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Journey



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD



THE ETHICS OF VOTING

Navigating the
political landscape

LIVING DANGEROUSLY

Arie and Anneke van Klinken

WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

National Church Life Survey results

What's inside >>



8 Helping hands



10 Living dangerously



6 Navigating politics



14 Warm and welcoming



16 Interplanetary immigration

5 Mustering ministry

9 Engaging, welcoming, loving

12 Dramatic data
National Church Life Survey

15 Ongoing innovation
St Stephen's 150 years

17 Amplifying our Witness

18 Reclaiming fatherhood

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Looking outwards to build together

Elections are always times of broad discussion. Debates are held, ideas are weighed and arguments—hopefully constructive ones!—are had around the dinner table.

They are times we turn to each other and ask, "What kind of future do we want to build together?"

It's an important question for every time, not just during elections, and it is a difficult one to answer. An informed decision is impossible unless we think outside of ourselves and engage with the world around us.

There is an interesting juxtaposition in this edition. Our cover story (page 6), is about asking that question on polling day and how we can continue, as people of faith, to be involved in public life at other times too.

On the other hand, the National Church Life Survey results from 2011 have just been released (page 12), and there is an indication that there has been a decline in our willingness to talk about our faith outside of our faith communities.

I think there is a challenge there. Declining to engage with the world around us in open and constructive ways would impoverish both our church and the broader community. Many of the other stories in this edition celebrate our church's engagement as it is occurring, both on an individual and corporate level.

The Uniting Church has a proud history of engaging with the broader community. Let's continue to be active and open, contributing our voices to the national conversation.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor



Paying attention to the world around us

Have you ever arrived somewhere and realised that you don't remember any of the journey? It is disconcerting to discover that on the way you may have ignored people that you encountered, drifted unconsciously through an intersection or maybe cruised unthinkingly through a school zone.

Deuteronomy 8 reminds the people that when they have eaten and are satisfied they should praise the Lord for the land and the ability to produce the crops and the wealth. Later is the warning, "Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God ... [or] you may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth.'"

How might attending to the world around us help us to appreciate the providence of God and be more conscious of the needs of our neighbours? When I am busy I sometimes forget to appreciate what I am eating and how it got to my plate. Perhaps that is why some people post pictures of their meals on Facebook.

At one of the Presbytery meetings there was a presentation from a local farmer about the state of agriculture in Queensland. He spoke about his experience as a farmer with 20 years in a



successful business. He now struggles to make the business profitable because of the impacts of external pressures such as competition from products produced overseas, bearing the cost of compliance with more safety regulations and the introduction of overtime rates for casual workers.

Paying attention to the world around us means more than focusing on getting cheap groceries. It might mean using a wider lens and wondering how we can make sure that we pay enough for food to ensure farmers and their families can produce good food and earn enough to be able to stay in production.

It might mean paying a little more so that farmers get a fair return for their investment and labourers get a fair wage.

Someone once dubbed the book of Deuteronomy "the good neighbour book". The people of Israel are reminded over and over again to love the foreigners, the orphans and the widows. As you pay attention to the world around you, who would you add to the list of neighbours?

Rev Kaye Ronalds
Queensland Synod Moderator

Moderator's diary

- 8 September**
Elimbah Uniting Church 60th anniversary celebration
- 9 September**
Mary Burnett retreat, Gympie
- 11 September**
Shalom Christian College commissioning of principal
- 22 September**
Goomeri Uniting Church building centenary celebration

Monday Middy Prayer

Lord Jesus, teach us to make choices carefully, mindful of the impact on the people with whom we share the world around us.
Amen

Mustering ministry

Weekends like the Rural Muster raise, equip and nourish rural church ministries in all their forms, run by both lay and ordained people. Rev **Suzu Sitton** reports.

Representatives from small and regional congregations across Queensland mustered from 2-4 August in Biloela to reflect on what it means to be church in the often challenging context of regional Australia.

Rural Muster coordinator and Callide Valley Uniting Church pastor Donna Muston described how Uniting Churches in rural areas face unique challenges including natural disasters and the increased stress on communities by the mining industry. Small, ageing congregations need to work together to continue their ministries.

"The concept of the Rural Muster was initiated to provide an opportunity for those in small and rural congregations to gather together for mutual support, encouragement, learning and sharing our resources and stories," she said.

Dawson Valley Uniting Church member Gail Johnstone reflected that gathering together helped her realise her community in Banana, west of Biloela, is not alone in the challenges it faces.

"Numbers are few, and many congregations are ageing and have no minister. I feel that when you put your problems into words, you also put them into perspective. You do what you can with what you have where you are. The Rural Muster is great fellowship," she said.

Group discussions, led by Principal of Trinity Theological College, Rev Dr Malcolm Coombes, focused on the practicalities of conducting worship services in rural areas where resources are often minimal, overcoming the challenge that the places where ministry is most needed are often where it can be least afforded.

Ms Muston was optimistic, saying that strengthening the links between rural communities in all their forms continues to benefit local churches and the Uniting Church in Queensland generally.

"At this Muster we heard the story of our shared faith—stories of regret and sadness, celebration, community, tradition, history, hope—and we were reminded that while we may be geographically distanced, our stories, actions, practices, and we ourselves are still part of the diverse community of faith which is the Uniting Church," she said.



Gary Hardingham speaks at the 2013 Rural muster
Photo: Rodney Muston

"The concept of the Rural Muster was initiated to provide an opportunity for those in small and rural congregations to gather together ... sharing our resources and stories"

Donna Muston

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The devil's in the detail

Navigating the political landscape



Balancing faith and politics is never straightforward
Photos: Istockphoto and Holly Jewell

Knowing how to balance convictions of faith and political expediency is a challenge at election time, but being politically engaged takes more than showing up on polling day. Rohan Salmond explores.

The debates are on, the attack ads are out and the campaign is in full-swing. On 7 September, Australia will once again make its triennial pilgrimage to the polls and elect a new parliament. After three years of high drama in minority government this might come as a relief for some, but the competing priorities between faith and politics make navigating the political landscape tricky for many in the church.

Even within the general population, ambivalence and disengagement with Australia's democratic system is high. A recent study conducted by the Australia Institute and released by ANZSOG Institute for Governance indicated well over half of Australians could not remember conducting any political activity—including signing a petition or participating in a protest—in the last two or three years.

That pre-existing disengagement combined with ever-narrowing differences in policy between the two major parties has led to a feeling of deep ambivalence within the electorate towards the upcoming election.

"There is a lot of frustration out in the Australian community," says John Beckett, National coordinator for Micah Challenge Australia. "There doesn't seem to be a clear vision for the nation, and there seems to be a lack of clear policy about where we're going ... a lot of people feel like they don't have clear distinctions between parties and are not exactly sure where they'll be voting."

National director of UnitingJustice, Rev Elenie Poulos agrees. "We fight over policy in a very, very narrow band, and the differences between political parties on major policy issues are actually very small.

"It becomes hard for people to clearly identify which policies across a range of issues are more reflective of the kind of Australia they want to build. When it comes to policy in this country, the devil is actually in the detail, not in the big picture."

Salt and light

Finding a candidate to support is not easy. Christian voters often have a range of priorities that transgress party lines, confounding the traditional left-right spectrum of politics. There are a number of "Christian" parties running in this election, but Christians in Australia hold an array of political ideologies and do not form a neat voting bloc, meaning these parties do not accurately represent the views of Christians as a whole.

"There's never a perfect candidate, never a perfect leader, so we're always making choices about candidates and parties that are less than ideal. There's no one party that fully embraces people's Christian traditions or their values and so you're always making choices about which way to go," says Mr Beckett.

But separating your personal faith from your political engagement is not an option.

"Where we sit at Micah Challenge, we are wholeheartedly sold on the idea that our faith needs to be expressed in the political space and in the social space; we need to engage as Christians. We are called to be salt and light and we're called

to participate. You can only be salt and light if you are participating and having your voice in the process," says Mr Beckett.

The lesser of two evils

This imperfect translation of Christian ethics into the political realm means casting a vote requires a certain level of pragmatism. Dr John Harrison, University of Queensland senior lecturer in Journalism and Communication has an academic background studying politics and religion. For him, politics is very much the art of compromise, even for Christians.

"I think it's very easy for Christians to take a pure and idealist position and be critical of those who have to make life-and-death decisions in the political arena.

"I think the Uniting Church is particularly at risk here, and I have been known to publicly castigate both the culture and institution of the Uniting Church for being 'the Greens at prayer'. Political ethics is a lot more complicated than we might think.

"Ethically, putting a mark on a ballot paper in the voting booth inevitably involves deciding among the lesser of two evils," he says.

Knowing when to make those compromises is never easy. A completely unbending attitude risks contributing just as little to the political conversation as not speaking up at all. How then should we approach casting our vote in a way which honours our Christian convictions?

"I think if we're confident we're using our voice and our vote for ... the benefit of the poor and the marginalised and the oppressed, then there are certainly times when as a community and as individuals we need to take a stand and not be moved on those things," says Mr Beckett.

Beyond elections

"Such a conundrum carries with it the imperative of civic engagement in-between elections. This engagement is about bringing the values of the Kingdom of God into the secular, political domain," says Dr Harrison.

Being engaged goes beyond the act of voting. "Your vote is just one part of the expression of your voice into the political space. Your voice into political leadership doesn't stop with your vote," says Mr Beckett.

"You need to choose the candidate and the party that most closely reflects what you think about the world and how it should be, and then continue to speak on issues where you disagree with them and can continue to voice your concerns about those issues.

"[At Micah Challenge] we do a lot of thinking about the prophetic role. Most people think that the prophets were mainly critics that always stood up against injustice.

"But for a large part of their function, the prophets, particularly in the Old Testament, were constructive. They spoke about what they were for and what God was for and sought to give a vision of what society could look like. So there's both a constructive and critical function to the prophetic role."

Uniting in action

Being a constructive voice during and beyond election time requires an engagement with the issues affecting the community, as well as getting to know the representatives that are sent to Parliament House.

"Many Uniting Churches around the country have already been holding community electoral forums and I think this is a really wonderful outreach into the community that the church can offer," says Ms Poulos.

"As a church you could also make an appointment to see your local member. You could take your minister and a few other interested people in the congregation to talk about an issue that matters to that congregation. You could also go as an individual; you could write letters or email.

"The thing about our democracy is the more people engage at a local level with their local members and their state senators, the more vibrant our democracy becomes."

Casting a vote in line with your values is not as straightforward as following a "how to vote" card on polling day. In politics, weighing the competing priorities can sometimes feel overwhelming, but being engaged is a service to the community and ourselves, spiritually.

"Regardless of your political inclinations I think the most important thing to maintain the strength of our democracy is to be informed and to get out there and to do whatever we can to help have robust and full discussion in our community so we can be informed, so we can listen to different opinions and so we can grow together as a community," says Ms Poulos.

John Beckett encourages Christians not to give up hope. "Frustration is fine, but don't become disillusioned. There will be times in any political cycle when we're frustrated with what's going on and we don't see what we want to see happening in the timeframes that we would want to see those things.

"But we have a God who has promised that his new creation will come. We have no reason to fear."

Audio from these interviews can be found at journeyonline.com.au

The thing about our democracy is the more people engage at a local level with their local members and their state senators, the more vibrant our democracy becomes

Rev Elenie Poulos



Emily Allpass from the Remote Family Care Service with Bronte on the family's cattle station west of Longreach
Photo: Frontier Services

Helping hand for rural families

Frontier Services has a long history of serving rural and remote communities in Queensland and across Australia. Now it is entering a new era, writes **Rebecca Beisler**.

On a remote property in the outback, you start work when the sun comes up. The next 12 hours until the sun goes down, there is work to do in the paddock or in the sheds, feeding stock, mustering, shearing, checking dam levels and operating machinery. But for many families, this is just the start.

Meals need to be cooked, washing needs to be hung, bookwork has to be completed and for young families, there is the care of children. Many parents also perform the role of home teacher for children studying with School of the Air. Parents with children under five are often working around the clock.

Because of their isolated location, these families do not have access to mainstream childcare services. The nearest childcare centre might be four hours away. Most families manage incredibly well, but at times, they just need a short break. This is where Frontier Services steps in to help.

Sixteen years ago, Frontier Services started the Remote Family Care Service (RFCS). Childcare

workers travel to the homes of isolated families to provide relief childcare for up to three weeks.

It is a valuable opportunity for the family, and in most cases, the mother, to manage the workload, get through a busy time, or simply take some time out.

"We had Emily from the Remote Family Care Service come and stay with us during shearing in February," said Julie Brown, a mother of two from a sheep and cattle station west of Longreach.

"My son Xavier also started prep this year, and so it was an incredibly busy and challenging time. Just having that extra pair of hands is a wonderful help."

RFCS supports more than 250 families with a team of ten childcare workers. They travel across the state from the far north, to the south, and west to the Northern Territory border.

It is just one of the community services run by Frontier Services in Queensland to support remote families alongside its Patrol Ministry network.

Now 101 years after John Flynn began this mantle of safety, Frontier Services continues to support both the practical and spiritual needs of families in the outback.

This year the organisation has entered a new chapter with a number of significant changes, however its commitment to remote Australia is stronger than ever.

"As we begin a new era, Frontier Services will continue to sustain the church's commitment to the people of remote Australia through its Patrol Ministry network and community services which make a vital difference to people's lives," said Interim National Director Rev Alan White.

As we begin a new era, Frontier Services will continue to sustain the church's commitment to the people of remote Australia

A new chapter for Frontier Services

- > After 18 years of dedicated service with Frontier Services, Rosemary Young has stepped down from her role of national director
- > Former Uniting Church Assembly president Rev Gregor Henderson, a long-time champion of Frontier Services, has been appointed Chairperson of the Board while Rev Alan White has begun as the Interim National Director
- > The Uniting Church is working towards the appointment of a specialist entity to take over the operation of the aged-care services
- > Frontier Services will continue to operate its Patrol Ministry and associated community services nationally



Engaging discipleship

Discipleship is not an abstract idea only to be talked about, it is a process of engaging with people both inside and outside the church. **Rev Marius Krueger** is a Uniting Church minister with a passion for meeting people where they are, outside of traditional ideas about church.

The other day I drove past a church sign that said, "Making disciples of Jesus". As I read it I thought, yes I like it, but what are they really saying? Who are they talking to? Are they good at making disciples? Are they inviting outsiders?

Further down the road at a different church I saw another sign that said, "Free meals every Friday".

Looking at those signs made me reflect on the nature of discipleship. Judging by those signs, it seemed to me that at the first church, discipleship is something they tell you all about, but at the other church, discipleship is something they invite you to come in and experience. It's that experience that helps us grow disciples of Jesus.

Discipleship is very much a buzzword in church circles. We all feel strongly about it. Jesus felt strongly about it, and we develop discipleship programs and look at ways to be more effective. I did a quick Google search on "Discipleship Course" and in 0.42 seconds it found 3.17 million results regarding this topic. It is surely something people talk and write about at length.

At our faith community in Highfields north of Toowoomba, we often talk about being real and not being perfect. As an unconventional, non-traditional church, we do not have specialised discipleship programs, but we focus on engaging

with the community in the obvious ways that a lot of churches overlook. We continually ask ourselves, "Where are people in the community meeting? Where do they go for fun, relaxation and exercise? Where do they go for coffee? Who are these people and who are their friends?"

There is no way people are just going to rock up at church on a Sunday for no particular reason, so we need to go out and engage with people where they are. We grow as disciples the moment we engage with, welcome and love people outside our own communities of faith. Growing disciples is really about creating the space for people to see and experience the love of Christ in a real way that is relevant to their lives.

By practising discipleship ourselves, we will help grow disciples in other places.

More information about Highfields Faith Community, Toowoomba can be found at highfieldscommunitychurch.com.au

We grow as disciples the moment we engage with, welcome and love people outside our own communities of faith

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Set free to live for others

Lives ruled by faith and inspired by a love of adventure have their own reward, as **Arie and Anneke van Klinken** discovered. **Dianne Jensen** reports.

Arie, 17 years, was picked up outside curfew by Nazi police in Emmen, occupied Holland. A few days later, en route to Gestapo headquarters, he escaped by jumping from the train while it was stationary. The young son of the local pastor hid him in the church roof. Arie remained in hiding for the next two years.

Anneke, 15 years, pretended to be asleep. She could hear the Gestapo searching for her father, concealed in his hiding place between the cupboard and the ceiling below her floor. He was on the list of people in Hoogeveen targeted for public reprisals.

Memories of the Second World War are still powerful for Arie (88 years) and Anneke van Klinken (86 years).

“Faith—that is why you are so against violence, you are so against evil”

Anneke van Klinken

“We saw great courage and integrity in people which had nothing to do with position, rich or poor, Christian or non-Christian. That shaped our lives,” says Anneke.

Seventy-five per cent of the 140 000 Jews in Holland perished over the five years of occupation, and many Dutch people—especially the young—were involved in underground activities such as distributing material and hiding Allied airmen and fugitives.

Like many of his contemporaries, Arie had refused to sign the mandatory papers to identify himself as a non-Jew.

“The underground kept saying, ‘don’t sign,’” explains Anneke. “If everybody signed, the Jews wouldn’t have a hope. But if you did not sign, you were treated like a Jew; that is, you were picked up and taken to the concentration camp. So you had to go into hiding.”

For both young people, their Christian faith underpinned their resistance.

“Faith—that is why you are so against violence, you are so against evil,” says Anneke. “The kingdom of God is such a big thing for me, even when I was young, and I thought, even the tiniest bit that I would be able to do against evil, I will try.”

Decades later and on the other side of the world, these first-hand experiences of brutal occupation would help Arie and Anneke to support other people suffering military repression.

A new world emerges

Like many Dutch people, Arie and Anneke had family links and a cultural connection to Indonesia, which was a Dutch colony until 1949. Towards the end of the war, Arie joined forces in Indonesia to fight against the Japanese occupiers. Soon after, Indonesia claimed independence from the Netherlands, leading to a protracted conflict.

“The government asked the army to maintain position to establish law and order in Indonesia, so I decided to stay,” says Arie, who quickly became disillusioned. “I thought that we were there to liberate the people, but then I felt that no, we were there to defend the colonial rule.”

The van Klinkens married in 1951, after Arie’s return to Holland. He joined the police force in Rotterdam, and studied law.

But life at home was lacking in adventure for the restless young man. Fascinated by stories of the untamed jungle, in 1956 the young couple left for Dutch New Guinea (later known as Irian Jaya, now West Papua), working on a small island for several years until Arie was appointed crown prosecutor.

Once again they encountered political turmoil. The area was a potent mix of Papuan culture and growing nationalism, the waning power of the Dutch colonial rule, and pressure from Indonesia, which took control in the early 1960s.

But the van Klinkens discovered an affinity with the people, and encountered a young, vibrant church far from their conservative Dutch tradition.

Back in Holland, their longing for a less restrictive society led the van Klinkens and their four children to migrate to Australia in the 1960s. They settled in Brisbane’s inner west and set up a catering business. Two more children were born, and the family settled into their local church.

East Timor connections

News of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975 shocked Arie, and he began reading about the growth of the Protestant church amid the reports of the brutal repression.

As soon as the East Timor borders were opened in 1989, he visited, along with their son Gerry and his wife Helene, some of the first outsiders to arrive.

“They found in East Timor, great suffering, hunger, and oppression, under Indonesian occupation,” says Anneke. “They counted many graves.”

Church leaders were under surveillance, the people lived in constant fear, and the resistance fighters were holed up in the mountains. Arie, and sometimes Anneke, began making frequent trips,

forming relationships with church leaders and delivering assistance where possible.

They understood what the East Timorese were going through.

“We spoke the language, and because of the war we knew how frightening it was for the people, how careful they had to be, and the importance of things like medication,” says Arie.

The couple paid for two ministers to have training in West Timor, and continued to fund others. Their Brisbane home became a respite for some East Timorese church leaders.

For the first few years it was just the two of them, doing what they could.

The price of independence

In 1999, following an overwhelming vote in favour of independence from Indonesia, military-backed militias ran rampant in East Timor. By the time United Nations troops intervened, half a million people had been displaced.

The van Klinkens find it hard to describe the devastation.

“They had very few men left; it was all women and children,” says Anneke. “There were so many kids without parents, or with mothers who could not support them, and the Catholic Church established quite a few orphanages.”

With buildings and services destroyed, education was considered a priority.

“When freedom came the moderator gave me a list of 28 names of people who needed training,” says Arie. “That really made me nervous—how can we find 28 scholarships?”

The cost for each student—including tuition and board—was about \$600, so the van Klinkens decided to appeal to their local Uniting Church at Indooroopilly.

“The money just streamed in, and that was the beginning of the scholarship scheme,” says Anneke. “Somehow we got to support all these 28 students, and over the years, hundreds.”

“At present the figure is 290 students currently studying at high school, university and as tradesmen.”

A small scholarships committee was established to oversee the scheme, which also helps finance local vocational training programs.

In 2007 the Scholarship Fund amalgamated with the Timor Children’s Foundation, a not-for-profit group that was set up in 2002 by Bob Mitchell.

At home in Brisbane, Arie and Anneke became involved in lay ministry. Anneke worked as a hospital chaplain, and Arie became a prison chaplain after his retirement.

They lent their business expertise to several Indigenous communities including Ernabella, helping with administration in community stores during Christmas holidays. With four children and a dog packed into the car, they travelled to remote areas, sleeping out in parks or beside the roads.

Arie and Anneke have many stories to tell from an adventurous life together, set free to live for others.

For more information visit timorchildren.com

“There were so many kids without parents, or with mothers who could not support them”



Arie and Anneke van Klinken
Photo: Holly Jewell

We're all in this together

What the latest data says about the Uniting Church

National Church Life Survey analysis is highlighting some encouraging trends in Uniting Church congregations, reports **Dianne Jensen**.



Asked what they liked most about the Uniting Church
71.6% of people nominated "inclusiveness"

67% of Uniting Church members are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church

In 2011
26% of Uniting Church members were aged **70-79**

Source: 2011 NCLS attender denominational surveys

Do you feel settled at your local church, yet sense that your gifts are not being fully used? You'll support outreach initiatives (if they don't clash with your volunteer work) but would prefer not to personally invite people to church.

Growing confidence and openness to change within mainstream congregations is one of the key trends emerging from the most recent National Church Life Survey (NCLS), alongside a decline in the number of people who feel encouraged to use their gifts and ongoing reluctance to talk about faith.

The 2011 survey included over 3000 churches and 23 denominations, and researchers are now delving deeper into the data and tracking trends over the 20 years since the first NCLS survey.

Director Dr Ruth Powell says there is some encouraging news for churches.

"What we see is the exciting trend that people are speaking more positively than they were 10 years ago about the internal health and life of their church. You get more people saying they have experienced growth in their faith because of their church."

While this attests to the possibility that disgruntled members have voted with their feet, Dr Powell says that researchers are picking up on a related trend which gives a more positive perspective.

"There are much higher proportions of people who say, 'I am aware of our church's vision for the future and I am strongly committed to it,'" she says.

"There is a sense of consolidation and strengthening, of clarification. It's a good picture of the church responding well to the change in context."

Collective confidence is about "I trust our church community. I trust the integrity of it. I believe it's going to be able to move forward"

Ruth Powell

Exploding the myths

While the Uniting Church data generally reflects mainstream trends, there are some interesting twists.

Our congregations were used to pilot some exploratory questions in the 2011 survey around the issue of openness to change and innovation, and the responses "really blew open some of the myths about openness to change," says Dr Powell.

In response to the statement: "This congregation is always ready to try something new", 55 per cent of people expressed agreement, with a further 13 per cent expressing strong agreement.

Asked whether they would be in favour of their church starting a new worship gathering of a different style, 31.7 per cent were definitely in favour, with a further 34.8 per cent tending to favour the concept.

And while we may crave more internal unity, most members of the Uniting Church value the wide embrace and the open door for which we are renowned. When asked what they liked most about the Uniting Church, 71.6 per cent of people nominated "inclusiveness", followed by "community service" (25.4 per cent).

We're here to help

NCLS data confirms that the Uniting Church does indeed have the oldest age profile of any denomination in the survey, but these folks are pure gold for both our congregations and our community.

Sixty-seven per cent of Uniting Church members are regularly involved in some form of community group activity beyond the church, and 58 per cent reported informally helping others in a number of ways.

"One thing that the Uniting Church is extremely good at is community services and volunteer service," says Dr Powell. "Church attenders in general have higher levels of volunteerism than the wider community, and it is a real strength in the Uniting Church. It is the strength of the older age profile as well, because it's older attenders who are providing that service."

Silent witness

But while Uniting Church congregations are demonstrating their faith through their deeds with commendable energy, there has been a decline in our willingness to talk about our faith and to invite others to church, says Dr Powell.

"We're feeling good about who we are, we're getting a strong sense of where we are meant to be going, we're building bridges with our community, but we're not quite there in terms of knowing how to speak about our faith communities in authentic ways."

And sharing our experience of church is perhaps the most powerful act we can make.

NCLS has a new research project underway in which 2000 people were asked specific questions about how they chose their church and why they decided to stay.

"We haven't done that research in detail yet, but a couple of things we know are that newcomers come because someone invited them, and they invited them over and over again," says Dr Powell.

In spite of the ambivalence of many towards joining any organisation, including churches, there is a hunger for community, she adds.

"Social capital is the sociological term for this social glue, and churches have it in spades. You are bonded

to each other, and there are networks which you would never have in other settings because you are mixing with such diverse people."

Sustainable leadership

While there are many theories about why churches flourish, NCLS researchers believe that the key factors are relatively simple. Their findings, echoed in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and USA research, suggest that healthy and growing churches are driven by the underlying factors of individual commitment and collective confidence working in tandem.

"What we mean by individual commitment is that no matter what is happening at your church, you are someone who is going to turn up. As an individual you are committed in your faith journey, and you are investing in your church in a number of ways," says Dr Powell.

"Collective confidence is about 'I trust our church community. I trust the integrity of it. I believe it's going to be able to move forward'.

"You can have lots of people who are individually committed, but do you have collective efficacy; do we think we can be effective together?"

Leadership is a critical ingredient for healthy churches, she adds, and NCLS has recently launched a range of resources on the subject.

"We have two strands at the moment to our leadership work: effective leadership and sustainable leadership. Effective leadership is this idea of finding and releasing the leadership strengths that exist amongst you, perhaps in unexpected places. Sustainable leadership is the challenge to thrive, and not just survive—how to be resilient for the long haul."

Church life surveys are available for local churches at any time. To find out about NCLS research visit ncls.org.au

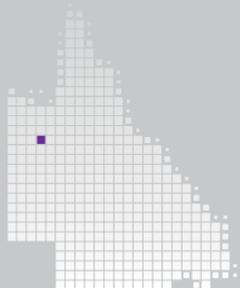
What we mean by individual commitment is that no matter what is happening at your church, you are someone who is going to turn up"

Ruth Powell



Families come together at St Andrew's Mount Isa
L to R: Levei, Karen, Hayley and Sharon
Photo: Viki Ashford

St Andrew's Mount Isa



Fast facts:

Community:

- > 1829 km north-west of Brisbane; 883 km west of Townsville
- > Mining town—copper, silver, lead and zinc
- > Population of 21 000
- > Large number of fly-in, fly-out workers
- > Celebrating 90 years since its founding
- > Covers 43 310 square kilometres land area. Longest street in the world runs from Mount Isa to Camooweal, 200 kms to the west

Values:

- > Worship, witness and service to the glory of God

What's new

- > Praying and planning for the upgrade of the church hall and paving an area outside the church to complement the garden which went in three years ago

Warm welcome at Mount Isa

St Andrew's Uniting Church is a congregation which wants to see people of all kinds come together to follow Jesus. Rohan Salmond spoke with pastor Viki Ashford.

What's happening in your congregation?

St Andrew's is a very multicultural congregation, so we have three worship services every week, one English speaking, one Tuvaluan speaking and one Tongan speaking. We also have a Fijian service once a month. The Pacific Island Community Association Mount Isa runs homework classes for all school-age children in association with our congregation every Thursday evening. Bible studies are a regular part of our fellowship as well.

What does creating disciples mean for your church community?

Creating discipleship is built on forming relationships with people who don't attend church or who don't know about Jesus Christ and showing them, by example, what it means to follow Jesus. We can do this in our workplaces, our hospitals, our schools and even our neighbourhoods. We want to get to know people outside the church. Talking about our relationship with Jesus Christ and introducing people to our church family social circle is very important to us.

How do you go about engaging with the people in your local community?

Hospitality becomes the way to continue to build the relationship with people outside our church. We talk about worshipping at church, invite the person to church and include them in our morning tea. Our congregation does morning tea and lunch fellowship very well and new people are always welcome. We always try to bless people with our words and given them a lift to and from church. Passing on daily Bible readings and Bible tracts for discussion is something we also do. These people may join us or not; it is not for us to judge.

What is your church community passionate about?

Inclusiveness is very important to us because the bulk of the congregation is made up of people from Samoa, Tuvalu, Tonga and Fiji with some from South Africa, India, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and some Australian-born folk. Hospitality and building relationships with others in the community is also a priority, along with hearing the Word of God, praise and worship.



St Stephen's Presbyterian Church, 1932
Photo: State Library Queensland

Grand dame of Toowoomba celebrates 150 years

One of Queensland's iconic city churches celebrates its 150th anniversary this year, throwing the spotlight on a remarkable period of Christian witness in the south-east region. Dianne Jensen reports.

Built of local basalt and sandstone, St Stephen's Uniting Church (formerly Presbyterian) in Toowoomba was completed in 1884. The 150th anniversary marks the establishment of the charge (parish) in 1863, although the first church was erected in 1859.

The fortunes of St Stephen's have mirrored the evolving community of the Darling Downs, with small numbers until the population boom in the 1870s. Over the next century, both church and community flourished even in times of hardship and war.

The congregation was the catalyst for the growth of the Presbyterian Church in the region, planting churches in Drayton (1893) and Westbrook (1902), and three in Toowoomba: St Andrew's (1906), St David's (1926) and St John's (1942).

It played a key role in the acquisition of Spreydon College, later Fairholme College, and the establishment of St Andrew's Hospital in 1966.

In 1977, St Stephen's and Scots churches voted for union, and St Andrew's, St John's and St David's joined the Continuing Presbyterian Church.

St Stephen's became part of the Toowoomba City parish together with Wesley Church, Middle Ridge, City Congregational and Blanchview.

Declining fortunes during the following years were exacerbated by a fire at St Stephen's in 1989 which resulted in the collapse of the roof, damaging the organ beyond repair. Re-construction was not completed until 1993.

As churches began rationalising their resources, St Stephen's became a separate congregation again in 1995. There was further turmoil in 2003, when congregations including the Rangeville congregation in Toowoomba left the Uniting Church following Assembly Resolution 84 on clergy in same-sex relationships.

St Stephen's endured in the face of these challenges, continually seeking new ways to witness. Rev Andrew Gillies, who was called to the congregation in 2008, suggests that one of the factors behind the resilience of the congregation has been their willingness to innovate.

The congregation pioneered broadcasting their services on radio in 1925, and set up a radio

Sunday School in 1946. They supported ecumenical initiatives like Wednesday Worship, a lunchtime service for city workers which ran for 20 years from 1987.

In the same spirit of openness, St Stephen's Uniting Church is today part of the One Church online hub for Toowoomba's Christian community.

"In more recent years the strong sense of community and identity of the congregation has helped them to survive," says Mr Gillies.

Worship and service continue to be strengths, he adds, and St Stephen's is a keen contributor to initiatives such as the Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers.

Coordinator of the 150th celebrations and church elder Wendy Williams has put together a program which highlights both local and church history.

The anniversary weekend will take place from 4-7 October.

For more information contact 07 4632 2971 or visit ststephensuniting.org.au

Grant applications are now open

Redcliffe Uniting Church is seeking applications to their *Neil James Grant Bequest* from Uniting Church congregations and agencies for works, projects and programs that extend the mission of God in Queensland.

Application forms can be downloaded from www.redcliffe.unitingchurch.org.au
Grants from \$1 000 - \$10 000 will be considered.
Closing date for applications is 15 October 2013 for distribution late 2013

For more information
call Rev Paul Clark on 3283 4066



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Science fiction speaks on asylum

Matt Damon stars in *Elysium* MA15+
Photo: Sony Pictures



Good science fiction doesn't just tell us where we are going, it explores where we are now. Although set in Los Angeles and directed by a South African, *Elysium* actually feels like it could have been made for an Australian audience. Writer-Director Neill Blomkamp's first feature *District 9*, as well as some of his short films, has given him a reputation for making socially-conscious futuristic films influenced by his childhood growing up during apartheid in South Africa. *Elysium*, his second feature-length film, continues in this vein, but is much more heavy-handed than *District 9*.

Elysium takes place in a dystopian future where the world's wealthy have fled Earth to live on the opulent, wheel-shaped space station, Elysium. Thanks to high-tech Med-Pods, there is no sickness there, and Elysium's citizens live lives of leisure. Max De Costa (Matt Damon) is an ex-convict who has always harboured a wish to live on the space station, but is driven to action after a workplace accident leaves him mortally irradiated with only five days to live.

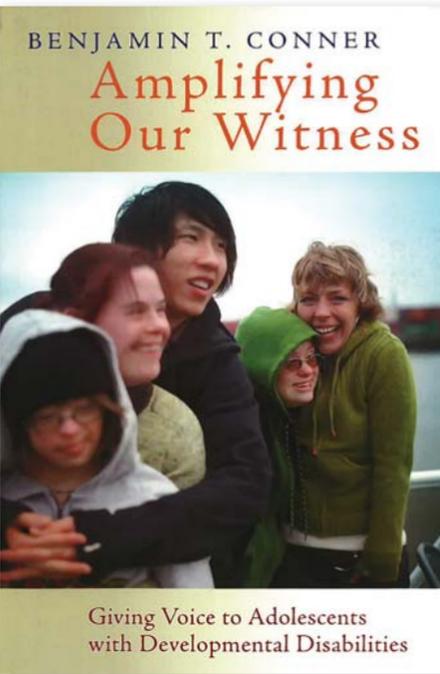
This film is not a runaway success and is unlikely to be remembered in the years to come, but it is still important for this place and time. Australian audiences will immediately draw the connection between present-day asylum seekers and those in the film who use people smugglers to reach Elysium. These futuristic, fictional asylum

seekers give a human face to what, in Australia, is a faceless group of people—deliberately so due to Department of Immigration and Citizenship regulations. In fact, journalists who visit detention centres must sign a deed of agreement which forbids them from speaking to the detainees or taking any photographs. As a result, their stories are never told and asylum seekers are only ever spoken about as an amorphous mass, never mentioning names or showing any faces.

It is unfortunate that the film fails to really grapple with the issue. Blomkamp's previous feature, *District 9*, initially takes the side of the oppressor before making him, and the audience, throw their support behind the oppressed. *Elysium* is far more simplistic, and Elysium's citizens are almost solely represented by Secretary of Defence Jessica Delacourt (Jodie Foster) who is one-dimensional, cold and callous. The only other Elysian with a speaking part is President Patel (Faran Tahir) who is more sympathetic but whose character and motivations go completely unexplored.

It's this simplicity that prevents *Elysium* from being the game-changer it could have been in the conversation surrounding immigration law both in Australia and the United States. Regardless, this film illuminates an issue critical to Australia's national life, but which is unable to be properly explored outside of fiction.

Rohan Salmond



Gathering in all of God's children

Amplifying our Witness: Giving Voice to Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities
Benjamin T Connor
William B Eerdmans, 2012
RRP \$21.95

Being an inclusive community of faith with respect to adolescents with developmental disability is not just about the "how". It is not just a pragmatic question of leadership, or support mechanisms, or developmentally appropriate programming. It is a question about who we are as the people of God, and the reality that we are not all we can be if some are not included.

At first glance, *Amplifying our Witness* begins as an academic exploration of the inclusion of young people with developmental disability in the community of faith, but it quickly becomes a dialogue, exploring the shortcoming of community without these young people and, by extension, other groups missing from our communities of faith.

Connor articulates the concept that within the witness of the church, one voice—or one kind of voice—is less adequate in enabling the church to fulfil its call in bearing witness to God. God is beyond any of our understanding or knowing or speaking and a variety of voices adds fullness to our image, and therefore to the image we proclaim.

Rather than seeking to provide a framework for engagement with young people with developmental

disability, Connor instead promotes the conversation regarding the contribution these young people make to our communities. These contributions go on to enrich our understanding of God, each other and ourselves.

The challenge is clear! As we exercise Christian faith, which is by nature a communal faith, we do ourselves a disservice if we exclude. That exclusion may not be intentional or deliberate; it may be as simple as a pre-conditioned understanding of the way in which a young person with developmental disability contributes, participates and bears witness to God within our community of faith. As we allow space, becoming more intentional in our engagement with these young people, and the breadth of people generally within our community, we have the opportunity to more fully participate in the mission of God through the community of faith.

This book is well worth the read. At around 100 pages, it will not take long, however, the challenges it offers may well be worth taking much more time to reflect on.

Rev John Cox
Associate General Secretary, Queensland Synod and parent of Jasmin, an adolescent with developmental disability.



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Blessings of the father



A father's influence has consequences that go beyond his immediate actions, and where better to find authentic fatherhood than in the church, asks **Phil Smith**.

I watched my father, Ron, hold his great granddaughter, Matilda. Dad is legally blind and can see faces about 30 centimetres away. Matilda is ten days old and can only see the same distance.

Nothing else mattered in their world. They had eyes only for each other.

She will grow in the blessings of faithful fatherhood, devoted men in her life from generations past.

Two days before this I met Pastor Pete Scazzero, from Queens in New York City.

"Jesus may live in your heart," he says, "but Grandpa lives in your bones!"

His grandfather pointed a gun at his mother. I can only imagine the emotional and psychological impact on her and her children.

Children and children's children live with the blessings or the damage of their fathers' behaviour.

In Torah language, there are consequences for what we do that rumble "down to the third and the fourth generation".

Many are uncomfortable with Jesus' "Father God" terminology. Some don't consider fathers are necessary in a current definition of family. Some of us just don't want the responsibility that goes with the role.

But it takes a village to raise children and in that village there must be authentic men.

Only a man can teach children about manhood. Fatherhood is necessary; one cannot teach what one doesn't know. One cannot model something one has never experienced.

Who will call a boy to choose manhood, inviting him to take each new step and promising to walk those steps alongside him? Who will model faithful, loving maleness to girls, demonstrating that we honour their mothers as more than objects of lust, the butt of humour or prized trophies?

Men, truly fathering a child—throughout life—will be the most important thing you ever do. The mother of your child cannot do it for you.

If modelling authentic manhood is important for biological families, it is vital in the family of Jesus Christ—the community of the new people of God.

Where better than a community of servants and disciples of Christ for girls to see strong and gentle men who make and keep lifelong promises? Where better for boys to watch and learn from generations of blokes who are honest about their failings but strong in the grace of God?

As church we have a fabulous opportunity for men to exercise fatherhood, modelling what it means to be a man, for all children.

‘As church we have a fabulous opportunity for men to exercise fatherhood, modelling what it means to be a man, for all children’

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Brisbane's Storey Bridge, illuminated in blue
Photo: Blue Care

Brisbane honours Blue Care 60th

Brisbane's Storey Bridge was illuminated in blue and decked out with two large banners throughout the month of August in celebration of Blue Care's 60th anniversary.

Blue Care is a not-for-profit service provider, which works in partnership with clients, families and other health providers to support people with tailor made services that maintain their independence, personal wellbeing, community connections and quality of life.

Blue Care began as the Blue Nursing Service, an outreach of West End Methodist Mission (now West End Uniting Church) at West End in inner Brisbane. The venture was backed by a passionate congregation who recognised a need in the local community.

Celebrating Peace amid diversity this Interfaith September

Uniting Church congregations around the country will again celebrate the peace and diversity that is a part of God's creation through interfaith events in September.

The month, beginning the first Sunday of September, will include worship, interfaith festivals, scripture studies and more.

Interfaith reflections suitable for the International Day of Peace, Social Justice Sunday and other resources for congregational activities are available on the Assembly's Relations with Other Faiths website.

The Uniting Church in Australia National Working Group of Relations with Other Faiths was established to promote knowledge and understanding of other living world faiths and their communities, and seeks to develop a commitment to respect, tolerance, friendship and harmony with our neighbours.

Uniting Church census underway

The new census of the Uniting Church in Australia is currently underway. Congregations are requested to fill out their form before 12 September.

The Assembly last published national statistics in 1994 and the census will provide updated statistics to help resource and grow the church.

Ministers and congregations are urged to complete the survey by visiting the census website ucasurveys.ncls.org.au

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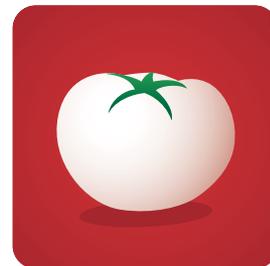
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says Pastor Rian Roux, Nexus Church (1000 attendees).