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It's time to talk

They say the number one rule of polite society is you should never talk about religion or politics. It's upsetting, and causes division where there should be friendship.

Communities of faith don't have that luxury. For obvious reasons we can't avoid religion, and the expression of faith in the public sphere is a political act. And when religion and politics intersect—such as with the future of marriage—it compounds the controversy.

At the 14th Assembly of the Uniting Church, the Assembly Standing Committee will bring a report summarising the responses to the discussion paper on marriage as requested by the 13th Assembly in 2012. On page six there is a feature exploring some of the issues from a range of points of view.

There's an intimacy that comes from being church together that somehow makes the opinions of a stranger in your pew matter far more than out on the street. On page eight Dr Janice McRandal examines how through Christ, God liberates us from dualistic, oppositional thinking, and frees us to celebrate difference. We could frame this discussion as an argument, but being divisive is not the goal.

Out of any church I've been part of, the Uniting Church finds the most value in difference. People who are different provide a fresh outlook and illuminating perspective to things we have long considered part of the furniture. People of different ages, cultures, economic status, genders, sexualities and theological traditions all have something important to contribute to the discussions that will continue during the 14th Assembly and beyond.

So let's be careful, but also share confidently in the knowledge that we are loved by God who loves the whole world. As God loves us, may we love one another.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor

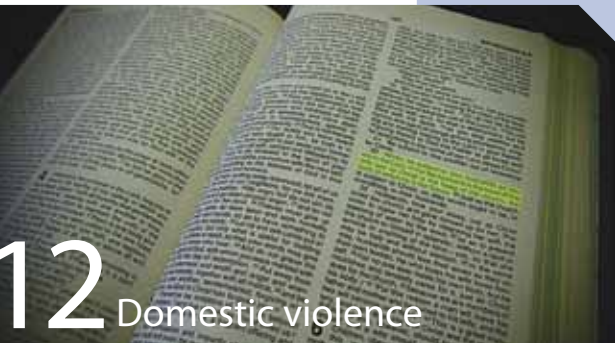
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The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod

60 Bayliss Street, Auchenflower QLD

GPO Box 674, Brisbane QLD 4001

Ph: (07) 3377 9910 | **E:** journey@ucaql.com.au

F: (07) 3377 9717 | journeyonline.com.au

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Monday Midday Prayer

*God of Love,
pour out your Spirit afresh,
open our hearts and minds
to see how we can be agents
of your purposes.*

Amen

Moderator's highlights

5 May

Kings College Annual Commemoration Dinner, St Lucia, Brisbane

15 May

Moderator's visit to North Queensland Presbytery begins. Guest speaker at the John Flynn College Council Dinner, Townsville

29 May

Addressing the Lutheran Convention of Synod 2015 Middle Park, Brisbane

Faith and fairness in Tolpuddle

After see-sawing for a couple of years, from 2016 we're back to celebrating Labour Day in May. It got me thinking about the church's connection to the union movement.

One of our founding tradition's connections goes back to Tolpuddle, in Dorset, England.

In the early 1800s, there was a trend of consolidation of land holdings by wealthy landholders that was putting further pressure on farm workers—their wages were being reduced, and their capacity to grow food for themselves was also. Unions had already begun to be formed in the cities, and landholders were extremely concerned that this might spread to rural workers. The country around Dorset is poor—chalklands—and to eke out a living is a struggle. (Not like the country to the north—Somerset and Gloucestershire, which is good dairying country and where a lot of cheese is produced, hence, some say, the term “chalk and cheese”).

In the midst of this pressure, George Loveless, a local Methodist lay preacher, joined with five other men to form a union of farm workers. They made an oath. The local landholder, James Frampton, heard about it, and used an old law against secret oaths—that had application in the navy—to have the men convicted and sentenced to seven years in jail, and transportation to Van Diemen's Land. Loveless sought to raise a rallying cry to defend himself and his friends:

God is our guide! from field, from wave,
From plough, from anvil, and from loom;
We come, our country's rights to save,
And speak a tyrant faction's doom:
We raise the watch-word liberty;
We will, we will, we will be free!

There was strong popular support for the men. A massive demonstration occurred in London, and a petition of over 800 000 signatories was delivered to parliament. The men became known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

It took three years of struggle for the government to respond; conditional pardons were offered, but refused. Eventually, after further demonstrations and petitions, the men were unconditionally pardoned and allowed to return home.

The event became a galvanising moment for the development of unions in England, and their place in civil society. It is still remembered in Tasmania, and at a yearly festival in July at Tolpuddle.

The sobering truth is that the landholders believed they were upholding the values of God, king, and country, even while they were oppressing the farm labourers and their families. Christian discipleship today demands that we too, exercise a critical discernment around the interplay of the gospel imperative and the ordering of our society.

Rev David Baker
Moderator, Queensland Synod

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Photo: UnitingCare

UnitingCare Australia speaks into welfare debate

Debates about welfare often place charities and policy-makers at odds, but UnitingCare Australia sees opportunity in the federal government's latest review of welfare. **Annette Pereira** reports.

UnitingCare Australia has long advocated investing more, not less, in people who are disadvantaged.

When the final report of the government's welfare reform review was handed down earlier this year, there were some unexpected surprises included in the recommendations. In particular, welfare groups were pleased to see the inclusion of an idea they have been raising for a number of years—an independent process for setting welfare payment levels, to make sure that people who rely on welfare are receiving enough money to cover their basic needs and remain connected to the community.

"It was great to see them pick up that idea which we have been pushing for a long time," says Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director of UnitingCare Australia.

"The key premise of welfare is that it enables people to live a basic, decent life when they are unable to provide for themselves. For years, Uniting Church agencies have been seeing that the payments people receive—particularly Newstart—are simply inadequate for that purpose. Payment levels have to be fixed," she says.

Beyond providing for people's basic needs, welfare is also about giving people the support they need to move towards a more flourishing life, where possible. The report also recommended investing early to support people to move back into employment.

"No one wants to see intergenerational welfare dependency. That is why the rest of the supports that go around welfare payments are so critical. Addressing welfare dependency requires a long-term view and proper investment in people," says Lin.

UnitingCare Australia believes the challenge now is to help the government focus on the good ideas that were contained in the review, and to move away from other measures like the welfare cuts that were in the 2014 budget.

"Payment cuts won't change anything. When someone finds themselves relying on welfare, they are normally already overwhelmed with multiple challenges. Stability, support and encouragement are what makes a difference and enables them to move towards independence. This is what we are frequently reminding all sides of parliament."

The government has welcomed the welfare review report and announced that as a first step it will revamp the out-of-date IT system that manages welfare in Australia. This is necessary before other reforms can occur. But there are no promises yet that other measures in the review will be adopted.

"We will continue to encourage better support for the most vulnerable people. We are hopeful that a better welfare system could be within reach," says Lin.

*UnitingCare Australia's submission to the review can be found at tinyurl.com/unitingcarewelfaresubmission
The full government report is available to the public at tinyurl.com/commonwealthwelfarereport*

‘Addressing welfare dependency requires a long-term view and proper investment in people’

Lin Hatfield Dodds



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Marriage

We're talking about it

The 14th Uniting Church Assembly will be talking about marriage when it meets in Perth in July this year. **Bruce Mullan** explores some of the issues.

Marriage has been a constant theme in the political conversation in Australia for several years as part of broader discussion about the legal recognition of same-gender relationships. The increasing public debate was acknowledged by the 13th Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia meeting in Adelaide in 2012 which expressed its desire for the church to have a “respectful conversation” about the issue.

An initial consultation process coordinated by the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine in 2013 came to the conclusion there is no agreed theology of marriage among people in the Uniting Church and that there was a wide range of views among church members.

Coordinator of the consultation process Rev Dr Robert Bos said the intent was to collect a representative range of views across the church rather than a “poll” which intended to provide accurate sampling of Uniting Church members.

“The aim of consultation process was to elicit views on marriage (not just same-gender marriage) from across the Uniting Church,” says Rob.

Following the consultation process, a discussion paper on the theology of marriage in the Uniting Church was prepared and widely circulated throughout the councils of the church. A total of 438 groups and individuals responded to the discussion paper. While there were very differing views, the working group reported that generally the conversations were respectful and helpful.

Diverse opinions

Intentional conversations were also held with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and culturally and linguistically diverse groups within the Uniting Church, recognising the cultural challenges of discussing such issues within these groups.

“Indigenous people want the opportunity to look at matters slowly, with careful biblical and theological discussion, and not be pressured,” says Rob.

While the view that marriage is an exclusive term for the covenant between a man and a woman was held by the

largest number of respondents, a significant minority supported a change to a more inclusive definition of marriage which includes same-gender relationships.

“More and more people have experienced gay people in their own extended family networks and this has been a catalyst for rethinking,” says Rob.

A theological question

The key questions for the church are theological. How do we discern what God wants with regard to marriage in the 21st century?

The *Basis of Union* clearly suggests that in the process of determining doctrine, the scriptures are not a stand-alone authority—doctrine is shaped by other factors. The “Wesleyan Quadrilateral”, named after the leader of the Methodist movement in the late 18th century John Wesley, is a process for discerning a church’s theological understanding. It brings scripture, tradition, reason and experience to these conversations.

Wesley himself did not see all four sources for authority and decision making as having equal weight. He understood the scripture as the preeminent norm which interfaced with tradition, reason and experience in a dynamic and interactive way.

Graceville Uniting Church minister Rev Dr Robert Brennan agrees the diversity of opinion about how marriage is understood within the Uniting Church is as much about the relative weight given to each of the four sources as it is about how the scriptures are understood.

“From a conservative point of view I’d have to say quite firmly that the base is scripture so that none of the other three can override it,” he says.

Those who are open to the possibility of same-gender marriage don’t ignore scripture and the wisdom of the Christian past, but place more significant emphasis on experience and a vital, inward faith upheld by the assurance of grace.

‘More and more people have experienced gay people in their own extended family networks and this has been a catalyst for rethinking’

Rev Dr Robert Bos





Ethicist and progressive Christian Rev Dr Noel Preston has been publically advocating for the recognition of same-gender relationships since 1974. “The Jesus I follow operated that way in his time and got straight to the point; it was about empowering people where they were,” he says.

The second key question seems to be about how we read the scriptures and about which passages or verses are used to support preconceived positions—whatever these may be. The danger being that taking the text in isolation may possibly ignore the original intent.

“A mature Christian ethical response takes account of the whole witness of scripture but at the end of the day it must be contextual and deal with the realities of the human condition,” says Noel.

Living in the tension

Convener of the Assembly Working Group on Doctrine Rev Alistair Macrae says the group was somewhat dismayed that some respondents to the discussion paper on marriage seemed to think that quoting isolated Bible verses addressed the question comprehensively, while others indicated contemporary cultural norms should be determinative.

“We argue that the *Basis of Union* reminds us that biblical interpretation is always an open and dynamic process. Our reading of scripture is nourished but not imprisoned by received interpretations,” he says.

Uniting Church scholar Rev Dr Bill Loader says, “Given that the biblical witness is clear in disapproving of same-gender sexual relations, the key question which should determine current discussion of same-gender relationships and their legitimacy must be whether any new knowledge causes us to believe that the first century believers did not have a sufficiently adequate understanding of same-gender relationships.

“Do new insights lead us to more differentiated conclusions than theirs?” he asks.

Will the status quo change?

The work done so far through the consultation process and responses to the subsequent discussion paper suggest that the 14th Assembly is unlikely to reach agreement to change the Uniting Church’s current position on marriage.

“Doctrinal change is only doctrinal change when it is actually owned by the whole church,” says Robert Brennan, who believes the conversation has to continue.

“Until it is owned by the hearts of the people it isn’t actually the faith of church.

“There has got to be an answer which maintains the integrity of the gospel and still offers grace and hope to all people.”

While the Assembly probably will encourage the church to continue the conversation, dozens of other churches worldwide already approve the marriage of same-sex couples. After 30 years of debate, members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted this year to change the definition of marriage in the church’s constitution to include same-gender marriage.

The Presbyterian vote amends the church’s constitution to broaden its definition of marriage from being between “a man and a woman” to “two people, traditionally a man and a woman.”

An ongoing discussion

Alastair Macrae believes the Uniting Church should do its work carefully and according to its theological convictions and processes.

“Changes to the Marriage Act will not determine the church’s response,” he says.

The Uniting Church in Australia is still guided by the Eighth Assembly’s 1997 Statement on Marriage which defines marriage for Christians as the freely given consent and commitment in public and before God of a man and a woman to live together for life.

While Uniting Church ministers are not prohibited from conducting blessings of same-gender relationships, they are not permitted to offer a marriage service to same-gender couples.

Ministers are always free to accept or refuse requests to celebrate marriages under the Marriage Act and are required by Commonwealth law and Assembly requirements to use the marriage order of service approved by the Assembly.

Even if the Australian parliament were to change the Marriage Act, unless the church agreed to change its definition of marriage, Uniting Church ministers remain bound to the 1997 statement on marriage and therefore will be expected to refuse requests for same-gender marriage.

And we will keep talking.

assembly.uca.org.au/marriage



Free to be different

We often talk about God and our souls, but what about our bodies? **Dr Janice McRandal** explores how God's threeness subverts our expectations of the world and frees us to be different.

‘We tend to think of the body as “carnal” or “flesh”, words that are really neutral but have come to mean something somehow corrupt’

In the world of contemporary theology, there seems no riskier notion than that of the body—what we do with our bodies and how we identity with them. It’s not that Christianity has ignored the body, but as Eugene Rogers says, in his book *Sexuality and The Christian Body*, “Christians have always been debating some practical issue about the body ... [but rarely have Christians connected] doctrines like incarnation, election, and resurrection, with race, gender, and orientation.”

Talk of doctrine has tended to focus on immaterial concepts or ideas, so thinking doctrinally about the body is unconventional, perhaps even uncomfortable, for both theologians and the broader Christian community. We tend to think of the body as “carnal” or “flesh”, words that are really neutral but have come to mean something somehow corrupt. It comes from dualistic thinking: that everything falls into two oppositional parts, perhaps beginning with good and evil, then extending to God and creation.

But the basis for Christian revelation is the startling claim that God has become embodied in Christ! Christian doctrine is directed wholly toward a God who creates and affirms the body, who sustains and redeems the entire body of creation. If our doctrines—creation, resurrection, salvation, eschatology—have nothing to say about gender,

sexuality, race, ableism and the many social, political, and ethical questions raised around the place and use of the body, then it seems we have missed the point. We’ve ignored the explanatory potency of the Incarnation!

Consider the damaging effects of dualistic thinking when related to the body. It’s a starting point for an entire order of oppositional categories: good and bad, up and down, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, black and white and so on. That these opposing categories are not neat fits for many of us within the community has been enormously confronting. Does Christian doctrine have anything to say here? Not surprisingly, I would say yes!

Ultimately, Christian theology is a theology of the Trinity. The divine economy reveals a God who enters into history and destabilises fixed, dualistic categories. The biblical narrative discloses a subtle yet potent fluidity to the Triune relationships. What remains is the profound mystery of threeness liberating us into the Triune life. To be a free subject is to be swept up in the Triune revelation. From this incorporative perspective, one may see gender and difference being drawn into the cleansing and transformative presence of the Triune God, so that, in Sarah Coakley’s words, “twoness ... is divinely ambushed by threeness”.

Janice is lecturer in systematic theology at Trinity College Queensland. Her new book, Christian Doctrine and the Grammar of Difference: A Contribution to Feminist Systematic Theology is out now.



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Rev Peter Lockhart with Kate Brazier and Lwanda Kahongo at St Lucia Uniting Church.
Photo: Ashley Thompson

Connecting congregation and community

St Lucia Uniting Church minister **Rev Peter Lockhart** speaks with **Ashley Thompson** about the Uniting Church's place in the crowded ministry of university chaplaincy.

A mere five minute drive from the University of Queensland's main campus, St Lucia Uniting Church is perfectly situated to minister to nearly 1200 young adults residing in Uniting Church-affiliated colleges: Emmanuel, Grace, Kings, Cromwell and Raymont Lodge.

Yet St Lucia must constantly review their methods as they endeavour to find a niche amidst the evangelical Christian groups currently dominating the Christian student clubs.

"What strikes me with students is they'll go where their friends go, so it's about belonging and community," says Rev Peter Lockhart.

"But one of the issues that creates is it ghettoises young people. So I'm only going to associate with other young people who look like me, sound like me and like the same kind of music as me."

As a university chaplain, Peter encourages young people to talk to people outside their age group as he believes we live in an ageist society and even talking about "millennials", "gen X" and "baby boomers" continues to reaffirm that we are divided and don't belong together.

"We're not just a congregation here for young people; we're here for the people of God."

Over the past three years, Peter has trialled a range of different approaches that aim to connect students back

to a local congregation. His activities include running study groups, mentoring senior residential assistants and networking with Toowong and Indooroopilly Uniting Church under the university chaplaincy movement Active Faith, launched in February this year.

Offering an alternative voice, Peter has made lasting connections with ex-Cromwell resident, Kate Brazier and international masters student Lwanda Kahongo from Zambia.

"I really enjoyed the Bible studies because it let me explore a bit further—I'm from a fairly conservative church but I love the different points of view and I just think that helps me grow in my relationship with God," says Kate.

"Not being afraid to question him [God] I think is important because if you just go along and accept everything you hear you're not going to have a solid faith."

Conversely, Lwanda has found a home at St Lucia feeling loved by those who have gone out of their way to give her lifts to church events, welcome her family and provide low-cost clothing options through the congregation op shop; demonstrating the power of outreach connected to a local congregation.

Sunday 31 May is Chaplaincy Sunday. For more information about Active Faith visit facebook.com/activefaithuca

'What strikes me with students is they'll go where their friends go, so it's about belonging and community'

Rev Peter Lockhart

A portrait of Heather Watson, a woman with dark hair and glasses, smiling. She is wearing a colorful, textured jacket. The background is an office setting with green plants.

Stepping up to leadership

Every young person reaches the point where they decide to sign up to their faith community or to drift away. **Dianne Jensen** talks to Heather Watson, former chair of UnitingCare Queensland, whose service to the church was shaped by the opportunities she received as a young Christian.

Heather Watson has a clear recollection of when she made a personal faith commitment.

‘I have learned
that my God
is bigger and
more complex
than I can even
imagine’

“It was prompted through the great camping movement that was part of my school-age experience—specifically through the camping ministry offered at Magnetic Island,” says the Brisbane-based lawyer. “In my later high school years that translated to a clear call to direct my vocational aspirations to a role that would be ‘helping people.’”

Heather is a partner with McCullough Robertson Lawyers where she leads a team specialising in non-profit organisations. Last year she completed a maximum term of nine years as a board member of UnitingCare Queensland, including seven years as chair.

Now in her late 40s, Heather has been married to Stephen for 27 years and has four children aged between 14 and 21 years. The family attends Indooroopilly Uniting Church in Brisbane.

Together on the way

Heather is a child of church union, just old enough to remember the celebrations which marked the establishment of the Uniting Church in 1977. Her family were longstanding members of the Aitkenvale Methodist congregation, which entered into a cooperative arrangement with the local Presbyterian congregation ahead of union.

After deciding to pursue law, Heather was keen to use her skills to serve both church and community. Her legal career has taken her from 15 years in family law to her current role, and includes volunteer work in legal aid, women’s leadership, and community services.

Heather’s service to the church began when she became a church council member when only in her teens, and was later appointed as a congregational representative to Presbytery, Synod and Assembly. Not only was she invited to contribute, but others stepped aside in order to provide a space.

“There were people who identified that I had leadership potential and deliberately found ways to enable me to

exercise that,” recalls Heather. “One example was an elder and the regular representative at Presbytery and the Synod—and he just loved being part of that community and being part of the wider church—but he made the deliberate decision to give up his place in order that I could attend.”

The experience of attending Assembly in the 1980s as a young Queensland Synod representative from a regional area was transformative.

“The Queensland Synod passed a resolution that talked about family relationships and the importance of marriage, and they used phrases like celibacy in singleness and faithfulness in marriage ... I look at this statement and go of course that is a given ... and then you listen to a variety of other experiences. It forced me to consider other people’s perspectives. When things happen within a family context which are out of the control of one of the parties, what does having this rigid statement say to that person about how they are valued and what the church is able to offer?”

She was also inspired by the emerging Indigenous leadership in North Queensland in the 1980s and the formation of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in 1985. Heather subsequently has visited numerous Indigenous communities through work and church including Weipa, Mapoon, Herberton, Groote Eylandt, Alice Springs, and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands in South Australia.

When the system fails

As she became increasingly involved in the church and the community, Heather became aware that the complex needs of those who fell outside the system could not be met by easy solutions.

“I contributed a lot of time as an articled clerk and young lawyer in supporting legal aid initiatives and programs to fill the gaps to access to legal support ... individuals and families found themselves in [circumstances] which often were outside of policy guidelines, but nevertheless dire.”

Her move into family law reinforced the importance of effective processes and good governance in addressing multifarious human experience.

Heather was appointed by the family court and the children’s court to act where necessary for children independently of their parents or the Department of Child Safety, and was official visitor to the public mental health units.

“When you are working with dysfunctional families what I could bring to those difficulties as a lawyer was only one part of the puzzle,” she says. “Where we actually made progress in some of those difficult family situations was where there was a combination of disciplines ... but if the policies and organisational capacities of those various organisations weren’t able to work together then no matter what efforts I put in from a technical legal perspective it wasn’t going to achieve the best outcome for the family.”

Steering a new course

Nine years ago Heather took up the opportunity to develop a specialist practice to meet the legal needs of the growing and increasingly complex nonprofit sector. At the same time, she was appointed to the newly consolidated board for UnitingCare Queensland with the prospect of a future appointment as chair.

These are challenging time for non-profits, she says, with substantial change in policy, funding and underlying business models requiring well-equipped board members and sophisticated organisational systems.

“Balanced against this is the need for client and patient-centred service models that still favour a local response. In Queensland these challenges are exacerbated by the geographic distances and the particular challenges for communities in regional and remote areas.”

Heather has also lent her expertise to the church in a range of roles from teaching Sunday school to helping instil robust governance systems.

“One of the ways that I have been able to contribute my skills to the wider church processes has been as a participant and as coordinator of the facilitation team during Synods and Assemblies—often at times when we have wrestled with major issues of theology and polity,” she says.

And after 20 years of chairing church councils, attending Synods and Assemblies and serving on the Synod Standing Committee, Heather reckons she has seen the best and the worst of the consensus model in action.

“It is not meant to achieve a unanimous outcome, but it is a model that says we want to listen even to the smallest voice and for that voice to at least be able to acknowledge that their voice was heard, even if they don’t agree with the majority. That is one of the features of the Uniting Church—that we are an umbrella of varied and divergent views that are held together with a common thread and a common purpose, but the tension of holding those views together can be quite challenging.”

Heather’s professional expertise has helped guide the Uniting Church and UnitingCare Queensland through some rocky channels in ways unseen by the average congregation member.

She has changed us for the better, and she has let God challenge and change her.

“I have come to realise that a simple faith with fixed boundaries on what’s right and wrong and where life is lived according to rules often reflects a narrow and limited life experience,” says Heather.

“I have learned that my God is bigger and more complex than I can even imagine and to take a rules-based approach to our faith in the context of the institutional church does not sufficiently allow for grace to have its way.”

‘ We are an umbrella of varied and divergent views that are held together with a common thread and a common purpose, but the tension of holding those views together can be quite challenging ’

The monster in

Why domestic violence still happens in your church

Churches must tackle their own demons if the scourge of domestic violence is to be overcome, writes **Dianne Jensen**.

The chilling stories take time to trickle down through the years, but the tragedy of abuse at the hands of family lingers across the generations. We all know this to be true.

Domestic violence is not a fancy term for marital discord. It is not solved by mediation, forgiveness or promises to change. It is an ongoing pattern by a perpetrator aimed at using a range of tactics to exercise power and control over a partner or family member.

The special taskforce report *Not now, not ever: Putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland* delivered to the premier in February has thrown a new spotlight on the violence taking place behind closed doors in every town and region across the state. The abuse might not always be physical, but it invariably involves control and coercion, and engenders pain and fear in its victims.

The report quotes Queensland Police Service figures of 66 016 domestic and family violence occurrences in 2013–14, an increase of 2.7 per cent from the previous year. In the same period more than 24 000 private and police-initiated applications for protection orders were filed in Queensland courts, with 14 579 contravention (breach) offences recorded.

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the picture is even bleaker.

“Violence and abuse is reported as being so prevalent in some communities as to have become normalised—the people who live there consider violence to be a part of ‘everyday’ life,” note the taskforce members.

And while people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the elderly, people with a disability, people in rural and remote communities, and people

who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex are at significantly higher risk of abuse, the report concludes that domestic violence is a gendered crime. In most cases, men are the perpetrators and women are the victims.

The fact that the abuse occurs within the bounds of family relationships and behind closed doors not only cloaks the issue from public gaze but also confronts traditional notions of the home as a sanctuary from government and community intrusion.

“Nowhere is the tension between public and private rights and responsibilities more evident than in the case of domestic and family violence ... many people hold fast to the notion that what happens in the family home is no-one else’s business,” say taskforce members.

“It is easy to contrast this reaction with the public outrage at the assault of young men in public places which gave rise to the ‘coward punch’ campaign. Many women told the taskforce that they were frustrated that the violence they had suffered was taken less seriously than assaults that took place between strangers and in public.”

Dangerous doctrines

The issue throws up unique challenges for churches, especially those whose theology advocates power structures which subjugate women.

Dr Lynne Baker’s book *Counselling Christian women on how to deal with domestic violence* (2010) quotes a study of Anglican, Uniting and Catholic church communities in Brisbane which revealed that 22 per cent of domestic violence perpetrators attended church regularly, with a further 14 per cent involved in church leadership.

“Further, biblical principles and scriptures may be used by the perpetrator as a point of authority to condone his

‘While male headship may not necessarily trip the switch of abuse, it can provide the wiring’

Dr Johanna Harris Tyler

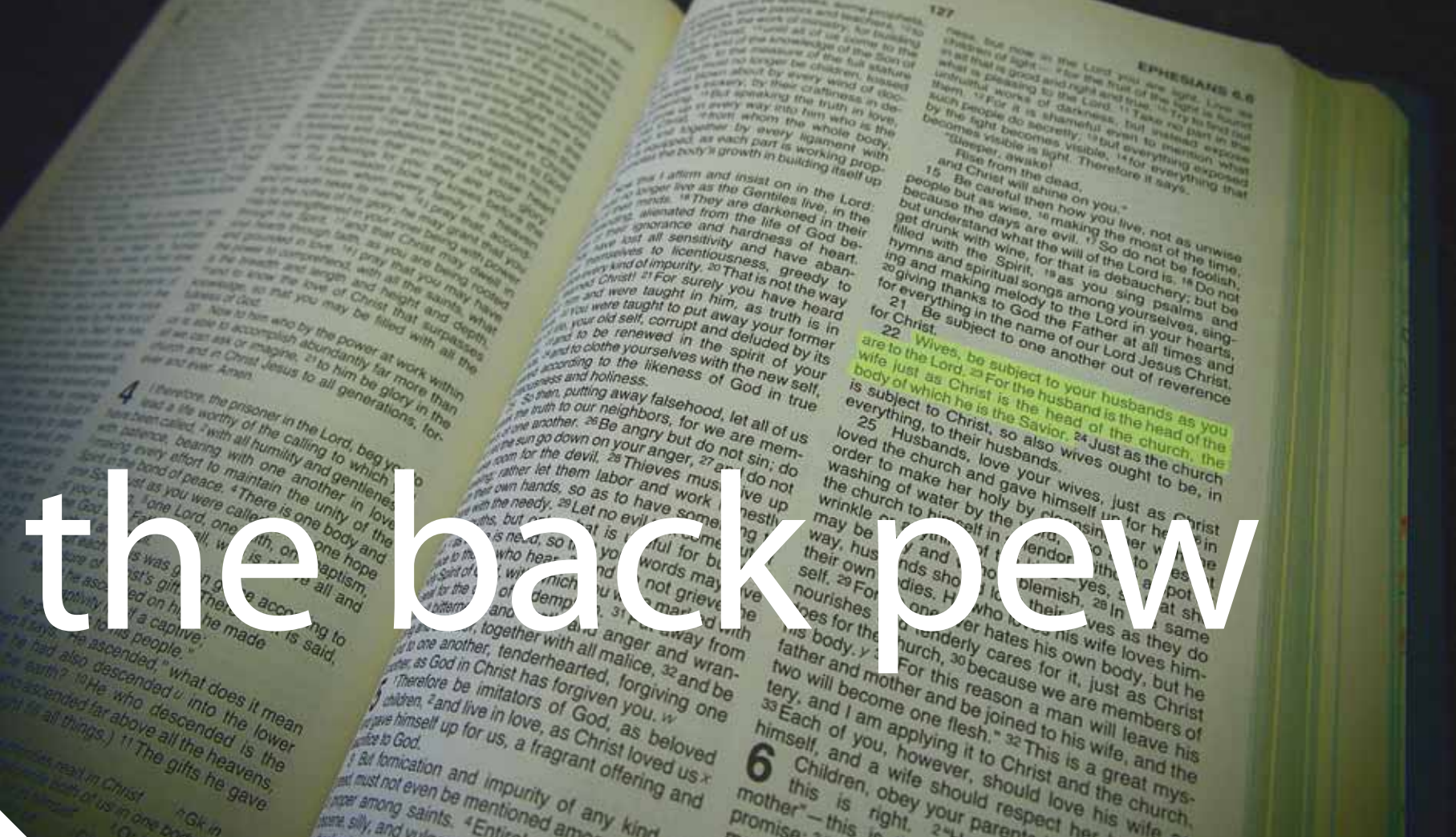


Photo: Holly Jewell

actions, or perhaps to ‘prove’ to the victim that she is not fulfilling her marital obligations,” writes Lynne. The 20 Christian women she interviewed struggled to reconcile the terrifying reality of their lives with their belief in the sanctity of marriage and injunctions from pastors and friends to forgive their husbands.

“The beliefs of some Christian churches can effectively inhibit total escape, safety or sanctuary for the victim,” says Lynne “Christian women may feel torn between the need to escape to physical and/or emotional safety and the desire to uphold the values associated with their faith.”

Executive Director of UnitingCare Community Bob Gilkes agrees that cultural and religious beliefs about marriage may cause women to feel ashamed of what is happening, as well as prompting them to hope that the perpetrator will change.

“For many survivors of abuse their networks with friends and family have broken down, so gaining support can be difficult. This can be particularly difficult if the abuse is verbal and emotional. Sadly this type of abuse may not be seen as serious as physical abuse. In some instances when they do reach out, people are unwilling to ‘interfere’ with a ‘personal’ or ‘domestic’ issue,” says Bob.

Christian women from conservative churches espousing male headship and female submission can become trapped in a special hell. Their churches and their all-male leadership advocate a structural relationship that always has the woman as the less powerful partner. Female subjection to God and male power is translated into obedience to a husband, and his right to chastise her.

UK academic Dr Johanna Harris Tyler, who grew up attending Anglican churches in Sydney, addresses this subject in her March article “Submission to your husband is a dangerous doctrine” on the ABC portal *The Drum*.

“The proponents of male headship have a tough job to convince the watching world that the hierarchy at the centre of their vision for marriage and church order is not more prone to abusive activity than the egalitarian alternative ... While male headship may not necessarily trip the switch of abuse, it can provide the wiring.”

Why Christians don’t speak out

While many Uniting Church members consider these views to be outdated, conservative attitudes continue to underpin the responses of some ministers and congregations when confronted by domestic violence.

Not now, not ever revealed that a number of submissions to the taskforce noted that the leaders of their faith community would neither assist victims nor condemn perpetrators. This experience is reflected by the Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Project (JCDVPP), a commission of the Queensland Churches Together.

Their resource *Questions women ask about domestic violence and Christian beliefs* (2010) suggests that the desire to hold up the family as a manifestation of Christian love may lead churches to ignore the glaring examples of when things go wrong.

“What this has meant is that when victims of domestic violence sought help from clergy or other church officials, it has made church leaders uncomfortable and the real needs of victims have often been ignored. In some cases, they have been met with silence, unhelpful platitudes, or worse, blame and condemnation,” says the report.

The Rev Susan Pickering from West End Uniting Church in Brisbane is the current JCDVPP chair. She worked in the United Kingdom with women experiencing domestic violence and has trained police and victim liaison officers.

Susan suggests that the voices of women—whether they profess a faith or not—are not heard because many victims will speak up only when they literally fear for their lives.

“By the time I have ended up working with women, it was often because an incident had happened where they thought they were going to die—up until that point they had excused the violence or they felt they had provoked it ... their own feelings of self-worth and self-esteem had been so diminished that they actually believed that that was what they were worthy of.”

She adds Christians need to challenge any interpretation of the scriptures which justifies violence.

“Let’s have some serious exegesis and understanding of the context of the passage, how they were written and when they were written. The church needs to be a safe place, and the church needs to be speaking out against domestic violence and naming it as wrong. It is a sin.”



It's official, belonging to a faith community contributes to health and happiness. In fact, the keys to the good life identified by mental health experts pretty much echo the Biblical imperatives to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Here are five top tips for happiness:

1

Give

Generosity is beneficial to your physical and mental health. Making someone else happy not only makes you feel better, it delivers measurable improvements in some health conditions. Doctors suggest that moving attention from ourselves may reduce exposure to stress hormones. Giving also empowers those who receive—if you need hard evidence, ask the folk at UnitingWorld.

2

Connect

Your mother was right to point out that it's not all about you. Social researchers say that looking outward instead of inward is fundamental to giving life meaning and keeping perspective. And for those struggling with isolation and loss, re-engaging in community may begin with rediscovering the joy of helping others. Is your church providing opportunities for everyone, regardless of age or ability, to serve?

3

Have faith

Believing that we are connected to something larger than ourselves and that our lives have meaning is an intrinsic human need. Research shows that an active spiritual life can have physical benefits as well as providing hope and optimism, key factors in fighting a range of illnesses.

4

Love mercy

Expressing gratitude for the good things in our lives doesn't stop at the prayers of thanksgiving. The scriptures remind Christians that love and mercy are two sides of the same coin, and health professionals agree. Anger and resentment are very aging; it's not a good look on you, darling.

5

Be engaged

Be mindful of what's happening here and now rather than worrying about the past or the future. Eckhart Tolle writes "The eternal present is the space within which your whole life unfolds, the only factor that remains constant. Life is now." Quit reading about happiness and go and talk to a real person. Go on, the list is all finished.

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Martha, UnitingWorld gender project officer, standing in front of a devastated Port Vila.
Photo: Uniting World

Climate change: a spiritual crisis

Climate change isn't just an issue of science and economics, it is also a spiritual crisis for people in the Pacific who are most affected. **Cath Taylor** explores.

Can God fix climate change? It's the question on the lips of many within Pacific churches—this month more than ever in the wake of one of the region's most deadly cyclones. Vanuatu's president did not hesitate to link Cyclone Pam to the accelerating effects of climate change, appealing again to the international community to do more for people left ankle deep on the global climate's shifting front line.

But within the Pacific, where faith is central to identity and culture, the debate often has a different focus. And very few agencies are equipped to deal with it: Where is God in the midst of climate change?

"Our people experience all this for themselves—the changes in weather cycles, the flooding that comes more often, the tides and storms," says Rev Maleta Tenten of the Uniting Church in Kiribati. "But we have been taught to be people of great faith. Many people believe God will save them, even as they experience great distress. When I speak to them of the need to adapt, of changing climate, it falls on deaf ears."

A spiritual identity is absolutely central to Pacific people. It's also never been so fraught.

According to many Pacific people, to believe in or act against climate change demonstrates a lack of faith.

God has "promised never again to flood the earth." God will save. At the same time, personal experience of devastating events undermines faith at every turn.

While Australians perceive climate response mostly in political and practical terms, Pacific leaders know that spiritual nurture and leadership from the church are also critical. Maleta says her people urgently need better theological education and pastoral care in order to understand what the Bible teaches about stewardship, creation, justice and the presence of God.

"This is the only way people will begin to act for themselves in response to what is happening," Maleta says. "We start here. It's the foundation of our work because it's the foundation of people's belief about how the world works. If we can convince people here, we can motivate them to act and reassure them for the future."

Through UnitingWorld, the Uniting Church is supporting projects that teach about God's presence, environmental stewardship and justice, train counsellors and chaplains for survivors of extreme weather events, help communities complete disaster risk assessments and advocate for climate justice.

The project will cost \$45 000 in its first year and UnitingWorld is seeking support to fund workers and resources. Please contact UnitingWorld on 02 8267 4267 or unitingworld.org/pacificchange

'When I speak to them of the need to adapt, of changing climate, it falls on deaf ears'

Rev Maleta Tenten

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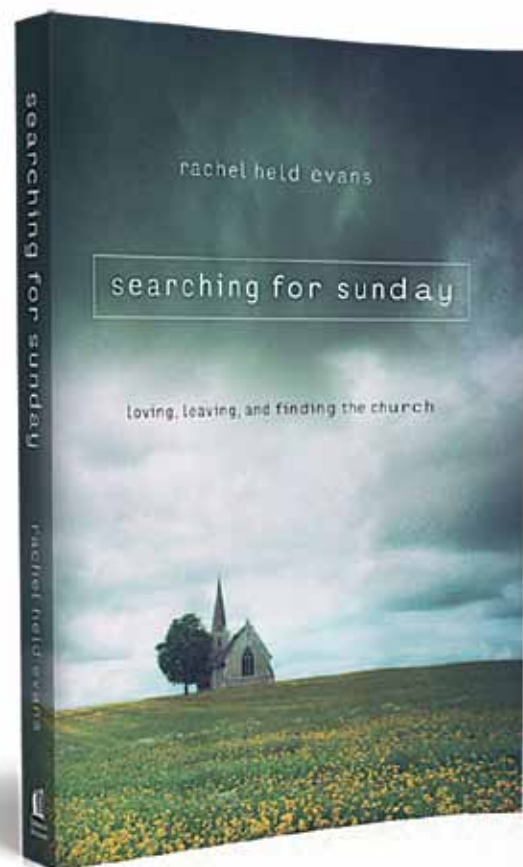
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In search for a community of Christ



Searching for Sunday
Rachel Held Evans
Thomas Nelson
Publishers, 2015
\$19.99

Rachel Held Evans is a young, thoughtful, hyperconnected woman of faith—and she has a troubled relationship with church. Having grown up in, then left, an evangelical nondenominational church, she is broadly representative of a generation of millennials that have grown up in churches but now in adulthood struggle with the baggage heaped upon them by their received traditions.

Research suggests Evans is not alone. While quantitative, data-based church analysis, such as the Barna Group's 2007 study *unChristian*, has indicated trouble brewing among millennials for years, Evans has put a qualitative face on it through her highly personal spiritual memoirs.

Searching for Sunday is Evans' third book. Her previous works, *Evolving in Monkey Town* (rereleased last year as *Faith Unraveled*) and *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* were pointed examinations of specific topics—the importance of doubt in spiritual maturity and the role of women in church. *Searching for Sunday*, however, is a more general exploration and celebration of what it means to be part of the body of Christ. It is simultaneously a criticism and breathless exultation of church, and a lucid appraisal of the problems facing established faith communities in the West.

Evans does not shy away from these problems, and speculates on what they might mean for the body of Christ in the future. "... [L]ately I've been wondering if a little death and resurrection might be just what church needs right now," she writes. "[I've been wondering if] maybe all this talk of waning numbers and shrinking influence means our empire-building days are over, and if maybe that's a good thing."

As a spiritual memoir, the stories in *Searching for Sunday* must resonate with the reader in order to effectively make its argument. Evans' ambivalence toward Sunday worship and her troubled relationship with the evangelical culture of her youth might seem absurd to some readers, and so it runs the risk of being misunderstood or written off as personal opinion. But Evans is 33, placing her at the vanguard of a generation of Christians only just now beginning to tell their story in their own words—and they're transforming the church as a result.

Evans has returned to regular Sunday worship, albeit in a different Christian tradition to that of her childhood. *Searching for Sunday* is a travel diary of this journey, but is really only the beginning of that story. Her voice, and the voices of her peers, will continue to speak.



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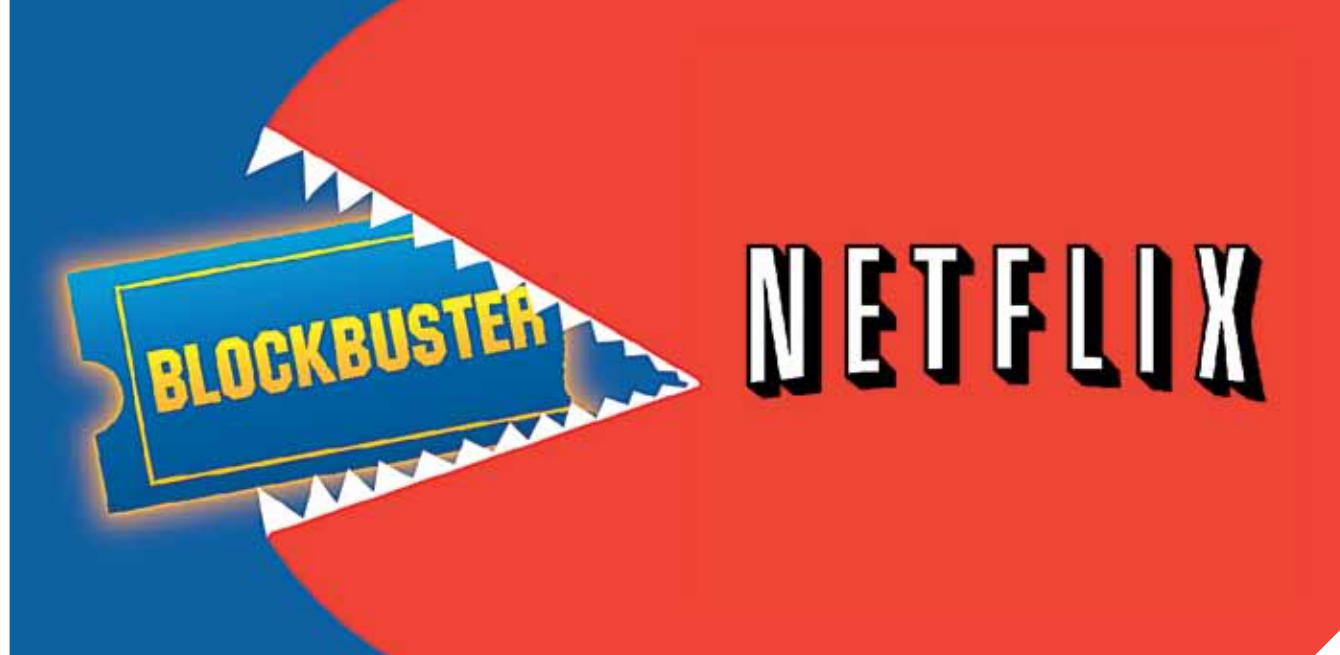


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Faith in a Netflix economy

The way we are consuming products—including church—is rapidly changing. **Ashley Thompson** asks, what does this mean for our communities of faith?

A mere decade ago, Blockbuster dominated Friday night entertainment. Now as on-demand internet streaming provider Netflix launches in the Australian market, the “Be Kind, Rewind” era is officially over.

Kodak, Nokia, Borders: Blockbuster is in good company among a long list of once unassailable brands that epically failed because they did not adopt new technologies. Blockbuster once turned down the opportunity to purchase Netflix, then, just as quickly as Netflix grew, Blockbuster shrank, reminding us no brand is safe from extinction. The question is: do you embrace the future or cling to the past?

“Innovation distinguishes between the leader and a follower,” said late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs. As traditional media services are shunned in preference for the convenience of on-demand streaming, it becomes increasingly difficult to remember a time when we were all in sync with our neighbours’ broadcast viewing.

Rideshare app Uber, which connects you with a local driver within minutes, poses a threat to traditional taxi services. Music streaming websites Pandora, Rdio and Spotify threaten the music industry which once controlled their own method of distribution. The same story, in every industry, is told over and over again, yet in each one it comes as a surprise, and companies that are threatened by change die while those who embrace it flourish.

What effect does this new economy have on our churches? What is the Netflix to our churches and how do we sustain communities of faith in an on-demand era?

This ever-increasing demand for media and service providers to fit around a consumer’s schedule is trumped only one thing: live events. Miss the NRL, Eurovision or *My Kitchen Rules* grand final and good luck dodging the minefield of spoilers awaiting you online, at work or even on your morning commute.

Miss the live action and you miss your ability to be part of the conversation. ABC talk show *Q&A* is a weekly demonstration of this principle; viewers can and do make the effort to tune in on Monday nights to see their questions answered in real time.

Adapting to the Netflix economy need not mean churches switch solely from one delivery system to the next, but exist on multiple platforms in an effort to continue sharing our story. We cannot keep doing what we’ve always done, so we need to be nimble, flexible and embrace of change.

Put simply: innovate or die.

‘The question is: do you embrace the future or cling to the past’



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Supporting young parents

Parenthood is full of challenges and rewards, but sometimes young parents can feel isolated and in need of support. Wesley Mission Brisbane's Young Parents Support Program nurtures young families who need it most. **Rohan Salmond** reports.

For people 25 years and under, becoming a parent can come as a huge upheaval to their way of life. A new baby does not come with an instruction manual, and without the right information and care young mums and dads can be left feeling overwhelmed.

Donna Hanson, program coordinator of Wesley Mission Brisbane's Young Parents Support Program (YPSP) in Beenleigh, Logan, says teenage pregnancy is associated with poor health and socioeconomic outcomes.

"Teenage pregnancies have an increased risk of pre-term delivery, infant mortality and low birth weight. Teenage mothers often find it difficult to complete their education and have fewer financial resources than older parents which can result in their children having poor health. So basically they are at risk in several social and physical areas," she says.

Originally started as a support group by a young parent living in Wesley Mission Brisbane's Logan accommodation, with the help of Logan Hospital midwives the YPSP quickly grew into a complete antenatal program. The YPSP has been providing peer support and education delivered in a youth-friendly manner for 16 years.

"There are a myriad of challenges faced by local young families," says Donna. "They are at higher risk of domestic

violence, involvement of the Department of Child Safety, and they experience isolation and depression and other mental health issues."

Improving relationships between young parents, their families, and other young parents is essential.

"Reducing isolation lets young parents gain self-esteem and self-worth. Developing rewarding and fulfilling relationships with their families, staff and other young parents and having places you can share is very important," she says.

Over the years YPSP has found new ways for young parents to connect with each other and share information. Not only there is a series of postnatal classes for parents with babies and toddlers, YPSP launched a Young Parents Facebook page, serving 220 young parents.

"The page allows program staff to deliver topic-related information, instant support from staff and their peers and opportunities to make formal and informal support networks in the form of friendships with other group members and links to professionals," says Donna.

From July 2014 to February 2015, YPSP serviced 76 young families and their children.

Mother's Day is Sunday 10 May.

More information about YPSP can be found at community.wmb.org.au/youth-families/logan-hub/young-parents-program

‘Teenage pregnancies have an increased risk of pre-term delivery, infant mortality and low birth weight’

Donna Hanson

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Letters about Mardi Gras

The following letters are in regard to the article “Uniting Church marches with pride”, April 2015, page 10.

Don't talk about it

We wish to lodge a complaint about the article in *Journey* about Uniting Church members marching in the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade, stating they were also going to do it again in 2016.

We truly don't believe *Journey* should have published such an article.

If it upset us, there must be a lot more people feeling the same way. We have even considered pulling out of the Uniting Church and going to a local Presbyterian church.

We are sure the reach out work that is being done by this group is worthwhile and has God's blessing, but we were surprised about taking part in the parade.

Jack and Denise Greenstreet
Emmanuel Uniting Church, Enoggera

Offensive to God

Who authorised some members of Uniting Church to use the Uniting Church logo in a celebration of lust and perversion? They are dishonouring God by its use. His anger at showing allegiance to Baal must surely be at breaking point. Australia, dedicated, “The Southland of the Holy Spirit”, along with the Uniting Church, will be held to account!

Isn't it fortuitous that the article on weasel words (“5 weasel words to watch out for”, April 2015, page 17) was printed in the same edition? Your article on Mardi Gras was full of weasel words!

The headline includes “pride”, which in context means “gay pride”. The dictionary definition of “gay” says it is a word used by homosexuals of themselves. Don't use it unless you are homosexual!

Also, “Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras”. Are lesbians not gay? With constant use males only will be gay. If gay is not offensive to you, you've been conned! It has exactly the same meaning. A rose by another name smells just as sweet or sour as the case may be.

Jack Waddell
Paradise Point Uniting Church

Horror and disgust

In the April edition of *Journey* I was horrified to read the headline, “Uniting Church marches with pride”. All I felt was disgust that we could be associated with the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in any way. The Bible is very definite on this issue.

Where in the Bible do we find “We are participating in the parade because sexual and gender diversity are part of God's plan, part of the fabric of creation woven by God”?

We are not condemning the people—rather their actions. We love the sinner but hate the sin.

Yours in Christ,

Joy Tabor
Wynnum North
This letter is undersigned by 16 other people from the Wynnum area in Brisbane. Most names are illegible.



Gallipoli not just about Anzacs

Dear Sir,

I enjoy the new style—colours, brief statements, brisk. I thank you. I write about the Anzac editorial (“Lest we forget”, April 2015, page 3). It is meritorious, supportive, but awfully one-sided. No mention of the British Navy offshore and British ground troops. There were soldiers from France. But the largest contribution was the Gurkhas from Nepal, three battalions of them fighting alongside the Anzac troops from mid-August 1915.

I could add more, but there is a limit on reading a 94-year-old whose father was at Gallipoli. I apologise for the scrawl. Keep up the good work. Put some “zip” into tired parishes.

Writing to you on Easter Sunday—my birthday!

Yours in the same kingdom work,

Rev Phillip Ramsay
Blue Care Wynnum

Looking at religion in a new way

It was interesting reading the article on postmodernism in *Journey* (“Beyond modern”, April 2015, page 12).

Postmodernism is God's way of looking at religion in a new way, but is not a new religion. Jesus was the great postmodern. He broke social norms to befriend the socially outcast woman at the well and had supper with the socially shunned tax collector.

Postmodernism will play its role in the present era. Postmodernism will strip off the many layers of religion and piety and move us beyond the secular and sacred to Christ himself.

The ultimate truth that defines us as humans is still called love.

Living in separation of that love is still called sin.

The God that judges us on the basis of love and love alone will still be our God.

Postmodernism, like the *Honest to God* debate of the 1960s will pass away. But God's continual breaking into history, to communicate in creative ways his love for us will remain our hope always.

Derrick Fernando
Sunnybank Hill Uniting Church

Submission guidelines for letters to the editor can be found at journeyonline.com.au/contact/submit

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