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Should God get a vote?

With family values, abortion and intelligent design firmly on the political agenda the Australian community is reassessing the role of religion in Australia's political life.

By Mardi Lumsden and Bruce Mullan

While conventional wisdom was never to mix faith and politics, both the Prime Minister and Federal Treasurer have participated in media saturated attendances at the Hillsong Church in Sydney, and the Family First party with its strong Assemblies of God connection has campaigned successfully in both state and federal elections.

Following the lead of George Bush and Tony Blair many of Australia's high profile politicians now overtly lay claim to Christian faith and values.

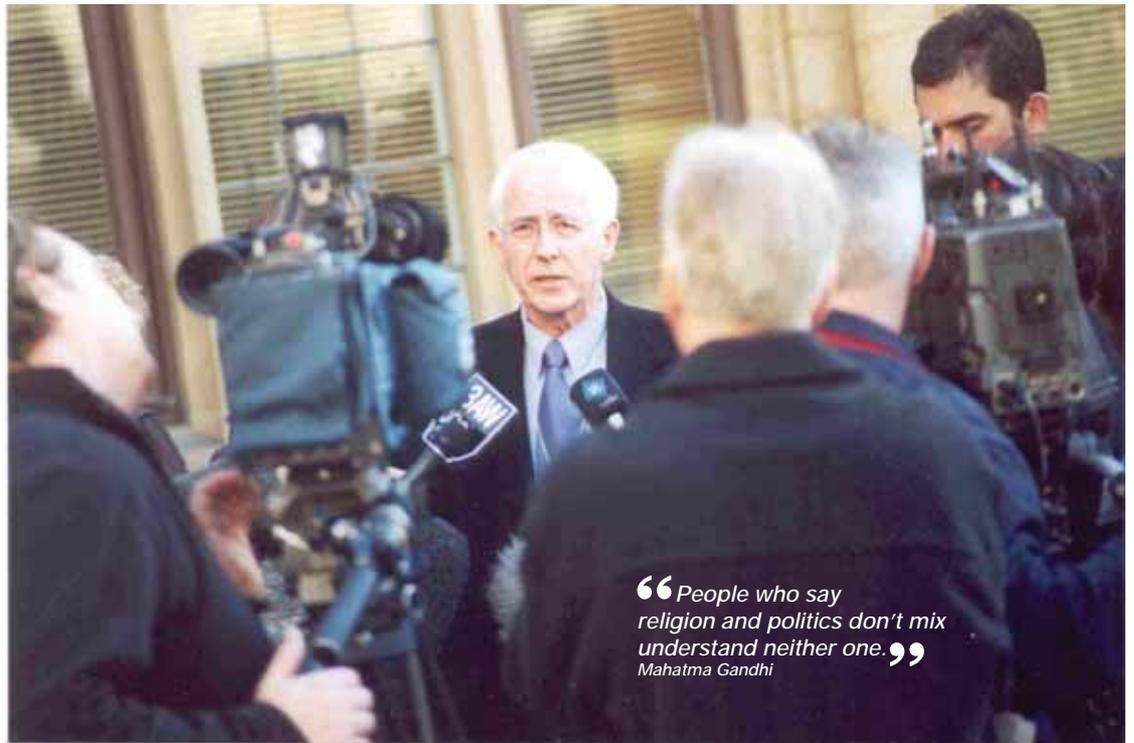
While the Australian Constitution prohibits government from imposing religious observance and states that religious test will not be required as a qualification for office, Tony Abbott, Peter Costello, Kevin Rudd and even Prime Minister John Howard wear their faith credentials on their sleeve.

Mahatma Gandhi claimed that anyone who says "religion and politics don't mix understands neither one", and self-proclaimed Christian Socialist and Shadow Foreign Minister, Kevin Rudd believes religion is back on the Australian political agenda.

"There's a general reluctance, reservation, almost aversion in this country for people mixing religion and politics, particularly demonstrable religion," Mr Rudd told ABC's *Compass* program last year.

"I come from a long history of people who have spoken about the relevance of their faith to their political beliefs.

"I think what we've seen in recent times is an increasing trend, both in the Liberal Party and other minor parties, to try and commandeer God for their own political purposes.



"People who say religion and politics don't mix understand neither one."
Mahatma Gandhi

Uniting Church President Rev Dean Drayton speaking for the church. Photo by Stephen Webb courtesy of *Insights*

"I think it's time that those people who have a view of faith from the other side of politics actually spoke out and dealt with this challenge, and I've therefore got a responsibility and others of faith within our political tradition have got a responsibility to start speaking out, and that's what we're trying to do."

Lecturer in Religion and Politics in Australia at the Australian National University Professor John Warhurst said religion has regularly appeared in many political contexts over the last five years.

Prof Warhurst points to the election of Family First party member Steve Fielding at the 2004 federal elections as a sign of the political influence of evangelical Christians but Kevin Rudd is leading a left-wing fight back.

"I think it is important for those who would support the Family First party to know what their organisational basis is, where their funding comes from and their

personnel ... But we [the Labor party] will not for one moment stand idly by while either the Liberals, the Nationals or Family First assert that God has somehow become some wholly owned subsidiary of political conservatism in this country," Mr Rudd told *Meet the Press* after the last election.

Professor Warhurst said churches continue to be active participants in political debate.

"There has been continuing church debate over issues such as IVF, abortion, homosexuality and euthanasia. There has been attention drawn to church responsibility for child abuse and the stolen generation."

The Uniting Church is renowned for its passion for justice and social responsibility, and leaders from both Synod and Assembly are regularly responding to a range of political issues such as treatment of refugees, children in detention, anti-terror laws, industrial relations law, gambling and poverty.

Controversial retired Uniting Church minister Dorothy McRae-McMahon said there is an ultimate irony in the attempts of mainstream churches to enter political debate.

"Howard in effect tells them to 'stop meddling' while at the same time taking advantage of what he sees as their capacity to deliver cheap welfare," she said in her commendation of Marion Maddox's book *God Under Howard: The rise of the religious right in Australian politics*.

Queensland Synod's Social Responsibility Advocate Andrew Johnson said seeking justice is at the heart of our Christian calling.

"If we live that calling out we will inevitably find ourselves caught up in politics," he said.

"Both Jesus' birth and his death occurred in the midst of political events, so the question for us as followers of Christ is not 'should we get involved', but 'rather how do we respond' when we find ourselves involved in politics."

Read more about religion and politics

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Moderator's message

Fools for the sake of Christ

The recent controversy, and accompanying violence, sparked by the publication in many newspapers around the world of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad, raises some pertinent questions for reflection by Christians.

It is my personal view (and I accept that there are differing opinions) that the media in general could act with a much greater degree of responsibility in such matters.

I do not support government censorship of the press, which does happen in some parts of the world, and which is invariably accompanied by various forms of oppression and injustice.

I do advocate a healthy self-regulation which incorporates common sense and a good measure of sensitivity in relation to issues that could cause unnecessary offence.

The self-righteous defensiveness of the media in response to the violence, and appeal to the freedom of the press, is what we have come to expect.

Helping to fuel controversy and conflict and then shrugging off all responsibility is common practice.



I doubt that it fools many people because we all know what the real motivation is.

On the other hand, the extensive and prolonged violence that has occurred represents a major over-reaction that almost certainly reflects more sinister behind the scenes attitudes and influences.

What has happened represents a particularly bad outcome at a time when our common focus needs to be on building relationships, understanding and tolerance across international, cultural and religious boundaries.

One dimension of the problem is that in those Muslim societies where religious devotion and national life are strongly identified, there is little understanding of the formal separation of church and state that is typical of secular western nations like Denmark, where just about anything and anyone is fair game for the cartoonist.

We consistently see the church and its clergy caricatured on TV, in the movies, and through the press.

Sometimes these depictions are genuinely funny. Sometimes, if we are honest about it, they help us to see ourselves as others see us.

The challenge for Christians, therefore, is to face the challenge of a society (clearly reflected in the media) in which a great many people see the church at best as well-intentioned and benevolent, but quaint and out-of-touch, and at worst as irrelevant, moralistic and hypocritical.

Jesus taught us to be living exemplars of the qualities that are fundamental to the nature of the Kingdom of God: reconciliation, forgiveness, peace-making, true

community, humility, servanthood.

What the world so often sees (and the media make sure of it) is disunity, exclusiveness, abuse of trust and judgementalism.

The first Christians were noticed because of their devotion to God, their strong sense of community, their generosity and hospitality, and their care for the poor.

These qualities of faith and life did not protect them from persecution, but they were noticed for the right reasons.

Mark Twain once said, "Clothes make the man. Naked people have little influence in the world."

In reality, whether clothed or naked we can still be noticed for the wrong reasons. Paul suggests that we need to put on another kind of clothing altogether.

"As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (Colossians 3: 12, 14)

There's a wonderful old fable about a very vain Emperor who loved new clothes.

However, there was an occasion when he was duped by a couple of tricksters into believing that he was wearing the new clothes they had made for him when, in fact, he was naked.

No one was prepared to tell him the truth until he was walking through the city and a little boy called out, "He's got nothing on!"

Paul has more wisdom for us. He says that it is OK to be seen by others as fools if it is for the sake of Christ, and the evidence that we belong to Christ is seen.

"When reviled, we bless; when persecuted we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly." (1 Corinthians 4: 10, 12-13)

I would suggest that we are very unlikely to be the subject of caricatures and cartoons when those are the qualities most evident in our lives and relationships.

From the Editor

Journey is pleased to be able to include in this March issue a series of five small group sessions that the Queensland Synod has produced for Lent 2006.

These studies are produced each year but this time they have been included in Journey.

The theme for the sessions is 'Agents of Grace', a wonderful topic given the current tensions both within and beyond our church community.

The small group I am part of has recently worked through the *What's so Amazing about Grace* DVD and study series by Philip Yancey.

I was reminded again how central the concept of grace is for the Christian faith and am more aware than ever of the need to exercise grace.

I am also more confronted than ever when I encounter "un-grace" from those who would claim to be Christian people.

As the third session points out, the prayer that Jesus taught us says we are to forgive those who sin against us just as God has forgiven us.

Shaking the dust off my feet sounded a much easier option but, like-it-or-not, I am called to live in fellowship in the Uniting Church in Australia with others with whom I disagree about some or even most things.

I am also called to act with grace and patience towards those who react aggressively or even violently over issues that seem relatively trivial to my way of thinking.

To all those who threaten, bully or harass me I want to say "lighten up", but the old WWJD (What would Jesus do) question demands

that I search for more loving and gracious responses.

As the Easter season approaches I hear the voice of Jesus say about his tormentors, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

Journey commends the study of Grace to all our readers. If you don't have a small group why not get one together for five weeks? If you can't, you can always read through the material yourself and reflect in quietness with God.

The prayer from week four of the Lenten Studies says this:

*God of love and grace,
forgive us when our fears,
intolerance, or indifference
create barriers between
ourselves and others.
Help us to embrace a new and
radical understanding of your
grace and purpose.
Transform our hearts and
minds today,
that we too might become
willing participants in the
coming of your Kingdom
into the life of our world and
time.
Lord, your way is the way of
love.
Inspire and encourage us to
love one another.
Help us to be open-hearted,
generous and hospitable,
especially with those who are
different from ourselves.
May your Spirit break down
the barriers that separate us,
and make us one in Jesus Christ
our Lord.
Amen.*

Bruce Mullan

Can you help?

Journey is in need of a camera tripod. If you would like to donate a second hand tripod to Journey please email journey@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au



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Osler Lau

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Communications Services Unit
Uniting Church in Australia Queensland Synod
60 Bayliss Street Auchenflower QLD GPO Box 674 Brisbane QLD 4001
Ph: 07 3377 9910
Fax: 07 3377 9796
Email: journey@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au
Web: www.journeyonline.com.au

Sign of the Times



First in the monthly *Signs of the Times* section for 2006 is from Ashgrove West Uniting Church.

Journey is pleased to announce that the winner of the best *Sign of the Times* for 2005 was Centenary Uniting Church for their sign that read, "Teddy where are you?"

That personal message made a real connection with Teddy and his family. Well done Centenary on using your sign to connect.

Journey encourages you to think about how many people pass your noticeboard each day and remember that people do read it.

They notice what you say and even think about your message.

Send your *Signs of the Times* to journey@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au. Please send large .jpg files.

Vision for Mission Advocate sees a future for the church

Rev Duncan Macleod has been appointed to the new Vision for Mission Advocate position by the Queensland Synod.

Synod Secretary Rev Jenny Tymms said the appointment of a Vision for Mission Advocate is part of the Synod's strategy to seed new mission ventures which will build intentional relationships with people of the wider community.

"We are looking to establish new initiatives which are outside more traditional church ventures."

Mr Macleod will have a pivotal leadership role in assisting the church to implement this vision which was approved by the Synod meeting at Carrara last year.

"We were looking for someone with ideas and expertise in identifying and growing creative ventures and who could provide encouragement for those who are working at the innovative edge of the church," Ms Tymms said.

An ordained minister with a background in youth work, horticulture and congregational ministry in New Zealand, Mr Macleod worked as minister of youth and families at Robina Uniting Church on the Gold Coast before joining the Queensland Synod as a Mission Consultant in 2002.

He has taken responsibility for the development of the Seeds of Hope church planting movement and, with his family, is involved in Pacific Parks, a UCA house church network on the north Gold Coast.

Mr Macleod is excited by the opportunity to serve God in this new role.

"I am strongly interested in pursuing the vision of seeding and

supporting fresh, new and culturally relevant missional communities in Queensland," he said.

"A strong part of my motivation is the desire to share the gospel in fresh ways that make sense to the unchurched."

Although Mr Macleod will no longer be a part of the Synod's Mission Consultant Team his passion for empowering local congregations and faith communities to reach out to their communities will continue to find expression in this new role.

"At the heart of the church is its call to share the good news of Jesus Christ in a way that is faithful to the biblical witness we have received."

The advocate will work closely with a small team of creative and energetic people who are experienced in working outside traditional Uniting Church structures.

This Vision for Mission Facilitation Team will work with Mr Macleod to offer support and guidance for the establishment and development of mission initiatives across the Synod.

Described by his colleagues as a promoter and networker, Mr Macleod intends to work across the Synod encouraging all kinds of people to vision new ways of being church.

"I believe that the Synod's vision will need to allow for a wide variety of models operating alongside each other," he said.

You can read more about the Vision for Mission at the new website <http://www.visionformission.unitingchurch.org.au> or call Rev Duncan Macleod on 07 3377 9809.



New Vision for Mission Advocate Rev Duncan Macleod. Photo by Osker Lau

JAMming for Jesus

What do the bands 'Soul-frame', 'Rookie', 'Half-Way Out', 'Maverick' and 'Falling Short' all have in common? They have all rocked at JAM a live music event for young people held at Emmanuel Uniting Church, Enoggera.

Each fifth Sunday in the month the 6pm service at Emmanuel

becomes a venue for quality Christian bands to come, play and proclaim their message of the good news found in Jesus Christ.

JAM has become a popular venue for youth and young adults from churches around Brisbane to enjoy a great night of music, connecting with other young people and worshipping together.

Emmanuel UC Youth Worker Tim Robinson hopes it will continue to be just that.

"Without working together, most churches don't have the opportunities to help their young people engage with other people their age in this kind of context," said Mr Robinson.

"I guess we really want JAM to be a place that can help resource other churches in this way and encourage young people in their faith in Jesus."

Emmanuel's evening worship director Nathan Robertson believes it is also a good opportunity for teenagers to invite their friends.

"JAM events are a great 'bridge' between youth group and church and we hope to expand the JAM program this year with events in local high schools.

"We hope those who come from other places will go back to their churches encouraged and uplifted by their experiences here."

For more information about JAM and other up-coming events at Emmanuel UC go to www.emmanueluc.unitingchurch.org.au or call Tim Robinson (07) 3355 2162.



Christian band 'Falling Short' performing at Emmanuel's JAM service



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Trainees head to new ground

By Mardi Lumsden

While most high school graduates are preparing for further study, apprenticeships, working or travelling, three young Uniting Church people are exploring their call to ministry with a year long traineeship in their chosen field.

Tagisa Lale from St Ives UC Samoan congregation is enjoying her work at Wheller Gardens aged care residential facility with chaplains Colin Gurteen and Ruth O'Sullivan.

Gavin Core and Monique Mawbey, both from the Emerald Uniting Church congregation, are starting their work in high school chaplaincy and congregational ministry respectively.

Both say they are well into preparations for the year and are looking forward to what lies ahead.

"Mostly so far the traineeship has been a lot of meetings, but that is good because it is preparing me for what is ahead and giving me an idea of what is going to happen this year," said seventeen-year-old Mr Core.

"I want to become a high school chaplain after I finish this traineeship and have done a bit of other stuff. I want to get back into the high schools and help out teenagers with what they're going through.

"I owe a lot to my high school chaplain, Peter Newman. He really helped me when I was going through some pretty tough times."

Mr Core graduated from Emerald State High last year and was school captain.

"I'm planing on going to university and studying teaching and drama and then I'll teach drama in high school for a while

and switch over into chaplaincy after I have got a bit more life experience."

Monique Mawbey said she is "following the minister around".

"I have been a couple of times to the aged care home. I kind of feel sorry for the old people because they have so much to share and give and nobody really willing to listen to them, and the ones that are there are too busy," she said.

"At the end of the traineeship, I am hoping to go to Bible College to become a minister. I suppose my biggest fear is that this traineeship tells me that I shouldn't be a minister. Maybe it's not God that wants me to be a minister, maybe it is just me."

For more information about the Traineeship program contact the Paul Yarrow on 07 33779866 paul.yarrow@yacmu.ucaqld.com.au or visit www.traineeships.ucaqld.com.au.



Mark McDuff and Kym Preston talk on spirituality for Generation X and Y at West End Uniting Church. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Progressive spirituality finds where the church misses Gen X and Y

By Mardi Lumsden

The Progressive Spirituality Network continued its Conversations on Spirituality with a session titled "Perspectives on Spirituality from Generations X and Y", in February.

The group meets at West End Uniting Church on Sunday evenings and is committed to exploring emerging spiritualities, the boundaries of belief, ethics, and spiritual experience especially in the light of contemporary knowledge.

Speaking with a panel of three Generation X and Yers (those born in the 1970s and 1980s) the group discussed the relevance of organized Christianity in the lives of twenty and thirty year olds.

Kim Preston, an art teacher, said church became irrelevant to her when she hit her teenage years partly because it was not a place that encouraged private spiritual contemplation.

Now working at a church-run school, Ms Preston said her creative arts department strives to help the students discover their own spirituality through creative exercises and personal reflection.

She spoke of the spiritual intelligence and insight of young people. Ms Preston said one of her year 10 students said the reason she was having trouble with her art project - to develop a personal symbol - was because 'she hadn't met herself yet'.

Jonathan Dingle a young engineer and a Christian spoke about the difficulties of working in an environment that was largely critical of mythology and spirituality.

"You lose the art of soul searching in engineering," he said.

Mr Dingle said young people are often too preoccupied building careers to explore their spirituality. He said from the outside, organised religion can look more like a social event than a focus on spirituality.

"Questioning isn't seen to be popular. Spirituality shouldn't be a comfortable place all the time.

"Young people want to be challenged. They need the church to challenge them, the world and the church itself."

Mark McDuff, the third panel member, was brought up in a conservative church environment but as a teen the church and indeed the Bible lost significance in his life and was "not enough" to sustain his quest for spirituality.

Now, as the father of two young children, Mr McDuff thinks about spirituality for his children. He said that modernising churches by putting in PowerPoint projectors and drum kits is not necessarily the answer to making organised religion relevant in young people's lives.

There was an overwhelming sense that young people want to be listened to as whole people. They yearn to be significant. These people want to ask questions. Why am I here? Why do I believe that?

The impression from young people present was that they could ask questions to a certain point but, if they questioned too far, they were not seen as Christian.

The overall feeling was that church as it is may not last, but the story will. The story will have validity.

For more information on the Progressive Spirituality Network and to see a program of upcoming events, visit www.progressivespirituality.net



Ministry trainees Monique Mawbey and Gavin Core share a joke while attending training programs in Brisbane in February. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Becoming a foster carer

Foster carers... make a difference



As part of the Queensland Government's initiative to find safe and nurturing homes for children at risk, the Department of Child Safety has recognised Uniting Church families as potential providers of loving homes for children in special need.

What to do:

- Attend an information session in your local area and attend a pre-training interview.
- Talk with children, partner, extended family and friends.
- Attend pre-service training over several sessions on several weekends.
- Lodge an official application form.
- Undergo referee, medical and criminal history checks.
- Receive a Certificate of Approval (you are now a foster carer).
- Take placements of children and young people.
- Receive support from various agencies and support groups.

Different processes can apply depending on the agencies.

For more information call the foster carer recruitment line on 1300 550 877 or visit www.childsafety.qld.gov.au

Become a foster carer

1300 550 877

www.childsafety.qld.gov.au



Church cooks Aussie breakfast for Gold Coast residents

Bacon, eggs, bush ballads and face painting kept over 5000 residents entertained at the big Australia Day breakfast hosted on the Robina Common by the Robina Uniting Church.

Newly appointed Robina Uniting Church Minister Rev Stuart Cameron said it was a great celebration and he was excited to see the community come together on such an important day.

"As a church we want to give as much back to the community as we can, and this event is a gift to the community," said Mr Cameron.

"We're drawing from all sorts of people: it's not just the church but we are in partnership with local businesses and other organisations to come together and celebrate a day we all can enjoy."

One of the more unusual activities was a fashion parade featuring recycled clothing from the church's Opportunity Shop.

Fashion parade coordinator Mrs Liz Adams said the parade featured 36 models of all shapes, sizes and ages because they wanted to show that everyone can look nice if they are wearing the right kind of gear.

"The Opportunity Shop is a wonderful symbol for the church," said Mrs Adams.

"It's a place where people can come for a second chance, find hope and, with a little bit of creativity, come out with a whole new opportunity."

This is the fifth year the Uniting Church has hosted the Australia Day breakfast and, unlike the 2005 event, the magnificent weather saw people turn out in their thousands for the free breakfast and entertainment.

Catering coordinator Mr Malcolm McMaster said they had cooked over 2000 eggs, 100 kg of bacon, 140 kg of sausages and used 230 loaves of bread.

Australia Day saw a number of UCA members honoured for their work in the community.

Mr John Martin Butters, a Lay Preacher and Elder at Cleveland Uniting Church, was awarded the Medal (OAM) of the Order of Australia in the General Division for service to education and the community through the Uniting Church in Australia.

Joyce Knight from Mt Mee was also awarded an Order of Australia medal for her work in the community.

In 1985 Mrs Knight brought together a group of ladies as a committee to rescue the Mt Mee Community Church from its derelict condition at that time.



Five year old Maddie Armstrong making damper at Robina Uniting Church's Big Aussie Breakfast. Photo by Bruce Mullan

Pastor Anne is more than just the face

Uniting Church Lay Pastor and Minister of the Mt Louisa House of Praise, Anne Harley, received the Townsville Australia Day Citizen of the Year for her efforts in co-ordinating the Stable on the Strand program.

Townsville Mayor Tony Mooney was reported by the *Townsville Bulletin* as having said that Townsville was acknowledging citizens who had achieved at the highest level.

Ms Harley claimed that she was just the face of the Stable program which only happens because so many volunteers and a good working committee make it so successful.

"There are a lot of people who work to help give our great city a spirit," Pastor Harley told the *Townsville Bulletin*.

Member of the Mt Louisa congregation Julie Hendle commended Ms Harley's enthusiasm, commitment and attitude and said she was always there at the assembling, pulling down, or final pack up and every day in between.



Pastor Anne Harley. Photo by Lori Neilsen courtesy of the *Townsville Bulletin*

"It puts her a little above being just the face," Ms Hendle said.

"To have those attributes acknowledged and honoured in such a way is a wonderful achievement for her, the Stable and the Christian community.

"I am sure you all thank God for the opportunity to know her, to have worked alongside her and believe she is truly worthy of the honour she has received."

University honours ex-President

The University of Ulster has honoured the Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture Reverend Professor James Haire.

A native of Belfast, Professor Haire became Principal of Trinity Theological College and President of Brisbane College of Theology and later was elected President of the Uniting Church in Australia (2000-2003).

In 2003 Professor Haire was elected as President of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA).

He is a leading scholar and contributor to dialogue between the Catholic Church and Protestant churches, both in Australia and beyond.

Professor Haire will receive the degree of Doctor of Letters (DLitt) in recognition of his promotion of interfaith understanding.



Former Uniting Church President Rev Professor James Haire

WHICH SCHOOL FOR YOUR CHILD ?



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Day school for boys from Prep to Year 7 in 2006
07 3906 9444
www.mbbc.qld.edu.au

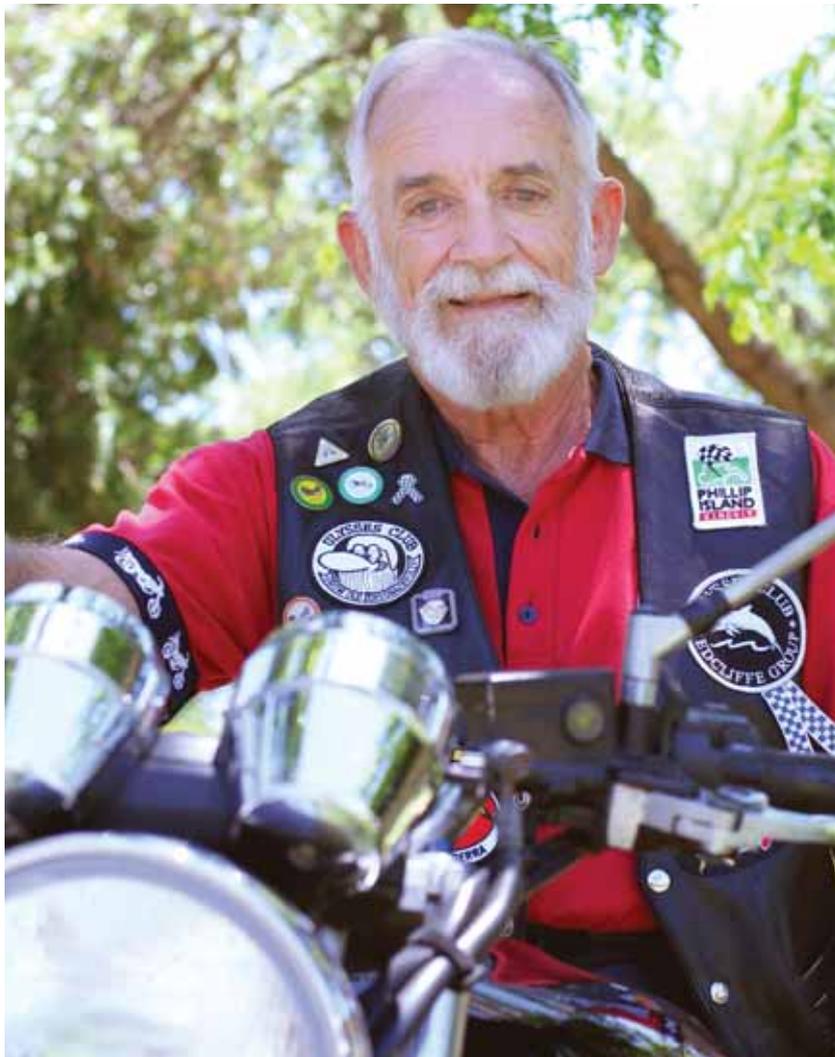
Clayfield College
Girls: Prep to Year 12
Boarding: Girls over 10 years.
Boys: Prep to Year 5.
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Sunshine Coast Grammar School
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Presbyterian and Methodist Schools Association www.pmsa-schools.edu.au A ministry of the Uniting and Presbyterian Churches, providing excellence in education in a Christian and caring environment.



Geoff Maskelyne ready to hit the road with the Ulysses Motorcycle Club. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

Sharing faith on the road

Redcliffe UC minister Rev Peter Armstrong has been talking a lot lately about church being outside a building.

One of the Redcliffe congregation who has been taking God outside the churchyard is Geoff Maskelyne, who recently conducted a service for the Ulysses Motorcycle Club Memorial Day.

The Ulysses Club for older motorcyclists is dedicated to those over 50, although anyone over 40 years can join as a junior member.

The inaugural Memorial Day was held at the 'Spit' at Somerset Dam to celebrate the lives of Ulysses members who had "ridden on". Nineteen Ulysses Clubs the South East Queensland attended and the day was mirrored nationally.

The plot, donated to the club by the Brisbane Water Board, will act as a permanent Ulysses Memorial Garden.

Mr Maskelyne has been riding motorbikes for 55 years and has been a member of Ulysses for around six years.

"I have always been fairly sensitive about cloistered Christianity," said Mr Maskelyne. "I prefer to be out where the rubber hits the road."

After working for 38 years at the organisation that became Drug Arm and ten years in Queensland Corrective Services as an agent

of Drug Arm, Mr Maskelyne said his work made him see other perspectives of becoming involved in a congregation.

"Work made me appreciate that there are a lot of Christian communities that make some people feel out of place.

"It was an intentional thing in joining Ulysses as a Christian, to be a Christian where I was at. Not to be a loudmouth, just a presence."

The Ulysses Club, Redcliffe branch, has quite a presence in their community. They have adopted Rothcoe Blue Care as a focal point.

Each year they do a Christmas run to raise money for Blue Care and attend the annual fete to give free motorbike rides.

Mr Maskelyne has a matter-of-fact approach. The memorial day was much larger than any of the organisers had expected and he was glad to be a small part of an important day.

"I did what I was asked and I felt it was a success."

By Mardi Lumsden

Coretta Scott King remembered

Coretta Scott King, the widow of Rev Martin Luther King Jr, has been remembered for her own leadership in the struggle for civil and human rights in the US and throughout the world.

"She was an unwavering advocate of civil and human rights and a champion of non-violence," said Rev Michael E. Livingston, president of the US National Council of Churches. King died on 31 January. She was 78.

King played a notable role in the US civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s alongside her late husband. After her husband's assassination in 1968, Mrs King became a leader in her own right, pledging: "I'm more determined than ever that my husband's dream will become a reality."

Among her legacies was the creation of the Martin Luther King Jr Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

US President George W. Bush said, "Mrs King's lasting contributions to freedom and equality have made America a better and more compassionate nation."

Chris Herlinger ENI
www.eni.ch

Amazed by School Packs response



Heather den Houting sorts piles of coloured pencils ready for the backpacks. Photo by Mardi Lumsden

As the School Packs for the Solomons project gains momentum, the goal of filling 800-1000 backpacks is drawing close.

"We have been overwhelmed by the response," said project coordinator Heather den Houting.

"This project appears to have touched a nerve in the church and community, and people are responding above and beyond all expectations.

"The stories we are hearing about people who are receiving unexpected help and assistance from shops, and those churches who are having special services to bless the packs are deeply moving, and reflect a real sense of community.

"What has also astounded us is the number of donations we have received.

"Because we have no doubt we will achieve the targeted number of backpacks required, with the donated funds we are planning to buy class sets of books, chalk and duplicating paper for the teachers."

However, the number of backpacks that are coming in has overwhelmed the staff, who did not

expect such an instantaneous and enormous response.

"We are currently calling out for volunteers who would be able to help us sort and pack backpacks into boxes ready for shipment to the Solomons.

"If you or your youth group could spend any time in assisting with this it would really help us get the backpacks ready for shipment."

If you can help over the next few weeks, please contact Heather den Houting on 33779805, or email heatherdh@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au.



Why should Christians be involved in politics?

By John M. Hitchen

For some the political arena is still seen as part of the 'world' they are to shun. For others it is a stage to commandeer for a public evangelistic testimony to the nation.

Others appear to regard politics as the scene in which to work as reactionaries to bring in a Christian theocracy in which legislated morality will overcome all the woes of modern society - assuming political coercion can change the human heart.

Others, who see political involvement as a human responsibility they share with all their fellow-citizens, are at odds about the way to develop economic, educational or welfare policies.

As Harold Turner noted, 'we need a theology and philosophy of the political realm'.

This begs the foundational question, 'Why be involved in the political system at all?'

God the Father instituted and oversees the political realm as much as every other part of creation.

His nature and his role as the active ruler of our universe provide the basic reasons for our political involvement.

We must be involved in the political issues of our day because we share the life of the Living God who is himself just, and who seeks justice among humans.

As the central theme of his earthly teaching ministry, Jesus announced he had come to inaugurate the 'reign of God'.

His kingly rule embraces and influences every realm of human life, politics included. He is indeed, 'Lord of all'.

Our political task involves demonstrating to our modern world with all its political forces what it means to represent the one whose lordship embraces all the powers at work in the universe.

Jesus was often surrounded by active members of the political parties of his day but acted deftly

in this political environment.

His response to their question sets out the basic answer to all such questions about our duty to government: "Give back to the Emperor what rightly belongs to him and give to God what rightly belongs to Him."

For Jesus, the Christian has a duty *both* to government *and* to God. We are to repay what we owe the government for the services it provides and at the same time we are to honour God as our true King and true Lord.

Jesus was not teaching that political responsibility and our duty to God are two distinct areas of duty to keep separate from each other. One part of our life does not belong to God and a different part to the government.

Good government and valid political and societal concerns all derive ultimately from God who gives his gifts without partiality.

Christians do not have a monopoly on political commonsense. Other people have sound moral judgement.

Christians in politics will be quick to recognise and acknowledge the validity and insights of others, work with them for the common good and will seek to bridge the differences between different sections of the community.

While there are issues against which we must take a stand, a merely combative mentality will ensure Christians are marginalised in the political arena.

We need to become known for what we are for, rather than for what we are against.

The commands to submit to government authorities are preceded by strong pleas to, "Do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge..."

One important reason for seeking to be salt and light in our community arises from lessons from biblical history about the role of the prophet which, although



seldom respected and often opposed, is of more lasting value than the might of the sword or the legislation of the state.

As comparatively insignificant minor prophets we know that the Good News we gossip to our neighbour about right living before Christ Jesus contains the dynamic to transform both individuals and, through them, communities.

We seek to ensure humble, discerning and widely-respected Christians are elected to parliament because we want their presence and words to continue to inform, to challenge and to guide opinion by contributing positively to public moral awareness and good political sense.

Too often we have said too little, and that too late, so that we have only ourselves to blame if Christians are regarded as reactionary traditionalists rather than astute moral leaders.

Only a few of us are likely to

be called into a full-time career in politics and even amongst these we need to beware of assuming that the "right" thing is for them to express their calling through membership in an overtly Christian party.

We need always to be careful about claiming that we represent the Christian position on a political issue.

Reinhold Niebuhr warns that 'we must never declare our politics to be 'Christian politics', thereby implicitly excommunicating those Christians who disagree with us'.

Richard Neuhaus says pointedly, "Christians engaged in politics will bring personal integrity and devotion to the common good. But that does not make their engagement 'Christian politics'. It is still just politics."

"A Christian engineer who builds a really good bridge has not built a 'Christian bridge.' The merit of the project depends upon qualities pertinent to the 'bridginess' of the

thing, although we may believe that these qualities are well served by the Christian conviction and integrity of the builder."

Christ-like humility will surely characterize any Christian involvement in politics, so one-eyed dogmatic and/or proud triumphalistic approaches will therefore be excluded for the Christian.

To quote Neuhaus again, "Christians are called to walk not the road to political victory but the way of the cross."

John M. Hitchen, BA, BD, PhD is Lecturer in Missions at the Bible College of New Zealand and Pathways Bible and Mission College. This is an extract of a longer article posted on the Evangelical Alliance 2004 Election Home Page <http://www.evangelicalalliance.org.au/election/aWhyShould.htm>

Every Day with Jesus author dies

Selwyn Hughes died on 9 January ending a ministry that spanned more than six decades, in which he uniquely combined the roles of writer, pastor, counsellor and teacher.

He also founded CWR (Crusade for World Revival), an international organisation that has spearheaded the training of Christian counsellors, leaders and workers throughout the world and that continues to produce Christian resources, including the bestselling *Every Day with Jesus*.

Born on 27 April 1928, Selwyn Hughes was inspired by the faith of his family. Many of his relatives had been influenced by the great Welsh Revival of 1904 and, at the age of 16, he professed his

own Christian faith. Following ministerial training and ordination as an Assemblies of God minister, he served in a number of churches.

In 1965 he initiated a series of short daily Bible-reading guides, written on blank postcards, for the benefit of friends and church members. Demand exceeded supply and soon these guides became a bimonthly publication.

Now *Every Day with Jesus* is read daily by nearly a million people all around the world.

Remarkably, he personally wrote every issue of *Every Day with Jesus*, only occasionally assisted by other writers. He continued to write prolifically for over 40 years, during which time he weathered the vicissitudes of life, including

the death in 1986 of his wife, the tragically premature death of their two sons in more recent years, and his own serious illness.

The writing of *Every Day with Jesus* had always been the first call of God on Selwyn's life and, in more recent months, when no longer able to travel, it gave him great pleasure and satisfaction to continue writing *Every Day with Jesus* and thus continue to reach the world and minister to nearly one million people every day.

He was therefore able to be well in advance in his writing schedule. In agreement with Selwyn, plans are in place for his ministry through *Every Day with Jesus* to continue into the future.

(Source: *Crusade for World Revival*)

CHILDREN & YOUNG FAMILIES COORDINATOR

The Uniting Church Beenleigh Region in South-East Queensland is seeking a full-time Coordinator for ministry to children and young families.

This exciting position is open to a lay, specified or ordained person.

For an information pack call the church office (Tel 07 3807 5969) or email to beenleighuc@dovenetq.net.au, or contact Rev Dennis Robinson on 0418 714 432.

Applications close 31 March 2006.





Brad Chapman, living the connection between faith and politics

Finding peace in politics

Brad Chapman is a self-professed high school dropout. The 22 year-old left school as a young entrepreneur to run his own mortgage broking company on the Gold Coast. Here is a young Christian who is exploring the world where religion meets politics.

As a teenager, Mr Chapman became interested in both Christianity and politics. Now he finds himself actively participating in both and seeing the potential to make a difference in his world.

At 21 years of age, he was selected as a member of the National Youth Roundtable (NYR) in 2004 and 2005.

The National Youth Roundtable is the Australian Government's key mechanism for youth consultation. It brings together 30 young people from all over Australia and from different walks of life and gives them direct access to Government and an education in the way the

Australian Government works.

"I have always been fascinated with 'power' and the mechanics of how things are 'made to happen' within society. Hence my interest in politics and the political process. I'm not affiliated with any particular political party or even ideology, I need the freedom to stand and argue on whichever side of the issue I believe is right," he said.

Mr Chapman has recently begun working with the Anglican Board of Mission, as Projects Officer to the Evangelism and Church Support Program.

"This provides an amazing opportunity to work with Partners throughout Australia and the world and to participate in God's mission. I hope to continue to learn and grow and in a sense to offer my life as a living sacrifice – however humble and insufficient.

May tomorrow find me still trying to identify where God is at work and attempting to reflect

some of the light of the author of life."

However, how does his faith intersect with his political and social agendas?

"My faith in a loving and merciful God who calls God's people to walk in the steps of Jesus forms the core of my identity and dictates who I am. As such, my faith is inseparable from those things that are important to me in a political/social context. That said, I don't see faith itself as a political issue – in the sense that I don't think political influence should be used to persuade or enforce adherence to any particular faith. I do however, feel that the manifestation of my faith demands that I be active in a political/social context."

"As messed up as both church and politics can be at times, both remain legitimate avenues for influencing and changing society. While I don't advocate working solely through politics or the institutional church; for good people to desert these areas would impoverish us all."



Papuan Island Region enterprises in Salamo making coconut oil. Photo courtesy of Ray Scarlett

Women head to WCC Assembly

The World Council of Churches celebrated increased participation by women at its 9th Assembly held in Brazil in February.

Leaders from the world's largest grouping of churches said that 45 per cent of participants were females.

"The WCC provides a space for women," said Agnes Abuom, the WCC's Africa regional president on 14 February, the opening day of a global meeting of the council's highest governing body that is held once every seven years.

The theme of the event was "God in your grace, transform the world" and major issues discussed were Muslim / Christian relations in light of the Danish cartoon furor, globalization, and climate change.

WCC general secretary Rev Samuel Kobia said climate change represents one of humanity's most dire threats and he has appealed to denominations around the world

to speak with one voice to alert political leaders to tackle the issue.

"Just as atomic weapons changed the very way we thought about life, so too the potential of major climatic changes put life as we know it in danger," said Mr Kobia.

Kobia, a Methodist from Kenya who took office as WCC general secretary in January 2004, has repeatedly emphasised the need for churches to respond to a global shift in the centre of gravity of Christianity from the northern to the southern hemisphere.

The gathering marked the mid-point of the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence: 2001-2010, an initiative launched at the last council assembly in Harare. Mr Kobia says it has taken on increased urgency following the continuing conflict in Iraq and a war on terror.

The WCC consists of more than 340 churches representing some 550 million people all over the world.

Do you recognise anyone in this photo?



This has been identified as a photo of a Synod meeting of the Methodist church at Beenleigh in 1955.

Perhaps you recognise some of these fathers and mothers of the church. Thanks to Rev Ian Lord and the late Mrs Hilda Shepherd for

Sharing the hope

Uniting Church people are invited to make a Lenten gift to six worthy projects in Asia, the Pacific and Australia.

Ask for a set of Lenten Appeal offering envelopes from your local Uniting Church.

Make Lent 2006 a time where you share the hope. Read the Lenten studies on pages 9-12 in this edition of *Journey*.

1st Week of Lent: 5th March. **Education for Leadership.** East Timor, one of the world's newest nations is also one of the poorest. This project will support the Protestant Church in East Timor in preparing young people for future leadership.

2nd Week of Lent: 12th March. **Pacific peace building initiative.**

This project will enable a three week peace-building course for 300 leaders from the Protestant Christian Church of Bali.

3rd Week of Lent: 19th March. **Region enterprises.** This project will fund training opportunities for young Papuan Islanders in carpentry, engineering, boat building and repair, general shop and financial management.

4th Week of Lent: 26th March. **Training elders, women and youth.** This project will assist and facilitate participation of Indigenous Australian elders, youth and women in the "Tomorrow's Leaders Today" conference.



2005 YAP delegates

5th Week of Lent: 2nd April. **Urgent manse renovations.** This project will fund the urgent need to replace the asbestos roof of the Uniting Church manse on Thursday Island.

6th Week of Lent: 9th April. **Young Ambassadors for Peace.** This project will provide week-long YAP workshops to assist local communities in strife torn Sri Lanka.

For more information visit the Synod Website at www.ucaqld.com.au.



Lenten Studies

2006

Agents of Grace

Introduction to Lenten Studies

These resources are offered to Uniting Church congregations in Queensland for group study and/or personal reflection during Lent or at some other time during the year. The sessions link some biblical texts, passages from the Uniting Church Basis of Union and other writings, with a series of questions designed to explore the subject of Grace.

When we consider the subject of Grace it calls us to focus both on the nature of God and on our personal and corporate responsibility to be "agents of Grace".

There are some underlying assumptions in these five sessions about how God speaks to us. *The Basis of Union* acknowledges 'that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated'. It also refers to foundational documents and God's continuing revelation to the church. *The Basis of Union* is itself a foundational document for the Uniting Church. We are indeed people on the way, but not without guidance.

If used in groups these sessions are designed in a way that does not necessitate a group having a leader. Group members

share in facilitating the conversation and encouraging all to participate in the discussions. This is also a reason for the suggestion that a different person speak the blessing each week. The role of ministry in the Uniting Church is a shared responsibility.

The material in this Journey Lenten Studies "lift-out" is copyright free for use in congregations and by groups.

The group process

The sessions follow a standard format but differ in content and emphasis. Each session will have:

Prayer – an opening prayer which is taken from Uniting in Worship 2, a book of prayers and resources for ministers and others leading worship. The same opening prayer is used for each session.

Read – a passage or story from the Bible usually in the Contemporary English Version translation. As this is not a "Bible study" as such, it is preferable for people to use the translation provided rather than rely on various versions. There are also short extracts from *The Basis of Union* and quotes from other writers relating to the theme.

Reflection – a brief reflection on the theme for the week.

Talk about – some questions for group

discussion or individual reflection. The purpose is to explore the scripture, the understandings of the people of faith and the theme for the session.

So what? – one question to focus us on some practical outcomes or application of the theme in our daily lives.

Prayer – people are invited to participate in a shared prayer but please feel free to use other prayers or an open prayer time.

Blessing – the same blessing is used for each session. It is recommended that a different person offers the blessing to the group each week.

There will probably be more questions than some groups can use or have time to talk about. Feel free to pick and choose those questions which are most helpful to the group process.

The opening prayer to use each week

Come to us, God of love.
Come with your extravagant kindness and your goodness.

Come, that we may see you in the people of every race and culture;
that we may embrace you in the lonely, the bereaved and the rejected;
that we may be an accepting and a caring church:

Come to us, God of love.

Come to us, God of unity.
Come with your forgiveness and your healing grace.
Come, that we may witness to reconciliation for a divided world;
that we may gather around Christ's table as one people;
that we may affirm one church, one faith, one Lord:
Come to us, God of unity.

Come to us, God of hope.
Come to us with your promises, come in your mysterious presence.
Come, that we may marvel at your faithfulness in past generations;
that we may celebrate the new things you are doing among us today;
that we may be your pilgrim people on our journey to your kingdom:
Come to us, God of hope.
Amen.

The blessing to use each week

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Week 1 - Grace Filled World

Lenten Studies 2006 Agents of Grace

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth ... From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. (John 1: 1,14,16 *New Revised Standard Version*)

In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the world's sin. Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God... (*The Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3)
"And the Word became flesh." In these five short words the central mystery which John will unfold is stated with absolute simplicity. It lies wholly beyond the power of flesh and blood, of the will of man [humanity], to pass from darkness to light, to lay hold of the life of God. But what is impossible has become a fact by a movement in the opposite direction. God ... has become [hu]man and "pitched his tent" among us. (Lesslie Newbigin *The Light Has Come*)

Reflection

Does God care about us? Does God even understand us at all?

Not long ago we were looking at Christmas cards showing the baby Jesus lying in a manger. John's Gospel has no such pictures but begins Jesus' story in quite a different way. It is the story of one who was there from the beginning. This "Word" was there at the beginning of time and it was through this Word that all was created.

Later on in this brilliant passage at the beginning of John's Gospel we have the shocking statement "the Word became flesh". Shocking not least for the people of the time who first heard this, that such a divine idea and being could become flesh and blood like every other human. Humanity and God are connected in the most intimate way.

The Word-in-the-flesh is full of "grace and truth". Behind the language of this phrase are the Old Testament words describing the principle of God's faithfulness, constancy and love. God who kept covenant relationships in Old Testament times is faithful now, even before we get a chance to enter into any agreement or sign on any dotted line.

In a world where earning a living, affection, a place in society, earning a degree or a promotion are highly regarded, the idea of something done for us which we haven't

earned is a difficult concept to grasp. That is the joy and the shock of grace, God's gift. Before we even thought about or grasped the concept of God, before we could do anything, grace was there for us in Jesus Christ.

As we begin our steps towards Easter we also experience the scandalous story that this Word-in-the-flesh (like all other flesh) dies. Dies for our world, for us, for our friends, for our loved ones, for people we don't know – dies for life.

From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace – before we were even born – wonderful grace for us all. Yes, God does care and God does understand. Faithful God camps with the world.

Talk about

"Grace" can mean anything from saying a prayer before a meal to describing the undeserved generosity of God. What meanings of grace can you think of? What does grace mean to you?

What is the most grace-filled thing anyone has ever done for you? If you feel comfortable to do so, share the story with the group.

Has there ever been a time you felt God didn't care about or understand you? If you feel comfortable to do so, describe the situation and how you feel looking back on that now.

Does having Christ described as the "Word" offer you any new insights into who Christ is? How do you think Christ is the "Word"? Talk about what it cost Jesus Christ, as the Word present from the beginning with God, to become "flesh".

So What?

Make a list of all the things we earn in life. How is grace different to this? How is God gracious to the world and what does this mean for us and others?

Prayer

God, you have given us your Word in Jesus Christ, born a helpless baby, growing as a person who got tired, hungry, thirsty, hurt and misunderstood, dying as a human in extreme pain. He didn't have to do that God. We thank you for grace and for the gift of life. You are with us, thank you. Amen.

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

Week 2 - Grace Embodied

Lenten Studies 2006 Agents of Grace

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock. Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock. Anyone who hears my teachings and doesn't obey them is like a foolish person who built a house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Finally, it fell with a crash. (Matthew 7:24-27) CEV

Jesus himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain. In raising him to live and reign, God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore to God on earth, reasserted claim over the whole of creation, pardoned sinners, and made in Jesus a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love. To God in Christ all people are called to respond in faith. (*The Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3)

This divine calling has appeared to us personally in Jesus and has taken shape in his personal call: to be converted, to take a different course from the one that we have been on, since the kingdom of God is now near. Therefore for those who have not heard

this historical call of Jesus, there is the good news of this event given by the Christian community in the world which is itself grace and power... (Edward Schillebeeckx *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*)

Reflection

For the Christian, the ultimate source and experience of life-giving grace is Jesus Christ. Grace - in all its fullness, diversity, hope and disturbing reality - has become uniquely focused and enfleshed in this extraordinary, historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the one in whom the grace of God is not only visible. He is the one who claims God's unique authority to lavish this grace on all who seek him.

Jesus' assumption of divine authority, including the authority to dispense God's grace, is highlighted in our bible reading. It was taught in Jesus' time that those who listen to the Torah (God's Law) and put its teachings into practice by doing good works, build on good ground. But here we have Jesus exclaiming, "Anyone who hears and obeys *my* teachings..."

God's grace is not only expressed in the teachings of Jesus, it also reverberates through his healings and exorcisms, his forgiveness of offenders, his parting with outcasts and 'sinners' and his relationships with the poor and marginalised. In all Jesus' encounters we encounter the embodiment of God's love and valuing of all people.

For the rich and respected, God's grace in Christ comes to provoke and disturb - to challenge the powerful to a freer way of living, the way of God's kingdom. For the broken, poor and powerless, Jesus embodies the grace of hope, community and self worth.

Ultimately, the grace embodied in Jesus is experienced as freedom. Freedom from: estrangement from God; the crippling power of life's destructive forces; meaningless living; the fear of death and freedom to pursue a future of hope, justice and dignity in service to God and others.

Throughout its history the Church has affirmed that it is through this grace-embodied life of Jesus, lived in full surrender to the love and will of God, even to the extremity of his unjust death on a Roman cross, that a spiritual dynamic has been released. This dynamic, experienced supremely in Christ's resurrection, and feely available through the gift of the Holy Spirit, empowers Jesus' followers to begin to embody that same grace in their lives and relationships.

Talk about

What is the best recent example of Grace that you have read or heard about? Share it with the group.

From your life experience talk about which of the teachings of Jesus you have found to be most wise and helpful.

Where do you see grace embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus? Share some

examples from scripture with the group.

What for you is unique, special or different about Jesus' authority compared with that of other religious leaders?

So What?

What were/are the consequences of living a grace embodied life:

For Jesus himself?

For yourself?

For the Christian community?

For the wider world?

Prayer

Gracious God,
The law was given through Moses;
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
We thank you for your grace to us embodied in your Son, Jesus.
Give us the power and freedom through your Holy Spirit to live daily in the integrity of that grace so that we may be true to our calling as people who make a difference for Jesus in this age.
Amen

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

Week 3 - Grace and Forgiveness

Lenten Studies 2006 Agents of Grace

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

Peter came up to the Lord and asked, "How many times should I forgive someone who does something wrong to me? Is seven times enough?" Jesus answered: Not just seven times, but seventy times seven!

This story will show you what the kingdom of heaven is like: One day a king decided to call in his officials and ask them to give an account of what they owed him. As he was doing this, one official was brought in who owed him fifty million silver coins. But he didn't have any money to pay what he owed. The king ordered him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all he owned, in order to pay the debt.

The official got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me, and I will pay you every cent I owe!" The king felt sorry for him and let him go free. He even told the official that he did not have to pay back the money.

As the official was leaving, he happened to meet another official, who owed him a hundred silver coins. So he grabbed the man by the throat. He started choking him and said, "Pay me what you owe!"

The man got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me, and I will pay you back." But the first official refused to have pity. Instead, he went and had the other official put in jail until he could pay what he owed.

When some other officials found out what had happened, they felt sorry for the man who had been put in jail. Then they told the king what had happened. The king called the first official back in and said, "You're an evil

man! When you begged for mercy, I said you did not have to pay back a cent. Don't you think you should show pity to someone else, as I did to you?" The king was so angry that he ordered the official to be tortured until he could pay back everything he owed. That is how my Father in heaven will treat you, if you don't forgive each of my followers with all your heart. (Matthew 18: 21-35) CEV

The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ has commanded his Church to proclaim the Gospel both in words and in the two visible acts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ himself acts in and through everything that the Church does in obedience to his commandment: it is Christ who by the gift of the Spirit confers the forgiveness, the fellowship, the new life and the freedom which the proclamation and actions promise; and it is Christ who awakens, purifies and advances in people the faith and hope in which alone such benefits can be accepted. (*The Basis of Union*, Paragraph 6)

The angels of God hold their breath to see which way we will choose to go. (CS Lewis)

Reflection:

Jesus' answer to Peter's question leaves us with the challenge of living out grace and forgiveness. Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer we make a commitment to God to "forgive those who sin against us", and yet offering forgiveness is often the most difficult thing to do.

Jesus story offers forgiveness as a way of life rather than a rule to obey. We experienced forgiveness and grace and may long to offer it to others, but how does a person who has been badly abused, or suffered pain, hurt and distress, forgive the abuser and the institutions that support the abuse?

Theologian Karen Lebacqz suggested

that those who have been abused should love their enemies but not lose sight of the fact that they need to survive in the midst of those enemies.

This implies that forgiveness that emerges from grace aids and strengthens a person's ability to heal and empowers them to confront the originators of abuse, pain, hurt or distress. Forgiveness moves us beyond the sense of victimhood and helps us see both ourselves and those who have harmed us as recipients of the grace of God.

This is echoed in the story of Jesus' crucifixion. He understood that he was living among those who were his enemies and sought to kill him, yet he did not take the role of victim. Rather he took the role of one who demonstrates grace even in the face of death.

Jesus' admonition at the end of this story reflects the reality that if we do not recognise the interconnectedness of the victim and the abuser, we will find ourselves in torment. Those unhealed moments where forgiveness has not occurred become our own prisons.

The Basis of Union points us to the sacraments of baptism and communion which remind us that we live in grace of forgiveness. The concept of forgiveness is essential to the ability to engage in fellowship and to encounter the new life and freedom, which is promised through Christ.

Talk about

What for you is the most impressive act of forgiveness you have read or heard about? Share it with the group.

What do you find are the easiest things to forgive? What are the most difficult?

What do you find most difficult to seek forgiveness for?

People say, "I'll forgive but never forget!"

How can we hold the pain of the hurt in tension with a commitment to forgive?

So What?

If your faith community was to begin to radically express grace through forgiveness where would you start and what would make it difficult? Talk about relationships inside the community as well as relationships with those beyond the community.

Prayer

Beloved, faithful and enduring God
We confess our times of struggle and disbelief, when we are asked to do the impossible.
We hear from you that we are forgiven and yet we can hardly forgive ourselves, let alone each other.
Lord, you ask us to journey with you into places beyond rules and formulas, and into a life that comes with the understanding of eternal forgiveness, grace and freedom.
We can hardly believe our ears, as our struggles to live in such grace so often fail.
And yet Lord, we hold tentatively to the understanding that you have given us life in all its fullness, and to the incredible reality that through Christ, our sins are always forgiven.
Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

Peter then said: Now I am certain that God treats all people alike. God is pleased with everyone who worships him and does right, no matter what nation they come from. This is the same message that God gave to the people of Israel, when he sent Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, to offer peace to them.

You surely know what happened everywhere in Judea. It all began in Galilee after John had told everyone to be baptized. God gave the Holy Spirit and power to Jesus from Nazareth. He was with Jesus, as he went around doing good and healing everyone who was under the power of the devil. We all saw what Jesus did both in Israel and in the city of Jerusalem. Jesus was put to death on a cross. But three days later, God raised him to life and let him be seen. Not everyone saw him. He was seen only by us, who ate and drank with him after he was raised from death. We were the ones God chose to tell others about him.

God told us to announce clearly to the people that Jesus is the one he has chosen to judge the living and the dead. Every one of the prophets has said that all who have faith in Jesus will have their sins forgiven in his name.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit took control of everyone who was listening. Some Jewish followers of the Lord had come with Peter, and they were surprised that the Holy Spirit had been given to Gentiles. Now they were hearing Gentiles speaking unknown languages and praising God.

Peter said, "These Gentiles have been given the Holy Spirit, just as we have! I am certain that no one would dare stop us from baptizing them." Peter ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and they asked him to stay on for a few days. (Acts 10: 34-48) CEV

(The Uniting Church) believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries, and to this end the Uniting Church commits itself to seek special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific. The Uniting Church declares its desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches. (*The Basis of Union*, Paragraph 2)

In 1985, Henri Nouwen abandoned academic life and went to live at "Daybreak" in Canada, a community for the severely disabled. "Daybreak assigned Nouwen one person to look after in particular: Adam. Adam was the weakest and most disabled person in the community...he could not speak, dress or undress himself, could not walk alone or eat without help...Yet Nouwen gradually learned that he, not Adam, was the chief beneficiary in this strange, misfitted relationship...From Adam he learned that 'what makes us human is not our mind but our heart, not our ability to think but our ability to love.'" (Philip Yancey *Soul Survivor*)

Reflection

Peter's radical declaration was made in the home of a gentile, a Roman Centurion. Prior to this event, the focus for the early Christian church had been on Jews alone. There was a great gulf between Jews and Gentiles,

centuries of conflict, mistrust and hatred.

This meeting between Peter, Cornelius and the Holy Spirit was a turning point which changed the whole course of church history. It was now clear that God's family was open to all who would join it, regardless of race, colour, language or culture.

Cornelius and his family were gathered into the Christian community, and became people of the resurrection. We do not hear of Cornelius again, yet his story remains to remind us that the faith he embraced, and into which he was baptized, is the faith we continue to affirm and declare today.

This real-life story demonstrates what Jesus meant when he said, "Love one another as I have loved you." To be true to what Jesus asks of us, we too have to identify and confront the barriers that separate us from others: fear, prejudice, judgemental and critical attitudes, an unforgiving spirit, and anger. We are called to repent and pray for God's grace to help us change our attitudes and our behaviour.

Just as Jesus took the initiative in loving us, just as Peter took the initiative in going to Cornelius, so we have to decide to take that first step that will break down the barriers separating us from others, and make reconciliation and relationship possible.

Talk about

Reflect on the personal, vocational, cultural, or theological diversity represented in the membership of your group. How could any differences you have identified potentially be sources of conflict and division?

What attitudes and behaviours have you consciously abandoned or rejected over the years because you have identified them as being contrary to the spirit and teaching of Jesus?

What do you personally find most

challenging and/or helpful in the declaration Peter made in the home of Cornelius?

Henri Nouwen's relationship with Adam had a profound impact on his life. Has there been an "Adam" in your life, someone very different from yourself, whose impact on you has been just as radical and life-changing? Share this with the group.

So what?

How can the grace of God shape your community of faith's response to the difference and diversity it experiences within itself and beyond itself?

Prayer

God of love and grace, forgive us when our fears, intolerance, or indifference create barriers between ourselves and others.

Help us to embrace a new and radical understanding of your grace and purpose.

Transform our hearts and minds today, that we too might become willing participants in the coming of your Kingdom into the life of our world and time.

Lord, your way is the way of love. Inspire and encourage us to love one another.

Help us to be open-hearted, generous and hospitable, especially with those who are different from ourselves.

May your Spirit break down the barriers that separate us, and make us one in Jesus Christ our Lord.

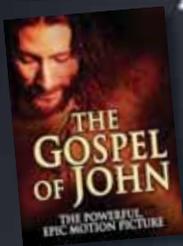
Amen.

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

5 weeks of MOVIES

Here are five movies which explore the theme of Grace that you can rent from your local video store on VHS or DVD to watch during Lent. Please note the rating and that these are not necessarily "Christian" movies.



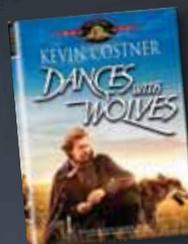
Gospel of John

For God loved the world so much – the story of Jesus' life as told in John's Gospel. (PG13)



Pay It Forward

Sometimes the simplest idea can make the biggest difference – a young boy finds a way to make the world a better place. (M)



Dances with Wolves

Lt. John Dunbar, exiled to a remote western Civil War outpost, befriends Indians and finds himself letting go of all he knew. (M)



Chocolat

A woman and her daughter open a chocolate shop in a small French village and shake up the rigid morality of the community. (MA15+)



Changing Lanes

The story of what happens one day in New York when a young lawyer and a businessman share a small automobile accident and both find their lives set in new directions. (M)

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

As Jesus was telling what the kingdom of heaven would be like, he said: Early one morning a man went out to hire some workers for his vineyard. After he had agreed to pay them the usual amount for a day's work, he sent them off to his vineyard.

About nine that morning, the man saw some other people standing in the market with nothing to do. He said he would pay them what was fair, if they would work in his vineyard. So they went.

At noon and again about three in the afternoon he returned to the market. And each time he made the same agreement with others who were loafing around with nothing to do.

Finally, about five in the afternoon the man went back and found some others standing there. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"

"Because no one has hired us," they answered. Then he told them to go work in his vineyard.

That evening the owner of the vineyard told the man in charge of the workers to call them in and give them their money. He also told the man to begin with the ones who were hired last. When the workers arrived, the ones who had been hired at five in the afternoon were given a full day's pay.

The workers who had been hired first thought they would be given more than the others. But when they were given the same, they began complaining to the owner of the

vineyard. They said, "The ones who were hired last worked for only one hour. But you paid them the same that you did us. And we worked in the hot sun all day long!"

The owner answered one of them, "Friend, I didn't cheat you. I paid you exactly what we agreed on. Take your money now and go! What business is it of yours if I want to pay them the same that I paid you? Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Why should you be jealous, if I want to be generous?"

Jesus then said, "So it is. Everyone who is now first will be last, and everyone who is last will be first." (Matthew 20:1-16 CEV)

... so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them by faith. (*Basis of Union*, Paragraph 10)

The community of saints... is a community of men and women who have genuinely encountered the precious grace of God, and who walk worthily of the gospel by not casting that grace recklessly away. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Reflection

Like so many words in the Christian vocabulary, 'grace' has been sentimentalised, trivialised and, at worst, emptied of its specifically Jewish and Christian meanings.

For Dietrich Bonhoeffer however walking worthily of the gospel of grace meant living a life of costly discipleship and ending that life dangling from a hangman's noose. So, even as it reassures us of God's love, the idea of grace can be quite confronting.

In the Old Testament, especially the Prophets, the idea of grace is tied up with God's freely chosen and steadfast covenant with Israel and the demand this placed upon Israel to respond to God in kind.

The idea of grace is confronting because it reminds us that, just as Israel did not invent itself, neither did or does the church. In the New Testament, even if the word "grace" does not appear on the lips of Jesus, it is used to summarise his teachings, his death, the entire drama of his mission, and the content of the apostles' preaching.

In other words, the very event which calls the church into being (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus) flows entirely from God's grace. As a community of this grace, the church has no intrinsic right to exist. As gracious communities, therefore, churches ought to be communities which are constantly surprised by their own existence. They will express that surprise in the relationships that exist amongst their members and, as Jesus points out in this Bible story, they should pause before grumbling about the other unlikely people that God calls into the community.

Detached from this sense of surprise, the church's proclamation of God's grace, whether it be through word or deed, will easily slip into legalism.

The framers of *The Basis of Union* did well to remind us that God's grace is not something self-evident: we are to be "again and again reminded" of it.

Talk about

What have been the significant 'grace tests' for your community of faith?

Which biblical images and stories have most shaped your understanding of God's grace?

How do you find yourself reacting to Jesus' story of the "Labourers in the Vineyard"?

How would you say that your community of faith has a sense of being "surprised by grace"?

So What?

What "words and deeds" would be required of your community of faith in order to clearly declare and demonstrate God's grace?

Prayer

God of grace, you surprised Israel by calling it into a covenant with you. You surprised the world by sending your Son to redeem it. We are surprised that you have included even us in the church. Help us never to recklessly cast away your grace, but to live by it and demonstrate it to the world in word and deed. Amen.

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

Textual notes

Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations in these resources are from the *Contemporary English Version* copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society, used by Permission. The CEV is an American Bible Society translation and is readily available from bookshops or the Bible Society. The text is easily read by school age children, second language readers and those who prefer the more contemporary form. The CEV is not a paraphrase. It is an accurate and faithful translation of the original manuscripts.

The original text of *The Basis of Union* was the document around which the union of three older traditions, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian, came into being in 1977. While the original text was finalised in 1971, where it is quoted in these resources the 1992 edition is used. The Basis of Union was prepared at a time when the desire for gender-inclusive language was only just emerging. By the 1990s some people were finding aspects of the language of the Basis to be rather curious, and at certain points jarring and even alienating. The Assembly Standing Committee therefore approved the publication of the 1992 edition, which incorporates relatively conservative changes to the language of the Basis, while seeking to retain its meaning <http://nat.uca.org.au/basisofunion/Basis1992.htm>.

Uniting in Worship 2 is a new set of worship resources released in the Uniting Church in 2005 which gives local congregations scope to develop worship relevant to their own setting. The book and accompanying CD-ROM provide range of worship services and resource templates for congregations to use for the production of local booklets. *Uniting in Worship 2* can be ordered through the Uniting Church in Australia's publisher, MediaCom 1800 811 311 or <http://mediacom.mediacomonline.org.au>.

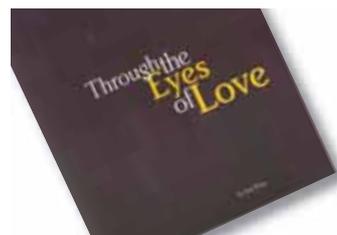
Lenten Studies 2006

Writers: Malcolm Coombes, Graham Beattie, Heather den Houting, David Pitman, Geoff Thompson
Project Coordinator: Duncan Macleod
Editor: Bruce Mullan
Layout: Osker Lau

Other small group study options

If you have used these Lenten Studies and would like some other resources to work through as a group why not consider these options?

God's Word, God's World, Towards the 11th Assembly, is a series of four short resources designed for use as discussion starters for small groups, congregations and faith communities who are interested in celebrating and exploring ways they can live out the mission to which God calls us. Print quality copies of the discussion sheets can also be purchased through the Assembly's publisher MediaCom (1800 811 311). The worksheets are being sold in sets of 4 (any combination) at \$3.00 per set (incl GST) and \$2.50 per set (incl GST) for purchases of 4 or more sets plus P&H. Alternatively you can download them for free from the Assembly website <http://assembly.uca.org.au>.



Through Eyes Of Love by Rev Dr Ian Price. Five studies that explore the person and impact of Christ on five key personalities of the New Testament - Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, Luke and Paul. Each of these sources of scripture and leadership provide unique insights into the way Jesus changes life and offers hope.

Spirit of Life by Rev Dr Ian Price. These five studies seek to explore God's gift of life as a positive experience of relating personally with God. They will help the group explore life as a good gift from God; establish order in the midst of chaos; experience mercy and power through the Spirit's presence in us; and conclude with a focus on the possibility of knowing wholeness within.



All the Ian Price studies are available from MediaCom 1800 811 311 or <http://mediacom.mediacomonline.org.au> \$9.00 per book or \$8.00 for ten or more.

Looking for more options? Try Duncan Macleod's excellent *Educating Christians* website, an A to Z of resources for Christian education in Uniting Church congregations. This site includes detailed reviews of small group and Christian education resources. <http://educatingchristians.unitingchurch.org.au>.



A Sensual Faith by Rev Dr Ian Price. This series of five studies sets out to explore the ways we experience God through our senses. Drawing on some of the great traditions of the faith, the studies lead the group through an intriguing array of experiences and group discussions



Wisdom's Way by Rev Dr Ian Price. It is said that we "have too much knowledge but too little wisdom these days". This set of five studies by Ian Price explores some of the key biblical ideas about wisdom.

What the UCA says

These are statements from the Uniting Church in Australia responding to contemporary issues in Australian culture. *Journey* stresses that these are not the full documents. This is a brief sample of the standings the Uniting Church has presented to the public. More information can be obtained from <http://assembly.uca.org.au/news/mediareleases/index.htm>.

Who we are?

The kinds of values that hold us together are a commitment to the Scriptures as the word of God and a passion for justice and social responsibility for all people in our community. We aim to be an inclusive community that holds together different views, cultures and expressions of faith through the unity given in Jesus Christ. As one of the largest non-government providers of community services in all parts of Australia, we are committed to reflecting the love and grace of God in caring for people, in advocating for those with special needs and for the equitable and appropriate provision of social services. (<http://assembly.uca.org.au/whoweare/UCA.htm#topofpage>)

Refugees - Treat people humanely and responsibly

The Moderator of the Uniting Church in Queensland Rev Dr David Pitman has released a statement regarding the arrival of a boatload of West Papuans understood to be seeking asylum in Australia.

"Most people will be aware that a boat carrying about 40 refugees from West Papua has landed on the coast of Cape York. Initial media reports suggest that the Indonesian Government is attempting to label these folk as political dissidents," said Dr Pitman.

"We need to remember that West Papua is a country annexed by Indonesia with minimal protest from the international community, and subject to military occupation.

"In recent years thousands of people from other parts of

Indonesia have been moved to West Papua to reinforce the notion that it is a genuine part of that nation. In the process the West Papuan people have suffered greatly."

Dr Pitman indicated that the Uniting Church will be monitoring this matter closely.

"It is our conviction that the Australian Government is obligated to treat these people humanely and responsibly, in accordance with the commitments made last year.

"It is also essential that our Government continue to actively pursue conversations with the Indonesian Government with a view to ending human rights abuses in West Papua."

(*Journey*, 19 January 2006)

Children in detention - Uniting Church calls for immediate release

The Uniting Church has again called for the immediate release of all children from Australia's detention centres.

UnitingJustice Australia National Director Rev Elenie Poulos, said she was outraged the Government has ignored the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report into Children in Detention and its recommendation that all children be released from Australia's immigration detention centres by today.

"This is a Government which claims to be supportive of families and children yet its policies are destroying children's lives. There is absolutely no excuse for robbing children of their innocence."

Uniting Church President, Rev Dr Dean Drayton said he hoped today's protest would help to end the detention of children once and for all.

"The Uniting Church opposes the policy of arbitrary and indefinite detention of all asylum seekers, especially children.

"Any Government that would allow children to suffer physical and mental abuse in a detention centre is effectively sanctioning violence against them for its own political gain."
(10 June 2004)

Immigration policy - Invitation-only visa is a rotten deal

The Uniting Church has expressed frustration and disappointment with the regulations for the new Bridging (Removal Pending) Visa which gives the Minister for Immigration absolute power and offers no rights of appeal for people who take up this visa.

National Director of UnitingJustice Australia Rev Elenie Poulos, said that while the visa is an acknowledgement by the Government that the indefinite detention of asylum seekers is unacceptable, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) has again failed to demonstrate compassion or decency.

"We are very concerned that people can only apply on invitation from the Minister. On what grounds will people be invited and on what grounds will they be denied?"

"There is no right of administrative appeal in relation to this visa and it could well be used by the Minister and DIMIA to keep people locked up indefinitely on the grounds of undisclosed issues of 'character'," Rev Poulos said.
(13 May, 2005)



Abortion - Compassion and balance

"The Uniting Church believes that human life is God given from the beginning. We believe that all human beings are made in the image of God and that we are called to respect the sacredness of life.

"Wereject two extreme positions: that abortion should never be available; and that abortion should be regarded as simply another medical procedure.

"It is important that women have the space they need to make an appropriate decision after careful consideration. The current abortion laws allow women to do this in whatever circumstances they face.

"Women must be free to discuss their situation before they make a decision. The Church needs to be a place where such discussion can happen. We can offer spiritual, moral and pastoral support to a woman at this time.

"Whilst we encourage our Ministers to remind people of the sacredness of life, the Church's role should be to offer care and support leading up to and following a decision, not stand in judgment."

Rev Dr Dean Drayton, President
(3 February 2005)

RU486

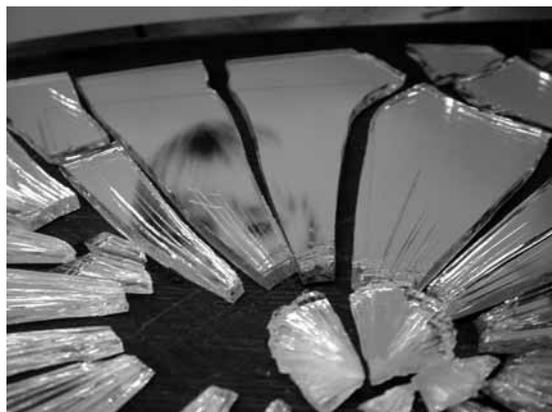
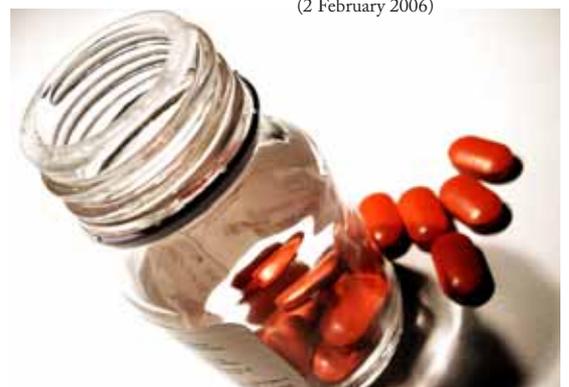
"It is our view that the current campaign against RU486 confuses medical, moral and political issues. As the Uniting Church understands it, the issue is whether or not this particular drug is safe to be released for use in a country where abortion is legally available. This is a decision that should be made by the Therapeutic Goods Administration using sound medical evidence and advice.

"It is our belief that RU486 should not be made an exception from this independent process purely due to its application as an abortifacient. Termination of a pregnancy is legal in Australia, however fraught politically or morally. As such, the drug should be evaluated by proper trials in the same way as any other therapeutic

drug or procedure. Public policy on the matter should depend on scientific evidence as to the safety and effectiveness of the drug. This issue should be viewed separately to a debate on the moral and ethical issues of the abortion procedure itself.

"The Uniting Church has no unified national position on the abortion procedure... We respect the rights and opinions of others involved in this debate; and we recognise that within our own church, there will also be a variety of views. However, we do not believe this current debate about the use of a particular drug should be used as a plebiscite on the broader issue of abortion."

"From a letter to the Senate from Rev Elenie Poulos - National Director UnitingJustice Australia
(2 February 2006)



Violence against women - Uniting Church seeks elimination

Uniting Church President, the Rev Dr Dean Drayton, has urged Australians to wear a white ribbon on Friday, 25 November (2005) in support of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW).

Dr Drayton said; "The Uniting Church will continue to support the elimination of violence in

all its forms. Sexual violence is a sin against God and against humanity and at its root is the practice of inequality between the sexes. We must ensure that a concerted community effort is made to address this endemic violence against women."
(24 November 2005)

Stolen wages

- Uniting Church rejects deadline

The Uniting Church in Australia has called on the Queensland Government to extend the deadline for Stolen Wage claimants.

Uniting Church President, Rev Dr Dean Drayton and the National Administrator of the Uniting Church Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) the Rev Shayne Blackman said they supported the moves by The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation to oppose the imminent reparations offer deadline from the Queensland Government on the 31st December

2005.

"This deadline imposed by the Queensland Government for reparations is suggestive of an administration increasingly becoming misaligned to their responsibilities in improving Indigenous outcomes and I feel saddened by their resolve," Rev Blackman said.

Dr Drayton said the Church has long called for practical measures and committed leadership on Indigenous issues as a way to help overcome the legacy of our history. (9 November 2005)



Anti-terror laws

- Australia is on a dangerous path

The Federal Government's anti-terror legislation puts Australia on a dangerous path according to the Uniting Church President, the Rev Dr Dean Drayton.

"While every Government has a responsibility to protect its citizens, these new laws send a clear message that the only way to do this is to erode people's rights. They have the potential to create an atmosphere of fear and distrust in Australia.

"We are concerned the Government has failed to allow adequate time for public discussion and debate about the proposed laws.

"Preventative detention without

judicial sanction is out of step with community expectations of accountability and transparency... The Government must ensure that this legislation is not open to abuse."

Rev Drayton said the Church was also concerned that these new laws could threaten freedom of association and speech. "We are especially concerned that these laws will result in suppression of peaceful activism, religious freedom and expression, and may encourage discrimination against members of the Islamic community."

(18 October 2005)



Child Care - Families need flexible, affordable options

Flexible, affordable child care should be a priority of the next Federal Government to ensure all families are able to balance the needs of work and family life.

Rev Dr Dean Drayton, said the Church wanted to see a child-centred approach to children's services that focused on what is in the best interest of children and recognised their developmental, spiritual and social needs.

Dr Drayton said families deserved real answers on how each of the major parties would ensure child care is more affordable, within close proximity, and available to all families at the times they need it. (27 September 2004)

HIV Funding - Church welcomes boost

Uniting Church National President Rev Dr Dean Drayton welcomed a doubling of Australian Government funding to treat and prevent HIV/AIDS.

"We applaud the Government for committing an extra \$300 million to combat the virus in the Asia-Pacific region - a region where last year 1 million people were infected and half a million people died.

"While infections have been relatively stable in Australia, the Uniting Church has constantly made the point that Australia has an obligation to the rest of the world, especially our neighbours in the Pacific.

"Two of our National Directors wrote to the Prime Minister late last year urging for an increase in the level of government funding to combat HIV/AIDS." (12 July 2004)

Unemployment

- Churches are committed to jobless

The President of the Uniting Church, the Rev Dr Dean Drayton has responded to claims by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry that the Churches were ignoring jobless Australians.

"The Uniting Church has been one of the most outspoken advocates of the poor and the unemployed in Australia and we believe that stable employment is one of the best ways to alleviate poverty and disadvantage.

"We have advocated to government for many years about the need to create more jobs, but not at any cost. In 1994, in a public statement about employment we said that the goal is paid employment for all who want it, at adequate wages to ensure that all employees can afford to meet the human needs of themselves and their families, and with some reward for competence'."

(13 October 2005)



Industrial Relations

- Reforms set to hurt workers

The Uniting Church has called on the Federal Government to rethink its approach to further deregulation of the Industrial Relations system.

UnitingJustice Australia National Director Rev Elenie Poulos called on the Government to protect the wages and conditions of Australia's lowest paid workers.

"We must remember that the purpose of a strong economy is to help Australians access secure and equitable standards of living. The labour market is not like any other market. People are not commodities in the service of greater profits and should not be exploited."

(26 May 2005)

Poverty - call to make it a top priority

UnitingCare Australia is part of a contingent of Church based service providers that have called on the re-elected Coalition government to make the most of Australia's economic stability and prosperity by committing to a National Anti-Poverty Plan.

UnitingCare, Anglicare Australia, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Catholic Welfare Australia and the Australian Council of Social Service called on the government and all politicians returning to Canberra to create a well resourced National Anti-Poverty Plan to help the poorest Australians.

(18 October 2004)

Why the Uniting Church speaks on social and political issues

The UCA offers comment on social issues as part of our involvement and commitment to the community. As we proclaim the Christian message in the political arena, we proclaim a vision of God's world - a world of compassion and justice founded on being a common humanity, loved by God.

Jesus preached about the love and deep commitment we are to have for each other that God expects from us. Jesus explained that acting to serve those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned, is an action of love and respect for God (Matthew 25: 33-36).

Jesus' greatest commandment to us was to love God and to love our neighbour (Matthew 22: 37-39). These verses allow us to see how strongly Jesus was committed to all of humanity in his proclamation of redemption and forgiveness, and also in his expectation of our compassionate

response to our neighbour and the world.

In James 1:26-27 we are invited to put our words into practice and care for those who are orphaned and widowed. In today's context we understand these words to mean that the grace of our compassion must extend to those who are marginalised and dispossessed in our community.

We are each called to be messengers in this world. Personal transformation is essential in this process. Only with the energy and guidance of the Holy Spirit can we truly work as Christians in the world. The message of God is real in the world as well as in our hearts.

The call to justice and righteousness is a fundamental message of the Bible, from Amos' declaration of the transformed community (Amos 5:24), to the requirements in Micah, to do justice, love constantly and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).

[<http://assembly.uca.org.au/unitingjustice/resourcearchive/elections/election2001/election2001.pdf>]

Keep up with the latest www.journeyonline.com.au

Deeper wells bring relief

By Cath Taylor

When the heavens finally open and the earth tips back its head to drink, all of creation breathes a sigh of relief. In front of television screens all around the country, men, women and children smile and nod skywards, and news of the drought dries up across front pages all across the nation. But it doesn't end there...

Frontier Services Remote Area Families Service Coordinator Davida Melkshan said that most people are familiar enough with the images of drought-cracked earth and desolate cattle but harder to measure, and certainly less interesting to capture on film, are the social impacts - the effects of drought at the personal level.

"When the rain comes, the stories in the media about the impact of drought slide off the front pages and are replaced with things that are more relevant," she says.

"Unless you're faced with it every day, you forget that the human face of drought continues to be serious even after the rains come and even after things pick up in the material sense, there are long term

implications for relationships that are harder to repair."

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Frontier Services Remote Area Families Service and Family Carers are so highly valued in the areas in which they work.

"Sometimes we drive away from a visit feeling really quite helpless," Davida acknowledges, reflecting on RAFS workers' visits to stations to run playgroups or socialise with mothers and children.

"These are the intangible, almost invisible issues you observe when you spend time with women consistently.

"It's hard for people to articulate those things to strangers, but when you're in their homes, meeting them for coffee, playing with their children, you pick it up just by being with them."

Remote Area Families Service have direct contact with families on stations three or four times a year, but also maintain constancy and contact through phone calls, newsletters and informal meetings in town.

RAFS Team members are



Photo courtesy of Frontier Services Remote Area Family Service

lateral, creative thinkers who develop relationships and genuinely delight in human contact, and long after the rains have come and gone, it's those deeper wells that will continue to bring relief.

Lorraine Kath with her husband Henning, daughters Leah and Cassandra, and son Jacob, are managers on a company property at Mt Leonard in Western Queensland.

The nearest centre to the property is Birdsville, 170 kilometres away, and at the height of the drought the property ran only 400 head of cattle on an area of 1.9 million acres.

"That was really scary," Lorraine says. "There's a waterhole here that in all of history has never been empty. For a day during 2002, it dried up completely. We were looking at having to truck in water just for things like showers and toilets.

"My children complete distance education through School of the Air and we're really happy with it.

"I cook for the staff when there are extras on the property, do the book work, gardening and was teaching prep via distance ed for a year there, so it's pretty busy, but I wouldn't have it any other way."

Lorraine speaks of the difference it makes to have the RAFS teams visit the property, bringing resources for her preschoolers and a listening ear for the adults.

"The RAFS teams are just really special people," Lorraine says. "Any time we are in town we drop in for a chat, and it's good to know that when they come to visit, you can talk to them about anything at all.

"The RAFS teams are loved by everyone."

A longer version of this article was published as "Deeper Waters" in *Frontier News*, February 2006 www.frontierservices.org.

Research puts rural churches under the microscope



Dr Rol Mitchell researched the contribution made by the church in country towns.

After six years of painstaking research into the significance of the Christian church in an Australian rural community Dr Rol Mitchell reports that the church is not irrelevant but rather is right at the heart of rural communities.

Dr Mitchell and his wife relocated for eighteen months to a small country town in western NSW where he immersed himself in the community to research his PhD thesis.

Since graduating at the age of 70 as Charles Sturt University's oldest ever PhD student Dr Mitchell has released *Country Life and the Church* as the published version of his thesis.

The town he chose had 3000 residents and was typically rural, with a declining population suffering the effects of drought.

"Yet it had 11 active churches including two charismatic Pentecostal churches which had grown significantly in the past decade," Dr Mitchell said.

After initial scepticism and suspicion from some residents Dr Mitchell managed to take a comprehensive survey which showed that the church was making significant contributions in a number of community areas.

As a lifelong committed Christian and accredited Uniting Church Lay Preacher, Dr Mitchell said that he needed to make sure that people felt free to criticise aspects of the church so went to great lengths to maintain professional neutrality in the research and data analysis.

Dr Mitchell found that 68 per cent of people undertook 84,000 hours of voluntary work each year in the community.

The work was carried out by regular churchgoers who were just 15 per cent of the community.

Dr Mitchell has published his research in a book *Country Life and the Church* which he hopes will be useful to ministers and others interested in the rural church.

"In spite of the erosive influences of secularisation and rural recession, the church is still a significant contributor to the quality of rural life," said Dr Mitchell.

"It was the beating heart of this community, but it wasn't obvious until I started looking for it.

Country Life and the Church is published by Glenlea and is available from Dr Rol Mitchell, 28 Western View Drive, Albury, NSW, 2640 for \$39.00 post paid email rmitchel@postoffice.csu.edu.au

Pioneer nun is key speaker for UnitingCare

Outspoken Catholic Nun and Associate Professor University of Western Australia Sr Veronica Brady will be a keynote speaker at the UnitingCare Australia and Uniting Missions Network National Conference to be held in Brisbane in March.

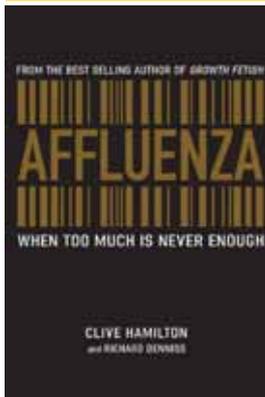
Born in 1929, Veronica Brady became one of the first Australian nuns to teach in a university, broadcast on radio and join in socio-political debate.

She has spoken out publicly against the Vatican stance on abortion, homosexuality and contraception, and has been involved in the Aboriginal rights movement and the anti-uranium mining lobby.

Other speakers will include former Uniting Church President Rev Professor James Haire, Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture.

The conference will be held 26-28 March in Brisbane. Contact Sally Brown 07 3201 2808 or visit www.nationalconference2006.com

Reviews



Affluenza. When Too Much is Never Enough
By Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss
Allen & Unwin
RRP \$24.95

Once upon a time in our Western society, people looked to Christianity, or at least the church, to determine truth, right and wrong. With the onset of the enlightenment, science became the ultimate arbiter of truth.

These authors argue that in today's world truth, right and wrong are more and more being determined by commercial factors. In other words, if something will make a profit, it is now the "right" thing to do.

This is the worldview that Clive Hamilton and Richard Denniss set out to expose in their book, *Affluenza. When Too Much is Never Enough*. These two men from the Australia Institute—a public interest think-tank—pull no punches in claiming our whole society is sick with over consumption.

With arguments showing that doctors are more influenced by pharmaceutical company advertising than scientific literature; that 25% of British children's first words will be brand names; how we could ever vote for tax-cuts for the rich while letting health slide; and how we gambled away our vote buying a baby bonus; their argument is compelling and prophetic.

As I read this book St. Paul's "secret" to contentment in any situation rang in the back of my mind (Philippians 4:10-13). The authors are not Christians, but they speak with a prophetic voice the church needs to rediscover. Our apathy to affluenza is a much more insidious problem than our over-preoccupation with sexuality.

The authors don't just complain but offer ways off the treadmill. Down-shifting and a "new politics" will challenge what you are doing. If you're more technically minded, Clive Hamilton's best-selling first book on the subject, *Growth Fetish*, is also a must read for those wanting help to burst forth from the political and economic malaise of our society.

Paul Clark

The Future of Jesus – The Boyer Lectures
By Dr Peter Jensen
ABC Books 2005
RRP \$22.95

What is the place of Jesus in our culture and memory? For this most recent Boyer lecture series the ABC chose Jensen, outspoken conservative and controversial Anglican theologian, to address Jesus' place in contemporary society. Jesus looks invisible, as four Australian academics nonchalantly quote Abraham Lincoln, "a house divided against itself cannot stand". (Lincoln was quoting Mark 3:25)

In seven readable chapters Jensen explores the transformation of Christian thought from the revitalisation movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear and brutality of life in the Graeco-Roman World to its current invisibility.

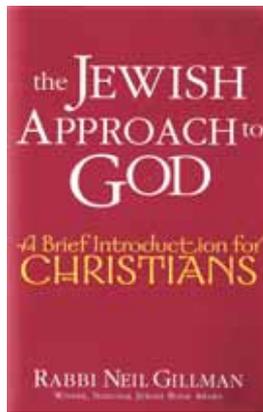
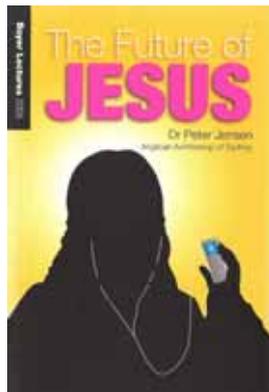
While some reviewers have been dismissive of Jensen's unashamed focusing on Christ alone, Jensen makes this important comment; "Fundamentalism is not refuted with a sneer; if it needs refutation it is refuted by theology."

In a theological diverse community polarised between conservative and progressive, there is a need to understand the underlying thinking which gives rise to current disagreements. *The Future of Jesus* is a useful starting point for understanding the basis for authentic conservative evangelical thought.

In our rapidly changing social context we have two alternatives: to refine our faith and practice in the light of what seems inevitable around us or to attempt to explain the mistakes of the past that have led to our current attitudes. Jensen does the latter. For example, in his last chapter he addresses the commonly held notion, especially among those controlling the media, that faith is private, both unjustifiable and irrefutable.

Whether Jensen's suggestions for re-establishing Jesus in contemporary thought are compelling, will be a matter for careful reflection. Agree or disagree with him *The Future of Jesus* is definitely worth a read.

Robert Brennan



The Jewish Approach to God: A Brief Introduction for Christians
By Rabbi Neil Gillman
Jewish Lights Publishing
RRP \$29.95

Ever thought of becoming a liberal Jew? Rabbi Neil Gillman sets smartly forth his modern theology of the nature of God as a taster for you in his latest work *The Jewish Approach to God: A Brief Introduction for Christians*.

Admittedly, religion is not the sort of thing one tends to change as often as one's toothbrush – no matter how good the taster. So, if you're ever going to read Gillman's book I think there will have to be some other good reasons to pick it up.

Perhaps you are interested in understanding some of the age-long Jewish wrestling with the God of Israel and its bearing upon today? Perhaps you have been wondering about the discrepancies between God's popular portrayal and his appearance in classic Jewish sources? Or perhaps you are fascinated with the origins of some of the many different ways Jewish people have understood and related to God?

In *The Jewish Approach to God* Gillman eruditely explains in simple language the central issues of Jewish theology and philosophy regarding the nature of God. He tackles this substantial task through looking at different metaphors for God in the Jewish scriptures, each picture telling something more of who God is and the relationship the Jewish people have with him. These metaphors include God is Echad, God is power, God is person, God creates, God reveals, God is nice (sometimes) and God is not nice (sometimes).

While the framework is an historical one, Gillman's point of view is decidedly modern in flavour. He attempts to engage the Christian reader with recurring comparisons to Christian doctrine. This is helpful insofar as it puts his thoughts in perspective with more familiar theological terrain. However with only 146 pages

to do the work, the comparisons are inevitably, at times, a tad tokenistic.

Religious allegiance aside, I enjoyed the proficiency of Rabbi Gillman's writing. Just don't grab it as a substitute for *Every Day With Jesus*.

Emma-Kate Moore

Walk the Line
Directed by James Mangold
Starring Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon
Rated M for drug use, moderate themes, infrequent coarse language

Walk the Line is a great movie about the power of soulful music in the 1950s and 1960s, describing the lives and romance of country singers Johnny Cash and June Carter. Cash (played by Joaquin Phoenix) married Carter (played by Reese Witherspoon) in 1968 and they died, months apart, in 2003.

The movie pivots on Cash's memory of his brother, Jack, who was killed in a farming accident in 1944, and his relationship with his unforgiving father.

Walk the Line is also very much June Carter's story; a gospel singer, songwriter and comedian who lived in a world of judgement following two failed marriages and her association with Cash, "the Man in Black".

This is a superb musical bio-pic. I was especially moved by Cash's response to his many fans in prison; connecting with their plight out of his own struggles with drug addiction, sorrow and a perceived failure to be anywhere as good as his late brother. Cash's growth as a musician and performer is watered by these tears. Phoenix and Witherspoon sing all the songs and deserve all the awards that this film attracts.

This film highlights the influence of gospel music on the direction of country and rock musical performances and the power of music revealed in the heights, which emerges from the utter depths, of life. This is the power of *Walk the Line*; a must-see movie for 2006.

Mark Young



Brokeback Mountain
Directed by Ang Lee
Main cast Heath Ledger, Jake Gyllenhaal, Linda Cardellini, Anna Faris, Anne Hathaway, Michelle Williams, Randy Quaid
Rated M for moderate coarse language, moderate sex scenes, moderate violence.

Feeling I should see the movie first and make my judgments later I headed off with a mate to see *Brokeback Mountain*. Being a pair of men going to see this movie was itself as confronting as the brief sex scenes both gay and heterosexual in what is otherwise an outstanding film.

After all the uproar around its release *Brokeback Mountain* was not as exploitative as I had expected. While the relationship between the main characters oscillates between love and lust, the film is more a moving and heartbreakingly tragic drama than a pro-homosexual statement.

Based on Pulitzer Prize-winner Annie Proulx' short story and co-adapted by fellow Pulitzer Prize-winner Larry McMurtry the script and dialogue are as understated as the magnificent Wyoming and Texas scenery is spectacular.

Taiwanese director Ang Lee produces an almost melodic amalgamation of visual and narrative elements that, despite the provocative story line, makes this film close to a cinematographic triumph.

Perhaps because of the many unanswered questions and a distinctly non-Hollywood, untidy ending *Brokeback Mountain* has stayed with me. Every character is outstandingly played and so believable I could only wonder at the painful consequences the men's infidelities would reap on each extended relationship.

Despite all the anti-gay controversy *Brokeback Mountain* is a story of people with very conventional attitudes about homosexuality. And while the love is forbidden, thwarted and tragic, this is none-the-less a powerful story about relationships that challenges conventional and simplistic responses.

Don't just dismiss it as a gay cowboy movie; somewhere beyond the furore *Brokeback Mountain* will be remembered as magnum opus, a truly consummate film.

Bruce Mullan

Read more reviews online at
www.journeyonline.com.au

Prayer Diary

12 March:
Trinity Wilston

Trinity Wilston Uniting has a strong history. Only in the last couple of years, it celebrated its ninetieth year as a worshipping community. A number of the members of Trinity Wilston have long ties with the church and also with the community. Wilston is a close community with pride and commitment to each other. You can also see this in places like the local state school, where there are strong links between families and the school. Trinity Wilston and families that are part of our church community also participate in this strong sense of community that exists within Wilston.

Alongside this strong community is a great ecumenical spirit and Trinity Wilston benefits and is a contributor to this wonderful spirit that exists between the churches in the Wilston area. Please continue to pray that God will continue to bless us and that the churches in Wilston and the surrounding suburbs will bring glory to God by continuing to work together as God leads us.

Late last year Trinity Wilston had its annual market day, and there was a very good response from its local community as people wandered in to browse, buy and just chat as they enjoyed the variety of stalls that were on offer. It was a great time of fellowship and outreach and was a tribute to the hard work put in by many people.

Trinity has been involved in supporting valuable projects in places like East Timor. Our Sunday Club over the last couple of years supported a significant project that allowed a community in East Timor to be more self supporting. Last year again our children worked together to support missionaries with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Africa.

Please pray for:

- Our teachers and children of Sunday Club in 2006 as they look forward to another blessed year learning more about and serving the Lord;
- Bible studies and pastoral concerns have always been very important to the Wilston church;
- Pray for our Bible study group that meets on a Sunday night as we seek God's will in our lives. Wilston has a pastoral heart and this is especially seen with new people who come into the church. They are always made to feel welcome and even if we don't always see them too often, they know that when they do come back they will always be accepted as they are;
- Pray for our Cameo group, an adult fellowship group that meets once a month. This group has been meeting regularly for some time, and continues to provide a place of warm hospitality and fellowship to all-comers. Cameo also is

very supportive of other church activities and is characterised by generosity of members' time and commitment.

• Pray for our church as we seek God's leading this year in how we are to serve and be a part of his mission in our community.

Thank God for our Well Balanced group that meets twice weekly that began from a belief by one of our members in providing supportive intervention through gentle exercise classes to those members of the community who may benefit from falls prevention and balance improvement. It grew over a period of time to what is now quite a large group of participants. Well Balanced is indeed a blessing from God and something that those who participate in and help organise can be proud of.

19 March:
Wolston Parish

Wolston parish includes Goodna UC, Redbank Plains UC and Goodna Samoan congregations.

Goodna sometimes feels like a bit of a forgotten place. It is on the main highway west of Brisbane, but teeters between Brisbane and Ipswich, not really sure where it belongs. In people's minds it is associated with the nearby psychiatric hospital and prisons. Newer, more upmarket estates surround it, but leave Goodna itself untouched. Goodna is not the most desirable postcode – which probably makes it the kind of place where Jesus would feel at home.

Our prayer points are:

- For our leaders- acknowledge what has gone on before but realise that we have the chance to provide a new model of ministry in this area to those who have a disability, those who are doing it tough financially, those in prison, those who are sick and elderly who are shut in and unable to make a contribution to the community.

- For unity amongst the churches regardless of denomination;
- For spiritual growth for our church in terms of becoming more aware of God's presence in our lives, and how our faith impacts on our families and the worlds we are part of;
- To encourage young people – to be part of the church in new and exciting ways;
- For effective prayer for young parents – so that we can reach them in new ways, and help them to find faith;
- To live in harmony in spite of our diversity of culture, language and background;
- Crossroads: give thanks for the Wolston branch – that new leaders will come on board, and for the Crossroads that they would grow in their understanding of God and the friendships that they make;
- For the play groups that meet at Redbank plains on a Friday morning;

• For the Samoan congregations, that they may continue to encourage and disciple people in the way of Christ;

• For new directions, guidance and growth in spiritual understanding for the church communities and the communities the church serves;

• For us all to have a greater understanding and thirst for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives;

• To take the challenge to change from being members to being disciples;

• For peace in the world – for tolerance amongst people;

Thanks for Richard Marlow being among us – for his leadership that gives us the hope for the future and for the plans in store that God will reveal.

26 March:
Albany Creek

Albany Creek is alive with expectation as we look ahead to ministry in 2006.

This year we welcomed Peter Gavel as the new leader of our Youth and Children's ministry team. Peter will be working with our young adults developing leadership skills and exploring the call to discipleship through worship and small group discussion. We thank God for the wonderful work already done by our previous youth worker Brian on which we are able to build.

Peter will also be working as School Chaplain at Ormiston State Primary School. We pray for Peter as he seeks to share faith in Christ in many and varied ways and across many age groups

We ask for prayer for:

- A new initiative with the parents of our preschoolers. A small team of dedicated members is seeking to help young parents to feel welcome within our church community, and to support them as they seek to nurture their children's faith;

- For Ann Hewson and her ministry team at Bray Park. Anne and her dedicated team continue to find creative ways to connect with the communities of Bray Park, Warner, Lawnton and surrounds. We pray that God will continue to strengthen and guide them.

We thank God for the wonderful gift of Mel Perkins who is in field placement this year at Albany Creek. We have already been blessed by Mel's loving caring nature. We pray that she may learn as much through us as we will learn through her.

Albany Creek is a busy congregation, members give unstintingly of their time and talents. We ask for special prayers for the success of the "Quiet Days" planned to be held throughout the year. On these days we will take time out to be still and to listen for the still small voice of God so often missed in the hustle and bustle of our everyday lives.

What's on

Wednesdays (during Term time), 9.15-11.30am. GUCCE – Gap UC Craft Experience at 1050 Waterworks Road, The Gap. Term 1 includes Scrapbooking, Beaded Jewellery, Hand sewn Reversible Needle Book and Card making. All most welcome! Morning Tea and lots of fun and fellowship included (for just \$3). Child minding \$3/child. More information contact the church office on 3300 2712 or email thegapuc@inet.net.au.

March 4, 9am-4.30pm. Workshop: How Can We Celebrate a "Progressive" Holy Week and Easter? New Farm UC Centre, 52 Merthyr Rd, New Farm. Guest presenter, Rev Rex Hunt from Canberra leads a full day exploring issues around the celebration of Holy Week and Easter by Christians who embrace critical religious scholarship, inclusive spirituality, progressive theology and social justice. Also includes workshop on developing new liturgies and resources for Easter. Further details visit www.progressivespirituality.net or Ph 3488 2300 or 3844 3557.

March 12. Oxfam Walk against Want 40th birthday! Take steps against poverty. To register a group contact James on 3637 4620 or email waw-qlc@oxfam.org.au. Ask friends, family or your congregation to sponsor you to walk. www.oxfam.org.au/walk.

March 12, noon-2pm. Barnabas Fellowship meets at Oxley UC hall. We invite all interested in the continuing ministry of the Barnabas Community to help celebrate through 2006, the 10th year since opening Barnabas House at Durack, Brisbane. Come and help plan the next stage in our development, hopefully a Barnabas Village! Bring Lunch to share. Enquiries ph Mareta 3279 9065 or Ed/ Olive 5598 2439 / 0411782439.

March 25th. Don and Beth Dalzell invite friends and relatives to an open house at their home in Manly West to celebrate Don's 80th birthday. For more details and to RSVP please phone Jenni Guse on 3856 4429 or email jenni.li@uqconnect.net.

March 26-28, UnitingCare and Uniting Missions' Network National Conference 2006 at the Carlton Crest Hotel Brisbane. Theme: 'Hope, Belonging, Connection and the Future'. More information contact Sally Brown Conference Connections, PO Box 108 Kenmore Q 4069. Ph 3201 2808 / 0407 178 200, Fax 3201 2809, or email sally@nationalconference2006.com or visit www.nationalconference2006.com

April 9, noon-2pm. Barnabas Fellowship meets at Oxley UC hall. Come and help plan the next stage in our development! Bring Lunch to share. Enquiries ph Mareta 3279 9065 or Ed/ Olive 5598 2439 / 0411782439.

April 13-17. Easter Family Adventure Camp. Rocky Creek Scout Camp, Landsborough, Sunshine Coast. Caravans, tents & cabins for families & singles to worship in out-of-doors, camp-fire, scenic trips, bushwalking, bush-dancing/table games, stargazing & mystery event. Contact Rev John Woodley ph 5495 3360 / 0419 025 150 or John Horchner 5496 8371 or email marjanhorchner@bigpond.com.

April 13-17. Easter Camp. Alex Park Conference Centre, Alexandra Headlands. Cost \$135. Guest speaker Nigel Rogers. Come together to have fun, spend time with friends new and old, take part in all kinds of activities including beach walks, outdoor adventure fun, awesome worship and most importantly a time to renew our faith and deepen our relationship with God. More information contact Louise Edwards on 0407 152 863 or email edwardslj@hotmail.com.

April 14, 6pm for 6.30 start. Alexandra Park 60th Anniversary Dinner. Alexandra Park Conference Centre, Mari Street Alexandra Headlands. \$25/person. RSVP 5443 8970.

April 22, 11.30am. Australian Nurses Christian Movement (ANCM) and Nurses Christian fellowship (NCF) reunion in Roma Street parklands (grass beside the lake). Past members welcome. Bring picnic lunch and memorabilia. Enquiries to June on 3205 1478.

April 22-23. Gladstone Uniting Church tenth anniversary and move to their new church building in Dixon Drive. Special guest Rev Dr Dean Drayton, President of Assembly. Celebration Dinner on the 22nd. Sunday worship lead by Dr Drayton, followed by a shared lunch. All past and present members of Gladstone UC, and any other interested people who would like to celebrate with us are invited. Further information contact Margaret Cathcart on 4979 3131.

April 28-May 1. Bulimba UC 3rd annual Round-About Arts & Crafts show. Contact Wendy 3399 8657.

30 April, 5.30pm-late. JAM hosts 'Iron + Clay' at Emmanuel UC, 249 South Pine Rd Enggera. BBQ from 5.30pm. More info at www.emmanueluc.unitingchurch.org.au. JAM will also be held on 30 July and 29 October.

Want to promote an event?

Email mardi.lumsden@uccentre.ucaqld.com.au with the subject 'What's on' or fax (07) 3377 9796.

Letters

Worthily worldly

Ours - A Worldly Church? Decidedly and unashamedly "YES".

It was settled long ago when "God loved the world" (John 3:16). Jesus came to promote us -lights "of the world" (John 1:4, Eph 5:13). Moreover, the New Testament encourages us to think cosmically (John 1:1), as the human race (Acts 17:31, and realistically (1 John 2:1). In addition, our Lord gave us two lessons on the nature and function of the Church. We are leaven, acting on society's heavy dough; the light given to us will penetrate all darkness. Epiphany celebrates the Gospel's penetration of the whole non-Jewish world. There is nothing exclusive - "Christ for the world, we sing. The world to Christ we bring". With zeal!

This is a world away from Jewry. Their high-churchmen, the Sadducees, were thinkers and power brokers. But their ministry stopped at the city's wall! The Pharisees chose a larger patch: from the southern desert to Capernaum, and sideways from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean. Although they were charged to proselytise (convert non-Jews) they had 75,000 Samaritans within their borders who could have been approached. Theirs was a cultivated mind-set: the "lesser breed, without the Law". People, en masse, to be despised, hated, or at best ignored.

For sure, we are not "worldly" in mammon terms - self-interested, lovers of pleasure. Lazy secularists. We believe there is work to be

done, hard uplifting work - and UnitingCare shows the many diverse ways our people serve - lovingly and untingly. Free thinkers and atheists are in general kindly - but I see no evidence if them building nursing homes for the frail aged, or dementia wards, drug counselling rooms, or a picking up of the remnants of delinquent youth. I see no network of domiciliary care such as Blue Care provides. Loving the world is limited to studying it and debating its virtues. In better, more practical ways, John Wesley was an honoured pioneer: "The world is my parish."

Phillip Ramsay

Old solutions best

Having read the moderator's proposal for a makeover of the Queensland Synod I ask is it to be a makeover or will the church sew a new patch on an old garment?

I believe the registration of congregations, "for" and "against" could sadly result in a situation in which the two groups would have no dealings with each other instead of unity and diversity there could be spiritual apartheid.

I have been exercised in prayer about this desparate situation and I am constantly drawn to the confession in older orders of Holy Communion, "We have followed the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have erred and strayed like lost sheep and there is no health in us"

So instead of a makeover, what

about using an old patch on an old garment? May someone with a more authoritative voice than mine be challenged to call the church to penitence and prayer?

May all who profess to love the lord in the Uniting Church earnestly join in heart-searching penitence that will lead to corporate repentance. Then we shall pray for the Holy Spirit to come again into our midst and assembly 2006 will find the grace and wisdom in this, our time of need.

Ron Smith

Silence the debate

I pray to God that the Assembly in Brisbane in July 2006 doesn't get bogged down with the sexuality argument again.

The media will be waiting to stir it up; it means good press for them. I can't understand why it was ever brought up; a little thought would have shown there was no answer. The church was going to alienate people whatever the decision and made itself a laughing stock to outsiders who will see us as bigoted, narrow minded, intolerant; a Church that has not heard of "Love thy neighbour as much as yourself".

Reading through the article about the State Synods and their varying attitudes it appears that Queensland has the strongest views on this issue while the others are much more tolerant and even suggest they are sick of the debate and to get on with all the other important issues facing the church.

One thing is sure, if debate rages like last Assembly then the Church can be certain it will again split and lose more members.

Ron Camplin

Find a new church

The Moderator 'predicts that in the next 10 years, those presently in the majority may become the minority' (Feb *Journey*). Would this be because they have moved on and or passed on?

It is OK to leave a denomination for conscience sake. It's been happening since the N.T. Visit the Martin Luther story again and hear him say 'Here I stand and I can do no other'. No need for any guilt feelings here.

One of the tasks of the Church under God is to preserve her purity. If your present spiritual home has lost the way and won't be changed, there are plenty of denominations and congregations out there. Find one that respects your values and worship preferences and be 'Happy in the Lord'. You will discover good mends wherever you worship. And you won't lose old ones. Such is unity in diversity.

Graham Hall

A house divided

Our Lord Himself tells us "a house divided against itself cannot stand". The UCA is implacably divided against itself on the issue of homosexuality.

The issue is not "homophobia" i.e., I am accused of suffering from a psychiatric condition in which I have an irrational revulsion for homosexuality.

The issue is the truth of the Gospel.

Firstly, it is the issue of the authority of the Scriptures as the Word of God. Karl Barth describes a liberal as someone who has liberated him/herself from the constraints of the Word of God.

Secondly, the issue is about the Biblical doctrine of the "Fall". This world is the world outside the Garden of Eden in which every aspect of our human nature is infected by sin- including our sexuality. Thus, homosexuality is an expression of the disorder of the fallenness of the world- it is not a part of a, so called, wonderful diversity blessed by God.

Thirdly, the issue is about the Biblical doctrine of God. Man, as male and female, is created in the Image of God. God is the triune

God of grace: the eternal Father united to the eternal Son in the bond of the eternal fellowship and love of the Holy Spirit. So, in the being of God, there is distinction and difference in unity. Thus, in human sexual relations there is to be difference and distinction in unity- male and female.

The Christian understanding of the male and female relationship is to be derived from the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and not from the Social Sciences of a modern university.

When the UCA declares 'good' what the Bible unambiguously calls 'evil' then the UCA has placed itself outside the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Ray Lindenmayer

Stay out of politics

It is interesting that in the very week of Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, arguing against the Churches' role in politics, our Moderator David asserts his right to "critique the policies and practices of our political leaders".

I believe that our esteemed Moderator is in error on two points:

Firstly, Jesus - "render unto Caesar", St Paul - "submit yourself to the governing authorities for they are appointed by God", and St Peter - "pray for the Emperor" all give a diametrically opposite instruction.

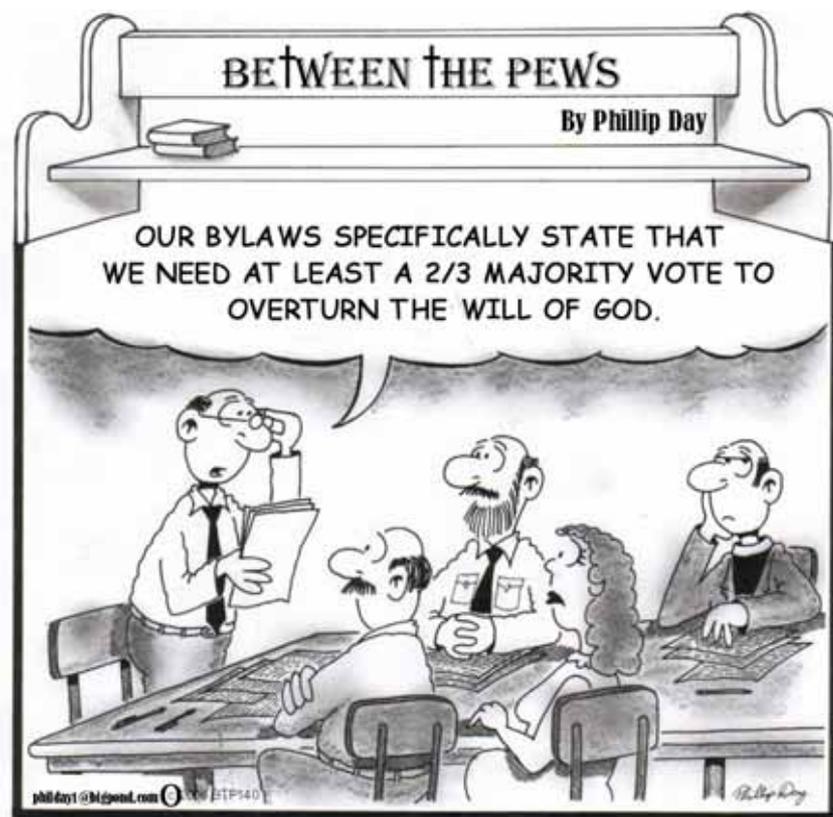
As do Luther's "Two Kingdom Theory", article 37 of the Anglican 39 Articles, chapter 23 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and John Wesley.

Secondly, when the Church meddles in politics, it usually backs the wrong horse and the poor and marginalised suffer even more.

It is certainly not a coincidence that the three Christian denominations whose clergy meddle most consistently in politics (Catholic, Anglican, Uniting) are the very three denominations in most rapid decline, according to the 2001 National Church Life Survey.

At least the rot may be arrested in the Catholic Church if the new Pope's first encyclical is obeyed.

Stan Klan



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Have your say

Letters to the Editor may be edited due to space limitations.

Post: *Journey* GPO Box 674 Brisbane 4001

Email: journey@ucentre.ucaqld.com.au

Keep up to date during the Assembly

A number of resources will be provided during the Assembly meeting in Brisbane in July to keep members of the church updated on the latest news.

These services will include a daily news alert sent electronically each night which will capture the news of the day including stories, reports and resolutions and a daily media resource kit for congregations who would like help to communicate with their local media

The media kit will be distributed electronically to subscribers during the Assembly meeting and contain draft media releases for distribution to local media and briefing notes that can be used when talking with journalists. There will also be a staff contact available during the Assembly to provide advice to congregations using the kit.

Official media releases issued by the President and Assembly Officers and selected media transcripts will also be accessible from the 11th Assembly website.

For more information on these services, or to subscribe to either the Daily News alert or the Media Resource Kit, visit the 11th Assembly website <http://assembly.uca.org.au/11thassembly/news-during.htm>.

Can exercise improve your memory?

If you are aged between 65 and 75, you can help answer this question.

Siobhan O'Dwyer, a PhD student at the University of Queensland and a member of St David's Uniting Church at Coopers Plains, would like to invite you to be part of some exciting research about memory, health and ageing.

Some volunteers will take part in a free exercise program, while others will complete some simple mental and physical assessments.

To take part you need to be doing less than 30 minutes of exercise per week, and be available to attend sessions at Toowong during the day.

If you would like to be involved, or simply find out more, call Siobhan on 3365 6103.



Fast News



Skeleton athlete Michelle Steel in action. Photo by www.monash.edu.au

Raymont student heads to Olympics

Raymont Lodge student Michelle Steel has competed in her first winter Olympic Games in Torino, Italy, in the sport of Skeleton.

The little known winter sport involves competitors sliding down a track head-first on a small sled.

Ms Steel, a former gymnast and Surf Lifesaver, lived at Raymont Lodge for the past two years.

Less than two years ago Michelle was juggling an occupational therapy degree at the University of Queensland with the surf lifesaving circuit and had never heard of the sport of Skeleton. She placed fourth and sixth at the first two World Cup competitions this year.

At the time of printing Michelle had placed 12th and 13th in her heats at the 2006 Winter Olympics.

Look for more up to date news on www.journeyonline.com.au.

Raymont Lodge is the Uniting Church student hostel attached to the Queensland Synod building in Auchenflower, Brisbane.

Needless to say, the staff and her fellow students are very proud of her achievements.

Assembly visitors program planning underway

Planning is underway for the 11th Assembly Visitors Program and expressions of interest are now being sought from those interested in joining the program.

To help make the schedule as interesting and suitable as possible for visitors, organisers are now asking for an indication from people about their possible interest in a range of activities.

Some of the ideas being considered include visits to Uniting Church congregations in Brisbane; meeting with the Assembly Bible Study leader, Rev Dr Myvne Dandala and participation in the worship and bible study program of the Assembly.

Anybody interested in being part of the program should visit the 11th Assembly website (www.nat.uca.org.au/11thassembly) where they can complete the on-line expression of interest form.

Easter Family Adventure Camp

Easter Family Adventure Camp is on again at Rocky Creek Scout Camp, Landsborough, Sunshine Coast from April 13-17.

Caravans, tents & cabins for families & singles to worship in out-of-doors, camp-fire, scenic trips, bushwalking, bush-dancing/table games, stargazing & mystery event.

For more information contact Rev John Woodley on 5495 3360 or 0419 025 150 or John Horchner 5496 8371 or email marjanhorchner@bigpond.com.

New Lifeline CEO

Uniting Care Director Anne Cross announced Trevor Carlyon as the Acting Chief Executive Officer, Lifeline Community Care, from 3 February 2006.

Mr Carlyon has been Director of Client Services within Lifeline Community Care for the past 18 months and has previously acted in the position of CEO. His experience and knowledge will be of great benefit as he takes up this leadership role on an interim basis.

Ms Cross also thanks outgoing CEO Anton Kardash for his wonderful contribution to Lifeline Community Care.

Can't get enough news?

www.journeyonline.com.au is updated almost daily



At Easter Camp your leader may look like this! Jo Nettle at Easter Camp 2005. Louise Edwards is to blame for this photo

Easter Camp

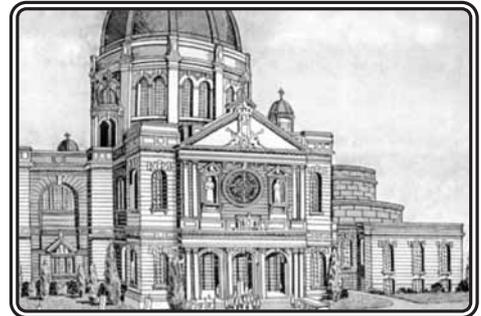
Easter Camp this year will be held at Alex Park Conference Centre, Alexandra Headlands. The cost of the weekend will be \$135 and the speaker is Nigel Rogers.

It is going to be an awesome time as we come together to have

fun, spend time with friends new and old, take part in all kinds of activities including beach walks, outdoor adventure fun, awesome worship and most importantly a time to renew our faith and deepen our relationship with God.

For more information ph Louise Edwards on 0407 152 863 or email edwardslj@hotmail.com.

Historically Speaking



THE CATHEDRAL WHICH NEVER WAS

It was to have seated 4,000, its Romanesque basilica dominating Brisbane's skyline. Inspired by a cathedral of the same name in Chicago, the Cathedral of the Holy Name had been the vision of Catholic Archbishop James Duhig.

The long-serving archbishop, known as James the Builder, laid the foundation stone of the cathedral in 1928. Such was his passion for the project, he was prepared to demolish his own residence, the imposing Dara, to ensure the realisation of his vision.

For many years, the city held its breath, awaiting word of the commencement of construction from within the sandstone walls. But in the late nineties, the site was sold for a multi-unit development.

All that remains of the vision are the architectural drawings for the cathedral that never was.

Alex Gow Funerals

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JOURNEY asks...

As a Christian why did you choose to be involved in politics??

John Woodley

During my time as a Senator there were two contradictory questions/comments frequently asked by Christians. One was, "What is a nice clergyman like you doing in a place like that?" and "I am glad you are in politics. We need more Christians in Parliament."

Both of these well-intentioned statements reveal a lack of knowledge of political processes and of the gospel. The first question assumes that there are places which may corrupt a clergyman if they go there or belief in the old adage: "Religion and politics should not be mixed."

In fact, religion and politics have always "mixed", because both are about how life should be lived and to omit either is to be concerned about only half of life. As for the danger of corruption, didn't Jesus risk his reputation constantly by choosing to be with sinners and outcasts?

The second statement assumes that Christians in Parliament will be able to make a difference as Christians. In my experience the party-political system in Australia is so controlling that this takes precedence over every other loyalty, that is, except for questions



of personal and sexual morality. On these questions parliamentarians, sometimes, are allowed a "conscience vote", as in the current debate about the drug RU486.

This reinforces the belief in the media and community that questions of sexual and personal morality are the only ones Christians are interested in. I should add that, overwhelmingly, these were the questions which drew the most violent response from Christians who contacted me.

The tragedy is that these questions are of relatively less importance in comparison

to questions of social and economic justice in the Scriptures. For Christians to be involved in politics gives them the opportunity to raise the major questions addressed in the Gospels – the gap between rich and poor, exclusive, suffocating legalism, racism, the plight of refugees, and questions of war and peace, to name a few.

John Woodley is a Uniting Church minister who served as a senator for Queensland 1993 to 2001

Stan Collard

At the precise moment Journey phoned me about writing this, I was reading *The meaning of Jesus – Two Visions* by Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright and had just read Marcus Borg's section *What was Jesus up to: Social Prophet* in which he talks of the domination system that prevailed and had prevailed on and off since the Jews enslavement in Egypt and of the plight of the marginalised in Jewish society.

Jesus was critical of the domination system of his day and at the same time related to the marginalised. He was comfortable with the common people and tried to ease their burden, relieve them of their bondage, although his methodology then as now was largely misunderstood.

This leads me to the word altruism. I would suggest that most people who go into politics do so to a greater or lesser extent from a sense of altruism, where one can be in a situation to have a say, to achieve things, to better society. Fortunately in our western democracy that opportunity is widely available. The "domination system" is not entrenched with any one group of people.

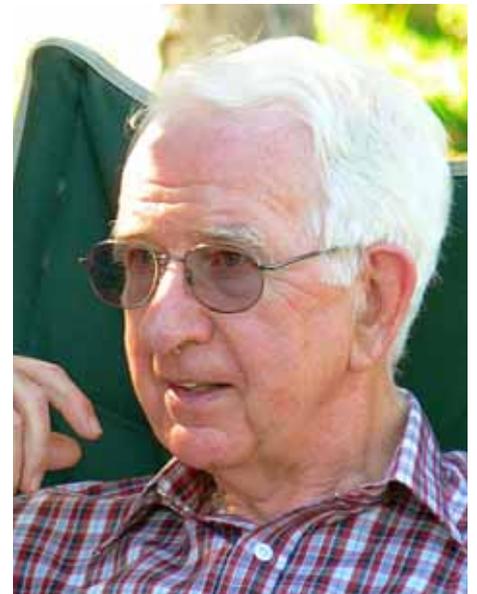
And then there was the home environment. My parents were Christians, farmers, and they involved themselves in community activities. Dad was a Methodist local preacher and active in agri-politics as well as organisational politics. This was the atmosphere in which I grew up.

But it's not enough to live in that situation; eventually one has to decide on certain directions for oneself. Thus I became involved in public

life which included church committees, politics and the union movement.

Therefore when an opportunity to preselect for a Senate position arose my sense of altruism as well as the Christian ethos which I had embraced "kicked in" and I decided to have a go!

Stan Collard was a Senator for Queensland 1976 to 1987 and is currently a lay preacher in the Uniting Church.



What others say...

"Historically, and theologically, the Western liberal-democratic State, in which I am a very great believer, is reliant upon the Church – perhaps, more specifically, Christianity expressed institutionally – for its formation and substance."

Federal National Party Member of Parliament John Anderson

"I do not want to end up with an American style of politics, with us all going out there beating our chest about our faith."

Tony Blair

"I think whenever there are big issues that affect Australians the churches have a role to voice their views."

Archbishop Phillip Aspinall

"The purpose of my life has always been guided by my Christian faith, which is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living."

Federal Liberal Member of Parliament, Louise Markus

"You cannot be President of the United States if you don't have faith."

George W. Bush

"No politician should consciously allow their politics to become an obstacle between another person and their experience of the cross of Christ. It's this concern that's stopped me from making an issue of my personal faith in my public career."

Federal Opposition Leader Kim Beazley

"When an Anglican archbishop speaks on IR, he has every right to speak, but his views on IR shouldn't be given any special weight, I don't believe, because of his theological training."

Federal Liberal Member of Parliament Peter Costello

"If I get stuck in politics, I will stop loving. Because I will have to stand by one, and not by all. This is the difference."

Mother Teresa

"If the Churches are not allowed to participate in the great debates about the values that ultimately underpin our society and our polity, then we have reached a very strange place indeed."

Federal Labor Member of Parliament Kevin Rudd

"Life's most urgent question is: what are you doing for others?"

Martin Luther King Jr.

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In addition to articles from the print version of *Journey* you will find extra articles, extended versions of articles, more reviews, opinion, links to other news and events, discussion groups, what's on and full PDF downloads of back issues of print *Journey*.

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