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Are we there yet?

The Uniting Church is very, very fond of travel imagery. From the *Basis of Union*’s declaration that “the Church is a pilgrim people” to the Queensland Synod’s *Together on the way*, enriching community journey to the masthead of this very magazine, it’s a sentiment you will find at every turn because it’s a part of our DNA!

It’s not specific to the Uniting Church of course—this kind of imagery has deep roots in the Christian tradition—but I think it resonates with us so much because we believe we are not done uniting. Being people of God is a continual process. God is moving. We don’t have all the answers, but with God’s help we are working on it. In the moderator’s column this month (page four) Rev David Baker says, “Healthy Christian communities can’t be stagnant ponds; they must have ‘flow’ ”.

Lent is one of the significant journeys Christians undertake every year, but of course it’s not a physical pilgrimage. On page six I speak to Reverend Father Anastasios Bozikis from the Greek Orthodox Community of St George. He says Lent is a “journey of spiritual renewal” in preparation for Easter. The way the Orthodox observe Lent is very different to how Protestants tend to do it, but they’ve been undertaking this journey for a long time. We have a lot to learn from each other.

On page ten Dr Joel Corney talks about the journey he has been on as his faith has matured. Joel is a physicist specialising in quantum physics, which is right at the cutting edge of what we know about how the world works. It’s exciting work.

Finally, thanks to those who wrote in letters over the past month. You can find them on page 18. Keep it up!

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor

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Closing date for editorial and advertising for April *Journey* is Monday 16 March. The next issue of *Journey* will be available on Sunday 5 April.



Monday Midday Prayer

*Loving God,
as we journey with Jesus to
Jerusalem during Lent, open
our hearts to what we need
to let go so that we can follow
him more closely.*

Amen

Moderator's highlights

1 March

NewLife Uniting Church Robina
visit, Gold Coast

6–8 March

Central Queensland Presbytery
meeting, Central Queensland

22 March

Preaching at Albany Creek
Uniting Church, Brisbane

Flow to grow

They say memory may not be housed just in our brains. I remember that some of my training talked about “anchoring”, that a memory, idea, thought, theme or plan, can be physically anchored in another part of our bodies—just as a noise, song or smell takes us back to a memory of life, so also one of these may be anchored physiologically.

This is the idea I think I have in my bones, in a way I cannot shake off: Healthy Christian communities are vital for a full life. Healthy communities which gather to remember the story of God at work and receive the life of God through hearing the story, through baptism and eucharist, become places of liveliness, of restoration, of hospitality and of hope. This idea is so much a part of me it has become a belief! It doesn't matter how they gather or work, or their geography or what the liturgy is, or how many are there, or how frequently, or if the gathering is in virtual space—being together, encountering the story of God at work, this is life giving birth to life.

Our communities are doing this in many ways: partnering with overseas churches through UnitingWorld, expressing solidarity with asylum seekers in practical ways, investing in the lives of children and young people, being places of refuge and sanctuary

from the vicissitudes of life, and engaging with other community-based organisations to give people who believe they don't matter a voice.

It will always have transitional aspects to it. I remember talking with one minister who was expressing some of the challenges of leadership in a growing congregation. I said, “Mate, it's like you're turning a DC-3 into a 747 while you're still flying in the air!”

Healthy Christian communities can't be stagnant ponds; they must have “flow”. You might even say they have to replicate themselves.

The members of the last Synod in Session expressed a desire to see “church planting”—establishing new Christian communities, whatever we call it—as a priority in our life. I believe it begins first and foremost with us believing we are receivers and givers, that we have been blessed to be a blessing and that we live in the midst of the greatest transaction of life.

How are your transactions going? What about the life of your significant community? How is it in the flow of God's purposes?

Rev David Baker
Moderator, Queensland Synod

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Drawing by Arrith, who was locked up in an off-shore detention centre.
Source: Sarah Hanson-Young

State-sanctioned child abuse must end

The Uniting Church in Australia is calling for the immediate release of all children and their families from Australian-run immigration detention centres, following the publication of a shocking report by the Australian Human Rights Commission. **Matt Pulford** reports.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has released a damning report, entitled *The Forgotten Children*, on the largest survey of children in detention ever conducted anywhere in the world. It details brutal and damaging treatment on Nauru and Christmas Island. In the 15 months to March 2014 there were 233 recorded assaults involving children and 33 incidents of reported sexual assault.

“Australia’s state-sanctioned abuse of children must end,” said Uniting Church President Rev Dr Andrew Dutney.

“The level of mental distress and long-term harm suffered by children as a direct result of their detention is appalling. These children are losing the most important years for their growth and development and some will be scarred for life by their experiences.

“For the sake of the children, to protect them from further harm, the government must release the children and their families, including those from Nauru, into the community,” said Dr Dutney.

Rev Elenie Poulos, national director of UnitingJustice Australia says the findings of the report are a national disgrace.

“The report describes how children are woken every day at 11 pm and 5 am by guards shining a torch light in their

faces as they conduct head counts. Children are being toilet trained in filthy conditions,” said Ms Poulos.

“On Christmas Island, families live in shipping containers with no room to sit or play. The children are surrounded by adults who themselves are suffering shockingly high rates of mental illness, including severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Dozens of children with physical disabilities and mental illness have received inadequate care and 100 children on Christmas Island had no education for over one year. Over 30 per cent of children and parents interviewed described themselves as ‘always sad and crying’.

“A family in which both parents and their child are profoundly deaf were denied hearing aids for seven months, so the parents couldn’t hear the cries of their child,” said Ms Poulos.

“Australia is the only country in the world which imprisons children as the first, preferred option yet both the government and opposition have admitted that the imprisonment of children serves no deterrent purpose.

“These children and their families need to be released immediately,” said Ms Poulos.

The Uniting Church Assembly and synods have signed a joint statement calling for immediate action on the Australian Human Rights Commission report. Read the statement at tinyurl.com/jointngostatement

‘The children are surrounded by adults who themselves are suffering shockingly high rates of mental illness’

Rev Elenie Poulos



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Getting ready

to get ready for Easter

Lent is a season binding Christians together no matter their church tradition, but it is observed very differently depending on where you go. What does it look like for the Uniting Church to observe Lent? **Rohan Salmond** explores.

‘... if you just stop the food without replacing it with these other elements you just end up being very cranky for 40 days’

Reverend Father Anastasios Bozikis

For more than 1000 years Christians everywhere have observed Lent, an annual 40-day time of fasting and reflection in preparation for Easter. It's a major part of the Christian calendar, but today it is not consistently observed across denominations, and customs practised during the time vary.

The Uniting Church itself does not have a consistent approach to Lent. While many Uniting Church congregations make much of the Lenten season, others do not observe it at all. Given the governance structures of the Uniting Church it is highly unlikely we will end up with a consistent approach, but it is still worth asking the question: What is an authentic Uniting Church expression of Lent?

Prepare to be prepared

It's blazing hot outside, but the Greek Orthodox Community of St George in South Brisbane is a cool refuge. Unlike Uniting Church buildings, St George Greek Orthodox Church has a domed ceiling adorned

with vibrant icons and a richly decorated sanctuary. The Greek Orthodox have had plenty of time to figure out their approach to the Lenten season, and compared to the mishmash Uniting Church style, the consistent, universal Orthodox approach to Lent is as different as their church buildings.

Assistant parish priest, Reverend Father Anastasios Bozikis says Lent is a “journey of spiritual renewal”.

“Lent is a time of prayer, fasting, penitence and repentance—a time when we focus on using our body to assist our soul on our spiritual journey,” he says.

Lent is observed the same way every year, with the same readings and the same traditions. The process is methodical and each ritual is potent with meaning. They even observe the Triodion, three weeks of preparation for Lent, which is itself a preparation for Easter.

“There's a series of stages of doing that [preparing for, and observing Lent] which over the last 1500 or so years



Reverend Father Anastasios Bozikis.
Photo: Rohan Salmond

Missing out on missing out

Much of what Father Anastasios says feels familiar, while other parts are completely alien. In contrast to the rigors of the Orthodox way, the Uniting Church approach to Lent is patchy—or flexible, depending on your point of view.

Rev Dr David Pitman is the convener of the Assembly Worship Working Group. He says the Uniting Church could do more to observe the Christian calendar. Leaders have a pivotal role to play.

“A lot of our ministers are not very good leaders when it comes to the disciplines of the seasons of the church year,” says David. “I hate to say that, but that’s the reality. These things often get scant attention.

“An authentic Uniting Church congregation during Lent at least would be following the lectionary because that helps us make that journey with Jesus.”

David also thinks there should be greater use of the liturgical resources on the Assembly website and in *Uniting in Worship*.

“It’s not about following the book [*Uniting in Worship*] in a boring way, it’s about taking those resources and using them imaginatively and creatively.”

So should Uniting Church members adopt an Orthodox-style observation of Lent? David shoots for an approach that is both rigorous and versatile.

“Giving up meat and dairy products—people could decide to do that—but that isn’t a part of our own tradition. Whereas making a conscious decision to give up something very important to us during Lent is a part of our tradition. So it doesn’t have to be meat or dairy products but it could be other things that we take for granted that are personal to us, and that will vary from individual to individual.

“I actually think Lent is an opportunity for everyone to accept the discipline of letting go of something that they take for granted. It could be a day of fasting each week, it could be one meal each day through Lent. It could be even just letting go of the things they like most like their coffee and their chocolate—but something that is tangible that will on a daily basis remind them that we’re remembering the passion of Christ. But in the end it’s how we live, not what we give up, that matters most.

“And an authentic Uniting Church response always involves an emphasis on achieving justice for those who are denied their basic rights as human beings. That’s just another tangible way that the whole dimension of Lent can be emphasised.”

Giving up to give away

Despite the Uniting Church’s lack of regard for church seasons generally, there has been renewed interest in Lent since the early 2000s though UnitingWorld’s Lent Event. It resonates with many in the Uniting Church, not just because of the agency connection, but because it gives expression to that desire for social justice.

Rob Floyd, national director of UnitingWorld says Lent Event is a home-grown expression of Lent.

“For many people within the Uniting Church the Lent Event experience has given real, tangible meaning to the hope we have in our risen Lord. Lent has become an opportunity not just to reflect humbly on what it means to walk with Jesus, but to stand alongside others within our global church and actively support the work they do to create a fairer, more compassionate world,” he says.

“Lent Event is a movement to live simply over 40 days and donate the money saved. It also gives us an opportunity to connect more deeply with our brothers and sisters in Christ from around the world and to learn from each other as we make the journey together.

“It’s through this connection, through learning each other’s stories and acknowledging the challenges we face together, that we become genuinely engaged in our global church, in our journey with Jesus and the hope we share in Christ for a renewed creation where justice and peace reign,” he says.

It’s a sentiment Father Anastasios shares. Orthodox Christians also participate in donating money saved by living a simpler life, but he warns that any activity undertaken during Lent is not an end in itself.

“I think through Lent we can remember to reduce our consumption so that others may be assisted, create the time and the space for meditation and prayer and reflect that this pattern of consumption that the world has taught us is not the way I think God intended things to be,” says Father Anastasios.

“Ultimately all the other stuff is good and will assist, but it is actually just a means to an end. It’s a means to the spiritual development and spiritual growth and union with the person of Christ—that is the ultimate goal.”

Lent Event resources can be found at lentevent.com and via the Lent Event app available through iTunes and Google Play.

have been worked out really meticulously through holy tradition,” says Father Anastasios.

To Protestants the most conspicuous aspect of Orthodox Lent is the comprehensive regime of fasting over the 40 days. Orthodox Christians abstain from meat and other animal products to remind them of the paradise Adam and Eve left behind where there was no killing, and in anticipation of the kingdom to come where there will be no eating or drinking nor giving in marriage. The aim is to live life more simply and with greater focus.

“Which means basically [all you may have is] fruit and vegetables which have been boiled or something like that. On the days you get something fried it’s very exciting.

“But Lent isn’t just about food,” says Father Anastasios. “There is also prayer and worship services. Alongside the fasting they have been developed over the centuries so we come together as a congregation much more frequently during Lent. There are at least two communion services a week, sometimes more, sometimes three or four depending on the parish you are in. Every evening in our parish we would have a service of supplication so it would really focus us.

“So there are two sides; it’s not just about the food because if you just stop the food without replacing it with these other elements you just end up being very cranky for 40 days,” he laughs.

“There has to be balance; there has to be spiritual balance and spiritual focus.”

Outfits sourced from op shop stores around Australia.
Photos: nevereverpayretail.com.au

Shop guilt-free

Years ago you wouldn't be caught dead in hand-me-down clothes, but today upcycling an old garment is considered both ethically conscious and fashionable. So why isn't it mainstream? **Ashley Thompson** explores.

Emerging in the early 1900s, “charity shops” or “bazaars” were first set up to give labour opportunities to the disadvantaged and simultaneously fundraise for charities. It wasn't until the deprivation of the Second World War that they became more widespread and popular among the “thrifty”.

Today, millennial hipsters view it as savvy to assemble an outfit for under \$10 or rediscover skills like sewing in an effort to “upcycle” pre-loved clothing and exercise their creative juices.

‘they want something that is funky, with clashing patterns and they know they can get amazing quality for less’

Melissa Keary

“Upcycling is taking something that might not be able to be used as it was originally and turning it into something usable, amazing and sometimes just a little bit different,” explains Lifeline Regional Retail Coordinator for the greater Sunshine Coast, Melissa Keary.

Melissa believes this rise in popularity is due to the quality of the clothes donated which contrast with the cheap, mass-produced materials used by retail giants.

“I also think that people, especially the young, want to dress differently. They don't want to be looking the same; they want something that is funky, with clashing patterns and they know they can get amazing quality for less,” says Melissa.

Competing against a department store's advertising budget, location, convenience and range makes it difficult for op shops to be at the top of a shopper's destination, as their altruistic nature is often mute among the inner-city latte set's scavenge for vintage wear.

“We do try to explain to people now and when they purchase something they are helping to save a life,” says Melissa, “But it has its ups and downs ... there are a lot of copies of styles out there in the retail world.”

Other roadblocks to upcycling's infiltration of mainstream culture include the “dirty and sometimes smelly” condition of ill-managed op shops or the idea of being looked down upon for buying items second-hand. However, Melissa says many shops are addressing this perception and that many are now even mistaken for boutiques.

“To me it's environmentally friendly and you are helping people at the same time, so it is something you should be proud of doing, shopping at an op shop.”

Operated by UnitingCare Community in Queensland, proceeds from Lifeline op shops go towards their crisis line 13 11 14.





Reclaiming our empty palaces

The problems facing the Uniting Church are common to many denominations around the world, and there is much we can learn from how they are responding, writes **Rev Orrell Battersby**.

At the 31st Synod we received some sobering statistics—attendance in the Uniting Church across Australia is in sharp decline. The prediction: continued decline. The problem: failure to attract young families. I don't question the statistics. I do question the problem and we all need to challenge the prediction.

The decline is not because of a failure to attract young families to church—that's the effect, not the cause! The cause is a failure to transfer leadership to succeeding generations in the church and send them from the church into mission.

During my study leave in 2012, I attended a leadership conference at Holy Trinity Church in Brompton, England (HTB). HTB is a vibrant Anglican church in the heart of London. Each Sunday HTB announces 11 services, held in 11 different locations. HTB is bucking the trend of declining and ageing congregations, whilst remaining true to its Anglican traditions and structures.

Every year since 1985, HTB has sent out teams of between 10 and 200, mostly young families, into a wide variety of communities throughout London to effectively plant new churches in existing buildings. When a new curate (trainee vicar) arrives at HTB they are encouraged to “build up and cream off” the liveliest and brightest from the congregation.

At the end of the three-year curacy, “the curate, the team and the cream” are told to “push off and don't come back”. Some families sell their home and relocate to the new area; many change jobs to secure work in the targeted borough. All commit their time, tithes and talents from day one.

HTB has a guiding narrative, “An empty church is like the empty palace of a long-forgotten king.” Their mission is to remind and re-awaken whole neighbourhoods to the fact that the King is alive and in residence. The arrival of a readymade congregation into an empty or emptying church is nothing short of dramatic! The effect on the community is palpable!

Their vision is one of reclaiming. The “reclaimed church” reflects the broader context of the redevelopment of areas within a large city like London.

How do we respond to our changing context? We may want to consider the concept of a reclaimed church. Like the Anglicans throughout the UK, the Uniting Church in Australia has underutilised buildings. More notably, we have underutilised young people and families. It's late, but not too late to reawaken our neighbourhoods to the fact that the King is alive and in residence.

Orrell is campus minister with NewLife Uniting Pacific Pines, a church plant in the Gold Coast's northern suburbs.

‘An empty church is like the empty palace of a long-forgotten king’

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‘ Maybe it is a transition that many of us need, regardless of what church we grow up in—our Sunday School understanding has to be questioned, modified or even rejected in order to fully grasp faith as an adult ’

A quantum leap of faith

If there's one principle that religion and quantum physics agree on, it's that the search for truth requires an open mind. Physicist Dr Joel Corney talks to **Dianne Jensen**.

Consider this: The only thing we can be sure about is that uncertainty is fundamental to the universe.

University of Queensland (UQ) Senior Lecturer in Physics Dr Joel Corney is a researcher in the strange world of quantum physics, a discipline in which matter and energy are observed at nanoscale (really, really tiny) levels. His work is in the area of ultracold atoms and optics, exploring the behaviours of particles at temperatures as close as possible to absolute zero.

It's a zone where science and philosophy intersect; where the laws of physics reveal seemingly random activity and curious minds can only imagine what binds creation together.

Joel is a member of Sherwood Uniting Church in Brisbane, and a Christian who views both physics and faith as integral to his search to understand what makes life tick.

“The two worlds don't compete and they are addressing very different aspects of human experience,” says Joel. “Scientific knowledge is provisional and it is empirical, and it is kind of self-limiting in that it narrows down the questions to those to which it can provide answers. In scientific explanations God doesn't appear because that is just not the kind of questions you are asking.”

The disciplines of science and theology do overlap, he adds, but not in ways that people might expect.

“The search for beauty—for symmetry and simplicity—is one of the things that physicists and mathematicians talk about, and that connects with the experience of faith. In the mess of equations, if you can see beyond the mess to the unifying simplicity, that’s beauty.

“Looking for patterns is for me one of the links between scientists and theologians; looking for order that isn’t quite obvious from a shallow first glance—you have to dig a bit and then you find it.”

Keeping an open mind

As tempting as it may be to use the concept of God to fill the gaps in human knowledge, Joel suggests that doing so limits our understanding of God, and leaves us high and dry when science forges ahead.

“You have to be careful not to try and fuse together theology and science; they are both provisional but if you fuse them together a scientific theory might move on, and the theology that went with it is divorced and you need to reinvent it.”

The disconnect between the fundamentalist theology of his childhood and his growing fascination with science forced Joel to question his faith during his teenage years.

“I grew up attending small congregations in the Pentecostal tradition where my dad was a pastor for a time. I became increasingly uncomfortable with the fundamentalist approach to science and things like evolution and the age of the universe ... by the time I left high school for university I was ready to look for other solutions.”

Living at Cromwell College on the University of Queensland campus opened up a different way of looking at things.

“I was introduced to the Uniting Church, and the idea that you could be a faithful Christian and still respect scripture and yet not have a literal view of it. You could accept fairly mainstream scientific things like evolution and the Big Bang creating the universe.”

Joel read the *Basis of Union* and encountered a Christ-centred approach which gave him the freedom to engage intellectually with his faith.

“The Basis gave a very unified view of what Christianity was about—we read the Bible with Christ in view. When I read that and learnt about what that meant, I felt that even with all my years of growing up in the church I hadn’t seen the Christ-centred focus and deliberation that comes with that. Maybe it is a transition that many of us need, regardless of what church we grow up in—our Sunday School understanding has to be questioned, modified or even rejected in order to fully grasp faith as an adult.”

A faith to live by

Now at 40 years of age, with a wife and three children, Joel is involved in his local congregation as well as being increasingly concerned with a range of social justice issues.

“My Christian faith informs my political views. If we look for a translation of the New Testament witness in the political sphere then we need to be thinking about a more

equal society where there aren’t huge gaps between rich and poor ... that is in a sense a prophetic tradition that the Uniting Church has taken up.

“The other big issue is our environment and what we are doing to it; I think the church is becoming more aware of that and it is a place where faith is pushing Christians to be more proactive.”

As a member of Gen X, Joel knows that he and his Christian peers are going against the tide by attending a traditional mainstream church or even committing to organised religion. He’s not bothered by the generation gap.

“I look for good preaching and a sense of order; I don’t know if this is the scientific side of me coming out but I like a sense of order coming through—maybe this is partly my personal reaction against my Pentecostal and charismatic upbringing. I like to be challenged and made to think about my faith but I also value fidelity; fidelity to the essential gospel is important.”

No easy answers

This same willingness to balance established theory and revelation is also a requirement in the world of quantum physics, where pat solutions don’t apply.

“One of the central aspects that you can’t get away from is uncertainty, and in quantum physics there is an irreducible uncertainty which is philosophically quite different to the more classical notions that in principle everything could be knowable, or if things were unknown it was because we didn’t measure them precisely enough,” says Joel.

In simple terms, when you observe how matter behaves at the nanoscale, the laws that govern larger objects go out the window—and nobody really knows why. For example, matter can go from one spot to another without appearing in the intervening space, and what we do in one part of the universe can instantly affect what is seen in a different part (described as “spooky action at a distance”).

In order to make sense of these apparent contradictions, the quest is on to find “the theory of everything”.

“The theory of everything is a search for an overriding theory that somehow unifies incompatible theories, but it is a bit like a mirage—it is currently far out of the range of what we can test experimentally so it remains in the realm of metaphysics and speculation,” says Joel.

Patterns at play

There’s a natural congruence between physics and faith and the third passion in his life, music.

“The patterns in classical music really appeal to me and that resonates with my goal as a research scientist and also the Christian believer—seeing the bigger pattern that ties things together.

“I am driven by curiosity and that translates into passion. I am a fairly quiet and reserved person, but I couldn’t imagine living without music and faith and physics.”

‘The theory of everything is a search for an overriding theory that somehow unifies incompatible theories, but it is a bit like a mirage’

A good day for bad news

Lessons from the Lindt café

Australians were glued to their screens last December during the Lindt café hostage drama. What can we learn from the way the tragedy unfolded? **Dianne Jensen** reports.

We all remember those first images of hostages holding up a black flag with white Arabic writing in the window of the Lindt café. The crisis in Sydney's central business district absorbed our attention as rolling coverage via television, radio and online media platforms provided a ring seat to the seventeen-hour drama.

‘I’m optimistic about the role of social media in connecting people, and fostering dialogue and debate, particularly dialogue and debate for which the agenda is not set by mainstream media’

Dr John Harrison

During the day and into the early morning the mix of updates, analysis and on-the-spot commentary was interspersed with looping replays of the few bursts of activity. We kept a helpless vigil as we watched the shadowy faces behind the window and glimpsed the terror of the fleeing hostages.

Barrister Katrina Dawson and Lindt café manager Tori Johnson were killed during the December siege, along with gunman Man Haron Monis.

The Lindt café siege was not the first act of violence in Australia with conjectural links to religious extremism, but it has placed the question of how we respond to the saturation coverage provided by both old and new media squarely on the agenda.

Too much information?

Dr John Harrison, journalism program director at the School of Communication and Arts at the University of Queensland agrees it is important to consider the role played by media outlets in shaping our perception of what happened, and even the way in which the events unfolded.

“There are complex ethical decisions that news producers have to make, often with very little time to reflect on any unintended consequences. Certainly during the Sydney siege, news organisations collaborated with the authorities in not broadcasting information that may have helped the perpetrator. They clearly acted in the public interest.”

John adds that many media commentators have expressed serious reservations about the rolling coverage of such events, particularly by television.

“I know from my Twitter interaction with him that Paul Barry from the *ABC Media Watch* program shares my concern that seemingly endless rolling coverage easily degenerates into hypothetical speculation which fails to meet the public interest test. Indeed, such coverage can be a form a public spectacle, even a ghoulish form of entertainment.”

The role of social media, particularly Twitter, is critical in situations of live reporting, says John.

“There are many who are critical of the bile that spews forth on Twitter, and a lot of old-school journos are ambivalent about the platform. However for journalists, Twitter is always the first platform of choice for breaking news. And as with traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television, you need to be selective about what you read and who you believe.

“Moreover, social media provides an immediate corrective to misinformation, through what we call ‘the wisdom of crowds’. It is impossible these days for a public figure to make a claim of dubious veracity, without an immediate corrective chorus from social media.”

John believes that new media platforms provide an opportunity to create social capital.

“I’m optimistic about the role of social media in connecting people, and fostering dialogue and debate, particularly dialogue and debate for which the agenda is not set by mainstream media.”

Truth comes at a price

The hostage drama regained traction in the public space with the coverage of the ongoing inquest into the three deaths which began at the Glebe Coroners Court at the end of January.



Photo: Channel Nine

This was followed in early February by the commercial television interviews with survivors who had agreed to sell their stories, with Channel Nine's *60 Minutes* winning the ratings battle against Channel Seven.

But not everyone elected to watch. *The Guardian* noted that "Despite the intense competition between the two networks, the extensive promos and the acres of news reports devoted to the siege, more Australians opted for lighter fare: *My Kitchen Rules* and *The House of Hancock*."

Were Australians weary of thinking about the incident, or did the commercialisation of the tragedy rankle? Maybe there was just something better on.

Ethicist and former journalist Trevor Jordan says that there are a number of ways in which people react to the saturation media coverage of violent events, especially so close to home.

"We are hard-wired for 'fight' or 'flight' and the array of emotions that go with it. We can respond to this anxiety in a number of ways. We can, for example, avoid it, deny it, rationalise it or drug over it," says Trevor.

"Rationalising violence takes many forms, from the simple, 'They had it coming to them' to the more sophisticated ideological point scoring or historical justification based on past wrongs. Much rationalising also results from racial or ethnic stereotyping."

Trevor says that viewers need to remember that the bottom line of media coverage is always ratings.

"The primary role of the media is to get viewers and listeners. Emotional links to tragic events are regularly used to promote station product—linkages we would find unacceptable in marketing other products."

Christians have a duty to seek out the truth, he says, and this means that we must walk a different path when we are confronted by public incidents which engender anger, fear and grief.

"A better way of dealing with our anxieties about violent events is to share those anxieties with others, find out we are not alone and to put some perspectives on them.

"The starting point for most Christians would be prayerful reflection. Handing our anxieties over to God, calming our minds, cultivating a mindful solidarity with all who suffer, and opening our hearts and minds to possible responses.

"A prayerful attitude helps us to accommodate our responses to the rhythms of the Gospels rather than those of the media, which in the case of live saturation coverage are often unhelpfully immediate and instinctive. Christians are lucky. We are part of a global community of faith. We have pathways for solidarity."

Taking time to mourn

Dealing with the anxiety and anger engendered by a climate of violence and fearfulness is an important pastoral issue, says Synod chaplaincy educator Lynne Gibson, and churches have a role to play in the community.

"Grief can be confronting to witness. We can become fearful for ourselves and our loved ones, feeling helpless and overwhelmed. For some, past losses can resurface and our grief becomes deeply personal."

Holding special services can provide an opportunity for community mourning, Lynne suggests.

"There is comfort in togetherness, hope, and the healing power of ritual provides an avenue for moving forward."



Left: One of eight trolleys donated to Teddies Without Borders for children in detention centres. Photo: Supplied
Above: Men from the local community at the opening of the Deception Bay Men's Shed in September 2014. Photo: Joy Killey

Making a vision for mission

Why do you do the things you do? **Ashley Thompson** talks to Ashgrove West and Deception Bay Uniting Churches about how to cultivate a mission-orientated church culture.

Whether you realise it or not every church has a culture. Framed by the vision, values and systems of its members, this culture is often buried beneath the reflexive answer “That’s just the way we do things around here”, but putting your church culture into words can be a powerful guide to mission.

‘It’s basically about trying to make connections with the community’

David Killey

Ashgrove West Uniting Church member Calvin Hanton describes his church’s vision for mission as: “very broad, very active and quite prepared to be hands on if it’s within the abilities of our members.”

The outworking of this vision was seen last December, when the Hanton family responded to a call in the Queensland Synod weekly email newsletter *Uniting News*.

“We heard that Teddies without Borders were desperately short of gifts for kids in detention centres,” says Calvin, “So a number of families, and the congregation both here and in Deception Bay, purchased around about 180 bears and we had them donated and delivered in under five days.”

The unique structure of Ashgrove West, which has not had a minister in placement for close to four years, allowed for quick action and flexibility in responding to the needs of others.

“We give whenever we can, whenever it is needed,” Calvin explains. “I believe this culture was intentionally created by a number of our church members who have strong backgrounds in overseas mission work and working for the church in rural areas.”

Similarly, just north of Brisbane, Deception Bay Uniting Church holds a strong evangelistic outlook, offering a wide range of community-based ministries including their kids’ club and recently opened Men’s Shed.

“It’s basically about trying to make connections with the community,” says Men’s Shed coordinator and congregation elder David Killey.

“I don’t try to make it religious but for me, and I am sure for other people in our church, the Men’s Shed is an opportunity for people outside the church to see what Christians are about and want to be one,” says David.

Deception Bay Uniting Church has cultivated this culture of missional initiative by supporting and utilising the skills and passions of its members.

They, like their Ashgrove West counterparts, simply “see a need and fill that need” because others who have gone before them have paved the way.



7 handy tips for a drama-free church camp

What could be better than heading off for a weekend with your church family? Here's a few tips about how to ensure that church camp is memorable for all the right reasons.

1

Start early

Once you have booked the venue, put together a timeline. Publicity is the key to good attendance so create a marketing strategy which gathers momentum over the final three months using newsletters, social media and worship updates. Keep a straight face if anyone mentions the 1982 church camp. Most of us got over it ages ago.

2

Teamwork counts

Churches are littered with the remains of burnt-out camp directors who expired still clutching their colour-coded washing up rosters. Share the organisational load by including different age groups; schedule regular short meetings and follow up with agreed actions and accountabilities.

3

Share the vision

Before you start worrying about where to put the tea urn, decide on the key focus of your camp (intergenerational community, spiritual retreat, church strategy, mission?) While all these things can be included, determining your priorities sets the structure and tone of the program.

4

Butcher's paper only works for wrapping meat

Wrestle the devilish details of rosters, accommodation plans, team lists and so on into submission by using basic computer spreadsheets. You have limited time, so use it well.

5

What will we do?

Good speakers are as rare on family camps as decent coffee, and both are critical. Unless you have the resources to attract someone really cool, consider working creatively around a theme.

6

Take time to veg out

The best camps offer a mix of relaxation, socialising outside the usual cliques, family time and spiritual refreshment. Delegate people to organise entertainment in the afternoon and evening but include a quiet zone for those who need to chill out. Nominate a few people to lead a bush walk or host a small discussion group, then sneak off and take a nap.

7

Worship together

Aim to include as many groups as possible in closing worship. People may be tired, scruffy, and hallucinating about the contents of their fridges at home, but this is the moment when we lay out all those shared stories and dreams before God.



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Hummingbird House cofounders Paul and Gabrielle Quilliam turning the sod with their daughter Shiloh, Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Margie Abbott and Wesley Mission Brisbane Executive Director Geoff Batkin.
Photo: Wesley Mission Brisbane

Hummingbird House takes flight

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has officially turned the sod at the site of Hummingbird House, a purpose-built children's hospice which will provide 24-hour paediatric palliative care in Queensland. **Jessica Mewburn** writes.

Baby Kate was born on 9 December 2008 with a congenital cardiac defect known as Tetralogy of Fallot. Fiona and Mark Engwirda knew from their 19-week scan that Kate had this condition, but with open-heart surgical repair she was expected to develop normally.

Unfortunately, this was not to be. At 12 weeks of age Kate developed seizures and was diagnosed with microcephaly—small head and brain.

"As a result she suffered severe epilepsy, respiratory difficulties and regular episodes of apnoea where she would stop breathing ... The first 18 months of Kate's life was spent bouncing in and out of hospital," says Fiona.

On Kate's first birthday she was deemed "palliative" and it was clear she would not grow up. With no respite options for families like theirs in Queensland the Engwirdas travelled to Bear Cottage in Sydney. The facility is a specialised paediatric hospice that provides families with respite in a warm home-like environment.

"As soon as I arrived back in Brisbane, I was convinced we needed one of these facilities here," says Fiona.

With Paul and Gabrielle Quilliam, who run the charity Queensland Kids, Fiona and Mark began to lobby for a facility like Bear Cottage in Queensland. Tragically in 2011 Kate passed away on Fiona and Mark's second visit to Bear Cottage.

"By chance we were surrounded by the beautiful staff and surroundings of a place that specialises in paediatric palliative care. The facilities allowed us to have Kate located posthumously in what is known as a 'cool room'; this room is decorated and furnished beautifully like a child's bedroom ... This gave our family valuable time to do and say all that we needed to.

"There is no place to do this in Queensland.

"I am excited to know that thanks to Wesley Mission Brisbane and the creation of Hummingbird House, this opportunity will now be granted to the thousands of other families in our position every year."

A joint project of Wesley Mission Brisbane and Queensland Kids, Hummingbird House will provide respite care to more than 3700 Queensland families who have a child living with life-limiting conditions.

Wesley Mission Brisbane Executive Director Geoff Batkin said Wesley Mission Brisbane is incredibly proud to allocate the land and come on board as the clinical service provider for Queensland's only children's hospice.

"Hummingbird House will change the lives of children with a life-limiting condition and their families in a profound way," he said.

hummingbirdhouse.org.au

‘Hummingbird House will change the lives of children with a life-limiting condition and their families in a profound way’

Geoff Batkin



Photo: StudioCanal

March to equality

The list of Martin Luther King Jr's achievements is long, and he looms large in our collective consciousness as a champion of civil rights and nonviolent, direct action. King was president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and played a major role in achieving a great shift in civil rights in America. For his great many achievements he is honoured every year on Martin Luther King Jr Day in the United States.

Unlike most biopics, *Selma* looks at just one small slice of its subject's life and accomplishment. Director Ava DuVernay focuses particularly on the 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches and the role King (portrayed by David Oyelowo) played in their coordination.

Unlike other popular Hollywood films about race relations like *The Blind Side* and *The Help*, *Selma* pointedly avoids the white saviour narrative and focuses on how black Americans, through sustained, unyielding, nonviolent action, made great strides towards achieving the same rights and freedoms as white people.

There has been a small controversy over the portrayal of President Lyndon B. Johnson (Tom Wilkinson) as a reluctant supporter of the civil rights movement—sources who knew him say he was much more enthusiastic—but regardless, his depiction serves as a shorthand for the highly strained relationship between King and the federal government. DuVernay is very clear that progress

towards equality has not been achieved because a white president took pity, but because black people spoke up and demanded it.

But why nonviolence? Considering its narrow scope, it is not surprising there is little time given to King's motivation for his particular methods. Little details, like a statuette of Ghandi in King's house and a tense conversation between Coretta Scott King (Carmen Ejogo) and Malcom X (Nigel Thatch), are a little nod to those in the know. The film also emphasises the responsibility people of faith have to stand up for the disenfranchised. When King calls for a second march to Montgomery, even though the first ended so tragically, hundreds of people of many races answer—and all of them are portrayed as religious.

Although there is a particular focus on King, it's the resolute citizens of Selma who are really celebrated here. DuVernay has been particularly careful to include the stories of some of the women who were instrumental to the marches including Dianne Nash (Tessa Thompson), Amelia Boynton Robinson (Lorraine Toussaint) and Annie Lee Cooper (Oprah Winfrey).

Selma is a triumph, and will remain an influential film long after it disappears from cinemas.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor

Selma

Directed by Ava DuVernay
Starring David Oyelowo,
Carmen Ejogo, Tom Wilkinson
2014, M

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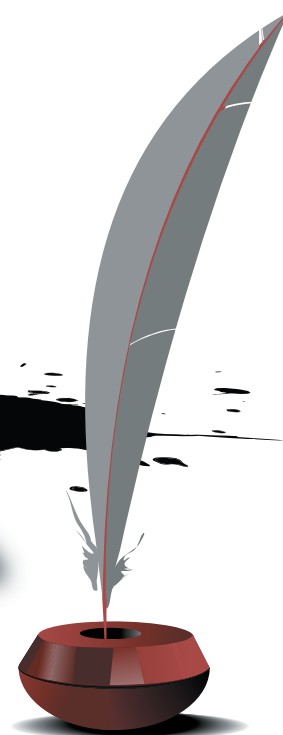
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To the editor



Perpetually a visitor

The article “Who are the 7%?” in the February 2015 edition of *Journey* was spot on. I came into the Uniting Church in South Australia as an 18-year-old after a couple of years in a youth group and quickly found myself running said youth group with the only other guy between the ages of 18 and 40.

It sounds counter-intuitive at first, but older people making such a fuss when a young person visits or starts attending a church can actually be a barrier to inclusion—if you’re always special, everyone’s always so amazed that you’re even there, it is hard to feel like part of the herd.

My wife and I are now at a church where we’re virtually the only under-50s, and have attended services there for about three years, but still get called “visitors” because we attend a couple of times a month rather than once per week.

Peri Strathearn
South Australia

(This letter was left as a comment on journeyonline.com.au)

Thanks for the hard truth

I want to commend *Journey* and particularly Rohan for the article about young adults in the February edition of *Journey*.

I thought it had some really good points and feeds into a critical conversation we have to have in the church around how to nurture young adults in their faith and how to build young adults into leaders or maybe even allow space for the young adults to lead. I used the article as a part of my report to Bremer Brisbane Presbytery and I am just really appreciative of you not being afraid to say some of these hard truths.

Thanks.

Rev Josie Neuendorff
Centenary Uniting Church

Don’t go there

In response to your article “Shake, rattle and roll. How theological study can change your faith” (*Journey*, February 2015), I was heartbroken to read that people attending theological college would lose their faith and become atheists. If that’s what’s going to happen to you, don’t go, especially young people who are easily impressionable to academic teachings.

A person’s faith and trust in God is so precious to him. He does not want to see it ruined and them not even believing that he exists anymore.

The Bible is a deeply spiritual book and like our minister says “It’s not like academic texts”. And like Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1: 21a (NLT): “Since God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom.”

Just read the Bible for what it is and it will bring you closer to God.

Miriam Bakker
Southport Uniting Church

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UnitingCare Australia welcomes more government support

The government has announced a new initiative consisting of \$54.4 million in funding over four years for people with severe symptoms of dementia in residential care facilities.

“It is very good news,” said Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director of UnitingCare Australia. “Our agencies provide the largest share of aged care in the country and we are consistently hearing that the challenges of caring for people with dementia are growing. Additional support to assist residential care providers in meeting this challenge is most welcome.”

Approximately one in four people aged 85 and over have dementia. With an ageing population it is expected that nearly 900 000 Australians will be living with the condition by 2050. Today more than half the permanent residents in government-funded aged-care facilities around the country have been diagnosed with dementia.

“This is a growing challenge and the government is right to be trialling a new initiative to improve our capacity to care for this vulnerable group of people. It is a positive step forward both for the people who need specialised care and for the services doing their best to provide that care with limited resources,” said Ms Hatfield Dodds.

Uniting Church condemns death penalty again

The Uniting Church in Australia has joined churches, non-governmental organisations and others in voicing concerns about Indonesia’s resumption of the death penalty.

President of the Uniting Church in Australia Rev Dr Andrew Dutney is one of 14 organisational leaders who have written to both the Indonesian ambassador to Australia and to the Australian minister for foreign affairs expressing grave concerns for at least 11 people facing imminent execution.

Signatories to the letter are asking Indonesia to commute the death sentences to terms of imprisonment. They’re also asking for a moratorium on all executions in Indonesia with a view to abolishing the death penalty. Two Australian citizens Myuran Sukamaran and Andrew Chan are among those facing imminent execution.

“The Uniting Church in Australia opposes capital punishment and stands against the death penalty, be it in Indonesia, the United States, China or wherever it exists,” said Dr Dutney.



UnitingJustice lodges submissions on immigration, Indigenous recognition

UnitingJustice submitted two reports to the federal government in January.

The first, submitted to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, recommended Australia’s Humanitarian Programme intake be increased to at least 25 000 for 2015–2016 and increased over the following years to 50 000 annually.

It also recommended that the offshore and onshore program intakes be de-linked, the decision to not accept refugees from Indonesian processing centres be reversed and that “all refugees, regardless of visa class, should have access to family reunion through the Special Humanitarian Programme.”

The other report, made in conjunction with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, was to the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The report warned that the Uniting Church Assembly would not endorse proposals that fall short of recommendations made by the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians and recommended that the Australian Constitution should be amended to remove reference to making racially-based laws. It also recommended that constitutional recognition of the languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be included and that the referendum for these changes should be held no later than the 2016 federal election.

Both reports can be found at unitingjustice.org.au

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