



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Journey

July 2016

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hardship and hope

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The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Editor's note

The Rogers household has a laugh whenever politicians or government bureaucrats talk about ideologically-neutral educational material in schools. If some are so desperate to remove religion from schools, then shouldn't they prioritise thinking about how the religion of the "state" is presented to children?

The way in which government has omnipotent authority to exempt itself from the rules it imposes on others; the infallible position that taxation is justified for redistributive purposes; the idea that governments have the right to control what you do with your body which say, in the past, has resulted in cancer patients and their families facing potential imprisonment for using medicinal marijuana. All issues I don't remember being taught in an ideologically-neutral way when I attended school.

If we are going to get serious about how content is taught to children, why single out Christianity for scrutiny?

Social sciences students: is there ideological-neutrality when exploring multiculturalism and the sometimes fraught relationship it can have with social cohesion? History students: is there ideologically-neutral learning of other cultures who have participated in slavery and colonisation, or is there a bias which highlights some cultures and not others? Economics students: is there any learning emphasis placed on Austrian economics versus the domination of Marxism and Keynesianism?

But anyway, for some, Christianity in schools gets the alarm-bells ringing and Mardi Lumsden has a great feature (page ten) on religious instruction in the classroom and the concerted movement to oust it.

Elsewhere, our profile on the Lale family (page six) is a riveting tale of those with an unshakeable faith to guide them through the darkest of times and the bright future ahead for Exodus Lale, star of the Australian stage production of *The Lion King*.

Finally, with such a prominent spotlight on gender and leadership given Hillary Clinton making the headlines, let's turn to that exact issue in a church context: our feature (page 14) speaks to five key church leaders, who attended the UnitingWomen 2016 conference, about practical ways to advance the cause.

Ben Rogers
Cross-platform editor

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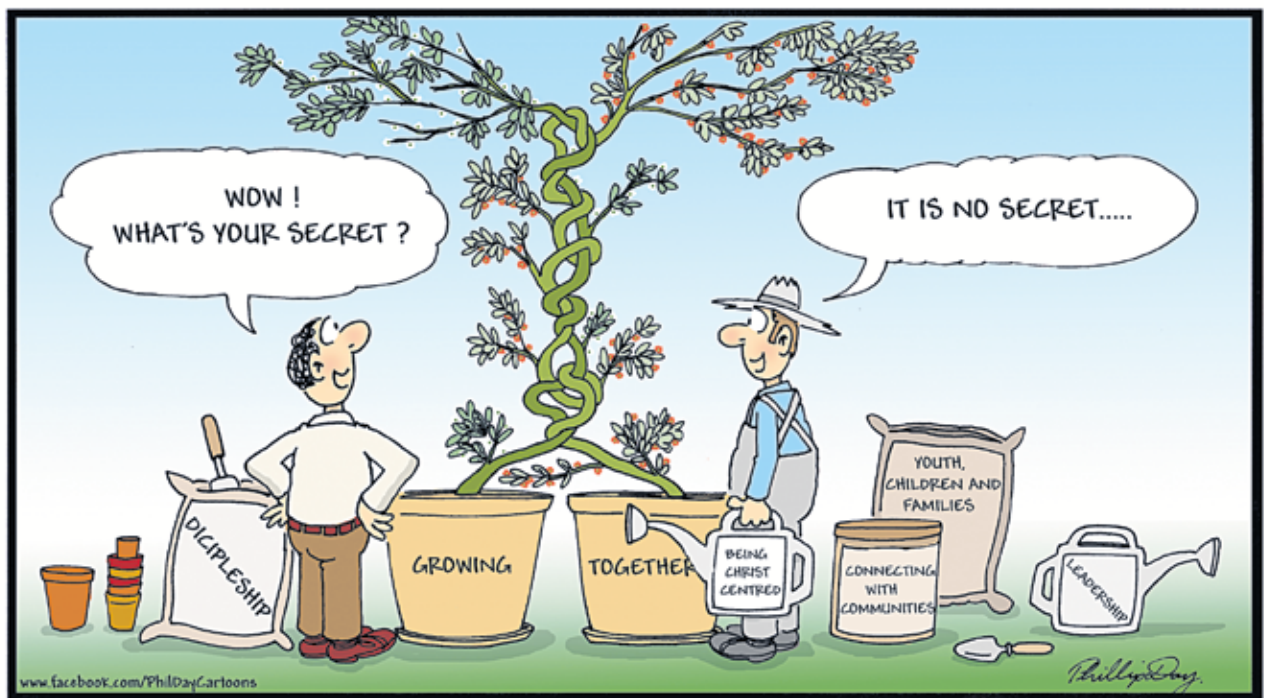
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Valuable takeaways from 32nd Synod

Monday Midday Prayer

Loving God,

Thank you for the church that you have called me into; may I be the blessing in it you want me to be

Amen.

A big thank you to all those who participated in the 32nd Synod.

One of the things you learn when being a follower of Jesus is the capacity to be surprised. So when about 120 people gathered during Synod to talk about contemplative prayer with Dr Neil Preston, who delivered the Norman and Mary Millar lecture, I was a bit surprised.

Neil came to us to speak about the place of the gospel in western thought and imagination, yet he struck a chord when he articulated the call of the Spirit in his life to take up the disciplines of contemplative prayer.

Contemplative prayer may sound strange and unfamiliar, but it's not really. It's simple, but it requires discipline and persistence.

In a church that is strong on being in solidarity with others, on being active in serving others, Neil reminded us of the importance of 'silence' (be present to God for who God is; "be still and know that I am God"), and of what he called 'solitude' (being oneself before God, and hearing God's message to us; "you are my beloved child").

We all had an opportunity to participate in contemplative prayer as a part of the small group work at Synod. If you'd like to know more, talk to your minister, or someone who was at Synod!

The Synod did some important work in discerning directions for the next few years. It took in a lot of information from the life of the church, and from members' own lives and experience.

The priority themes identified were:

- To be Christ-centred, at Prayer, and listening
- Leadership
- Discipleship
- Connecting with communities
- Youth, children and families.

These priorities will guide our life over the next few years.

It's greatly heartening to me that we are being called to centre our life in Christ—to find our foundation and confidence in the faithfulness of Christ, and in Christ's capacity, in Word and Sacrament, and in the Stranger, to be present to us and reveal himself to us.

The other priorities are encouraging also, because they direct us away from worrying about preserving an institution, about surviving or being sustainable, towards growing people and living our faith in our context.

So these priorities ask that we find our confidence and our hope in Christ, in Christ's life in us. They ask us to be a sign and foretaste of the promised reign of God.

Rev David Baker
Moderator, Queensland Synod

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Dell, a resident at Wesley Mission Brisbane Jacobs Court Aged Care Community in Sinnamon Park, Brisbane, knitting for an aged-care facility in Shandong province, China.
Photo: supplied

欢迎

Stronger ties with the middle kingdom

Dianne Jensen reports on how a partnership between the Christian church in China and the Uniting Church in Australia is flourishing at the grassroots level.

An aged-care facility in a regional town in Shandong province in China seems a world away from the Wesley Mission Brisbane (WMB) Jacobs Court Aged Care Community in Sinnamon Park, Brisbane.

But thanks to a historic partnership between the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Uniting Church which began in 2013, cross-cultural exchange is delivering tangible benefits to staff and residents alike.

WMB director of residential aged care Annie Gibney first connected with the facility in Shandong while on a delegation last year. Once back home, she enlisted the support of staff member Jean, a Registered Nurse (RN) and Mandarin speaker, to create a link with a local aged-care community.

Jacobs Court manager Janet Morganti takes up the story.

“We set up a WeChat live video connection and began talking with the manager Mrs Li and her staff once a month, with our conversations translated by Jean. We discovered that the Chinese staff are doing their best to care for the elderly residents as well as a number of orphans without any formal training, so we share information such as tips for working with people with dementia and advice on wound management.”

The real-time connection has provided an opportunity for residents at Jacobs Court to get involved.

“Our ladies decided to knit some items for the elders and others made cards with messages that were translated into Mandarin,” says Janet.

“Later we saw pictures of people wearing what the ladies had made. They are now knitting for the orphans there and some ladies are making teddy bears for the babies at another orphanage. It’s a wonderful connection where they are actually doing something that makes a difference for somebody else.”

Janet was one of the WMB team who returned from China in May after presenting clinical training at a three-day conference for caretakers and managers from 22 provinces and visiting aged-care facilities. The team included clinical care dementia specialist Julie Latham, CEO Geoff Batkin and RNs Wendy and Jean (both Mandarin speakers).

Julie Latham says that the Jacobs Court model generated a lot of interest.

“Our staff member Wendy is now in the process of developing a similar relationship with another facility. We would like to develop more of these wonderful partnerships where we can work together. In a lot of ways we learn as much from them as they learn from us.”

“
It’s a wonderful connection where they are actually doing something that makes a difference for somebody else

Janet Morganti



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Keeping the through tragedy and triumph



Ten of the eleven victims slept soundly as fire engulfed their Slacks Creek home on a cold winter's night in 2011. Five years on, **Ashley Thompson** visits the Lale family of Sunnybank Uniting Church to remember their loss and celebrate their future.

Often described as Australia's worst house fire, the exact cause of the blaze, which ripped through the Lale and Taufa family home in Logan, south of Brisbane on 24 August 2011, still remains unknown.

While the 2014 Coroners' inquest found no evidence the fire was deliberately lit, the only conclusive finding as to the cause was it originated from the home's downstairs office.

Eight of the victims were aged 18 years or younger and only three men from the two Pacific Islander families managed to survive the devastating inferno.

Among those men was Logan Central Multicultural Uniting Church member Jeremiah Lale, who lost his wife

and five children. His uncle, Sau Lale's voice still breaks with emotion remembering the day.

"I say to God 'Why me? Why my family? Why?' I say 'You hurt me, you hurt me and you didn't look after me,'" says Sau.

"But when days go and I saw the love of God to us—that's the thing that gives me strength."

From vigils to overflowing community prayer services, hearts bled in unison as the Tongan and Samoan communities within the Uniting Church mourned. Shoulder to shoulder the community stood, lifting the family up in prayer.

faith



(L—R)
Sau, Tino and Exodus Lale.
Photo: Ben Rogers
Exodus Lale with his 37th Young
Artist Award for Best Performance
in Live Theatre.
Photo: Ben Rogers
The Lale family memorial at
Mount Gravatt Cemetery.
Photo: Holly Jewell

“I can’t explain the love that’s been showed to us at that time,” says Sau. “Everything we need—we not ask but people they coming and giving to us ... we just say thank you.”

Journey to Australia

Sau Lale left Samoa in 1974 to move to Christchurch, New Zealand where he met his wife Fofoga. After five years he decided to move to Brisbane because he had “always read in magazines about Australia”.

“I’m a boiler maker, so I rang up the North looking for a job and they offer me one. I found when I arrived in Brisbane it was a better life here,” says Sau.

Like many immigrants, Sau worked hard to find his feet in “the lucky country”, bringing with him a generational Methodism and solid faith he has since passed on to his children and grandchildren.

“Me and another Samoan man, I was talking to him about starting a Samoan Methodist Church but that man he said ‘no no, Methodist is gone and it’s replacing with the Uniting Church’.”

Following the amalgamation of the Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian churches in 1977, six families started gathering at Sau’s home in Morningside. From there they moved to Fortitude Valley and then out to Inala where the majority of the community was based. The faith community quickly outgrew their Inala location and began searching for larger premises.

“It was the first [Samoan congregation] in the whole of Queensland,” explains Sau. “Other Samoans heard about it and they start coming. Many then had the idea to start their own churches and they go and do it, but we are the main one.”

Well-known by that time in the Brisbane Christian community, Sau and his congregation were invited to join the Sunnybank Uniting Church.

“We start our own service at Sunnybank [in] 1989 and we found we can do our own service in our own language.

“The gift that we bring [to Australia] is worship.”

Family ties

In Samoa, 98 per cent of the population identify as Christian—a difference of 30 per cent from the 2011 Australian census data.

Although he has grown up in Australia, the cultural impact of these statistics has not been lost on Sau’s son, Tino.

“One of the main things with the Samoan culture is it’s always God first and then family,” says Tino, “But in [mainstream] Australian culture, they seem to have different priorities.”

Tino, his wife Nicola and their five children identify more strongly with the Samoan faith community than Australia’s increasingly secularised society.

“In the islands God’s a big thing,” Tino explains. “You can see on all our rugby jerseys they’ve got the cross.”

“There’s so much tragedy that happens but because they build their foundation on Christ, that’s what gets them through. They don’t have much money but I can guarantee you the smaller things that they do have, they cherish and they will get up and rebuild.”

Like Sau, Tino faced a time of questioning God when the fire took his aunt and cousins.

“I believe my older two cousins could have made it out of that house but they also weren’t going to leave their mum or little siblings,” says Tino.

“It was definitely hard to keep our faith strong in God but when some are weak others in the family are strong—you have to pull together.”

Hakuna matata

Today, hope lives on in the unexpected success of Tino and Nicola’s ten-year-old son Exodus Lale.

In March this year, Exodus won the Best Performance in Live Theatre award at the 37th Young Artists Awards held in Los Angeles, for his role as Young Simba in Australia’s *The Lion King*.

At nine years of age, Exodus was the youngest Simba ever cast worldwide and one of the least experienced.

“Before I became involved in musical theatre two years ago, I only sang in church,” says Exodus. “I auditioned for *The Lion King* but I was too young. I was eight but the criteria sheet said ten to 13.”

Despite his age, Exodus was chosen from over 100 boys to be one of three different Simbas for the Australian 2014–2015 tour of *The Lion King*.

As South Moreton Presbytery multicultural project officer David Busch reported on 12 November 2014 in *Multiculturalism Matters*, Exodus consciously brings his Christian faith into his preparation.

“I pray to calm my nerves, and I feel God giving me the strength when I’m dancing and acting,” he told David.

“Whatever my talents, they are a gift from God, and I want to give him the thanks and praise.”

His mother Nicola attended the awards ceremony with Exodus in Hollywood and recalls the feeling of pride she felt when Exodus dedicated his award to “all the other kids who were nominated”, saying both he and they were blessed to be there.

His father Tino reflects. “I think it’s important to stay constant through everything.

“We’ve definitely had lows as a family but we’ve just trusted that God would pull through. Seeing now how we’ve been blessed abundantly with Exodus and our other four kids, it’s always important to remain sure that we give thanks in the highs and the lows.”

Keeping hope alive

At the end of each day the Lale household gather to cover one another in prayer. In the peaks and the valleys they support Exodus and Jeremiah Lale both practically and emotionally, choosing to worship God in every season.

For Sau, the story of his family’s Bible is another reason to keep hope alive.

“When the fire finish a detective from the police ring us up and say ‘we got a bible,’” says Sau.

“They say ‘that bible we found in the dust—a shelf full of books fall down and cover up the Bible’ ... and I said “I can’t believe that’. He gave it to me and that bible I give to Andrew Ross, the Sunnybank Uniting Church minister. I give it to him and I say ‘this bible, it stay in the church’.

“That story I always carry: The Bible survived.”

Email smpres.multicultural@gmail.com to sign up to the Multiculturalism Matters e-newsletter or download past issues from southmoreton.org.au



Participants at KidzArt, Southport Uniting Church.
Photo: Dona Spencer

Art to heart chats about God

One thing that brings children together is their love of drawing. **Dianne Jensen** finds out why KidzArt is booming at Southport Uniting Church.

“Children are so open to the things of God and there is a real common language of faith and spirituality

Rev Dona Spencer

Exploring spirituality through art is just one of the things which makes KidzArt an effective mission of Southport Uniting Church. The innovative program was started four years ago by Rev Dona Spencer to provide a creative Christian art space for children and parents from different cultures and backgrounds.

“Children are so open to the things of God and there is a real common language of faith and spirituality,” says Dona, an artist and art educator. “We have had Muslims attend and we currently have three Hindu families as well as kids with no church background, so at special times in the year the program is very Christian-focussed and other times it might be about the fruits of the spirit.”

KidzArt attracts between 30 and 40 participants every Friday. The free sessions begin with a story, discussion and prayer, followed by art activities exploring different mediums and techniques. The afternoon finishes with a prayer circle where children contribute their own prayers.

“I don’t teach skills: this is how you draw a tree, this is how you draw an apple. I teach a lot about composition and design, but more about having confidence in their own innate expression,” says Dona. “Children who

have been involved in our art program for years—their drawings are so bold and their pencil goes all over the page they’ve developed so much confidence.”

Drawings done by the children for the church’s annual Flourish art festival will be showcased on a giant mural surrounding the renovation of the Australia Fair shopping centre.

KidzArt has also created floor-to-ceiling murals for the church sanctuary. Last year the group produced their own calendar, raising over \$500 for a UnitingWorld project in Kalimpong, India.

Southport congregation member Glenda Rolley has been bringing her grandchildren since KidzArt began, and she has seen relationships grow across cultures and generations.

“I think it’s the fellowship that keeps bringing people back. This is a mission of the church not only to the children—who just love the artwork—but also the parents and we can really get to know one another,” says Glenda.

“It’s like a children’s church. I think Sunday School as it used to be is no more—and this is a good way for them to learn about God in a fun and creative way.”



Rev Johnson Makoti from Atherton Uniting Church.
Photo: Supplied

Stepping out in faith

Zimbabwean-born Johnson Makoti often gets phone calls out of the blue from people who have heard about the new prayer and deliverance ministry at the Atherton Uniting Church.

Dianne Jensen reports.

After only a year in the job, Rev Johnson Makoti's hands-on approach to spreading the word of God has created a stir in the North Queensland town of Atherton and spurred growth in the local congregation.

There is a distinctly Wesleyan flavour to the new minister. He wears a dog collar, is passionate about pastoral visiting, and pours his energy into forming new disciples grounded in biblical teaching and ministry practice.

The former Methodist joined his wife Bridgetta and five children in Atherton in early 2015 after several years of postgraduate study in the UK, and he is the first to admit that the congregation took a step of faith inviting him.

"I actually applaud them because they called a black minister from Zimbabwe; they knew they were taking a risk. When I came over for the interviews, they said 'As you can see, this church is full of elderly people. Will you be able to grow our church?'"

Johnson set about the task with enthusiasm, focussing from the beginning on pastoral care and evangelism.

"Three months down the line I asked the elders, would you mind if I set aside time on Wednesdays where I can just pray for people, counsel people? I didn't know how many would come but on the first day 12 people turned up."

The Prayer, Healing and Deliverance ministry is now a regular event, providing people from across the community with hope and healing.

Two days each week have been set aside for pastoral visits, and if someone has been absent for a while Johnson will call and offer to come and pray with them—usually with positive results. He has also joined the chaplaincy team at Lotus Glen prison.

The Atherton congregation has doubled from a weekly average of 53, attracting people of all ages across different cultures.

"We are saying the spirit of God is moving," says Johnson. "We concentrate on equipping people to become disciples because when you equip them, they are able to go and witness to others. The issue is to evangelise, disciple and send out—because people bring others, and that's the only way to grow the church—otherwise we end up doing maintenance ministry."

“

The issue is to evangelise, disciple and send out—because people bring others, and that's the only way to grow the church

Rev Johnson Makoti

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Christ in the classroom

Each week hundreds of Christian, Bahia, Jewish and Muslim volunteers provide religious instruction to students in Queensland state primary and high schools. Should objections to one particular program lead to unprecedented intervention from Education Queensland? **Mardi Lumsden** explores.

“
[QPSSS] is one particular group trying to define what everyone gets when it comes to religion or no religion. What we have in Queensland is a very pluralistic, sophisticated system where no one decides what everyone else believes

Rev Paul Clark

In early June, religious instruction (RI) at Windsor State School in Brisbane's north was suspended for the third time since 2014.

Principal Matthew Keong wrote to the school's RI coordinator saying he had reviewed the RI program being used, the *Connect* program, “and found that it contravenes policy that prohibits proselytising”. Proselytising in RI is defined by Education Queensland as, “soliciting a student for a decision to change their religious affiliation”.

The Windsor RI coordinator says they were not aware of any complaints from a parent whose child participates in RI.

As in many schools, RI at Windsor is conducted under a cooperative agreement signed by many local Christian churches. Matthew gave the RI coordinator four pages of “examples of proselytising found in *Connect*”. Legal opinion provided to the Queensland Christian Religious Instruction Network disputes this claim.

Education Queensland's Religious Instruction Quality Assurance task group member and Indooroopilly Uniting Church minister Rev Dr Elizabeth Nolan insists that none of the principal's examples were ever used at Windsor State School (an Independent Public School) and most were from an old version of *Connect*.

“The current principal ... had suspended RI in 2014 and again in 2015 saying he wanted to review curricula,” says Elizabeth. “As per the legislation, it is a principal's right to review programs being used but not to determine them.

“We have been told the principal insisted on a change from another curriculum to *Connect*.”

Principal Matthew Keong was not available for comment.

Caught in the Act

After a referendum, the Education Act was amended in 1910 to permit religious instruction in state school buildings during school hours. In accordance with this, religious leaders approve the program of instruction to be used by their accredited representatives as instructors.

Unlike other states, Queensland has always been open to different faith groups providing RI.

As this edition of *Journey* goes to print, Queensland Education Minister Kate Jones MP is reviewing *Connect* for use in state schools.

Queensland Synod moderator Rev David Baker along with other heads of Christian churches or their representatives met with the Minister about the review.

“There is a legislated ability for religious groups to provide instruction to students whose parents have requested it,” says David.

“We affirm the current policy. We affirm the opt-in nature of the policy. Our concern is that in the Windsor State School example, the policy has not been followed and in removing the program, choice has been removed from parents,” says David who until recently taught RI in state schools for 25 years.

David says religious instruction in state schools “informs children on probably the most fundamentally formative mythic story of Western civilisation: that is the Judeo-Christian tradition”.

According to David, RI also helps inform students about caring for the environment and other people, and that their worth is not linked to worldly possessions.

Perhaps the larger issue is whether one group (religious or not) should be able to dictate what others access optionally in school time.

The case against RI

Queensland Parents for Secular State Schools (QPSSS) spokesperson and Windsor State School parent Alison Courtice has been a vocal opponent of RI in state schools and the *Connect* program.

She says QPSSS is part of a movement to remove RI in state schools, and gave a talk at the Australian Humanist Convention in Brisbane in May entitled *Religious instruction in Queensland state schools: the dinosaur in the classroom*.

“We have certainly been inspired by what has been achieved in Victoria,” she tells *Journey*, referring to the removal of RI in Victorian state schools. “There no longer is a place for it [religious instruction]. This legislation is 106 years old and it was controversial back when it was passed.”

Despite a thorough review of the Education Act in 2006, RI was endorsed to remain within it.

The QPSSS Facebook page says the “segregation of children according to their religion does not foster the inclusiveness and respect for diversity needed in our multi-faith and multicultural society”.

“Our solution is take RI out of state schools,” says Alison. The QPSSS wants to replace it with a government approved and taught curriculum about religious and non-religious belief systems.

Elizabeth Nolan says, “The national curriculum designers in 2010 declined to attempt this because it would be too difficult to get agreement, whereas RI allows for religious freedom.”

Alison argues the opt-in process during student enrolment is problematic and widely varies from school to school, and that parents need to be more aware of what the RI program entails.

“Mainstream Christian churches aren’t that interested in going into schools and providing religious instruction anymore,” she says. “The programs that are used, for example *Connect*, have come about because ministers are not taking as much notice at what is in these programs these days because they are, on the whole, not going in themselves.

“We have no difficulties with anybody wanting to follow their religious or non-religious beliefs, everybody has that right, however there are plenty of opportunities for families to take care of their own children’s religious instruction in their own time.”

Once more, with feeling

Redcliffe Uniting Church minister and Queensland Christian Religious Instruction Network spokesperson Rev Paul Clark says QPSSS is “one particular group trying to define what everyone gets when it comes to religion or no religion”.

“What we have in Queensland is a very pluralistic, sophisticated system where no one decides what everyone else believes.

“QPSSS’ arguments don’t hold water. Their criticisms could easily be fixed with some improvements in the current system; they don’t justify a wholesale removal of what we have.

“That is what is so sad about what we are seeing here because the group that are saying ‘we want to move forward into the future’ are actually taking us back to a time where one group determines what everyone else has an opportunity to think and hear.”

Paul says he hopes the current media attention and issues at Windsor remind churches of the importance of quality RI programs and resourcing needs.

“I’m hoping that it puts some impetus back into RI but also that it makes the Department of Education and the church very clear on what the guidelines are.”

Oxley State School in Brisbane’s west is one place where RI happens in a different way.

A program is provided once a term with two sessions conducted: one for the lower grades and one for upper primary and has been running for around eight years. Oxley Uniting Church Youth, Children, and Young Adults Pastor Ken Acworth says the response from children and the school has been good.

“They are very engaged,” says Ken about the children. “I think the school appreciates that it is not a disruption every week.”

Ken says that the children’s parents have opted them into RI and it may be the only opportunity they have to hear the Christian story.

“Their parents must think ... ‘at least they are getting some kind of religious instruction’.”

Elizabeth Nolan says schools are concerned about developing values (honesty, respect etc.).

“If we are to be doing values education with children and trying to develop a harmonious society, we need to be looking at the core beliefs that drive the values that drive attitudes and behaviours,” says Elizabeth.

Megan Thomson leads RI at Oxley State School in June.
Photo: Mardi Lumsden





Looking for peace beyond “Holy War”

For many Australians the word “jihad” means one thing in an age of terrorism, but **Dr Aaron Ghiloni** explores the complexities and nuances of Islamic struggle and what lessons it offers non-Muslims.

“

Inter-religious encounters are often enriching: in times of trauma such as natural disasters as well as in neighbourhood tranquillity, goodwill flows across religious borders

I was researching “jihad” on the day the Brussels airport and metro were attacked by ISIL. It could have been any day. Whether war is dubbed “cold”, “just”, “civil”, or “asymmetrical”, calamity seems humanity’s persistent condition. These days, Islam is often blamed.

Let’s blur the teleprompted simplicity.

Many Christians are shrewd enough to mistrust the stock media narrative: Islam equals violence. Inter-religious encounters are often enriching: in times of trauma such as natural disasters as well as in neighbourhood tranquillity, goodwill flows across religious borders.

Still, war booms and televised-binaries blast. What are we to make of ceaseless conflict?

Let’s invert clash-of-civilisations history-making.

Intra-human hostility is where inter-religious learning is particularly useful. Christians can learn to face the enigma of war through comparative theological reflection on Islam’s understanding of “jihad”.

Throughout history Muslims have described struggle on the path of God and all that struggle entails—psychologically, sociologically, ritually—as “jihad”. Jihad is a multivalent term giving rise to diverse forms of Islamic practice ranging from education to lovemaking, from combat to peacemaking.

For its many meanings, jihad is not “holy war”. Holy war is the Crusaders’ leftovers.

From their earliest days, Muslim communities have encountered the ambiguities of conflict.

“Fighting is ordained for you, though it is hateful to you. But it may be that you hate a thing though it is good for you. And perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. Allah knows, you know not.” (Quran 2.216).

These puzzles are not confined to war—the text indicates that similar dilemmas are posed by drinking alcohol and gambling.

In its dazzling, twirling style the Quran reveals that in times of conflict it may be preferable to think in terms of paradox rather than equation. As this text has it: certain experiences are sinful while also having “some benefits for humankind...” (Quran 2.219).

Love and hate. Sobriety and excess. Benefit and sin. Negotiating religious identity in the dappled spaces between war and peace requires constant striving.

Let’s learn across religious borders.

Our Muslim neighbours can teach us how conflict and risk are productive tools. Islamic theology employs what Islamic scholar Shahab Ahmed calls “exploratory authority”—the use of ambivalence as a form of theological reasoning. Striving in God’s path is necessary because the path is often perplexing.

Not every bullet is halal (“permissible”). Not every conflict is haram (“forbidden”).

Inter-faith engagement accepts ambiguities as a divine gift. It embraces neighbour by rejecting the binary.

Aaron Ghiloni is Dean of Research at Trinity College Queensland. This month catch Aaron speaking on Islam in Coolangatta (16 July) and Chapel Hill (21 July), or online through Trinity College’s World Religions unit (starting 11 July). Visit the Trinity College website for more information, trinity.qld.edu.au

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Attendees get into the swing of things at a fundraising barn dance in Greenisland, Northern Ireland.
Photo: Eric Lawson

A barnstorming fundraiser for McKay Patrol

A reciprocal fundraising effort by a Northern Irish community brings much needed funds for the McKay Patrol. *Journey* reports.

As a two-year appointment with the Greenisland Methodist Church in Northern Ireland draws to a close, Rev Eric Lawson was recently treated to a traditional barn dance and concert by the community as a farewell fundraiser for the McKay Patrol.

For Eric, his connections to Northern Ireland are strong—his wife, Ruth, was born there and they’ve been regularly visiting the region since the late seventies.

“Over the years I have preached in Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Catholic churches in Ireland,” says Eric. “We are very familiar with Irish culture and history as well as the particular ‘culture’ of Irish Methodism.”

In early 2014, Eric and Ruth once again found themselves returning to Northern Ireland after accepting a house-sitting offer from friends.

Soon into their stay, the Greenisland Methodist church approached Eric to enquire whether he was available for a short-term appointment since the normal stationing processes of the Methodist Conference had been unable to fill the vacancy.

“We accepted, and after returning to Queensland for four months, came back and took up appointment from August. Our commitment was initially for one year but extended to two.”

Before they departed, Eric’s home congregation at Redcliffe organised a morning tea fundraiser so he could

present a gift from the Uniting Church for his new Northern Irish community.

The morning tea raised approximately £1200 for the Greenisland congregation, of which they accepted £200 and forwarded the remainder to the Newtonabbey Methodist Mission to support their work with marginalised and disadvantaged people.

Fast forward to 2016 and with Eric and Ruth’s imminent return to Queensland, the Greenisland Methodist congregation decided they’d like to send them back with a gift for the Uniting Church in Australia: Eric suggested that any fundraising efforts should go towards supporting Rev David and Janette Ellis in the McKay Patrol.

A barn dance and concert was subsequently organised, and over 100 people attended, including visitors from other Methodist churches in the area, which raised around £1000 (or \$2000).

Towards the end of the event, Eric provided attendees with information on Frontier Services and the McKay Patrol but for some the concept of Australia’s vastness still remains alien.

“Folk here sometimes have difficulty comprehending the size of Australia: Northern Ireland fits into Australia more than 556 times, and fits into the area covered by the McKay Patrol 33 times!”

For more information on the McKay Patrol, including how to make a donation, visit ucanq.com.au/mckaypatrol

“Folk here sometimes have difficulty comprehending the size of Australia: Northern Ireland fits into Australia more than 556 times, and fits into the area covered by the McKay Patrol 33 times

Eric Lawson

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Seven ways to smash

“Women see the world differently to men. In the same way as when I’m with the breadth of cultural diversity of the church, it opens my mind to see things I wouldn’t have seen if they hadn’t have been in the room.”

Stuart McMillan

The Uniting Church in Australia may be a leading light when it comes to gender equality in leadership but we still have some way to go. **Ashley Thompson** talks to five key church leaders at UnitingWomen 2016 about how we can fully annihilate the glass ceiling.

1 Shift your thinking

Colleen Geyer is the newly appointed general secretary of the Assembly, the national body of the Uniting Church in Australia. She reminds us that the 1977 founding document the Basis of Union was formative in its celebration of “all-member ministry”. “Everyone is created in the image of God, there’s a uniqueness about them, a preciousness of creation,” says Colleen. “And because we are equal in God’s sight, it has to be equal when you think about how we interact with each other here on earth.”

Then why did it take 30 years for the Queensland Synod to elect its first female moderator?

“I think the church is used to a particular way of being,” she says. “It’s a subconscious bias ... it’s not as if we don’t have women who have the skills, abilities, gifts and expertise—we definitely do. We just have to break out of the norm to what is a new norm.”

2 Get out of the way

Lead organiser of UnitingWomen 2014, Dr Sureka Goringe recounts her first “inadvertent venture into church leadership”. “When I got this crazy idea we should do a conference, for me the real gift was the Uniting Church’s openness to a total nobody stepping up and saying I’m really passionate about this idea—and then people either stepping up to help or getting out of the way,” says Sureka.

Colleen Geyer agrees. “It is amazing to me that we live in a world that says we don’t need feminism anymore because we’ve reached nirvana—and women can do whatever they like. Well if they can do whatever they like, let’s let them do it.”

3 Demonstrate the strength of diversity

So what do women bring to leadership and why is this so important? Sureka, now associate director of church connections at UnitingWorld, offers up a two-part explanation: “To have a good leadership team you need to have diversity in two dimensions; you need a diversity of skills and you need diversity of experience so that you don’t have an affinity group where everybody sees the world the same way,” she says.

“I think women should play their rightful role in leadership not simply because they are somehow better or different at leadership but because women’s experiences, stories and ways of looking at the world need to be a part of that discernment process.”

Assembly president Stuart McMillan concurs.

“Women see the world differently to men. In the same way as when I’m with the breadth of cultural diversity of the church, it opens my mind to see things I wouldn’t have seen if they hadn’t have been in the room.

“If we all viewed the world the same way we’d miss so much. So I value the way in which my sisters in leadership show me different perspectives.”

Rev Elenie Poulos is the national director of UnitingJustice Australia, the social justice arm of the Uniting Church in Australia. Growing up in the Greek Orthodox Church, Elenie says it made her angry that “there was no place for women” in leadership.

“When I discovered the Uniting Church I stayed because I found it a place where women were encouraged to be leaders,” she says.



(L—R) Colleen Geyer, Dr Sureka Goringe, Stuart McMillan, Rev Elenie Poulos and Dr Deidre Palmer.
Photos: Supplied

the glass ceiling

“I think there’s a truly shared ministry between women and men, which when you see it happening inspires a kind of wholeness and flourishing—an openness to difference and conversation.”

4 Challenge your theology

Dr Deidre Palmer is the South Australian moderator and Assembly president-elect. Her 2018–2021 term will be the first time a female general secretary and female president have served in the Assembly at the same time. She believes that “at times our interpretation of scripture has contributed to the inequality of women and the abuse of women”, referencing links to domestic violence.

“The Uniting Church has provided Biblical foundations that come out of the early Jesus movement that was the discipleship of equals,” says Deidre.

“So that means children and young people have a voice in our church and women and men are equal.”

Like Elenie, Sureka Goringe spent part of her youth in another denomination. Looking back, she identifies a growth period between her “conservative” and “literal understanding of the Bible” to one more “critically” engaged.

“As I grew up, and had to make sense of the real world, my theology broadened,” she says. “Because you can’t deny your experience of God, what you have to do is reform your internal thinking and fix your theology to deal with the fact that actually God loves everybody.”

5 Play the game

Eighteen months into her new position at UnitingWorld, Sureka is starting to “get glimpses of the politics of the church”. She believes that while we have excellent processes such as “discerning how to achieve wisdom through consultation”, that doesn’t stop games from being played underneath the surface. “We are political beasts. As humans we work in certain ways: we network, we connect and there’s always going to be the way it’s written down and the way it’s actually done,” says Sureka. “It gets tricky where women are often not invited to play those games and in fact a lot of them don’t even know those games are being played. So part of the challenge of being a woman is figuring out how people—who don’t think like you—work and how they play that game.”

6 Think bigger

Why stop at gender equality? Colleen Geyer, Deidre Palmer and Sureka Goringe highlight the need for a broader understanding of diversity within the Uniting Church. “We have a long way to go in not only seeing gender equality in leadership but also multicultural and First Peoples equality,” says Colleen.

Deidre recounts the diversity of speakers represented at UnitingWomen 2016: “We have heard from women of different cultural contexts, age groups and life experiences; people who have been working in their professional lives as social workers, teachers, politicians and educators; those who have nurtured families, loved them and created healthy spaces for them.”

Sureka Goringe adds, “It’s not just about women, it’s about all sorts of diversity. Are we listening to the LGBTIQ community, are we listening to the minority voices, those who are the marginalised? “As people of the gospel it is our job to listen to and prioritise the voices of those who are not heard by

mainstream society. If we don’t go and seek those people and put them at our tables then we are not living the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

7 Convert the non-believer

The recognition of all-member ministry is an intrinsic part of the Uniting Church’s identity and constantly needs to be revisited for hidden hindrances to be brought into the clear light of day. Whatever our shortcomings, all the leaders agree no theological barriers exist in affirming women in church leadership.

“The Uniting Church is one of the leading lights in this space because the ability for women to serve at any level of the church in any role is absolutely there,” says Assembly general secretary Colleen Geyer.

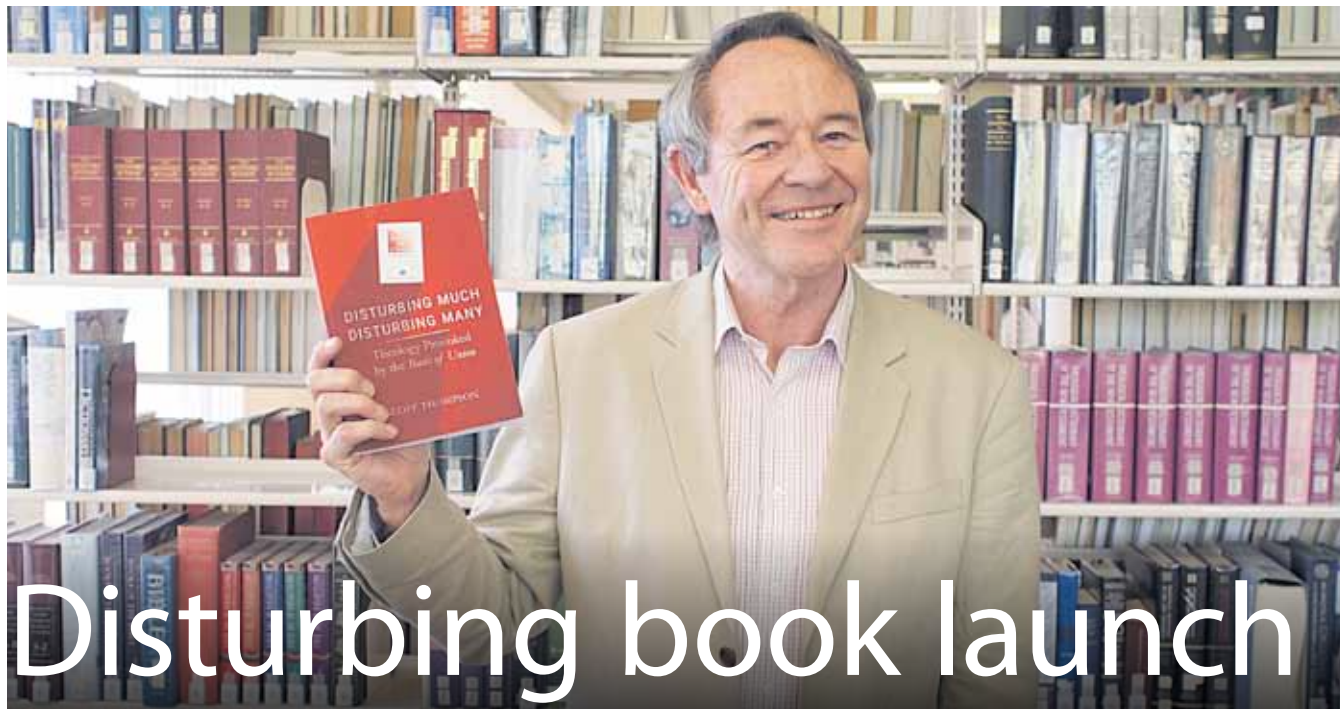
Sureka Goringe reflects, “I think we can definitely celebrate the fact we are so progressive in terms of our inclusion and affirmation of women in leadership. I’m so proud—I have friends in evangelical churches that moan about what being a woman is like in those denominations and I feel slightly smug about the Uniting Church.”

Rev Elenie Poulos acknowledges the men who have fought for gender equality.

“There are so many amazing men in our church that work against the systems and structures of patriarchy—because not only does it exclude women but it’s also not helpful for men in the context of a modern, multicultural, vibrant life.”

For more information visit unitingwomen.org.au

Rev Dr Geoff Thompson at the recent launch of his book, Trinity Theological Library, Brisbane.
Photo: Mardi Lumsden



Disturbing book launch explores the *Basis*

Journey sits down with Rev Dr Geoff Thompson to discuss his new book on the *Basis of Union* and its relevancy to issues alive in the church today.

“
I try to use the *Basis of Union* as a springboard for thinking about and engaging some of the issues that are alive in the church today

Rev Dr Geoff Thompson

A new book by Rev Dr Geoff Thompson exploring the Uniting Church in Australia's foundational document, the *Basis of Union*, recently brought the former principal of Trinity Theological College back to Queensland to launch the publication at Indooroopilly Uniting Church.

Although he now calls Melbourne home, for Geoff it was always a natural choice to include a launch in the sunshine state.

The book, *Disturbing Much, Disturbing Many: Theology provoked by the *Basis of Union**, is dedicated to Trinity's staff, faculty, librarians and students between 2001 and 2013, and Geoff says the whole of the Queensland Synod enriched his life, and that it was here he learnt to be a teaching theologian.

Speaking on the book's intended audience, Geoff admits, “Firstly Uniting Church folk. To be honest it's mostly pitched at people who already have some theological understanding or people who have begun to ask theological questions. I would hope that the book is sufficiently accessible for them too.

“One of the really important things I want to say about the book is that it's not an exercise in retrieval of the *Basis*. There's some books that have been written which expound the *Basis*, and tell us its history.

“What I'm trying to do is say this is the theology we've got, and to ask what do we do with it. I try to use the *Basis* as a springboard for thinking about and engaging some of the issues that are alive in the church today.”

Given the *Basis of Union* points to Jesus Christ as the foundation of the church, Geoff notes this has “profound implications for a whole range of theological topics”.

“The ones [theological topics] that I've actually addressed in the book are spirituality, the bible, baptism and the Eucharist, sexuality, scholarship; all of these things around which we have quite conventional ways of talking.

“The conviction that grew on me as I was writing the book was that it's often thought that when you talk about the centrality of Jesus Christ you're making a very conservative statement, reinforcing the status quo. I'm increasingly convinced, however that not only does that starting point always call into question the status quo, it's also something that's very fruitful and productive. I hope that by re-familiarising ourselves with that starting point we can become a church that sees the world more clearly through that filter.”

Disturbing Much, Disturbing Many can be purchased from Morning Star Publishing. Visit morningstarpublishing.net.au/product/disturbing-much-disturbing-many. It is also available for loan at Trinity Theological Library.



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Kurt Russell, Jennifer Jason Leigh and Bruce Dern in *The Hateful Eight*.
Photo: Roadshow Entertainment

Tarantino's violence in a world gone mad

The Hateful Eight may be an R-rated, hard-to-stomach watch for some Christians, but Dr Janice McRandal offers an alternative perspective on Tarantino's violence and the film's defiantly religious framing device.

***The Hateful Eight* is a characteristically antagonizing film written and directed by Quentin Tarantino: intense violence, extreme profanity and uncomfortable truths around race and misogyny assault the viewer for almost three hours.**

In his use of luscious and frightening landscapes, along with exceptionally tight and relentlessly tense dialogue, Tarantino more emphatically than ever eschews the narrative necessities of good guys and bad guys. Everyone is evil.

This western/horror hybrid takes place in postbellum Wyoming, and follows the story of bounty hunters, outlaws and the decidedly untrustworthy.

For many, the over the top graphic story-telling may even render the film unwatchable. Tarantino's use of violence—in language, plot, and graphic visuals—doesn't sit well for many, and perhaps especially for Christians.

But the truth is many of us are wild consumers of multiple forms of depicted violence: think *Game of Thrones*, video games and even violence parsed and commoditised through mainstream media. Against this backdrop, Tarantino intentionally seeks out violence as creative opportunity.

And in *The Hateful Eight*, he pushes the boundaries even further. This film typically intersects the world of fantasy film and storytelling with real-life horrors; an

imaginative horizon that has framed most, if not all of Tarantino's films.

Tarantino recently told the press he wrote *The Hateful Eight* to reflect America's fraught racial history, with the splitting of the cabin into northern and southern sides and a speech about the perils of "frontier justice". So how do we think critically about the use of violence in Tarantino films, and in this film in particular?

One of the significant themes that has shot through many of his films, has been the possibility of redemptive violence.

In a society in which the desire for revenge is considered almost a virtue, Tarantino has repeatedly tricked his audience into laughing shamelessly as the bad guys are tortured or killed, and that's where *The Hateful Eight* gets interesting.

We are abandoned to a world where not a single good guy appears, and the story refuses to sufficiently nuance a characters' past so that future vengeance becomes justified. In the end, we are left with a barren amalgam of meaninglessness and hopelessness. It is almost as if Tarantino's violence has likewise reached its end.

Oddly enough, this is not the final word. The entire film is framed by a crucifix. The iconic and strange figure of Christ crucified is both our way into this messy hell on earth, and somehow, our way out of it.

Dr Janice McRandal

The Hateful Eight

Director: Quentin Tarantino

Starring: Samuel L. Jackson, Kurt Russell, Jennifer Jason Leigh

2015, rated R

Available on Bluray/DVD from Roadshow Entertainment





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leadership qualities young people demand

Sure to be a hot topic during the National Young Adult Leaders Conference (8–13 July), what are the key qualities that young people look for in their leaders? *Journey* picks five must-have traits for leaders who want to command the attention and respect of millennials.

1

Authenticity

Young people want their leaders—whether in the church, the workplace, the parliament or on a sports-field—to have a genuine sense of themselves and speak from the heart. They want a leader who has the self-awareness to not just identify personal strengths, but, critically, vulnerabilities, and how they overcome them. Relatability is vital and the seemingly all-too-perfect expose themselves to charges of inauthenticity.

2

Commitment to social responsibility

From environmental issues to human rights concerns, young people have an acute sense of the challenges humanity must overcome and expect their leaders to share that concern. Millennials want to see their workplaces treat “corporate responsibility” as more than just buzzwords to virtue-signal: they want concrete actions. But whether it’s a line-manager or a church leader, the lesson equally applies: make young people feel that they’re part of a broader social movement that gets results.

3

A flexible and adaptive attitude

A top-down view of others as a homogenous unit that can be shaped to the will of the leader no longer cuts it in a world of empowered young people used to open, egalitarian dialogue on Twitter and Facebook. Being willing and

able to adapt yourself to those with vastly different expectations for communication styles, technological platforms and even workplace habits (think ‘remote working’) than their parents’ generation, will reap the ultimate rewards of engagement and productivity.

4

Empowerment

There’s more than a skerrick of truth to the cliché that millennials are a generation of me-me-me, and leaders must understand their cultural context of “participation ribbons” and “helicopter parenting”. Empowerment methods such as mentoring programs or ongoing positive reinforcement are the make-or-break for leaders who want an environment where their youth can flourish.

5

Embrace innovation

When each year brings more disruptive technology and e-solutions to shake up the way we live and interact with each other, young people are accustomed to living in a constantly shifting landscape of new ideas and tectonic shifts to tradition (for instance, Airbnb has fundamentally re-conceptualised holiday accommodation). Leaders must be willing to embrace change and be unafraid to push boundaries and test the unknown.

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when everything
seems impossible



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To the editor

Disappointing that your excellent article on Julie McCrossin (June 2016 edition) brought in the denominational issue. Sydney Anglicans' ideas are represented in one wing of our Uniting Church, while Rev Dorothy McRae-McMahon is represented on another. Those of us somewhere in the centre thank God for our Christian fellowship with both wings.

I don't have any worry about your excellent demonstration of how one person found acceptance in one "church" rather than another. I suppose that it was when you sort of used the church of Rev McRae-McMahon as representative of the Uniting Church (as against the Sydney Anglicans) that I began to get worried.

From the snippets that I have read in church magazines over the years it seemed to me that the very "liberal" views of Rev McRae-McMahon and her church, represented only one wing of our Uniting Church—a very "liberal" view.

On the other hand during my wanderings around the state, I found quite a number of Uniting Churches who have what I would call a rather literal dogmatic, almost fundamentalist view of bible theology that I would associate with the general stance of the Sydney Anglicans.

And of course, I have found a great many more Uniting churches somewhere in the centre. I have learnt to respect all those who have accepted Christ and are trying to live as his disciples.

Journey is (and is meant to be I'm sure), a blessing to all our Queensland Uniting Churches. I guess I saw in your editorial statement an unconscious leaning to favour one part of our Uniting Church against another.

Rev Alan Renton
Magnetic Island

All letters must directly address articles and letters from the previous month's edition of Journey and be accompanied by the writer's name and the name of their congregation or suburb of residence. Opinions expressed are only indicative of the individual writer, not their entire congregation. Letters are published at the discretion of the editor, but do not necessarily represent the views of the editor or that of official Uniting Church policy. Letters may be edited for clarity or space, at the discretion of the editor. Letters should be no longer than 150 words. Full submission guidelines for letters to the editor can be found at journeyonline.com.au/submit

Storm relief appeal

After recent storms swept across Australia's east coast leaving a trail of death and destruction in many communities, the President of the Uniting Church in Australia Stuart McMillan has launched a national appeal to assist those impacted.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with those who have lost loved ones," says Stuart. "We grieve with the families and friends and pray for the safety of all. The Uniting Church seeks to support people in need in such times of difficulty and to join with others at the heart of community recovery."

National Disaster Recovery officer Rev Dr Stephen Robinson added, "There are many ways in which Uniting Church ministry agents and churches are involved even now, including disaster recovery chaplaincy and support programs. Your donations will help the Uniting Church be alongside these communities at the time they most need our support."

To contribute to the appeal visit
assembly.uca.org.au/donate

*Donations of \$2 and over are tax-deductible. Additional support can be contributed through the Share Tasmania Flood Crisis Appeal, **shareappeal.org.au***

NAIDOC Week

NAIDOC Week (3–10 July) celebrates the history, culture and achievements of First Peoples with a series of events around the state, including ceremonies, traditional dances and morning teas.

NAIDOC is celebrated by all Australians and you can participate by visiting Indigenous sites of significance, host your own community BBQ, display the National NAIDOC poster or other Indigenous posters around your workplace, or simply watch a movie about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history.

*For more information on NAIDOC Week or to register your own event to their calendar visit **naidoc.org.au***

Order of Australia medal winners

Several Queensland Uniting Church affiliated people were recently awarded the Medal (OAM) of the Order of Australia which recognises a diverse range of contributions and service across all fields, including professional endeavours, community work, Australia's defence force and emergency services.

Ann Brand (St David's Uniting Church), Jonathan Ferguson (Lifeworks Uniting Church), Daphne Webster (Oakey Uniting Church) and Dr Stewart Gill (the University of Queensland's Emmanuel College principal) were all awarded in the Queen's Birthday 2016 Honours List.

"We are fortunate as a community to have so many outstanding people willing to dedicate themselves to the betterment of our nation and it is only fitting that they have today been recognised through the Australian Honours system," said the Governor-General and Chancellor of the Order of Australia, Sir Peter Cosgrove.



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