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QUEENSLAND SYNOD

June 2014

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Journey

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Okay, what's next?

Have you ever had one of those moments when something happens or you find out something new and all you can do is ask, "Well what do I do now?"

Coming to faith in Jesus is a moment like this, and if you talk to an activist they will usually describe a turning-point that propelled them down the path they now tread. These are pivotal, life-changing moments which trigger a choice: "Will I keep going the way I was before, or will I let this moment transform me?"

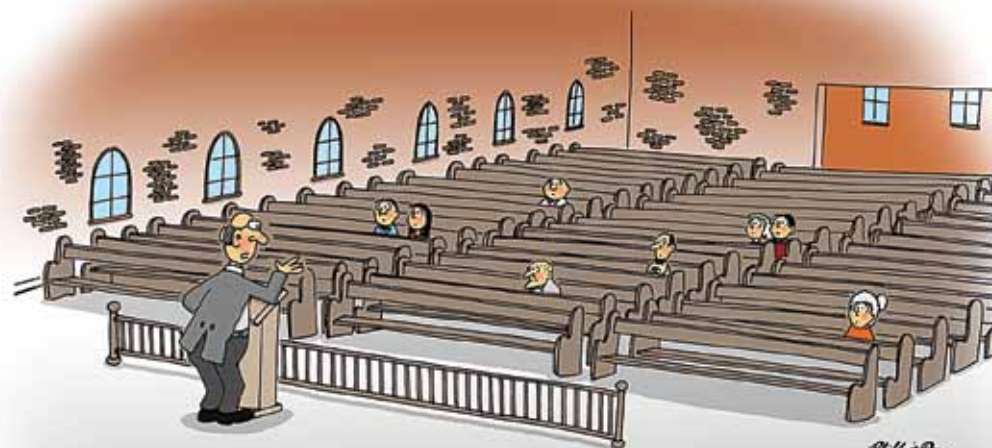
The Bible is littered with these moments. In fact, you'll find at least one in just about any story you are told. They're central to how we understand the world and how we understand ourselves.

Two stories in this month's edition made me think about these moments. The first can be found on page six, where we ask, "*Destiny Together* has happened—what now?" The members of the 13th Assembly in Adelaide in 2012 passionately stood alongside our Indigenous brothers and sisters calling for justice, and that passion was further expressed at the *Destiny Together* vigil in Canberra earlier this year. How do we continue that momentum? How do we keep that flame alive? What's next?

The other story, about the Uniting Church national census, can be found on page 12. There was some unease surrounding the results of the census, and some worry that they could wind up demoralising Uniting Church congregations. But these results aren't just a warning; they are also an opportunity, which is something the Moderator explores in her column on page four. Where are we really succeeding? Can we serve people better? Are there difficult changes we should make?

Transformational moments contain a challenge and a promise. May there be many more as our story unfolds!

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor



ON OUR CHURCH'S ANNIVERSARY, I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE TO TALK ABOUT HOW WE, AS A CONGREGATION, ARE DEALING WITH THE URBAN GROWTH IN OUR AREA, AND I'LL ASK THE QUESTION, "HOW MUCH LONGER CAN WE ENDURE THIS OVERCROWDING?"

Time to change gears

When our daughter was back in Australia for her wedding in February, her new husband offered to do the grocery shopping. Sitting in front of the computer in our home he made his order online and arranged for it to be delivered to their home in London just a few hours after their plane landed.

People now have many choices about how to do their shopping and some corner shops stand empty. But that doesn't mean that people have stopped shopping. They are doing it differently.

Last century many congregations built small timber churches to service the needs of their neighbourhood, but now people have lots of choices about how they maintain their faith. Worship, witness and service don't look the way they used to!

Small, strong congregations can make an enormous impact on their communities. Yet there remains a tension between maintaining the old buildings and giving up the patterns of church life from a former era in order to embrace new missional directions.

The house churches described in the Book of Acts would have seemed like an innovation compared with the familiar patterns of synagogue worship.

I recently attended the Trans-Tasman Moderators' gathering in New Zealand. The Moderator of

the Aotearoa New Zealand Presbyterian Church provided us with statistics gathered across their congregations.

Worship attendance is down, some congregations rely on rental income of unused manses or church halls in order to pay the stipends of ministry agents. Several congregations have sold property and live off the interest. Their statistics match the Uniting Church in Australia.

We wondered together whether it is a sin for congregations to hold on to funds that were gifted by generous and faithful members of a different era. What does it tell us about being faithful stewards and trusting God to provide the resources for mission in this time and place?

Some congregations are re-shaping the way they connect with their communities in creative ways, but we are often shy about inviting people to contribute money for the innovative missions in local areas. If we believe that "money follows mission" then we should not be shy of asking people to share in the good work, that faith in action, that we are doing.

Perhaps it is time to change gears. How can we use the momentum on the decline to help us get up the hill on the other side?

Rev Kaye Ronalds
Queensland Synod Moderator

Monday Middy Prayer

*God in Christ,
may your Holy Spirit guide us as
we imagine our future together
in your church.
Amen*

Moderator's diary

3 June

Week of Prayer for Christian
Unity ecumenical service
Sacred Heart Catholic
Church, Paddington

6 June

Queensland Day Reception
at Government House

30 June

President's Ministers'
Conference in Charleville

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Budget challenges most vulnerable

The 2014 Budget was a major concern for the Uniting Church and its agencies.
Mardi Lumsden reports.

The federal government's 2014 Budget was met with frustration and concern by many different parts of the Uniting Church in Australia in May.

Uniting Church President Rev Dr Andrew Dutney said the church's main concern is how Australia's most vulnerable are affected by the tough changes.

"Cutting more than half a billion dollars from Indigenous programs, tough new conditions for youth support, and making all Australians pay to see a doctor are just a few of a number of measures that have the potential to harm those who really need our help," he said.

"The federal government must be true to its word that this Budget supports the most vulnerable and provides equality of opportunity. It is unjust that the most vulnerable Australians should bear the pain of economic reform."

UnitingWorld National Director Rob Floyd said the Uniting Church's Relief and Development arm has expressed bitter disappointment that the government has made its biggest cuts in the Budget to foreign aid.

"The government has broken its promise on overseas aid by reneging on the bipartisan commitment to lift aid levels to 0.5 per cent of gross national income," said Mr Floyd. "These cuts come at the expense of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, many of whom live in our Asia-Pacific region."

UnitingCare Australia represents one of the largest networks of social service providers in Australia. National Director Lin Hatfield Dodds said the

Budget falls short of its own ambition to provide equality of opportunity for all Australians.

"The burden of this budget falls overwhelmingly on families, pensioners and young people.

"Cuts to family payments, income support and pensions are four times the size of the temporary levy on high income earners," said Ms Hatfield Dodds. "Many of these cuts are permanent, while the high income levy runs for only three years.

"There are a number of budget measures that we support, including the levy on high income earners," Ms Hatfield Dodds said. "We urge the government to consider continuing this levy until the Budget returns to surplus."

"The Budget includes record spending on physical infrastructure, but misses important opportunities to invest in people—Australia's most important and valuable asset," she said.

The federal government has confirmed its support of the National School Chaplaincy Program, a move applauded by Scripture Union Queensland and the National School Chaplaincy Association.

From 1 January 2015, the National School Chaplaincy Program will replace the existing National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program and provide \$243.8 million over four years for schools to engage a chaplain.



UnitingCare Australia National Director Lin Hatfield Dodds was critical of the budget.
Photo: UnitingCare



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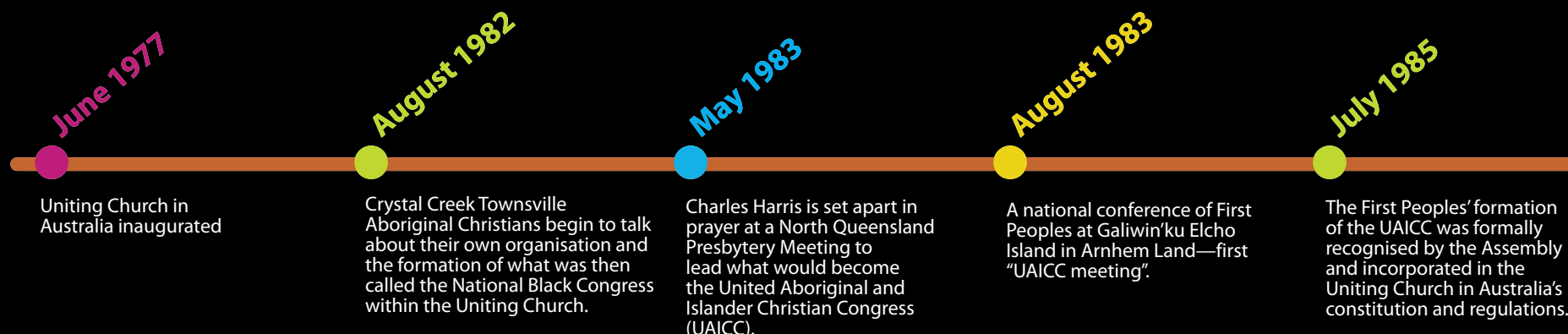
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The journey of reconciliation between First Peoples and the Uniting Church



Heading towards a prom

The *Destiny Together* week of prayer and fasting is over. **Bruce Mullan** looks at what's next in the Uniting Church's journey of reconciliation with First Peoples.

The paint was washed off the foreheads and the chairs packed away but for those who participated in the Canberra prayer vigil and at other *Destiny Together—Justice for First Peoples* events around the nation, reconciliation will always have names and faces.

In what Uniting Church President Rev Dr Andrew Dutney called a "foretaste of that reconciliation and renewal that is the end in view for the whole creation", the week and the vigil on the lawns at Parliament House gave new resonance to the Uniting Church's covenant between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

It has been the faith in the power of God in Christ to bring divided peoples together that has kept the momentum of the reconciliation process in the Church moving forward and it is clear that the journey is not over yet.

"We're very different from each other. In many ways we're very divided. But in Christ we have been made into one body ... and we're in pain," Andrew said to the gathering.

For Uniting Church President-elect Stuart McMillan, even though it was held on the lawns of Parliament House, the Canberra vigil was quite a non-political event and very different.

"We weren't asking for anything, we were praying about something. We were asking God rather than asking politicians to act in a particular way," says Stuart.

"We were seeking God's justice and there was something particularly powerful about that. It was kind of hard for politicians to understand what we as people of faith were doing."

Working together

During the *Destiny Together* week, Chairperson of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress Rev Rronang Garrawurra spoke to ABC's John Cleary through an interpreter about how he saw conversation with Aboriginal people being successful.

"We are sitting down on the land and that is where we need you to come and sit with us and listen to us so we can help out and sort out the issues and work together."

Chairperson of the Calvary Presbytery Rev Dennis Corowa says that Australia is busy trying to find a cultural identity and doesn't recognise that it's had one since well before the arrival of Second Peoples.

"Australia wants a bit of costume but we haven't got any dance or language—it's all been imported.

"But Aboriginal people have the language; we've got the dance and we've got the song—all of it available in the spirit of coexisting."

Dennis thinks the Uniting Church has done reasonable work in the process of recognition of and reconciliation with First Peoples.

"The autonomy that Aboriginal people have within the Uniting Church with self-determination on certain aspects within the church's life is really good," he says.

Dennis says the Uniting Church has been helpful not just in the support for pastoral work with Aboriginal people but also through its work with schools providing opportunity for education and training and by ensuring opportunities for Aboriginal employment in the agencies of the church.

“The next thing the church can do is come in fully behind the constitutional reforms and to be very vocal about that”
Peter Jackson

August 1994

Covenant signed between the UAICC and the Uniting Church.

July 1996

The Uniting Church formally apologises to the Stolen Generation and their families for the part it played in this policy.

July 2009

12th Assembly adopted a new preamble to the Uniting Church Constitution recognising the First Peoples. It was endorsed by presbyteries and synods in 2010.

July 2012

13th Assembly members conducted a public vigil of lament on the steps of South Australia's parliament to protest the Stronger Futures legislation.

March 2014

Uniting Church calls the nation to pray and fast for *Justice for First Peoples—A Destiny Together*.

ised end

Constitutional recognition

For The Gap Uniting Church member Peter Jackson, his volunteer role as Co-chair of Reconciliation Queensland is the current part of a lifetime commitment to the principles of reconciliation with First Peoples.

Peter remembers from his youth sitting around the kitchen table with his parents, family and their friends and having conversations leading up to the referendum on constitutional change that gave Indigenous Australians the vote on 27 May 1967.

Forty-seven years later, the Queensland Constitution acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but the Australian Constitution still does not.

Advocates say that a constitution reflects the nation's values, acknowledges its past and provides hope for its future and constitutional recognition of First Peoples as the world's longest continuing traditional culture would demonstrate that they possess a valued place in our national identity.

Reconciliation Queensland is active in supporting the "Journey to Recognition": an epic relay across Australia building momentum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.

"The next thing the church can do is come in fully behind the constitutional reforms and to be very vocal about that," says Peter.

"Christians should encourage fellow Australians, their families, their friends to get better understanding about what the constitutional changes are all about and to spread the word."

"Unless we can get it down to that level of discussion with a whole range of people, people will not understand what we're going in to vote about or have any interest in it, so we've got to get it to that level."

Dennis Corowa also believes constitutional recognition will be an important next step in acknowledging the place of Aboriginal people as the First Peoples in the life of the nation, particularly on the international stage, but he isn't holding his breath.

"It took 200 years before we were recognised as people—we were flora and fauna before that."

Dennis thinks the church needs to encourage its people to engage with the issue and to speak to the government to help it along but that significant influence will also come from outside.

"Politicians know [constitutional reform] has to happen but the greater pressure is where Australia sits internationally because it's an embarrassment to us in those forums," he says.

Candace Champion, young Uniting Church member from Salisbury Uniting Church in Adelaide, is looking forward to Australia giving constitutional recognition to her people.

Candace says she is "putting her foot down" and taking action, so she joined the "Journey to Recognition" road trip.

"Constitutional recognition is really important to me," Candace says.

"I want my children's future, and my nieces and nephews, and my grandchildren and my cousins and brothers and sisters to be recognised and be able to put this issue to bed once and for all that we are here and we are the First People, and we are custodians and we have a real sense of connection to this land."

Stuart McMillan also believes constitutional recognition is fundamental for his Indigenous brothers and sisters.

"Our history is one of their identity not being recognised—they weren't people in this nation according to the colonisers and it wasn't until Mabo that *Terra Nullius* was overturned," he says.

"Through our own experience in developing our [Uniting Church Constitution] preamble over many, many years, the Uniting Church has some clear experience and ways of speaking into the discussion that's in the broader Australian community at the moment."

But Stuart believes that in the end reconciliation is about relationship.

"We can have all the programs and special events and all those kinds of things we like, but the real thing is about deepening relationship and mutuality."

Stuart quotes Aboriginal leader Rev Dr Djiniyini Gondarra who said to him, "I've found things of value in your society that I value and have shaped me. True reconciliation will happen when you find things in my society that will transform you".

'We commit ourselves to build understanding between your people and ours in every locality, and to build relationships which respect the right of your people to self-determination in the church and in the wider society'
(Uniting Church in Australia, Covenanting Statement, 1994)



Photo: Stock image

Communities care post-suicide

UnitingCare Community, in partnership with StandBy Response Service, offers postvention programs to assist families, friends and communities bereaved by suicide. Ashley Goetze reports.

Queensland's largest drought has consequences that stretch beyond its thirsty soil. According to *The Australian*, Lifeline figures show that where severe drought hits, suicide rates increase sixfold.

“Everyone who has been affected by suicide needs to be reminded and reassured that they are not alone”

Jill Fisher

Issues of guilt and shame about suicide impact the grieving process of those left behind.

“It’s knocking down the stigma of mental health issues really,” says Longreach Uniting Church member, Rosemary Champion.

“It’s got to come out of the closet, there’s no shame in not travelling well with your mental health. It’s no different from breaking an arm or breaking a leg, you suffer just as badly or more.”

A cattle farmer in central Queensland, Rosemary understands more than most the shame fellow rural folk feel in addressing mental health issues and the difficulty of navigating the emotions of those affected by suicide.

StandBy Response Service, managed by not-for-profit United Synergies on the Sunshine Coast, operates with service providers across Australia to deliver its pioneering model that provides both practical and spiritual support.

“Insensitivity to loss can inadvertently cause those grieving to further isolate themselves and thus increase their own risk of suicide,” says National StandBy Response Coordinator, Jill Fisher.

“Everyone who has been affected by suicide needs to be reminded and reassured that they are not alone. The best and most caring help is simply to say ‘I’m here. I’m sad. What can I do to help?’”

Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that in 2012, 2535 people of all ages died by suicide across Australia. According to information provided by StandBy Response, it is estimated that for every suicide, between 10 and 100 people are directly affected. New research suggests more than 40 per cent of the population may be impacted by suicide loss.

StandBy Response’s Pathways to Care community workshops help UnitingCare Community Cairns and Brisbane establish effective community response plans to help provide early intervention and ongoing support to those affected.

The process of educating people to recognise and support others who may be at risk of depression, suicide and other mental health issues, is also a part of the UnitingCare Community Psych Aware workshops of which Rosemary was a participant.

“Be open and aware that if something worries you, you need to intervene and reach out to people,” says Rosemary.

For support after suicide call the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467 or Lifeline 131 114. For more information about StandBy Response Service visit unitedsynergies.com.au



Trust and follow the Spirit

In the lead up to Pentecost, Rev David Won Kim reflects on the power of the Holy Spirit.

I am the minister of a very blessed congregation, and we try to follow the Spirit wherever the Spirit leads. Last year a church member named Mrs Ahn was diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

In 2009, her family came to Australia to give her son a better education. She and her husband worked hard to settle down and forge better opportunities for their future in this blessed and privileged land.

When she bought her own business in Dalby about 80 km west of Toowoomba, she was thrilled. She invited me to give a blessing at the grand opening of her restaurant at the shopping centre. It took me over three hours to drive there, which is how far they drive to come to church on Sundays.

However, their joy did not last long. Just a few weeks after opening her restaurant, she felt a weird pain and was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Her name is Kyung Ok Ahn. When I visited her in hospital I told her, "Mrs Ahn, your name initials are KO, so you can 'knock out' anything. You can even KO your husband!" She had a big smile, "Yes, with God's help I can KO anything and anyone, so God will help me KO this cancer—but I won't KO my beloved husband!" she laughed.

On the day of her surgery, I visited again with several church members to pray with her. While I closed the intercessory prayer I was moved by

the Spirit and encouraged to proclaim, "My child, you are not going to have surgery. You are going to show everyone how great your God is."

In the evening, her husband called me. "Minister Kim, the doctors made a huge mistake!" he said. I immediately thought she passed away, but he continued, "The doctors misdiagnosed her. It is not a cancer, but a big polyp. She is OK."

I don't know how modern medical technology, millions of dollars' worth of equipment and well-trained doctors made such a mistake, but one thing I know for sure is when we follow the Spirit, we can "KO" all kinds of difficulties and challenges. God turns things around and gives the OK to those who live in faith.

Mrs Ahn's doctors still wanted her to go through a series of chemotherapy just in case, and after ten rounds of chemotherapy, her doctor was finally convinced she was cancer free and how great her God is.

The Sunday after Easter Mrs Ahn came to church without wearing her hat. She was celebrating how great our God is by showing her growing hair to the church members.

David is the minister at Calvary Korean Uniting Church. Find more grow faith resources by registering at abigyear.net

“Minister Kim, the doctors made a huge mistake!”

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Principal, Uniting College for Leadership and Theology and Senior Lecturer, Flinders University

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Herald or heretic

John Harrison proclaims faith in the 21st century

Professional communicator and Uniting Church member **Dr John Harrison** talks to **Dianne Jensen**.

Sons and daughters of the manse grow up living and breathing the mantra of mission and service. As adults they can end up living out their own Christian witness in surprising places.

‘Phenomena like Twitter are one of the most powerful instruments we have in engaging in questions of morality and ethics’

Dr John Harrison is Senior Lecturer in Journalism and Communication and Undergraduate Program Director at the University of Queensland (UQ), and has weekly segments on local Brisbane ABC and 4BC talk-back radio. He is a son of Rev Duncan Harrison, who became moderator of the Queensland Synod in 1980, and later general secretary.

A well-known commentator on communication strategy and ethics, John has worked in print, radio and television and is now engaged in teaching and researching cutting-edge communication technologies. His most recent book is *Communication and New Media: Broadcast to Narrowcast*.

John Harrison describes himself as an active and occasionally antagonistic member of both the Uniting Church and the trade union movement, organisations suffering a similar malaise as their power base declines.

He's also a theological conservative mentored in the Presbyterian tradition of social activism.

“There was an enormous amount of cultural capital around the dinner table,” he recalls. “Because we were in the country, we had an almost unceasing flow of people through the manse who provided us with windows on the world. Wally Thompson was a visitor to our home in Bundaberg in the 1960s, he was an AIM patrol padre; people like Colville Crowe who had been a missionary in Timor in the 1960s ... in 1968 Ian Kerr came to Bundaberg and he had been a missionary in the Church of South India, so this opened our eyes to the whole ecumenical dimension of life as well to the importance of Asia.”



John was inspired by the vision of the outback legend Rev John Flynn, and began his academic career with a BA honours thesis focused on the Indigenous communities on the Western Coast of Cape York: Aurukun, Weipa, Mornington Island and Mapoon. Later, he and his wife chose to go to the Bowen Basin; he as a teacher, she as a physiotherapist.

“We knew that there were new towns springing up and the church's presence was limited or struggling, so Julie and I volunteered to go and we went to Moranbah which was a new school and a new community with few medical services. I had only been there for a year when the Australian Inland Mission came calling, and they said we want you to set up this new community development education program funded by the mining company, which we did for two years. I still regard myself as being one of Flynn's mob.”

Communication shakedown

Following their return to Brisbane, John took up the role of editor of the Uniting Church newspaper *Life and Times*. He also did a series of broadcasts on ABC called *Diary of Outback Suburbia*, in which he talked about their experiences in remote communities.

Like his outback inspiration, John Harrison was passionate about the importance of communication



Dr John Harrison coaching students Nancy Upadhy and Natalia Torres in television presentation on the set of the pop-up television studio in the UQ Journalism School.
Photo: Genevieve Worrell

and frustrated by the disinclination of the church to adapt to the rapidly changing social landscape.

“I spent 10 years in the Uniting Church and we tried to develop the profile of the church in ways that were quite contemporary,” says John.

He worked with Uniting Church Assembly general secretary David Gill to establish a national communications team, and trained moderators in media relations. With his colleague David Busch, John transformed *Life and Times* newspaper into *Journey*, a magazine format offering feature articles and profiles.

New directions

John left his Uniting Church role to finish his PhD, a historical and sociological study on former Queensland premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen and the religious culture of Queensland. He began working in a variety of communications roles including the National Council of Churches and Radio National, and was appointed by Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to teach business ethics.

In 2002 he joined UQ to teach professional communication and journalism, developing research interests in new media, the scholarship of teaching, and media ethics.

He is adamant that the essentials of good journalism are even more important in the evolving media landscape.

“The old verities of journalism are still essential; what has changed radically is the practice and it has changed in two ways. The first is that the platforms have changed and the devices and so on, but the other thing that has changed is that the ‘he said she said’ model of journalism is no longer good enough. Therefore we expect journalism to be information based, not opinion based, and that is a very strong principle in our curriculum. That means that the old news values, conflict and proximity and all that sort of stuff, go out the window in favour of a paradigm that is actually quite strict about data.”

John describes the current generation of students as having a passion for social justice and engagement that was not evident in Generation X.

“Part of that is because cheap flights have allowed them to travel, and most have travelled around the world far more than I have, so they are engaged. I have students who are involved in an unbelievable number of social justice causes across the board, and I don’t just mean engaged online. Their risk is that they think you can actually destabilise an African warlord by pressing ‘like’ on Facebook.”

Engaging with this generation requires Christians to reclaim their place in the public discourse about how we should live, says John.

“That is what it is all about; it is about asking theological questions without the baggage of theological language, and you can do it. It is possible to do that. It is not about making statements; it is always about asking questions.”

Deafening silence

John remains critical of the way in which churches, including the Uniting Church, have failed to harness the possibilities presented by new media such as Twitter.

“Religious institutions, certainly the Uniting Church, which has the oldest demographic of any of the denominations that still exist, have completely missed the boat in terms of the transition from old media to new. Why when we have theologians on Q&A, do we have George Pell; why don’t Andrew Dutney and Geoff Thompson and our other leading theologians have such a public profile? Where is the theological insight on the Q&A Twitter feed?”

The fact that data about the social media engagement of religious institutions is non-existent points to systematic failure, he says.

“What it means is that strategically, councils of the church have not prioritised new media and the argument has often been, ‘Well, most of our people aren’t on the internet’. They may be late adopters, but they are on the internet!” says John.

“The bottom line about the churches and social media is that at a congregational level and an institutional level, there is no serious attempt to deploy social media effectively. Yet phenomena like Twitter are one of the most powerful instruments we have in engaging in questions of morality and ethics.

“It is a fact that we don’t know how to use this new media; for example Twitter is two things, it is a broadcast medium but it is also an interactive medium, so if you take Twitter you have to be prepared to engage.”

*John is married to Julie and has two adult children, Caitlin and James. He has written several books including *Baptism of Fire*, a history of the Uniting Church. Connect with John on Twitter @thedoctorsaid*

Taking stock

The number crunch we can't avoid

Data from the 2013 census of the Uniting Church in Australia has been released just in time for its 37th anniversary. It reveals an organisation facing some tough decisions. Dianne Jensen reports.

Thirty-seven years down the track, Australia's first home-grown church is facing a mid-life crisis familiar to any adult wondering where the kids have gone and what lies ahead. The newly released 2013 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) census data about the Uniting Church in Australia reveals an organisation facing some tough questions about the future.

“We can grieve over the loss of the profile that we once had, but there is a time when you say, right, there is still a call, there is still an opportunity”
Rev Dave Baker

The census was commissioned by Assembly President Rev Dr Andrew Dutney to collect information about ministry agents, church location and attendance, and other features of congregational life such as internal activities and community outreach.

In brief, the data reveals 2078 church locations across Australia, a decrease of 31 per cent since 1990, and a weekly worship attendance of 97 200 (including 12 500 children), a decline of 40 per cent.

The median weekly attendance is the highest in Queensland (59 people per church, including eight children), and the Queensland Synod has a relatively high proportion of churches in the 50-74 size bracket (35 per cent of churches).

These days our churches are better known in their communities for visiting and emergency relief services than for the social rituals of weddings, funerals and baptisms which have largely disappeared.

The sobering statistics will come as no surprise to congregations across Australia, many of whom are already dealing with declining attendance and a dearth of ministerial agents.

Reinventing church

Andrew Dutney agrees that we must acknowledge that both church and society have changed since the 1970s.

He points out that the Uniting Church in Australia continues to be a significant presence across Australia, with over 2000 congregations. More than four in ten of these congregations are in

small rural areas, and Andrew suggests that we may learn important lessons from their resilience and flexibility.

“Many of [our rural congregations] are lay-led congregations that have found innovative ways to be present and effective in their communities—in contrast to the withdrawal of so many organisations, businesses and services during the long rural decline.”

The question, he says, is how Assembly might go about resourcing the congregations of this new century with regulations that reflect their actual shape and circumstances.

Queensland Moderator Rev Kaye Ronalds also has first-hand experience of how some rural congregations have successfully maintained a Christian presence in their communities. Kaye has visited many congregations celebrating milestones such as a centenary, as well as four congregations that have decided to close their doors.

“I think the rural congregations have been facing these changes for 15 years. Many find ways of adapting to having fewer clergy on the ground and they sit together to decide what they need to do to be the people of God. That does not always mean continuing to have worship Sunday by Sunday,” says Kaye.

“We need to have some conversations about what kind of church we want to be. On the one hand we have many clergy who are not prepared to move from the ‘green edge’ [on the coast] and yet our community services in Queensland have a presence in 400 locations, many of which are rural or remote.”

Doing nothing is not an option

Rev Dave Baker, Moderator-elect of the Queensland Synod, is blunt in his assessment of the challenges ahead.

“We can grieve over the loss of the profile that we once had, but there is a time when you say, right, there is still a call, there is still an opportunity,” says Dave. “The question before us is a stewardship



Uniting Church Assembly President
Rev Dr Andrew Dutney (left),
Queensland Synod Moderator-elect
Rev Dave Baker (centre),
Queensland Synod Moderator
Rev Kaye Ronalds (right)
Photos: Uniting Church Assembly
and Queensland Synod

question; are we prepared to re-deploy the precious things we have for the sake of the mission or do we want to stay where we are?"

In an environment which is no longer benign to people of faith, Dave believes that providing quality leadership is critical.

"Let's understand what is needed and let's apply ourselves to addressing that through the shaping and forming of leadership, lay and ordained, the resourcing of church councils and lay leaders in their ministry and their understanding of the gospel, and the capacity to be more flexible around how we deploy our assets."

While we won't be the same church in 20 years, we do have the opportunity to be a better church; "a church that actually provides a place of strength, of identity, of belonging, an alternative vision of what human society can be like, an encouraging place and a safe haven," says Dave

Members of the Lay Forum, an organisation aimed at giving a voice to progressive thinkers in the Uniting Church, believe that we need to take a critical look at our church culture.

"Changing social demographics are faced by all organisations and can be addressed effectively with a significant focus on the uniqueness of each Australian community," says Executive Officer Dr Paul Inglis. "But more significantly, and not addressed seriously, are the generally changing world views as a result of raised standards of education, greater critical thinking and consumer awareness. The age of compliant and uncritically accepting audiences in churches is well and truly over in this era of advanced rational thinking.

"The Uniting Church, of all denominations, offers great possibilities for diverse thinking,

and for understanding and connection to the real world," he says.

"It has within its polity and philosophy an intentional goal to be adaptive, focussed on bringing Jesus into the 21st century and an openness to change. It is poised for change and many are ready to move forward. It simply needs to liberate thinking and participation at community level, so this can happen before the critical mass of talent and intelligence further diminishes."

More than counting heads

Perhaps the most pressing issue raised by the census is the demographic time bomb. One quarter of churches have no children, and another half have between one and nine children in the congregation.

At the other extreme, over a third of active ministers are at least 60 years of age, and only six in 100 are under 40 years of age.

Moreton Rivers presbytery youth, children's and families coordinator Alison Cox says our attitude to young people needs to go beyond "wanting them to be on our property to actually engaging in meaningful relationships".

"I become fearful when we continue to 'wait for young people to be old enough to contribute in a meaningful way', by which time they've left and found somewhere else that actually does listen, and engage, and recognise the valuable contribution they make to the whole community of God."

She believes that the church needs to provide better support and proactive mentoring.

"I don't think we expect young people to consider entering ministry—often it takes someone suggesting or affirming or encouraging or prompting someone to hear God's call on their life and take that next step. If no one is having those conversations with young people in our churches or giving them opportunities to learn and grow then they'll find other places to share their gifts and skills and time."

Brisbane Bayside Uniting Church minister Rev Lu Senituli says the outlook is far from bleak for multicultural congregations and ministers. Lu is a member of the Synod Standing Committee and the Assembly Doctrine Group as well as the convenor of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations Cross Cultural Commission.

Data from Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and minority migrant-ethnic churches was largely missing from the census, but Lu says that these congregations are in fact growing.

"The migrant-ethnic based communities and their associated multicultural congregations are not declining congregations with a notable absence of children, youths and young adults. There are significant numbers of multicultural congregations here in Brisbane who are faced with the challenge of finding more suitable worship space for their growing numbers."

Lu believes that the relegation of the Christian faith to the private and personal space has muted our voice.

"The church needs to regain confidence in its Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel for the world, and to hold to the moorings of the Christian faith in an ever-changing pluralistic, post-modern, multicultural, multi-faith Western society."

2078

Uniting Church
locations/congregations
across Australia.
A decrease of

31%

since 1990

68%

of Uniting Churches
experienced strong
community building
through running small
groups in the last
12 months



of Uniting Churches
do not have children
in the congregation



of all Uniting Churches
provided visiting and
emergency relief



34%

of urban Uniting
Churches run
youth groups

Rev Russell Reynoldson, Mored Mwakajumba (left) and Dr Njau Gitu (far right) with ASCOF members Leyna and Ronisha (centre).
Photo: Supplied



A little help goes a long way

As part of its development project, Forest Lake Uniting Church in Brisbane's south west is partnering with ASCOF to provide interest-free loans to those who need them most. Rohan Salmond explores.

For migrants and people on government payments, a lack of credit rating and a low income can mean exclusion from financial services. Uniting Church member Dr Njau Gitu is the Program Director of ASCOF, a financial inclusion advocacy organisation whose mission is to ensure everyone gets the chance to access the financial information they need. Alongside Forest Lake Uniting Church, ASCOF through the voluntary efforts of Njau is providing interest-free loans to those who need them most.

‘The support we have received from the Uniting Church has been tremendous’
Dr Njau Gitu

The loans are between \$300 and \$1200 and are underwritten at no interest by the National Australia Bank. They are administered by Good Shepherd Microfinance, an activity of the Catholic order Sisters of the Good Shepherd, of which ASCOF is an accredited provider.

“The no-interest loans are for people who are low income—people who would otherwise not be able to access any funding from mainstream financial institutions,” says Njau.

“Through this program we have assisted many people who would otherwise never get the assistance,” he says. “We’re talking about assisting people to get their basic household appliances that the rest of us take for granted.

“The support we have received from the Uniting Church has been tremendous,” he says.

Founded in 2009, ASCOF originally stood for “Africans Community Foundation” and catered to migrants from African nations. Now the name is no longer an acronym, reflecting how ASCOF’s

broader focus includes members from all kinds of cultural and linguistic backgrounds including Indigenous Australians, Pacific Islanders as well as Australians whose first language is English. Widening the scope of ASCOF’s programs was helped by Njau’s partnership with Forest Lake Uniting. Their minister, Rev Russell Reynoldson, is enthusiastic about their partnership.

“Our job as a church is to give support to Njau,” says Russell, “but he also refers people to me if they need extra support ... The people who don’t fit into [Njau’s] criteria will be referred to the welfare side of our church and vice-versa so we’re going to be working in partnership with him as it unfolds.”

Forest Lake Uniting Church intends to expand their partnership with ASCOF through the construction of a “community life centre” which will afford them more space.

“That will provide counselling rooms,” says Russell. “Njau isn’t just giving people no-interest loans, he also provides counselling and support for people who are in financial need. There’s a fair bit of budgeting and that sort of thing done with the people.

“In a sense, this is all about building community connections. As a church that’s what’s driving us at the moment ... Given the Vision 2020 of the church, community engagement fits very strongly into that area.”

ascof.org.au

6 ways to be a welcoming church

Have you ever visited a church and felt awkward because you didn't know when to stand or sit or why a smiling stranger was suddenly holding your hand and singing at you? It can be daunting attending a new church. Even if your congregation is small, you have something precious and life-giving to offer. Here are some ways to make sure newcomers—and everyone in the congregation in fact—are welcome to be part of your community.

1 First impressions count
Most newcomers will decide whether or not to return within the first few minutes of arrival. It's about the basics: people making eye contact and offering a friendly smile, the comfort (and cleanliness) of the space, and whether their children are welcomed, happy and safe.

2 Provide a guide
Some people may never have been inside a church before and their first worship encounter may be akin to dropping into a curling tournament or being drafted onto a Gaelic football team. Every member of a church is a host. Having someone guide them through an unfamiliar service and explain jargon can ease a newcomer's worry about sticking out like a sore thumb. Speaking of which, don't make visitors stand up for a public welcome! Just ensure people their own age have a chat with them after the service if they decide to linger.

3 Feed the flock
If people don't linger after the service, it may be those cheap biscuits and that nasty coffee. The brutal truth is that anyone not strapped into a pram or confined to a walker will immediately leave in search of something decent to eat and drink if your hospitality reminds them of the waiting room in a public hospital. The Bible tells us to treat each other like honoured guests, and don't forget that everyone appreciates being able to sit down while they chat.

4 Keep calm
Keep your cool when a visitor walks through the door. Give people a warm welcome without becoming their new best friend or trying to sign them up as church treasurer or organist (no matter how desperate you are to fill these roles). Don't apologise for shortcomings ("Our minister is away so we had to take who we could get!") and don't tell them they are the first visitor since Easter.

5 Have a welcoming website
Before someone visits your church, they'll google you. To anyone under 40, if you don't have a website—you don't exist! Make sure your website is up-to-date, uncluttered and user-friendly. Make sure your service times, location and a link to an FAQ section for newcomers can be found on the home page.

6 Be yourself
Being a welcoming church doesn't mean dumbing down the message to simplistic solutions to life's problems. As communities of faith we have traditions and rituals intrinsic to who we are and what we believe. People who walk through our doors are not looking for a social club or a welfare organisation; they are seeking a church—a group of believers who follow Christ and seek to build a spirited community of faith. Remember who you are and you will find the grace to be a truly welcoming church.



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Waste not, want not

I may not remember my first kiss, but I do remember the first pizza I ate and the first quiche I made (and the fact that everyone thought it rhymed with “witch”).

One of the most surprising things for baby boomers about reality shows such as *Masterchef* and *My Kitchen Rules* is the rehabilitation of humble vegies like pumpkin and kale into foodie heaven. Backyard produce, once consumed under protest, mindful of the reproachful eyes of starving children in India.

I do not miss that childhood fare for a single minute. The expansion of food choices to include tastes and textures from across the world was long overdue in kitchens where Tabasco sauce was considered a daring condiment.

Australians' love affair with food began in the 1960s when cooking icon Margaret Fulton set out to revolutionise the way we ate. She coaxed our mothers into buying garlic and introduced pâté and boeuf bourguignon to eager home cooks. Fresh pasta and yoghurt arrived, and we learned to cook (and pronounce) quiche.

And as we changed the way we cooked, we began to think about food differently. Historians describe what occurred as the commodification of food culture; the transformation of food from a necessity to a dominating theme of public discourse. Food and eating become public preoccupations, with speciality shops and celebrity chefs, cooking classes and a plethora of eating venues.

Reality cooking shows introduced a different and more sinister paradigm; a public space where dishes and their creators were subject to relentless criticism and rejection. The modern shopper/cook/diner came to understand that food was in itself a moral virtue; foods are good or bad, and imperfect or unattractive food is disgusting and inedible.

And the more we associated food with moral worth, the more peevish we became and the more stuff we simply tipped into the bin.

Food rescue charity OzHarvest says that one in five shopping bags of food is thrown out, with the average Australian household wasting \$616 annually. An estimated 20 to 40 per cent of fruit and vegetables are rejected even before they reach the shops.

In partnership with Wesley Mission Brisbane, OzHarvest collects excess food from cafes, delis, supermarkets and restaurants and delivers it to some 80 charities within south-east Queensland.

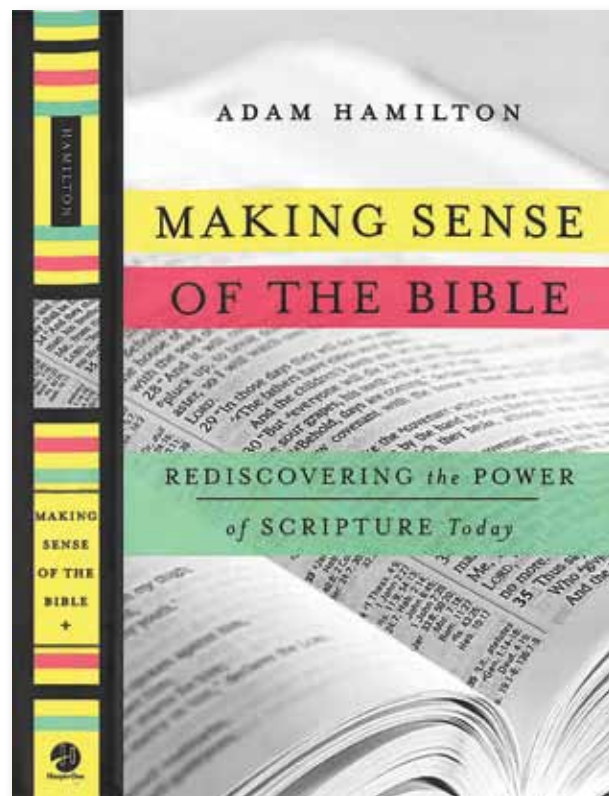
Initiatives like OzHarvest and its regional food rescue toolkit Reap (now expanding into north Queensland) are bringing concepts like frugality, sharing and sustainability back to the table.

It is much harder to throw out the leftovers from a meal that you shopped for, prepared, and served with love. Or it ought to be.

Dianne Jensen

For more information about OzHarvest visit brisbane.ozharvest.org or phone 1800 108 006.

‘And the more we associated food with moral worth, the more peevish we became and the more stuff we simply tipped into the bin’



***Making Sense of the Bible:
Rediscovering the Power
of Scripture Today***
Adam Hamilton
HarperOne, 2014
RRP \$29.95

Grappling with the Bible

Breathtaking in scope and certainly ambitious in prospect, Adam Hamilton has written an important book that many people in congregations will find stimulating, challenging and, in the end, comforting.

With clear and understandable language, this book is not only an invaluable resource for ministers, but also a must-read for the growing number of book clubs Uniting Churches are establishing. This is a book that will bring the lay reader up to speed with the fruits of current Biblical and theological learning.

A scholarly and rich engagement with the scriptures underlies this work. Hamilton writes honestly and personally from a strong pastoral background borne of many years in ministry to those who are hurting and with those on the margins of society. Written from a United Methodist perspective, this book is similar in its heritage both in outlook and theology to the Uniting Church in Australia's Reformed and Evangelical focus.

In the first section Hamilton addresses "The nature of scripture". Here there is an overview of the Old and New Testaments which not only addresses the main themes, but tackles topics such as who wrote the books, why these books made it into the scriptures and the role of prophecy and revelation. In a challenging section, he asks "Is the Bible inspired? Is the Bible the word of God? Is the Bible inerrant and infallible?" Not everyone will be happy with what he says, but it will spark a discussion over the role and place of the Bible in individual lives and that of a worshipping community.

The second section of the book is titled, "Making Sense of the Bible's Challenging Passages". It is ambitious. Insights into the debates on creation and dinosaurs in Noah's ark proceed to a focus on God's violence in the Old Testament and the issue of suffering and divine providence. The list of topics goes on: authenticity of the gospel accounts of Jesus, women in leadership and homosexuality and gay marriage. Finally, the book concludes with chapters "Towards an Honest and Reverent view of

Scripture" and "Reading the Bible for all it's Worth".

The Uniting Church is a church that values the Biblical witnesses of prophet and apostle and lays upon us the serious duty to study and preach from the scriptures. Hamilton's book is a resource that will immensely aid in this endeavour.

Neil Thorpe
Director, Pilgrim Learning Community

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Prime Minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen has reached a resettlement deal with the Australian government.
Photo: World Economic Forum

Church questions Cambodia “solution”

Ahead of Refugee Week, Sue Hutchinson and Rohan Salmond examine the federal government’s pursuit of a regional solution in asylum seeker policy.



Cambodia
Population 14.1 million

- More than 30 per cent of Cambodians live below the poverty line
- Almost 40 per cent of children are malnourished
- Around 70 per cent of the population is aged under 30
- Receives hundreds of millions of dollars of foreign aid, including \$US244 million from Australia over the last three years

The federal government renewed its commitment to offshore processing of asylum seekers in the 2014 Budget with the closure of six onshore detention centres. The government is also in talks with Cambodia to resettle an as yet unknown number of refugees in that country.

Cambodia’s prime minister has announced via Facebook that at least some of the refugees processed on Naru will be resettled in his country. However, at the time of printing no official Memorandum of Understanding between Cambodia and Australia has been signed. The proposed deal is reminiscent of Labor’s 2011 Malaysian resettlement plan, which was scuttled by the High Court due to fears refugees would be mistreated. The new Cambodia plan is of equal concern to refugee advocates.

Rev Elenie Poulos, UnitingJustice Director says, “Cambodia is one of the poorest countries in the region with an exceedingly poor human rights record. It is a totally unsuitable place for Australia to send refugees.

“As the wealthiest, most stable and secure country in the region, Australia should not be shifting its responsibilities to the poorest, most vulnerable countries,” she says.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection did not respond to *Journey’s* request to comment but, in response to criticism about Cambodia’s poverty, Immigration Minister Scott Morrison told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “It’s

not about whether they [refugees] are poor; it’s about whether they can be safe. That’s the issue. The [refugee] convention was not designed as an economic advancement program.”

But potential poverty is only one of the concerns of critics of the Cambodian plan. During a United Nations review of Cambodia’s human rights record in January, Australia expressed concern about “restrictions on freedom of assembly and association, particularly recent disproportionate violence against protestors, including detention without trial”.

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade lists Cambodia as “one of the world’s least developed countries” and warns of “periodic reports of intimidation and political violence”. In its annual Corruption Perception Index, last year Transparency International ranked Cambodia as Asia’s second most corrupt nation, after North Korea.

Elenie Poulos says a genuine regional solution needs to address the reasons why people leave their homes to seek asylum in the first place.

“A genuinely regional solution would see asylum seekers and refugees safe and able to provide for themselves and their families where they are, without having to get on a boat,” she says. “It would see Australia taking significant numbers of refugees from Indonesia and other countries and an efficient, robust and timely refugee determination system across the region.”



NSW/ACT Moderator
Rev Dr Brian Brown was
arrested while participating
in a sit-in prayer vigil in
Prime Minister Tony Abbott's
electorate office in Sydney.
Photo: Love Makes A Way

Uniting Church leaders arrested in asylum seeker protest

Two prominent members of the Uniting Church in Australia have been arrested while participating in Love Makes a Way ecumenical sit-in prayer vigils in response to Australia's treatment of asylum seekers.

Former Uniting Church president Rev Dr Alastair Macrae was arrested and removed from federal Opposition Leader Bill Shorten's electorate office in Melbourne. At a simultaneous vigil in Prime Minister Tony Abbott's office, Moderator of the NSW and ACT Synod, Rev Dr Brian Brown was also arrested.

Other sit-in participants included two Catholic priests, a nun, two Baptist pastors, an Anglican priest, five Uniting Church ministers and a number of lay church leaders.

At the vigil Dr Brown said, "Churches have exhausted all formal channels of policy debate on the issue of asylum seekers, that's why we are risking arrest today. There comes a time when such grave injustice must be confronted directly through peaceful acts of civil disobedience. We believe that to be silent is to be complicit in the injustices being perpetrated against asylum seekers."

No charges were laid.

Australia must not enable bigots and racists

The Uniting Church in Australia has called on the federal government to drop its proposed changes to the *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)*.

"The amendments proposed would diminish protections against racial vilification. This is totally unacceptable in a multicultural, multi-faith society," said Uniting Church Assembly President Rev Dr Andrew Dutney.

"Christian principles of love and inclusion are principles we share with all major faith traditions. They lead us to oppose bigotry and intolerance wherever it occurs. It is simply wrong to enable the expression of racial prejudice and bigotry."

Submissions on marriage

A discussion paper has been released by the Uniting Church on marriage and same-gender relationships for distribution and consideration, as requested by the 13th Assembly.

The discussion paper and a report, *Views of marriage in the UCA*, are available from the Assembly website along with a response form. These resources were produced via preliminary consultations with a sample of presbyteries and groups identified by the 13th Assembly.

The Assembly is seeking submissions in response to the paper by 10 October so they can be collated and provided to the Assembly Standing Committee for its meeting in November this year.

assembly.uca.org.au/marriage

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