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Rachel Held Evans
Swayed by sacraments





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A church for all God's people

There's a lot of thought going on at the moment as to how the Uniting Church can do things differently in order to adapt to demographic changes in the broader community. It's a topic that sparked a lot of conversation during Open Space at the 31st Synod in Session last year.

It's not a new conversation. This year we celebrate 30 years since the Uniting Church declared, *We are a Multicultural Church*. Multiculturalism has been a transformative force both in the church and for Australia as a whole, and its effects will continue to be felt long into the future. We take a look at how far we've come and where we are going on page six.

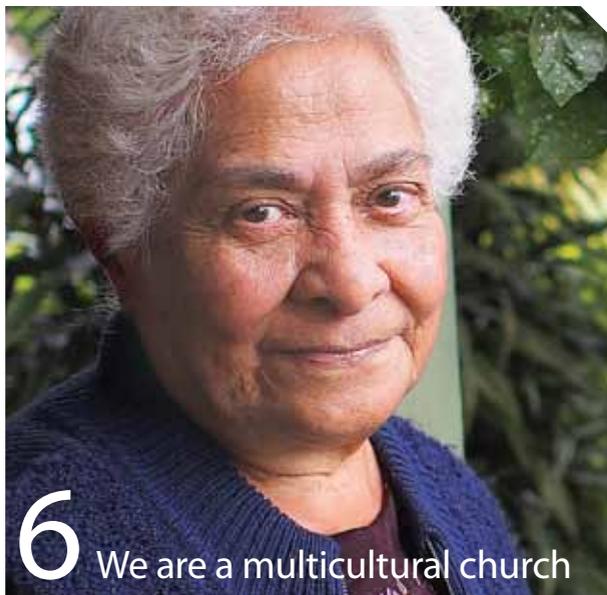
Many denominations from all over the world have identified the necessity to adapt to change. Last month we reviewed American author Rachel Held Evans' new book *Searching for Sunday*. This month we sit down with her to talk about a religious shift happening amongst Generation Y. Read her profile on page ten.

I'd also like to draw your attention to the special report on page 13 about the ongoing drought in central Queensland. Three years without rain has put enormous pressure on the community, and already-stretched Uniting Church congregations are under even further strain. We sent one of our reporters out with Moderator Rev David Baker on one of his visits to the affected communities.

Change is hard, but the Body of Christ is resilient. Together, with God's help, we can continue in our mission to love God and love our neighbour.

Rohan Salmond
Cross-platform editor

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Advertising: Ashley Thompson

Publisher: The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod.

Printing: Horton Media Limited, Narangba

Contact: Uniting Communications

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ISSN: 0817-4466; **Circulation:** 15 000; *Journey* is published 11 times a year for the Queensland Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia. Opinions expressed in *Journey* do not necessarily reflect those of the editor or the policies of the Uniting Church. Acceptance of advertising does not imply endorsement; inclusion of advertising material is at the discretion of the publisher. *Journey* cannot guarantee the publication and/or return of submissions but makes every effort to do so if requested.

Closing date for editorial and advertising for June *Journey* is Monday 15 June. The next issue of *Journey* will be available on Sunday 5 July.



Wrestling with angels

Monday Midday Prayer

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,

To venture on wilder seas

Where storms will show Your mastery;

Where losing sight of land,

We shall find the stars.

Amen

—Sir Francis Drake

Moderator's highlights

11 June

Multifaith Gathering for World Peace with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Brisbane

19 June

Synod Multicultural Forum, Broadwater Road Uniting Church, Brisbane

The last two editions of *Journey* have elicited comment regarding the May edition cover, and articles and letters about same-gender marriage, homosexual orientation and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

The Uniting Church, through its *Basis of Union*, commits itself to be a church open to the world, in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, as attested to by the apostolic witness. As we adhere to paragraph 11 of the *Basis*, we commit ourselves to be open to the fruits of historical, literary and scientific enquiry into our world, and to be open to having our understanding of the will and purpose of God sharpened by contact with contemporary thought.

This commitment, to both hear the word of God as he comes to us through the scriptures, and to be open to new discoveries, places us constantly in some degree of tension. Bruce Mullan highlighted that in his *Journey* article last month. As disciples, creative tension can be good for us. We have the gift of an inner peace of love, acceptance, and being reconciled with God; a grace in which we live and which we owe to others, yet we are also on a constant journey of being drawn out of ourselves, and our assumptions and ideas, and being made in the image of Christ.

Being born again is not without pain and struggle!

The Synod has adopted resolutions—between 1991 and 2003—on sexuality. These may be found at: ucaqld.com.au/administration/synod-meetings/minutes

These resolutions clearly adopt a Western Protestant, traditional view of sexuality, marriage and sexual expression. The resolutions also address matters of church discipline and freedom of conscience.

Members of the Uniting Church have a legitimate expectation that the church will engage them in the task of discerning the will and purpose of God and that this will be carried out fairly and openly. They also have a reasonable expectation that our publications will fairly and clearly represent existing doctrines and resolutions of the church and the various issues people are raising around matters of life and faith.

The obligation upon us as members of the church is to engage these discernments with humility and grace, and with a commitment to finding the truth that sets us free. One of my favourite Bible stories is in Genesis 32, the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel God sent. Discipleship in the Uniting Church is at times a bit of a wrestle—of thoughts, ideas, beliefs and of deeper understandings of the Christian story being born amongst us.

Rev David Baker
Moderator, Queensland Synod

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“A lot of love” between Aussie and Kiwi churches

Uniting Church president and moderators gather with the president of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, the moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and Hatton Vale Uniting Church pastor Rob Edwards.
Photo: Rohan Salmond

Church leaders from across Australia and New Zealand gathered in Brisbane last month.
Rohan Salmond reports.

The annual trans-Tasman gathering of church leaders took place in Brisbane in April, bringing together the six moderators from Uniting Church synods, the president of the Uniting Church Assembly, the president of the Methodist Church of New Zealand and the moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand for worship, prayer and discussion.

The meeting, which lasted five days, covered a range of topics including the need for more flexible pathways to ordination, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and engagement with immigrant communities in the life of the church.

Moderator of the Queensland Synod Rev David Baker said, “There is a lot of love in the room. I’m heartened by the readiness of those present to recognise the significant challenges facing the church across a number of issues.

“Rev Dr Andrew Dutney’s leadership in opening up these issues during his presidency of the [Uniting Church] Assembly has been greatly appreciated.”

There was a focus on church renewal during the week, with the leaders visiting Hatton Vale Uniting Church, a church plant in the growing Lockyer Valley region

of south-east Queensland, and the Coorparoo Uniting Church community garden in Brisbane. They also visited Uniting Church congregations near the University of Queensland which have teamed up to support Active Faith, a student ministry.

Rev Tovia Aumua, president of the Methodist Church of New Zealand, said churches are able to help each other work through issues, most of which are common to all communities of faith.

“Part of our pastoral role as leaders is not only to care for people, members of the church, but also for the ministers and their families. Without going into details, I see the same sort of issues in my role as president of the Methodist Church [as what I’m hearing from Uniting Church leaders].

“I feel that there are some issues I’ve heard today that the Methodist Church is well ahead on, in terms of relationships with Indigenous people, Europeans and other ethnic groups, within our churches. We are more than happy to assist you in that.

“Thus far I’ve really enjoyed my journey. The general sharing is very interesting, and getting to know the leaders of the church here in Australia is good.”

“I’m heartened by the readiness of those present to recognise the significant challenges facing the church across a number of issues”

Rev David Baker



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Multiculturalism Are we there yet?

The upcoming Assembly in Perth marks 30 years since the Uniting Church committed to being a multicultural church. Rohan Salmond explores how far we've come and where we are going.

Thirty years ago Calvin and Hobbes first appeared in newspapers, the Nintendo Entertainment System was launched in the United States, the wreck of the RMS Titanic was discovered and Live Aid concerts raised money for Ethiopian famine relief.

The Uniting Church, formed only eight years prior, gathered for what would become its historic fourth Assembly meeting in Sydney. In response to rapidly-changing social demographics, the Uniting Church formally adopted the *We are a Multicultural Church* statement, declaring that “The Uniting Church seeks to be open to changes that the Holy Spirit will bring to the church because of the creative contributions of people of different racial and cultural groups to its life.” (Paragraph six).

Thirty years of movement

It's a wide-ranging statement, encompassing everything from multiculturalism in the *Basis of Union* to the use of property among Cald (culturally and linguistically diverse) groups within the church. Thirty years on it continues to shape the life of the Uniting Church, providing guidelines for growth and a goal to which to aspire.

David Busch, multicultural project officer for South Moreton Presbytery, was at the 1985 Assembly meeting, reporting for *Journey* predecessor *Life and Times*.

“It was a profound change in emphasis in the church,” says David. “A lot of people who were there had been in the constituent denominations through the 60s and 70s,

and outside of Sydney and Melbourne those constituent denominations were vastly, dominantly white and mostly middle class. The Uniting Church was still finding what was distinctive about its character.

“It was a prophetic statement, not merely a descriptive one.”

Since that time, the Uniting Church has made a lot of ground in its commitment to multiculturalism. National conferences for many Cald groups meet regularly, including Indonesian, Korean, Tongan and South Sudanese meetings, among others. The church has expounded upon the 1985 statement as well: *A Church for all God's People* in 2006 and *One Body, Many Members* in 2012 examine the call to be a multicultural church in much finer detail.

Deaconess Terani Lima, chair of the Multi-Cross Cultural Committee in the Queensland Synod, is thrilled with how the Uniting Church is responding to increasing cultural diversity.

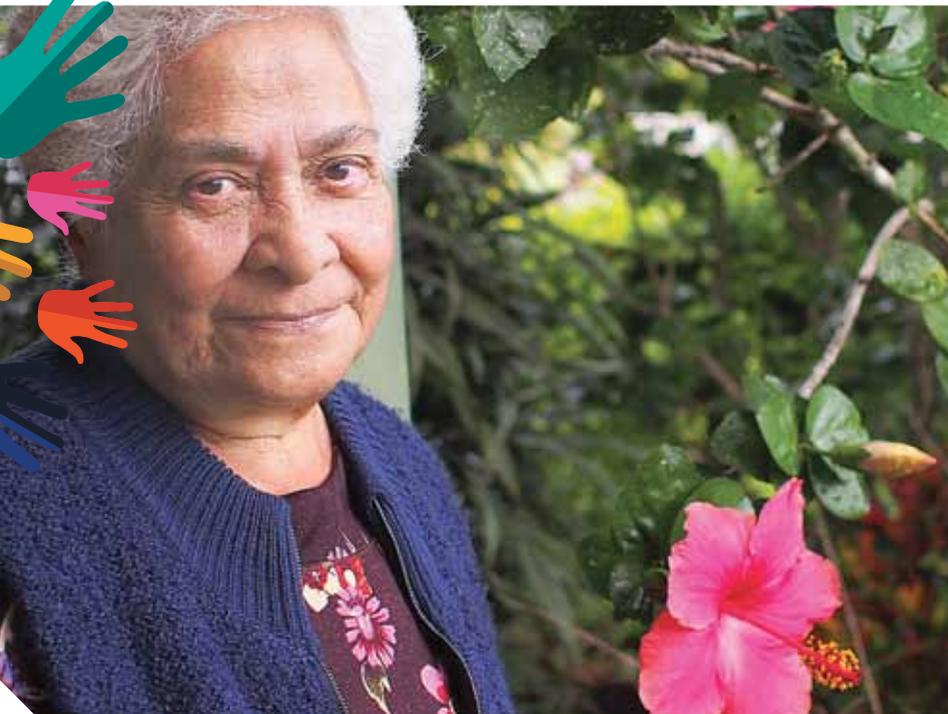
“I am most grateful to the Uniting Church for making all these statements and reiterating what is there theologically, to bring the cultures together to be one people, because we are the Body of Christ.

“Different gifts we have been given to enhance the work of mission. I'm very excited for these things happening in the church,” she says.

But measuring success is difficult, and points of friction between different cultural groups certainly exist,

‘ We can't just have a Korean and a Fijian on church council acting like white people ’

David Busch



Left: Deaconess Terani Lima.
Right: David Busch and Rev Dennis Corowa.
Photos: Rohan Salmond

such as issues surrounding women in ministry and recognising the qualifications of overseas ministers. How does the Uniting Church know when it has “made it”?

Yet more to do

The process of moving from a dominantly Anglo church to a multicultural model is difficult and slow. Despite affirmative action measures, people from Cald backgrounds are still under-represented in most synod and Assembly councils.

“I think the Uniting Church is trying,” says Terani. “I would like to see more of those gifted people in different cultures in committees and leadership groups. They need to be encouraged to be there,” she says.

According to Terani, both Anglo and Cald leaders need to be part of this process. “Then people feel more confident and enthused than if there are only people like us [from Cald backgrounds] telling them, ‘This is the sort of thing for you.’”

David is blunt in his challenge to Anglo churches: “White isn’t the culturally-neutral centre”. He believes that every church needs to recognise its own cultural framework, and be open to genuine input from people who are different.

“To include other cultures does not mean we’ll just do what we’ve already been doing,” he says. “We can’t just have a Korean and a Fijian on church council acting like white people; in actual fact the way we actually talk about things needs to change.

“We need to find different ways of raising issues in the life of the church such that people who operate in conversational and theological discussions and cultural context different from Western parliamentary style can actually bring their gifts to those discussions.”

Progress is certainly being made, and as time passes multiculturalism is becoming part of Uniting Church DNA—literally.

David says, “That call to be multicultural comes increasingly through the second generation. Children [of Cald parents] who have been born here are themselves multicultural or bicultural in the way that they relate. So that influence comes into the church.”

Congress turns 30

We are a Multicultural Church wasn’t the only move the Uniting Church made towards cross-cultural ministry that year. The 1985 Assembly also resolved to form the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).

National UAICC chairperson Rev Dennis Corowa wants to be clear that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation is vital to multiculturalism, the relationship Indigenous Australians have to this country is unique.

“Aboriginal people are the ancient culture of this land,” he says. “We retain that, but we are a small part of the population, and if the Anglos get us mixed up and lost in the wider multicultural society, the Anglos can control how that gets out.”

Congress is within itself a multicultural body, composed of diverse Indigenous cultural and language groups. Dennis says there are parallels from which multicultural society can learn.

“Historically, Aboriginal people have had their own areas and languages from different groups and how they related. They were able to do that—relate and to have that respect or relationship across their borders. If they were journeying to other places there is an interrelationship between groups to allow means for you to be cared for.

“We all need to learn how to be interdependent again. That mode of selfishness might appear every now and then, but then—bang!—God keeps drawing us back. I think there’s a continued move in a very respectful way towards a multicultural society.

“It’s very healing for Aboriginal people with mixed backgrounds. It definitely is for me; I have four different cultures in my background and I hold them all with much pride.”

Let’s rejoice!

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of *We are a Multicultural Church*, the Queensland Synod Multi-Cross Cultural Committee is hosting a forum to consider how to be a truly multicultural church, and a worship service to mark the anniversary.

“Hopefully we’ll have a good turnout. Hopefully people will be praying for that particular day to remember that this statement is made for the good of the church,” says Terani Lima.

“*[We are a Multicultural Church]* is reiterating what has always been there, but brings it to the fore and says to the people, this is it. We are all in it together, regardless of colours and cultures, we are all together as the Body of Christ.”

The 30th anniversary celebration of the We are a Multicultural Church statement is taking place Friday 19 June at Broadwater Road Uniting Church, with a forum to take place 9 am to 5 pm and a worship celebration between 7 pm and 9 pm.

Read the statement at assembly.uca.org.au/mcm/resources/assembly-resolutions-and-statements

Dump your junk, officer



Central region police chaplain Rev Glenn Louttit and Senior Constable Tracy Graham.
Photo: Queensland Police

‘Regardless of what people think, police officers are just like 100 per cent of our wider society’
Rev Glen Louttit

Investigating robberies, assault, homicide and rape; police officers have heavy burdens to carry. Ashley Thompson speaks with Rev Glenn Louttit about being a listening ear to Queensland’s finest.

“Police officers deal with trauma all the time but they become conditioned to it as time goes by,” says central region police chaplain Rev Glenn Louttit. “If the truth be known they like to portray that they are resilient ... but the conversation turns when you get them by themselves.

“Our job is to loiter with intent,” he says.

A member of Fitzroy North Rockhampton Uniting Church, Glenn has ministered in the Queensland Police Service for nearly ten years, having earned his stripes through three cyclones and two train crashes.

An ordained minister in the Uniting Church, Glenn is a trained youth worker and has worked and worshipped in congregations as far and wide as Chermside, Toowoomba City, Jandowae, Laidley, Gympie and Innisfail.

“Becoming a police chaplain, I believe, has taken me back to my training with working with young people because the majority of people in the Queensland Police are less than 40 years of age,” says Glenn.

Called to ministry beyond the church, Glenn found his start as a part-timer and is now one of six full-time police

chaplains in Queensland, covering an area from as far north as Bowen, west to Emerald and south to Hervey Bay; travelling over 50 000 km a year and dropping in at police stations along the way.

“It’s really about, ‘G’day, how are you? How are things going? Are you happy in your job?’—leading questions inviting them to share,” says Glenn.

“It has taken time to build relationships—and we don’t often talk about God but when we do, they are what I would call divine moments, they’re God moments ... and they’re gold.”

The moral integrity of the police is something Glenn is passionate about, and it hurts him to witness media and public criticism of their actions—he has a deeper appreciation for their humanity.

“Regardless of what people think, police officers are just like 100 per cent of our wider society,” he explains.

“They go through relationship break-ups, they go through marriages, they go through marriage break-ups just like everybody else does and I am there on the side not making judgement but being a listening ear when they want to come dump their junk.”

To find out more about how you can get involved in police chaplaincy, email Rev Glenn Louttit on louttit.glennd@police.qld.gov.au



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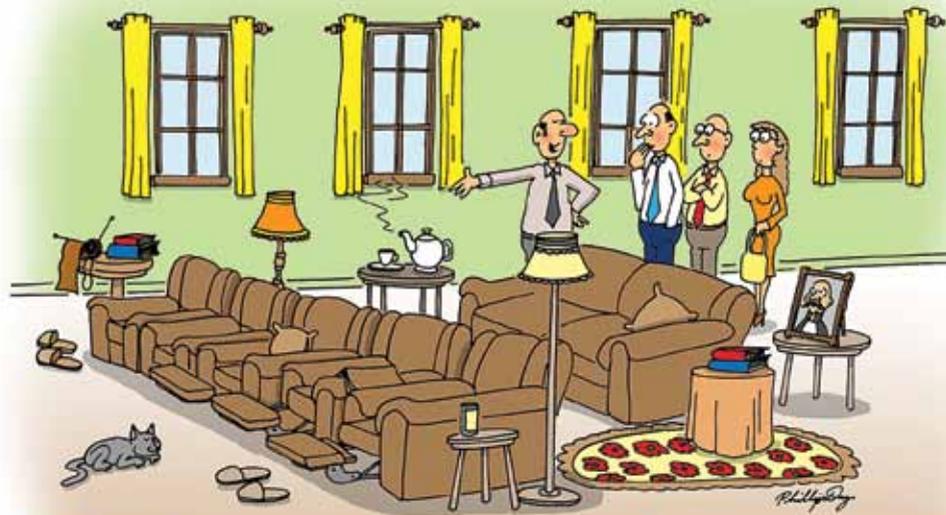
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They're new, what do we do?

For a community of faith to grow, it needs to make room for people who have never been to church before. Rev David MacGregor explores a variety of ways newcomers can feel at home in a new place.

In our worshipping communities we struggle to make inclusion real in our life together, especially with those who have never previously belonged to a church. This was among the topics discussed during the Open Space at last year's Synod in Session.

We too easily offer "monocultural" worship—one size and style fits all. But Jesus' welcome was wide, including those otherwise excluded because of race, wellness, gender, social status or religious sensibilities.

To provide inclusive worship in which anyone may participate, some aspects of our corporate worship may have to change. We'll also have to become more proactive about inviting people to church in the first place.

Inclusive worship will embrace the diverse nature of the community of faith, not only to make young people and families feel welcome, but giving them the opportunity to lead and share faith. Inclusion is built when the story of our life has the opportunity to connect with God's story. The nature and style of preaching needs to be considered, connecting with people's real life hurts and hopes.

The language of congregational song and spoken prayer in worship can often be quite foreign and alienating to newcomers. Everyday lingo needs to be encouraged where

possible, along with inclusive language, both for God and people—more "we" and less "I". Inclusion also involves giving space for silence, symbols and non-verbal gestures.

We all behave differently and prefer different styles of worship through which we engage with God. Some will engage with God through words, while others resonate more through emotion, symbol and action. Include a range of people in the team crafting and leading worship so various styles are taken into account. It must be an authentic expression of the community—we can all sniff out something that lacks depth or integrity.

Church buildings themselves, no matter how aesthetically pleasing, can be like foreign territory for a worshipping newcomer. Many congregations have seen value in meeting in a school or community hall, or even a park, a home or a pub.

Ultimately, worship is inclusive and authentic in spirit and truth when it allows the whole community to "engage the holy". Historically, the creative arts have proven to be a wonderful means of so engaging. Perhaps the ultimate question is not what we hope worshipping God might be like, but what does God want worship to be like?

David is minister with Wellers Hill Tarragindi Uniting Church.

‘Jesus' welcome was wide, including those otherwise excluded because of race, wellness, gender, social status or religious sensibilities’

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Rachel Held Evans

Busting myths about millennials

A millennial's reasons for staying, leaving and returning to church are as rich and complex as the generation itself. Ashley Thompson speaks with *New York Times* best-selling author Rachel Held Evans about why Generation Y isn't as shallow as you might think.

A self-described introvert and “doubt-filled believer” from the small town of Dayton, Tennessee, Rachel Held Evans writes with courage and humour, airing her sometimes unpopular opinions like “red bras on clotheslines” while voicing the “quiet misgivings most Christians keep hidden in the dark corner of their hearts and would rather not name”.

“Me too!” echoes back her online community, exchanging stories about church scars and the relief they're not alone. Yet it would be a mistake to read Rachel's third and latest book *Searching for Sunday* as a negative critique of the church. It is a spiritual memoir detailing the evolution of a faith from “intoxicated with certainty” to “ugly doubt” and an inside look into how one millennial loved, left and came back to church. It is a celebration of the sacraments, around which the book is based, and an advocate for the value of church.

“What finally brought me back, after years of running away, wasn't lattes or skinny jeans; it was the

sacraments,” writes Rachel in her latest guest blog for *The Washington Post*.

“They don't need to be repackaged or rebranded; they just need to be practised, offered and explained in the context of a loving, authentic and inclusive community.”

Stop trying to make church “cool”

“Bass reverberates through the auditorium floor as a heavily bearded worship leader pauses to invite the congregation, bathed in the light of two giant screens, to tweet using #JesusLives. The scent of freshly brewed coffee wafts in from the lobby, where you can order macchiatos and purchase mugs boasting a sleek church logo. The chairs are comfortable and the music sounds like something from the top of the charts. At the end of the service, someone will win an iPad,” writes Rachel.

“This, in the view of many churches, is what millennials like me want.”

‘ But all I really wanted was just for the questions I had to be taken seriously ’

As a member of the generation whose childhood was saturated by unregulated mass marketing and digital technology, Rachel argues millennials are more media critical and less shallow than you think; able to “sniff out” inauthenticity and style without substance—something they despise.

New United States research from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life confirms the trend churches everywhere are obsessed with: “Among those of us who came of age around the year 2000, a solid quarter claim no religious affiliation at all.” A significant disconnection from previous generations.

As the number of young people dwindles from the pews, church leaders are freaking out—jumping to conclusions as to the reasons they left and attempting to lure them back with flashier, concert-style stage performances.

Yet according to Barna Group and the Cornerstone Knowledge Network, 67 per cent of millennials prefer a “classic” church over a “trendy” one and 77 per cent would choose a “sanctuary” over an “auditorium”.

So if style isn’t the catalyst for millennial attendance, what is? And why did they leave in the first place?

Who do you think you are?

“You’re a young woman without a seminary education, who do you think you are?”

The first to confess to her lack of theological training Rachel says this is the biggest prejudice she faces in sharing her story. “And I’ll be completely honest that does sometimes tap into an insecurity of mine,” she says, “that I don’t have any right to be writing what I write.”

In a recent blog post titled *Why a Seminary Degree Doesn’t Have to Make You a Jerk*, Rachel describes an awkward dinner party put-down from a “young, seminary-trained man” and that she is “intensely aware of my lack of theological qualifications” but on her better days is “of the conviction that regular people can talk about God too and perhaps even prophesy”.

She says, “I think people need to know that the folks in your pews care about this stuff and want to engage with it on a personal level, want to think it through and wrestle with it, read the text for themselves and study the text—and that should be a good thing because we’ve got something to bring to the table.”

And to the table she has brought it.

Rachel’s first book *Evolving in Monkey Town* (2010), re-released in 2014 as *Faith Unraveled*, cemented her mark as the voice of progressive “doubt-filled believers” in the American Christian space, after years of blogging on the topic. Much like her close friend and Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber, Rachel found she could no longer reconcile her issues of conscience with the political framing of her fundamentalist Christian upbringing, particularly around the areas of women’s ordination and LGBT inclusion.

For many years Rachel struggled with conflicting feelings she had for the church she loved but which also made her feel completely alone in her questions, culminating with her and her husband Dan’s heartbreaking decision to leave.

“It became increasingly clear that my fellow Christians didn’t want to listen to me, or grieve with me, or walk down this frightening road with me. They wanted to fix me,” Rachel writes of her doubt in *Searching for Sunday*.

“But all I really wanted was just for the questions I had to be taken seriously,” says Rachel. “I didn’t need any more apologetics books to try and answer them, I didn’t need any more prayers of intervention or anything like that, I just wanted people to say ‘Oh, Rachel that makes sense, I understand and I’m here, I’m here no matter what happens.’”

Rachel’s next book, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* (2012), in which she recounted how she spent an entire year of literally living a Biblical lifestyle, garnered her national media attention as a *New York Times* best seller and landed her on *The Today Show*.

The outspokenness that draws in her readers also causes friction between Rachel and the fervent Protestant fundamentalism of the Bible Belt states surrounding her. Nashville-based Christian retailer Lifeway, helmed by the Southern Baptists, decided not to carry *Biblical Womanhood* and did not provide any explanation for the decision.

Why I returned

Yet despite all these misgivings, Rachel loves the church and believes in its value, finding home in an Episcopal church that embraces the “inclusivity so many millennials long for in their churches”.

But as Rachel writes in *Searching for Sunday*, a millennial’s reasons for “staying, leaving and returning to church are as complex and layered as we are. They don’t fit in the boxes we check in the surveys or the hurried responses we deliver at dinner parties” and generalising it any other way would be denying them their humanity.

“I want to acknowledge that a lot of people have left the church because it has deeply wounded them and I grieve with them on that and it’s not okay; it’s not okay when people get kicked out of their churches because of divorce or because they’re gay. It’s not okay when churches sideline people for asking questions or having doubts about their faith,” she says.

“The trick isn’t to make church cool; it’s to keep worship weird,” Rachel writes, “[A church] whose doors are open to all—conservatives, liberals, rich, poor, gay, straight and even perpetual doubters like me.”

Searching for Sunday is available in print or eBook from Trinity Theological Library’s website library.trinity.qld.edu.au

‘ I want to acknowledge that a lot of people have left the church because it has deeply wounded them and I grieve with them on that ’



faith Facebook faux pas

Just because you can say something, doesn't mean you should. Heaven knows not all Christians use Facebook appropriately—a sad and missed opportunity considering the potential impact. Here are five tips to keep you on the straight and narrow.

1

Inspiration overload

I'm so glad you are inspired by five million quotes from "Anonymous" laid over city backdrops and Bible verses placed adjacent to fluffy animals but please find other things to share. Except #spiritualinspiration posts from the Uniting Church Queensland Facebook page, you can share those ;-)

2

#blessed!

Akin to the humblebrag (self-promotion couched in phony humility), #blessed posts are the worst because it's straight-up bragging cloaked in Christianese. "So #blessed to wake up to my beautiful hubby every morning 🥰 #blessedbeyondmeasure #itsthelittlethings" Ew.

3

"Isn't it horrible that ..."

Hmmm. Be careful with this one! Your opinion isn't shared by all your Facebook friends and while you may think it's your Australian-given right to express political and social opinions that to you are "common sense", it's wise to approach hot button issues in a more constructive manner.

4

Ease up on that clickbait

Clickbait sites like Upworthy use sensationalist headlines encouraging people to read in order to generate advertising revenue. We've all fallen for: "19 facts about motherhood that will SHOCK you! Number 7 will make you cry," but in reality this is just fuzzy, feel-good media designed to drive traffic. It doesn't affect real change and only

5

Tone matters

If only Christians realised the tone and posture in which they talk about contentious issues can be a greater witness than the words spoken. Facebook is good for talking about important issues but sometimes conversations need to be taken offline if authenticity is a priority. "Do you want to grab a coffee to discuss this further?" may be the perfect response to diffuse an aggressive, rude "friend" who has real questions but lacks the web etiquette to express them cordially.

exists to generate profit for a private company. So keep this in mind before you hit the share button and spam your friends.

A friend at your side

If you find yourself in the delicate position of having to arrange a funeral, one of the greatest things you can have with you, is the Alex Gow Funeral Planning Guide.

It explains everything about funerals in simple English and sets out all your options to plan a service that honours, remembers and celebrates a life well-lived.



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Phillip Walker and Rev David Baker
at Westhill, outside Blackall.
All Photos: Dianne Jensen



On the road ...

Over three days barrelling down long dusty roads through the iconic landscape of central west Queensland, there are many stories about what it means to be church in this remote and starkly beautiful place during the worst conditions in living memory.

Congregations in the bush have a lot in common with the faithful core who keep small churches alive across Queensland. But out here, the congregations of Central Queensland Presbytery are scattered across an area 1000 km west to east and 650 km north to south, and ordained ministers are rarer than hen's teeth.

This is the third failed wet season for the Longreach district, following a string of years without decent rain. For as far as the eye can see (and that's a long way out here), the Mitchell grasslands and Buffel grass are leached to the reddish-brown colour of the sandy soil.

When the going gets tough

Our first visit is to Marchmont, the 50 000 acre property of graziers Adrian and Julie Brown at Ilfracombe. Youngsters Xavier and Bronte are taught by their mother and a young governess via the Longreach School of Distance Education.

The homestead is an oasis of green fed by a diminishing dam. The bore water rising steaming hot from 800 metres below ground level waters stock, but is not suitable for the garden. Julie and the children take us on a tour of the empty shearing shed—like most people the Browns have sold their 8500 sheep, and the last of their beef cattle are on agistment.

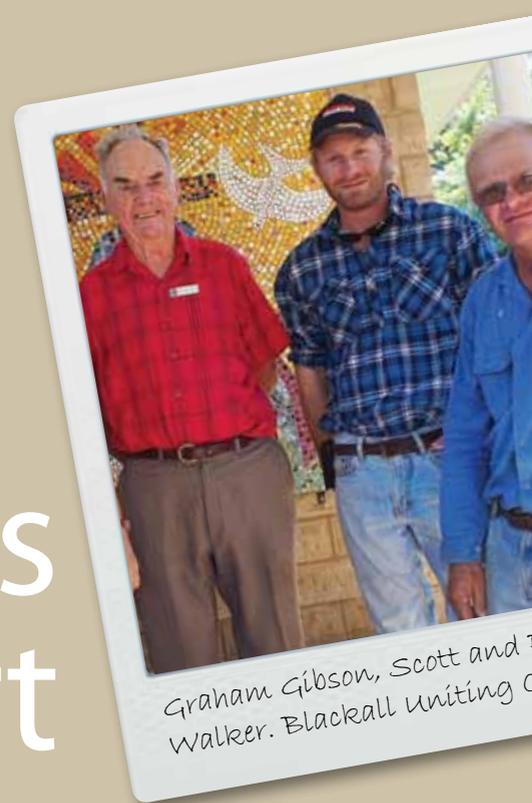
Adrian's parents Anne and Andy Brown are members of the Longreach Uniting Church, and the hosts of a barbecue that evening to meet the moderator. The 20 or so people are warm and friendly, and their stories of everyday life reflect a commitment to this community and a love of outback life.

Continued >>>

Bush congregations battle to support drought communities

Everyone tells us that the country is a real picture in a good season. But as the moderator Rev David Baker, Central Queensland Presbytery minister Rev Brian Gilbert and their Uniting Communications sidekick meet with church members in Longreach, Barcaldine and Blackall, the talk is all about the iron grip of the drought. **Dianne Jensen** reports.

Bush congregations battle to support drought communities



Graham Gibson, Scott and Richelle Walker. Blackall Uniting Church

Continued
from page 13

‘... David Baker’s message is simple, and it’s one that he delivers to church members everywhere we go on this whirlwind trip; you are not forgotten by your Uniting Church brothers and sisters’

Queensland moderator Rev David Baker’s message is simple, and it’s one that he delivers to church members everywhere we go on this whirlwind trip: you are not forgotten by your Uniting Church brothers and sisters living on the coast and in the cities. The church appreciates your witness. We know times are tough, and we care.

Ministry of hope

Jenny Coombes is the Uniting Church minister at Longreach, with a congregation of between 40 and 50 regular attenders, averaging around 27 on any given Sunday. Helping the church and the community survive the deepening crisis has become a focus for her ministry.

“We are doing a lot of work with drought relief, but getting the contact out on to the properties, that’s a challenge,” says Jenny. “It’s difficult in some cases to reach people because they are constantly out feeding cattle, or they’ve got the cattle on the road. You’ve got to build up the trust—in a lot of cases I am actually being the support person for someone who is supporting friends and family who are struggling.

“There used to be a very strong ministry, with about half a dozen stations where services would be held but as the older couples have retired into the town, there’s just not the people there,” she adds. “Each station used to be a community in its own right but now it’s right back to just the husband and wife, with kids going away to work elsewhere.”

Witnesses to the faith

The next day we catch up with Barcaldine Uniting Church members at Mandy Balderson’s café in the beautiful main street of Barcaldine. With no ordained minister, the congregation is sustained by a faithful group who work ecumenically to keep groups like the Ladies’ Fellowship alive and to provide a Christian presence at public events.

“When I came here ten years ago the average congregation would have been 20 to 25—now it’s 13. In that time there hasn’t been anybody come in that’s new—a few off and on, but there hasn’t been replenishment,” says Doug Lane, who is also actively involved in the local men’s shed.

The Barcaldine church used to receive a good income from catering at the cattle sales, adds Bev Church, but the volunteers can’t manage any more.

An hour or so down the road we meet members from Blackall Uniting Church, an active church community with 15 to 25 regular attenders, two keyboardists and song worship leaders, a drummer and a strong cohort of lay preachers. There is a regular Sunday service, a monthly Sunday Night Live service and a youth ministry led by Scott Walker.

“We get anywhere from between five to 15 kids at youth group—it’s really good, and we are just about to start up a Bible study for those who are really keen,” says Scott. “We do a small study at youth group but that’s more evangelistic, teaching them what Christianity is all about.”

His parents Phillip and Richelle Walker are stalwarts of the congregation. They own Westhill, a cattle property centred around a shady homestead about 30 km north of Blackall. In country terms, it’s just down the road from Alice Downs, the property where legendary shearer Jackie Howe made his mark.

Down at the Westhill yards, we watch cattle being rounded up by motorbike. Even though it’s dusty, the red-gold landscape dotted with trees is a stunning sight in the setting sun.

“It’s one of the better countries, except when it’s got no rain,” says Phil. “We used to have sheep, but the dogs [dingos] got rid of them, we have cattle now. You take years to build up to a certain stage of breeding, but at the moment we’re just selling. We closed the stud down.”

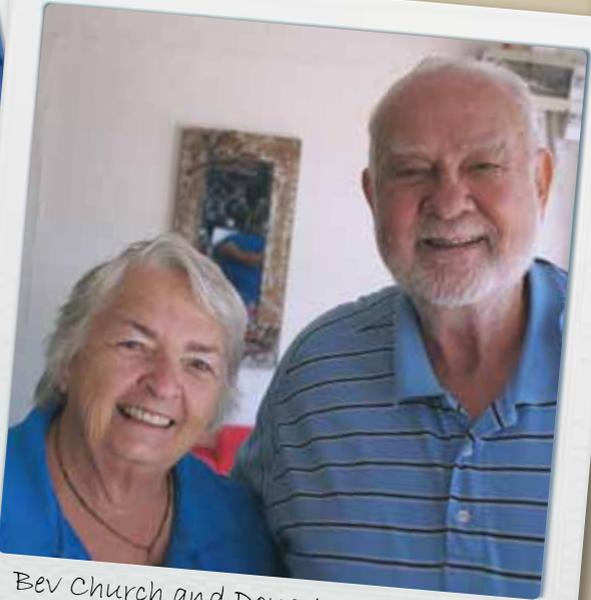
“This is a different sort of a drought to what we had from 2002 to 2007,” adds Richelle. “We’ve never run out of dam water at the house in the 34 years we’ve been there—we’ve been close—but this time we have and it’s only the third year.”

Retired couple Meryl and Graham Gibson have served the Blackall church for many years.

“We’ve got a thrift shop that we’ve run since 1958 and it has been a background support to the church and if anyone has any disaster in town we supply everything that they need,” says Meryl. “This is the worst year that we’ve ever had ... we have \$2 tags on just about everything in the shop and still people say that’s too much.”



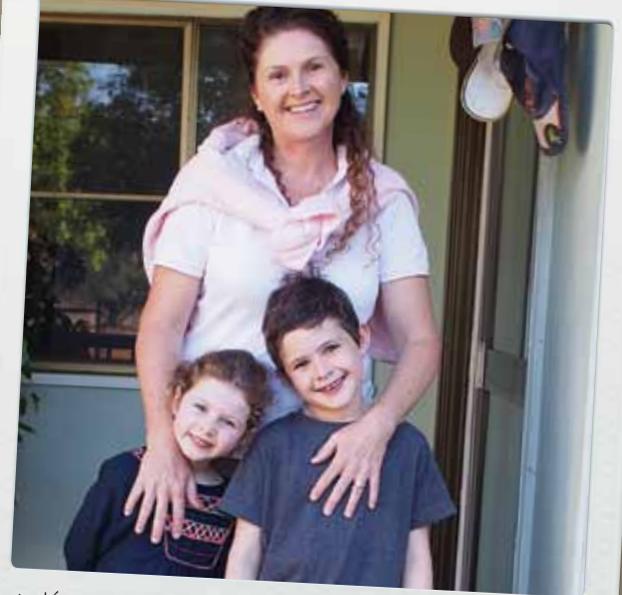
Phillip Church



Bev Church and Doug Lane,
Barcaldine Uniting Church.



Meryl Gibson, Richelle Walker.
Blackall Uniting Church



Julie Brown with Bronte and Xavier
at Marchmont, Ilfracombe.

Graham is on the combined churches team which provides breakfast to the local state school every Thursday. He and Meryl are both lay preachers and regularly travel to the tiny towns of Jericho and Alpha as well as sharing the preaching in Blackall.

“I am only getting say three people in Jericho and about six in Alpha, but if we don’t go that church will close,” says Graham. “Blackall church has seen that as our mission over the years. We’ve been maintaining it while we haven’t got a minster ... but it’s a 400 km return trip.”

Who shall I send?

The pressures on rural congregations are familiar to Central Queensland Presbytery minister Brian Gilbert, whose remit covers the area from Prosperine to Winton, down to Blackall and across to Theodore and Miriam Vale and up the Capricorn coast.

There are no ordained ministers in Gregory (Capella, Clermont and Moranbah), Barcaldine, Blackall or Emerald, although Callide Valley (Biloela and Wowan) has the part-time (0.25) services of Pastor Donna Muston.

Brian says, “In some places there are lay people who are either trained as lay preachers or have done some sort of training at a lay course. One of the things that has had an impact has been Emmaus, where people take on leadership roles and learn to present in front of people—that’s been a good training ground.”

“One of the other things that has been significant has been the lay presidency of the sacraments. Back in the 90s this was a rarity, but now every congregation in the presbytery has people who are authorised to preside over the sacraments. Without that, places like Blackall, Barcaldine, Clermont, Capella, Dysart and Moranbah wouldn’t be able to have communion at all.”

Moderator Dave Baker believes that a full-time ordained person resourcing a growing ministry or congregation—the model the Uniting Church adopted at union—is still the ideal ministry model, even in the bush.

“We certainly have to be adaptable, and the churches that are surviving out here are doing so because of a willingness to do things differently. Rural Queenslanders have always had to be creative and inventive!” says Dave. “In the Uniting Church there is now a broader capacity to appoint people to positions of responsibility in faith communities—there are many models, and our understating of the ordering of the church must always be of service to the mission of the church.”

How to help

Rev Jenny Coombes is one of the drivers behind the new Western Queensland Drought Appeal Committee set up by churches and community agencies to assist with the coordination and distribution of drought aid across the Longreach region.

“The impact of drought starts with the farmers, and moves to the people who supply things for the farmers, and then it moves to all the other businesses because there is no discretionary money. Work hours start reducing, so everything compounds,” says Jenny.

Donations of hay or food, however well meant, can chew up resources and under-cut locals, she says. “As soon as you send a product that can be purchased or produced here, you’re cutting out our businesses. We’ve got to have a community as a whole left when this drought finally breaks.”

The appeal committee will distribute funds to those affected by the drought, benefitting property owners and local business.

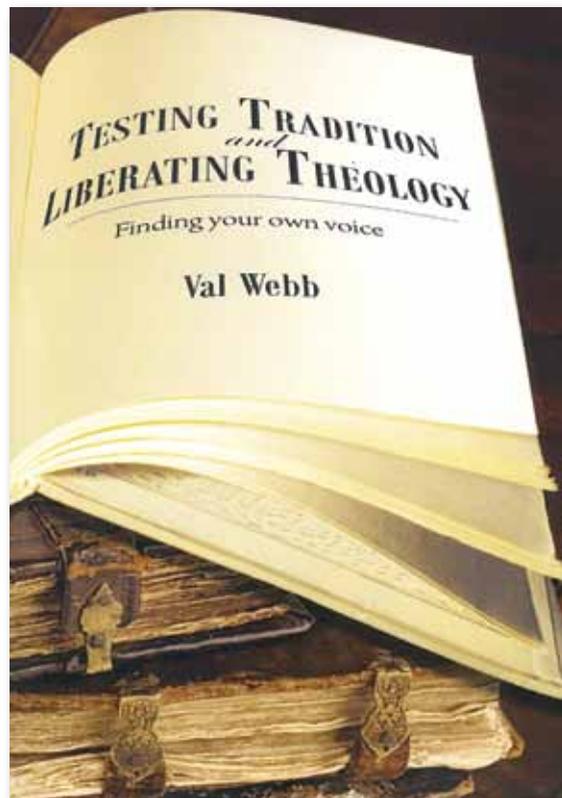
“I am constantly astounded at how positive the people are,” adds Jenny. “You know they are struggling but they also know it’s part of life on the land. They are not looking for charity—they need help just to keep going and they’ll work their way out of it.”

For more information visit [facebook.com/wqdroughtappeal](https://www.facebook.com/wqdroughtappeal) or contact Longreach Uniting Church 4658 1164 or longreachuca@gmail.com

‘ We are doing a lot of work with drought relief, but getting the contact out on to the properties, that’s a challenge ... It’s difficult in some cases to reach people because they are constantly out feeding cattle ’

Rev Jenny Coombes

Finding your own theological voice



Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology
 Dr Val Webb
 Morning Star
 Publishing, 2015
 \$39.95

***Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology* is a little Aussie gem from our own pre-eminent lay theologian Dr Val Webb.**

Webb's goal in this book is to unlock theological process from the rarefied academic world of the seminary and encourage everyone to do their own theological thinking, "rather than continually accepting the often dumbed-down scraps from the altar of others".

Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology makes theology accessible for the average reader, using clear language and everyday images that open up the mysteries of religious belief.

It provides a comprehensive overview of the history of theology through the last 2000 years, presenting an intelligible overview of key theologians and their contribution to the development of theological thought.

If you have ever wondered what systematic theology, Pelagianism, neo-orthodoxy or the "filioque" clause are all about, then the early chapters of this book are for you.

Webb then goes on to explore and explain liberation and feminist theologies and appropriately concludes with the contribution eco-theology can make to understanding our relationship with the natural world.

Whether it is ancient and traditional theology or emerging, evolving and progressive theologies, Webb summarises the

significant while acknowledging the impossibility of a comprehensive analysis in one small book.

Her précis provides plenty of revision to what we may already know as well as moments of revelation and discovery. Reading this book is to be empowered by a credible lay theologian.

What could have been a dry read is flavoured by an autobiographical thread which covers Webb's own theological journey from the early certainties of evangelical faith to more complex current contextual understanding.

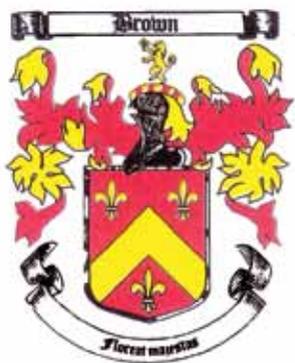
While she deals equitably with the flow and history of theological thought, Webb doesn't hide her own theological preferences and unashamed partiality for contextual theology.

"Many people today are 'doing their theology' with their feet—walking out of churches that continue to preach outdated and unbelievable ideas from former ages, rather than helping people find answers in their present situation," she writes.

This perspective won't sit comfortably with many who favour the neo-Barthian (look this up in her book) fondness that dominates much Uniting Church thinking.

Testing Tradition and Liberating Theology submits that there are many ways to think theologically, and Webb leaves the reader to make their own decision.

Bruce Mullan
 Acting director, Uniting Communications



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Unfreeze the past, create the future

Past success shouldn't rule out innovation in the future. North Queensland Presbytery minister **Rev Garry Hardingham** encourages the Uniting Church to continue to be a pioneer in faith and service.

One of the problems of viewing the world through a rear-view mirror is not being able to focus on what's in front of you.

In April, my fellow ex-flying patrol padre Bob Heathwood, current padre David Ellis and I attended the unveiling of a slide-show at John Flynn Place, the museum celebrating the history of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and the outback padres that worked alongside them.

It was a wonderful dinner, but there was a strong theme that emerged as speakers took up their places to recall the foundation of the RFDS and what it meant to the people and the church of the time. There emerged a sense that once the RFDS was put in place and the pioneers had done their thing, history was somehow frozen.

And here is the danger for the church.

As someone who came to faith later in his life, not having experienced the church in the so-called "glory days", I fear the Uniting Church is in danger of slipping into a "what good could ever come out of Nazareth" mentality. We did our bit and now we will just fade off like old soldiers.

There is much we can celebrate: UnitingCare and BlueCare, Lifeline and our hospitals, top-quality schools

and childcare centres and myriad other great examples of passion that bore fruit for the wellbeing of our communities. We have the right to be proud of the way we have served God and the world. I think rightly we can afford glimpses into the rear-view mirror.

But we must continue to move forward. To dream, to hope, to vision and to take risks. After all, is this not why the church exists?

Recently in Townsville the little congregation of Wulguru took a big step out in faith by establishing the Holistic Cancer Help Centre, a place where people can come and find nurturing and support in the most difficult time of their lives. In many other congregations we see people beaver away at finding new ways to express Uniting Church faith in the world.

The pioneers and the heroes of our church do not just live in the sepia tones of past glory, they are amongst us now harbouring a spark and coalescing a vision.

In this year, the year of Living the Gospel, let's refocus on what has made the Uniting Church great in the past so that in generations to come, they may peek back in the rear-view mirror and say, "Now those people had faith, courage, vision and passion."

‘ But we must continue to move forward. To dream, to hope, to vision and to take risks. After all, is this not why the church exists? ’



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"We take the time to listen."

Australian prime minister Tony Abbott and federal treasurer Joe Hockey pose for pictures as they look through budget papers at Parliament House in Canberra. Photo: Lukas Coch/AAP



World leaders to meet for Paris climate summit

We have a window of opportunity to ensure that governments take effective steps to prevent climate change.

This December delegates from almost 200 countries will meet in Paris to try and solve perhaps the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced—climate change.

Ninety-seven per cent of the world's climate scientists say that effective action now is necessary to ensure a safe climate future.

Our government has said that mid-year it would announce the target for our greenhouse gas emissions cuts, which Australia will bring to Paris.

This is our chance to tell our government that we want them to make effective cuts.

Find the full piece at journeyonline.com.au

Rations to raise money for refugees

Can you survive on the same rations as a Burmese refugee?

Act for Peace is issuing a Ration Challenge during Refugee Week from 14–20 June. Money raised will help make sure refugees have enough to eat, and by sharing this powerful experience with those around you, you can bring the refugee struggle closer to home in a way that's impossible to ignore.

Help stand up for refugees by registering at actforpeace.org.au/rationchallenge. By registering you will be immediately linked to your online fundraising page which you can personalise, and share with your family and friends to start getting sponsored.

Uniting Church budget response: lukewarm

The Uniting Church Assembly and UnitingCare Australia have issued mixed responses to the federal budget released in May, praising the government's continued support for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and commitment to infrastructure but criticising further cuts to foreign aid.

"Another \$1 billion of cuts in foreign aid in the next financial year will hit the world's poor hardest of all," said Uniting Church president Rev Dr Andrew Dutney.

National director of UnitingCare Australia Lin Hatfield Dodds said government handouts had been poorly targeted.

"The government needs to decide whether or not it is serious about clamping down on middle class welfare," she said.

Dr Dutney said investment in infrastructure must not come at the expense of Indigenous people in northern Australia.

"First Peoples must be equal partners in these enterprises and their rights and sovereignty respected. I expect the role of Indigenous Australians to be duly acknowledged in this process."

Income management programs will also be extended in all locations for another two years.

Online giving is here!

Now you can give online to the Uniting Church Foundation's \$10 for 10 appeal and support the Queensland Synod's mission of Indigenous education. Our secure online portal registered with Paypal accepts Mastercard or Visa credit cards. No donor surcharge fees apply.

Visit missionpossible.ucaqld.com.au for more!

Why change?

I agree with all the letters in the May issue of *Journey*. There is nothing to talk about, God's word is clear. He made Eve. No I am not narrow-minded, these gay people have been around since the year dot but it was always kept quiet.

Why should we change ways for them? All the publicity they get is wrong. To me they are weak people. How would the population grow? No, God knows best.

Marjorie Mourilyan
Living Rivers Uniting Church, Coomera

Love the gay community

I was very happy to read Rev Alistair Macrae's comments in your article on marriage ("Marriage: We're talking about it", May 2015, page six). Discussion on this important issue should not be cheapened by reduction to our favourite Bible verses or cultural quips. These important issues require careful thought to do what is right.

However, after all this time I fear that the Uniting Church's fear of disunity is preventing it from taking a decisive stance on this matter. The current position of neither blessing nor condemning gay relationships is easy and convenient for the church but leaves its gay members in a difficult position.

In the meantime, I hope the Uniting Church's struggle over this issue doesn't prevent it from actively loving the gay community. The church could gain much moral authority by showing hospitality to disowned gay youths or assisting suicide prevention services. Let's not restrict the church's mission to only politics.

Adam Myers
Newmarket

Looking forward to conversation

I support *Journey's* publication of news about Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in the April edition ("Uniting Church marches with pride", page 10). It is important to share stories about all our members and support agencies. I appreciate Bruce Mullan's article "Marriage: We're talking about it" (May 2015, page six). It assists us to grasp the realities of our current situation. I also look forward to continuing our conversations on this topic.

However as a senior I found the black type on a dark blue background difficult to read. Please consider the needs of readers with "old and tired" eyes when designing the print editions of this excellent magazine. Thank you for your hard work on our behalf.

Lorna Skilton
Middle Ridge Uniting Church



You are selling out on marriage

I picked up *Journey* in the Wesley Hospital after visiting a friend. I was absolutely amazed that your writers are “selling out” to the spirit of our times in accepting homosexual relationships as reconcilable with our faith (“Marriage: We’re talking about it”, May 2015, page six). I think most Christians would agree that, quite apart from the Bible, nature and common sense inform us of their illegitimacy. The first article seems to say that if we don’t like what the Bible says, we can supersede it with “experience”—an idea that seems extremely loose. The second article (“Free to be different”, May 2015, page eight) goes further by appealing to a Triune perspective—an argument that could be used to support polyamory as well. Where is our faith, the faith of our fathers? Instead, we are seeing our churches make such concessions to our age as to be indistinguishable from it, whereas we need to debate marriage from an anthropological perspective, I think, as indicated in scripture, “Male and female he made them”.

Warwick Adeney
Annerley Catholic Church, Brisbane

Walk with Jesus

This month we celebrate the 38th anniversary of church union. Since 1977 many things have occurred, all contributing to and shaping the church we see today.

The traditions we have known in the past are starting to give way to things we may now find hard to accept (“Marriage: We’re talking about it”, May 2015, page six). This different environment reminds us of the new world of compliance, regulation, social change and community attitudes. All these raise the question, “What should we do?”

As we mark this union of a different kind than that of marriage and approach the Assembly meeting, it is perhaps time to reflect on the words of Robin Mann’s “Walking down the road”—“Oh, stay by my side, Jesus, you be my guide/don’t you know how I trust in you/Show me where I should call/pick me up when I fall/as I’m walkin’ down the road with you.”

Allan Gibson OAM
Wesley Castle Hill Uniting Church, NSW

Consider 21st century insights

Thank you, *Journey* and Bruce Mullan for a balanced look at marriage given that it is a topic to be considered at the Assembly in July and it is a subject that is very much in the arena of public discussion (“Marriage: We’re talking about it”, May 2015, page six). Particularly insightful was the question about same-gender relationships asked by Rev Bill Loader: “Do new insights lead us to more differentiated conclusions than theirs (the first century Christians)?”

If we are to use Wesley’s four pillars of scripture, tradition, reason and experience as the legs of a chair to help in discernment, it will be a very unbalanced chair we sit on if we deny the reason (knowledge) and experience of the 21st century when making decisions on same-gender relationships and marriage.

What a pity that the simple definition of the word “marriage” will hold the church back from seeking equality for all in this aspect of life when a simple change such as that of the Presbyterian Church in USA could make such a difference.

Desley Garnett
Merthyr Road Uniting Church, New Farm

What’s the deal with the Uniting Church?

The latest *Journey* asks the question, “What’s the deal with marriage?” I would like to ask, what’s the deal with the rainbow wedding cake, and the Uniting Church participation in the hedonistic Mardi Gras? What’s the deal with bringing it all up again?

It’s not as though the Bible is vague on the subject; it is very clear. We’ve had the discussions, we put in our submissions, we signed the petitions (all ignored) and we lost thousands. I have stayed only because of the Assembly of Confessing Congregations. Does the Uniting Church never learn? Now we are in trouble—shortage of ministers, shortage of funds, shortage of members. Is this progress? Only as we honour God and his Word can we expect his blessing.

Val Pym
Iona West Uniting Church, Mackay

This is how they were born

It gave me great pride to read in *Journey* about Uniting Church participation in the Sydney Mardi Gras (“Uniting Church marches with pride”, April 2015, page 10) however, the three letters in the May edition of *Journey* decrying this filled me with dismay. Quoting isolated Bible verses to address issues we face in the 21st century is not convincing. It is time to be authentic in dealing with real life situations.

I think of our daughter and son. Our daughter has battled challenges at work—being gay, claiming Aboriginality and coping with the results of a head injury. Our son is in the mental health unit.

Our children did not choose to live like this. This is how they were born. We love them and will always support them as they are “part of God’s plan, part of the fabric of creation”.

We are blessed with having a loving and caring community which supports us as parents and engages with our son and daughter with great respect and friendliness.

Alwyn Thomas
The Gap Uniting Church

Be welcoming, loving, accepting

I was pleased and encouraged to see the article in the April *Journey* on the Uniting Church floats at Mardi Gras. Jesus practised welcoming, loving acceptance and it’s great to see that message being shared.

Also, congratulations to UnitingCare NSW for supporting LGBTIQ residents in aged care.

I look forward to continued discussion on marriage as raised in the May edition of *Journey*.

And to those who wrote letters to the editor in May, I pray for the LGBTIQ people in your communities, especially the young people, that they will not be a statistic of those who suicide or self-harm, but that they may know and experience God’s love, as we all can, as children created by God.

Christabel Carvolth
Indooroopilly Uniting and Centenary Uniting, Brisbane

All letters must directly address articles and letters from the previous month’s edition of Journey. Opinions expressed are only indicative of the individual writer, not their entire congregation. While direct responses to letters are acceptable, ongoing discussions about an article more than two months old will not be published.

Full submission guidelines for letters to the editor can be found at journeyonline.com.au/submit



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General Secretary Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Western Australia

The Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Western Australia, is seeking a General Secretary to commence in January 2016.

To be considered for this position, you must be a member of the Uniting Church in Australia, have a deep knowledge of the Uniting Church with a commitment to the Basis of Union, and to our calling to fulfil the mission of Christ. We would expect the successful applicant to have a passion for the gospel and gifts in visionary, prayerful and empowering leadership.

The new General Secretary must also have the ability to lead through times of change with a pastoral approach.

This position also requires managerial and executive responsibilities.

A position description will be available from 18 June 2015.

Please email your Expression of Interest to:

Maureen Bourke
Administrative Assistant to the Selection Committee
Uniting Church in Australia WA
Email: maureen.bourke@wa.uca.org.au
Phone: 08 9260 9833



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