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The United Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Journey

August 2016



THE MAN BEHIND THE \$100 MILLION ARK

Val Webb and liberating theology

The minister's partner: life beyond the fishbowl

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The Synod Governance, Nomination and Remuneration Committee (GNRC) is asking you to tap someone on the shoulder!

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These important roles provide appropriate governance of Synod and its agencies while developing and richly blessing the individuals who contribute.

There are opportunities now, and in the immediate future, to join the Finance, Investment and Property Board (FIP), the GNRC and a number of school and college boards.

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Editor's note

This edition brings profiles of two Christian Queenslanders who offer radically different perspectives on faith: Ken Ham (page 6) and Val Webb (page 10).

While Val emphasises the importance of questioning in faith and brings an unmistakable progressivism to Christianity, Ken has an intense certainty in the Old Testament as literal history and is getting people around the world talking, for better or worse, about Christ, Genesis and how we interpret the Bible.

To be clear, Ken and Val are not presented to you as figures to rally around within a false narrative pitting progressivism against conservatism. Wherever you stand on a litany of theological and social issues, these profiles offer a fresh perspective on both people and help illustrate we are all far more complex and nuanced creatures than the religious and political labels we apply to others and ourselves.

Ashley Thompson's fascinating feature on modern partners in ministry (page 12) talks to a range of ministers' spouses in the Uniting Church to reveal the challenges and joy of life in "a fish bowl" as one interviewee describes it.

Finally, I have been repeatedly asked by readers why we don't publish "Letters to the editor" as a regular section of the magazine. The simple answer is we receive very few, and they arrive at such an irregular cycle we couldn't possibly keep a monthly section healthily-stocked.

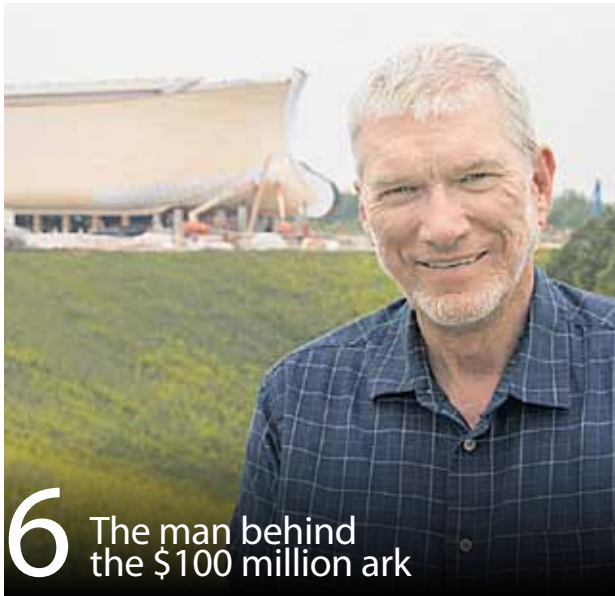
Your letters are certainly welcome but a few things to consider before you put pen to paper or finger to key. Publication is at the editor's discretion; *Journey* always reserves the right to edit those which are published for clarity and space's sake (please try to keep them to 150 words or less); please keep the focus on topics raised within the previous edition; and please, please, please be aware of defamation laws when making statements about other individuals or organisations.

Having said all that, we all want the magazine to instigate discussion, reflection and civil debate, and your letters are a crucial way for us to gauge what *Journey* is doing right, what can be improved and where you, the readership, stand on key matters of concern for this church and the broader society to which it belongs.

Please send your letters via email or to the GPO box address located below.

Ben Rogers
Cross-platform editor

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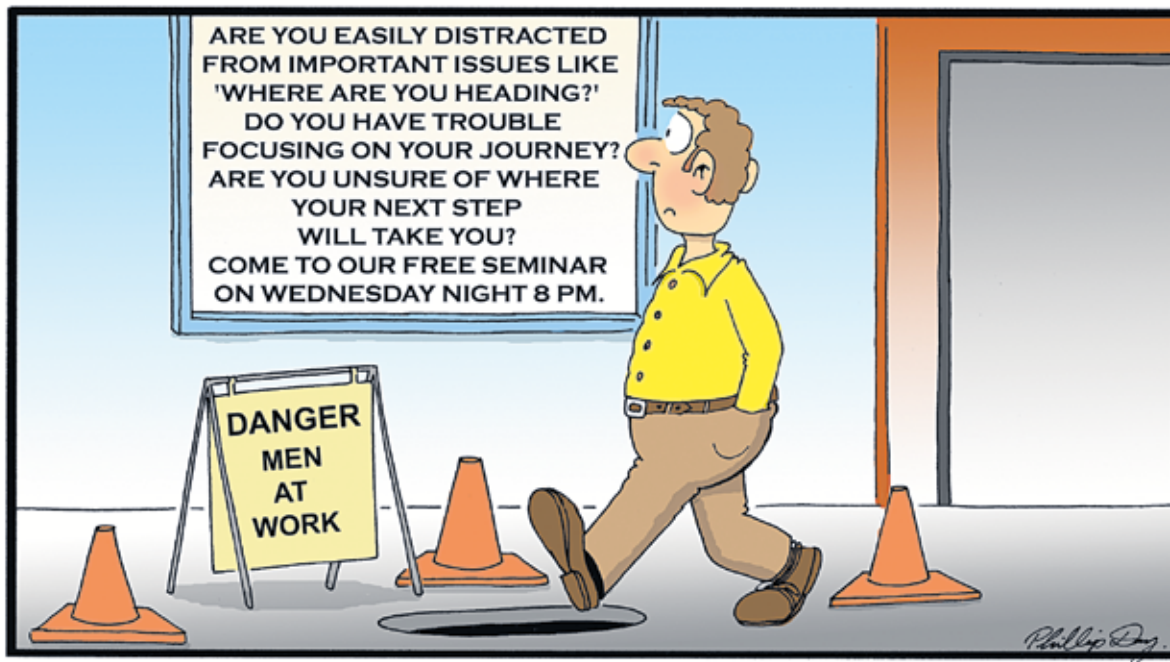
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Closing date for editorial and advertising for September *Journey* is Monday 15 August. The next issue of *Journey* will be available on Sunday 4 September.



To everything —turn, turn, turn

Monday Midday Prayer

*O Lord,
Hear the desire of the
humble
Strengthen their hearts
Incline your ear, and do
justice to the orphan and
the oppressed,
So that those from earth
may strike terror no more
Amen.*

Psalm 10

For anyone interested in the wider world, the windows we have to it each has its own perspectives. In terms of the mass media, the press and TV and radio channels all bring their own proclivities to their choices not only of what we see and hear, but their interpretations of what it means.

The narrower, pervasive views that are custom made for us by Facebook and our search engines use sophisticated algorithms to discern our interests.

In a strange paradox, given the ubiquity of media, we can live more and more in our own bubble of self-reinforcing information.

The other challenge with all this information coming to us is, how are we to interpret and make sense of it? It is tempting to “pull up the drawbridge” so to speak, and create a world of our own security. Yet life and health and the Spirit won’t let that last for long.

It does become an issue of “what turns your head?”

Many competing claims to attention, and to truth, surround us. Voices play on our fears or our hopes. How do we sift the claims and discern the times?

One of the profound gifts of the Judeo-Christian tradition is that it is rich with themes and issues that can help us make sense of events today, and mitigate the potential to be drawn into either being seduced by the sirens of the media or the desire to retreat inside our castle.

The Preacher, the writer of Ecclesiastes, said in his discourse on life, “There is nothing new under the sun”. His rather resigned view of life was that the best we can do is to enjoy of it what we can, as we are soon gone.

Yet a good understanding and knowledge of the Old and New Testaments, and of Christian thought down through the centuries, gives us a solid framework from which we can have a better awareness of who is seeking to turn our heads, and in what direction they are pointing us.

If we, the Christian community, are going to be salt, yeast, and light in our many manifestations and engagements, then we of all people need to develop the capacity to discern the times and the messages.

Only a life—individual or communal—grounded in the great salvation story, in living that story out in our lives, will have the capacity to sift the messages and discern the times.

Rev David Baker
Moderator, Queensland Synod

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Members of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress at NYALC 2016.
Photo: Uniting Church in Australia, National Assembly

Diversity on show at NYALC

Over one hundred young adults from across Australia attended the 2016 National Young Adult Leaders' Conference (NYALC) where the church's multicultural identity was on full display. *Journey* reports.

While there's often talk of ageing within the Uniting Church, NYALC demonstrated that a new generation of culturally-diverse young people is coming through to enrich the identity (and grow the congregations) of the church.

The six-day conference held in early July at Burleigh Heads on the Gold Coast gathered young adults from across Australia to hear and trade inspiring stories of faith, discipleship and leadership, as well as network and participate in a range of activities designed to connect them with experienced leaders in the church.

Witnessing the CYC Burleigh campsite brimming with life as young people played basketball or sat around in small groups to sing and play guitar, the multicultural bona fides of the Uniting Church were unmistakable.

"I'm looking around at 120 people, 90 of whom are young adult leaders from many different cultural backgrounds, from all over Australia, from Elcho Island to Tasmania to Perth, every state," says Rev Tom Kerr, NYALC event coordinator. "These people are representative of other young adults from all over Australia and many of their communities are growing."

Uniting Church in Australia president Stuart McMillan, who also attended the conference, concurs: "We've had a 30 per cent reduction in Anglo congregations since 1991, but we've had a 300 per cent increase in culturally-

diverse peoples, congregations, languages being used in the life of the Uniting Church, that's the rich and growing edge of the church."

Since its inception, the implementation of a culture-based quota system that ensured one third of participants were Anglo-Saxon, one third Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and one third were from second-generation multicultural groups has allowed NYALC to be an incubator for future leadership that retains the unique diversity of the Uniting Church.

Reuben Edmonds from Wesley Church congregation in Western Australia also relished the opportunity to network with other Uniting Church young adults as he is "kind of it" in his congregation.

"It is an amazing opportunity to see the Uniting Church in all its breadth and depth," says Reuben who like many others, was sponsored by his congregation to attend the conference.

As for the future of the Uniting Church, South Australian Uniting Church pastor Sam Chan hopes the church "will lead the nation in diversity".

"I hope the nation will look at the church and think that's how we live together. We don't live in our little enclaves and put walls up against each other but we do life together."

For information on NYALC visit nyalc.org.au
For videos taken during the event, visit facebook.com/unitingchurch.queensland

“
I'm looking around at 120 people, 90 of whom are young adult leaders from many different cultural backgrounds, from all over Australia

Rev Tom Kerr



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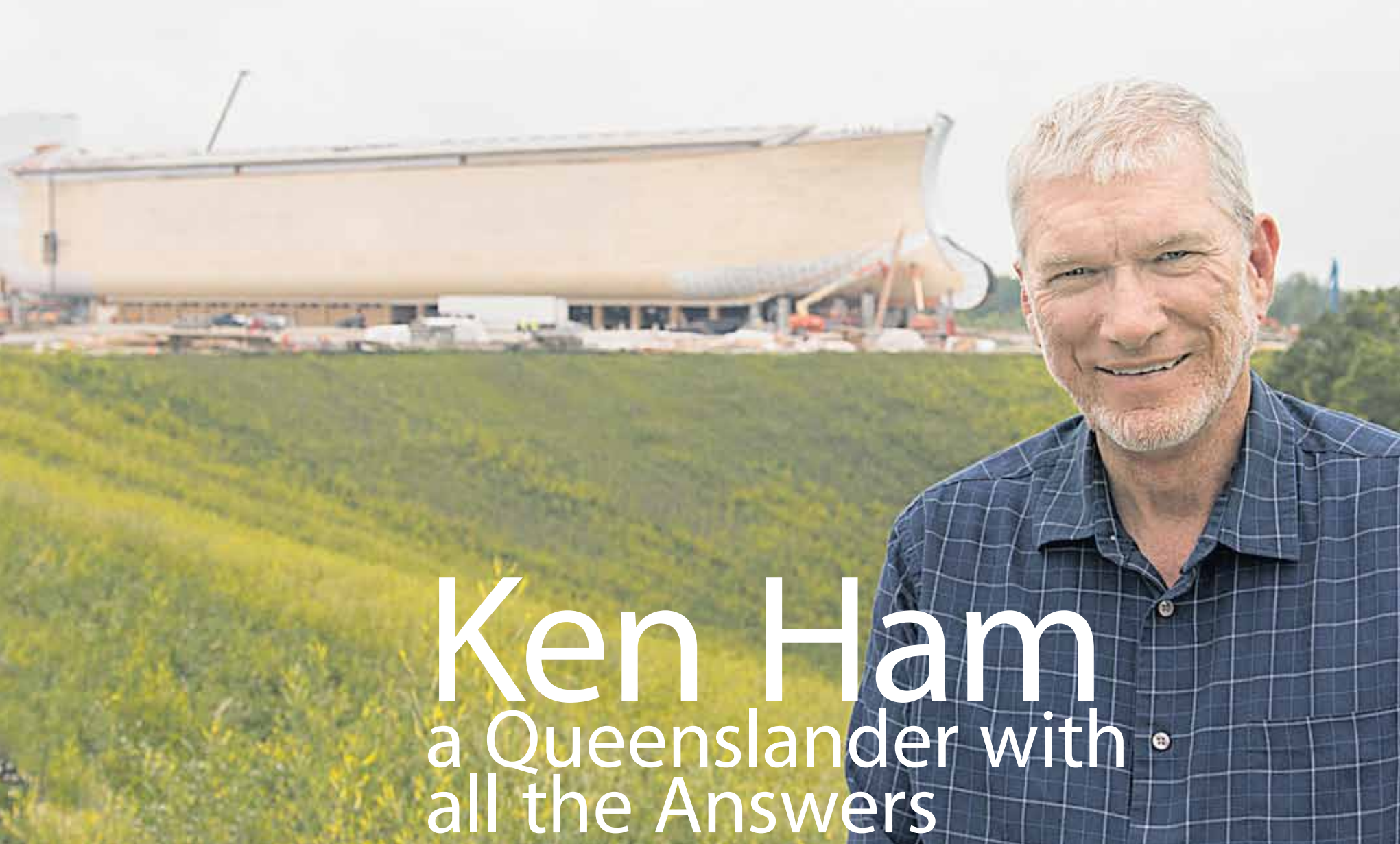
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Ken Ham

a Queenslander with all the Answers

When it comes to divisive Australian Christians, they don't get much bigger than **Ken Ham**. **Ben Rogers** interviews the Queensland creationist who is grabbing news headlines for his \$100 million Noah's ark replica.

“
I do take a strong stand on taking Genesis as literal history, but that doesn't mean that we're saying, 'If you don't believe what we believe, you can't be a Christian.' We have never said that

The recent public unveiling of Ken's Ark Encounter attraction in Kentucky, North America, brought the kind of media attention you'd expect from building a faith-themed mega-structure 155 metres long, 25 metres wide and 15 metres high.

The reactions have been a predictable mix of awe, shock, skepticism and horror. Atheist groups have used the unveiling as a rallying-point to decry creationism and its appearance in classrooms as a viable alternative to evolutionary science. Families of faith looking for a fun day out have been left inspired and impressed by the ark's rebuttals to the doubters.

The project—years in the making and boasting a structural monolith that Ken claims is the largest timber-frame building in the world (built to the exact specifications laid out in Genesis 6:15)—is providing ammunition for both supporters and opponents, but ultimately there's no ignoring it which is precisely what Ken wants: attention and lots of it.

There's no doubting Ken is a polarising figure, and one which many *Journey* readers may question why we would bother giving him further press.

After all, to his detractors (Christian or otherwise), his fusion of questionable scientific claims with biblical text is dangerous, especially when taught in the classroom, and risks tarnishing the image of Christians who integrate evolutionary science and progressive social positions in their faith.

But there are many out there who see Ken's hardline stance on Genesis as literal-history and intense zeal to spread the gospel as nothing short of heroic in a world of secularism and humanity's reinterpretations of God's word.

Regardless of where you stand on Ken, most will agree he's a deeply fascinating figure, not to mention a very savvy businessman and promoter, and as a Christian Queenslander in the international spotlight, he opens up an important discourse *Journey* readers should have about science, faith, literalism and how to promote the Bible in a world where corporations, politicians and religious institutions are jostling for the short attention spans of incoming tech-savvy generations.

On the defence in the classroom

Ken grew up in a Queensland household heavily influenced by Christian apologetics, and his school teacher father would inculcate in his children an attitude of not just believing the Bible, but knowing why you believe it and “knowing how to defend it”.

Like his father, Ken also became a school teacher, and was soon confronted with a need to defend his faith in the classroom while teaching science at Dalby State high school.

Ken recalls one instance where the students flat-out told him the Bible wasn't true because of, “what we're taught in our textbooks about evolution, millions of years, we came from ape-like creatures, obviously the account of Adam and Eve is not true.”

“I was able to teach the students about creation, about the Book of Genesis, about evolution. It wasn’t an issue at all back then from a teaching perspective in the schools, and I taught my students what they were supposed to learn in their textbooks,” says Ken.

From Sunnybank to Kentucky

After starting a creationist ministry out of his Sunnybank home to cater to increasing demand for his origins teachings, Ken eventually moved his family to North America in 1987 to work at the Institute for Creation Research.

America, with its immense Christian population and vast sums of investment capital, was a perfect breeding ground for growing the creationist movement, and Ken founded the Answers in Genesis (AIG) ministry in the mid-nineties to spread the message.

Since then, AIG has become an empire of books, DVDs, radio broadcasts, the 75 000 square-foot Creation Museum and now the Ark Encounter theme park.

For Ken, the motivation for building the Ark Encounter is simple: “I see this as a way of publicly opening up the conversation about Christianity, of impacting millions of people. We can get people talking about the Bible, talking about the Christian faith, because our whole motive is, as Christians, we do want to see people saved and won to the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Given the sheer volume of resources—financial and otherwise—the Ark Encounter required, Ken has a response to those, including this author, who question whether such expenses are justified in a world where so many struggle with crushing poverty or economic hardship.

“Some of the secular world has said, ‘what a waste of money’ because it should have been given to the

poor and needy, well, the reason they say that is out of prejudice because they don’t agree with the message,” Ken argues.

“And the reason I say that is because do they say that to Hillary Clinton who is spending \$2 billion on her political campaign? That’s how much they’re raising, \$2 billion! What about all these cruise ships that are being built just for entertainment? Some of those cruise ships are nearly a billion dollars to build. I mean we could talk about any facility, what about a church auditorium that costs fifty million or a hundred million? So it goes on. We could look at everything like that.”

Ken also points out that AIG supports other missions and their Vacation Bible School program partners with the Children’s Hunger Fund to, according to Ken, “supply nearly three million meals to those kids.”

Christianity and the current culture

Our conversation turns to the current state of society and how government interacts with the church on topics such as marriage and freedom of religious expression.

“From a Christian perspective when you look at what the role of state is from what God says and the Bible, it’s to maintain law and order, and what we see is the state is getting, in the whole western world, more involved in legislating morality. That’s where the state is, in a way, dictating a state church and those things do become issues. We live in this world, we’re to obey the government, but when it comes down to obeying God’s word we have to obey God’s word first obviously.

“Many of those who want gay marriage, they don’t want to be just free to believe what they want, they want to enforce that others have to believe it too, that’s what I see happening, and that’s where the problem arises, where it then takes away from the free exercise of religion and someone saying, ‘Look,

I should be free to say I don’t agree with that, I believe God made Adam and Eve, he made the first marriage, Jesus quoted from that, that’s why I believe marriage is a man and a woman.”

Finally, for the non-creationist Christians Ken stresses that “salvation is conditioned upon faith in Christ, not what you believe about the age of the earth or the days of creation” but offers a challenge for them to reflect on.

“I do take a strong stand on taking Genesis as literal history, but that doesn’t mean that we’re saying, ‘If you don’t believe what we believe, you can’t be a Christian’. We have never said that.

“I would say for those who believe in evolution or millions of years, there’s an inconsistency and an authority issue that I would challenge you on. What you’re doing is unlocking a door to say, ‘We don’t take God’s word as written, we can take man’s ideas and reinterpret it’, then where do you draw the line? Do you do that with the resurrection? Do you do that with the virgin birth? Do you do that with all the miracles? Do you do that with everything else as well?

“It really comes down to your view of scripture and whether we’re letting outside ideas influence how we’re taking scripture and interpreting it, or whether we’re letting it speak to us naturally according to the type of literature and the language.”



Read more at The Scoop. Our online-exclusive expanded interview with Ken explores his past, the stories behind the Ark Encounter and his experiences with atheist comedian Bill Maher. Visit: journeyonline.com.au/scoop/expanded-ken-ham

Ark Encounter grand opening
in North America.
Photo: Supplied





A 3DM Learning Community participant sharing her church's plan with other participants for feedback and encouragement. Photo: Supplied

Discipleship moves in to the third dimension

3D Movements (3DM) is gaining traction in Australia, and an upcoming workshop introducing it to Queenslanders will put further focus on discipleship in the church, one of the 32nd Synod's strategic priorities. *Journey* reports.

“
At the heart
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Rev Orrell Battersby

Originally devised in the United Kingdom by St Thomas' Church, the 3DM approach emphasises discipleship and mission to everyday people through the prism of the two major elements running through the Bible: “covenant” and “kingdom”.

Central to 3DM's principles are “LifeShapes”, which are described by creator Mike Breen as a “language of leadership”, and “Huddles”, an invitation-only, high commitment group session for leaders to receive investment, training and accountability.

Rev Orrell Battersby, who has been utilising 3DM in Newlife Pacific Pines Uniting Church, explains, “At the heart of what is now 3DM is a church culture that doesn't just create converts or invite people to church services, it makes disciples that are learning to live like Jesus did.”

“They train people to listen to the voice of God and respond, to pass along what they are learning, to become leaders. The people they train, in turn train others, and they train others. Disciples make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.”

Now spanning North America and Europe, 3DM is yet to fully flourish in the Asia-Pacific, but those Australians practising it have nothing but positive messages for the curious.

Rev Mark Illingworth notes, “The Billabong Uniting Church in Western Australia has been journeying with 3DM for the past four years. The increased clarity and resulting simplicity of what it means to follow Jesus is creating a culture that lives and breathes 24/7 imitators of Jesus amongst the last, the least and the lost.”

Rev Andy Goodacre echoes these sentiments: “Six years ago we took over a very small, struggling Anglican parish church in the northern suburbs of Launceston. The principles, support, coaching and encouragement we received from 3DM helped us to persevere when this was hard, but also to learn really wise, strategic principles to put in place, in order to reshape the culture of the church.”

For those keen to explore what 3DM can offer their congregation, the Queensland Synod will host an introductory workshop in early September to provide further information on the movement and hear success stories from Missional Communities Australia.

Scott Guyatt, co-organiser of the workshop, says, “3DM is one of a number of structured approaches to shaping a discipleship culture in your congregation.”

“The workshop is an ideal opportunity to check it out, and see whether the 3DM approach might fit for your particular context and your congregation's desire to emphasise discipleship.”

For more information on the workshop visit ucaqld.com.au/3dmworkshop



(L—R) Geoff Batkin, Anne Cross, Judy Wollin, Senator Michaelia Cash and Trevor Evans.
Photo: Supplied

Women given a springboard for employment

A new employment project developed by UnitingCare Australia in partnership with the Australian government is helping women enter the job market and early trials by UnitingCare look promising. Amy Cobb reports.

Wesley Mission Queensland, UnitingCare Queensland and UnitingCare Australia welcomed the recent announcement by Federal Minister for Women and Employment, Senator Michaelia Cash of \$10 million for a national rollout of the Springboard employment project.

The Springboard project, developed by UnitingCare Australia in partnership with the federal government, aims to provide women, who might otherwise struggle to get a foothold in the job market, with a career pathway.

There have been two trials undertaken by UnitingCare so far in Western Australia and South Australia. Due to the success of these trials, funding has now been allocated for the national rollout.

Springboard will be implemented by Wesley Mission Queensland as they prepare for the opening of a new aged care home at Geebung in October where more than 100 new staff will be required.

Geoff Batkin, Wesley Mission Queensland CEO says, "Through the Springboard employment project we will provide formal and on-the-job training, mentoring and a career pathway within our aged care and community services."

"Last year we commissioned a report to understand Queensland women's experience of poverty, which revealed that approximately 46 982 women over the age of 65 will be 'doing it tough' in 2016.

"We know that women in poverty is a serious issue and the Springboard employment project will allow us to provide opportunity to women facing disadvantage to pursue a rewarding career in aged care and community services."

Acting National Director Martin J Cowling noted Springboard is an innovative model that both addresses employment issues for individuals and helps meet the workforce needs of the growing community services sector.

"Participants in the pilot tranches of Springboard that have been rolled out so far have completed both pre-employment and on the job training, as well as receiving mentoring," says Martin.

"Those who have successfully completed all the requirements of the project have been offered roles within the community services agencies of the pilot organisations.

"I congratulate our staff at UnitingCare Australia, along with the three pilot sites, UnitingCare West (Perth), UnitingCare Wesley Bowden (Adelaide), and Wesley Mission Queensland, for their initiative and commitment to successfully developing this project. We are pleased that this funding will now allow other agencies to deliver the program and benefit more people around the country."

Wesley Mission Queensland is part of the UnitingCare network, one of Australia's largest providers of social services.

For information about Springboard visit <http://www.unitingcare.org.au/springboard>

“

We know that women in poverty is a serious issue and the Springboard employment project will allow us to provide opportunity to women facing disadvantage

Geoff Batkin



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Outside the comfort zone with Val Webb

Dianne Jensen talks to Val Webb about keeping the faith in a challenging world.

“
So many
people become
trapped in
having to
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If Uniting Church theologian Dr Val Webb has one message for Christians, it's that asking questions is good for your faith.

“There are so many people who think there's only one way to think theologically, and if they can't stomach that particular doctrinal package they have to either leave or just accept it and put their questions to one side,” says Val, who has taught religious studies at universities and colleges in the United States and Australia.

“When I talk about these things you can see the lights coming on in lay people. So many people become trapped in having to believe what their pastor or church tells them without knowing that there are other liberating ways to think.”

Val's eleven books include *In Defense of Doubt: An Invitation to Adventure* and *Like Catching Water in a Net; Human attempts to describe the Divine* which won the religion category of the 2007 Best Books USA awards. Her most recent book *Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology: finding your own voice* traces the development of theology across the centuries.

The times were a changin'

Val's 1960s upbringing in Brisbane followed a familiar track for many of her generation.

“I grew up in the church, in a fairly conservative, evangelical, Billy Graham atmosphere with parents involved in the Evangelical Union,” she says. “My life was the church really. I remember doubting a lot of stuff when I was only 13 or 14 ... It was more than just doctrine—it was your whole family and all your friends so it was difficult to break away from that.”

Once she got to university, Val discovered that the social and political turbulence of the 60s was also impacting Christians. Just as in the secular world,

students and teachers were challenging institutions which demanded blind adherence to a set of beliefs.

In church circles, Bishop John Robinson's book *Honest to God* introduced the laity to radical ideas about God from the German theologians. For Paul Tillich, God was not “up there” or “out there” but the Ground of Being itself; Rudolf Bultmann demythologised the Gospel stories; and Dietrich Bonhoeffer called for a “religionless” Christianity.

That does not compute

For science students like Val, the “God of the gaps” theory could no longer paper over the schism between their expanding knowledge and their faith.

Whether churches liked it or not, the next evolution in theological method was underway, one driven by ordinary people reading the Bible through their own life experiences. The idea that one theological system (a systematic theology) could fit all circumstances was developing into contextual theology.

As Val explained in her presentation at Merthyr Uniting Church in Brisbane in March this year, “Contextual theology ... is more than just acknowledging the influence of your context on your theological ideas—it starts with the context and gives priority to that context before any theologising. It describes what is going on in the world and analyses this, especially experiences of oppression, then critiques traditional theology in light of this as to whether it answers the problem. It then goes back to scripture to see what might actually be liberating in the situation, rather than imposing traditional arguments.”

Feminist, black and other liberation theologies emerged, challenging traditional power structures and claiming God's promise to liberate the poor and the oppressed in this life. As people



Dr Val Webb.
Photo: Holly Jewell

re-examined biblical texts and how they were interpreted, there were more questions from an increasingly well-educated laity.

For Val and her husband Maurice, professional and family life intervened and theological questions were put on the back-burner. Maurice was a surgeon at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota and Val later held leadership positions in the Queensland Synod in the 1980s and at the Wesley Hospital in Brisbane.

Permission to doubt

The turning point came when Val decided to study religion at the University of Queensland during the 1980s.

“I determined at that point that I needed to address these questions, even if it meant walking away from the church,” she says. “I wondered, why is doubt the cutting edge in science but when it comes to religion you can’t question anything?”

Val began writing *In Defence of Doubt: An Invitation to Adventure*. The first edition was published in 1995 and revised in 2012.

“It was one of the first books that didn’t ask you to solve the problem of doubt but said instead that it was okay. In fact, it talked about doubt being a catalyst in learning and a gift, the discrepancy between what we are asked to believe and what we intuit in ourselves, as opposed to talking about doubt as the opposite of faith and belief,” says Val.

“I was swamped with responses, because people were waiting for something that gave them permission to doubt.”

Her work has been dismissed by some as “progressive” or even unchristian.

“To me that’s a reaction of fear, because I was there once myself,” says Val. “We’re afraid. We’ve been taught that we’ve got to do this, believe this and this if we want to go to heaven. But are there minimum requirements for being a Christian, and who decides?”

“I sat for 20 years in pews trying to believe in a literal bodily resurrection and felt that if I didn’t I was condemned to hell. I just wanted somebody to say, some scholars think this and some scholars think that—and not come down on either side.”

Why theological education matters

Val completed a PhD in Theology (1996) from Luther Seminary, Minnesota, USA exploring the role of ordination in the Uniting Church in Australia, and went on to an academic career.

She remains critical of what she describes as “the great divide” in theological access between ordained and non-ordained and the homogeneity of the “correct” theological position in some theological colleges.

“Are the students being formed around one or two theological positions, or are they being offered a spectrum of theology so that they can fit themselves in, or at least see that something that’s transforming for them may not be transforming for someone else?” asks Val.

“I think there are a lot of people out there who haven’t made the move from the security of

fundamentalism or church doctrines that trouble them because they don’t know where to move—there’s no one to take them. It’s easier to stay, to get on with social justice or whatever else is going on and enjoy the community but don’t mess with the thinking.

“Some church people say that what you do is more important than what you believe but I can’t buy that, because what you believe is going to influence what you do. If you don’t actually deconstruct any of the theology that really has been quite harmful to people, you don’t open them into theological options that might be more liberating.”

Returning theology to the provenance of all Christians provides them with the tools to navigate the contemporary world, says Val.

“I encourage people to go back to Wesley’s four-fold test: scripture, tradition, reason and experience. We need literate lay people who understand how things have changed through the centuries and will not be bound to believe and repeat the old stories described in the language and worldviews of medieval England, ancient European monasteries or the imperial courts of fourth century Rome. A liberating faith should open our hearts to the changing landscapes of our lives, using tradition as a guide but not an iron-grill.”

Dr Val Webb is a keynote speaker at Common Dreams 4 Conference in Brisbane from September 16–19
commondreams.org.au



The minister's partner: life

It's 2016, the working world has changed and "traditional" marriage roles no longer exist. **Ashley Thompson** explores what it means to be today's face of the minister's partner.

“The traditional role? ... I think that's out the window now, there's no such thing as a traditional role anymore

Peter Coombes

It was difficult to find people willing to speak to *Journey* about the challenges of being a minister's spouse. Understandably, those who aren't retired were not comfortable publicly voicing the strains ministry can have on their families while they currently serve in congregations.

This is why the Queensland Synod's Partners in Ministry (PIM) organisation and yearly retreat is so important—because not many people can relate to the pressures and joy of serving the church in this unique way. It is a confidential safe space for attendees who can be comforted that “what happens at the PIM retreat, stays at the PIM retreat”.

“Unemployed employee” and “two for the price of one” are common phrases used to describe partners in ministry. Maria Buwa writes on the North American Ministerial Spouses Association blog that these idioms are a “tragedy” as merging a spouse's labour together with that of their husband or wife “cripples their individuality”.

The church “demands a pastor's spouse for service, and yet there is no budget for her,” says Maria, referring to her experience within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A lack of recognition and an unrealistic expectation of involvement are the primary pain points of embittered spouses.

However, this is not everyone's experience as we soon found out from those willing to share—the stories of our Uniting Church ministers' partners ranged from fulfilling to challenging at worst.

Pam Kerr

Pam Kerr is the wife of retired Uniting Church minister, Rev Ian Kerr. She attends Forest Lake Uniting Church in Brisbane's west, has qualifications in nursing and is a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother—but if you're looking for the embittered spouse of a minister you've come to the wrong place.

“I loved it,” says Pam as she recalls Ian's eight placements which ranged from northern Queensland to India and inner-city Brisbane.

“I loved travelling, I loved going to new parishes and meeting new people. It was always very interesting, I gained more than I gave I'm sure. We had hiccups and problems but I mean that's life isn't it? No, I loved my life. It was always a challenge.”

While Pam served the church in many areas, she does not tie this involvement to her status as the minister's wife but rather that of an everyday church person.

“I see the minister's wife as a lay person. She's a member of the church like any other person who contributes and does what they can,” says Pam.

Of course there were expectations of the minister's wife in parish ministry she adds, for example she was “automatically expected to be the president of the ladies fellowship”—but Ian supported her and always said, “It's your life you do what you feel you should do”. And she did.

As a full-time mother and homemaker, Pam says she takes her “hat off to those women who can manage full-time work and have young children”.

Dr Joan Baker

Dr Joan Baker is a general practitioner, business owner, mother and wife of the current Queensland Synod moderator, Rev David Baker.

She says partner roles have changed to reflect the wider community. “I would think the majority of couples younger than 60 would now have a working wife—whether they are in the ministry or not,” says Joan.

Like Pam she compares her involvement to that of a “committed lay member”, and speaks fondly of the flexibility parish ministry offered their family while their children were young.



(L—R), Dr Joan and Rev David Baker;
Rev Ian and Pam Kerr; Ben, Lyndelle, Ellie
and Rev Andrew Gunton;
Penny, Dr Amy, Rev Harlee and Sally Cooper;
Peter and Rev Jenny Coombes.
Photos: Supplied

beyond the fish bowl

As current organiser of the PIM retreat—held yearly at Alexandra Park Conference Centre on the Sunshine Coast—Joan is excited about the growing number of delegates as she is a “real believer that ministers’ partners have a lot in common with each other.”

“Getting together, having fun, supporting one another and being called into a spiritual response together is meaningful.”

Peter Coombes

“I’m Peter Coombes from Longreach and I am not the minister’s wife,” was Peter’s cheeky quip to the 32nd Synod in May.

Peter is a university health student placement coordinator, farmer, father and grandfather—he is also the husband of Rev Jenny Coombes, Longreach Uniting Church minister.

“When it became evident Jenny was going to be a candidate for ministry and become successful in it, I realised then that my role would be a support person for her. She had supported me when I travelled around with the army for 20 years,” says Peter.

“The traditional role?” he laughs. “I think that’s out the window now, there’s no such thing as a traditional role anymore.”

This year Peter attended his first PIM meeting “reluctantly” he admits.

“My perception of the program a few years ago was that it was very female-centric but I was refreshed by the different approach they’ve taken now. From a male viewpoint, I felt there was a much wider agenda overall.”

Peter is involved in the Longreach congregation but only because “that’s how I operate, I get involved in community”.

Lyndelle Gunton

Lyndelle Gunton is a communications professional, librarian, mother and wife to Oxley-Darra Uniting Church minister, Rev Andrew Gunton.

Having heard negative stories from previous partners in ministry, Lyndelle says she was anxious about encountering the old “24/7 style of ministry” often associated with living in an on-site manse.

“I’ve been told stories of how people would just not respect boundaries,” recalls Lyndelle. “Of partners feeling unsafe or being put in difficult situations when people would just show up at their home when the minister was out and come back night after night.

“The main thing that I’ve realised is the stories that partners in previous generations have told me are quite different to my own experience,” she says. “It’s changed, people accept now that the minister and their family does have a life apart from the church.”

Moving around every three to five years can be difficult and Lyndelle says she has learned that having “a group of friends not work related, or connected to your partner’s job” is key.

As a committed retreat participant, she is excited about the evolving program of the PIM retreat which has included inspiring speakers, massage therapists, a chaplain, barista coffee and walks on the beach.

“There’s this stereotype that we just do Bible study the whole weekend but really the most time we have is time for rest and connection.”

Dr Amy Cooper

Dr Amy Cooper holds a doctorate in philosophy, is a data analyst, research officer, mother and wife of Albany Creek Uniting Church minister Rev Harlee Cooper.

She is also a PIM committee member and happy to be in the company of “other people who know what it is to be married to a Uniting Church minister”.

“I don’t think people truly understand how much an ordination is a marriage—so you’re also married to the church, it’s theoretically the other woman,” says Amy.

“Prioritising family time is always difficult. There’s a lot of people in the church to keep happy and it’s not necessarily our job to keep them happy, but the burden of numbers makes it hard to balance family and work priorities.”

Amy has recently sought out a mentor to help her maintain her spiritual life.

Beyond the fish bowl

Marrying a minister has often been compared to living in a glass house, or as Amy puts it “a fish bowl”. Sacrifices are made and families are affected by those who accept the call to ministry both near and far.

However, much like the minister’s wife in the British TV show *Rev.* the role of your partner should and does not define you.

Minister’s partners are lawyers, doctors, mothers, husbands, teachers and at times, reverends themselves. Whatever the joys and challenges they face, the least we can do is validate their individuality.

Watch the first two seasons of Rev. on Stan or buy them on iTunes.



Revelation: first century speaks to the twenty-first

“
When our church
seems unsure of
its place in the
world, the gospel
in Revelation
is that Jesus
is standing in
our midst, our
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will endure
in the face of
tyranny, chaos,
persecution and
destruction

Much theological debate centres on the apocalyptic and prophetic Book of Revelation but what can be drawn from it for today’s society? **Rev Dr Neil Sims** reflects on Revelation, its historical context and the questions it poses for us today.

This year, I have begun to lead two small groups in a study of the last book of the Bible, Revelation. I have been realising how appropriate this study is for a church in Australia under increasing challenge and threat from the surrounding society.

Not so long ago, the church here was at the centre of society with some influence, but now it is being pushed to the margins in an increasingly secular, yet multi-faith world. And we are struggling with these transitions as a Christian community.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ was written to the early church by the apostle John just before the turn of the first century—about sixty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Early Christians faced public opposition from the Jews. They witnessed to Jesus in a multi-faith context where there were many gods and many temples.

The power of the Roman Empire was strong and the Emperors began to claim divinity and demand worship. Christians took a substantial risk in publicly declaring, “Jesus is Lord,” when the society was crying out, “Caesar is Lord”.

Early Christians, reading and receiving the message of Revelation, were reminded that God

had not forgotten them. The kings of this world are subject to the authority of the Lord of creation.

The book finishes with a vision of hope, the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, gifted by God.

Such a study reminds us that the political process is critiqued by the wider context of God’s being and action. When our church seems unsure of its place in the world, the gospel in Revelation is that Jesus is standing in our midst, our prayers matter to God, and God’s purposes will endure in the face of tyranny, chaos, persecution and destruction.

The book raises significant theological questions. How is the Christian faith different from other faiths and what makes it unique, if at all? How do we view nation-states in the light of the purposes of God? How do we discern the continuing work of God that sustains our faith and hope in an environment that is often evil and hostile? How are we to respond to evil powers?

Whatever our questions, Revelation strongly affirms the centrality of Christ, the Lamb of God, for the ongoing faith of the church. It concludes with the prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

Rev Dr Neil Sims

Rev Dr Neil Sims is a retired Minister of the Word who served in congregations and Trinity Theological College, and is currently living in Dalby where his wife, Jenny, is the Minister.

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Bob and members of the Redcliffe Uniting Church and UnitingCare Community come together to help build stronger families in the community.
Photo: Supplied

Stronger support for families? Yes, we can!

A partnership launch between UnitingCare Community and Redcliffe Uniting Church brought a children's favourite to town. *Journey* reports on the event and what's in store for the community's families.

Bob the Builder, the beloved children's television icon, recently came to Redcliffe to help launch the Building Strong Families partnership-program between UnitingCare Community and Redcliffe Uniting Church.

The event attracted hundreds of children and their parents who were treated to sing-alongs with Bob, playgroup crafts and activities and food supplied by the church's catering team.

As one happy parent later wrote on the church playgroup's Facebook page, "Thank you very much for organising such a fantastic morning for the children. The show was one thing, the activities and morning tea that came as a bonus was absolutely fantastic."

The idea for Building Strong Families was sparked after the church expanded their popular playgroup from two days to five and UnitingCare Community commenced the Children and Parenting Program (CAPP) service in Redcliffe.

"CAPP is there to empower and strengthen parents and families before life gets tough," says Cathy McCabe, CAPP team leader. "It's a preventative program encouraging and equipping parents for the important role they have raising children."

The church and UnitingCare Community soon recognised that a partnership-program could enhance and expand the range of services both bodies offered the community.

"When we realised we had five days of playgroup on our doorstep, it made our task so much easier," Cathy explains. "We instantly had 100 families to relate to, a volunteer base of support and a fantastic playgroup program to build on."

In addition to expanded playgroup and CAPP services, the partnership will include short parenting tips, education and self-care pamper mornings throughout the term, as well as free parenting breakfasts held every six to eight weeks on Saturday mornings.

With future directions already being planned, there are four-ingredient cooking classes, parenting programs and a parenting self-help book all in the pipeline.

Rebecca Clark, children and families pastor at Redcliffe Uniting Church, feels there's only positive benefits to flow to parents as a result of the partnership.

"God keeps surprising us! We take a leap of faith and God meets us with even more than we expected."

"Cathy and her team have added to our program in ways we could never have done. We allow UnitingCare Community to do things they could never have achieved alone. The parents are loving the extra support they are getting."

“
God keeps
surprising us!
We take a leap
of faith and God
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even more than
we expected

Rebecca Clark

The Scoop

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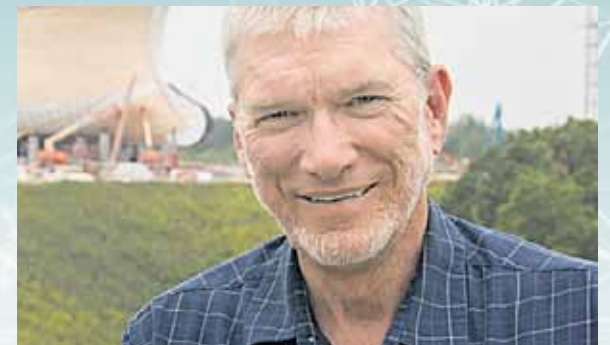
For online-exclusive articles, interviews and reviews, visit *The Scoop* and enhance your *Journey* experience.



Film review: *God Willing*

Dianne Jensen reviews *God Willing*, an Italian comedy exploring love, faith and meaning in a post-Christian society. Now playing in select cinemas around Queensland, the film won the Best New Director prize at the recent Italian Oscars and the Audience Award at the Tokyo International Film Festival.

journeyonline.com.au/culture/film-review-god-willing



Expanded: Interview with Ken Ham

He's the controversial driving force behind the \$100 million Noah's ark replica in North America, and is unafraid to defend the Bible's historical accuracy against a world largely convinced life has been around for longer than 6000 years. This extended interview explores Ken's mission, the fascinating details of the ark's construction and his future plans.

journeyonline.com.au/scoop/expanded-ken-ham



Church Unchained podcast

In the first Church Unchained podcast, **Scott Guyatt** and **Mardi Lumsden** talk to Rev Stephen Rothery and Rev Craig Batty about augmented and virtual reality and how it is changing the world and the church.

ucaqlld.com.au/unchained



Reflecting on women and the Uniting Church

Journey's recent focus on smashing the glass ceiling in the church has forced many to confront how issues of gender, equality and theology coexist in the church. **Rev Dr Geraldine Wheeler** reflects on her past brushes with prejudice before Queensland inducted its first female moderator in 2011.

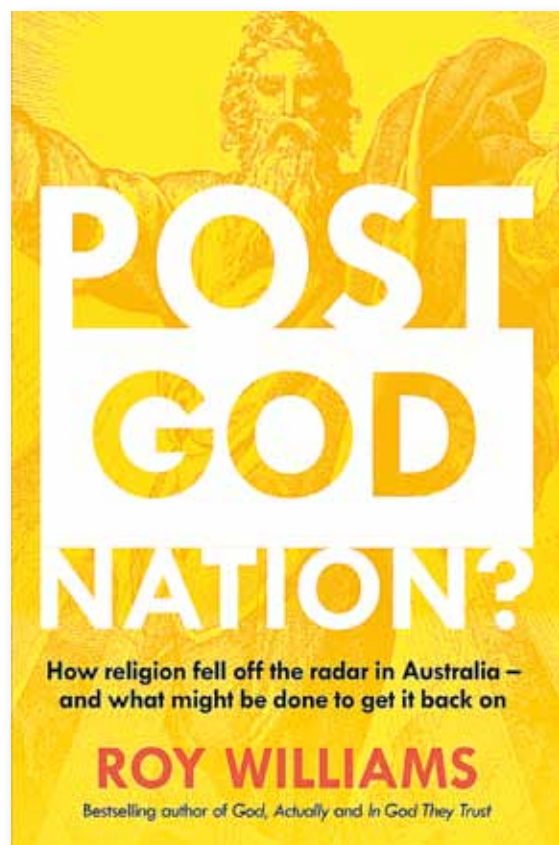
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What the church needs to learn from Pokémon GO

It's the augmented reality game taking the world by storm with many players flocking to their local church in search of digital creatures. **Mardi Lumsden** offers some lessons the church needs to learn from the phenomenon.

journeyonline.com.au/scoop/church-needs-learn-pokemon-go



Make Australia Christian again?

Australia could be reasonably described as a post-Christian nation, and Roy Williams' *Post-God Nation* tackles the issue of faith in our current society head-on. **Dr James Page** reviews.

Apologetics is an established theological genre, traditionally involving the defence of Christianity against pagan beliefs.

Roy Williams and his book *Post-God Nation* stands in this historic tradition, although, in this case, Williams is defending Christianity against some of the attacks by the more radical secularists of our time.

Williams argues in the first part of the book that much of what is positive about Australia, such as our notions of justice and respect for individual rights, stems from Christian origins. In the second part of the book he deals more specifically with the challenges of secularism.

I found a particularly interesting part of the book to be the discussion of scientism, the belief that science in itself can provide meaning to life, and the discussion on materialism, the corresponding belief that prosperity in itself can provide meaning to life. Williams rejects both beliefs.

Williams is also prepared to be critical of churches. For instance, he argues that churches need to be more outspoken on issues of peace and social justice, and

indeed he suggests that failure to do so in the past is one of the reasons for the decline of institutional Christianity.

One of the weaknesses in the book is that Williams fails to engage more on important theological issues, such as the task of interpreting Christian truths within a modern idiom.

It would seem obvious that this is central to why institutional Christianity is monumentally irrelevant to the majority of people.

The other weakness of the book is that Williams seems to be, at times, arguing for a back-to-the-future return to civic religion, that is, a time when religion and religious belief is assumed and culturally acceptable.

For instance, if we are speaking of a post-God nation, then this subtly implies that we ought to be working towards returning to a God-nation, whatever that might be.

For all those weaknesses, this book is an ambitious and valuable foray into the public role of religion in Australia.

Dr James Page

Dr James Page holds a PhD in peace education and has taught extensively in Australia and overseas.

Post-God Nation

Author: Roy Williams

Publisher: ABC Books
2015



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5 Global issues close to young hearts

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.—1 Timothy 4:12

Right before Australia hit the polls on 2 July, **Ashley Thompson** asked under 30s at Newlife Uniting Church's Heartbeat Conference what policy decisions they would champion given the chance.

1

Let them stay

The plight of refugees and asylum seekers is a contentious issue in the Australian political arena but in the eyes of Grace (13) and Iram (12) it's simple: "We have so much room here but they only take some," says Iram, "we could easily take way more to help." Grace agrees, "We've got a big country and could provide for them."

"Politicians have all the money and power in the world and yet they don't choose to share that with people who are less needy than others," says Kyle (17).

"There is more than enough food for everybody in the whole entire world and yet there are people dying of starvation every day," adds Alice (14).

2

Protect our privacy

For Alastair (18), one issue has him riled up more than any other: our right to privacy.

He argues that while we may not be United States citizens all of our data passes through American servers where the National Security Agency can download and record any piece of information, often, in Alastair's opinion, "without good enough cause".

"So even though we're not American nationals or under their government, we can still have our rights infringed upon in this way."

4

Close the gap

Elouise (16) gets fired up about the inequality between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians who she says don't have the same start to life "as we do".

"We start life with our parents who generally have a house already, they have their lives set-up and they have secure jobs," says Elouise. "[Indigenous Australians] don't have the same opportunities, I'd close the gap."

3

Love one another

Far from quaint, loving our neighbours and caring for the poor was by far the most popular response to what young people would champion if they were in charge.

5

Reject apathy

Newlife Uniting Church youth and children's pastor, Mike Hands (27) believes all these issues are rooted in apathy—and that if he was prime minister of Australia he would work to "help people understand how practical small steps actually make a big difference".

"It doesn't sound sexy or romantic and it's not going to win any political campaigns but if you could work out some way to alter selfishness or apathy you would solve half or most of the world's problems."

heartbeatconference.com

To the editor

Looking at the recent *Journey* (July 2016 edition) I am concerned at the apparent level of support for ‘feminist’ agendas. I have no problem with women seeking jobs but I wonder whether the headline should have read “Smashing the glass floor”.

I feel there is such a pandering to status-seeking in feminist ‘conversation’ which does a disservice to the faith.

Or do you feel such criticism is simply that of a misogynist? If so, then I may as well retreat to the pub and let you lot do it all (figuratively speaking).

Personally I see feminism as simply the female equivalent of chauvinism—a particularly virulent strain of individualism with nothing to recommend it within the Christian register.

Karl Tietze
Maleny

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



A seed program working bee with Townsville Central City Mission and Townsville Korean Uniting Faith Community congregation members.
Photo: Supplied

Thank you from Townsville Central seed program

As a result of an article highlighting a seed distribution program in the February edition of *Journey*, Uniting Church people from all over Queensland have been most generous in their donations.

Townsville Central City Mission church members recently packaged nearly a thousand packets of vegetable seeds to over 240 contact people in 45 countries.

Thank you to all those who responded with support and prayers.

Homelessness Week

Homelessness Week (1–7 August) draws attention to those experiencing homelessness and the issues they face, as well as those individuals and groups working to support them.

With Census night (9 August) closely following the campaign's close, this year's theme “Homelessness Counts” is designed to ensure conversations are started around how the homeless are adequately represented in Census data.

Data integrity is vital to ensure Australians are properly informed about the severity of the issue and what level of funding is required to combat homelessness and affordable housing challenges.

The community is encouraged to host fundraising and/or awareness-raising events; volunteer or donate to local homelessness services; or simply promote the cause on social media channels to raise general understanding and foster connections for those working in the homelessness sector.

For more information or to register your own event on their calendar visit homelessnessaustralia.org.au

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London B and B. Lovely home, reasonable rates. Ph 0011 44 20 8694 6538. rachelallen1234@gmail.com.

Boulder Creek Holiday Centre 281 Hill Rd, Mothar Mountain, via Gympie—the ideal place for your next church or family group camp. Catered accommodation for up to 100 persons. Self cater available for small groups. Check boulder creek.com.au for more information or ph 5483 5221.

[Correction] House-Sitters Available: Retired Christian couple want to house-sit in Sunny Coast area for 2 months. Ph 4974 7428 or 0438 793 673.

Booking are now open for the **Music on the Hillside** to be held on 6 November 2016 at Karana Downs Uniting Church. This event is a fundraiser for Cunnamulla Uniting Church's wheelchair access. Tickets are \$36 and sell out fast so book early on karanadownsunitingchurch.org.au For more information contact Ray Crompton on 0450 526 502.

Blue Care Sunday

Blue Care Sunday (21 August) celebrates the Uniting Church's establishment of, and commitment to, community services. Blue Care is part of the network of UnitingCare Queensland agencies that provide quality and compassionate care to more than 13 000 people daily.

Congregations can celebrate Blue Care Sunday by inviting a Blue Care service manager, chaplain or staff member to explain the history of Blue Care within the community, or if a congregation includes members of the Blue Care auxiliary or committee they can be invited to speak about why they believe it is important to serve the Uniting Church's mission in this way.

For more information on Blue Care Sunday or to access information resources visit bluecare.org.au

Corrections and clarifications

The July edition of *Journey* ran an article entitled “Christ in the classroom”. The article stated that, “... Rev Dr Elizabeth Nolan insists that none of the principal's examples were ever used at Windsor State School”; this should have stated, “... Rev Dr Elizabeth Nolan insists that the majority of the principal's examples were never used at Windsor State School.”

Additionally, the article noted, “Unlike other states, Queensland has always been open to different faith groups providing RI.” This should have stated, “Queensland has always been open to different faith groups providing RI.”

Both corrections have been made to the online version of the article.

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This is a change of name only. There will be no change to the delivery of services, the support we currently provide or our day-to-day operations as a result of our name change.

We will continue to seek to partner with congregations where we can and where there is a shared mission call.

How do I find out more?

Visit www.wmq.org.au or call 1800 448 448.

