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# The real work

**Assembly has come to a close for another triennium, but really the work has just begun.**

The meeting resolved to undertake all kinds of tasks that will keep us well and truly busy over the next three years. Committees, working groups and task groups have been formed; regulations have been changed and now need enacting; awareness-raising campaigns have been planned and some people need to finish up in old roles and settle into new ones. (You can find an Assembly overview on page nine.)

In the flurry of post-Assembly activity it's important that we remember that Jesus is the reason for the work. Our new president Stuart McMillan sent Assembly members out into the world with the following blessing:

“Go forth from here to live out the covenant in which we the First and Second Peoples of this land have entered into with one another.

“Confront and challenge injustice wherever you see it. Act justly yourselves and insist that others do the same. Rejoice in the richness of our diverse cultures and learn from them. Celebrate and demonstrate the unity we share in Jesus our Lord. Commit to worship and witness and serve, as one people under God.”

Jesus reconciles us to God and to each other. All our work should reflect this call to reconciliation, not only between First and Second Peoples, but for strained and broken relationships everywhere.

Reconciliation calls us to listen before we speak. That's hard. That's when the real work begins.

**Rohan Salmond**  
Cross-platform editor

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# Journey



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Cover: *Consensus cards*, illustrated by Rev Ellie Elia at the 14th Assembly.

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AND FINALLY, TO COMPLETE YOUR TRAINING, YOU MUST ASK MRS. JACKSON HER OPINION ON YOUR CHOICE OF WORSHIP SONGS, LISTEN INTENTLY TO MR. BAXTER'S CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM OF YOUR SERMON, AND CONVINCE MR. O'REILLY TO INCREASE HIS WEEKLY OFFERING.....

## Monday Midday Prayer

*Thank you for the diversity  
of your creation.*

*May it encourage us to go beyond  
our familiar circles and discover  
the breadth of grace.*

*Amen*

## Moderator's highlights

### 1–2 August

Rockhampton South  
Parish celebration service,  
Rockhampton

### 4 August

King's College Annual Dinner,  
St Lucia, Brisbane

### 8 August

South Moreton Presbytery  
meeting, Beenleigh Uniting  
Church

# Prepare from day one

## “Preparation for married life begins the day you are born.”

It was one of those new thoughts that made such common sense that as a 34-year-old, I wondered why I hadn't thought of it before. I still remember the time and place it was said 23 years later! We learn what married life is about by observing and modelling.

The members of the last Synod in Session asked the church to think about formation—how ministers of the gospel are being formed. That's a critical question for our theological colleges, one they wrestle with constantly. We are in a world that asks for the capacity in Christians to make the gospel intelligible and defensible in the marketplace of ideas. Our ministers need to be able to do that; they also need to be able to resource the church to do that. So formation is also a critical question for ministers, church councils, youth workers, and communities that are called together around word and sacrament.

If preparation for married life begins the day you are born, then preparation for ministry, the ministry of the whole people of God in the ways of the kingdom, begins at baptism.

When I meet with parents who are seeking baptism for their children, I feel I have to confront the idea that

says, “Let them make their own choice”. It's a dominant thought pattern in our society, but we have to be clear: Coca-Cola has a plan for our children. Toyota has a plan. McDonald's has a plan. Facebook has a plan. Great big billion dollar organisations have plans for our children; if we decide to leave life up to them, to which forces are we subjecting them, unprepared?

That young people will make up their own minds about life, the universe and their place in it is patently obvious; the question for those who care for them is how are we preparing them for that? How are our communities of faith shaping and forming people in the ways of the kingdom, that they may discern the difference between what is life-giving and what is not?

As for marriage, so for Christian formation. We learn it by observing, experiencing and modelling so much more than by being told!

So, how are the agenda of congregational meetings and church councils reflecting this? How much is this worked on in home fellowship groups? How are families supported in their life and work by our faith communities? What discipleship are we demonstrating?

**Rev David Baker**  
Moderator, Queensland Synod

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Colleen Geyer.  
Photo: Osker Lau

# Steady hand at the helm

With Rev Terence Corkin stepping down as Assembly general secretary at the end of the year, Queenslanders will find a familiar face at the helm in 2016. **Nigel Tapp** reports.

## The 14th Assembly has appointed UnitingCare Queensland's director of mission, Colleen Geyer as its incoming general secretary.

Colleen will take the reins from Rev Terence Corkin, who will step down from the position after 15 years of service at the end of this year.

She has held a range of significant positions in the Uniting Church, including director of mission at Blue Care, associate director at UnitingCare Australia, registrar of Coolamon College and national consultant for the Assembly Gospel and Gender Unit.

Currently Colleen is a member of the Executive Leadership Team of UnitingCare Queensland and the Governance Committee of the UnitingCare Queensland board, as well as the Queensland Synod Chaplaincy Commission, Placements Committee and Discipline Procedures Review Task Group.

She chairs the UnitingCare Queensland Human Research Ethics Committee, the UnitingCare Australia Ministry and Mission National Network and the Board of Jabiru Community Youth and Children's Services Association Inc. She is also a member of the Pastoral and Spiritual Care of Older People (PASCOP) national board.

Ecumenically, Colleen has been the Christian World Service coordinator with Queensland Churches Together and a member of the Queensland Churches Together Indigenous Peoples Partnership. She is currently a member of the Queensland Churches Environmental

Network and the Roman Catholic/Uniting Church National Dialogue.

The Assembly's retiring president Rev Dr Andrew Dutney said Colleen emerged as a preferred candidate who had a deep understanding of the vision, values and processes of the Uniting Church.

"She came with particular gifts for this time in the life of the church—strong skills in the development and practice of governance ... [and] strengths in areas of risk management and financial management and human resources," he said.

Colleen said as she looked back over her vocation with the Uniting Church she felt an affinity toward the role.

"During the interview process and the conversations we have had, my sense of call has deepened and been affirmed by others," she said.

Colleen said that she embraced the uniqueness of the Uniting Church as an authentic movement of God, and appreciated the church's commitment to working ecumenically in seeking unity and understanding with other churches.

She acknowledged that, in common with many parts of society, the Uniting Church faced an uncertain future.

"Together, it is our responsibility to look to the future with the hope that is from God, and the realism that calls us to think about the new."

‘She came with particular gifts for this time in the life of the church’

**Rev Dr Andrew Dutney**



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Peter and Rev Jenny Coombes.  
Photo: Dianne Jensen

# Opportunities open for ministry partners

Rewarding opportunities can await ministry partners willing to venture beyond the city lights, as **Dianne Jensen** discovered on the moderator's recent trip to the outback.

**Rev Jenny Coombes and her husband Peter had plenty of time to consider the pros and cons of moving to Longreach on the long drive to meet congregation members.**

Newly ordained, Jenny had asked for a country placement, assuming that she would find a role near their working property in Murgon. But the moderator suggested Longreach, and Central Queensland Presbytery agreed to support a full-time role in the outback community, so the couple were faced with a decision.

"As I looked at the congregational profile I thought wow, so much of what I had done and learnt in Murgon was just setting me up for what I was seeing there," says Jenny. "There was that really strong sense of—this is where I'm meant to be at this time."

As a former teacher who had supported Peter's army career until he retired, Jenny's call to ministry was a journey through accreditation as a lay preacher, a pastor, and finally minister of the word.

Peter Coombes admits that "a fair bit of prayer coverage" went into the decision to up stumps and head west.

As a former generalist officer in the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps, Peter had spent 20 years organising

everything from drought relief in Papua New Guinea to humanitarian missions to northern Iraq after the first gulf war.

His willingness to tackle a challenge—and his unique professional background—turned out to be a perfect fit for a part-time position in Longreach looking after James Cook and other university health students on placement.

"All of those roles had led to us to being where we are, but prepared for it," says Peter, who combines his part-time work with managing the household and keeping an eye on their farm.

"Working in a community like this—it might not be the job that you believe you are trained for, but particularly if you've got a bit of experience under your belt, there are numerous positions that quietly appear in rural areas."

Country life offers a rich community and endless opportunities for people prepared to think outside the square, he adds.

"Ministry is a call on your life—it's not a call on your life in Brisbane. If you are available for God's work—then that's the role. Sure, circumstances change as you go through life, but sometimes you need to step into the void with faith."

**'It's a call on your life—it's not a call on your life in Brisbane ... sometimes you need to step into the void with faith'**

**Peter Coombes**



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Photo: Supplied

# New road for Frontier Services

The 14th Assembly has sought to understand the reasons behind the changing circumstances of the Uniting Church's valued remote area ministry Frontier Services. **Nigel Tapp** writes.

**Frontier Services is changing tack, re-directing its work away from aged-care to community support activities and resourcing patrol ministry.**

Less than a year after Frontier Services celebrated its 100th anniversary and the 13th Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to the people of remote Australia in 2012, the ministry found itself under severe financial threat due to high costs associated with the delivery of aged-care services in remote areas.

The major financial burden caused by sanctions, and the need to spend significant amounts of money to rectify major deficiencies in systems and services took a great toll on Frontier Services' bottom line.

The Assembly recognised that Frontier Services' commitment to filling needs in remote Australia was the catalyst for the difficulties—when small aged-care service operators were unable to fulfil demanding accreditation standards, Frontier Services increased its number of aged-care services threefold.

Former president Rev Dr Andrew Dutney told the Assembly that Frontier Services never planned to increase its operations.

“(But) rather than see people in remote Australia deprived of aged-care services, especially Indigenous communities, Frontier Services took on these difficult operations with the intention of restoring them to

financial viability and handing them back to the communities they served,” he said.

“It was a risky, heroic undertaking reflecting the can-do, have-a-go attitude that has been so characteristic of Frontier Services.”

Over time, about 80 per cent of Frontier Services' business was directly linked to aged-care, accounting for about \$60 million per annum.

The Assembly Standing Committee has stressed that the wider church is fulfilling its commitment to remote Australia and continues to express this in a variety of ways. These have not diminished since the transition of aged-care and community services from Frontier Services to other providers in the UnitingCare network.

In answer to a question from the floor of Assembly, Andrew said the Assembly Standing Committee recognised that there were failures in governance and all agencies now operated with an appropriate risk matrix structure.

He said the Assembly accepted it did not have the capacity to oversee patrol ministries well, and was in consultation with synods and presbyteries to transfer oversight of the operations to them.

Andrew said many people associated with Frontier Services are feeling disappointed and hurt, and that he hoped actions undertaken at the Assembly would assist in helping with the healing process.

‘ It was a risky, heroic undertaking reflecting the can-do, have-a-go attitude that has been so characteristic of Frontier Services ’

**Rev Dr Andrew Dutney**

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Marda Pitt lives in Mapoon.  
Photo: Holly Jewell

# New church for Mapoon

An appeal to replace the church at Mapoon which was burned in 1963 has been launched.  
**Rohan Salmond** writes.

## **A new appeal to rebuild the church at Mapoon has been authorised by the 14th Assembly.**

Mapoon, on Cape York in far north Queensland was originally a Presbyterian mission. Bauxite was discovered in Mapoon during the 1950s, making the area of great interest to mining companies. With cooperation of the church, the Queensland Government cut services to Mapoon, closing the community.

In November 1963 the government forcibly removed the remaining residents from their homes and the church building was burned to discourage people from returning.

Mapoon resident Marda Pitt was elated at the decision to rebuild.

"You don't know how much it means for my community at this time," she said.

"God is good all the time! This is such a blessing. After so many years! Thank you!"

Uniting Church president Stuart McMillan reiterated the apology made by the Uniting Church president in 1990.

"Sir Ronald Wilson made an apology for the destruction of the church and for not being as outspoken as we should have been. There was an appeal in 2001 to raise funds to rebuild and we are relaunching that today," said Stuart.

The Uniting Church Assembly also resolved to work with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) on a compensation claim to the Queensland Government and the relevant mining companies.

*Donations to the Mapoon Church Appeal can be made through the Assembly. To donate via cheque, download a donation slip from [tinyurl.com/mapoonchurchappeal](http://tinyurl.com/mapoonchurchappeal)*

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Past, present and future Uniting Church presidents (L-R) Rev Alistair Macrae, Dr Deidre Palmer, Stuart McMillan, Dr Jill Tabart, Rev Dr Andrew Dutney.  
Photos: Uniting Church Assembly

# Hearts on fire at Assembly

The Uniting Church triennial Assembly met and tackled weighty subjects, but still found time for fellowship and reconciliation. **Nigel Tapp** reports.

**There are those within the Uniting Church who would deride the triennial Assembly gathering as a bit of talkfest.**

And there really is a lot of talking. Over six days members deal with a range of issues, both of a social nature and of church polity: how the “church does church” and how it engages with its congregations, synods and other bodies.

But much is achieved and some of those truly special—most powerful—moments actually come in silence before God.

Continued >>>





Below: Stuart McMillan is installed as president of the Uniting Church.  
Right: Uniting Church members stand in solidarity against the forced closure of Aboriginal communities.  
Photos: Uniting Church Assembly



## Hearts on fire at Assembly continued ...

Such was the story of the 14th triennial Assembly in Perth last month.

The gathering tackled weighty subjects such as same-gender marriage, the role of elders within the Uniting Church, church governance, federal government cuts to overseas aid, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the treatment of those seeking asylum and federal and state government policies aimed at closing remote Aboriginal communities.

### Installing the president

Stuart McMillan was installed as president of the Uniting Church Assembly in a service on the first day of the meeting, only the third lay person to hold that position in the church.

Children from the Synod of Western Australia sang the Assembly's theme song, "Hearts on Fire" as Uniting Church members gathered for Stuart's installation.

Stuart, who has lived and worked with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory for more than 30 years, was presented to the Assembly by members of an Arnhem Land choir. Members of the Birrkili Gupapuyngu nation, Stuart's adoptive clan, had dressed him with traditional face paint and a dillybag, representing the constitution, law and title deeds to their land and waters, and their connection to the Creator.

A Yolngu Matha speaker, Stuart opened his installation address with the words, "*Bala limurr ronyirr norrangitjlil*"—"Let us return to the white ashes of the fire" as an invitation to the Uniting Church members, both First and Second Peoples, to let the Holy Spirit rekindle the flame of God's love so they can strive for a more just church and nation.

### Lament and solidarity

The most powerful moment of Assembly came on the Wednesday when Assembly members stood in silent respect for all those who have suffered from child abuse.

It came after chair of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Justice

Peter McClellan had informed members that 399 of the 13 256 allegations within the commission's terms of reference were in respect to abuse by members of Uniting Church institutions, representing about three per cent of the total figure.

A further 106 allegations had been received in respect to abuse by members of Presbyterian Church institutions and 62 in respect to abuse by members of Methodist Church institutions, the majority of which relate to incidents before 1977.

Justice McClellan said the power of institutions must never again be allowed to silence a child, nor must it be allowed to diminish the preparedness or capacity of adults to act to protect children. Those representing the Uniting Church clearly endorsed that position, with Assembly president Stuart McMillan putting those who had suffered at the forefront of the church's thinking.

"Their wellbeing and the opportunity for those people to be afforded justice, healing and perhaps with time some reconciliation [is our utmost concern]," said Stuart.

"His Honour [Justice McClellan] has outlined the changes in our society over a period in time when children were not to be seen or heard which allowed them to be quite vulnerable.

"Fortunately that has changed as the Christian community understands the value Jesus placed on children and we place that same value on the safety and welfare of children not only in our care but in our community."

### Still talking

The Assembly has committed to continue to engage in a culturally-appropriate conversation about marriage and same-gender relationships, but did not change its position on marriage.

In addition to this conversation, the Assembly resolved to issue a pastoral letter to the church affirming the Uniting Church as an inclusive church embracing those members who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ).

‘People of God,  
go forth from  
here to live out  
the covenant that  
we the First and  
Second Peoples  
of this land have  
entered into with  
one another’

Stuart McMillan





If a change to the Marriage Act is made between now and the next Assembly in 2018, the Assembly general secretary will issue a letter to all Uniting Church celebrants advising them that they are not required to celebrate any marriage for any reason, and in their church-authorised role must continue to use the Uniting Church marriage rite.

Members were encouraged by UnitingWorld to advocate strongly for increases in government aid funding and to increase their own support for development aid through personal and church giving, and through advocacy and encouragement of their friends and community.

It followed a massive cut in overseas aid by the federal government in the May budget which will slice \$2.7 billion from the forward estimates over the next few years.

### **Church says "No!" to community closures**

The gathering stood as one to oppose the forced closure of remote Aboriginal communities.

The symbolic action was the result of a heartfelt plea by a contingent of youthful members who implored the Assembly to respond to the potential closures.

All members, including the president, Stuart McMillan, Nyungar elder Rev Sealin Garlett and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress chairperson Rev Dennis Corowa moved outside the hall to signal their solidarity with Indigenous people in threat of being forced off their land by federal and state government policies.

The Assembly also demanded the Australian Government adopt policies which genuinely support, rather than demonise, asylum seekers and refugees.

In adopting a proposal from UnitingJustice the Assembly outlined a nine-step plan to achieve this goal which included calling for the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees to be upheld at all times and an abandonment of the policy of mandatory detention.

### **A church from the margins**

While at last national census only five per cent of Australians identified themselves as being Uniting Church compared to 14 per cent regarding themselves as Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist in 1976, members were encouraged not to see being on the margin of society as necessarily a bad thing.

The associate general secretary of the China Christian Council, Rev Dr Lin Manhong, argued that Jesus Christ was the marginal person "par excellence". He was born in a lowly stable, was considered an outsider by his own and befriended those on the edge of society—such as Zaccheus the tax collector, the sick, the poor and the woman at the well.

"If Jesus Christ, the incarnated God, was a marginal person, we Christians are definitely called to be the marginal people of God.

"When the church is in a position of being at the margin, it will be more likely to be like Jesus Christ to relate to and embrace those who are marginalised, because the church itself is one of them, as Jesus Christ was," she said.

"It will be more likely for the church to join the voices from the margins and not just to listen to and speak for them from a distant, central and privileged position.

"It will be more likely for the church to be a more active agent of missionary activities to counteract injustice, inequality and exclusivity that have kept people at the margins.

"It will be more likely for the church to remember its original nature and what it ought to be."

Being more willing to look for change and renewal in the church was another positive which came from being on the margin of society.

### **President-elect**

The ballot for president-elect took place on Thursday, electing Dr Deidre Palmer to the role—the second woman in Uniting Church history.

Deidre is currently the moderator of the Synod of South Australia and a member of number of Uniting Church working groups and committees.

Addressing the Assembly, Deidre thanked members for entrusting her with the responsibility of leading the Uniting Church.

"It gives me great pleasure to be serving you as president-elect," she said.

"I promise to listen to the Holy Spirit, and allow myself to be shaped and empowered by the Spirit."

She also paid tribute to Dr Jill Tabart, the first woman president in the Uniting Church.

"It is an honour for me to walk in her footsteps," said Deidre.

### **Closing service**

The Assembly came to a close with a service of Holy Communion presided over by Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress chairperson Rev Dennis Corowa and assisted by Stuart McMillan.

Stuart sent the members of Assembly into the next triennium with a charge to continue the process of reconciliation between all people.

"People of God, go forth from here to live out the covenant that we the First and Second Peoples of this land have entered into with one another," he said.

"Rejoice in the richness of our diverse cultures and learn from them.

"Celebrate the unity we have in Jesus."

The next Assembly will be held in Melbourne in 2018.

# Mission: conquer culture shock

International student pastor Noah Kim talks to **Dianne Jensen** about his call to ministry in the Uniting Church.

**Noah Kim knows first-hand that the call to God's service can take you far from home and well outside your comfort zone. The South Korean-born Christian received the nudge from his pastor to attend Bible college in Australia eight years ago—and has used his experiences to support other international students struggling with isolation and culture shock.**

‘Social isolation is a big issue and [international students] long for connection with the community, but they don't know how to do it’

Now 26 years old, Noah is international student ministry pastor at Sunnybank Uniting Church in Brisbane and project officer at the Brisbane South International Students Support Partnership. He is also a chaplaincy intern at Griffith University and founded and leads Students Together Brisbane, a social outreach of Sunnybank Uniting Church.

## It's a minefield out there

Noah ventured to Brisbane with only basic English skills. The hurdles he faced set him on the path to helping others navigate the cultural minefield and interact with local Aussies. After working with international students for the past three years he understands just how confusing and intimidating Australian society can be—and how easy it is to fall foul of social mores and encounter rejection or even exploitation.

“When I first came I could not speak English properly, and also I went through some cultural difficulties and I felt really isolated. I had a deep longing for being connected to community,” says Noah. “Because I grew up in an Asian country, for me to come and live in western society was quite a different experience, even with simple things like food or weather or communication—how to interact with other people.

“The education style was quite different as well, and in my first year at Bible College I struggled to engage in the class.”

Noah found an immediate welcome at Sunnybank Uniting Church, a multicultural congregation which reflects the diversity of Brisbane's southern suburbs, particularly around Griffith University. An estimated

8000 international students from 100 countries live in the region, with more than 2000 others on short-term travel and working holidays.

The congregation sponsored him to stay on in Australia to undertake ministry as international student pastor.

“I have been in the role for three years now, and when I first started, to be honest, I wasn't really sure what I was going to do but my senior pastor felt I had got a calling in my life,” says Noah. “So I thought, God has something for me to do in this particular community and particular time. I started reflecting on my experiences—the big pain that I had from being an international student and all the experiences that I went through sort of shaped my heart attitude towards people from overseas and the community.”

## Creating safe spaces

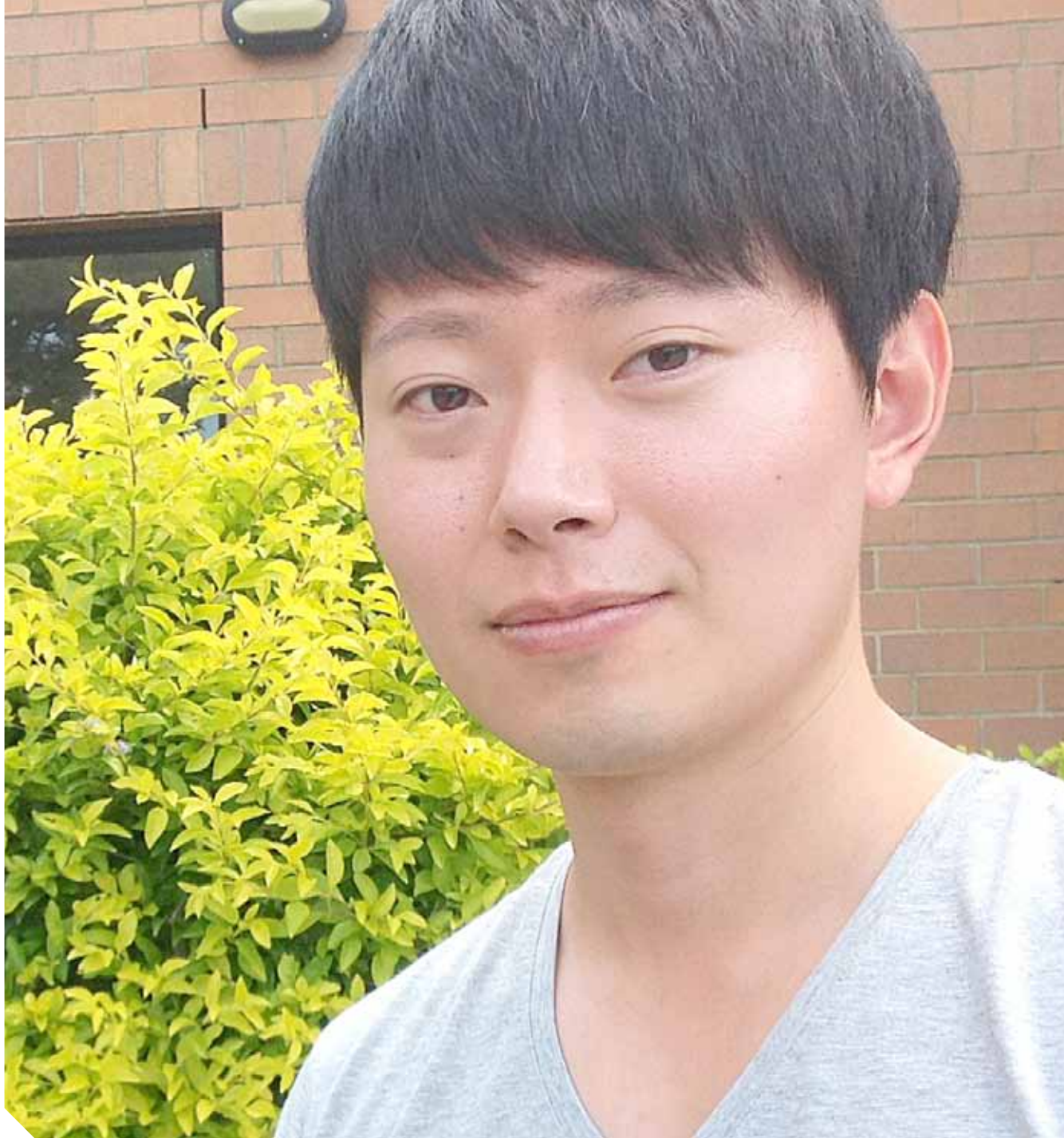
Noah's ministry resulted in a \$10 000 research grant from the Brisbane City Council to set up Students Together Brisbane. He was joined by Sunnybank church members Katrina Tseng and Wilfred Nguyen, from Taiwanese and Vietnamese backgrounds respectively, who shared the vision of creating a safe and welcoming space for young people.

“The program has grown and it has 15 to 20 regular attenders, but so far we have had 80 to 90 students through our program. Because many international young adults travel a lot, we found the group is challenged to grow numerically. However, we can see that the influence that we are having in the wider community is growing fast.

“We made this Facebook page and that now has 200 subscribers across the world. So far we have held 50 to 60 events and activities that include day trips, free English conversation classes, cultural festivals. We also invite people from community to run special workshops that might help international young people, such as cooking classes, self-defence classes, things like that.”

The Students Together Brisbane team, together with Roberto Chata and Rev Andrew Ross, undertook an





Noah Kim, international student ministry pastor at Sunnybank Uniting Church in Brisbane.  
**Photo:** David Busch

online survey to identify the key issues faced by international students, presenting the results at a community forum in February this year.

“Social isolation is a big issue and [students] long for connection with the community, but they don’t know how to do it,” says Noah. “Also there is exploitation at workplaces and fewer opportunities for international students to get employed or gain internship opportunities, [plus] safety issues as well as financial difficulties. But the main issue is they feel less connected to the wider community and they look for opportunities to meet people from local communities.”

He is currently funded for several hours a week by Brisbane City Council to do a small project with their youth development team, based on the experience that he gained from his role as project officer at the Brisbane South International Students Support Partnership.

### **A faith worth sharing**

Noah’s passion for outreach is rooted in the evangelistic dynamic at the heart of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, his church of origin. After the United States, South Korea is responsible for the second largest number of missionaries in

the world, a testimony to the impact of the first American missionaries who planted the Protestant church in Korea in the nineteenth century.

“The missionaries taught people the importance of going to other countries and spreading the gospel, sharing the gospel with others, and even today that part is a really important heritage of the Korean church,” says Noah. “We have huge emphasis on evangelism, sharing faith and making Jesus known to others ... in Australia I discovered that people would not impose their religious views and political views on others because they respect one another’s different beliefs. In this context I learnt evangelism should be more than sharing of the words but showing through lifestyle.”

Although his home congregation in Sunnybank embraces a multicultural model of ministry, celebrating the diverse cultural traditions of those who worship there, Noah understands the value of fostering migrant communities of faith.

“I am doing supply ministry (25 per cent) in Gold Coast Korean church at the moment. I see first generation migrants, they often are not really able to communicate in English and they struggle to be in English service. Also, I understand it is hard for them to mix with new culture even in

church settings. In migrant communities of faith it is amazing to see that their worship manifests their beautiful traditions and heritages. But some churches like Sunnybank Uniting Church are specifically called to demonstrate an aspect of the gospel; that regardless of race and cultural differences we are one in Christ and worship God in unity.”

### **Path to ministry**

The young Uniting Church member is now a permanent resident of Australia, and is eagerly anticipating making his citizenship pledge in the next few months.

Noah is currently undertaking a Period of Discernment to explore God’s call upon his life.

“As I have been working with people from different backgrounds and people from the community in general I have grown to sense that God may be calling me into congregational ministry,” says Noah. “I have the intention to be a candidate for specific ministry role in the Uniting Church in Australia, yet what will lead my life is God’s intention not mine.”

# 4

## signs God may be calling you to ministry (or not)

Here's a handy list for those considering a call to a specified ministry in the Uniting Church.



### **You're hooked on Christian education and you've run out of lay courses**

Many ministry candidates report that the hunger for knowledge and understanding that led them to explore theology was their first step. Talk to Trinity College Queensland at [ask@trinity.qld.edu.au](mailto:ask@trinity.qld.edu.au) about what's next.



### **You take notes during sermons**

If you've got a yen to connect with people's hearts and minds have a read of Matthew 23. It reminds us that God sends prophets, sages and teachers. If that's you, get moving.



### **You know that God's grace is the only reason you're still whole**

The most effective ministers are often those whose challenging or even heartbreaking experiences have transformed their lives into powerful messages of hope and redemption. Being invincible is not part of the job description.



### **Once you enter a Period of Discernment, you feel a sense of peace**

"I felt my heart strangely warmed," wrote John Wesley when he opened his heart to God's call. If the path appears before you, forge ahead.



### **You want to spend your life cloistered in prayer and contemplation**

You might consider changing denomination if this is your heart's desire. Be prepared to give up a few things to meet your goal.



### **You take notes during sermons (and provide a score out of 10)**

The desire to share your gifts (and the urge to ask questions during the sermon) can be authentic signs that you should put your hand up to serve, but keep in mind that hubris is not considered a mark of leadership in the Uniting Church.



### **You know that a dog collar and a long white outfit will provide authority (and take kilos off your silhouette)**

If your passionate theological pronouncements are falling on unreceptive ears, head straight to Trinity College Queensland and do some real exegesis. And use the stairs; you clearly need the exercise.



### **You want to play golf on Mondays.**

As if.

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- Exploring the Old Testament (22–23 August and 23–25 October) • Exploring Worship and Preaching (5–6 September)
- How Do We Read the Book of Revelation? Intensive (9–11 October)

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# Forming salty souls for ministry

Paul's counsel to Timothy to atune ourselves to the mind and heart of Christ is a wake-up call for ministry formation, writes **Sean Gilbert**.

**“Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way ...” (1 Timothy 4:7b-8a)**

Paul's encouragement to Timothy has nothing to do with sanctimonious practices of faith yet everything to do with a growing attunement to the mind and heart of Christ. “Godliness” in this particular context means a deepening of character in Christ, born and sustained by the Holy Spirit. In short, it is a life of reverencing—of seeing then doing in Christ's name.

With ministry practice in mind, such forming processes are significantly free of pressures to perform, impress or leave an indelible holy mark! What is more important and arguably what is most pressing today, are ministers of forming character who can authentically reflect the salted character of Christ's own ministry. And whilst not discounting the place of skills development and competencies, such a biblical (baptismal) understanding of formation—for ministry—might offer a needed corrective, if not an overdue wakeup call.

In typical acerbic voice, Thomas Merton wrote,

“The one who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening their own self-understanding, freedom, integrity and capacity to love Christ, will not have anything to give others but the

contagion of their own obsessions, their aggressiveness, their ego-centred ambitions, their delusions about ends and means, their doctrinaire prejudices and ideas ...”

Merton's prophetic insight digs uncomfortably at what can ail the Christian church with regards to its leadership and an often unformed disposition, namely a presumption upon Christ and not a life lived humbly or securely in Christ by virtue of prayerful or contemplative practice.

In my own experience, this is no small matter or an exercise in mere semantics. It really counts so far as ministry delivery is concerned because in the end, to whom are we pointing as the source of saving grace and from what wells are we drawing in order to make that witness compelling? If it subtly or not-so-subtly be ourselves, in and for ourselves, such “ministry” will either blandly run out of steam or end in injurious ruin. We have seen too much of these extremes of late.

May it be then, in an anxious church climate seeking surefire solutions or overnight changes, that Paul's “training” counsel to Timothy still be the basis of everything pertaining to ministry practice itself? Never just an add-on but the heart and soul of who we are called to be.

*Sean is lecturer in ministry practice, Uniting College of Leadership and Theology, Adelaide. Sean is currently writing a doctoral thesis on, “Spiritual Affections and the Art of Christian Ministry.”*

‘What is most pressing today, are ministers of forming character who can authentically reflect the salted character of Christ's own ministry’

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# When Christian media sucks

Google suggestions don't lie. So if popular opinion is calling out Christian movies and music as the "enemy of quality", "intellectually vacant" and "disconnected from reality" what value does it hold in a world already full of hopeless content? **Ashley Thompson** explores.

**Christians in media are stuck between a rock and a hard place—damned if they do, damned if they don't. The tension between a Christian's faith and their work is evident in every industry but is perhaps nowhere as pronounced or scrutinised as on a public platform.**

**'The temptation is to try to make God famous or defend our Christian position and in doing so we can end up embellishing our faith stories beyond reality'**

**Geoff Bentley**

"I don't think people need to be overt; but I admire those in public life who identify intentionally as people of faith. What is important is authenticity," says professional communicator and Uniting Church member, Dr John Harrison.

"I would like to see people of faith producing authentic media which reflects that faith in the many diverse ways it can."

## **Knock it off**

Today, the highly sought after Christian target market is in no way lacking content churned out by omnipresent media conglomerates Time Warner and Sony Pictures.

*Old Fashioned, God's Not Dead, Persecuted, Heaven Is For Real*: last year alone Hollywood Christians spat out lacklustre movies which were reviewed as weak responses to current issues. Online Christian resource group the Gospel Coalition described them as "inherently dishonest" and "egotistic castle-building". Their key offence was identified as an indulgence that

projects Christians into the most admirable and ethical characters, without flaw.

Concurrently in 2014, *Son of God*, *Exodus: Gods and Kings* and *Noah* initiated a wave of biblical epics that will continue to dominate our screens in upcoming releases: *Apostle Paul*, *David and Goliath*, and *Killing Jesus*.

In a guest post on Vox.com titled "Why are Christian movies so painfully bad?" Brandon Ambrosino wrote that much of Christian media seems like a knock-off: a cheap alternative that runs contradictory to the doctrine of creation—as artists choose to mimic someone else's vision, rather than cultivate their own.

Others suggest that Christians cocoon themselves within cultural walls—producing out-of-date content that perpetuates an idealistic fantasy world rather than the one in which we actually live.

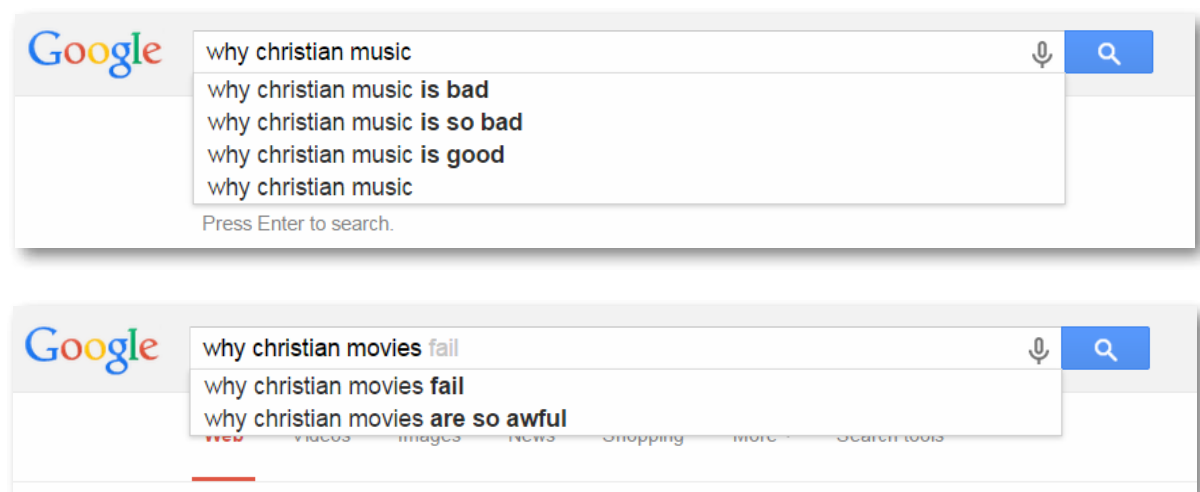
So if our mission is to reach beyond church walls and affect the mainstream, how and why are we failing so badly?

## **What's in a name?**

"I think that there is a problem with the terminology that can frame this conversation. What makes something Christian? Does a car become Christian when we slap a Jesus sticker on the bumper?" asks Australian Christian Channel (ACCTV) general manager, Geoff Bentley.



Hillsong United perform at Hillsong Conference in Sydney earlier this year.  
Photo: Ashley Thompson



According to Geoff, of the more than 4500 movies made last year—only 90 movies were major releases in cinemas (films grossing in excess of \$70 million at the box office). Of these he is aware of at least six that were written by Christians, or based on a biblical world view, although not necessarily marketed as such.

“It may appear that there is a plethora of poorly-made films in the Christian genre but I wonder if labelling films as ‘Christian movies’ is like the ‘Christian’ sticker on a car—it gives the perception that the reason it’s a bad movie is because it is ‘Christian’, not because it was poorly made or written,” says Geoff.

“I can’t help but feel that as Christians we, to some extent, are to blame for this perception; as we tend to focus on championing the Christian brand despite the integrity of the product under which we place the brand, falling far short of the God we want to be honouring.”

Geoff believes excellence is achieved when artists strive to close the gap between an extraordinary vision and their ability to execute it.

### Hitting the right note

Contemporary music labelled under the genre “Christian” is criticised as insular and completely foreign to secular audiences. Whether it’s pop, soft rock or worship, writers and commenters on religious blogging site Patheos.com describe this music as “cheesy” and “limited” noting it “all sounds the same”.

“Much music under the banner of ‘Christian’ is rubbish replete with ‘Jesus is my boyfriend’ type lyrics,” says John Harrison.

“We need to remember that much of it comes from the conservative American Christian publishing, media and music industry; an industry which does not wish to challenge Christian consumerism.”

It’s a criticism also levelled at Australian Christian media giant, Hillsong Church. Its worship label Hillsong Music has reached international renown

under the leadership of Hillsong Church senior pastors, Brian and Bobbie Houston.

Hillsong-affiliated bands are undeniably popular. Young & Free and Hillsong Worship frequently chart on Christian and mainstream bestseller lists, as does Hillsong United, which has received acclaim both at home and abroad. Their latest album *Empires* hit number one on the 2015 ARIA chart and their song “Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)” set a new record for longest reign on Billboard’s Hot Christian Songs chart.

According to Brian and Hillsong United member Jonathon “JD” Douglass, the ten members that take that stage are first and foremost “members of the church” and “lovers of Jesus”.

“Everything that you see of United comes out of the heart of a local church; they never ever cut those roots,” says Brian.

JD says Hillsong Church strives to be early adopters in new media technologies.

“The [gospel] message is eternal and we don’t want to touch what the message is but the method completely needs to change and be relevant to society.

“I just think that we need to present that in a way that people can understand and that is covered in grace not law.”

“The world’s changing dramatically around us,” concurs Brian, “Even from last week to this week, it’s changed. A month ago we’ve never even heard of [social media app] Periscope and now it’s the latest and greatest thing; so I feel like unless us older people sometimes get out of the way and give young people room to do things differently, and have creativity, we really will hold back potential.”

### Divine lens

Both the Hillsong team and Geoff Bentley believe it is impossible to separate faith and work as their relationship with God frames the lens through which they view the world.

“In my understanding of faith in God, I cannot separate my faith from who I am and all that I do. My faith in God should be the framework from which everything I do is based,” says Geoff, “But it lacks integrity if we do a poor job and ascribe [media] high value just because we have faith or label it as Christian work.

“The temptation is to try to make God famous or defend our Christian position and in doing so we can end up embellishing our faith stories beyond reality. We need to let God do the promoting; he will defend our position when we just keep it real.”

Online critics suggest we stop producing “Christian movies” or “Christian music” and simply have “Christ-followers who create great art”. Put another way, American college professor and artist Gary Wilson says, “What the world doesn’t need are more Christian artists, what we need are more artists who have their Christianity intact”.

John Harrison agrees, “All media can do is challenge and ask questions. I’m sufficiently old fashioned to believe the rest is up to God.”

*Content from the Australian Christian Channel is available free online via their website [acc.tv](http://acc.tv)*

*Hillsong United’s latest album *Empires* can be purchased through the Apple iTunes store.*

*John Harrison will be the keynote speaker at the annual Australasian Religious Press Association conference in Brisbane on 28–30 August speaking on the theme, Against the murderous, thieving hordes—freedom, religion and the press.*



Pope Francis at closing mass for Asian Youth Day.  
Photo: Jeon Han, Korea.net / Korean Culture and Information Service

# When the pope calls state to account

The latest encyclical to come from the Vatican has sparked a lot of commentary in both religious and mainstream press. Dr John Harrison examines what *Laudato si* means for Australian Protestants.

**Christians outside the Roman Catholic tradition are watching with interest the debate among Catholics about the most recent papal encyclical. The issue under debate is not climate change, but the authority of the Catholic Church, and the obligation of its members to adopt and act on the social teaching of the church.**

*The Australian* has already pronounced the encyclical a prescription for a “flawed economic order” and that “in advocating radical change in economic structures and world governance, [Pope] Francis has stepped over important demarcations between church and state, blurring the lines between God and Caesar” (27 June 2015).

In modern times there are only a handful of encyclicals that have made the front page. Of the 233 encyclicals published since the accession of Leo XIII in 1878, four stand out. First, *Rerum Novarum* (*On Capital and Labor*) in 1891, and *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931, commemorating the 40th anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*.

The strong thread that runs through Catholic social teaching from *Rerum Novarum* to the present day is papal condemnation of both capitalism and socialism, and their excesses:

“... the hiring of labor and the conduct of trade are concentrated in the hands of comparatively few ... very rich men ... able to lay upon ... the laboring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself.” (*Rerum Novarum*, paragraph 3)

“Socialists, therefore, by endeavoring to transfer the possessions of individuals to the community at large,

strike at the interests of every wage-earner ...” (*Rerum Novarum*, paragraph 5)

Of the other two encyclicals, *Mit brennender Sorge* (*On the Church and the German Reich*) was issued on Palm Sunday 1937 by Pius XI who tore down the claims and practices of the German state, whose leadership he described as “enemies of God”. Finally, there is *Humanae Vitae* (*On the regulation of birth*) published in 1968, prohibiting the faithful from the use of artificial birth control.

This current encyclical, *Laudato si* (*On care for our common home*) gives attention to the state as an actor in resolving the global environmental crisis:

“A politics concerned with immediate results, supported by consumerist sectors of the population, is driven to produce short-term growth ... (and) governments are reluctant to upset the public with measures which could affect the level of consumption or create risks for foreign investment.” (*Laudato si*, paragraph 178)

Finally for Australian readers, this gem stands out among the 40 000 words of exegesis, excoriation and exhortation:

“Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions.” (*Laudato si*, paragraph 14)

Read the pope's encyclical at [tinyurl.com/popefrancislaudatosi](http://tinyurl.com/popefrancislaudatosi)

‘This current encyclical, *Laudato si* (*On care for our common home*) gives attention to the state as an actor in resolving the global environmental crisis’



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## Women and men should be in equal partnership

I read in the July *Journey* about the proposal for the Uniting Church Adult Fellowship to encourage “participation from all cultural groups in women’s fellowships” (“Multicultural women’s fellowships proposed”, page 19). I certainly agree that as a church we should be actively encouraging the involvement of all cultural groups in our churches but I am concerned that we have moved back to the position that existed before union.

When the Uniting Church began it was one of its strengths that no one could be excluded from a fellowship group because of their sex or race. We were to be an inclusive church, but gradually over the years we have moved away from this ideal and women’s groups and men’s groups have slipped back into our churches.

We need both women and men to work together and be in equal partnership to bridge the cultural divide. Setting up single-sex organisations just perpetuates existing power bases and makes us more irrelevant to the rest of the community.

**Heather Blake**  
Ashgrove

*All letters must directly address articles and letters from the previous month’s edition of Journey. Opinions expressed are only indicative of the individual writer, not their entire congregation. While direct responses to letters are acceptable, ongoing discussions about an article more than two months old will not be published.*

*Full submission guidelines for letters to the editor can be found at [journeyonline.com.au/submit](http://journeyonline.com.au/submit)*

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[ucaqld.com.au/administration/communications/road-show/](http://ucaqld.com.au/administration/communications/road-show/)

This is a free event, all welcome.



The Uniting Church in Australia  
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Image: Thibault Le Mer

## Seeking Youth Pastor

Moggill Uniting Church is seeking a fully devoted disciple of Jesus Christ to get alongside the young people of our church and its surrounding area. This position is full time and has a specific focus on creating and sustaining discipleship pathways for children and youth.

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For more information:

e. [melaniewheelley@gmail.com](mailto:melaniewheelley@gmail.com) p. 0412 538 015 w. [moggill.unitingchurch.org.au](http://moggill.unitingchurch.org.au)



**Moggill Uniting Church**



## CALENDAR SELFIE COMPETITION

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## Ministry Challenge: Seeking Expressions of Interest

### Calvary Presbytery

The Calvary Presbytery is seeking expressions of interest from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ministers and pastors who have a desire to minister in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and congregations in Queensland.

Calvary Presbytery is the regional organisation of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in Queensland. It has oversight of the remote congregations of Mornington Island, Aurukun, Napranum, and Mapoon, as well as urban ones in Gordonvale, Townsville and Zillmere in Brisbane. There are current vacancies in some of these congregations.

We are seeking people who have a desire to work with and beside Indigenous people in an empowering way, both in supporting and leading local congregations and also supporting the community to address its own critical issues.

If you are motivated to be involved in this kind of ministry, please contact the Rev Dennis Corowa or the Rev John Adams at the Presbytery office in Townsville.

**Contact details:**  
Office tel: 07 4723 1805  
Fax: 07 4723 2058

**Dennis Corowa**  
m. 0408 871 354; e. [dennis@calvarypresbytery.com.au](mailto:dennis@calvarypresbytery.com.au)

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