress, and prayerful support will get you through.

“We love our new facility! We have been able to provide extra space—empty chairs that represent a person known to and loved by God—and thanks to the grace of God those chairs are filling up!”

For more information about property development or building regulations contact 3377 9838 or property@ucaqld.com.au
Throughout an otherwise tumultuous childhood, God's love could be found in a grandmother's gentle mothering care, writes Jenny Noble.

I am told I started living with Gramma from age three. I can remember being on her farm before that, and I was definitely in her care by my first year of primary school. A dysfunctional marriage coupled with alcohol set the scene for my parents' very rocky relationship and many years of heartache.

But at Gramma’s place peace reigned. We would spend months and months in Gramma’s care—and then be pulled back into the family home for short periods of time as my parents tried hard to work things out. I lived with an old cardboard school port under the bed packed with my treasures ready to flee back to the sanctuary that was my grandparents’ home at a moment’s notice.

Memories of that home, and it was a home, were wet days making cubby houses over the lounge with blankets and sunny days running under the sprinkler in the late evening. There were the same rituals every day: “Have you got a hanky? Have you brushed your teeth? God bless and see you tonight.” These words have followed me throughout my life.

We said grace at every meal, and while it was not a particularly “preachy” home, I could feel God’s presence in Gramma’s life in strong but gentle ways.

Attendants at church and women’s guild were a given. Gramma still has her Bible and a devotional book of some sort near her bed. God and his presence are so natural to her that without having to preach, Gramma taught me what living with God really meant.

Gramma’s mothering continued into my teenage years, into my sometimes “wild-child” years, and then into marriage and settling down. Like all good mothers she has journeyed with my family through the good and the bad times.

I recently attended a retreat day where the theme was “Do you gaze at those around you in love as our Father gazes at his beloved children, or do you glare at them in your humanity?”

I honour my Gramma every Mother’s Day for constantly mirroring God’s gaze over my life. Even though she is now in care, her mothering is still a part of our conversations. As I have strive to raise my children in a home of love and peace, I thank God for Gramma’s example.

Jenny Noble is a member of Middle Ridge Uniting Church, Toowoomba and a Blue Care Chaplain.

Jenny’s grandmother is 108 years old and a member of Clayfield Uniting Church.
Hospitals care with praying hands

Last month Brisbane’s Wesley Hospital launched a program that will enable all UnitingCare Health hospital staff to pray for patients, no matter their job. Ashley Goetze reports.

Dubbed the Praying Hands initiative, staff identified by a green and yellow Praying Hands badge can now answer prayer requests from patients as they go about their daily tasks.

“We’re the first hospital in the world that we know of to do this,” says the Wesley Hospital Pastoral Care Manager, Rev Murray Fysh.

“We wanted to send a message that prayer and the involvement in faith and how that might relate to a person’s health is everyone’s concern.”

Aware of the strict professional limitations surrounding praying for patients, three years ago Murray and his team set out to find a way staff could pray for patients within these restrictions.

“If a person asks you it’s fine, but you don’t offer,” says Murray, “so here’s an opportunity for some of our staff to interact on that spiritual level with patients.”

Multi-denominational and multi-faith, the Praying Hands initiative is founded on the belief that engagement in spirituality has a positive effect on a patient’s recovery.

“In a congregation I’d get a faith conversation about two or three times a year; here I get two or three a day. It’s radically different,” says Murray.

Rolled out across the Wesley, St Andrew’s War Memorial Hospital and the Sunshine Coast Private Hospital, the Praying Hands initiative has so far enabled 45 newly trained hospital staff to bring their passion for prayer into their sometimes grim work environment.

“We don’t want prayer to just be part of the Holy Roller Empire: the pastoral care team; it needs to be everyone and not just chaplains,” says Murray.

These extra hands are invaluable to the Wesley Hospital’s 38 chaplains who are spread thin trying to cover the 522 registered beds and an ever-growing list of staff referrals.

“We’re just going real slowly,” says Murray, “It took us three years to get it together and there’s no race to the end.”

unitingcarehealth.com.au

“We don’t want prayer to just be part of the Holy Roller Empire”

Rev Murray Fysh
This is a book the church really needs.

Many people in our communities are affected by mental illness of one kind or another, but how do our church communities respond? This book identifies people who fall through the gaps or are even damaged by contact with churches and looks at what can be done about it.

Let’s look at some Australian statistics: 45 per cent of people aged between 16 and 85 will experience mental illness at some stage in their lives; one in five people will experience mental illness during this year; 14 per cent of children and adolescents aged 12–17 years have mental health problems. Mental illness is commonplace and usually treatable, from depression and anxiety to schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

American author Amy Simpson has lived the story herself. She recounts her family’s struggle to survive when her mother developed schizophrenia. Her father was a pastor and her family strongly rooted in Christian life. This story is bravely told, as every family member suffered deeply and struggled long and hard to make sense of the pain and confusion they have felt over so many years in relation to their local church.

Troubled Minds helps us understand mental illness, how people are affected, how churches commonly respond and what can be done about it. Amy draws on eye-opening surveys of pastors, research and the stories of many people she has met to explain how and why churches so often fail people with mental illness, their families and friends.

Amy thoroughly explores the prevailing stigma that surrounds mental illness. Stigma is harmful and makes people unnecessarily fearful: people affected by mental illness, ministers and church members. This book explores strategies for addressing stigma, welcoming people and supporting them. It honestly and thoughtfully recognises and addresses the challenges in responding to people whose needs may be intensive, intrusive, long-term and difficult to fit into congregational life.

Amy Simpson expresses the hope “that the church will be synonymous with hope in the minds of people who can find hope nowhere else.” What a challenge!

Sue Hutchinson
Research Officer, Queensland Synod
Schizophrenia Awareness Week runs from 11 to 17 May.
Adapting written works to the screen is as old as cinema itself. It’s a difficult process in which conveying the core of the story is balanced against preserving the details of the original text. What works on paper does not usually work on screen, so the original work needs to be reinterpreted and retold in a new way for a new medium. Often the adapted work is a success when taken on its own merits, but fails when measured against expectations held by fans of the original.

Adapting biblical stories for visual retelling is even harder. Viewers are not just fans, they are followers. If the retelling undermines the expectations of this audience it can be construed as a personal attack. This is the challenge faced by *Noah*.

Many Christian film critics have panned *Noah* for embellishing the biblical text. In fact, director Darren Aronofsky has called it “the least biblical film ever made”. It is unusual—often alarming—yet *Noah* still demonstrates genuine affection for the source material and an understanding of its themes and complex implications. It explores deep, religious questions about justice and mercy, as well as God’s relationship to humankind and humankind’s relationship to the earth.

Every character is fully fleshed out; good and evil reside in everyone—even the titular character.

Noah (Russell Crowe) isn’t the paragon of righteousness and certainty he is commonly portrayed to be, and many of those killed in the flood are portrayed sympathetically. This will rankle some viewers, as will some of the film’s more outlandish aspects inspired by folklore or drawn from apocryphal sources.

It’s not that *Noah* takes more liberties with the text than, say, Mark Burnett’s mini-series *The Bible*, which was received positively by Christian audiences. Both are reinterpreted works with their own slant, highlighting some aspects of the story while changing others. While *The Bible* played into expectations, *Noah* challenges them. It is bolder and takes more risks, and it is willing to ask challenging questions about life and faith. It also shakes the kitschy, Christmas pageant vibe *The Bible* suffered from.

There’s real imagination at work here, and plenty of material for Bible study discussion. Aronofsky’s *Noah* is a solid and vibrant reimagining which cuts to the theological heart of the biblical story.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor
Volunteers share the chaplaincy load

May is the month of Chaplaincy Sunday and National Volunteer Week. Ashley Goetze speaks with two Uniting Church volunteer chaplains about their sector’s needs.

Health care, aged care, education, police and emergency services, defence, tourism, human services and sport and recreation are the seven formal sectors of chaplaincy found within the Uniting Church.

Need and calling draw out volunteer chaplains who, along with their paid counterparts, fulfil the church’s vision to express ministry into the community and journey alongside people who don’t necessarily own faith.

“It’s different from a usual work position in that you stay for as long as you’re needed,” says St Andrew’s War Memorial Hospital chaplain, Gail Ayre.

Gail, a former nurse, became involved at St Andrew’s in Brisbane after experiencing the comforting presence of a chaplain first hand.

“My husband [Clive] had heart surgery there back in 2003. Things didn’t go quite right and I was pretty upset … so to just be given that support and know someone cares … it’s very important,” says Gail.

Community, purpose and the opportunity to help others drew Gail out of retirement and into volunteer chaplaincy. The UnitingCare Hospital and Prison Ministry chaplaincy teams are always on the lookout for qualified volunteers.

“I know that at St Andrew’s we’re pretty light on,” says Gail. “I’m the only volunteer at this stage and so it’s been important to help spread the load.”

Following the Chaplaincy Commission’s vision to grow chaplaincy as a healthy and sustainable part of the church, new online courses are on offer at Trinity Theological College to include regional and remote Queenslanders in chaplaincy education.

For more information about participating in a Certificate IV in Pastoral Care, contact John Coles or Lynne Gibson at ttce@ucaqld.com.au or 3377 9821.

Chaplaincy Sunday is 25 May

Being able to bring hope into a place of despair, that’s what we do

Greg Tschernez

Queensland Synod chaplaincy educator Lynne Gibson works with Cert IV Pastoral Care students online and in the classroom. Photo: Holly Jewell
Queensland Synod Moderator, Rev Kaye Ronalds speaks at the Brisbane rally for asylum seeker and refugee rights.

Photo: Tim Bennett

Uniting Church promotes interfaith relationships

On 10 April the Queensland Synod Interfaith Relationships Committee hosted a gathering with the Toowoomba Goodwill Committee at the Uniting Church Centre in Auchenflower.

The Toowoomba Goodwill Committee works to develop strategies to make Toowoomba a model city of peace and harmony. Members of the committee include leaders from various faith and community organisations.

At the gathering, eight people from the Uniting Church in Brisbane sat down with people from Indigenous, Buddhist, Baha’i and Islamic backgrounds and from no particular faith tradition. Much talk, listening, laughter, food and interesting questions were shared and a basis built for ongoing friendships.

UnitingWorld clean water appeal

This month UnitingWorld launches their biggest appeal of 2014 to provide clean water and sanitation for communities in the Pacific, Asia and Africa. All donations will be combined with an Australian Government Aid grant to make the gifts go further.

Please consider giving a family a chance to access clean water by giving a donation to the clean water appeal before June 30.

Donations can be made at unitingworld.org.au/water or by calling 1800 998 122.

To the editor

Regarding Rev Mel Perkins’ comments (Journey, April 2014, pages 6 and 7).

The Easter story doesn’t disturb me. The way the church interprets it does.

I agree with Rev Peter Lockhart that we are “almost obsessed with the sin and death part” of the Easter story. I am frustrated by the doom and gloom of Easter—especially Tenebrae services and the “defeat” of Good Friday. Easter Sunday is happy enough, but my question is, why aren’t all our Easter services happy and victorious?

Many years ago a minister ended his sermon with, “At the crucifixion, the angels were aghast and the fiends from hell rejoiced.” I asked him, shouldn’t it be the other way around? After some thought, he was grinning like a Cheshire cat, which I took as agreement. If it is all right for the angels (aware of the bigger picture) to rejoice in the victory of the cross all through Easter, why isn’t it right for us?

Sincerely,

June Ehrenberg
Nambour Uniting Church

Submission guidelines for letters to the editor can be found at journeyonline.com.au
Blue Care would like to thank our dedicated volunteers who have contributed their time and services to our residents and clients.

The invaluable support provided by our volunteers has a significant and positive impact on the quality of life of our clients and residents.

THANK YOU TO OUR DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS!

To find out how you can become a Blue Care volunteer contact your local Blue Care service or visit our website: