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Board Members vacancy

The Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia is seeking to appoint a new member to the Board of UnitingCare Queensland. The appointment will take effect from early 2016.

On behalf of the Uniting Church, UnitingCare Queensland provides health and community services to thousands of people every day of the year through its service network - Blue Care, UnitingCare Community, UnitingCare Health and Australian Regional and Remote Community Services (ARRCS).

Our 16 000 staff and more than 9 000 volunteers provide health care and support people from all walks of life, including older people, people with a disability, and children and families. We have an extensive geographic footprint with a strong regional and remote presence across Queensland and the Northern Territory.

The UnitingCare Queensland Board is responsible to the Church for developing the overall strategic directions for the organisation, ensuring the organisation is dynamic, visionary, true to its mission, values driven and sustainable into the future.

Community service, health, business and professional leaders who can demonstrate appropriate qualifications and outstanding achievement are encouraged to express their interest. We are seeking candidates who have board and senior executive experience in large complex organisations. Community service, aged care or health industry experience will be highly regarded.

To obtain an information kit or to submit an application please email Geoff Rogers, Director Human Resources at UnitingCare Queensland (geoff.rogers@ucareqld.com.au) or phone mobile: 0421 053 971.

Applications close Friday 23rd October 2015.





The heart of community

When I was in Sunday School, it was drilled into me that church is not a building, it is a community.

Church can happen anywhere, “wherever two or three are gathered in my name”. It is a body and a family which grows and changes, reflecting Christ’s love and glory.

Our cover story this month is a profile of Maria Phalpang (page ten), a former South Sudanese refugee who is part of the Nuer faith community at St David’s Uniting Church in Coopers Plains. She describes how although her family is separated by oceans, her faith community is “like our family ... where we come together as one person and one community” in love and support, especially during crisis.

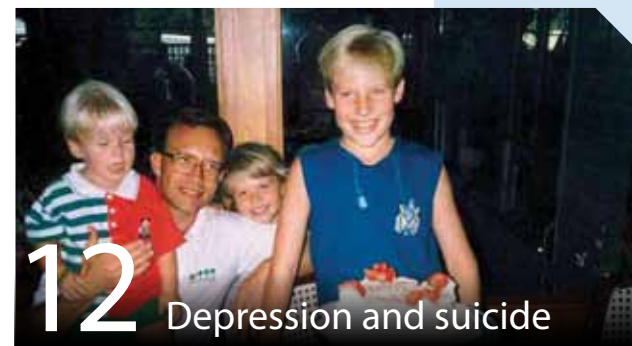
Support during crisis isn’t just important for refugees. Mental Health Week runs from 5–12 October, and we spoke to some people in the Uniting Church and its agencies about how their lives have been affected by struggles with mental health and how we can support each other in this important area (page 12).

We also have a feature on café church, a highly accessible form of worship that has been growing increasingly popular. There’s no better way to form a bond with someone than over a meal or a cup of coffee. Read on page six to see how these communities of faith have been strengthened by including food and drink all throughout worship.

However you worship, and whoever is part of your community, Jesus is at the heart of all we do. Through him the bonds of friendship and faith grow strong.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor

Contents



- 4 Moderator’s message
- 5 Faith in public office
- 8 Anti-Poverty Week
- 9 Holy Spirit
- 14 Uniting Church future
- 15 Buy Nothing New Month
- 16 Review: War Room
- 17 Mental health resources
- 18 Synod budget
- 19 Letter and fast news

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Closing date for editorial and advertising for November *Journey* is Monday 12 October. The next issue of *Journey* will be available on Sunday 1 November.



Monday Midday Prayer

Loving God,
Enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith, certain hope and perfect charity, that I may fulfil your purpose.
Amen
—Saint Francis

Moderator’s highlights

- 6 October**
UnitingCare Queensland board meeting
- 16–17 October**
North Queensland Presbytery meeting
- 29 October**
Heads of churches lunch meeting with premier Annastacia Palaszczuk

The Spirit is abroad in the world

A couple of weeks ago, one Friday night, the youth group from St Stephen’s Roman Catholic Church in Brisbane hit the streets. They introduced themselves to people and told them that the cathedral was open for prayer; that they were welcome to go in, pray about something that was on their mind or troubling them, and light a candle as a symbol of their prayer.

Late that night they discovered 278 candles had been lit and placed in the votive box.

The Spirit of God is abroad in the world. It is bearing witness to people’s hearts that God is present to them. It is inviting them into relationship. The Spirit is active and alive.

Some associate the Spirit with ecstatic utterances, with experiences of transcendence. That’s fair enough, but our tradition bears witness to the Spirit’s activity as much broader than that.

In the Old Testament, as recorded in Exodus, God gave Bezalel and Oholiab the Spirit to craft wood and metal. (I reckon the ability to interpret financial reports needs the power of the Spirit.) Paul speaks of the Spirit quickening creation to labour as in childbirth for the revelation of the children of God.

A key word must be “enlivener”. Giving power to that youth group to open doors to faith; giving those who responded hope and assurance that their prayer was heard.

At the Synod in Session, the members identified a call to seek for the Holy Spirit to act in the church as a defibrillator. Defibrillators revive an arrhythmic heart; they give the heart an opportunity to beat again to its natural rhythm.

So, what do you reckon?
How’s your heart ticking over?
Is it in the rhythms of the gospel?

If worship is anything, it’s the space where our hearts have opportunity for an overhaul.

Adoration gets our blood going. Confession cleans out the gunk. Hearing the word and receiving the sacraments feeds it with good things. Responding to the word preps it for service.

So don’t miss the opportunity for a clean out. Retreats, quiet days, spiritual direction? Well they’re like major services in in the lifecycle of a machine. We all need them.

Rev David Baker
Moderator, Queensland Synod

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Fiona Simpson and Dr Leigh Trevaskis at the Faith and Public Office conference.
Photo: Ashley Thompson



Dr Scott Stephens (foreground) at the Faith and Public Office panel discussion.
Photo: Geoff Rankin

Keeping the faith

Last month, Christian political practitioners and academics gathered to unpack the presence of faith in public office. **Ashley Thompson** reports.

To what extent should people that hold high public office constrain the expression of their personal faith and its inevitable influence over the performance of their public duties?

Toowong Uniting Church member and director of Emmanuel College's Centre for the Study of Science, Religion and Society, Dr Leigh Trevaskis argues these questions hold an unequivocal tension in the public space.

"It's only 50 years since the Nuremberg trials where the defendant said 'I was just carrying out what the state told me to do, I'm a faithful public servant'," says Leigh, recalling the prosecution of prominent members of Nazi Germany leadership who carried out the Holocaust and other war crimes.

"But the jury found, 'No way, you remain responsible in public office. You should have allowed your personal moral framework to say this is wrong to do this to these people'."

Leigh uses former minister for immigration and border protection Scott Morrison as a modern

example. According to Leigh, Morrison's critics would say he's personally responsible for allowing abuse of asylum seekers in detention, and that this runs contrary to his Christian faith.

"Yet those same critics are people who posted on Facebook 'No, it is outrageous that faith should have any influence in public office.'"

"So this is what the conference is about. It's not cut and dry, black and white," says Leigh.

"So, can one be a politician and still have faith?" asks former Uniting Church pastor and current online editor for the ABC Religion and Ethics portal Dr Scott Stephens. "This question seems to be a complete misunderstanding of what faith is."

"As counterintuitive as it may seem, I would even suggest that the more pressing question is not whether a religious believer can be a good politician but whether it is possible to resist the suffocating cynicism and self-satisfied irony of modern public life *without* some reference to faith."

Conference attendee, St Andrew's Uniting Church minister Rev Bruce Johnson adds, "The only time

the wider community wants to know the church's opinion is when they want to talk about sex or some other equally contentious issue.

"This is short-selling the impact that faith has on shaping society. I want to help my congregation think through how maybe they can help this conversation happen, from a professional perspective."

Fiona Simpson, Liberal National Party member for Maroochydore and former speaker in the 54th Parliament of Queensland says, "If you love God, you love people. You cannot stay away from the issues of the day."

"Society would be poorer if we were to push people of faith out of the marketplace."

The Centre for the Study of Science, Religion and Society is an initiative of Emmanuel College, auspiced by the Uniting Church in Queensland.

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Café church

Give it a shot!

Whenever two or three people gather to eat and drink together as part of worship, café church is happening. **Dianne Jensen** talks to three Queensland congregations exploring fresh forms of this ancient model of being church.

It's family friendly, low key, and a lot harder to slip into the back row unnoticed. Café church is a contemporary reimagining of a concept which harks back to the early church; the coming together of small Christian communities to break bread and share worship.

Many Uniting Churches across Queensland have caught the vision, but how does the model really work, and is it right for your church community?

In general terms, most café churches are lay-led, collaborative services in informal worship spaces with ad hoc café-style seating. Whether hot fork suppers or fast food, there is always something to eat and drink, and the format is likely to include creative forms of liturgy and shared prayer and discussion around tables.

Creating family spaces

The evening café church in St Stephen's Uniting Church hall in Maryborough is still going strong after 15 years.

"It began when a small group of people got together to experience a different form of worship in a less formal manner," says veteran organiser Nalda Brett.

"Café church has been the entry level for many folk who were not regular worshippers and who feel uncomfortable in a traditional church set-up. People love the informal style and the chance to be part of family-style worship."

The monthly services are planned around a theme, and the congregation of between 30 and 90 people often includes regulars from country churches. Everyone brings a plate, and dinner is shared during a short break in the 90-minute service.

Music is especially important, attracting participation from other local churches.

"Our regular keyboard player is the organist at the Anglican church and her husband plays clarinet in the band. Another clarinet player is a minister at the New Apostolic Church, and his wife plays flute with him. One of our violin players is from the Church of Christ, her

son plays guitar in the group and her husband is our sound man. Another teenager plays accordion and joins us from Hervey Bay. The other band members are from St Stephen's, a violinist who is 81 years young, and three singers who lead the worship," says Nalda.

"It is a great way to get to know each other, to experience different styles of worship, and to use our God-given talents in music, singing, prayer, drama and participation. Working as a team helps folk grow spiritually and learn how to lead worship. Food and fellowship bring together a meaningful outreach event. It is well worth all the effort."

Worship without barriers

Café church at Oxley Darra Uniting Church in Brisbane's west is a monthly service organised by different groups on a roster. Food and drink are provided by the church.

"We still follow what I would call a normal church liturgy; it just becomes a little less formal in those spaces," says Rev Andrew Gunton.

"It's more about trying to take away some of those barriers that the pews can put up, with people feeling a bit more relaxed gathering around a table and sharing food together as part of the service. We often do things in table groups, having a chat about an idea or using the group for prayer."

The café church format gives people the freedom to contribute their own creativity and life experience to worship, he adds.

"We don't lose the elements that make a worship service—they are simply presented in a different format. For those people who are regular churchgoers, I think they appreciate the difference and it can move them to engage in a different way."

The service draws about 40 to 50 regular attenders representing a cross section of ages.

"I think we get people who are more on the fringes coming to café church but we do occasionally get

‘It is a great way to get to know each other, to experience different styles of worship, and to use our God-given talents in music, singing, prayer, drama and participation’

Nalda Brett



some people who have been invited by friends,” says Andrew. “And it doesn’t matter how much promotion we do in the church, the personal invitation is going to be the one which gets results.

“People need to recognise that café church is not going to be the silver bullet that solves every dilemma in the life of the church; it’s simply another way that we can present a worship service.”

Building new community

Pastor Phil Smith describes the Sunday worship at BELLS, a new faith community in Bells Reach on the Sunshine Coast, as dinner church. The thriving congregation of 40 to 45 people is about to relocate to Unity College, where Phil is campus minister, after outgrowing space at the real estate developer’s offices.

“The tables are set up and everybody brings food to share,” says Phil. “Eating just sort of flows out of the message discussion time. So liturgical structure—you would have to look a bit more closely to recognise it—but that happens around the tables and then flows into the meal, particularly if we are celebrating holy communion that leads us into grace.”

Like the average family meal, there’s always plenty of noise and busyness at dinner church, he adds. And as the faith community grows, the limitations of the café church model are clear.

“When you want things to be relaxed and welcoming and open, people need to actually know one another. Café church has that sense of intimacy and there’s a limit to how big it can be ... so do we move to the next model, or do we do the same thing at another place at another time?

“For instance, in the summer we want to explore a pop-up church in the community garden so we bring the barbeque down there, eat the produce from the garden, and have a very accessible public form of worship.”

Phil suggests that models such as café/dinner church are challenging the accepted wisdom that Sunday worship is the central experience of Christian life.

“This needs to be missional community and I think the café church idea lends itself to that, whereas one of the risks with a more traditional form of church is that sense of, well I can drive 40 minutes and go there on Sunday for an hour and then go away and never really have to get to know those people at all,” says Phil.

“For me as the pastor, this church is for people who are either disconnected from church or have not experienced the life of church before—that they would sense that they belong and that this grows beyond Sunday night.”

Café church tips:

1. Remember that café church is a worship service.
2. Listen. What is it that people actually want and need?
3. Consider sustainability. What are your resources and how can you create opportunities for leadership?
4. Plan each service around a theme. Be creative.
5. Watch the clock. Keep speakers to a time slot and be prepared to skip songs to finish on schedule.
6. Don’t skimp on hospitality.
7. Be willing and able to welcome newcomers.
8. Be realistic with expectations.
9. Have fun!

Top: Craig Josic, Phil Smith, Zoe Josic, Connor Russell, Naomi Cavalli and Emily Schlaikier at BELLS dinner church, Caloundra.
Photo: Supplied

Middle: Café church at St Stephen’s Uniting Church Maryborough in August.
Photo: Nalda Brett

Bottom: Café church at Oxley Darra Uniting Church in Brisbane.
Photo: Ken Acworth

Adam W sells the *Big Issue*
in Brisbane city.
Photo: Adam Robert Young



Photos reveal face of Aussie poverty

Queensland's Anti-Poverty Week launch will unveil the surprising face of poverty in Australia.
Rohan Salmond reports.

‘It’s all about the nature of poverty in Australia and overseas and what, as responsible people, we can do to highlight the issue’

Geoff Batkin

For more than ten years, Anti-Poverty Week has been a reminder for Australians that poverty is a real part of their community and their world. From an Australian point of view, poverty can feel like a distant, abstract problem, but for Geoff Batkin, executive director of Wesley Mission Brisbane, an effective response is always local.

“The whole purpose of Anti-Poverty Week is to undertake community engagement, research and other activities at a local level to highlight issues of poverty both in Australia and also overseas,” says Geoff.

“It’s all about the nature of poverty in Australia and overseas and what, as responsible people, we can do to highlight the issue and hopefully come up with some form of solutions for it in a local context.”

This year, Wesley Mission Brisbane has joined the Youth and Family Services (YFS) as a co-chair for Queensland’s Anti-Poverty Week, and its new position has given the Anti-Poverty Week events a bit of Wesley Mission Brisbane flavour.

“This year the Anti-Poverty Week launch at Brisbane Square Library will coincide with a photojournalism project we have been doing with Griffith University students for the past 10 years,” says Geoff.

“The ‘Through My Eyes’ exhibition highlights the extraordinary stories of everyday Queenslanders. The photos capture what words and stories cannot. They show us what hardship, drought, overcoming adversity, compassion and hope looks like. Past and present students have photographed clients at a variety of community service organisations across the state and in rural and remote areas to bring these important issues and heartfelt stories to Brisbane audiences.”

The events organised throughout Anti-Poverty Week will raise awareness of the hardship in our own backyard.

“For a lot of people it’s hidden,” says Geoff. “Effectively it’s people on low or no incomes who may or may not be connected into the community services, who, because of the cost of basic housing, electricity and other costs have very little left in order to effectively engage in the community.”

“It can happen to a lot of people who might be one pay cheque away from being homeless.”

The free “Through my eyes” photojournalism exhibition will open 11 October at Brisbane Square Library and run until the end of November. Other events include a “Walk Against Poverty” for the whole family on 17 October at Sandgate. For more information visit www.antipovertyweek.org.au



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Moved by the Spirit

The Uniting Church is not widely known for being pentecostal or charismatic, but that doesn't mean the Holy Spirit isn't part of our theological DNA, writes **Rev Dr Wendi Sargeant**.

As young theological students, we loved it when a minister retired and donated books to the Trinity students to scour for relevant knowledge for the next assignment and to add to our own libraries.

One of these that I remember well was a book entitled, *What Does Our Church Say? Questions Uniting Church People Are Asking*. Question number seven was, "Why is there a lack of recognition of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Uniting Church?" A brief but sound answer was given squashing any sense that the Uniting Church doesn't recognise the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. The chapter culminated with these words: "The Uniting Church in Australia is committed to be a Spirit-filled Church."

How do we understand the person and work of God's Holy Spirit? First and foremost, the Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the Trinity that is God.

Jesus describes the Spirit as the way people enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5-8). The Spirit frees and leads us to be God's children (Romans 8:14-17, 1 Corinthians 12:3). The Spirit gives us different gifts (1 Corinthians 12) and fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) for service and ministry. Paul encourages people to live and to be guided by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25). But it is also possible to grieve God's Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). The Spirit facilitates

unity despite our differences (1 Corinthians 12:13). This is just the beginning.

After the Bible, a good place to explore the topic from a particularly Uniting Church perspective is the *Basis of Union*. The *Basis* mentions the Holy Spirit in nearly every one of its 18 paragraphs. Mostly these describe the Spirit as giving or enabling power, but the gifts God gives the church in and by the Spirit are also noted. The *Basis of Union* describes the church as the fellowship of the Spirit and outlines the Spirit's guidance to the church and the work of the Spirit through baptism.

The final paragraph portrays the Uniting Church as belonging "to the people of God on the way to the promised end. [Praying] that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord."

I think we are pretty much "committed to be a Spirit-filled Church".

Wendi is acting director of Trinity College Queensland.

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‘You can grow old
dreaming of going
back to Sudan’

This is my home now

Former South Sudanese refugee Maria (Nyaluit) Phalpang belongs to the Uniting Church Nuer faith community in Brisbane. She tells her story to **Dianne Jensen**.

‘We left
because life
was not safe;
there was no
school and
people are
fighting every
day—there is
no stability’

Maria (Nyaluit) Phalpang has travelled a long way from her childhood home of Bentiu in Unity, a predominantly Christian state in war-torn South Sudan.

Faith, family and a passion for education have sustained her on the journey from this dangerous region bordering the Muslim Arab north to the huge Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, and thence across the world to Australia.

Now 32, Maria lives in Banyo on Brisbane’s north. She belongs to the Uniting Church Nuer faith community which meets at St David’s Uniting Church, Coopers Plains and balances work as an interpreter and health researcher with the study load and final year placements for her nursing degree at the Australian Catholic University.

“We left because life was not safe; there was no school and people are fighting every day—there is no stability,” says Maria. “My father always wanted his children to go to school, so when there was this chance for coming to Kenya

he sent me—I got a scholarship from a Catholic organisation that was sponsoring children to boarding school.”

Barely in her teens, Maria left Bentiu with two of her brothers in 1998, later joining their older brother Peter in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Peter was offered a UNHCR scholarship to an Australian university and after graduating as a biochemist was able to sponsor his three siblings to join him in 2007.

The fractured family was never fully reunited. Maria’s father died in 2009 and her mother fled to Nairobi after the resurgence in violence in South Sudan in 2013. Like many older refugees, she waits in the refugee camps housing the thousands of Africans escaping violence in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia.

“It is very hard for parents, because you recognise that your child could die in this dangerous place,” says Maria. “It is sad because you were born into a family and

suddenly you are separated and it's not a separation that you choose; it's a situation that forces you to leave, or as a parent to send your children away."

Maria's mother will not join her children in Australia.

"My mother doesn't want to come here; she says she can't speak English," says Maria. "No, it's not good for old people to come; it's good for young people. I understand."

A faith to live by

The schism between generations is a common experience among young refugees in Australia. Many are caught between their desire to forge a new future and the struggle of their community to deal with the trauma of war and the ever-present anxiety for friends and family left behind.

Maria says that the faith community at St David's plays an important role in supporting the Nuer diaspora in Brisbane.

"Church is actually like our family because this is where everybody comes on Sunday or other meetings. We have a lot of things that happen as a group and we do them as a church. People have been through a lot and they are surviving it because they have been together and they have faith," says Maria.

"This is our backbone of faith because this is where we go to church and we pray and this is where we come together as one person and one community. This is where we advise each other on how to live—especially in this crisis—and this is where we get our parenting advice. Every time we go to church somebody says something about how we can take a good thing out of these bad things, and how lucky we are to be in Australia and we should embrace it and be happy about it and hope and pray a lot about things that are going wrong back home."

Maria and her brothers, like many new Australians, continue to send money to support family overseas.

Violence leaves its mark

The outbreak of ethnic violence in 2013 and the ongoing conflict in Darfur and other regions have exacerbated tension between different Sudanese groups in Australia.

"There is a lot of mistrust," says Maria. "We know anyone who is an Australian citizen is supposed to live as an Australian citizen but the fact is that you are born in that country, you still have ties to that country; you still have your relatives; your mother's there. I would say 80 per cent of the thinking is back home, not here. If anything happens it actually connects to the people who live here."

Alongside these historical rivalries, Maria says that violence within families is also impacting the fragile refugee community. Her job interpreting for the

Department of Immigration and Citizenship and Centrelink brings her face-to-face with the reality of domestic violence.

"It is a big issue because the society where I come from is very male-dominated. When they come here, the woman now starts to have a voice and the husband says, 'Now you are going out from the home, you don't even listen to me', and that creates a lot of problem between couples and married people."

The issue highlights the difficulty that many older refugees experience in adapting to a different culture, as well as the pressures of everyday life.

"People are working so much and they have so many responsibilities and it seems to be getting harder and harder for families, certainly for the older men. They used to say, 'Do this, do that' to a woman, and the man comes from work and the woman takes his shoes off, and they are expecting that. There is not time for all that now as everyone is busy, and they wind up fighting all the time. I hear it all coming out and I feel sad because this shouldn't be happening in Australia."

Breaking down barriers

Maria is passionate about helping refugee women access the health services they need, and her work for the Improving Health Care Service Delivery Research program at the Mater Hospital in Brisbane focuses on breaking down the barriers to service delivery.

"The program is looking into the gap between the health system and refugees [because] these women are not visiting the doctors, they are not aware of so many chronic diseases. The hospital is trying to find out why they are not coming to the doctor—language barrier, cultural barrier or anything hidden."

This is my home

As she looks forward to beginning her nursing career, Maria's plans are focused on building a home and family in Australia.

"About two years ago I realised, you can grow old dreaming of going back to Sudan but it is not happening. I am so proud to be South Sudanese and I will always help them and do anything I can, but I have decided to base my life here. A lot of people don't want to hear me but I say it's a fact and if we are here, we should decide to settle."

"My life is here now. I love it here and I like the freedom, the opportunity."

‘ Church is
actually like
our family...
this is our
backbone
of faith ’



Inside a world of pain 'Somebody notice me'

For every death by suicide, Lifeline estimates that every day as many as 30 people make an attempt, and 250 make suicide plans. **Ashley Thompson** speaks with Christians affected by, and called to care for, those living with suicidal thoughts.

Trigger warning: What follows is a retelling of people affected by suicide and/or involved in crisis support. If you should ever need to talk to someone about your own or another's mental health, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. If a life is in danger, call the emergency services on 000.

"He was much more than how he died," says Newlife Uniting Church member and trained counsellor, Liz Adams.

"It is important that his death doesn't become our memory of who he was."

In your darkest hour

It was a chaotic morning in 2001. One child was late for the bus and another had an assignment due—but the printer was playing up and Liz had somewhere to be.

Amidst the usual morning rush, Liz's youngest son (ten) answered a knock on the door as she attempted to sort out her daughter's (13) botched printout.

"I said 'just tell them to wait for a few minutes!'" recalls Liz, "but then he came back and he said 'no mummy, the police.'"

Frazzled, Liz ignored her son and continued helping her daughter.

"The next minute they [the police] are standing in front of me asking me where our son was, our oldest son," says Liz.

Confused, Liz explained he was out with his father training in the surf—she didn't take him this morning, so he must have.

"Then they said 'There's been a body found ... and it had your son's identification'."

Confused and agitated Liz laughed it off as a prank by his mates, "They're always taking each other's clothes."

"Then he said, 'Does your son ride a triathlete bike?' ... and it all clicked."

Liz describes the feeling of finding out her 16-year-old son Peter had ended his life like “an incredibly hard punch in the heart.”

“It takes your breath away and you can’t breathe and everything stops.

“You become numb.”

Left behind

Fourteen years later Liz is a counsellor at Newlife Care, training to be a clinical psychologist and studying the outcomes of suicide bereavement on children who in her words are “taught to suppress their feelings so they don’t distress their parents”.

Liz believes it is vitally important we break the silence around suicide because, “Whatever we’re doing at the moment is not working”.

“More people die by suicide than deaths on the road and murder combined in a year but no one’s doing anything.

“How many people drown and we have life savers, we train our children, we do all kinds of things to protect people on the beach but seven people every day die by suicide and what is the community doing? We pretend it doesn’t happen.”

How to help

According to Liz, the theory of suicide tells us there are three components that at intersection have a deadly mix. These are: a sense of not belonging, a sense of being a burden and other volitional factors including fearlessness and high tolerance to pain.

“We can’t help people with fearlessness and we can’t help people with a high tolerance to pain but the church can help people feel like they belong, to each other and to a place. We can also make people feel like they’re not a burden,” she says.

Rev Dr Paul Walton is minister with Centenary Uniting Church. He is open about living with depression.

Paul stresses that, “Mental illness is not a sin, nor a sign of a lack of faith.

“It is simply not true that if only people had more faith they would not be ill. When I was at my most depressed, it required faith just to get through the day,” says Paul.

He believes the church can help by encouraging faith, preaching forgiveness and not demanding more.

“When I was at my most depressed, I told the elders in my congregation about it and their immediate response was, ‘What can we take from your workload so we can help you?’

“They willingly took on a couple of things that were weighing me down. This support was invaluable.”

The Queensland Synod’s newly available publication *Called to Care* offers a suite of free mental health resources for congregations who wish to support those suffering with mental illness.

Penning the theological introduction to these resources, Rev Dr Paul Walton encourages Christians to respond from a place of generosity, not fear; we are all broken people. He champions the local congregation as a safe and welcoming place for the healing of wounded people.

Living on suicide watch

Lifeline Telephone Crisis Support operator, Dorothy Walsh has also suffered from depression and experienced suicidal thoughts. She would have given anything for someone to only ask, “Are you OK?”

“That’s all I wanted. I wanted—almost like a sign on me to say—somebody notice me!” says Dorothy.

“It wasn’t until somebody said to me, there’s a particular female doctor we think you should go and see, and I sat down in her chair and just cried and cried and she asked, ‘Are you thinking of taking your life?’ and I said, ‘Yes’.

“I want to put my kids in a car and drive off a bridge.”

Dorothy was more than relieved to have these thoughts finally in the open, “Because it was a way forward”.

When asked whether the impact she would leave on her family had any influence in stopping her actions she replied, “No, no, not at all. It was about making it stop.”

At the time it seemed to Dorothy that her death would have been an “absolute service, because I wouldn’t be a drain on anybody anymore. And that was really strong, those thoughts.”

She later realised the irrationality of her thinking and that at times all a person needs is to have someone “interrupt your thoughts” because, “You have really wrong thinking when you’re depressed”.

Paul Walton echoes these feelings as typical of someone suffering from severe mental illness.

“It is a terrible thing, but when a mentally-ill person commits suicide they are showing that they have found life to be unbearable.”

Called to care

Finding a way forward in this emotional, spiritual and psychological world of pain can only be achieved through forgiveness, says Liz.

“My husband and I, we had to forgive him [Peter], we had to forgive ourselves, we had to forgive others—there were other people we were very angry with.

“We have a God that is a God of the second chance. We have a God that can redeem the worst situation and bring good out of evil and that was very clear to us.”

Liz remembers Peter as a “whole” person: “terror”, “larrikin”, warts and all—anything less would deny him his humanity.

“He lived for 16 years and he was an amazing, wonderful, frustrating person.

“How he died was not who he is.”

If you ever need to talk to someone about your own or another’s mental health, call Lifeline on 13 11 14. If a life is in danger, call the emergency services on 000.

Access the Queensland Synod’s newly available, free mental health resources at ucaqld.com.au/calledtocare

Parents and siblings who have been bereaved by the death of a loved one under 20 in the last ten years are invited to participate in Liz Adams’ suicide bereavement research. Email elizabeth.adams@griffithuni.edu.au or call 0402 692 755 for more information.

‘ ... seven people every day die by suicide and what is the community doing? We pretend it doesn’t happen ’

Liz Adams

Over 80 Uniting Church members across four presbyteries came to engage with Suter's scenarios.
Photo: Ashley Thompson

Suter gets the ball rolling on reform



Last month over 80 church members from across four presbyteries within the Queensland Synod gathered to discuss the outcomes of Dr Keith Suter's thesis "Does the Uniting Church in Australia have a future?" **Ashley Thompson** reports.

Since its release last year, Dr Keith Suter's four possible scenarios for the Uniting Church's future has received mixed reviews, causing fear in some parts of the church and stimulating conversation in others.

'If the situation is as serious as it seems to be, no deck chair shuffle or band aid application has any chance of reversing long established trends'

Rev Dr Lew Born

Retired minister Rev Dr Lew Born opened a lunch time discussion held on 2 September at Beenleigh Region Uniting Church with sharp criticism of those who have ignored Keith's thesis:

"It is an abysmal betrayal by some national and synod leaders not to grant any recognition and status to this gift of Keith Suter's dissertation to the church he loves—warts and all.

"His professional status has international recognition and this work provides unquestioned competence with academic verification. Any commissioning corporation would pay tens of thousands of dollars for this gift."

Keith's four proposed scenarios include: "Word and Deed", "Secular Welfare", "Return to the Early Church" and "Recessional, the End of Church", each one falling on the end of an axis that favours high or low Christian spirituality and high or low government expenditure for church welfare.

Lew said the purpose of this discussion was not to push for "Suter's scenarios" as they have been dubbed, but stimulate conversation and confront fear.

"If the situation is as serious as it seems to be, no deck chair shuffle or band aid application has any chance of reversing long established trends."

A spokesperson from each table brought forward recognisable differences in opinion such as big vs small churches with the acknowledgement one size does not fit all.

Newlife Uniting Church minister Rev Melissa Lipsett urged members of smaller churches not to be afraid of larger churches as the church's commitment to be in regional Queensland was fervently represented by outer-city presbyteries.

Newlife congregation member, John Gibson shared his home group's thoughts on Keith's thesis and acknowledged, "There is no one person or one committee that can drive the comprehensive changes that are required."

"The number one challenge I hope this group will focus on is to decide a strategy to get the issue constructively considered at Synod."

Discussion proved beneficial to all those who deeply desired to see the topic brought to the attention of the wider church, as Catherine Booth said, "If we are to better the future, we must disturb the present."

"Solution is more likely to require spiritual reformation rather than administrative or structural adjustments," said Lew in closing.

"But it is late already."

Find out more about Dr Keith Suter's thesis by visiting churchfutures.com.au



Help young people like Katelyn grow in faith!

Katelyn; 14 years; Chinchilla Uniting Church

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7

ways to get by without spending a penny

October is Buy Nothing New month, a global movement for collective, conscientious consumption which began in Melbourne. Here are a few ideas for saving your pennies and caring for the planet.

- 1 Stop making excuses**
The challenge is to buy nothing new (with the exception of essentials like food, hygiene and medicines), not to go without. It's about evaluating consumer choices and asking questions about where all that stuff comes from, and where it ends up.
- 2 Vote with your money**
If you want to see more sustainable production, consider the provenance of everything you purchase. Is it made locally, with good design, and built to last? We all love a bargain, but remember that the price tag is indicative of the cost of labour, materials, and transport.
- 3 Write it down**
Writing down everything you purchase for a month is a revealing exercise about spending priorities. It helps with budgeting, and is a sure-fire way to keep track of what goes in and out of the pantry.
- 4 Swish**
This is the new word for swapping clothes, shoes and accessories with friends at parties. If the thought of others scrutinising your clothes tags is too confronting, try op shopping or up-cycling. Be brutal; practise "one in, one out" when you bring home something new. (When used as a general rule, this practice should only be applied to non-human life forms and fish tanks).
- 5 Relax**
Think about it: every time you eat out or stay in a hotel you use linen and kitchenware that other folks have handled countless times (and that's before we start talking about the water you drink). Recycle or donate unwanted stuff, and consider whether items you need can be sourced second-hand or by borrowing or swapping.
- 6 Get a hobby**
Don't shop to alleviate boredom. Before handing over your hard-earned cash, ask yourself: if I leave without buying this, will I remember why I wanted it?
- 7 Consider the lilies**
Grandma and Bear Grylls might have a use for everything from laddered nylons to used tea leaves, but we know you are too busy reading *Journey* in your spare time to be a survivalist. Take a few minutes to list some changes that you can make to your lifestyle, then relax, take the weight off your feet and consider the lilies and how they grow.

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Klaxons sound at War Room's success

***War Room* is terrible. There's no getting around it. It's a turgid, artless film with an unusually simplistic approach to prayer and a staggeringly problematic slant on abusive relationships.**

It's also wildly popular.

War Room
Directed by Alex Kendrick
Starring Priscilla C Shirer,
TC Stallings,
Karen Abercrombie
2015, PG

War Room is the latest in a string of films by the Kendrick brothers, who have a talent for making movies panned by critics but lauded by Christian audiences. True to form, churches have turned out in droves to see this faith-based flick, rocketing *War Room* to a surprise US opening weekend, coming second only to the critically-acclaimed *Straight Outta Compton*.

Elizabeth Jordan (Priscilla C Shirer) is caught in what can only be described as an abusive marriage. Her husband Tony (TC Stallings) leers at other women in front of her, stops her accessing their shared bank account, goes through her phone and cruelly undermines her in front of their daughter. When she complains to her workmates, they all laugh in resignation about how difficult it is for a modern woman to submit to her husband.

When Elizabeth's mentor Miss Clara (Karen Abercrombie) hears about it, she tells Elizabeth her lukewarm faith is to blame for her situation. Elizabeth has allowed the devil to enter her home and marriage. Instead of seeking couples counselling or directly telling

Tony there is a problem, Miss Clara tells Elizabeth to shut herself in her walk-in wardrobe and pray about it. Elizabeth never stands up for herself again.

Spoiler alert: The changes to Elizabeth's life are, literally, miraculous. Tony becomes a faithful and attentive husband with such speed the film is barely halfway finished. It then drags on for another hour.

There's nothing wrong with making a movie about prayer, and movies with explicitly Christian characters (like *The Blind Side*) don't have to be bad. While its focus on making Christians serious about their prayer lives is very admirable, the tin ear it lends to the victims of domestic violence combined with the uncritical endorsement of the film from pulpits across the country is deeply concerning.

What is the message conveyed by churches directly endorsing this movie? Tapping into church networks has certainly been profitable. From a meagre budget of \$3 million, *War Room* has made over \$40 million in the United States alone. Its undeniable commercial success with Christian audiences indicates there's a disparity between what churches think *War Room* is saying, and the message it is broadcasting to the world.

As a representation of Christian life to mainstream society, we deserve much better than this.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor



Synod research officer
Sue Hutchinson.
Photo: Holly Jewell

Let's start talking about mental health

New resources will help Uniting Churches to create safe spaces to talk about mental health.
Dianne Jensen reports.

The most powerful conversations are often the hardest to begin, and Synod research officer Sue Hutchinson understands that mental health is a confronting topic for church communities.

Sue has coordinated the new *Called to care* suite of mental health resources for Uniting Church congregations in response to a request by the 31st Synod in 2014. The information booklet, prayer and liturgy resources and Bible study were launched in October in time for the Mental Health Day of Prayer on 11 October and are available online.

"Mental health has been a no-go area for the majority of church communities of all denominations," says Sue. "People experiencing mental health issues, either first-hand or as carers or supporters, have had many life experiences that tell them that the community views mental illness as scary, funny, and something 'other people' experience."

Breaking down the stigma starts with honest conversations about our preconceptions and fears, she adds, and the Bible study is a key component of the process.

"There is much history surrounding the church and mental illness. There are some attitudes and beliefs that need to be

challenged and addressed through theological discussion; for example that mental illness is caused by demonic possession, is a punishment for sin, or that mental illness reflects a spiritual weakness or lack of faith."

The Bible study was trialled at the Mudgeeraba Uniting Church weekly Connect group. Facilitator Peter Hinze says that the topic elicited a good response, with 100 per cent participation on the night and the group eventually running out of time for discussion.

"It was great to have a resource to start the conversation, and that's all we needed. We had good, honest and open interaction, with some people sharing their own experience. We learned that it is easy to give advice but often more important to take time to listen, to be respectful," says Peter. "It was very challenging and educational!"

Sue Hutchinson believes that faith communities can lead the way in creating safe spaces to talk about mental illness.

"These resources help us to open up conversations about mental health, to see that we are not alone, and that helps to encourage and strengthen us as we walk on together as people of faith."

The Called to Care Bible study and other resources are available for free download. For more information visit ucaqlld.com.au/calledtocare

‘Mental health has been a no-go area for the majority of church communities of all denominations’

Sue Hutchinson



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Putting the money where it counts

The Synod is not yet out of the woods financially but still has important work to do. **Bruce Mullan** spoke with the Queensland Synod moderator Rev David Baker about how the budgeting planning process is being more closely aligned with the priorities of the Synod’s strategic plan.

“We have developed a categorisation process to ensure the allocations of our precious funds are open, transparent and equitable and will help us see clearly how we’re travelling and how we are investing in the priorities discerned by the Synod and the presbyteries,” says Queensland Synod moderator Rev David Baker.

He explains the four categories which describe how the Synod’s funds are distributed for the work of presbyteries.

Core oversight

These are the wages and costs that are required to help all the presbyteries keep operating. The moderator describes this as the “bread and butter stuff” like stipends and administration costs.

Particular function

“Some activities are better managed and tasks undertaken at a presbytery level,” says David. “For example, up in the Downs we are funding a part-time position to support congregations that don’t have a minister and in South Moreton there is a multicultural officer who supports immigrant congregations in their journey into the Uniting Church.”

Strategic projects

The moderator speaks enthusiastically about the opportunity to provide fixed-term funding for strategic activities that would have clear and intentional missional outcomes.

“This includes support for congregations doing church plants at Cairns Northern Beaches, Ripley,

Hatton Vale, Rosewood, and in South Moreton. We’re also assisting the development of ministry outreach at the University of Queensland.”

In solidarity activities

“Sometimes the Synod and presbyteries will discern that some activities are so important that they need to happen even if there isn’t sufficient local funding to enable it to happen,” says David.

The moderator explains that when the church looks at the demographic in which some ministries are operating, it is never going to be realistic to expect local funding to provide all the resources needed.

“This doesn’t mean picking up the whole tab,” he says. “We are not about doing for others what they can do for themselves; it’s about standing with the local ministry and doing some of the lifting.

“Whether it’s patrol ministry in the remotest areas, ministry with First People in the Gulf or ministry among marginalised people in our towns and cities, the Synod stands ready to work with presbyteries to make the impossible happen.”

From the perspective of the Synod’s Budget Development Oversight Committee which the moderator chairs, the process of developing budget categories is a work in progress.

“In the end it’s all about helping the church to be responsible stewards of the funds generously provided from congregations and other resources,” the moderator says. “I hope that the work we’re doing will help ensure that our commitments are fruitful for the kingdom.”

Uniting Church president applauds refugee decision, launches appeal

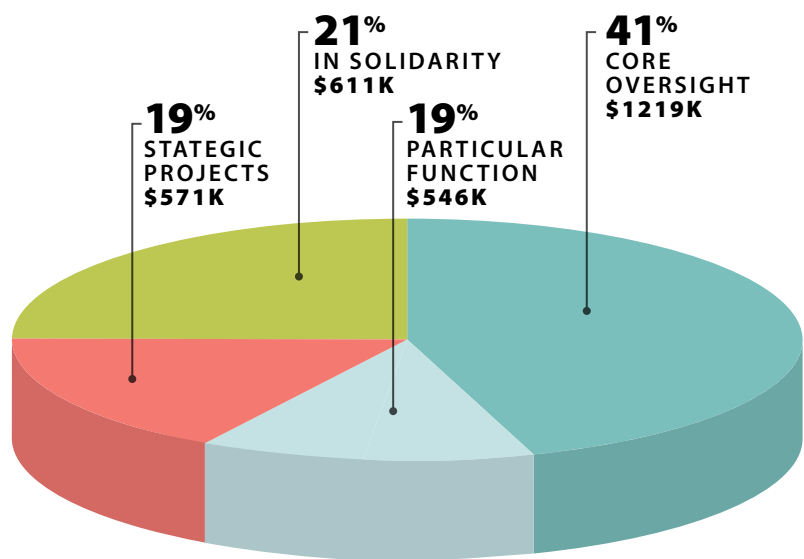
Prominent figures from the Uniting Church and its social services arm UnitingCare have thanked the federal government for its decision to accept a further 12 000 Syrian refugees in addition to the usual 2015 intake.

“Assyrian Christians have been suffering terribly,” said Uniting Church president, Stuart McMillan. “They are the indigenous people of Iraq and Syria—and their members within the Uniting Church have asked me to pass on their deep gratitude to the prime minister and the federal government.

“For many years our church has been a strong critic of the refugee policies of both major political parties. While we hold, of course, significant points of contention, today we congratulate the prime minister and his government wholeheartedly for doing the right thing by these most vulnerable people.

“The Uniting Church in Australia stands ready to support these refugees from Syria and Iraq—whether they are people of faith or none, of any ethnicity, selected according to their need without discrimination,” he said.

Stuart has launched a new National President’s Appeal for Syrian refugees. Donate at shareappeal.org.au



Apportionment of funding - Budget financial year 2015/2016





Christian young adults converge in Brisbane

Converge, a new cross-denominational connection point for young adult Christians, has formed at Toowong Uniting Church. Young Christians from ten local churches and one on-campus ministry gather regularly for lunch, getting-to-know-you activities, prayer and testimony.

“Converge was great, lots of fun. It’s nice to meet new friends and to get to talk about our faith,” said Mikayla Hiscock from Toowong Uniting Church.

Toowong Uniting Church pastor Simon Gomersall said, “It’s exciting to see people from many different churches and cultures sharing food, fun and fellowship. A little foretaste of heaven!”

The last Converge gathering on 13 September attracted 75 people.

For more information email Stephen Longbottom at stephenlongbottom7@gmail.com or Grace Branjerdporn at gracebran@gmail.com

Call for donations after Maloloi family home burns

Logan Central Multicultural Uniting Church has launched an appeal to support Ilai Maloloi and his family after a fire devastated their family home last week, destroying everything.

“Fire is the disaster that does not discriminate,” said Ilai, who is a Tongan elder at the church.

“No matter where we live or the age and condition of our homes, there is always the chance a fire could occur at any time and for any number of reasons.

“We are so blessed that everyone in the family is accounted for and we were all able to escape unharmed.

“We are going through a range of overpowering emotions, from frustration to anger to sadness right now.

“The fire has destroyed a lifetime of precious memories and irreplaceable possessions.”

Logan Central Multicultural Uniting Church is accepting donations to help the Maloloi family in this difficult time. Monetary donations can be made by donating to the church bank account.

Bank St George
BSB: 334 040
A/C Name: UCA Logan Central
A/C No: 553866728

The church is also accepting donations of goods, which can be made by contacting the church council chairperson, Gewa Au on 0419787242.

To the editor

Knowing where to stand

First and foremost, I want to say I’m thrilled that we are talking about feminism in relation to faith (“Storming the old boys’ club”, September 2015, page six). But I must stress the importance of understanding our movement in order to speak with authority on it. We don’t need to be experts, but making errors on the fundamentals (like calling the second wave liberal—that’s the third wave) and distancing ourselves from those second-wavers who made huge political gains for us, are trends we could really do without.

Understanding how feminism worked in the past, how it works today, its strengths, its weaknesses, and the parts we individually embrace or reject, is vital to the future of our movement.

Because above all, feminism is a political movement for the liberation of women—and in a time where there are so many differences of opinion on what that means we need to know where we stand, both as Christians and as feminists.

Rebecca Nixon
London, United Kingdom

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

Journey wins international award

Representing the Uniting Church in Queensland, *Journey* magazine's cross-platform editor Rohan Salmond won best feature, single author (silver) at the 2015 Australasian Religious Press Association (ARPA) awards in Brisbane in August.

Judges said his article in the November edition of *Journey* 2014 “Love your neighbour” superbly met all the category’s criteria with stylish simplicity and conveyed hopefulness.

Other Uniting Church publications also won awards including: South Australia's *New Times* for best profile story (bronze); Western Australia's *Revive* for best theological article (silver); NSW/ACT's *Insights* for best faith reflection (bronze); and Vic/Tas's *Crosslight* magazine for best feature, single author (gold) as well as publication of the year.

Cross-platform editor of *Journey*, Rohan Salmond receiving his award from ARPA president Peter Bentley. **Photo:** Belinda Taylor

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SERENATA SINGERS invites you to our “SING SING SING” Concert on Sat 7 Nov The Gap UC @ 7.30 pm. Proceeds to med research. \$20 p. 3359 5773

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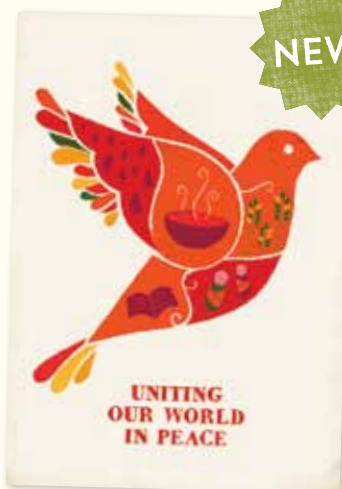
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